

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

Meeting of the Working Group on Gender and Economy

19 September 2018, 9:30am-6:00pm

Almaty, Kazakhstan

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 19 September 2018 Almaty, Kazakhstan. 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 key objectives of the meeting were to (a) review the policies, programmes and measures implemented in the SPECA countries to achieve SDG 5 and its linkages to other SDGs as a follow up to the recommendations of the SPECA TWGGE meeting in February 2017; (b) identify opportunities for further sub-regional cooperation on the implementation of the SDG 5, with a particular focus on women's economic empowerment, and (c) adopt a work plan for 2018-2019.
4. Participants included government representatives from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as representatives from UN Women, Regional office for Europe and Central Asia, representing the Issue-Based Coalition (IBC) on Gender in Europe and Central Asia, representatives of UNECE and ESCAP (see Annex II for the full list of participants).
5. The meeting was opened by Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the SPECA Thematic WGGE who welcomed the participants and highlighted the strong potential of the SPECA as a sub-regional forum for exchange of experience and information on the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the member countries. She noted the good cooperation since the establishment of the SPECA WGGE in 2006 and welcomed the strong participation of governments' representative at this meeting. On behalf of the host country, Kazakhstan, Ms. Zhuldyz Pernebayeva, Director of the Department of Social Policy at the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan, welcomed the participants of the SPECA WGGE and underscored the important role of SDG 5 in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
6. Participants were welcomed by representatives of ESCAP and UNECE. Mr. Hong Joo Hahm, Officer-in-charge of ESCAP, commended the SPECA countries on the progress made on a wide range of social and economic indicators that signify the important ways in which the standard of living has been raised in these countries. Drawing from his own experiences as a national of the Republic of Korea, he highlighted the important role of women in the economic miracle of the Republic of Korea, and their enormous contributions to the social, economic and sustainable development. He praised SPECA member countries for their initiatives in developing women's entrepreneurship as reflected in the findings of the ESCAP report on "Examining Women's Economic

Empowerment in SPECA Countries”. He urged member states to move beyond data research and analysis, to programmes and actions towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

7. Ms. Monika Linn, Principal Adviser and Chief, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the countries in the SPECA region transform and adapt to new models of sustainable development, involving women as agents of change at all levels of decision making becomes even more needed. Ms. Linn reassured the participants that UNECE continues its support to gender equality and women’s economic empowerment through mainstreaming gender in its sub-programmes, promoting women’s entrepreneurship development and capacity building, and providing forums for exchange of policies and practices. She invited the SPECA countries to share their experiences, raise issues and propose solutions on how to speed up the achievement of gender equality as an accelerator to national development and regional cooperation at the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development on 21 and 22 March 2019 in Geneva.

8. The work of the TWGGE meeting was organized in two main sessions. The first session focused on the progress of achieving SDG 5 in the economic area in the SPECA countries since the last meeting in 2017. In view of the recommendations agreed at the SPECA TWGGE meeting in February 2017, representatives of countries shared practices on gender-transformative policies for the achievement of SDG 5 and their impact on accelerating the implementation of the sustainable development agenda at national level.

9. The representatives of the SPECA member countries provided a short update on recent policies, programmes and initiatives for the promotion of women’s economic empowerment and gender equality in their respective countries. As part of their governments’ commitments to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs, countries reported advancement in strengthening institutional structures, including gender machineries and the mechanism of coordination with the line ministries, such as the ministry of trade, ministry of labour and social protection, ministry of economy, finance ministry, ministry of education, ministry of health in all SPECA countries. Collaboration have taken place following different patterns and modalities: from Working Groups inside ministries to Task Forces at the highest political level. Actions towards achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women have thus contributed to advance other SDGs at national level, including eradicating poverty in rural areas (SDG 1), obtaining equal access to quality and affordable education for all (SDG 4), water and sanitation (SDG 6), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), enterprise development and innovation, industrialisation and infrastructure (SDG 9), and reducing inequalities (SDG 10) in the SPECA countries.

10. Participants highlighted the role of gender machineries in developing new laws, such as the Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women, Law on Anti-Harassment of Women and Children, strategies and policies for their implementation, such as in Afghanistan, as well as continued reflection of the gender dimension in laws in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Gender budgeting was reiterated as a powerful instrument to ensure the financing of gender needs. Representatives of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan shared some practices on how to develop and implement gender budgets at regional and national levels. All participants highlighted the important role of women’s entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic independence of women as well as to the creation of new jobs and eradication of poverty. They exchanged practices on supporting and developing women’s entrepreneurship in various areas from setting up women resource centres, to organising trainings, conferences, special events for women in agriculture, women and water resources, women in industries and start-ups, investments and other forums.

