

Evaluation report

Evaluation

Project E 293: Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system

*Report completed in June 2024
Evaluation conducted by: DUSAN ZUPKA*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The evaluator extends his gratitude to those stakeholders who contributed with their insights during the evaluation of E293 project. Their expertise and dedication have been instrumental in shaping this report.

I would like to express my gratitude to all persons met, interviewed, and who contributed to this evaluation through electronic survey, particularly the E293 project manager in UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division for cooperation and support during the entire evaluation.

This report was commissioned by UNECE. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of this report are those of the external evaluator and do not necessarily reflect the views of the UNECE.

Table of Contents

List of acronyms and abbreviations	4
Executive summary	5
I. Introduction	11
1. Description of the project	13
2. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions	19
3. Evaluation methodology	21
II. Evaluation findings	25
1. Relevance	25
2. Effectiveness	32
3. Efficiency	38
4. Sustainability	45
III. Conclusions and recommendations	51
1. Conclusions	51
2. Recommendations	53
Annexes	54

List of acronyms and abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ECTD	Economic Cooperation and Trade Division
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia/Pacific
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITC	International Trade Center
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTFB	National Trade Facilitation Body
OECD/DAC	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
PMU	Programme Management Unit
PROJECT	UNECE Project E293: Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPECA	United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia
TCPF	Technical Cooperation Project Form
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
TFIG	Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UNDA	United Nations Development Account
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WGT	Working Group on Trade
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary

This evaluation assesses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of the UNECE Geneva E293 Project entitled “Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system”, (further project or E293)). Project was formulated and managed by [Economic Cooperation and Trade Division](#). This division supports UNECE member States in designing and establishing institutions, policies, processes and initiatives with a strong role for good governance to build innovative, competitive, and inclusive societies to progress towards the goals set out in [Agenda 2030](#) in the areas of innovation policy, infrastructure investment (e.g. public-private partnerships) and trade (including trade facilitation).¹

The report looks at the implementation approach and the results of E 293 during the period May 2018 – December 2023. The evaluation has been commissioned by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to the independent evaluator in January 2024. The evaluation report includes evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. It aims to promote learning, ensure accountability and inform decision-making by assessing if and how far trade facilitation measures have been integrated in the target countries and whether the intended results have been achieved. It also identifies the areas where it has been effective in adding value, and provides recommendations for the future implementation of similar projects.

Brief overview of the project

The five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) plus Afghanistan and Azerbaijan participate in the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). When the Project was designed these countries were among the last in the world to accede to the international rules-based trading system coordinated by the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was also recognized that the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) would make a significant contribution to facilitating trade in the region and its integration with the economies of Europe and Asia.

The objective of the project was to strengthen national capacities of the beneficiary countries (the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan) to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system. The technical cooperation project form (TCPF) established two expected results for achieving the main objective. These **expected accomplishments** were defined as follows:

¹ <https://unece.org/economic-cooperation-and-integration>; [Trade | UNECE](#); https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/ECTD-Booklet_Final.pdf
<https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fun.mdrtor.com%2Ftrack%2Flink%2Fkey%2F84209-3716-44500-160-3414-261949%2Fsignature%2F72f21e1a418734f8c07a5766a7cc4929%2Fuserid%2Fc84869d9600ec122806763a53d5207a2&data=05%7C02%7CCelisabeth.tuerk%40un.org%7C579f1ec24a6d4439a47608dc84741360%7C0f9e35db544f4f60bdcc5ea416e6dc70%7C0%7C0%7C638530881287500144%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjojMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjojV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6IklhaWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Kak7JHj63DIafjYXzmBRDCRTHel0aPTA%2Bvb1%2FuKptyU%3D&reserved=0;>

1. Enhanced capacities of policymakers and experts in National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders, to develop and implement Trade Facilitation (TF) policies and measures, notably in the area of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) Articles 10.1; 10.3; 10.4; and 23.2, in which UNECE and its subsidiary body UN/CEFACT have a comparative advantage.
2. Improved capacities of policymakers and experts to measure progress in the implementation of TF, and to achieve internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures.

Evaluation purpose, objectives, scope, and intended users/audiences

The broad purpose of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNECE project E293 “Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system” were achieved.

The report looks at the extent of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability achieved by the project implementation activities in strengthening capacities of the target countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system.²

The evaluation also assessed any impacts the project may have had on progressing human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion, climate change and disaster risk reduction in the context of this engagement. The evaluation finally looked at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and assessed, where relevant, UNECE’s COVID-19 early response through this project.

The evaluation process included activities needed for conducting fair and independent assessment of if, and how were the objectives, expected accomplishments, planned activities and estimated costs delivered/respected as established in the UNECE Technical Cooperation Project Form. The evaluation was initiated in January 2024 and concluded in April 2024.

Based upon the Terms of Reference, the evaluation covers the full implementation time of the project, from January 2018 to December 2023 and its impact in targeted UNECE member States, in particular Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The results of the evaluation will be used in the planning and implementation of future activities of the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Integration Subprogramme. Findings, conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation will be used, when possible, to:

- Improve direct project’s follow up actions, implementation of products by project beneficiaries and dissemination of the knowledge created through the project.
- Assess the gaps and further needs of beneficiary countries in the area of this project.
- Formulate tailored capacity building projects to strengthen the national capacity in enhancing trade facilitation regulations in beneficiary countries.

² Evaluation TOR

The intended users/audience of this report is the UNECE secretariat and member States, in particular government representatives and other stakeholders from beneficiary countries with active engagement in trade facilitation policy making and practical application, private sector, development organizations and practitioners in trade facilitation.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of E293 project is structured around the four OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability). In summarizing the findings for each of the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, the evaluation links them to UNECE's Economic Cooperation and Trade Division normative machinery³ and its objectives as well as a strategy set out in the UNECE Proposed programme budget for 2023⁴.

The construction of the evaluation methodology was guided by the TORs aiming at fair assessment of the degree of achievements of E293 overall objective and its expected results.

The evaluator used a mixed-methods design that uses a variety of evaluative methods and techniques to address the key evaluation questions set out in the TOR. The evaluation methodology was intended to be flexible so that it could be adjusted to take into consideration frequent changes of project management responsibilities as well as the different needs of recipient countries under the programme's umbrella and better understand how the project has adapted to these different circumstances. In other words, the interview protocol was built on the same building blocks—it means the key evaluation questions—to allow for data collected to be compared during its analysis but while using the tool, it was very specifically adapted to the context and type of respondent.

Furthermore, the evaluation was guided by normative guidelines and principles based on good practices in managing, conducting and using evaluations. The evaluation process and methodological approach followed the principles set forth in the UNECE Evaluation Policy.⁵ Moreover, it has been performed in line with the Norms and Standards for Evaluation and respecting the Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation published by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).⁶

The inputs for the evaluation report were collected by several tools such as:

- Desk research of existing trade facilitation documentation, literature and data on the Project.
- Electronic survey, designed by the evaluator, targeting key stakeholders and beneficiaries.

³ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/ECTD-Booklet_Final.pdf

⁴ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/PPB%202023_Sect%2020_ECE.pdf

⁵ ECE Evaluation Policy, adopted by ECE EXCOM in December 2021: <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021>

⁶ <https://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866>

- Online interviews of diverse stakeholders and beneficiaries with the public and private sectors, international organizations, national authorities and academia.

Summary of key findings

1. Evaluation criteria concerning the relevance of E293 were fully achieved in relation to its responsiveness to beneficiary countries needs and alignment with the program of work of the UNECE and partially achieved in relation to its alignment with global/regional priorities, Sustainable Development Goals and, consideration of gender, human rights, disability perspective and climate change integration into the design and implementation of the project.
2. Evaluation criteria concerning the effectiveness of E293 implementation were fully achieved in relation to alignment of the project design with the needs of beneficiary countries and harmonization and coherence of activities with those of other partners operating within the same context and, partially achieved in relation to the extent of implementation of the planned activities required for the achievement of the project objective/expected results and overcoming of the challenges/obstacles to achieving expected results.
3. Evaluation criteria concerning the efficiency of E293 implementation were fully achieved in relation to adequacy of the project resources for attaining its planned results and, partially achieved in relation to the degree of achievement of the planned results on time, organization of all activities efficiently and extent of efficiency in using the resources economically.
4. Evaluation criteria concerning the sustainability of E293 results were fully achieved concerning measures adopted to ensure that project outcomes would continue after the project ended as well as regarding extent to which the partners and beneficiary countries “own” the outcomes of the project and the likelihood of the stakeholders’ engagement continuation, scaling up, replication and institutional strengthening.

Summary of key conclusions

1. Overall, the project responded to beneficiary countries needs as well as to the expectation of trade facilitation stakeholders in Central Asia. It was well aligned with development priorities of recipient countries’ governments and other stakeholders’ needs and helped support these countries to support their international obligations in contributing to several SDGs.
2. The project was fully aligned with the program of work of UNECE. Its approach and main target groups were in line with the UNECE mandate, mission and goals.
3. Key aspects of the project activities’ consistency with the sustainable development goals were well explored, while gender, human rights and disability perspectives have barely been touched. The evaluation did not note any evidence concerning the integration of gender, human rights and disability perspectives in the project document.
4. Several shortcomings linked to the interrupted continuity of the project affected the evaluation’s ability to fully assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the project. Another

shortcoming was the absence of a framework enabling a structured analysis of progress with respect to timing of delivery of expected activities and outputs.

5. The project was consistent with the interventions of other actors in the same areas, ensuring complementarity and coordination of the activities implemented. Regular dialogue with majority of the agencies supporting trade facilitation enhancement in Central Asia during the SPECA Working Group on Trade meetings and various capacity building seminars facilitated harmonization of efforts in trade facilitation with other partners operating in the same context.
6. The limited strategy for overcoming the obstacles/challenges that the project had to face resulted in large delays in the implementation of the planned activities and an extension of the project's duration from two to six years.
7. In practical terms, the confirmation of sustainability was manifested in the improvement of the legal basis for trade facilitation in several Central Asian countries in the last 6 years (see example from Tajikistan below), as well as in the commitment of these countries in the preparation of national trade facilitation road maps (completed in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and work in progress in Uzbekistan) aligned with the SPECA regional trade facilitation strategy and road map and the creation of national trade facilitation committees (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).

Summary of key recommendations

1. UNECE, through its three core functions – development of norms, standards and legal instruments; hosting of a convening platform; and technical cooperation across a number of relevant sectors - to continue trade facilitation related assistance to SPECA participating States, in particular with regards to standards and best practice recommendations for trade facilitation and electronic businesses to support Governments efforts to fulfill their obligations stemming from the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and/or WTO accession negotiations.
2. In the future, it is necessary to gradually move focus of UNECE trade facilitation capacity building activities from SPECA Working Group on Trade centered activities to training workshops and hands-on training at the national level in five Central Asia countries including all line ministries involved in export/import activities.
3. Future trade facilitation activities should include a more robust discussion/awareness raising concerning trade impacts on sustainable development, such as SDG 5 (gender equality) or SDG 13 (climate action), etc., to better integrate considerations of cross-cutting issues such as gender, human rights, disability perspectives, climate change. The COVID-19 crisis has made it more difficult for women to participate in economic activities and trade. Focusing on gender sensitive challenges should be further supported and type of assistance broadened.
4. In any scenario for future UNECE support to its member States in trade facilitation, UNECE internal management should be strengthened to ensure sound project management from

planning through delivery to reporting. The future projects' planning should therefore explicitly consider this vital function and specify how this is to be ensured.

I. Introduction

This report constitutes the final deliverable of the evaluation of the UNECE Geneva E293 Project entitled “Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system”. It presents results based on an in-depth document analysis (focused on the Evaluation Questions), online interviews of stakeholders and results of the Electronic Survey covering the entire implementation period 2018-2023.

Trade facilitation has been widely recognized as a key factor in economic development policy, due to the realization that it can generate major economic benefits in terms of competitiveness and efficiency at a relatively low cost. Trade facilitation can greatly enhance the integration of developing and transition economies into the global economy. Developments in trade facilitation at the WTO and other international fora have brought this subject to the highest level of political decision-making.⁷

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) has become, upon entry into force in 2017, a major driver for the implementation of trade facilitation instruments developed and supported by UNECE and other international organizations. With trade facilitation on national political agendas, many countries are now faced with the challenge of translating this broad concept into specific implementation strategies that can achieve the expected results and economic benefits. The task is even more challenging in landlocked regions such as Central Asia. Trade facilitation in Central Asia has a potential to underpin supply chains, reducing time and cost of moving goods among the Central Asian countries and around the world and promote more inclusive trade.

UNECE is an international organization with experience and capacity to support implementation of trade facilitation measures. It is particularly well placed to support the implementation of some of the key measures in the WTO TFA. Working through its subsidiary body, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), it is one of the bodies producing standards and best practice recommendations in trade facilitation and electronic business globally. It has produced close to 40 trade facilitation recommendations on such topics as trade document formats and procedures, codes for trade and transport, and the implementation of Single Window systems for export and import clearance. UN/CEFACT also develops relevant standards such as the only global standard for Electronic Data Interchange UN/EDIFACT, XML schemas, core components, and others. These tools are of primary importance for allowing SMEs and economies in transition to benefit from trade facilitation. The standards, best-practice recommendations and other tools offered by UNECE and UN/CEFACT support the implementation of a number of measures in the TFA.

⁷ E293 project concept note

Background to the evaluation, including the reason for the evaluation and the time frame of the evaluation

Established in 1947 by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and based in Geneva, Switzerland, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is one of the United Nation’s five Regional Economic Commissions. UNECE has 56 member States in Europe, North America and Asia. UNECE promotes pan-European economic integration in line with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030. One of UNECE’s six divisions, the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) assists UNECE member States to better integrate into the world economy and to harness trade (including trade facilitation), innovation and infrastructure financing and investment for the sustainable development of the UNECE region. As already mentioned above, UNECE as one of the international organizations with experience and capacity to support implementation of trade facilitation measures by providing know-how, capacity building support and preparing relevant publications and guideline.

