



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

Eleventh Session of the SPECA Governing Council

(Ganja, Azerbaijan, 23 November 2016)

**PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE ACTIVITIES
OF THE SPECA THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS**

This document contains information on the activities carried out by the SPECA Thematic Working Groups since the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council which was held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 11 November 2015.

A. ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE SPECA REGION

I. WATER, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

The annual session of the SPECA Working Group on Energy, Water and Environment was held on 20-21 October 2016 in Baku, Azerbaijan, in conjunction with the 7th International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development. In its conclusions and recommendations of the session the Working Group underscored the importance of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and acknowledged the importance of SPECA both in strengthening regional cooperation and a deeper integration of the region in the global economy. The Working Group also noted its huge potential in facilitation of the achievement of SDGs related to water, energy and environment in SPECA countries and providing a platform for supporting progress towards achieving SDGs and for identification and coordination of technical issues within the scope of the Working Group's competence. The Working Group took notice of the activities on water, energy and environment implemented by UNECE and ESCAP as well as by relevant international organizations in SPECA countries in 2016. Based on this information, the Working Group made recommendations about its programme of work for 2017.

The directions of work during the reporting period include the following:

Dam Safety in Central Asia: Capacity-building and Subregional Cooperation

The third project phase focuses on cooperation on training of experts and students in the region and to continue the work to safeguard the safety of individual dams. A grant from the Russian Federation provides the main funding of the project. Information about the project can be found at: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/damsafety.htm>.

A regional project meeting took place in Bishkek on 3-4 December 2015 and the next regional meeting will take place in Almaty in the end of 2016. During the Bishkek meeting two reports on the regulation of low-pressure dams and the renewal of Rules for Exploitation for hydraulic infrastructure were approved.

In 2016, a model national regulation for the establishment of a cadastre for hydrotechnical installations is being developed. Work on national institutions and policy in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan is continued. The International training centre for the safety of hydro technical constructions in Taraz is supported with procurement of equipment and two training courses are held with participation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. A report on recent global developments with regard to building and providing safety of dams and other hydrotechnical infrastructure is also being prepared and will be presented in the end of the year.

Development of Cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers

The project on “Enabling Transboundary Cooperation and Integrated Water Resources Management in the Chu and Talas River Basins”, funded by the Global Environmental Facility, started in 2015. It aims to broaden the bilateral cooperation, including on environmental issues. UNDP and UNECE are responsible for project implementation. Project activities in 2016 are mainly linked to the development of a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis. Information about the work under the Commission can be found at <http://www.chutalas-commission.org/>.

Promoting Cooperation to Adapt to Climate Change in the Chu-Talas Transboundary Basin

A follow-up of a previous project on climate change adaptation with the objective to develop a joint strategy for climate change adaptation was initiated in 2015. This UNECE project aims to further improve the adaptive capacity of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to support dialogue and cooperation on assessing impacts of climate change on water resources and identification of possible adaptation measures in the transboundary context and thereby prevent controversy on the use of water resources. The project is closely coordinated with the above mentioned GEF project and is funded by Finland.

Regional Dialogue and Cooperation on Water Resources Management in Central Asia

The Programme “Transboundary Water Management in Central Asia” was launched in 2008 by the Government of Germany. A Programme component “Regional dialogue and cooperation on water resources management” has been implemented since 2009 by the UNECE, with the aim to empower the countries of Central Asia to develop and implement mutually acceptable, long-term solutions to improve cooperation on transboundary water resources. Enhancing the regional dialogue and strengthening the capacity of regional institutions for water resources management are the major objectives.

Phase III of the project was initiated in 2015 with the main focus on the development of a shared information space for water and environment in Central Asia and further capacity-building on international water law. The second meeting of a coordination group for the shared information space involving regional organizations was held 18-19 February 2016 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. For more information see <http://www.unece.org/env/water/cadialogue/cadwelcome.html>.

Water Quality in Central Asia, second phase

A follow-up to the previous water quality project funded by the United Nations Development Account and implemented 2009-2012 (for information see: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.html>) is being initiated and the first meeting took place in October 2016. The project is implemented in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC).

In cooperation with authorities from all countries the project, funded by Finland, aim to further develop regional cooperation on water quality.

