



UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR THE ECONOMIES OF CENTRAL ASIA (SPECA)

Eighteenth session of the SPECA Governing Council

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PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECA THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

Introduction

The SPECA Thematic Working Groups implemented the following activities since the seventeenth session of the SPECA Governing Council held on 18 November 2022.

Water, energy and environment: In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to facilitate economic cooperation in the SPECA subregion as well as integration of the SPECA participating States into the world economy for their attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and previous decisions of the Working Group on Water, Energy and Environment, the Working Group shall: (a) Provide a platform for supporting progress on strategic issues related to water, energy and environment, and towards achieving the respective SDGs (including, but not limited to SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation and SDG 7 on Affordable and Clean Energy); (b) Aim at improving awareness of SPECA countries on the water-, energy- and environment-related SDGs, provide information and share best practice experiences with regard to the implementation of these SDGs, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs, promote consideration of energy and water cooperation opportunities and intersectoral and transboundary impacts in the SDG implementation and related action plans; (c) Promote compliance with relevant international legal instruments (to which the countries are Parties), norms, guidelines, standards and recommendations in the fields of competence of the Working Group; (d) Act as a platform for identification, development, support and coordination of technical programmes and projects within the scope of Working Group competence thereby building capacity, promoting best practices and strengthening mutual trust at political level among the SPECA participating States; (e) Identify, in consultation with its participating States, their priorities and emerging issues, and consult on regional approaches, taking into consideration subregional aspects; (f) Promote dialogue among its participating States, including subregional synergies, and an exchange of experiences on policies and programmes; (g) Monitor the implementation of the decisions

of the Governing Council; and (h) Promote a collaborative approach to addressing the development challenges of the SPECA subregion, where appropriate, between Governments and civil society, the private sector, as well as the United Nations and other international organizations.

Name of Activity	Time & Venue	SPECA participating States	Major results
Study “In-Depth Analysis of Coal Demand Dynamics in Tajikistan until 2050”; Workshop on the dynamics of coal demand in Tajikistan until 2050 and viability of replacing coal with alternative domestic energy sources	September-December 2022; 15 December 2022, Dushanbe and online	Tajikistan	The report was developed upon a request from the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan and with support from the UNECE Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation. It contains assessment of the efficiency of coal industry management in the country, an analysis of the price factor (including environmental costs) of coal consumption, as well as of the viability of replacing coal with alternative domestic energy sources, taking into account the local conditions and the principle of energy security of the country.
Preparation phase of the project “Improving the energy efficiency of the global building supply chain industry and its products to deliver high performance buildings”	April-November 2023	Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan	The preparation phase is ongoing. The objective of the Preparation Phase is to develop a complete project document for the project “Improving the energy efficiency of the global building supply chain industry and its products to deliver high performance buildings” funded by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) Germany with all accompanying materials that outlines concrete, result-oriented activities of all stakeholders, takes account national circumstances of the beneficiary countries and responds to their needs in an effective manner while remaining consistent in terms of common outputs and outcomes, and ensures alignment across the board on the project log-frame. The project aims to develop a strong foundation of proven best practice methods and focused technical capacity that beneficiary countries can build upon to improve building energy performance and reduce embodied carbon and energy to support their development and achievement of enhanced national determined contributions (NDC) targets.
UNDA project “Strengthening energy policies of Countries with	January 2022-June 2025; 31	Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan	ESCAP is the lead organization and UNECE is an implementing partner in this project. The project aims to