According to OECD, “Trade facilitation refers to a specific set of measures that aim to streamline and simplify the technical and legal procedures for goods entering or leaving a country to be traded internationally. The concept covers the full spectrum of border procedures, from the electronic exchange of data about shipments, to the simplifications and harmonization of trade documents, to the possibility of appealing administrative decisions by border agencies⁸”.

The E293 project started in 2018 and it was formally closed in December 2023 (after multiple no-cost extension). The evaluation of the project was commissioned by the UNECE which constitutes a customary approach for all international cooperation activities implemented by this organization with reference to its Evaluation Policy⁹. The evaluation activities were initiated in January 2024 and completed in April 2024 by delivering the independent evaluation report by evaluator to UNECE management. In accordance with the evaluation TOR, the results of the evaluation will be used in the planning and implementation of future activities of the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Integration Subprogramme. Findings of this evaluation will be used, when possible, to:

- Improve direct project’s follow up actions, implementation of products by project beneficiaries and dissemination of the knowledge created through the project in recipient countries and beyond.
- Assess the gaps and further needs of the Central Asian countries in the area of the implementation of trade facilitation measures and better integration into the international rules-based trading system.

⁸ Source: OECD 2023

⁹ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Item%2010_ECE_EX_2021_35_Rev1_Evaluation%20Policy_as%20adopted.pdf

- Formulate tailored capacity building projects to strengthen the national capacity in enhancing innovation in the project focus area.

Purpose and objectives of the evaluation, and the primary users/audiences

According to the Terms of Reference (TOR), the overall objective and purpose of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the objectives of the UNECE project E293 were achieved.

The evaluation assesses the degree of achievements of the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project in strengthening capacities of its target/recipient countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system. Attention was also paid to consideration of impacts the project may have on progressing human rights, gender equality, disability inclusion and climate change in the context of the UNECE engagement in the context of the E293 project. As envisaged by TOR, the evaluation also looked at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and assessed, where relevant, UNECE's COVID-19 early response through this project.

Expected primary users/audience of the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations are the E293 project team and the ECTD management as well as UNECE as a whole (including top management). Financing donors and partners of the Programme are also foreseen to be key users of the report, in particular the donor (Russian Federation). These are not only important due to their financial and in-kind support but also important stakeholders in building consensus on the need for further enhancing of trade facilitation measures and state-of-art approaches.

1. Description of the project

1.1 Background

Central Asia is a fast-growing region endowed with rich natural resources. While social and economic fragility are common challenges, the Central Asian countries also share trade and investment opportunities which have the potential to yield social and economic progress.

The five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) plus Afghanistan and Azerbaijan participate in the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). When the E293 project was designed these countries were among the last in the world to accede to the international rules-based trading system coordinated by the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was recognized that the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) would make a significant contribution to facilitating trade in the region and its integration with the economies of Europe and Asia.

The objective of the project was to strengthen national capacities of the beneficiary countries (the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan) to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system.

1.2 Project objectives and expected outcomes

As already mentioned above **the overall objective of the project was to strengthen national capacities of the beneficiary countries (the Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan) to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system.** The technical cooperation project form (TCPF) established two expected outcomes for achieving the main objective.

These expected accomplishments/outcomes were defined as follows:

1. Enhanced capacities of policymakers and experts in National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders, to develop and implement Trade Facilitation (TF) policies and measures, notably in the area of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) Articles 10.1; 10.3; 10.4; and 23.2.
2. Improved capacities of policymakers and experts to measure progress in the implementation of TF, and to achieve internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures.

The following indicators of achievement were formulated in the E 293 concept note:

Indicator of achievement IA1.1. - At least two countries established and/or maintained national trade facilitation bodies;

Indicator of achievement IA1.2. - At least four national policy documents (e.g. decree on establishing a National Trade Facilitation Committee, a strategy for the implementation of international trade facilitation standards or other document) promoting trade facilitation formulated;

Indicator of achievement IA2. - One pilot benchmarking system for measuring progress in trade facilitation developed.

The project targeted low and middle-income countries with economies in transition. These countries participate in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (UN SPECA), promoting implementation of trade facilitation measures and better integration into the international rules-based trading system. The UNECE has been aiming to advance the capacities of the member states in trade facilitation for many years. Therefore, it is well situated to support the implementation of some of the key measures contained in the WTO TFA. Working through its subsidiary body, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), UNECE has produced a long list of trade facilitation recommendations on such topics as trade document formats and procedures, codes for trade and transport, and the implementation of Single Window systems for export and import procedures

1.3 Project strategies and key activities

Project strategy

The strategy of the project was to focus on the four areas covered by the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, in which UNECE and UN/CEFACT have comparative advantage:

1. National Trade Facilitation Committees (TFA Art.22.2);
2. Streamlining documents and documentary procedures (including digitalization) (TFA Art. 10.1);
3. International Standards for Trade Facilitation (TFA Art. 10.3) and,
4. Single Window (TFA Art. 10.6).

The overall concept was to prepare training materials on these subjects and use them to help the Central Asian countries' transition economies to engage meaningfully in trade facilitation activities.

The project was meant to support:

- (1) the SPECA Working Group on Trade, and
- (2) the finalization and implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy¹⁰ and Roadmap¹¹ to implement this Strategy, developed in the SPECA WG on Trade and adopted by the SPECA Governing Council on 21 November 2019 in Ashgabat.

Project key activities

The UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM), which is entrusted with the approval of extrabudgetary contributions, approved the Technical Cooperation Project Form (TCPF) related to E293 project on 26 September 2017.

TCPF established the following activities for achieving the final goal of the project and its expected outcomes:

A1.1. Adaptation and development of training materials and modules for national TF courses to cover the relevant target areas in the TFA for the implementation of WTO TFA provisions related to Articles 10.1 on formalities and documentary requirements; 10.3 on use of international standards; 10.4 on single window; and 23.2 on national trade facilitation committee (NTFC);

A1.2. Organization of two capacity-building seminars for members of NTFBs, regulatory agencies, and other relevant stakeholders on the development of national trade facilitation roadmaps, including for the implementation of the WTO targeted TFA measures;

¹⁰(https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/SPECA_Trade_Facilitation_Strategy_English.pdf)

¹¹(https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/Roadmap_for_Implementation_of_the_SPECA_TF_Strategy_English.pdf)

A1.3. Organization of one sub-regional SPECA capacity building and experience sharing conference to strengthen cooperation on the implementation of TF measures and supporting international standards, including on the aspects of Single Window interoperability;

A1.4. Translation of the training materials developed under A1.1 into Russian;

A2.1. Development of training materials on benchmarking mechanisms to measure progress and achieve policy coherence in the implementation of TF measures, based on the UN/CEFACT Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Methodology (TTFMM) in the beneficiary countries;

A2.2. Organization of two capacity-building seminars for NTFBs on the development of national benchmark mechanisms to measure progress and achieve policy coherence in TF based on the UN/CEFACT TTFMM methodology;

A2.3. Translation of learning materials and training courses into Russian;

A2.4. Update and maintenance of the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) by incorporating project results and lessons learned and the new learning materials, including through the development of new itineraries providing a step-by-step approach to the implementation of TF measures in the project target areas, and the drafting of case stories;

A2.5. Organize a concluding Conference (in the context of the UN/CEFACT Forum) on regulatory cooperation for TF to disseminate project's outcomes and share lessons learned from project target countries.

1.4 Beneficiaries and target countries

The Technical Cooperation Project Form determined as **the project target group the senior trade policy makers, national experts in trade policy and trade facilitation, representatives of the business community, representatives of academia. The same documents identified as the beneficiary countries Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.**

All these countries participate in the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). The subregion lacks a tangible sense of regionalism. When the project document was drafted the Central Asian countries were among the last in the world to accede to the international rules-based trading system (WTO). The need to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which was entering into force, was a significant challenge to the Central Asian countries. The trade policy and capacity-building events, as well as the TFA readiness assessments carried out by UNECE with various partners in 2015-2016 have shown the demand and justification for a project such as this in the target countries.

1.5 Key partners and other key stakeholders

The project stakeholders targeted during the evaluation were the trade facilitation policy makers, government officials, UNECE, other international organizations involved in trade facilitation,

private sector and practitioners in trade facilitation, as shown in Table 1 (based on information provided by the project manager). **The project was intended to support:**

- (1) the SPECA Working Group on Trade¹², and
- (2) the finalization and implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy¹³, adopted in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan during the 14th session of the SPECA Governing Council
- (3) the drafting of a Roadmap to implement the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy¹⁴.

Logically, the key partners/stakeholders were the representative of the five targeted countries participating in the SPECA Working Group on Trade activities.

The project’s concept note and the technical cooperation project do not provide the intended stakeholder list and the stakeholder analysis. In the absence of an overview/analysis of different institutions that would have been affected by activities of the project and how these participated and/or benefited from the project, the table 1 contents are based on the discussions/interviews with the UNECE staff responsible for the project management and the documentary review undertaken by the evaluator.

Table 1: Stakeholders mapping

Stakeholder	Role in the project	Level of influence on the project	Extent to which affected by the project
Governments			
Government of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan,	Main stakeholders Implementation of TF approach Monitoring progress	High	High
UN and other International Organizations			
UNECE, ITC, WTO, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCAP	Stakeholder Project leadership, management and monitoring, technical support to SPECA	High	High
SPECA WG on Trade	Advice on TF approach/development	High	High

¹² https://unece.org/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/VIII_ToR_SPECA_WG_on_Trade_English.pdf

¹³

https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/SPECA_Trade_Facilitation_Strategy_English.pdf

¹⁴

https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/Roadmap_for_Implementation_of_the_SPECA_TF_Strategy_English.pdf

Stakeholder	Role in the project	Level of influence on the project	Extent to which affected by the project
	of TF strategy and best practices sharing		
GIZ, USAID	Advice on TF approach and best practices sharing	Medium	Low
Private sector			
Private sector: Trade-facilitate.com	Advice and sharing lessons learned in TF	Medium	Low

1.6 Resources

The project management and implementation counted with the following resources:

- 1/Human resources which according the TCPF consisted from 4 months/year of one regular budget staff time, supported by the ECTD G staff as required.
- 2/Training and capacity building know-how.
- 3/Partnership and collaboration with the stakeholders described above.
- 4/Monitoring and reporting mechanism supported by the project manager.
- 5/Communication and outreach including awareness raising, engaging stakeholders, workshops.
- 6/Financial resources as described in the following table:

Table 2 Project under evaluation, its duration and financial resources

Title of the intervention	“Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system”	
Budget of the intervention	USD 352 000	
Project Number	E 293	
Dates of the intervention	Start date:	January 2018
	End date:	December 2023

1.7 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals

Trade facilitation activities play an important role in advancing several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting economic growth, innovation, and fostering partnership. Here's how trade facilitation activities are closely linked to various SDGs:

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth: Trade facilitation promotes economic growth by making trade processes more efficient and less costly. This, in turn, creates job opportunities, enhances productivity, and fosters entrepreneurship, thereby supporting decent work and sustainable economic growth.

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure: Trade facilitation activities contribute to fostering innovation. By improving trade logistics, enhancing connectivity, and promoting technology adoption, trade facilitation supports the development of modern infrastructure.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals: Trade facilitation requires collaboration and partnerships among governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society. By fostering cooperation and coordination among stakeholders, trade facilitation contributes to achieving the broader SDGs through collective action and shared responsibility.

2. Evaluation objectives, scope and questions

Purpose and objectives

The evaluation assessed the work of the UNECE project E293 “Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system” and extent to which the objectives were achieved. To achieve its objective the evaluation assessed how the four standard DAC criteria, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability were reflected in E293 activities.

In addition, the evaluation measured impacts that the project may have had on progressing gender equality and women empowerment in the context of the project implementation. The gender perspective was addressed through assessment of the cooperation with women policy makers, representatives of academia and national experts in the area of trade in the target countries. Finally, it looked at the activities repurposed to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and assessed, where relevant, UNECE’s COVID-19 early response action through this project.

The specific objectives of the exercise were:

- Determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the project results in light of its objective and expected accomplishments.
- Assess how the project activities contributed to gender equality and women’s empowerment and make recommendations on how these considerations can be better addressed in future activities supporting trade facilitation measures.

- Identify key findings and conclusions from the project and formulate action-oriented, forward-looking recommendations addressed to UNECE for improving future interventions in trade facilitation cooperation projects.
- It is expected that the evaluation of the E 293 Project would contribute to trade facilitation learning and capacity strengthening in UNECE and beyond.

The results of the evaluation will be used in the planning and implementation of future activities of the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Integration Subprogramme. Findings of this evaluation will be used, when possible, to:

- Improve direct project's follow up actions, implementation of products by project beneficiaries and dissemination of the knowledge created through the project.
- Assess the gaps and further needs of countries in the area of trade facilitation.
- Formulate tailored capacity building projects to strengthen the national capacity in enhancing innovation in the field of trade facilitation.

The results of the evaluation will be reported to the UN/CEFACT as well as to the UNECE Executive Committee if required.

Evaluation scope, criteria and questions

The temporal scope of the evaluation includes the entire UNECE E293 project activities in the period 2018-2023, while the **geographic scope** looks at the extent to which the project has managed to strengthen the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement effective trade facilitation measures.

