



## **MEETING OF THE SPECA WORKING GROUP ON GENDER AND ECONOMY**

27 February 2017, 9:30am-5:30pm

Palais des Nations, Salle IX, Geneva

### **REPORT**

1. The Working Group on Gender and Economy (WGGE) of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was established by the SPECA Governing Council in June 2006 with the following objectives: to raise awareness of policymakers that gender equality is an economic asset; to exchange good practices in the gender and economy area; and to develop pilot projects for which the SPECA WGGE provides guidance on country priorities, strategies and policies. It is jointly supported by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

2. The SPECA Thematic Working Group on Gender and Economy meeting was held on 27 February 2017 at the Palais des Nations, Geneva. It was chaired by Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Chair of the WGGE (See Annex I for the Programme of the meeting).

3. The purpose of the meeting was to review activities over the period 2015-2016; share examples of gender-transformative economic policies to address gender gaps in the countries of SPECA; identify priorities for sub-regional cooperation on the implementation of SDG 5 and its mainstreaming into other SDGs; and agree on a work plan for the period 2017-2018.

4. Participants included government representatives from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, as well as representatives from the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub (representing the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Regional Working Group on Gender co-chaired by the ECA UN Women and UNFPA Regional Offices), the UNDP Office in Geneva, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, UN Environment, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and UNECE (see Annex II for the full list of participants).

5. The meeting was opened by Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE. He welcomed the participants and highlighted the strong potential of SPECA as a sub-regional forum to support and facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He noted the importance of SDG 5 – the goal on gender equality and the empowerment of women – both as a stand-alone goal and as a cross-cutting issue, as reflected in the Declaration “Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region” adopted in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 11 November 2015.

6. Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the SPECA Thematic WGGE, introduced the agenda of the meeting and thanked the Secretariat for supporting the SPECA WGGE. She underscored the importance of sub-regional cooperation in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and the role of the working group as a platform for the exchange of best practices of gender-sensitive policies, programmes and models of legal instruments in SPECA countries and with international institutions, and the lessons learnt from joint activities since the establishment of the WGGE in 2006.

7. The meeting was organised into two main sessions. The first session reviewed activities over the past two years and looked at key gender gaps in the SPECA economies, policies implemented to close these gaps and how regional cooperation has contributed to these processes.

8. The Progress Report for 2015-2016 activities, presented by UNECE, covered the following main areas: (i) capacity-building activities to support women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region, and (ii) knowledge sharing and exchange of information. UNECE continued to cooperate with the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International

Training Centre (MCTC), Haifa, Israel in organising joint biannual UNECE-MCTC workshops on support systems for women in small businesses at national and local levels and the use of information and communication technologies. Participants were informed on the updates in the programmes of these workshops, which reflect new elements related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the area of women's entrepreneurship development.

9. In addition to the overview on the previous work of the SPECA Thematic WGGE, it was noted that the SPECA Governing Council (November 2015, Dushanbe, Tajikistan) in its Declaration "Paving the way for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the SPECA region" decide to change SPECA Project Working Groups into SPECA Thematic Working Groups to facilitate policy discussions on key areas of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Declaration specifies that SPECA can provide the intergovernmental cooperative framework to help countries achieve the SDGs in several key areas, including gender equality and its mainstreaming in other SDGs. Participants agreed that the Thematic Working Group on Gender and Economy can be instrumental and contribute to reflecting gender in the work of other SPECA Thematic WGs.

10. Mainstreaming gender in the respective areas of UNECE work, including on the SDGs, is in the focus of the new UNECE Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which was presented by Ms. Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point of UNECE. Participants of the SPECA Thematic WGGE welcomed the strong focus on accountability and the action-oriented framework of the Policy accompanied by a Gender Action Plan (2016-2017).

11. Following the presentations of these activities, participants took the floor to share recent developments in gender-transformative policies in their respective countries. Within the theme of the meeting: *Identifying Barriers and Defining Opportunities for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in SPECA countries through a Gender Lens*, discussions had a particular focus on gender inequalities in the economic area. Some participants stressed the sluggish economic growth which had restricted domestic markets and reduced the policy space for decent jobs for women and men. Differences between women's and men's employment rates persist, the gender pay gap has widened in some countries, which has impacted women's incomes and well-being, in particular in rural areas. In other countries, however, several years of policies and programmes addressing women's needs through education and training have been beneficial. In Azerbaijan, women's economic independence is perceived as a key component of women's active participation in political and economic life; it has facilitated poverty reduction and in many cases has eliminated gender-based violence. Various policies and programmes have been implemented to promote women's entrepreneurship development, such as those with financial support from the National Fund on Assistance to Entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan and the Entrepreneurship Development Fund "DAMU" in Kazakhstan. In Kyrgyzstan, concerns are growing over increased gender differences in poverty, labour force participation and wages. Time allocation to unpaid care is often a barrier to women's participation in the economy. Therefore, there is a need to accelerate building social infrastructure, including kindergartens and services for the elderly, which are accessible and affordable for the population in urban and rural areas. Lack of financing, in particular the decline in microcredits in the last few years was stressed as another barrier for women entrepreneurs in Kyrgyzstan. The resulting recommendations from the discussion are found below in this report.