Special Needs to build back better from COVID-19”; National Stakeholder Consultation Workshops	January 2023, Tashkent and online and 2 February 2023, Astana and online		improve the capacity of policymakers by supporting them to develop SDG 7 roadmaps which enable the delivery of both the sustainable energy transition and the economic recovery from COVID-19. The process of developing SDG7 Roadmaps is underway.
Project on “Sustainable hydrogen production in the UNECE region and its role in the development of a hydrogen ecosystem and export potential”	January 2022-October 2023	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Project achievements include: (i) analysis of national potentials to contribute to development of a hydrogen ecosystem and global energy transitions, including the supply of energy to energy-deficient regions of the world; (ii) analysis of priority areas for the development of national hydrogen potential, analysis of hydrogen production potential across CIS countries; (iii) analysis of the opportunities for hydrogen export and possible applications in the domestic market; (iv) subregional assessment of cost and technical performance of hydrogen production from fossil fuels, low-carbon energy, and renewable energy across beneficiary countries; (v) refining the existing data and assumptions related to sustainable hydrogen production for the energy model; (vi) proposals for directions for the implementation of pilot projects for the supply of sustainable hydrogen for export. The project organized a policy dialogue to identify and overcome existing barriers to development of a hydrogen ecosystem (14 November 2022, Almaty) and co-organized the Green Hydrogen Symposium (7 June 2023, Astana).
Policy brief “Building Carbon Neutral and Resilient Energy Systems in Central Asia”	December 2022-March 2023	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Applying the UNECE carbon neutrality toolkit and developing a roadmap on carbon neutrality in Central Asia. The policy brief builds on the recommendations from UNECE Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality for Europe, North America, and Central Asia. It also builds upon a series of technology briefs that directly support the implementation of the Carbon Neutrality Project. The underlying objectives of this publication are to inform policymakers about a range of options and solutions to attain carbon neutrality; support countries’ efforts to reach carbon neutrality and attract investments into clean

			infrastructure projects; build capacity in economies across the UNECE region to reach common goals.
UNDA project “Strengthening sustainable management of natural resources with the Food-Water-Energy nexus approach to support post-COVID-19 recovery and build resilience in Central Asia, Middle East and Africa”	December 2022-July 2023	Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan	UNECE leads the project in partnership with ESCAP, ESCWA, ECA, UNEP, WHO/Europe and UNU. The natural resource nexus is the interdependence and interconnectedness of food, water, and energy. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for sustainable management of these resources. The project developed an integrated approach to managing the food-water-energy nexus to assist several countries, including Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The three pillars of the project are food security and sustainable production and consumption patterns, water, sanitation and hygiene, and energy and raw material supply. The project has initiated work on mapping food availability in cities and developing a food management tool for cities. Achievements have been made concerning the equitable provision of water and sanitation services, including organising and implementing a regional workshop. The pilot application of a methodology to assess the equity of access to water and sanitation is underway. The project prepared a report on natural resource nexuses and initiated case studies on sustainable resource management. The project supports implementing the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution on environmental aspects of minerals and metals management.
SDG-7 Roadmap for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan	January 2022 – December 2023	Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan	ESCAP has been actively supporting the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 7 in the Asia-Pacific region by creating SDG 7 Road Maps at both national and subnational levels. At the national level, these Road Maps play a crucial role in identifying and recommending technological interventions and policy measures. The SDG 7 Road Map for Kyrgyzstan has been developed in 2022 to assist the Government of Kyrgyzstan in developing enabling policy measures to achieve the SDG 7 and NDC targets (available here: https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/energy-transition-pathways-2030-agenda-sdg7-road-map-kyrgyzstan). This roadmap contains a matrix of technological options and

			enabling policy measures for the Government to consider. It presents several scenarios that have been developed using national data, and which consider existing energy policies and strategies as well as reflect on other development plans. These scenarios are expected to enable the Government to make an informed decision to develop and implement a set of policies to achieve SDG 7 by 2030, together with the NDC. SDG 7 Road Map for Tajikistan development is undergoing. It will be finalized and presented for the Government of Tajikistan review in the end of 2023/early 2024.
Support to transboundary cooperation and integrated water resources management in the Chu and Talas rivers	2022-2023	Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan	Advancement of the agreements with the GEF on the second phase of the project.
National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management	2022-2023	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan	Decisions of the meetings with various stakeholders at the country level: Kazakhstan (14 December 2022, Astana), Kyrgyzstan (3 February 2023, Bishkek), Tajikistan (15 February 2023, Dushanbe). Various issues discussed and taken decisions on: development of the legislation on IWRM and water and sanitation, methodology for water, investment concepts, labour market in water sector, water-energy relations among the countries, economic instruments for water management.
Project “Regional mechanisms for the low-carbon, climate-resilient transformation of the energy-water-land Nexus in Central Asia “	2022-2027	5 Central Asian States	At the preparatory phase a study on nexus investments in agriculture in CA was prepared. The full-fledged project implementation is to start in 2024.