The specific aspects evaluated were:

- The materialisation of the expected results and their facilitating/hampering factors.
- The contribution to SDGs (specifically to SDG 17) and the mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues. The matching of the needs of the regional (SPECA) and national partners.
- The governing mechanism of the Intervention including the effectiveness of UNECE management

Attention was also paid to the following categories of project results:

- Project design and its relevance for the target countries priorities
- Results framework/Log frame alignment with existing gaps in trade facilitation practices
- Achievement of planned results by reviewing the log frame indicators against results
- Project implementation process including management arrangements, work planning, monitoring and reporting
- Potential risks to sustainability

The project stakeholders targeted during the evaluation were trade facilitation policy makers, government officials, private sector and practitioners in trade facilitation, as shown in Table 2 above in the text. The Project Concept Note as well as the Technical Cooperation Project Form contain neither a stakeholder list nor a stakeholder analysis. In the absence of an overview of

different institutions that would have been affected by activities of the project and how these participate and/or benefit from the project, the table 2 contents is based on the initial discussions with the project management.

The evaluation was guided by the planned objectives of the project, its expected accomplishments, planned activities and estimated costs established in the TCPF. It assessed the results achieved by the project by application of the following evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of all activities implemented during the project duration (2018-2023). The evaluation TORs, evaluation questions and evaluation matrix are attached in Annexes.

3. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology was constructed in accordance with the TOR. It was established in line with the UNECE Evaluation Policy approved by the UNECE Executive Committee on 16 December 2021,¹⁵ completing the administrative instruction for the evaluation in the United Nations Secretariat (ST/AI/2021/3). The methodology was also aligned with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development Assistance Committee criteria for international development evaluations.¹⁶

The evaluation was carried through the following 3-phased process: Inception, Desk/Research, and Synthesis, which are summarised below:

Inception phase

This phase consisted of online and face-to-face kick-off meetings with the project management staff, followed by initial documents/data collection/ review and background analysis.

Desk/Research phase

This phase consisted of an in-depth document analysis followed by semi-structured interviews with selected key stakeholders. This exercise included the identification of information gaps. and of hypotheses to be tested in the field phase. The Desk Note was presented online.

Synthesis

A final analysis and an overall assessment of findings were carried out in this phase which consisted of clustering and prioritizing lessons learned, drawing conclusion from the evaluation questions and providing recommendations on future actions.

The evaluation followed the recommendations of the UNECE Evaluation Policy¹⁷, adopted by the UNECE Executive Committee on 16 December 2021, the administrative instruction guiding Evaluation in the UN Secretariat¹⁸; and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms

¹⁵ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Item%2010_ECE_EX_2021_35_Rev1_Evaluation%20Policy_as%20adopted.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

¹⁷ [UNECE Evaluation policy](#)

¹⁸ ST/AI/2021/3

and Standards for Evaluation¹⁹. Human rights and gender equality considerations were integrated at all stages of the evaluation²⁰: (i) in the evaluation scope and questions; (ii) in the methods, tools and data analysis techniques; (iii) in the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the final report. SDGs considerations were also taken into account during the evaluation of the project.

The key questions established for the assessment of evaluation criteria have been structured along the main purpose of the evaluation, the Terms of Reference and the line of the enquiry mentioned above into a set of thirteen key evaluation questions. The criteria for undertaking the evaluation are mentioned in the TOR and represent the standard criteria used for project evaluations: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. OECD/DAC glossary of key terms in evaluation and results-based management updated in 2019 provides the definition of these evaluation criteria as follows:

“Relevance: The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners’ and donors’ policies.

Efficiency: A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.

Effectiveness: The extent to which the development intervention’s objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.

Sustainability: The continuation of benefits from a development intervention after major development assistance has been completed.”²¹

The evaluation used and analysed a wide range of data and information sources. To make the information received from several sources fully beneficial the combination of information gathered were regularly cross-checked and triangulated. Attention was paid to both project process assessment as well as to its outcome evaluation. Process evaluation was important for measuring whether the planned activities were implemented on schedule and in the right way. In addition, outcome/impact evaluation measured whether the expected changes had been achieved by the project activities after project completion.

The evaluation process was a summative one in its nature, it means that it focused on:

- assessing what happened
- asking if the project did what was planned
- asking if implementation was done well
- asking if the intended changes happened
- asking if the changes observed are attributable to this initiative

¹⁹ UNEG 2016 Norms and Standards for Evaluation

²⁰ In line with UNEG Guidance contained in Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations

²¹ OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation, 2019 which completes and updates the traditional OECD/DAC, glossary of key terms in evaluation and results-based management, Evaluation and Aid Effectiveness series, 2002

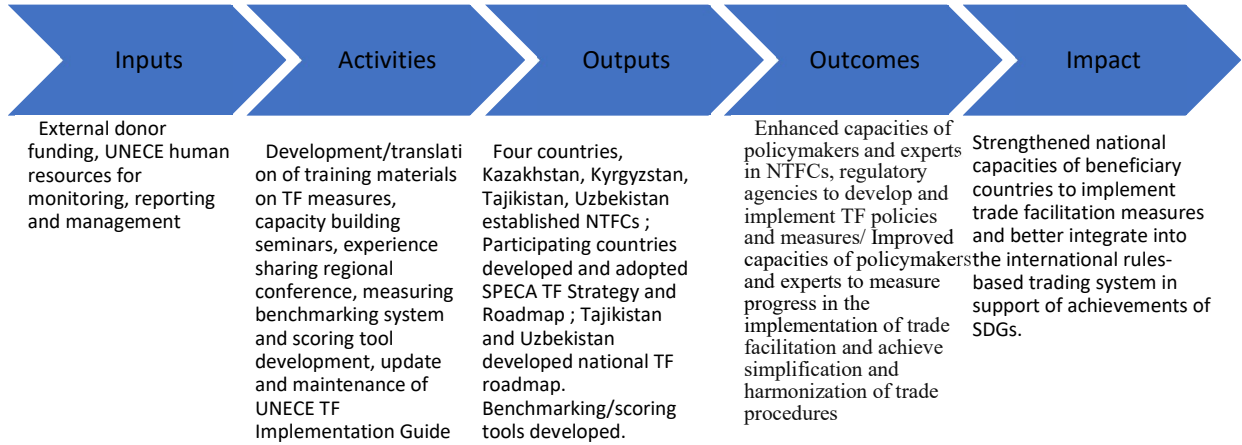
-focusing on learning.

The evaluation was conducted based on the following mixed methods to triangulate information:

1. A desk review of all relevant documents, including the project document and information on project activities (monitoring data); materials developed in support of the activities (agendas, plans, participant lists, background documents, donor reports and publications); proposed programme budgets covering the evaluation period; project reports to the donor.
2. Online survey (designed by the evaluator) of key stakeholders and beneficiaries.
3. Interviews (in-person and/or online) of a wide range of diverse stakeholders and beneficiaries (names and contact information received from UNECE) from both the private and the public sector, academia, and international organisations.

Theory-based approach:

The evaluation is theory-based as it was guided by a reconstructed theory of change to assess whether and how Project activities have contributed to expected results. A theory of change explains how an intervention is expected to produce its results. It clarifies the causal pathways behind an intervention’s cause-and-effect logic, which are often just implicitly assumed but not explicitly specified. The theory of change therefore allows to better examine the causal link between delivered outputs and observed outcomes. For the purpose of this evaluation a result chain, or a pipeline model was applied. It represents the theory of change in terms of boxes, as designed below:



Source: The evaluator.

Gender equality and human rights

The evaluation paid due attention to the principles of a rights-based and gender mainstreaming approach. Both men and women have been consulted in the evaluation to obtain a proper understanding of the different needs and challenges they face in their specific contexts, social and economic challenges and in trade facilitation development.

[Interview guide and online survey questionnaire](#)

The interview guide (see Annex) guided the evaluation as the principal analytical tool. This tool was designed already during the inception phase following the initial meetings held with UNECE stakeholders and an initial review of the project documents. It contains the evaluation questions to be considered for all evaluation criteria, as well as the justification criteria and indicators of success. The Interview guide (see Annex) and the Electronic survey questionnaire (see Annex) were fully aligned.

Limitations:

The evaluation had to overcome a number of challenges, some of which are described below:

- The E293 project started in 2018 and was scheduled for 2 years; in the end, it was formally closed in December 2023, after multiple no-cost extension. Many stakeholders found it difficult to assess all project aspects and to relate the program inputs, outputs and outcomes between the start of the project in 2018 into 2023. For example, consultants stayed with the project for 2 weeks to 4 months at maximum.
- Similarly, the application of the methodology outlined above faced a challenging situation, represented by the low interest/readiness of the project stakeholders (recommended by UNECE) to participate in the interviews or the on-line electronic survey after 6 years (i.e. due to regular turn-over of officials in governments). To overcome this challenge required extraordinary and time-consuming efforts from evaluator in organizing interviews and/or obtaining necessary feedback through the electronic survey.
- The available documentation and monitoring data of the project were quite fragmented. Over the span of six years, the project's documentation and reporting has been carried out by different people and in varying formats, depending on the type of activity. Even though the project management team put in a lot of work since the start of the evaluation to make data available to the evaluator, the documentation still lacked coherence.
- The evaluated sample of activities has not been randomly selected. It mainly represents activities judged by the project management team to be 'good examples' of the project. The main reason for this was the fact that only a small number of interventions were sufficiently extensive and long-standing to offer a reasonable perspective to draw broader conclusions.
- The absence of budgetary provisions for a field-based evaluation mission to at least one of the targeted countries presented another limitation
- Technical issues related to on-line interviews and surveys (poor internet connection, limited knowledge of some stakeholder of the on-line survey procedures etc.)

- limited number of stakeholders, if any, that were actively involved at least during 20-30% of the duration of the project

II. Evaluation findings

This chapter presents evaluation analysis and findings of the project results and performance in terms of its activities relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, according to evaluation criteria and questions determined by UNECE in the evaluation TOR. Findings are based on evidence generated by documentary review, online interviews and electronic survey activities. The findings reflect a systematic and intensive analysis and interpretation of the information and data obtained, and not the subjective judgement of the evaluator.

Evaluation applied the project performance rating marks, to promote learning and accountability as a foundation of the UNECE journey towards establishing itself as a learning and accountable organizations. The following table explains relationships between the rating number and the extent of the evaluation criteria achievements:

Table 3:

Evaluation criteria	Rating number	Degree of criteria achievement
Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability	1	Criteria not achieved
Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability	2	Criteria little achieved
Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability	3	Criteria partially achieved
Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability	4	Criteria fully achieved

1. Relevance

Relevance assesses the consistency of the objectives and expected accomplishments of the E293 project with the needs/priorities of recipient countries, global development priorities, with UNECE corporate goals and comparative advantages and consideration of cross-cutting issues

1.1 Responsiveness to beneficiary countries needs/priorities and timeliness of the project

Stakeholders interviewed and surveyed confirmed that the project met their needs and priorities in improving trade facilitation measures. The project activities were timely as they were aligned to the participating countries trade facilitation needs in the timeframe 2018-2023

The fundamental project rationale was in essence that when the project was designed trade facilitation was widely recognized by the Central Asian stakeholders as a key factor in

economic development policy. During SPECA working group on trade sessions, the Central Asian countries repeatedly acknowledge that trade facilitation can generate major economic benefits in terms of competitiveness and efficiency at a relatively low cost. It was also noted that trade facilitation could enhance the integration of the Central Asia countries transition economies into the global economy. Developments related to trade facilitation at the WTO and other international fora (UNCTAD, ITC, SPECA, WB) have brought this subject to the highest level of political decision-making.

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) adopted in 2017 became a major driver for the Central Asia countries for the implementation of trade facilitation instruments developed and supported by UNECE and other international organizations. Moreover, with trade facilitation on national political agendas, the Central Asia countries were faced by the challenge of translating the WTO TFA broad concept into specific implementation strategies. Considering a long standing UNECE experience in this area, the Central Asia countries expressed interest in receiving UNECE assistance in supporting the implementation of trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system. These expressions of interest were made during the sessions of the SPECA Working Group on Trade held in 2016, 2017 and 2018. Conclusions and recommendations of the SPECA Working Group on Trade confirmed the need and relevance of the UNECE support to the Central Asian countries in trade facilitation strengthening^{22, 23, 24}, as well as a timeliness of such support by UNECE.



²² 2016: https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/workshop/2016_May_Ashgabat/Report_Eng.doc

²³ 2017: https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/workshop/2017_July_Geneva/SPECA-WG11_Report_Eng.pdf

²⁴ 2018: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/workshop/2018_Sep_Kazakhstan/ConclusRecs-Eng.doc

Photo: Participants of the SPECA Working Group on Trade meeting in Uzbekistan, 2024

Project activities were undertaken in close cooperation with the SPECA countries under the SPECA Working Group on Trade. A high proportion of stakeholders from the SPECA participating states' NTFBs were also involved in this work.

In this context, E293 project was designed to assist its participating countries integrate the WTO trade facilitation system by adopting UNECE respective standards, best practices and recommendations (notably single window system and strengthening/establishing trade facilitation bodies).

Rating: 4

1.2 Alignment with global/regional priorities and with Sustainable Development Goals



The compatibility of the project's activities/results with the regional priorities of the countries of Central Asia was explained above. As far as global priorities are concerned, the main focus of the project was on supporting the SDGs.

Project document and its activities dedicated very little, if any attention to the contribution of trade facilitation activities to other important global priorities, such as Paris Climate Change Agreement 2015²⁵ or any others. In the current context, when UNECE's support for climate action is strongly emphasized in several UNECE publications (for example "UNECE Support for Climate action 2023, 2022, 2021"^{26, 27, 28}) more attention to this area would be expected from the project managed by UNECE. The project did not fulfil this expectation. In this context, it is fair to

²⁵ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

²⁶ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/UNECE%20Climate%20Action_Brochure_WEB%20%282%29.pdf

²⁷ <https://unece.org/info/UNECE-and-the-SDGs/pub/372540>

²⁸ <https://unece.org/info/UNECE-and-the-SDGs/pub/361192>

note that the project was designed shortly after the 2015 Paris Agreement and long before the UNECE Evaluation Policy of 2021.