12. Mainstreaming gender in a broad range of economic policies was acknowledged as a strong factor towards closing gender gaps in various economic areas. Further development of gender budgeting, gender-sensitive employment strategies, training and education, and exchanging experience through study visits and projects were outlined as opportunities to expand sub-regional cooperation in gender and economy.

13. Further discussion on gender-transformative policies as part of the 2030 Agenda was in the focus of the second session of the meeting. It was opened by Ms. Monika Linn, Principal Adviser and Chief, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE. She introduced the objectives and structure of the one-day Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD), which would be convened by UNECE on 25 April 2017. As a follow up on and review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UNECE region, the RFSD would focus on practical value-added and peer learning, sharing policy solutions, best practices and challenges in SDG implementation and would help identify major regional and sub-regional trends. The Regional Forum would be followed by the 70th Anniversary session of UNECE (26-27 April 2017).

14. The second session of the meeting provided a platform for a policy-oriented dialogue and exchange of ideas for the nationalisation and localisation of the SDGs, with a focus on SDG 5. Country representatives shared information on the preparatory work and the challenges arising from the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, in particular, the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. SPECA countries have moved from the framework of the MDGs (with MDG 3 on gender equality) to SDGs where gender equality and the empowerment of women is both a goal in itself and a major factor for accelerating the

achievement of other SDGs. Expert group meetings, conferences, Task Forces and consultations with civil society have taken place at a country level, including the preparation of voluntary national reviews of the SDGs, with a focus on SDG 5 (Azerbaijan). Many of the targets of the SDGs, including that of SDG 5, are aligned with the national priorities of the SPECA countries, but strengthening work on cross-sectorial issues were noted as crucial by the members of the WGGE. In some countries, such as Kazakhstan, plans for implementation envisage aligning SDG 5 with short-term plans (National Plan for the realisation of the Concept for Gender and Family Policy (2017-2019), and Gender Policy (2020-2022) and long-term targets of SDGs (2023-2030). Participants agreed on the need to strengthen coordination between various institutions responsible for SDGs, and sharing experience with countries that have advanced institutional frameworks in this regard was recognised as important for SPECA countries.

15. In addition to country presentations, Ms. Barbora Galvankova, UNDP Regional Hub Istanbul, outlined the cooperation between SPECA countries and UNDP in the implementation of SDGs. As a representative of the Regional Working Group on Gender Equality (RWGGE) in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) she presented key points of the Briefing Note prepared by the RWGGE on SDG 5 in the ECA region. Ms. Galvankova pointed out several possible areas of cooperation between the RWGGE and the SPECA WGGE, such as the revision and adaptation of national and sectoral economic policies; gender-responsive budgeting; the design and compilation of time-use survey data to recognize and address unpaid care work, the development of gender-sensitive infrastructure to strengthen women's access to transport and trade; and the promotion and collection of gender-disaggregated data. Ms. Dono Adburazakova, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, addressed the region's most urgent challenges in promoting socially inclusive rural development in support of SDG 5. The importance of legislation, in particular as a barrier for women to work in specific sectors was brought in by the representative of EBRD. UNEP focused the attention on the important role of women in environment and more specifically in green economy.

16. Following the discussions on individual countries' challenges, Ms. Malinka Koparanova addressed the importance of implementing an integrated framework to achieve gender equality in the 2030 Agenda. Gender equality is an outcome, but also an important determinant and enabler for SDGs. Therefore, policies need to factor in the linkages of gender equality and the empowerment of women with other goals. Eliminating the structural constraints to gender inequalities, as identified in SDG 5, requires coherent policies and means of implementation which are linked to other SDGs. Economic policies to close gender gaps are part of policy packages to promote growth and employment (SDG 8), enterprise development and innovation, industrialisation and infrastructure (SDG 9), water and sanitation (SDG 6), obtaining equal access to quality and affordable education for all (SDG 4), eradicating poverty (SDG 1) and reducing inequality (SDG 10).