Strengthening Cooperation on Transboundary Watershed Management between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the Upper AmuDarya River Basin

The project supports Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the development of hydrology and environment cooperation in the upper Amu Darya basin. The Ministry for Water and Energy and the National Environmental Protection Agency of Afghanistan and the Committee for Environmental Protection and the Hydromet of Tajikistan are project partners. On the basis of existing bilateral agreements the two countries aim to strengthen their cooperation and information exchange.

Joint work programmes on hydrology and environment cooperation were approved during a high-level bilateral meeting in 2015 in Dushanbe. The exchange of hydrology data on the Pyanj river between Afghanistan and Tajikistan was started in 2015 and negotiations of a separate bilateral environmental agreement are likely to be concluded in 2016. In October 2016, a joint training of hydrologists from Afghanistan and Tajikistan took place.

Project activities are funded by the Russian Federation and Finland. More information including an “Atlas of cooperation” can be found at: <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/conventions/water/areas-of-work-of-the-convention/enwatercentralasia/strengthening-cooperation-on-hydrology-and-environment-between-afghanistan-and-tajikistan-in-the-upper-amu-darya-river-basin.html>.

Application of clean, renewable and/or alternative energy technologies for rural areas in Central Asian countries

The objective of the project is to strengthen national capacities of the Central Asian countries to enhance access to clean, renewable and/or alternative energy through off-grid, micro- and mini-grid solutions in rural and remote areas.

The objective of the project has been achieved through the following strategy:

- Conducting national assessments for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on access to clean, renewable and/or alternative energy provided by off-grid solutions with the focus on rural and remote areas, and on identifying potential renewable energy sites close to productive use loads in rural and remote areas.
- Developing a prefeasibility study for future implementation as a pilot project.
- Organizing an end-of-the-project workshop for experts and governmental officials from Central Asian countries to present the results/recommendations of the project.

As a result of the project, potential renewable energy sites close to productive use loads in rural and remote areas have been identified and pre-feasibility study on the biogas plant at the farm near Kant town in Kyrgyzstan has been developed.

Promoting Renewable Energy Investments for Climate Change Mitigation and Sustainable Development

Under the framework of this project, 15 experts from 5 SPECA countries participated at the “International Training Course on Business Planning for Renewable Energy”. The training was designed to help representatives of private and public companies better prepare and implement renewable energy (RE) projects. It also aimed at raising awareness about RE investments, including through public-private partnerships, among financing organizations. Participants improved their financial engineering and business planning skills to identify, select and develop RE investment projects and prepare bankable project proposals.

Asia-Pacific Energy Portal

The Asia-Pacific Energy Portal (www.asiapacificenergy.org) is a web-based information platform designed to increase the accessibility and use of ESCAP regional energy information to support research, analysis and ultimately informed decision-making and policy actions. The Portal provides the informational foundation for ongoing ESCAP dialogues, analysis and reporting. As mandated by member States under the 1st Asian and Pacific Energy Forum (APEF), ESCAP is responsible for establishing a platform for regional cooperation, reviewing progress against the APEF outcomes, and reporting to the Commission. The Portal is a component of a broader 3-pillar APEF Implementation Mechanism. The Portal collects and openly offers more than 200 data sets on almost all ESCAP member States, including all SPECA countries, from IEA, World Bank, SE4All, IMF, EIA, UN Comtrade, and Bloomberg, covering access, efficiency, renewables, trade flows, subsidies, investment and more. It also collects policies from 58 ESCAP member States, sourced from hundreds of official websites. The Portal’s interactive data visualization platform is simple to use, and enables quick generation of meaningful charts from complex data sets. The Portal offers more than 2,400 full-text policy and programme documents, which have been analyzed to enable cross-sectional views of policy approaches from the region.

The Policy Dialogue on Energy for Sustainable Development Asia and the Pacific

SPECA countries participated in the work of annual session of the Policy Dialogue on Energy for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP organizes annual sessions of the Policy Dialogue on Energy for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific to engage senior officials, experts and policymakers in discussions to address emerging and persistent energy challenges affecting the region. The 2016 session was held in Bangkok from 25-27 April 2016. The participants exchanged their views on aligning national energy policies with the newly-concluded international agreements, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. This enhanced understanding of the policymakers of the key issues relating to the transition to sustainable energy, enhanced energy connectivity, energy security and energy access, and recommended approaches and strategies for organization of the first Committee on Energy, planned in 2017.

II. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT, TRANSIT AND CONNECTIVITY

Efficient international and regional transport plays a key role in addressing the economic development challenges faced by landlocked SPECA countries. Therefore, inland transport infrastructure development, facilitation of border-crossing procedures, railway and intermodal transport development and improvement of road safety is a priority for cooperation in the SPECA subregion.

The SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity (WG-STTC) held its 21st session in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 7-8 September 2016. The session was organized by ESCAP and UNECE in cooperation with the Ministry of Motor Transport of Turkmenistan. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan participated, alongside with the Islamic Development Bank and members of Turkmenistan national transport institutions.

The 21st session of WG-STTC discussed the latest developments in transport infrastructure, progress on transport regulatory environment and implementation of facilitation measures, promotion of PPPs for financing transport-related projects and progress in road safety, as well as transport-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and assistance to SPECA countries in implementing and monitoring SDGs and targets. Some of the WG-STTC topics were closely linked to improvement of regional connectivity and international transit. SPECA countries representatives presented progress in national transport infrastructure development (road, rail, dry ports/intermodal terminals, etc.) as well as activities to remove major bottlenecks along transport corridors and border-crossing facilitation issues. The WG-STTC highlighted road safety as a vital issue and urged SPECA countries to take necessary actions to improve road safety. Meeting participants acknowledged the importance of regional transport cooperation to achieve SDGs and agreed to include SDG-related actions in the future Programme of Work of the SPECA WG-STTC. The WG-STTC:

- encouraged those SPECA countries that have not yet done so to take measures towards ratification, acceptance, approval of or accession to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network, Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network and Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports and actively participate in the secretariat's activities related to the development of these networks;
- requested SPECA countries to increase the effectiveness of facilitation programmes and projects and accelerate the development of international road transport through long-term targets in SPECA countries as stipulated in the Regional Strategic Framework for the Facilitation of International Road Transport;
- reaffirmed the importance of the UN legal instruments and requested SPECA countries to intensify their efforts to accede to all of them as soon as possible;
- invited SPECA countries to review and provide the texts of missing agreements, additions, corrections or updates to the ESCAP Database of Agreements on International Road Transport;
- emphasized the importance for SPECA countries to pursue policy measures to create the appropriate institutional environment for the development of public-private partnerships;
- requested SPECA countries to continue efforts to develop and implement national road safety strategies and action plans with goals and targets in line with the Decade of Action for Road Safety and work towards achieving the Regional Road Safety Goals, Targets and Indicators for Asia and the Pacific; and
- encouraged SPECA countries to take actions to improve robustness and reliability of transport statistics as a tool to support governments or decision makers to make informed transport decisions.

All documents and presentations of the 21st session of the SPECA WG-STTC are available at the UNECE and ESCAP Websites: http://www.unece.org/trans/main/speca/speca_21.html and <http://www.unescap.org/events/21st-session-speca-thematic-working-group-sustainable-transport-transit-and-connectivity>

The SPECA Workshop on Road Transport and Road Safety Statistics sought to strengthen the capacities of SPECA and East-European countries in collecting reliable and comprehensive road transport and road safety statistics. Technical assistance workshop, under the SPECA WG-STTC umbrella, was held back-to-back with 21st WG-STTC session. Representatives of five SPECA countries and participants from other UN member States met with the UNECE, ESCAP and Euro-Asian Economic Commission representatives to discuss the methodology for collecting road transport and road safety statistics, as well as how best to make this information available to decision makers, the road transport community and the general public. National representatives presented their data collection mechanisms and key successes/difficulties in data collection. The workshop allowed all to share and learn, and to confirm the mechanisms for exchanging vital transport information. More information is available at:

http://www.unece.org/trans/main/speca/speca_road_safety_statistics_workshop.html

The ESCAP secretariat continues to actively support the development and operationalization of the Trans-Asian Railway network. The fourth meeting of the Working Group on the Trans-Asian Railway Network was held on 23 and 24 November 2015 in Bangkok with four SPECA countries participating (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). The Working Group noted with satisfaction the continued commitment of countries to develop the Trans-Asian Railway network as a regional infrastructure asset facilitating regional and interregional trade and acknowledged the role of the network in the development of rail-based international intermodal services. The next meeting of the Working Group will be held in 2017. Please see <http://www.unescap.org/events/fourth-meeting-working-group-trans-asian-railway-network>

SPECA countries are some of the most remote from major international maritime ports. Well-functioning dry ports are therefore particularly relevant and essential to facilitate their access to international markets by acting as ports away from coastal areas through the provision of efficient intermodal transport and logistics services. As of today, 17 ESCAP member States have signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports and eleven, including Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, have deposited their instrument of acceptance/ approval/ accession/ratification.