On the other side, **the relationship between the planned activities of the project and the SDGs was well defined in the project document drafting phase.** Project Concept Note stipulated that:

“This project will contribute to achieving SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, in particular its target 17:10 – promotion of the international rules-based trading system in a region, which still faces challenges in its integration into this system, as well as target 17.11: increasing the share of developing countries in international exports. From a broader perspective the project also will contribute to achieving SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms, SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, and 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all level.”

Project clearly supported the sustainable development goals, namely its following targets:

-17.10 which focuses on promoting a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory, and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization (WTO). This includes the conclusion of negotiations under the Doha Development Round²⁹. In this context E293 aimed to create a fair and inclusive global trading environment that benefits all SPECA nations, regardless of their economic status and,

17.11. in supporting SPECA countries to increase their exports by implementation of trade facilitation measures. Some of the SPECA participating states are not yet WTO members and in their accession aspirations the project stimulated their pursue for policy reforms with the goal to harmonize their domestic trade regime as much as possible with the top-tier best practices of the WTO.

For example, the project implemented the following activities: (Activity 1.1) drafting training materials on the four targeted trade facilitation measures (national trade facilitation committees or NTFCs -TFA Art.23.2; streamlining documentary procedures – TFA Art. 10.1; using international standards – Art.10.3; and Single Window – Art.10.4) as well as PowerPoint presentations as training tools were prepared during the normal project period. One additional guide on an additional measure (establishing a TF enquiry point – TFA Art.1.3, tailored for the SPECA countries was requested by the countries and was prepared with support from the project.

Two itineraries of the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG), namely WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and SMEs and Trade Facilitation were developed through a grant to the ILO training institute in Turin. In addition, the Single Window itinerary was modified. The webpages of these itineraries have been designed and content have been incorporated. Some new instruments to TFIG have been added including: UN Regional Commissions Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade – Regional and Global Reports, Reference Data Model, Technical Notes on Trade Facilitation, Public-Private Partnerships in Trade Facilitation (Recommendation

²⁹ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dda_e/dda_e.htm

41). UNCTAD, ITC and ESCAP pages have been updated as well. The content was translated into Russian. Several broken hyperlinks to external materials have been fixed. ITC-ILO, the grantee of the update and maintenance of TFIG pages conducted the technical part of the activities whereas secretariat staff and consultants jointly coordinated the content development and update.

All this went in parallel with the progress in other non-trade related SDGs that were indirectly benefitting from the increased prosperity and economic growth resulting from the processes mentioned above.

Rating: 3

1.3 Alignment with the program of work of the UNECE and UNECE project added value

UNECE as a multilateral platform facilitates greater economic integration and cooperation among its fifty-six member States and promotes sustainable development and economic prosperity through:

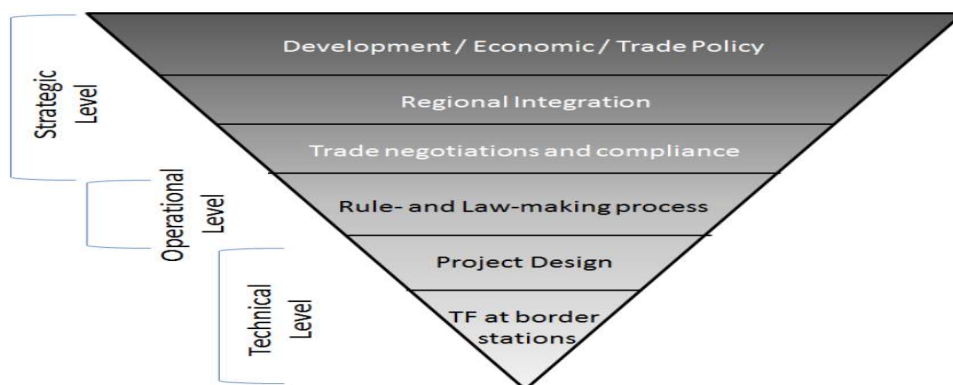
- policy dialogue,
- negotiation of international legal instruments,
- development of regulations and norms,
- exchange and application of best practices as well as economic and technical expertise,
- technical cooperation for countries with economies in transition.

The UNECE contributes to enhancing the effectiveness of the UN through the regional implementation of outcomes of global UN Conferences and Summits. Its terms of reference have been defined by ECOSOC.³⁰

The UNECE region continues to face economic and environmental challenges in addressing the complexity of achieving the SDGs, which remain a source of primary concern to member States. In line with the UNECE mandate/priorities the project addressed a persisting challenge faced by the SPECA countries: implementation of trade facilitation measures in line with the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and better integration of these countries into the international rules-based trading system.

Structure of the National Trade Facilitation Committees proposed by UNECE Manual:

³⁰ <https://unece.org/objectives-and-mandate>



The project concentrated on the four measures in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, in which UNECE has decades of experience, mandate and comparative advantage. The project contributed to the capacity of the SPECA participating States and their business community to advance trade facilitation by using the main comparative advantages of UNECE:

- through the project UNECE developed major tools to assist learning about trade facilitation: including four training materials on core areas of trade facilitation and measures in the WTO TFA, which are the areas where UNECE and its subsidiary body UN/CEFACT have advantage:
 - national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs) -TFA Art.23.2 and UN/CEFACT Recommendation 4,
 - streamlining documentary procedures – TFA Art. 10.1 and most standards and trade facilitation recommendations of UN/CEFACT, as well as standards and other tools for digitalization,
 - use of international standards – TFA Art.10.3 and half of the UN/CEFACT Recommendations,
 - Single Window – Art.10.4 and UN/CEFACT Recommendations 33-36,
 - Training materials (PPT presentations, etc.) based on the UN/CEFACT Recommendation 42: Establishment of a Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism (TTFMM)³¹ developed with ESCAP and contributions made to the UN Survey on trade facilitation, which produced a special issue on the SPECA subregion³²,
 - Upon request from the SPECA countries, UNECE developed a Guide on Establishing a Trade Facilitation Enquiry Point (TFA Art.1.3 and UN/CEFACT Recommendation 40: Consultation Mechanisms³³) as training tools were prepared during the regular project period.

The project was fully aligned with the program of work of UNECE and its added value was reflected in the following activities led by UNECE:

³¹ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Rec42-ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2017_8E-Rev1.pdf

³² https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/untf-survey-2023-SPECA?ref=unftsurvey.org&_gl=1*1f7k8b4*_ga*NzEyODkyNzAxLjE3MDk1NzYwNTU.*_ga_SB1ZX36Y86*M_TcwOTgzMzgOS4zLjEuMTcwOTgzMzg1NC40NS4wLjA.

³³ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/Rec40-ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2015_9E_Rev1.pdf

- UN/CEFACT reviewed the training modules, endorsed them, and published them on its website, for wider use.
- The trainings on these subjects and the support for the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy made a valuable contribution to the dissemination of the UNECE standards and best practice recommendations on trade facilitation.

Rating: 4

1.4 Consideration of gender, human rights, disability perspective and climate change integration into the design and implementation of the project

Consideration of human rights, disability perspective and climate change integration were not key focus area of the project although the importance of these subjects was recognized by a few of the interviewed stakeholders.

The project design did not include in its proposed strategy explanation of how the project would contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment, the realization of human rights, with an emphasis on “leaving no one behind”. The same applies to the integration of climate change consideration. There is no reference made to these aspects neither in the Technical Cooperation Form, nor in the Project Concept Form. This is a weakness of the project considering the World Bank Group study made in 2018 informing that across the world, countries are losing \$160 trillion due to the lifetime earnings differences between women and men. It’s a situation that doesn’t just affect women, who’ve been blocked from higher earnings, jobs, and capital. It affects everyone — leaving trillions on the table instead of catapulting gross domestic product growth. In nearly every country today, women face barriers to fully participate in the work force and earn as much as men. The losses in wealth from inequality in earnings between men and women vary by region. The largest losses—each between \$40 trillion and \$50 trillion—are observed in East Asia and the Pacific, North America, and Europe and **Central Asia**.

The evaluation noted that the gender dimension was reflected in the participation and the discussion held in SPECA WGT session in 2019 in Uzbekistan. Evidence can be found for instance in the report from the Technical Cooperation Seminar on Implementing Specific Provision of the WTO TFA held in Nur-Sultan, from 20-22 May 2019 showing a considerable involvement of women in the discussions, as well as in the follow up activities to this event³⁴. One of the electronic survey responders mentioned that “Gender rights were actively taken into account, because the participation of women in all events organized by E293 was evident.”

The gender dimension was taken into account during the evaluation phase reflected in the significant percentage of woman stakeholders in interviews/electronic survey. Another sign of woman's perspective mainstreaming was integrated into the project activities was the evidence that, the key consultants and project management staff in the UNECE were women.

³⁴ Technical cooperation Seminar on Implementing Specific Provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement; National Trade Facilitation Committee and a Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring and Measuring Mechanism Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan 20 - 22 May 2019/Report

Reports from other SPECA WGT meetings as well as reports from capacity seminars organized as part of the project do not contain sex-disaggregated information about the participants of these events. Lack of sex-disaggregated data and full-scale gender statistics from the key meetings/seminars was a considerable obstacle to assess a gender-based approach during the project implementation. Women’s empowerment and gender equality were not embedded in the project design. Generally, some trade facilitation activities include elements that relate to human rights issues, of which labour-related human rights are most widely found. No performance indicators were defined concerning human rights and climate change integration.

On a positive note, UNECE/UN-CEFACT published a white paper “Women in trade facilitation”³⁵, during the project duration. This paper is part of UN/CEFACT’s gender mainstreaming efforts which look to create deliverables that provide support for policy development, data creation and research, standards, recommendations, advocacy and dialogue, resource allocation, planning, implementation, and monitoring of programs aimed at eliminating gender disparities in trade facilitation.

Project lacked specific analyses, activities and goals related to other human rights issues.

It can be concluded that the mainstreaming issues were not sufficiently embedded in the interventions

Rating: 2,5

Relevance Overall Rating: 3,38

2. Effectiveness

Effectiveness is to assess that to what extent the intervention’s objectives and expected results were achieved for meeting the needs of beneficiary countries and assuring coherence and harmonization with other partners operating within the same context and overcoming challenges faced during the project duration

2.1 Extent of project design and set up effectiveness in meeting the needs of beneficiary countries

As explained already above, Central Asia and Azerbaijan very much needed support in trade facilitation and preparing for accession to the WTO at the time of designing the project. Political will for trade facilitation in all countries, both members of WTO at the time (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and the acceding countries, had gained momentum. The governments, the business community and the development partner engaging with the region (GIZ, UNCTAD, ITC, etc.) looked at UNECE and UN/CEFACT for cooperation on the areas in which UN/CEFACT had

³⁵ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/WhitePaper_Women-TF_Eng.pdf

comparative advantage in trade facilitation. The project played a catalytic role in accelerating activities on trade facilitation under the SPECA WG on Trade and other activities on trade facilitation supported by UNECE. Project design was effectively addressing the needs of the Central Asia countries related to accession requirements to WTO TFA in assisting SPECA countries to implement the provisions of this agreement.

For example, the project played an instrumental role in the following activities: (A 1.1) drafting training materials on the four targeted trade facilitation measures (national trade facilitation committees or NTFCs -TFA Art.23.2; streamlining documentary procedures – TFA Art. 10.1; using international standards – Art.10.3; and Single Window – Art.10.4) as well as PPT presentations as training tools were prepared during the normal project period. One additional guide on an additional measure (establishing a TF enquiry point – TFA Art.1.3, tailored for the SPECA countries) was requested by the countries and prepared later with support from the project.

In line with the needs of beneficiary countries as voiced during the SPECA WGT meetings and training seminars, the project supported the preparation of several training materials:

-Training Material on the Implementation of a Single Window (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.5) https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF5E_TrainingMaterialSW.pdf

-Training Material on the Use of International Standards (United Nations ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.6) https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF6-StandardsTraining.pdf

-Training Material on National Trade Facilitation Bodies (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.7) https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF7-NTFB-Training.pdf

-Guide for National Trade Facilitation Bodies on How to Use UN/CEFACT Standards and Tools (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.8) https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF8-Guide-NTFBs-UNCEFACT-Standards.pdf; <https://unttc.org/documents/guide-national-trade-facilitation-bodies-how-use-uncefact-trade-facilitation-standards>; <https://unttc.org/documents/prakticheskoe-rukovodstvo-dlya-nacionalnykh-organov-po-uproscheniyu-procedur-torgovli-kak>

These training materials were used in the substantive part of the programmes in at least two large regional seminars: in May 2019 in Nur Sultan (Astana) and July 2020 in Dushanbe, carried out in collaboration with all the SPECA participating States and such international partners as GIZ (Nur Sultan) and OSCE (Dushanbe), for numerous activities in support of, for example, the establishment and functioning of national trade facilitation bodies (committees) and a regional network of such committees. All SPECA countries received assistance for the establishing and functioning of national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs). Four of them (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) actually launched such bodies during the period and also established a regional network of these bodies. UNECE provided much information on its

experience with these bodies and technical advice on their functioning. This was reflected in the tangible improvement of the performance of the countries in the reports on the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (<https://www.tfadatabase.org/en/implementation>) and the UN Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade (<https://www.untfsurvey.org/>).

The training materials and the activities under the project contributed significantly to the development and adoption by the intergovernmental SPECA Governing Council of the Trade Facilitation Strategy.