17. Participants discussed the importance of SDG 5 in economy, featuring the linkages between SDG 5 and other SDGs into the work of the SPECA WGGE. Depending on a country's specific conditions, achieving some SDGs may have various impacts on the progress towards gender equality. The progress towards eliminating poverty or achieving growth and decent work for all, for example, can be different for women and men, and can be affected by gender-based discrimination. That is why it is important that these linkages are taken into account by policies, monitored, and reported using sex-disaggregated data. The participants of the WGGE agreed to support the other SPECA WGs to mainstream gender in their respective areas of work. In this regard, there are new opportunities for cooperation in the SPECA region to support SDG implementation in the area of women and economy. Participants agreed to share more information on their country's priorities, including examples of specific measures, indicators and programmes which target the achievement of SDG 5 and its linkages with other SDGs. The first inputs should be sent to the Secretariat by end of May. The recommendations resulting from the discussions at the second session are included below in this report.

18. UNECE presented the WGGE Work Plan for 2017-2018. Activities of the SPECA WGGE will continue to focus on the promotion of gender mainstreaming into economic policies. Special attention will be paid to policies, programmes and measures aiming at the achievement of SDG 5 and contributing to other SDGs in the economic area.

19. Two project proposals for joint activities in 2017-2018 were discussed: 1) Strengthening institutional support for the achievement of SDG 5 in the economic area; and 2) Enhancing the capacity of governments in Central Asia and the South Caucasus to mainstream gender in economic policies supporting the implementation of SDG 5. Both project proposals were supported by the representatives of SPECA countries and of international organisations as relevant to the TWGGE objectives of promoting gender-transformative economic policies for the achievement of SDG 5.

20. The proposed Work Plan included the continuation of capacity- building activities, including the training workshops in support of women's entrepreneurship in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. These

workshops are organized biannually in cooperation with the Centre for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre.

21. The Chair of the WGGE invited country representatives to provide comments and feedback on the Work Plan for 2017-2018, and all country delegates considered the proposed Work Plan to be highly relevant to the needs of their countries and supported the activities listed in the Work Plan for 2017-2018. For strengthening further cooperation, the Chair outlined the need to set up a network of country representatives of SPECA and experts to contribute on a regular basis with experiences and inputs for sub-regional cooperation in the SPECA region on the achievement of SDG 5 and related SDGs, including the development of project proposals for ongoing collaboration. The proposal for the active exchange of information and lessons learned from other countries in the area was fully supported by all participants.

22. In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked the participants for the information and discussions and expressed satisfaction with the continued efforts of the SPECA countries to strengthen policies targeting gender equality and the empowerment of women through sub-regional cooperation. She noted the importance of focusing further work of the SPECA WGGE on SDG 5 and its linkages to other SDGs through sub-regional cooperation. As a Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, she confirmed the relevance of the thematic areas discussed at the meeting for the achievement of gender equality as a goal and accelerator of other SDGs at country level and noted the benefits of sub-regional collaboration in these areas. Ms. Huseynova recommended that participants inform the Secretariat about the main thematic areas after consultations with their respective gender machineries/ministries by end of May. Ms. Huseynova expressed her appreciation to the UNECE secretariat for their efforts in organizing the meeting as well as the activities of the Working Group.

23. Ms. Malinka Koparanova expressed her sincere appreciation to all the representatives for their active participation and cooperation.

24. The Work Plan for 2017-2018 was agreed upon.

25. The key recommendations that emerged from the discussions of the meeting were as follows:

- a. The participants of the SPECA Thematic WGGE underscored the importance of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the fundamental role of gender equality in it both as a stand-alone goal – SDG 5 – and as an accelerator to other SDGs.
- b. Participants acknowledged the potential of the Working Group to promote gender-transformative economic policies for the achievement of SDG 5 and accounting for the linkages with other SDGs, through exchange of experience and practices, capacity building and joint projects. The WGGE could be a facilitator of the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in sustainable development in the sub-region. A network with focal points at institutional level of the SPECA countries was recommended to be established with the objective to explore further how the SPECA WGGE can collaborate through projects in research and analysis on issues related to gender and economic development, awareness raising in the sub-region and support in SDG implementation.
- c. The SPECA WGGE stressed the need to continue joint efforts towards promoting women entrepreneurship development, including through capacity building for women entrepreneurs, strengthening support to improving the business environment and through related sub-regional initiatives and projects with the support of international organisations and the UN system.
- d. Against this background, the WGGE will provide a platform to support progress in achieving SDG 5 and its mainstreaming in other SDGs, such as SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 9 and SDG 10, improve awareness of SPECA countries on the important linkages between SDG 5 and respective SDGs, and for regional projects on thematic areas within its mandate.