II. Sustainable transport, transit and connectivity: In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to support its participating States in: developing subregional economic cooperation, integrating their economies into the world economy, and attaining the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WG-STTC fosters subregional cooperation to promote development of sustainable transport systems and improvement of international and regional connectivity in the SPECA States. To achieve this through subregional cooperation, the Working Group: (i) Provides a platform for strategic discussions on supporting progress towards achieving the directly transport-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3, SDG 9 and SDG 11) and targets, and contributing to the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development

Agenda, as a whole, through subregional cooperation, exchange of best practices and experiences, consultations, relevant activities and implementation of projects in the SPECA States; (ii) Raises awareness of SPECA States on the transport-related SDGs and the role of transport and connectivity in supporting the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda; provides information and share best practice experiences, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) Promotes policy dialogue: to support accession and efficient implementation of the United Nations transport-related legal instruments; for coordinated development of road and railway networks, dry ports and intermodal transport; for elimination of physical and non-physical barriers to transport, and for safer and more environmentally friendly transport system; and (iv) Provides analytical work and capacity development activities and tools in the areas of transport infrastructure development, sustainable transport operations, operationalization of international transit corridors, use of new technologies and innovation, regulatory harmonization, intermodal transport, border crossing facilitation, transport of dangerous goods, and other areas, including identification of funding modalities for the SPECA activities.

The thematic orientation of the activities of the WG-STTC includes: (i) Sustainable transport development, to enhance subregional and international connectivity in line with the needs of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, harnessing the opportunities arising from global and regional transport trends and technological advances; (ii) Accession and efficient implementation of the United Nations inland transport-related legal instruments, to further develop legal framework for efficient transport, transit and connectivity; (iii) Inland transport infrastructure development; identification of the missing links, removal of bottlenecks, increasing the quality of the infrastructure, transport project financing (including public-private partnership) and promotion of intermodal transport and development of dry ports and terminals; (iv) Development of efficient transport operations; transport facilitation and removal of non-physical barriers to transport (including border crossing facilitation); (v) Development of a monitoring mechanism for sustainable transport connectivity in support of SDGs, collection of transport and border crossing statistics, harmonization of data collection, publishing of subregional transport statistics; (vi) Road safety; activities to reduce road traffic fatalities and casualties in the SPECA region; and (vii) Promotion of subregional cooperation for sustainable transport connectivity which plays an important role in addressing the economic development challenges faced by landlocked SPECA States.

Name of Activity	Time & Venue	SPECA participating States	Major results
SPECA Working Group on sustainable transport, transit and connectivity, 27th session	26 November 2022	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Participating countries shared the experiences and information on latest developments in the improvement of regional connectivity (infrastructure development, removing of bottlenecks), international transit (border crossing facilitation and corridor management) as well as road safety. Furthermore, countries shared information on building back better transport system in post-pandemic times. All of them were presented in the context of transport-related Sustainable Development Goals and assistance to SPECA participating States in