(https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/SPECA_Trade_Facilitation_Strategy_English.pdf), the Roadmap for the implementation of this strategy (https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/SPECA/documents/gc/session14/Roadmap_for_Implementation_of_the_SPECA_TF_Strategy_English.pdf) and their implementation, supported by the project.

Rating: 4

2.2 Extent of implementation of the planned activities required for the achievement of the project objective/expected results

According to the technical cooperation project form the main objective of the project was “to strengthen national capacities of beneficiary countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system”. The project designers believed that in order to achieve the expected results of the project, it will be necessary to carry out the following:

A1.1. Adaptation and development of training materials and modules for national TF courses to cover the relevant target areas in the TFA for the implementation of WTO TFA provisions related to Articles 10.1 on formalities and documentary requirements; 10.3 on use of international standards; 10.4 on single window; and 23.2 on national trade facilitation committee (NTFC);

A1.2. Organization of two capacity-building seminars for members of NTFBs, regulatory agencies, and other relevant stakeholders on the development of national trade facilitation roadmaps, including for the implementation of the WTO targeted TFA measures;

A1.3. Organization of one sub-regional SPECA capacity building and experience sharing conference to strengthen cooperation on the implementation of TF measures and supporting international standards, including on the aspects of Single Window interoperability;

A1.4. Translation of the training materials developed under A1.1 into Russian;

A2. 1. Development of training materials on benchmarking mechanisms to measure progress and achieve policy coherence in the implementation of TF measures, based on the UNICEF ACT Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Methodology (TTFMM) in the beneficiary countries;

A2.2. Organization of two capacity-building seminars for NTFBs on the development of national benchmark mechanisms to measure progress and achieve policy coherence in TF based on the UNICEF ACT TTFMM methodology;

A2.3. Translation of learning materials and training courses into Russian;

A2.4. Update and maintenance of the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) by incorporating project results and lessons learned and the new learning materials, including through the development of new itineraries providing a step-by-step approach to the implementation of TF measures in the project target areas, and the drafting of case stories;
A2.5. Organize a concluding Conference (in the context of the UNICEF ACT Forum) on regulatory cooperation for TF to disseminate project's outcomes and share lessons learned from project target countries.

It was planned that if all activities are implemented as planned the project would achieve its two expected results:

EA.1. Enhanced capacities of policymakers and experts in National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders, to develop and implement Trade Facilitation (TF) policies and measures, notably in the area of WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) Articles 10.1; 10.3; 10.4; and 23.2

EA.2 Improved capacities of policymakers and experts to measure progress in the implementation of TF, and to achieve internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures.

The following indicators of achievement were formulated in the E 293 concept note:

Indicator of achievement A1.1. - At least two countries established and/or maintained national trade facilitation bodies;

Indicator of achievement IA1.2. - At least four national policy documents (e.g. decree on establishing a National Trade Facilitation Committee, a strategy for the implementation of international trade facilitation standards or other document) promoting trade facilitation formulated;

Indicator of achievement IA2. - One pilot benchmarking system for measuring progress in trade facilitation developed.

As written in the project final report the extent of implementation of the planned activities as of 31.12.2023 was the following:

A.1.1 – fully implemented – all planned training materials and modules were developed.

A.1.2 – partially implemented – against planned two capacity-building seminars for members of NTFBs, regulatory agencies and other relevant stakeholders on the development of national TF roadmaps, including for the implementation of the targeted TFA measures, only one such seminar was carried out. The gap was partially closed by online webinars.

A.1.3 – fully implemented

A.1.4 – fully implemented

A.2.1 – fully implemented

A.2.2 – partially implemented – from originally planned two capacity building seminars dedicated to the UN/CEFACT methodology, only one seminar was organized in Nur-Sultan in May 2019 (co-funded under the UNDA 11 Tranche project) together with GIZ, ESCAP and ADB.

A.2.3 – fully implemented

A.2.4 – fully implemented

A.2.5 – not implemented

Several activities that conditioned the fulfillment of expected results were not carried out for some subjective reasons. One of the reasons was a frequent change of the project manager in the course of project undermining consistency of original work plan implementation. It was also reported during the interviews that a portion of the project financial resources was spent for activities with a limited relation to trade facilitation support in Central Asia. It is notable, from a sustainability and SDG perspective, that the project also contributed to enhancing the understanding on the relationship between trade, including trade facilitation, and sustainable development (e.g. in the context of the SPECA Principles for Sustainable Trade).

Interviews/electronic survey results indicated that the project expected results were achieved fully regarding EA.1 and, partially regarding EA.2. Several interviewed stakeholders thought that the progress achieved concerning internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures was less tangible than expected. The progress made has been only partial, and there is still much work ahead of the Central Asian countries to achieve a workable harmonization and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of current trade procedures.

Rating: 3

2.3 Harmonization and coherence of activities with those of other partners operating within the same context

UNECE is one of several institutions/agencies supporting the Central Asia countries in the area of the trade facilitation. The evidence collected from interviews and electronic survey suggests that the project has maintained a dialogue and practical collaboration with a number of development partners such as UNCTAD, WTO, ITC, UNESCAP, GIZ, USAID.

Regular dialogue with majority of the “competing” agencies during the SPECA trade facilitation group meetings and various capacity building seminars facilitated harmonization of efforts in trade facilitation. As a matter of fact, several of these agencies were active in raising awareness about the trade facilitation and WTO TFA. However, considering the importance of the awareness raising about these issues in the region this situation can be classified as a “useful redundancy”. The view expressed by interviewees was that the relationship among the trade facilitation actors in Central Asia resulted in positive results and there had not been issues leading to a counterproductive competition.

Project achieved sound coordination in the support for the establishment of National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs) and their regional network in partnership with all the partners mentioned above. Especially fruitful was the close collaboration with GIZ, which focused on support to the NTFCs. Project cooperated also with the WTO secretariat on several activities, especially on drafting the Guide for the implementation of Art 1.3 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (Trade facilitation Enquiry Points). WTO staff helped in drafting it, and accepted it as the very first Guide on Trade Facilitation Enquiry Points. Guide was published on the WTO web site, as a best practice example to be used by any country. Another positive example is cooperation in the context of GIZ Regional TF project for SPECA countries, in the context of which UNECE supported GIZ in providing assistance concerning the establishment of the national trade agreement facilitation committees (established in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan). Representatives of the donor agencies were invited to participate in meetings promoted by the project, and the contribution of the donors was highlighted at the meetings. The partnerships established under this project provide sound basis for continuing the work on trade facilitation in the SPECA region.

Photo: Presentation of GIZ Trade Facilitation Project in Central Asia during SPECA meeting:



Rating: 4

2.4 How successfully did the project overcome the challenges/obstacles to achieving expected results?

Documentary evidence and discussion with stakeholders identified a few obstacles/challenges that prevented the project to achieve expected results in full. **Three major factors considered as disruptions to the complete achievement of the project results were:**

- The COVID 19 pandemic which impacted the implementation approach and strategy
- several changes in project management responsibilities
- temporal discontinuity of the project activities.

The Covid19 pandemic was definitely a huge problem for trade facilitation advancement in the SPECA region and the world as a whole. The pandemic resulted in a very low implementation rate in 2019 and 2020.

Building on synergies with other projects and partner organizations colleagues, the project managed to do studies on the immediate effects of the pandemic on trade facilitation and organized one of the planned trainings, (originally planned in person), in 2020 in virtual mode. This on-line event had a strong focus on the effects of the pandemic in the region. Moreover, several meetings planned by the work plan had to be canceled.

Several interviews showed that the effectiveness of the project was adversely affected by several factors, such as frequent changes in responsibility for project implementation and engagement of several actors on the UNECE side. While noting that the changes were done in compliance with UN rules and regulations and in consultation with the PMU at that time, it might have been more effective to ensure the continuity of the project responsibility with person who planned/formulated the project and negotiated it with the beneficiaries and the donor instead of removing this person temporarily from its responsibility. Moreover, such unexpected change raised several doubtful questions in the recipient countries. The project would have benefitted from appropriate communications with stakeholders in beneficiary countries to explain these changes.

During the project implementation duration, the UNECE senior management changed several times the personal responsibility for the project management. There were significant gaps concerning effective planning for a project-related staff continuity.

One interview partner noted that this situation resulted several times in decisions leading to diversion of the part of the project financial and human resources for purposes with limited relevance for trade facilitation strengthening in the Central Asia countries.

Above mentioned obstacles resulted in considerable delays in implementation of planned activities with major disruptions in organizing meetings, field visits and trainings. **Originally planned project duration was 2 years, however the project ended up lasting 6 years.**

Rating: 2,5

Effectiveness overall rating: 3,38

3. Efficiency

Efficiency is to assess the extent a project intervention has converted its resources and inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) economically, efficiently organized and on time into expected results.

3.1 Adequacy of the project resources for achieving its planned results.

Financial efficiency of the project was quite good in terms of achievement of its planned results.

As a matter of fact, the estimation of the ideal ratio of the financial, human and other resources, and the project results is not easy especially when dealing with trade facilitation capacity building in the Central Asia region. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to say that with a relatively modest budget the project activities contributed to strengthening of the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and increase the window for a better integration of these countries into the international rules-based trading system. Only one of the interviewed/surveyed stakeholders felt that the project resources were not sufficiently robust for achieving its planned results.

Donor (Russian Federation) financial contribution for the project implementation was supplemented by human resources of UNECE office in Geneva, namely 4 months/year of one regular budget staff time at P-4 level and administrative support of one general staff on a part-time basis.

Table 4: Expenditure report for the UNECE project E293 (1 January 2017 to 30 June 2023)

Explanatory Note on Budget Classes:

Staff and personnel costs: includes consultant contracts and travel of consultants

Contractual Services: includes external commercial contracts such as for room rental, interpretation services and individual contractors for project support

Budget Class	Fiscal Year	Expenditures (USD)
1. Staff and personnel costs	2018	9 000,00
2. Contractual Services	2018	6 090,00
3. Operating and Other Direct Costs	2018	0,00
4. Travel (staff travel and Meeting participants)	2018	0,00
5. Grants out	2018	49 610,92
6. Equipment Veh Furniture	2018	0,00
7. UN Programme Support Costs	2018	8 411,12
Total	2018	73 112,04

Budget Class	Fiscal Year	Expenditures (USD)
1. Staff and personnel costs	2019	3 240,00
2. Contractual Services	2019	4 002,40
3. Operating and Other Direct Costs	2019	418,40
4. Travel (staff travel and Meeting participants)	2019	12 458,79
5. Grants out	2019	0,00
6. Equipment Veh Furniture	2019	0,00
7. UN Programme Support Costs	2019	995,88
Total	2019	21 115,47

Budget Class	Fiscal Year	Expenditures (USD)
1. Staff and personnel costs	2020	56 990,26
2. Contractual Services	2020	9 704,40
3. Operating and Other Direct Costs	2020	1 494,53
4. Travel (staff travel and Meeting participants)	2020	0,00
5. Grants out	2020	0,00
6. Equipment Veh Furniture	2020	0,00
7. UN Programme Support Costs	2020	8 864,58
Total	2020	77 053,77

Budget Class	Fiscal Year	Expenditures (USD)
1. Staff and personnel costs	2021	61 967,20
2. Contractual Services	2021	11 965,40
3. Operating and Other Direct Costs	2021	656,20
4. Travel (staff travel and Meeting participants)	2021	10 606,51
5. Grant out	2021	0,00
6. Equipment Veh Furniture	2021	380,00
7. UN Programme Support Costs	2021	9 745,95
Total	2021	95 321,26

Budget Class	Fiscal Year	Expenditures (USD)
1. Staff and personnel costs	2022	38 219,60
2. Contractual Services	2022	345,00
3. Operating and Other Direct Costs	2022	329,70
4. Travel (staff travel and Meeting participants)	2022	76,09
5. Grant out	2022	0,00
6. Equipment Veh Furniture	2022	0,00
7. UN Programme Support Costs	2022	5 056,25
Total	2022	44 026,64

Budget Class	Fiscal Year	Expenditures (USD)
1. Staff and personnel costs	2023	25 000,00
2. Contractual Services	2023	0,00
3. Operating and Other Direct Costs	2023	212,00
4. Travel (staff travel and Meeting participants)	2023	3 449,75
5. Grant out	2023	0,00
6. Equipment Veh Furniture	2023	0,00
7. UN Programme Support Costs	2023	3 277,56
Total	2023	31 939,31

Budget Class	Fiscal Year	Expenditures (USD)
--------------	-------------	--------------------

1. Staff and personnel costs	2018-2023	194 417,06
2. Contractual Services	2018-2023	32 107,20
3. Operating and Other Direct Costs	2018-2023	3 110,83
4. Travel (staff travel and Meeting participants)	2018-2023	26 591,14
5. Grant out	2018-2023	49 610,92
6. Equipment Veh Furniture	2018-2023	380,00
7. UN Programme Support Costs	2018-2023	36 351,34
Total	2017-2023	342 568,49

Rating: 4

3.2 Degree of achievement of the planned results on time an organization of all activities efficiently

The efficiency in achieving the planned results within the originally planned schedule was quite low. The evidence from Table 5 underneath indicates that the annual implementation rates during the entire duration of the project were very low. The achievement of the planned results took three times longer period than was assumed in the project document. At the same time, it has to be noted that project extensions were agreed upon with the donor, and that the project implementation coincided with important events, such as the COVID pandemic and related travel restrictions.

The Technical Cooperation Project Form established quite ambitious project implementation schedule for 24 months. This planned assumption turned out to be unrealistic for several reasons. The main reasons that led to a significant delay in meeting the planned goals on time were:

- Limited human resources for project implementation
- Frequent shifting of the main responsibility for project management/implementation from person to person
- The proliferation of small consultancy contracts with limited coordination and communication among these consultants
- Limitation imposed by COVID 19 pandemic

This complex situation could have been, at least partially, solved by hiring 1 or 2 highly qualified individual contractors for the extended period (12-24 months) to accelerate annual implementation rates. But instead, the project used plenty of its financial resources on short-term consulting contracts for pursuing small partial goals without sufficient coordination and shared vision among the consultants.

