



16th session

**Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness,  
and Public-Private Partnerships**

**DIGITAL AND GREEN TRANSFORMATIONS**

The role of innovation and Public-Private Partnerships

**31 MAY | 2023**  
**2 JUNE**

## Agenda

### **Side event to the 16th session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships:**

*“Promoting women’s entrepreneurship in transition economies for sustainable development”*

1 June 2023, 13:00-14:30 (CET)

Geneva, Switzerland (Palais des Nations, Building H, entrance auditorium H.200), and online



Registration link:

<https://indico.un.org/event/1002148/>

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has for many years supported the countries of Central Asia to harness innovation policy for sustainable development,<sup>2</sup> including in the area of innovative entrepreneurship. This support is provided through the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). The participating countries of SPECA adopted in 2019 a Strategy on Innovation for Sustainable Development, which highlights the key role of entrepreneurs in finding innovative solutions for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



In July 2022, in order to promote innovative private sector development and overcome the issues inhibiting entrepreneurship growth, the SPECA participating countries endorsed the establishment of a SPECA Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators for Sustainable Development. This Network is a platform for exchange of experience on issues, challenges and solutions, as well as best practices related to innovative entrepreneurship support through business incubators (BI) and accelerators (BA) in the SPECA sub-region.

In the context of the innovative development of transition economies, it is crucial to promote women’s entrepreneurship as a catalyst for new economic opportunities, to bring innovative new ideas from female entrepreneurs into the market, and to accelerate progress towards SDG 5 on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The economic potential of women is not sufficiently tapped in the SPECA sub-region. Women’s labor force participation is uneven, ranging from 71.8% in Uzbekistan to 31.8% in Tajikistan.<sup>4</sup> Only 23% firms in Tajikistan and 26% Uzbekistan have female participation in ownership.<sup>5</sup> According to the UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development of Review of Kyrgyzstan, highly educated women in the country face challenges to put their knowledge and skills into commercial practice.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Uzbekistan specifically recommends that the implementation of more targeted initiatives, especially in the regions, for women to engage in start-up activity.

1 The SPECA participating countries are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

2 UNECE: [SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development](#)

3 World Bank database: [Labor force participation rate \(% of population\) - World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)

4 World Bank database: [Entrepreneurship - World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)

5 UNECE: [Innovation for Sustainable Development of Review of Kyrgyzstan](#)

6 UNECE: [Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Uzbekistan](#)

Persistent barriers for innovative women's entrepreneurs include:

- Limited access to finance and markets (especially in male-dominated sectors such as information technology, engineering, sciences etc.);
- Gender norms and stereotypes;
- Having to shoulder the bulk of childcare and domestic work;
- Legal and regulatory barriers such as discriminatory laws or regulations, lack of property rights, or limited access to legal services;
- Limited participation in STEM education, etc.

Addressing these challenges and fully empowering women entrepreneurs to innovate for the SDGs in the SPECA sub-region can provide significant benefits:

**Economic opportunities:** Entrepreneurship provides women with the ability to start their own businesses, generate income, and contribute to the economic growth of their communities. By creating their own ventures, women entrepreneurs can achieve economic independence. The Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative housed at the World Bank estimates that if barriers to women entrepreneurship were eliminated, 5 to 6 trillion USD in net value addition could be generated around the world<sup>7</sup>.

**Fostering innovation:** Women entrepreneurs can use their creativity and skills to introduce innovative solutions to social and economic challenges in their communities, which can benefit the broader economy.

**Promoting gender equality:** Women entrepreneurs can challenge gender norms and stereotypes, as well as break down barriers that have traditionally prevented women from participating in the economy.

**Building social capital:** By forming networks and collaborating with other entrepreneurs, women can share knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as build social support systems that can help them overcome common challenges, including limited access to training and lack of role models and mentors.

Given the above challenges and opportunities, it is important to ensure that women entrepreneurs have access to the resources and support they need to succeed, including access to finance, training, and networks. Policymakers and other stakeholders should create an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship, which can include policies that support access to finance, training programmes, and initiatives that promote gender equality in the workplace as well as increasing the share of women in STEM education and incorporating entrepreneurship development in higher education curricula.

## Objective of the policy dialogue

In order to discuss relevant challenges and opportunities within this context, under the auspices of the SPECA Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators for Sustainable Development, UNECE is organizing a policy dialogue on “Promoting women’s entrepreneurship in transition economies” on 1 June 2023, as a side event of the 16th session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships. This hybrid meeting will be dedicated to the empowerment of women to innovate for the green and circular transition in the UNECE region. It will provide a platform for peer learning and the sharing of experiences and inspiring examples.

**Date:** 1.5-hour event on 1 June 2023, 13:00-14:30 (CET)

**Place:** UN premises, room H.200, Geneva, Switzerland, as well as online on Zoom

**Format:** The event will take the format of an interactive moderated panel. English to Russian interpretation will be provided.

## Speakers:

**Opening statement:** Ms. Shahlo Turdikulova, Vice Minister for Innovation, Uzbekistan

**Moderator:** Ms. Elisabeth Türk, Director, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

### Panelists:

- Ms. Laman Ganbarova, Project Coordinator, Innovation Ecosystem Development Department, Innovation and Digital Development Agency of Azerbaijan;
- Mr. Anders Broström, Managing Director, Swedish Entrepreneurship Forum;
- Ms. Alina Fetisova, Trade Facilitation Programme Officer, Trade Facilitation and Policy for Business Section, International Trade Centre
- Ms. Indira Shah, co-founder, Impact Hub Almaty