			implementing and monitoring SDGs. All prepared documents were adopted.
SPECA Working Group on sustainable transport, transit and connectivity, 28th session	16 November 2023	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Participating countries shared the experiences and information on latest developments in the improvement of regional connectivity (infrastructure development, removing of bottlenecks), international transit (border crossing facilitation and corridor management) as well as road safety. Furthermore, countries shared information on building back better transport system in post-pandemic times. All of them were presented in the context of transport-related Sustainable Development Goals and assistance to SPECA participating States in implementing and monitoring SDGs. All prepared documents including the Programme of Work for 2024-2025 were adopted.
SPECA Workshop - eLearning platforms on transport legal instruments	25 November 2022	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	During the workshop beneficiary countries strengthen knowledge on UN transport- and trade-related legal instruments and get the hands-on training how to use LearnITC eLearning platform. The national capacities strengthen knowledge on how to develop policy tools for sustainable transport and better trade connectivity.
SPECA Mini workshop on digitalization of transport services for better connectivity after pandemics	17 November 2023	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The aim of the Workshop was to strengthen knowledge of the national representatives of SPECA States on digitalization of transport services, tools based on legal instruments (eTIR and eCMR) and regional projects highlighting the advantages that new electronic systems can bring on trade and border crossings facilitation in the region.
Road Safety Performance Review	2022-2023	Uzbekistan	The RSPR was designed to help the beneficiary country to strengthen the road safety system and effectively address and improve national road safety records. The most critical road safety aspects and priority needs in the beneficiary country are identified by preparing the RSPR. The RSPR mapped gaps in national institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks, assessed the level of compliance with UN road safety legal instruments - all in line with the ITC Recommendations and the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety and gave recommendations for future actions.

How to design safe roads workshop	17 March 2023	Uzbekistan	National experts strengthen knowledge on how to design safer roads and get appropriate reasoning to updated national standards and guidelines. The workshop has built capacity on how changes in road design influence the basic road safety indicators, and representatives learned on international best practice in road design and road work zone safety. Good cooperation with EIB and UNICEF UZ in implementation of the workshop.
RSPR and the How to improve National Road Safety System Workshop	18-19 May 2023	Uzbekistan	Analysis and recommendations of the RSPR Uzbekistan presented to national road safety stakeholders. Meeting with the Head of Traffic Police resolved some missing info and we asked to intervene to MoT to send required data.
Interconnection of Customs system of Uzbekistan with the eTIR International System	2022-2023	Uzbekistan	Cooperation and technical assistance to strengthen capacities of national representatives on benefits, methodology and technical specification of eTIR international system and implementation of activities to allow interconnection with eTIR International.
Making the middle corridor an eTIR Corridor	21-22 June 2023	SPECA States	Strengthen capacity of SPECA countries to efficiently connect with eTIR International and use all benefits of digitalization of transport service.
Interconnection of Customs system of Kazakhstan with the eTIR International System	2022-2023	Kazakhstan	Cooperation and technical assistance to strengthen capacities of national representatives on benefits, methodology and technical specification of eTIR international system and implementation of activities to allow interconnection with eTIR International.
Interconnection of Customs system of Kyrgyzstan with the eTIR International System	2022-2023	Kyrgyzstan	Cooperation and technical assistance to strengthen capacities of national representatives on benefits, methodology and technical specification of eTIR international system and implementation of activities to allow interconnection with eTIR International.
Interconnection of Customs system of Tajikistan with the eTIR International System	2022-2023	Tajikistan	Cooperation and technical assistance to strengthen capacities of national representatives on benefits, methodology and technical specification of eTIR international system and implementation of activities to allow interconnection with eTIR International.
LearnITC Project – Action plan Kyrgyzstan	2023-2024	Kyrgyzstan	An Action Plan will be developed on low carbon and environmentally friendly transport. It will focus on promoting environmentally friendly transport, such as electric vehicle, to promote green economy development in Kyrgyzstan

LearnITC Project – Action plan Uzbekistan	2023-2024	Uzbekistan	The Action Plan focuses on the digitalization of the freight transport sector with a view to improving the connectivity of this double-landlocked country, one of the only two in the world. It outlines the actions necessary to fully benefit from digitalization, including not only the carriers but also importers and exporters in the country. The Action Plan includes a call for a full review of the current implementation status of various UNECE inland transport conventions, as well as the need to harmonize standards to ensure interoperability of the systems and the provision of sufficient backend support.
The ECO-UNECE Coordination Committee on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Istanbul Corridors	2023-2024	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The aim of the Coordination Committee meetings was better understanding of current shifts in transport and trade flows between Asia and Europe and their impact on the Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Istanbul corridors, potential for further diversification of multimodal inland transport routes between Asia and Europe, taking into account the views and expectations of private sector. The required measures aimed at ensuring the smooth operationalization of Trans-Caspian and Almaty-Istanbul corridors were also explored during the meetings.
Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to develop sustainable urban mobility policy on car sharing and car-pooling initiatives	2022-2023	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan	Strengthen capacities of target countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) on shared urban mobility, shared project results during subregional workshops and provided final guidelines for setting up car sharing and car-pooling services in these countries.