11. Participants acknowledged improvement in the legal and business environment in their countries albeit at a moderate pace. In some rural areas, countries are facing challenges as unemployment is high and migration of men place additional burdens on women. In this regard, countries called for stronger policies, programmes and initiatives to be put in place to both improve the economic and business environment as well as provide support to women through sub-regional cooperation with international institutions. Establishing networks of women working in various sectors was acknowledged as an important factor to dynamize the markets at national level as well build stronger relations between countries.

12. Following the country reports, the Progress Report of the SPECA WGGE for 2017-2018 activities was presented by UNECE. It covered the following main areas: (i) capacity-building activities to support women’s economic empowerment as part of the 2030 Agenda, (ii) knowledge sharing and exchange of information and (iii) the Asia-Pacific Regional High-Level Meeting for the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 23 February 2018. 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 economic empowerment and entrepreneurship development. The WG agreed that women entrepreneurs benefit from these international workshops through both new skills and knowledge as well as networking. In 2019, two workshops are included in the work plan for SPECA region which was approved at the meeting.

13. Speaking to the theme of the second session, *partnership for sub-regional cooperation for women's economic empowerment*, representatives of UNECE, ESCAP and UN Women shared regional perspectives on strategies to accelerate progress on gender equality and its linkages with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ms. Malinka Koparanova, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point at UNECE, presented major trends in gender inequalities in the SPECA countries and focused on key economic policies as contributor to achieving other SDGs. She outlined major opportunities where countries can benefit from stronger regional cooperation. This includes activities in two major areas: (a) gender transformative policies, including capacity building, exchange of experience and practices, and (b) monitoring and reporting. A discussion within these areas pointed out the need of the SPECA countries to foster regional collaboration in gender transformative policies on a broad range of issues: from labour market non-discriminatory policies to the promotion of women's participation in public and private sectors, preventing stereotypes, to building support systems for women entrepreneurs. The national reports and Regional Review meeting on the progress and challenges of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, Beijing +25, to be held for the UNECE region in October 2019, will be a milestone in reporting achievements on gender equality and the empowerment of women and will include linkages with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

14. The ESCAP representative, Ms. Channe Lindstrom Oguzhan, Social Affairs Officer, shared findings from the work on the integration of gender concerns into national and sub-national planning and budgetary processes, and enhancing women's economic empowerment in Asia-Pacific countries, including through entrepreneurship and E-Government. She highlighted the main conclusions from the ESCAP study on women's economic empowerment in SPECA countries using a variety of indicators from gender inequality index to women's labour force participation, and other monetary and non-monetary determinants¹. Despite relatively high human development indicators and economic growth in the SPECA countries, unpaid labour continues to characterize women's work. Furthermore, discriminatory social institutions and norms obstruct the realization of women's economic rights and opportunities. Innovative solutions are, therefore, required to empower women economically to be agents of change in their families and communities. The ESCAP representative informed participants of the upcoming regional review of Beijing +25 in Bangkok in November 2019.

15. Building partnership to empower women by working with the private sector was discussed by the representative of UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Ms. Mehtap Tatar. She highlighted the importance of the Seven Principles of the UN Compact, the Women Empowerment Principles (WEP) and provided as an example a case study for Turkey which was supported by UN Women.

16. All participants agreed that building partnership at sub-regional level need further strengthening of SPECA WGGE work through: (a) enhancing the mechanism of coordination between international organisations, governments and civil society, (b) establishing a network for women entrepreneurs for SPECA countries, (c) organising business competitions and awards for women entrepreneurs for innovative solutions and best role models, (c) developing joint programmes for women entrepreneurs in green economy (for example in agriculture, ecotourism, forestry, etc.) and (d) organising working visits for exchanging best practices. All participants supported the proposals and agreed to search opportunities for developing joint projects.

17. In the discussion on priorities and future work of the SPECA, the WGGE participants identified key areas for further sub-regional cooperation focusing on SDG 5 and its mainstreaming throughout the other SDGs, as well as the modalities of the working group for 2018/2019. All representatives of the SPECA countries reiterated the need for further sub-regional cooperation with the aim to accelerate progress in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and agreed to continue to work in the area of gender mainstreaming and transformative policies as follows²:

- (a) non-discriminatory labour market policies in the course of hiring and work environment free of discrimination and exploitation;

¹ Examining women's economic empowerment in SPECA countries, April 2018, ESCAP.

² In its session held on 21 September 2018, the Governing Council of SPECA approved the recommendations made at the meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy held on 19 September 2018, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and agreed with the recommendation to change the Group's name to "SPECA Working Group on Gender and SDGs".