The first meeting of the Working Group on Dry Ports was held in Bangkok on 25 and 26 November 2015. The Working Group noted that efficient dry ports along international intermodal corridors could contribute greatly to improving the access of landlocked countries to international markets. So far 43 such dry ports have been identified by SPECA countries. More information is available at: <https://www.unescap.org/events/first-meeting-working-group-dry-ports>

The Policy Dialogue on Strengthening Transport Connectivity in Southern and Central Asia was organized by ESCAP on 20-21 December 2015 in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran. The Dialogue was initiated in 2013 to engage policymakers and key stakeholders in the subregion and sensitize them about lost economic opportunities due to inadequate transport connectivity. About 100 participants, including Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, shared experience on measures to enhance transport connectivity and explored ways to apply a set of transport facilitation tools developed by ESCAP. The policy dialogue reaffirmed that a master plan approach is the most suitable to enhance transport connectivity within the subregion as well as with other subregions. Participants reiterated the importance of railway transport in promoting sustainable transport and expressed the view that ESCAP was best able to coordinate concrete and

time-bound measures towards the development of a Master Plan on Transport Connectivity, in consultation with member States. More information is available at: <http://www.unescap.org/events/policy-dialogue-strengthening-transport-connectivity-southern-asia-0>

Three Regional Meetings have been organized by ESCAP to review and finalize the draft Models for Subregional Agreement on Transport Facilitation, for Bilateral Agreement on International Road Transport and draft Model Multilateral Permit for International Road Transport and proposed to submit it for adoption at the Ministerial Conference on Transport to be held during 5-9 December 2016 in Moscow, Russian Federation. SPECA countries participated in these meetings and contributed as follows:

- The Regional Meeting on Harmonization of Legal Instruments and Documentation for Cross-border and Transit Transport by Road held in Bangkok on 16-17 December 2015, in which three SPECA countries (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) participated, focused on the draft Model Subregional Agreement on Transport Facilitation. SPECA countries may benefit from the Model Subregional Agreement when drafting and negotiating new subregional agreements and for planning amendments to existing agreements, as well as use it as a useful tool for the establishment of legal regime favourable for development of cross-border transport and gradual harmonization of transport related agreements in the SPECA region. Available at: <http://www.unescap.org/events/regional-meeting-harmonization-legal-instruments-and-documentation-cross-border-and-transit>
- The Regional Meeting held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, from 25 to 26 May 2016 was attended by participants from 5 SPECA countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) and other UN member States. It reviewed and finalized the draft Model Bilateral Agreement on International Road Transport. SPECA countries may benefit from the Model Bilateral Agreement when drafting and negotiating new bilateral agreements and for planning amendments to existing ones. See <http://www.unescap.org/events/regional-meeting-harmonization-legal-instruments-and-documentation-cross-border-and-transit-0>
- The Regional Meeting on Harmonization of Legal Instruments and Documentation for International Road Transport and on Preparations for the Ministerial Conference on Transport, organized in Bangkok, Thailand, from 9 to 11 August 2016 was attended by officials from ESCAP member States, including five SPECA countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). The participants discussed and agreed on the model multilateral permit for international road transport along the Asian Highway Network. Once approved at the Ministerial Conference, the model can be used by the SPECA countries as a facilitation tool in their international road transport operations.

The Database of Agreements on International Road Transport was developed and launched by ESCAP in July 2016. It contains the texts of over 200 documents, including bilateral agreements and other legal instruments on international road transport or related to it, as well as selected major multilateral agreements containing provisions on international road carriage from about 30 member States, all SPECA countries included. The Database can be accessed at: <http://www.unescap.org/resources/database-agreements-international-road-transport>

ESCAP organized a Regional Seminar on Safe, Climate Adaptive and Disaster Resilient Transport for Sustainable Development in Kathmandu, Nepal, on 17 and 18 November 2015 as part of the Intergovernmental Ninth Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia.