III. Trade: In line with the overall objectives of SPECA to support its participating States in developing subregional economic cooperation, integrating their economies into the world economy, and attaining the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WG on Trade shall foster subregional cooperation to promote national and regional development of sustainable trade in the SPECA participating States. To achieve this through subregional cooperation, the Working Group shall: (i) Provide a platform for supporting progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through subregional cooperation in trade and trade facilitation with a focus on SDGs directly related to trade development, notably SDG 17 on partnerships, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (ii) Assist in improving the awareness of SPECA States on the trade-related SDGs; help provide information and share best practice experiences, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) Promote policy dialogue to support: trade policy cooperation among the SPECA States and their trade negotiators; trade facilitation; aligning positions on sustainable trade, dealing with non-tariff measures, and investment policies; and (iv) Provide analysis and

capacity-building in the areas of trade facilitation, sustainable trade development, regulatory harmonization, agricultural quality standards, elimination of non-tariff barriers to trade, investment, and other areas, including identification of funding modalities for SPECA activities.

The thematic orientation of the activities of the Working Group on Trade includes: (i) sustainable trade development among the countries in the region and with the main trading partners; (ii) trade facilitation and promotion of trade facilitation norms, standards and best practice recommendations; (iii) public-private cooperation for trade facilitation; (iv) regulatory harmonization, market surveillance and risk management; (v) agricultural commercial quality standards; (vi) investment and trade development; and (vii) other areas of competence of UNECE and ESCAP related to the development of trade, regional markets and harmonization of standards in these areas. The deliverables of the WG on Trade focus on four areas: (i) trade policy cooperation, including on the WTO negotiations; (ii) implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy; (iii) implementation of the SPECA Principles for Sustainable Trade; (iv) non-tariff measures and barriers to trade; as well as (v) digitalization of multimodal transport information exchange, with which the WG started dealing in 2021.

Name of Activity	Time & Venue	SPECA participating States	Major results
18 th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade	20 November 2023 Baku, Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The session is scheduled to advance progress on all topics in the programme of the Group: regional cooperation in the WTO process; implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade, non-tariff barriers, and standardized digitalization of information flows along SPECA multimodal trade corridors (new topic).
Thirteenth UNECE International (Odessa) Seminar on Trade and Transport Facilitation: <i>EU Electronic Freight Transport Information Regulation and UN/CEFACT Semantic Standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model¹</i>	22 December 2022, online	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan	The seminar provided core information to stakeholders in Ukraine and neighbouring countries on the EU eFTI regulation ² and the UN/CEFACT semantic standards and Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model, which serve as foundation for multimodal interoperability in the implementation of the eFTI Regulation. Non-EU eFTI platforms—like the port community system in Odessa—can be certified for work with eFTI information exchange. This was the main reason for the request to hold this additional Odessa Seminar.
Capacity-building on the nexus between Sustainable Trade, Water Management, Food	21 November 2022 Astana, Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	First national seminar on the implementation of the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade. A scoping study on the implementation of the principles and a Business Process Analysis on trade in environmentally friendly agricultural