Rating: 2

3.3 Extent of efficiency in using the resources economically

The main challenge in evaluating this question was that the majority of the participants in the electronic survey and interviews did not have an overview of how the project financial resources were used. Their overall feeling was that they did not have sufficient information concerning the financial and other resources allocated to the project. Human resources consisted of a project manager at P level (part-time), his/her assistant at G level (part-time) and a long list of consultants.

Table 5: Consultancy services -Project E293

Consultant or IC	contract dates	duration	amount		AA	
(Individual Contractor)	1.07-30.09.2018	3 months	3000	SB-008547		
(Individual Contractor)	1.10 to 30.11.2018	2 months	3000	SB-008547		
(Individual Contractor)	14.1.2019 to 14.2.2019 10 days	10 days	1000	SB-008547- E293		
(consultant)	16 to 31 Dec 2019	11 days	3000	SB-008547		
(Individual contractor- Editor)	16 to 31 Dec 2019		3000	SB-008548		
(consultant)	16.7-16.10.2018	3 months	9000	SB-008547		
(Individual Contractor)	2 months from 06.04.2020 to 05.06.2020	2 months	7000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	3 months between 15 May and 15 August 2020	3 months	5000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	60 days between 18 May and 30 Sep 2020	2 months	10000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	1 month between 12 Oct. And 6 Nov. 2020	1 month	6000	SB- 008547		
(Individual Contractor)	2 months between 18.08 and 18.10.2020	2 months	2000	SB- 008547		

(Individual contractor-Editor)	1/09-31/11 2020	3 months	3000	SB-008548		
(Consultant)	3 months between 11 Nov 2020 and 11 Mar. 2021	3 months	15000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	8.2.2021 to 5.03.2021 terminated on 5.3.2021	1 month	8000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	05.07-05.10.2021	3 months	12000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	02.08-19.10.2021	2,5 months	12000	SB-008547 (E293)		
(Consultant)	30.7 - 30.9.2021	2 months	20000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	2 months between 11/10/2021 - 11/12/2021	2 months	9000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	16/05/2022 - 16/09/2022	4 months	17000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	23/05/2022 - 23/09/2022	4 months	10000	SB-008547		
(Consultant)	17/10/2023-29/12/2023	56 days	14000	SB-008547 (E293)		
(Consultant)	22/12/2023-30/04/2024	50 days	11000	SB-008547 (E293)		

183 000 total

(Olga Kharitonova)	Staff GS, 2months	Nov-Dec 2020	19 550	%	
Staff & personnel	Consultants and admin charges		174 000	%	194417
Contractual services	Individual contractors		19 000	%	

Contractual services	Contractual services (interpreters, translators, equipment hire during the events organised in the countries)		13 107	%	32107
----------------------	---	--	--------	---	-------

The significant portion of financial resources was used for staff and personnel costs associated with the hiring of twenty-two consultants and associated travels. In most cases, the consulting contracts had a short duration from 10 days to 2 months. **The consultants were usually focused on a narrow part of the project's activities, which did not allow them to gain a global view of the project.** This problem could have been avoided if the project management entrusted responsibility to a smaller number of consultants with much more complex responsibilities who would ensure greater synergy between the main activities of the project.

The consultants' focus was predominantly on the preparation of training manuals, capacity building events, preparation and realization of meetings within the framework of SPECA, preparation of country specific trade facilitation road maps and implementation of SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy.

The project also relied on the expertise and knowledge of staff within the UNECE Secretariat to deliver and/or directly coordinate a number of activities, as for example:

(Activity 1.1) drafting training materials on the four targeted trade facilitation measures (national trade facilitation committees or NTFCs -TFA Art.23.2; streamlining documentary procedures – TFA Art. 10.1; using international standards – Art.10.3; and Single Window – Art.10.4) as well as PPT presentations as training tools were prepared during the normal project period. One additional guide on an additional measure (establishing a TF enquiry point – TFA Art.1.3, tailored for the SPECA countries) was requested by the countries and prepared later with support from the project.

Training Material on the Implementation of a Single Window (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.5)³⁶

Training Material on the Use of International Standards (United Nations ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.6)³⁷

Training Material on National Trade Facilitation Bodies (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.7)³⁸

³⁶ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF5E_TrainingMaterialSW.pdf

³⁷ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF6-StandardsTraining.pdf

³⁸ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF7-NTFB-Training.pdf

Guide for National Trade Facilitation Bodies on How to Use UN/CEFACT Standards and Tools (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.8)³⁹

(A1.2) technical cooperation Seminar on Implementing Specific Provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, was organized by UNECE in Nur-Sultan (Astana) May 2019⁴⁰ in collaboration with GIZ, ESCAP, and the Asian Development Bank as a model for a seminar under this project, which had to be replicated in other locations.

(A1.2) online seminar on Trade Facilitation in Times of COVID-19, 6-7 July 2020 for the SPECA countries: hosted in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, online due to the pandemics and restrictions of travel⁴¹ training was based on materials prepared under the project for the SPECA countries and new analysis of the situation with trade facilitation under the Covid-19 pandemic.

(A1.3) 18.11.2021- Tashkent – first physical regional meeting of the NTFCs after the pandemic, back-to-back with the 16th session of the SPECA WG on Trade, the annual SPECA Forum and session of the SPECA Governing Council. Organized in collaboration between the ECE Regional Adviser and GIZ⁴²

The evaluator could not contact the project manager for the years 2018-2020 (retirement from UNECE) and therefore the evaluation of effectiveness is limited in scope for the period 2018-2020. E293 provided generally good value for money, but economic efficiency of different intervention strategies differs significantly. UNECE did not achieve an ideal ratio of good value for money since some of its activities were diverted from the main project focus as planned in the project document. Other negative factors that reduced the overall effectiveness of the project were frequent changes in responsibility for project management.

Rating: 3

Efficiency overall rating: 3,0

4. Sustainability

Sustainability assesses the degree of the likelihood of the project long-term benefits for recipient countries.

The project document does not discuss which aspects should be considered for assessment of sustainability of its achievements. In the absence of clear sustainability criteria at the beginning of the project, the evaluation focused on enhancing technical knowledge on trade facilitation

³⁹ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2021_INF8-Guide-NTFBs-UNCEFACT-Standards.pdf; <https://unttc.org/documents/guide-national-trade-facilitation-bodies-how-use-uncefact-trade-facilitation-standards>; <https://unttc.org/documents/prakticheskoe-rukovodstvo-dlya-nacionalnykh-organov-po-uproscheniyu-procedur-torgovli-kak>

⁴⁰ <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/18240>

⁴¹ <https://unece.org/info/Trade/events/17768>

⁴² (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/SPECA_WG_on_Trade_2021_Agenda_EN.pdf)

standards in the recipient countries, empowering trade facilitation institutional structures and national legislative and strategic documents.

4.1 Measures adopted to ensure that project outcomes would continue after the project ended and extent of addressing existing risks of sustainability

It's always difficult to measure at the end of the project focusing on trade facilitation strengthening its sustainability since by definition, sustainability can only be assessed later on.

Stakeholders' interviews identified several factors that could limit sustainability of the project:

- Human resource limitation in terms of numbers and technical knowledge
- Lack of internal coordination
- Rotation of government staff
- Lack of relevant capacity building activities
- Not sufficiently robust institutional and regulation platforms

The project contributed positively to reducing the risks of sustainability associated with two critical issues:

1. enhancing limited technical knowledge concerning trade facilitation measures and the international rules-based trading system by publishing a long series of relevant manuals (both in English and Russian), and conducting capacity building seminars and workshops, and
2. strengthening regional and national institutional trade facilitation platforms in the Central Asia countries.

E293 used well for its trade facilitation capacity building activities SPECA working group on trade and collaboration with GIZ and other partners. In this context, the evaluation has noted several important contributions of the project, as follows:

A1.1.1: A report was drafted on the results of activities in implementation of the SPECA TF Strategy and Principles of Sustainable Trade and was presented at the 16th session of the SPECA WG on Trade, the 2021 SPECA Economic Forum and 16th session of the SPECA Governing Council in November 2021.⁴³

A1.2.1 Five meetings were organized with support from the project on how to strengthen operational capacity and subregional cooperation among the NTFBs in the SPECA countries (four of them in collaboration with GIZ).

A1.3.1 GIZ and UNECE organized a sub-regional event (first in person seminar of the NTFCs in SPECA countries after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic) on 16 November 2021 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, back-to-back with the 16th session of the SPECA WG on Trade.

A2.1.1 Two sessions of the WG on Trade in November 2021 and August 2021 reviewed the implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and this project. The state of implementation of the recommendations of the SPECA working paper on harmonizing border-crossing procedures and the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy were discussed at the 16th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade on 18 November 2021 and the 17th's session of the SPECA

⁴³ (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Trade%2C%20Water%2C%20Food%2C%20Circular%20Economy_Analytical%20background%20paper_ENG.pdf)

WG on Trade on 31 Aug.2022, and the group decided to update the roadmap for the implementation of the SPECA TF Strategy for the next sessions of the WG.

A2.4.1: A web facility on exchange of information on TF issues among regulatory agencies in the region was developed under the project.

With a view to strengthening the sustainability dimension of the project, recognizing the relevance of sustainable trade facilitation, in consultation with PMU and in line with UNECE's cross cutting priority theme of the circular economy transition, an additional area of activity to be managed by the Director of the ECTD was added: EA3: Increased awareness of Central Asian countries on better integration into the international rules-based trading system:

- A webinar Central Asia: New Ways, Old Traditions. Trade Policy Perspectives at the Geneva Trade Week in September 2021; recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJyWyHDr6tg>,
- Peer review consultations on the draft SPECA paper on implementation of Principles of Sustainable Trade in October 2021,
- National consultations with governmental representatives from Tajikistan on the draft SPECA paper on implementation of Principles of Sustainable Trade in November 2021,
- Webinar on Trade in Circularity: Perspectives of Developing and Transition Economies as part of the Trade and Sustainability Hub on 2 December 2021 featuring Ilkhom Khaydarov, the Chairman of Uztextileprom Association, recording <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2b4cE21uvPY>,
- [Regional Policy Dialogue: Harnessing trade and economic cooperation for the transition to a circular economy in the UNECE region \(online\)](#) (28 Oct. 2021). Meeting featured high-level opening by H.E.Mr. Alibek Kuantyrov, vice Minister of **National Economy**, Republic of Kazakhstan, [Roundtable: Circular Economy - Fostering Circularity in Food Trade \(online\)](#) (16 Nov. 2021).

The results of several SPECA events held from 20-24 November 2023 in Baku confirmed that its member states are committed to continue strengthening regional and national institutional platforms in Central Asia countries :

- a. 20 Nov. SPECA WG on Trade 18th session: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/Recommendations_WG%20on%20Trade%202023_EN.pdf
- b. 21-22 Nov. the 2023 SPECA Economic Forum on Trans-Caspian trade, transport and energy connectivity: <https://unece.org/speca/events/2023-speca-economic-forum>
- c. 23 Nov. 2023: 18th session of the SPECA Governing Council: <https://unece.org/speca/events/eighteenth-session-speca-governing-council>
- d. 24 Nov.2024: the SPECA Presidential Summit, which was an intergovernmental and not a UN meeting, but we prepared much input. The Presidents adopted the Baku

Declaration <https://unece.org/speca/baku-declaration>; and the SPECA Roadmap for the Digitalization of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor, using UNITED NATIONS legal instruments and standards (<https://unece.org/speca/speca-digitalization-roadmap>), to which we contributed the essential part.”

Regarding the institutional strengthening at national level, SPECA countries received project’s support directly or indirectly through SPECA WGT for the establishing and functioning of national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs). Four of them (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) actually launched such bodies during the duration of the project and also established a regional network of these bodies. UNECE provided much information on its experience with these bodies and technical advice on their functioning. This was reflected in the tangible improvement of the performance of the countries in the reports on the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement⁴⁴ and the UN Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade.⁴⁵

E293 provided support in the preparation of Trade Facilitation Roadmap for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These Roadmaps provide a framework to overhaul the countries’ trade facilitation reforms. They represent a strategic vision, developed jointly, and shared by the numerous national stakeholders whose engagement is vital in making trade facilitation a success. There is a positive prospect that the results of the project will be further strengthened after the project’s termination as UNECE continues to implement the E379 project “Building cross-border cooperation for sustainable trade in the SPECA sub-region”.

Rating: 4

4.2 Extent to which the partners and beneficiary countries “own” the outcomes of the project and the likelihood of the stakeholders’ engagement continuation, scaling up, replication and institutional strengthening

The interviews demonstrated that the project stakeholders and beneficiary countries own the outcomes of its activities and are committed to continuation, scaling up, replication and institutional strengthening with respect to trade facilitation.

In the framework of the project, UNECE provided support to specific SPECA countries in their efforts to apply trade facilitation principles to expand trade, including through WTO accession.

UNECE has a long history of cooperation with Central Asian economies. This work is done, inter alia, as part of the United Nations Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), launched in 1998, which is serviced jointly by UNECE and UNESCAP.

⁴⁴ <https://www.tfadatabase.org/en/implementation>

⁴⁵ <https://www.untfsurvey.org/>

SPECA, including Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, aims to strengthen subregional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy. Three of the seven SPECA participating countries are in the process of WTO accession. Most recently, the [SPECA Working Group on Trade in August 2022](#) and the high-level SPECA meeting in the framework of the [WTO Ministerial Conference in June 2022](#) reiterated the pledge to support Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan on their way to WTO accession. All these countries benefited from the capacity building and advisory activities of E293.