The regional seminar provided opportunities for participants to share and exchange ideas, issues and experiences in building safe, climate adaptive and disaster resilient transport, discuss policies, strategies and action plans for development of safe, climate adaptive and disaster resilient transport systems and showcase various regional and global initiatives and policy options to improve road safety. The regional seminar was attended by representatives from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and other ESCAP member States. Please see <http://www.unescap.org/events/regional-seminar-safe-climate-adaptive-and-disaster-resilient-transport-sustainable>

A Regional Meeting on Renewing Regional Road Safety Goals and Targets for Asia and the Pacific was organized by ESCAP jointly with the Korea Transportation Safety Authority (KOTSA) in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on 28 and 29 July 2016. The Meeting discussed the renewal of the regional road safety goals and targets in line with the Decade of Action for Road Safety and the SDGs as well as reviewed issues and challenges related to progress in improvement of road safety in the ESCAP region. Representatives from Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan participated in the meeting with representatives from other countries. The meeting proposed a revised set of Regional Road Safety Goals, Targets and Indicators for Asia and the Pacific to be considered for adoption at the Ministerial Conference on Transport to be held in December 2016 in Moscow, Russian Federation. More details are available online at: <http://www.unescap.org/events/regional-meeting-renewing-regional-road-safety-goals-targets-and-indicator-asia-and-pacific>

The United Nations Development Account Project “Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to facilitate legitimate border crossing, regional cooperation and integration”, lead by UNECE and implemented in cooperation with ESCAP, aims at increasing Customs-to-Customs electronic exchange of transit related data between, inter alia, Kyrgyzstan and its neighbouring countries to further improve risk management procedures at border crossing and, ultimately, further facilitate legitimate transport. In 2016, the following meetings took place:

- National Technical Workshop on Electronic Customs and Transport Data Exchange was organized by ESCAP in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 24 May 2016, to discuss the issues of electronic international transport data exchange between the Customs authorities of Tajikistan and neighbouring countries. It was attended by representatives of transport and Customs authorities and road transport industry of Tajikistan and discussed the recommendations on the measure for establishing electronic data exchange between Customs and other control authorities for the facilitation of international road transport. Following studies and based on the discussions among the Customs experts during the workshops, a Roadmap for Establishment of Electronic Data Exchange between the Customs authorities of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was finalized. It is expected that it can be further utilized by the two countries for the purposes of developing international cooperation between Customs authorities and implementation of technological solutions aimed at facilitation of transport and border-crossing procedures.
(https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/doc/themes/UNDAC2C/Conclusions_RecommendationsENG_Dushanbe.pdf)
- Seminar for the Promotion of Electronic Exchange of Customs Information and the Adoption of Standard Electronic Messages (20-21 June 2016) was held in Geneva, Switzerland. The participants underlined the importance of internationally harmonized processes and data requirements to further facilitate trade and transport across borders, in particular for landlocked countries. They noted the Vienna Programme of Action specific

objectives (on information and communication technologies) and agreed that the standards and conventions to achieve them are already available. Furthermore, importance of standardizing the applications of international legal instruments, e.g. the computerization of the TIR procedure (eTIR) was emphasized. The participants encouraged countries to make use of the Central Exchange Platform (CEP) developed in the framework of the project to facilitate the C2C exchange of transit data. They recommended the further dissemination of the project's outputs in the different regions through capacity-building and other follow-up activities.

[http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/doc/themes/UNDAC2C/Geneva2016/Con Rec_Geneva210616.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/doc/themes/UNDAC2C/Geneva2016/ConRec_Geneva210616.pdf)

The primary objective of Phase III of Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project is to operationalize the nine roads and nine rail EATL routes that have been identified in previous phases. The Group of Experts and the UNECE secretariat initiated the process that is expected to convert the results of Phase II into reality during Phase III. To this end, the Group of Experts held two informal sessions in Istanbul (20-21 October 2015) in Vienna (2-3 February 2016 - hosted by the OSCE) and its formal 14th meeting in Yerevan (26-27 October 2016) hosted by and co-organised with the OSCE. The main objectives of these meetings were: to identify the specific structure of cargo that could be transported overland between two continents; to facilitate the coordination of integrated time schedules and tariffs on the Euro-Asian transport links; to identify of needs and requirements of producers, shippers, traders and freight forwarders in transport and trade on the EATL routes; and to consider further application of the Geographical Information System (GIS) on EATL routes. The report of Phase III, which will be of great interest to all SPECA countries, the Group is expected to deliver to the UNECE Inland Transport Committee in February 2017.