Security, Trade Facilitation, and Circular Economy ³			products in the SPECA region presented. The Government of Kazakhstan had already taken pioneering steps to include these Principles in its sustainable development strategies, and the meeting further supported the national endeavors. The overall aim is to strengthen knowledge and capacities of national experts in sustainable trade and circular economy and create a link to national sustainable development plans.
Brainstorming session with Kazakhstani agencies on who is doing what on digitalization of data and document exchange for trade and transport	22 November 2022 Astana, Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan	The UNECE Regional Adviser and the QazTrade organization of Kazakhstan co-organized a brainstorming session to identify which agency is doing what in Kazakhstan for the digitalization of supply chain information exchange and on using United Nations standards.
SPECA Ministerial Meeting ⁴	17 April 2023 Geneva	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The Ministerial Meeting issued Joint Ministerial Statement issued at a meeting , which requested UNECE to “develop a roadmap for digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the trans-Caspian transport corridor using relevant United Nations standards”. This would include a regional pilot project for SPECA participating States.
Fourteenth UNECE International (Odessa) Seminar on Trade and Transport Facilitation ⁵ : <i>Trade Facilitation and Digital Transformation of Multimodal Information Exchange in Eastern Europe and SPECA, using United Nations Standards</i>	22-23 May 2023 Baku, Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Presentations made by the Chair of UN/CEFACT, the Regional Adviser, eFTI, DTLF and other experts resulted in preparing a methodology for digitalization of data and document exchange in the trans-Caspian corridor and a draft roadmap for digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange in the region. Apart from signing the memorandum of understanding on digitalizing the railway consignment note, cooperation started on integrating port community systems in the overall flow of information in the trans-Caspian corridor, involving the port community systems of Odessa and Baku and the International Port Community System Association (IPCSA). This led to discussing collaboration with TRACECA, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), EU4Digital and others on support for countries and pilot projects.

Validation seminar for the National Trade Facilitation Roadmap of Uzbekistan	16 October 2023 Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan	Validation seminar for the draft trade facilitation roadmap of Uzbekistan, developed by UNECE and consultants.
Readiness assessment for cross-border paperless trade study	January 2022 - January 2023	Tajikistan	Tajikistan acceded to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific on 8 December 2022, indicating the commitment of the country to accelerate development on paperless and cross-border paperless trade. To support the country in implementing the Framework Agreement, this report provides an assessment of the readiness of Tajikistan for cross-border paperless trade and proposes action plans which serve as a basis for developing more detailed activities at the national level.
Readiness assessment for cross-border paperless trade study	January - December 2022	Turkmenistan	This report provides an assessment of the readiness of Turkmenistan for cross-border paperless trade, in other words, the current capabilities and future plans of Turkmenistan for usage of electronic data and/or documents in international trade transactions. The findings from the technical and legal readiness assessments for cross-border paperless trade will follow. Recommendations on the technical and legal aspects of cross-border paperless trade are then provided, followed by an initial action plan for Turkmenistan to move forward in this area.
Policy recommendations on Kazakhstan's export	March 2022 - March 2023	Kazakhstan	This report analyzes the trade process and procedures for exporting iron, steel, and metal products from Kazakhstan to European countries, specifically Latvia and France. It provides policy recommendations to enhance trade facilitation and emphasizes the importance of Kazakhstan's accession to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific to enhance trade facilitation.
Second sessions of the Standing Committee and Paperless Trade Council of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of	19-23 June 2023	Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan	Second sessions of the Standing Committee and Paperless Trade Council were held in Bangkok and online from 19 to 23 June 2023. Representatives from Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, together with other Parties to CPTA, attended the meeting and firmed up the plan to implement CPTA.

Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA)			
Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia 2023	Early November 2023 (in time for the SPECA meeting)	All SPECA States	Report based on the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation.
Upgrading of ESCAP's Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisory (TINA, https://tina.trade)	August 2023	All SPECA States	Following feedback from trade negotiators from CAREC members, TINA, with funding from ADB, TINA was upgraded to allow for multiple negotiation partners to facilitate trade agreement research as country blocks.
Contributed to the workshop on Strengthening Knowledge and Capacities for the Design and Implementation of FTAs Involving CAREC Countries	25-28 January 2023, Georgia	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan	Trade negotiators from CAREC members were trained on tariff negotiations and usage of ESCAP's Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Advisory (TINA, https://tina.trade)

¹ <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/374662>

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/electronic-freight-transport-information.html>

³ <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/373002>

⁴ Meeting of Ministers of SPECA Participating States. *Joint Ministerial Statement*, online: <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/SPECA%20Ministerial%20Meeting%2017.04.23%20Joint%20Ministerial%20Statement%20.pdf>