Uzbekistan, for example, recently reaffirmed its commitment to intensify accession efforts following successful meetings of its WTO Accession Working Party. In June 2022, the UNECE Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards⁴⁶ discussed progress in trade reforms in the country, based on an UNECE study Policy Options for Harnessing the Power of Trade and Economic Cooperation⁴⁷. As recent reforms increase export opportunities for the country, particular attention needs to be given to ensuring that non-tariff measures during the pandemic do not become trade barriers. In addition, UNECE has provided capacity building regarding this country's innovation ecosystem as the government seeks to implement recommendations from the Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Uzbekistan (I4SDR)⁴⁸ launched in 2022.

In the case of Turkmenistan, the country applied in November 2021 to become a member of the WTO. Subsequently, in March 2022, UNECE organised a national capacity-building seminar on WTO accession for Turkmenistan and contributed to the multi-stakeholder meeting organised by Turkmenistan on the occasion of the visit of the WTO Deputy Director General in July 2022⁴⁹.

Turkmenistan has already played a role in fostering sustainable trade in Central Asia. In 2019, under its SPECA chairmanship, countries adopted the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade in Ashgabat. These principles, with a focus on diversification and innovation of production and trade, contribute to shaping sustainable and circular economy-focused regional policies - an essential component of the overall trade reform relevant to WTO accession.

The main results from the project supporting its sustainability include:

1. Increased local capacity in the four areas in the focus of the project:
 - a. National Trade Facilitation Bodies: NTFCs were established in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and they are sustainable. NTFCs are being established in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.
 - b. Increase of national capacity to streamline documentary procedures. Work continues on digitalization of document exchange using the UN standards, and this work will deepen in the years to come. In this area UNECE continues collaboration with ESCAP, ITC, GIZ, USAID.

⁴⁶ <https://unece.org/circular-economy/news/removing-barriers-trade-facilitates-economic-integration>

⁴⁷ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/ECE_CTCS_2022_05_E.pdf

⁴⁸ <https://unece.org/economic-cooperation-and-integration/publications/unece-innovation-sustainable-development-review>

⁴⁹ https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news22_e/acc_05jul22_e.htm

- c. The same applies with the use of international standards. UNECE has prepared guidelines on how the SPECA countries and their NTFCs can use the UN standards for trade facilitation and electronic business, and they report increased capacity to implement the standards in the UN Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade and the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement web page.
- d. Single Window for export and import clearance: practically all countries in Central Asia and Azerbaijan have Single Window projects or operating Single Window systems, which they are committed to ameliorate. Much of this work was impacted by our project and related activities.

In addition, E293 supported work on the following tools which are available for use by the SPECA participating States, their business communities and business and development partners:

- e. Rating tool and the regular surveys on trade facilitation and paperless trade (currently, when the World Bank Doing Business Report was discontinued, the UN Survey remains a major tool for measuring progress in trade facilitation in the region and elsewhere), and
- f. Guide for establishing trade facilitation enquiry points: Uzbekistan was the first country to develop and launch a Trade Facilitation Enquiry Point using the Guide.

The SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and the Roadmap for its implementation are major instruments for the sustainability of the results of the project. The meetings of the SPECA WG on Trade listen to periodic reports on the stage of implementation of the SPECA TF Roadmap, which includes all measures covered by the project. SPECA member states will continue reviewing the progress of implementation of the roadmap and envisage updating it according to evolving needs. Another significant guarantee that stakeholders' engagement will continue and scale up is the fact that GIZ has decided to invest another 6.5 million euros in strengthening trade facilitation in Central Asia in the years 2024-2026.

As a confirmation of ongoing processes of strengthening the institutional framework for trade facilitation in Central Asia, the following **short review from Tajikistan can serve as an example:**

- Export Agency under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, <http://www.export.tj/>
Created by Decree of the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan dated August 6, 2018 No. 396.
- State Unitary Enterprise “**TAJAGROPROMEXPORT**” was created by government decree under the Export Agency of Tajikistan on May 27, 2020 and its scope of activity includes the purchase, storage, packaging and export of competitive domestic products abroad. According to its mandate, the Agency has formed a database of exporters of the main export products. Promotes products through participation in exhibitions and fairs, produces booklets and video materials with export products
- the Coordination Committee for Trade Facilitation has been created in Tajikistan and is functioning.

Government Decree No. 529 of December 24, 2016

- On April 26, 2019, the Trade Portal of Tajikistan was officially opened <https://tajtrade.tj>
- On September 1, 2020, the State Unitary Enterprise “Single Window” began operating to process export-import and transit operations. <https://www.swcustoms.tj/>

Structure of Coordinating Committee on TF Procedures in Tajikistan



Principal trade facilitation laws and regulations of Tajikistan as of January 2019 are available in the UNECE publication “National TF Roadmap of Tajikistan 2019-2024.

Rating: 4

Sustainability overall rating: 4,0

III. Conclusions and recommendations

1. Conclusions

1. The evaluation is forward looking and aims to assist UNECE in moving the future trade facilitation activities in the right direction, especially because these activities have already taken solid roots in the UNECE overall portfolio.
2. The objective of the project was to strengthen national capacities of the beneficiary countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system. The majority of activities implemented, outputs produced and outcomes attained supported this objective.
3. Both, the Technical Cooperation Form and the Project Concept Form missed the description of the overall trade facilitation context (for example main trade facilitation needs and national counterparts) in the recipient countries. The evaluation made a special effort to close this gap by a detailed documentary review and the stakeholders` interviews. These efforts confirmed that E293 was a demand/needs driven project.
4. Overall, the project responded to beneficiary countries needs as well as to the expectation of trade facilitation stakeholders in Central Asia. It was well aligned with development priorities of recipient countries `governments and other stakeholders` needs and helped

support these countries to support their international obligations in contributing to several SDGs.

5. The project was fully aligned with the program of work of UNECE. Its approach and main target groups were in line with the UNECE mandate, mission and goals.
6. Key aspects of the project activities' consistency with the sustainable development goals were well explored, while gender, human rights and disability perspectives have barely been touched. The evaluation did not find any evidence concerning the integration of gender, human rights and disability perspectives in the project document.
7. The project explored the UNECE added value in trade facilitation by concentrating on the four measures (see detailed references in the evaluation report) in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, in which UNECE has decades of experience, mandate and comparative advantage.
8. Interviews/electronic survey results indicated that the project expected results were achieved fully in enhancing capacities of policy makers and experts in National Trade Facilitation committees and regulatory agencies to develop and implement trade facilitation policies and measures, notable in the area of WTO TFA Articles 10.1, 10.3, 10.4, and 23.2. Examples of results directly impacted by the project include, but are not limited to: the establishment of NTFCs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and they are sustainable; the ongoing process of establishing NTFCs in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan; the existence, in practically all countries in Central Asia and Azerbaijan of Single Window projects or operating Single Window systems, which they are committed to ameliorate.
9. E293 expected results defined under EA.2 were achieved partially. Several interviewed stakeholders thought that the progress achieved in internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures was less tangible as expected.
10. Several shortcomings linked to the interrupted continuity of the management of the project somewhat affected the evaluation's ability to fully assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the project. Another shortcoming was the absence of a framework enabling a structured analysis of progress with respect to timing of delivery of expected activities and outputs. This situation resulted in a low interest of the project's stakeholders to participate in the electronic survey and on-line interviews.
11. E293 activities main focus was on knowledge development, capacity building including development and dissemination of training materials/tools, organization of training seminars and regular support to SPECA Working Group on Trade to support the achievement of the SDGs through sustainable and efficient trade lines among the Central Asia countries and beyond.

12. The project was consistent with the interventions of other actors in the same areas, ensuring complementarity and coordination of the activities implemented. Regular dialogue with majority of the agencies supporting trade facilitation enhancement in Central Asia during the SPECA trade facilitation group meetings and various capacity building seminars facilitated harmonization of efforts in trade facilitation with other partners operating in the same context.
13. The project had to face important challenges/obstacles (the COVID 19 pandemic which impacted the implementation approach and strategy; several changes in project management responsibilities; temporal discontinuity of the project activities), the negative impact of which was not mitigated sufficiently.
14. The limited strategy for overcoming the obstacles/challenges that the project had to face resulted in large delays in the implementation of the planned activities and an extension of the project's duration from two to six years.
15. While E293 had adequate financial resources to achieve the planned results and was cost-efficient (to a great deal thanks to synergies operated by the management with SPECA activities as well as the activities of other international organizations), it was implemented with unacceptable delays.
16. The SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and the Roadmap for the implementation of this strategy are major instruments for the sustainability of the results of the project since their implementation is supported by the political leadership of Central Asian countries.
17. In practical terms, the confirmation of sustainability was manifested in the improvement of the legal basis for trade facilitation in several Central Asian countries in the last 6 years (see example from Tajikistan above), as well as in the commitment of these countries in the preparation of national trade facilitation road maps (completed in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and work in progress in Uzbekistan) aligned with SPECA regional trade facilitation road map and the creation of the national trade facilitation committees (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).

2. Recommendations

1. UNECE, through its three core functions – development of norms, standards and legal instruments; hosting of a convening platform; and technical cooperation across a number of relevant sectors to continue trade facilitation related assistance to SPECA participating States, in particular with regards to standards and best practice recommendations for trade facilitation and electronic businesses to support Governments efforts to fulfill their obligations stemming from the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and/or WTO accession negotiations.
2. In the future, it is necessary to gradually move focus of UNECE trade facilitation capacity building activities from SPECA Working Group on Trade centered activities to training

workshops and hands-on training at the national level in five Central Asia countries including all line ministries involved in export/import activities.

3. Future trade facilitation activities should include a more robust discussion/awareness raising concerning trade impacts on sustainable development, such as SDG 5 (gender equality) or SDG 13 (climate action), etc., to better integrate considerations of cross-cutting issues such as gender, human rights, disability perspectives, climate change. The COVID-19 crisis has made it more difficult for women to participate in economic activities and trade. Focusing on gender sensitive challenges should be further supported and type of assistance broadened.

4. In any scenario for future UNECE support to its member states in trade facilitation, UNECE internal management should be strengthened to ensure sound project management from planning through delivery to reporting. The future projects' planning should therefore explicitly consider this vital function and specify how this is to be ensured.

Annexes

[Annex 1: Evaluation matrix](#)

[Annex 2 : Interview guide](#)

[Annex 3: Electronic survey design](#)

[Annex 4: List of documents reviewed](#)

[Annex 5: List of individuals interviewed](#)

ANNEX 1: Evaluation matrix

Evaluation matrix – Evaluation of E293 Project

Evaluation question	Indicators of success	Data/Information sources	Data collection methods
RELEVANCE			
1/ To what extent did the project respond to the priorities and needs of participating countries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which the project design, objective and result are aligned with the needs and priorities of recipient countries. Extent to which the recipient governments and local stakeholders were consulted during project design phase. Degree of alignment between the justification of the Project in Project Document and the Project outputs/outcomes. 	Technical Cooperation Project Form, Project documentary database, Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating governments, focal points, consultants, and other key stakeholders	Documentary review, Stakeholder interviews, Electronic survey
2/ To what extent were the project activities consistent with global and regional priorities and aligned with the SDGs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree of alignment of the Project activities with global and regional priorities and with the SDGs. 	Technical Cooperation Project Form, Project documentary database, technical collaboration partners, government focal points, consultants	Documentary review, Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
3/ How relevant were the project activities vis-à-vis the program of work of the UNECE? What value have UNECE efforts added in this area?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree of alignment of the Project activities with the program of work of the UNECE and the level of value added by UNECE in trade facilitation approach in recipient countries. 	Outputs/outcomes generated, technical collaboration partners, government focal points, consultants, Project management team	Documentary review, Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
4/ To what extent were gender, human rights, disability perspectives and climate change integrated into the design and implementation of the project? How can these perspectives be better included in future projects design and implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which the project design and implementation integrated human rights, disability perspectives and climate change. Degree of alignment of project design and implementation with relevant UN frameworks Number and quality of measures in project design and implementation that address gender/disability inequalities and climate change perspective 	Project documentary database, Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating governments focal points, consultants, and other key stakeholders	Documentary review, Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
EFFECTIVENESS			
5/ To what extent were the project design and set-up effective for meeting the needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which the Project design and set-up addressed 	Technical Cooperation Project Form,	Documentary review

Evaluation question	Indicators of success	Data/Information sources	Data collection methods
of the beneficiary countries?	the needs of the beneficiary countries	Implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, consultants, and other key stakeholders	Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
6/ To what extent were the project objectives and expected results achieved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree of achievements of the planned objectives Extent to which the planned activities have been implemented 	Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, consultants, and other key stakeholders. Project documentary database.	Documentary review Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
7) To what extent are the project activities coherent and harmonized with those of other partners operating within the same context, particularly those of other UN system entities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree of coherence and harmonization of the Project activities with those of other partners operating within the same context, particularly those of other UN system entities 	Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, consultants, and other stakeholders, Project documentary database	Documentary review Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
8/What were the challenges/obstacles (including COVID-19) to achieving the expected results? How successfully did the project overcome these?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of the challenges/obstacles (including COVID-19) to achieving the expected results. Evidence of enabling conditions/activities to overcome challenges/obstacles. 	Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, consultants, and other stakeholders, Project documentary database	Documentary review Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
EFFICIENCY			
9/ Were the project resources adequate for achieving the results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which the financial and human resources were adequate for achieving the planned results. Specific evidence on achieving the expected project results can be cited 	Project financial report, Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, Project documentary database	Documentary review Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey
10/ Were the results achieved on time and were all activities organized efficiently?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which activities have been implemented according to planned schedule and 	Project financial report, Project design and implementation team	Documentary review