More specifically, the WGGE concluded:

- e. There is a need for improvement of coherent gender-transformative policies within the aim to increase the employment of women in public and private sectors through a range of development-oriented objectives, to ensure decent job creation for women and men with equal pay for work of equal value, to invest in education and training of skills and knowledge for women, breaking stereotypes and making innovation and technology work for and by women.
- f. Gender responsive budgeting needs to be implemented as a tool to improve the results of budgets in general, and gender equality and women's empowerment in particular.

- g. Special policies have to be introduced in areas and regions where poverty is widespread and persists, in particular in rural areas.
- h. Financial support for women entrepreneurship development should be accompanied by the provision of capacity-building, such as financial and business literacy trainings, network building and information sharing; it has to include new financial schemes and innovations.
- i. Sex-disaggregated data for poverty, employment, education and entrepreneurship needs to be regularly produced and monitored; time-use surveys should be used for recognising gender gaps, in particular in unpaid care and policies need to be developed to eliminate those gaps.

## Annex I



### SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy

Meeting on 27 February 2017  
9:30-17:30, Room IX, Palais des Nations

*Theme 2017: Sub-regional Cooperation for Gender Equality and Sustainability: Identifying Barriers and Defining Opportunities for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in SPECA countries through a Gender Lens*

#### Programme

<b>9:30 – 10:00</b>	<b>Registration</b>
<b>10:00– 10:30</b>	<b>Welcome and opening</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Mr. Andrey Vasilyev, <i>Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE</i></li><li>▪ Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Chairperson of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy</li></ul>
<b>10:30 – 11:00</b>	<b>Review of activities in 2015 – 2016</b> <p>Under this agenda item, activities over the past year will be reviewed. A brief summary of the UNECE Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women will be presented as well.</p>
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Country presentations of gender-transformative economic policies</b> <p>Participants are requested to provide a short update on recent policies, programmes for women’s economic empowerment and gender equality and to highlight key existing and emerging gender gaps in the economic area in their countries. Working group members are also invited to indicate where they see greatest potential and benefit of sub-regional cooperation, and what help UNECE could provide to assist.</p>
<b>12:30 – 14:30</b>	<b>Lunch Break</b>

<p><b>14:30 – 16:00</b></p> <p><b>14:30 – 15:15</b></p> <p><b>15:15 – 16:00</b></p>	<p><b>2030 Agenda and SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy: new opportunities and challenges</b></p> <p><b>Linkages with the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development</b>  <i>Ms. Monika Linn, Principal Adviser and Chief, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE</i></p> <p><b>Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Agenda in the EECA Region: What is at Stake?</b>  <i>Ms. Barbora Galvankova, Programme Specialist, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub</i></p> <p><b>A Framework for Achieving Gender equality – SDG 5 – and its Systematic Mainstreaming in SDGs</b>  <i>Ms. Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE</i></p> <p><b>Promoting Socially Inclusive Rural Development in Central Asia in Support of SDG 5</b>  <i>Ms. Dono Abdurazakova, Senior Gender and Social Protection Specialist, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia</i></p> <p>Short country presentations of key issues on localisation and nationalisation of SDG 5 and related SDGs, followed by discussion and exchange of experience</p>
<p><b>16:00 – 16:30</b></p>	<p><b>Coffee Break</b></p>
<p><b>16:30 – 17:10</b></p>	<p><b>Discussion on priorities and future activities for 2017 -2018</b></p> <p>Under this agenda item, the priorities for sub-regional cooperation in achieving SDG 5 and its mainstreaming throughout the SDGs will be identified. Modalities of the functioning of the working group (frequency of meetings, activities and resources) will be reviewed and agreed upon and activities for the period 2017/2018 will be discussed.</p>
<p><b>17:10 – 17:30</b></p>	<p><b>Conclusions and approval of work plan</b></p>
	<p><b>Closing of the meeting</b></p>

## Annex II

### List of participants



## Meeting of the SPECA Thematic Working Group on Gender and Economy

**Start Date:** Monday, February 27, 2017

**End Date:** Monday, February 27, 2017

**Participants:** 16

#### Governments - ECE Member States

##### *Azerbaijan*

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