⁵ <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/377875>

IV. Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development: The main objectives of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development are: (i) to provide a platform for supporting progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on the SDGs directly related to innovation and technology development (including, but not limited to SDG 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure; SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth; SDG 13 on combatting climate change and its impacts; and SDG 17 on partnerships); (ii) to aim at improving awareness of SPECA States on the innovation and technology development related SDGs, provide information and share best practice experiences with regard to the implementation of these SDGs, taking into account interlinkages between the SDGs; (iii) to become a mechanism for identification, implementation and coordination of technical programmes and projects within the scope of Working Group competence thereby building capacity, promoting best practices and strengthening mutual trust at political level among the SPECA participating States; and (iv) to promote cooperation between SPECA States on strategic approaches to harness innovation as a driver of future sustainable development in the subregion.

Thematic orientation of the activities of the WG on ITSD includes: (i) ICT for development; (ii) Promotion of innovation and innovative technology applications; (iii) Promotion of transfer and commercialization of innovative technologies; and (iv) Development of effective infrastructure for innovation support and financing, including through PPPs.

Name of Activity	Time & venue	SPECA participating States	Major results
Online training for SPECA countries “Development of business incubators and start-up accelerators: training for university management”	21 February 2023, online	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The training demonstrated the primary benefits of encouraging entrepreneurship and start-ups within university academic processes. It provided information and best practice examples on how to keep an educational institution competitive in an era of rapid change; how to create and develop the necessary components that improve the quality of education and are critical for students in the twenty-first century, and how to promote innovation for sustainable development. Beneficiaries included representatives of the education system involved in the development of educational curricula, heads of higher education institutions, heads of departments at universities, university management, and scientific supervisors (employees of universities and of research institutions supervising projects of students).
Working with venture funds and business angels: UNECE practical online training for staff of business incubators and accelerators in the SPECA sub-region	16 March 2023, online	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Improved practical skills of managers of business incubators and accelerators, including the administration of startup training programmes in constantly changing venture markets. The training enabled managers to strengthen their ability to analyze current trends and requirements of the venture market, develop new solutions, enhance their understanding of the acceleration process, including the development of innovative startup ideas, and helped them build relationships with the market, investors, and partners.
UNECE workshop for Chief Innovation Officers on innovation for the circular economy	2 May 2023, Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	Enhanced capacity of national policymakers to develop innovation policies to support transition to a circular economy.

Capacity-building programme for Azerbaijan on building a venture capital ecosystem	June-September 2023	Azerbaijan	Upon request from the Government of Azerbaijan, UNECE is providing advisory services to Azerbaijan on revising its venture capital law to better attract innovative financing.
Study tour to Georgia for innovation policymakers from the SPECA sub-region	10-11 July 2023 Tbilisi, Georgia	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	The tour provided an overview of the national innovation system and entrepreneurship support structures in Georgia, and highlighted best practices that may also be applied in the SPECA subregion. The study tour targeted policymakers from national innovation ministries or agencies of SPECA participating States.
Subregional SPECA Workshop on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development and Fourth Session of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development	18-19 October 2023 Tashkent, Uzbekistan	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan	These events of the SPECA WG on ITSD served to assess progress in the implementation of the Action Plan of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development as approved by the 16 th session of the SPECA Governing Council in Tashkent on 19 November 2021.

V. Gender and SDGs: In line with the overall objective of the Programme to facilitate economic cooperation in the countries of the SPECA region as well as integration of the SPECA participating States into the world economy for their attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Working Group on Gender and SDGs shall continue to work in the area of gender mainstreaming and transformative policies as follows: (a) Non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and work environment free of discrimination and exploitation; (b) Policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies; (c) Policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors; and (d) Policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development.

Name of Activity	Time & venue	SPECA participating States	Major results
Follow-up to the conclusions and recommendations made during the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs annual meeting in 2022	10 May 2023 Online	Azerbaijan	Strategic discussion held with the Chairperson of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs, UNECE, ESCAP and UN Women colleagues to agree way forward for planning and preparing the 2023 annual session.