Evaluation question	Indicators of success	Data/Information sources	Data collection methods
	<p>within the anticipated budget and allocation of resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of efficient use of available resources 	<p>members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, Project documentary database</p>	<p>Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey</p>
<p>11/ To what extent were the resources used economically and how could the use of resources be improved?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which human and financial resources have been used wisely to achieve expected results. Perceived efficiency of program and project governance, management structures and processes 	<p>Project documentary database, Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating governments focal points, consultants, and other key stakeholders</p>	<p>Documentary review Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey</p>
SUSTAINABILITY			
<p>12/ What measures were adopted to ensure that project outcomes would continue after the project ended and to what extent have these measures addressed the existing risks for sustainability?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which sustainability risks were identified and measures adopted to address these risks Degree to which the trade facilitation tools developed, capacities of experts in NTFCs enhanced and measures integrated into beneficiary countries activities 	<p>Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, consultants, and other key stakeholders, Project documentary database,</p>	<p>Documentary review Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey</p>
<p>13/ To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the project? How is the stakeholders' engagement likely to continue, be scaled up, replicated, or institutionalized?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the work There are "focal points" for trade facilitation measures development and implementation and routine procedures in the beneficiary countries to ensure implementation of TF measures knowledge transfer Evidence of engagements mentioned above and of tangible outputs 	<p>Project design and implementation team members, technical collaboration partners, participating government focal points, consultants, and other key stakeholders, Project documentary database,</p>	<p>Documentary review Interviews of stakeholders, Electronic Survey</p>

Annex 2: Interview guide – Evaluation of E293 Project

INTERVIEW GUIDE				
DATE		ORGANISATION	FUNCTION	EMAIL
	Dusan Zupka	UNECE consultant	Evaluator	zupkad@gmail.com
Documents Requested: Documents Received: Web Links: Action:				
Final Evaluation: E293: Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system				
1. Introduction 2. Follow-Up				
Justification Criteria (JC)		Indicators (IND)		
Evaluation Criterion (v)				
	Relevance			
EQ1	To what extent did the project respond to the priorities and needs of participating countries?			
1.1	Design and activities of the Project are aligned with relevant ECE policy and mandates and beneficiary countries policy	1.1.1	Specific evidence on policy can be cited	
1.2	Design and activities of the Project are aligned with needs and priorities of beneficiary countries	1.2.1	Specific examples of alignment with needs and priorities can be cited	
EQ2	To what extent were the project activities consistent with global and regional priorities and aligned with the SDGs?			
2.1	Activities of the Project show consistence with global and regional priorities and alignment with the SDGs?	2.1.1	Specific examples of consistency and alignment can be demonstrated	
EQ3	How relevant were the project activities vis-à-vis the program of work of the UNECE? What value have UNECE efforts added in this area?			
3.1	Activities and results of the Project show relevance vis-à-vis the program of work of the UNECE and value added by UNECE efforts in trade facilitation?	3.1.1	Specific examples of relevance and added value can be cited	

Justification Criteria (JC)		Indicators (IND)	
EQ4	To what extent were gender, human rights, disability perspectives and climate change integrated into the design and implementation of the project? How can these perspectives be better included in future projects design and implementation?		
4.1	Design of the project integrated gender, human rights, disability perspectives and climate change	5.1.1	Specific evidence on integration of gender, human rights, disability perspectives and climate change in the design of the project
4.2	Implementation of the project integrated gender, human rights, disability perspectives and climate change	5.2.1	Specific examples on integration of gender, human rights, disability perspectives and human rights during the implementation of the project
	Effectiveness		
EQ5	To what extent were the project design and set-up effective for meeting the needs of the beneficiary countries?		
5.1	Project design addressed the needs of beneficiary countries	5.1.1	Survey and interviews confirmed the satisfaction of the beneficiary countries with project design
EQ6	To what extent were the project objectives and expected results achieved?		
6.1	Planned objectives and expected results have been achieved	6.1.1	Monitoring results indicating that planned objectives and expected results have been achieved
EQ7	To what extent are the project activities coherent and harmonized with those of other partners operating within the same context, particularly those of other UN system entities?		
7.1	Project activities are coherent and harmonized with those of other partners operating within the same context, particularly those of other UN system entities	7.1.1	Monitoring results indicating that project activities are coherent and harmonized with those of other partners operating within the same context, particularly those of other UN system entities
EQ8	What were the challenges/obstacles (including COVID-19) to achieving the expected results? How successfully did the project overcome these?		
8.1	Challenges/obstacles identified by stakeholders	8.1.1	Evidence from survey and interviews that the challenges/obstacles were overcome or not
	Efficiency		
EQ9	Were the resources adequate for achieving the results?		
9.1	Financial resources have been sufficient for achieving the project expected results	9.1.1	Specific evidence on achieving the expected project results can be cited

Justification Criteria (JC)		Indicators (IND)	
9.2	Human resources have been sufficient for achieving the project expected results	9.2.1	Specific evidence on achieving the expected project results can be cited
EQ10	Were the results achieved on time and were all activities organized efficiently?		
10.1	The expected results were achieved within the planned implementation period	10.1.1	Monitoring results confirming this
EQ11	To what extent were the resources used economically and how could the use of resources be improved?		
11.1	Management cost was reasonable and implementation cost produced expected results	11.1.1	Monitoring results indicating economic use of resources
Sustainability			
EQ12	What measures were adopted to ensure that project outcomes would continue after the project ended and to what extent have these measures addressed the existing risks for sustainability?		
12.1	The trade facilitation tools developed, capacities of experts in NTFCs enhanced and measures integrated into beneficiary countries activities	12.1.1	Evidence of tools, procedures and measures that have been adapted by the beneficiaries and the existing risks for their sustainability have been identified
EQ13	To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the project? How is the stakeholders' engagement likely to continue, be scaled up, replicated, or institutionalized?		
13.1	There are "focal points" for trade facilitation measures development and implementation and routine procedures in the beneficiary countries to ensure implementation of TF measures knowledge transfer	13.1.1	No. of focal points" for trade facilitation procedures and lessons learnt disseminated in the partners agencies in beneficiary countries

What preliminary lessons learnt can be identified to inform the planning of future UNECE interventions in trade facilitation assistance? Please name at least 2 lessons learnt:

-
-

What recommendations you propose for the future UNECE efforts to support the promotion and implementation Of trade facilitation assistance in the beneficiary countries in general? Please propose at least 2 recommendations:

-
-
-

Electronic Survey Questions

Evaluation of E293 project

Strengthening the capacity of Central Asian countries to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading system

* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email

Relevance

1) To what extent did the project respond to the priorities and needs of participating countries?

Highly

Partially

Little

Not at all

Please explain reasons for your

ranking:.....

Clear selection

Relevance

2) To what extent were the project activities consistent with global and regional priorities and aligned with the SDGs?

Highly

Partially

Little

Not at all

Please explain reason for your

ranking:.....

Clear selection

Relevance

3) How relevant were the project activities vis-à-vis the programme of work of the UNECE? What value has UNECE's efforts added in this area?

Highly

Partially

Little

Not at all

Please explain reason for your ranking:.....

Clear selection

Relevance

4) To what extent were gender, human rights, disability perspectives and climate change considerations integrated into the design and implementation of the project?

How can these perspectives be better included in future projects design and implementation?

Highly

Partially

Little

Not at all

Please explain reason for your ranking:.....

Clear selection

Effectiveness

5) To what extent were the project design and set-up effective for meeting the needs of the beneficiary countries?

Highly

Partially

Little

Not at all

Please explain reasons for your ranking:.....

Clear selection

Effectiveness

6) To what extent were the project objectives and expected results achieved?

Highly

Partially

Little

Not at all

Please explain reasons for your ranking:.....

Clear selection

Effectiveness

7) To what extent are the project activities coherent and harmonized with those of other partners operating within the same context, particularly those of other UN system entities?

- Highly
- Partially
- Little

Not at all

Please explain reasons for your ranking:.....

Clear selection

Effectiveness

8) What were the challenges/obstacles (including COVID-19) to achieving the expected results? How successfully did the project overcome these?

Your answer

Efficiency

9) Were the project resources adequate for achieving the results?

- Highly
- Partially
- Little

Not at all

Please explain the reason for your ranking:.....

Clear selection

Efficiency

10) Were the results achieved on time and were all activities organized efficiently?

- Highly
- Partially
- Little

Not at all

Please explain the reason for your ranking:.....

Clear selection

Efficiency

11) To what extent were the resources used economically and how could the use of resources be improved?

- Highly
- Partially
- Little

Not at all

Please explain the reason for your ranking and propose ways for improvement:.....
Clear selection

Sustainability

12) What measures were adopted to ensure that project outcomes would continue after the project ended and to what extent have these measures addressed the existing risks for sustainability?

- Highly
- Partially
- Little
- Not at all

Please explain the reason for your ranking and propose ways for improvement:.....
Clear selection

Sustainability

13) To what extent do the partners and beneficiaries 'own' the outcomes of the project? How is the stakeholders' engagement likely to continue, be scaled up, replicated, or institutionalized?

- *
- Highly
- Partially
- Little
- Not at all

Please explain reason for your ranking:.....

Submit

Annex 4: Documents reviewed:

- 1) Project E293 Concept Note, UNECE 2017
- 2) Project E293 Technical Cooperation Project Form approved by EXCOM, 26.09.2017
- 3) Project E293 Annual Implementation report 2018
- 4) Project E293 Annual Implementation report 2019
- 5) Project E293 Annual Implementation report 2020
- 6) Project E293 Annual Implementation report 2021
- 7) Project E293 Annual Implementation report 2022
- 8) Project E293 Final Implementation report 2023
- 9) Project E293 list of consultants
- 10) Project E293 list of project managers
- 11) L.KISLYAKOVA(CONSULTANT): Report: Harmonization of Border Crossing procedures in the SPECA countries
- 12) UNECE Guide to the implementation of Art.1 para.3 of the WTO TFA: Trade facilitation enquiry points
- 13) UNECE study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Uzbekistan, 2021
- 14) UNECE study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Kyrgyzstan,2023
- 15) Reports from the Seminar on implementing specific provision of the WTO TFA, Nur-Sultan, 20-22 May 2019
- 16) Reports from Webinar "Trade facilitation in times of COVID-19, 6-7 July 2020
- 17) Program from the Seminar on Strengthening the private sector capacity in TF, Dushanbe, 29 June 2022
- 18) Report form USAID Central Asia Forum on Paperless Trade, 12 October 2022
- 19) Multiple exchanges of letters UNECE-Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation concerning several project extensions
- 20) Case study Tajikistan Coordinating Committee on TF Procedures
- 21) UNECE Training Manual on National TF Committees
- 22) UNECE Guide to drafting National TF Roadmap¹
- 23) UNECE Single Window training materials
- 24) UNECE Training Material on the USE of International Standards
- 25) UNECE Training Manual on CEFACT
- 26) UNECE Training Material concerning CEFACT, ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2019/20
- 27) UNECE Training Material on National Trade Facilitation Bodies
- 28) E293 Expenditure report, 23.01.2024
- 29) GIZ Kyrgyzstan: Trade Facilitation in Central Asia executive summary
- 30) Evaluation of UNECE subprogrammes 4 and 6, 30 May-30 June 2023
- 31) National TF Report of Kazakhstan 2023
- 32) UNECE SPECA Webpage²
- 33) UNECE: The national TF Roadmap of Tajikistan 2019-2024
- 34) UNECE: National TF Roadmap of Kyrgyzstan 2021-2025
- 35) Draft of UNECE National TF Roadmap of Uzbekistan 2023-2026
- 36) UNECE Assessment report of the readiness of Kazakhstan to implement future commitments arising from WTO TFA, February 2016

¹ <https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/Publications/ECE-TRADE-420E.pdf>

² <https://unece.org/speca>

- 37) UNECE Assessment report of the readiness of Uzbekistan to implement future commitments arising from WTO TFA, 2021
- 38) UN General Assembly Proposed programme budget for 2018-2019, 2020, section 20/Programme 17 – Economic development in Europe
- 39) USAID Fact Sheet: USAID's Trade Central Asia activities
- 40) UNECE/ESCAP: Report on progress of the implementation of the programme of work of the SPECA WG on Trade, 2020
- 41) UNECE/ESCAP: Report on progress of the implementation of the programme of work of the SPECA WG on Trade, 2021
- 42) UNECE/ESCAP: Report on progress of the implementation of the programme of work of the SPECA WG on Trade, 2022
- 43) UNECE/ESCAP: Report on progress of the implementation of the programme of work of the SPECA WG on Trade, 2023
- 44) SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, Ashgabat, 19.11.2019
- 45) SPECA Roadmap for Implementation of the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy, Ashgabat, 19.11.2019
- 46) SPECA High-Level Seminar on Trade in Central Asia, WTO, Geneva, 4 July 2019

Annex 5: List of individuals interviewed

Name	Organization
Mr. MARIO APOSTOLOV	UNECE Project E293 manager
Ms. LARISA KISLYAKOVA	Former Deputy-Minister of Trade, Tajikistan, Chair of SPECA WGOT, Chief Tajikistan accession to WTO negotiator
Ms. POLINA TARSHIS	UNECE focal point for E293 Project administrative issues
Ms. AIZHAN BEISEYEVA	Expert on trade facilitation, Kazakhstan, USAID Kazakhstan Advisor
Mr. BOCARL LIBERT	International Expert, Sweden/Former UNECE staff
Mr. Lance Thompson	Advisor trade facilitation, UNECE
Ms. Nadezhda SPORYSHEVA	Secretary, Steering Committee on Trade Capacity/Standards
Ms. ASEL UZAGALIEVA	Acting Head, GIZ Trade Facilitation Project