- (b) policies to promote the participation of women in public and private companies;
- (c) policies to prevent stereotypes in education and research to advance the participation of women in R&D sectors; and
- (d) policies for building support systems for women entrepreneurship development.

These areas of work have been agreed as the Work Plan for 2018/2019 in addition to the capacity building activities (see paragraph 12).

18. The representatives of the SPECA countries recommended that Focal Points are nominated to follow up to the work of the WGGE and regularly communicate with the SPECA secretariat.

19. In addition, the Working Group decided to contribute to the monitoring and reporting for the regional review process of Beijing +25 as well as the Sustainable Development Goals and report at its next meeting. The latter has been decided to take place at the margins of the UNECE Regional Review meeting in October 2019, at the Palais des Nations, Geneva.

20. To align the focus of the sub-regional cooperation on gender equality and the empowerment of women to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the WG decided to change its name from “The Thematic Working Group on Gender and the Economy” to the “Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs”.

21. 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 SPECA secretariat about the main planned activities within the outlined thematic areas of cooperation (paragraph 17) after consultations with their respective gender machineries/ministries. Ms. Huseynova expressed her appreciation to the SPECA secretariat for their efforts in organizing the meeting as well as the activities of the Working Group.



ANNEX I: Programme of the SPECA WGGE meeting, 19 September 2018

- 9:30 – 10:00 **Registration of participants**
- 10:00 – 10:30 **Welcome and opening**
Opening statements by:
- H.E. Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Chairperson of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy, Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs (Representative of Azerbaijan),
 - Ms. Zhuldyz PERNEBAYEVA, Director, Department of Social Policy and Development of State Bodies, Ministry of National Economy (Representative of Kazakhstan)
 - Ms. Monika LINN, Principal Adviser and Chief, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE
 - Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, UNESCAP
- 10:30 – 12:30 **Country presentations of economic policies and strategies for accelerating progress towards gender equality and the achievement of SDG 5 and related SDGs**
In this session, country's representatives will provide a short update on recent policies, programmes for women's economic empowerment and gender equality related to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Participants are invited to share progress in achieving SDG 5 and how this progress has helped to accelerate other SDGs, such as SDG1, SDG4, SDG8, SDG 9 and SDG 10. Issues of important linkages between SDG 5 and respective SDGs will be addressed in view of the specific country's needs and national plans.
- H.E. Ms. Delbar NAZARI, Minister of Women's Affairs (*Afghanistan*)
 - H.E. Ms. Hijran HUSEYNOVA, Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs (*Azerbaijan*)
 - Ms. Zhuldyz PERNEBAYEVA, Director, Department of Social Policy and Development of State Bodies, Ministry of National Economy (*Kazakhstan*)
 - Ms. Gulchekhra NAZAROVA, Head of Department, Social Protection of Women, The Committee for Women and Family Affairs (*Tajikistan*)
 - Ms. Diloram KUZIEVA, Head of the Department for Enhancing the Socio-Political Activity of Women, Women's Committee (*Uzbekistan*)
- 12:30 – 14:00 **LUNCH BREAK**
- 14:00 – 14:40 **Review of activities in 2017 – 2018**
Under this agenda item, activities of the SPECA Thematic Group on Gender and Economy over the past year will be reviewed. A brief summary of key activities related to the advancement of women's economic empowerment in the SPECA region will be provided by representatives of UNECE and UNESCAP.
- Ms. Malinka KOPARANOVA, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE
 - Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, UNESCAP
- 14:40 –16:00 **Partnership for sub-regional cooperation for women's economic empowerment: strategies to accelerate progress and linkages in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

In this session, representatives of UN Women, UNECE, UNESCAP and other international organizations, as well as civil society will be invited to present views on how to further strengthen partnership to better reflect the gender dimension and its impact on sub-regional policies. Strategies, programmes and measures to accelerate women's economic empowerment in key areas will be discussed. The discussion will benefit from the study on women's economic empowerment in SPECA countries and its findings in several thematic areas for policy action.

- Ms. Mehtap TATAR, Programme Specialist, UN Women ECA RO
- Ms. Malinka KOPARANOVA, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Gender Focal Point, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, UNECE
- Ms. Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, UNESCAP

16:00 –16:30

Coffee break

16:30 –17:00

Partnership for sub-regional cooperation for women's economic empowerment: strategies to accelerate progress and linkages in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (continuation)

Working group members are invited to discuss where they see greatest potential and benefit of mainstreaming gender in sub-regional cooperation, and what help international organizations could provide to assist SPECA gender machineries as well as other local institutions.

17:00 – 17:20

Discussion on priorities and future activities for 2018 -2019

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 2018/2019 will be discussed.

17:20 – 17:30

Conclusions and approval of work plan

ANNEX II: List of participants

SPECA NATIONAL DELEGATIONS

ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

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