Recognizing the need for concerted action on the impacts of Climate Change international transport networks and related adaptation measures, experts from various countries, international organizations and academia, under the auspices of the UNECE established a Group of Experts on Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation for International Transport Networks. Information from the UNECE region and beyond was analyzed and the potential implications of climate variability and change on transport infrastructure and services were identified. Information was collected on (a) the current level of awareness and preparation; (b) the availability of relevant information and tools; (c) the existing and planned transport adaptation policies; (d) measures and initiatives; (e) the research needs and financing requirements; and (f) the collaboration mechanisms at national, regional and international levels.

The Group, which includes representatives from Central Asia countries, continues its work on a second phase and it is expected to analyze: (i) the need for establishing inventories of transport networks in the UNECE region that are vulnerable to climate change impacts; (ii) the usage or development of models, methodologies, tools and good practices to address potential and/or extreme hazards; and (iii) the compilation of case studies on the potential economic, social, and environmental consequences of the climate change impacts.

III. TRADE

The main activities of the SPECA Working Group on Trade included:

Trade Policy Forum for the SPECA countries, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 11-13 May 2016

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) organized a Trade Policy Forum on Central Asia and the Multilateral Trading System from 11 to 13 May 2016 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42188#/>), hosted by the Government of Turkmenistan, in response to the decisions taken by the 9th session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade in July 2015 and the 10th session of the SPECA Governing Council in November 2015. The Forum had four major objectives: (i) integrate the SPECA subregion into the rules-based Multilateral Trading System under the WTO (thus helping achieve Sustainable Development Goal 17.10); (ii) promote trade facilitation in the region; (iii) support regional trade cooperation; and, (iv) clarify what would be the contribution of the SPECA Working Group on Trade to the achievement of the SDG targets related to trade. (Chief) Trade Negotiators of the SPECA countries and Iran participated in the Forum. The World Bank, GIZ and UNDP were represented and actively participated.

The Trade Negotiators confirmed that WTO membership had positive effect for: trade facilitation; domestic reforms; diversification of production and trade; upgrading the regulatory architecture and business environment of the countries; and strengthening their capacity for trading in a knowledge-based economy. The Forum welcomed the proposal for the endorsement and further development of a regional trade facilitation strategy, presented by the Chair of the SPECA Working Group on Trade.

The Forum welcomed the representatives' proposal to consolidate a consultation and cooperation mechanism among Trade Negotiators, initiated at the Forum. The Forum participants reiterated the importance of preparing regional studies on: non-tariff barriers to trade, including the integration of economies of the region into global value chains; and the development of regional, cross-border supply chains. The Trade Policy Forum further urged international development partners to support such studies and the implementation of their recommendations.

Tenth Session of the SPECA WG on Trade, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 13 May 2016

The tenth session of the SPECA WG on Trade was hosted by the Government of Turkmenistan, in Ashgabat, on 13 May 2016. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as UNECE, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Regional Centre for Central Asia, the World Bank / International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Trade Organization, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), as well as Iran, took part in the meeting. Discussions focused on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets related to trade and the role of the SPECA WG on Trade. The Forum recommended that the WG should:

- provide a platform for supporting progress towards achieving the SDGs directly related to trade, in particular: (SDG 17.10) promotion of the multilateral, rules-based trading system under the WTO; (SDG 17.11) increasing the share of the Central Asian countries in global exports; and (SDG 17.12) granting duty-free, quota-free preferential access to markets to Least-Developed Countries (particularly to Afghanistan). The Group may also deal with the impact of progress made in the above areas on other SDGs;

- improve the awareness of the SPECA countries on the trade-related SDGs, including on best practices with regard to the “localization” of SDGs;
- support the exchange of best practices, capacity-building, joint development and implementation of regional projects, on the example of UNDP facilitated Afghanistan-Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Tripartite Agro Food Industry Consortium;
- support the establishment of mechanisms of regional cooperation, notably a network of Trade Negotiators and trade facilitation experts, enhancing the countries’ ability to achieve the SDGs;
- help the countries develop a model for rolling out the SDGs related to trade using the experience of UNCT in Turkmenistan, and the World Bank in the SPECA region;
- assist the countries in mobilizing additional support for national and subregional implementation of relevant SDGs;
- undertake policy discussions on trade issues from a regional perspective, including, for example, the development of relevant studies and a regional trade facilitation strategy;
- attribute attention to mainstreaming gender issues in trade in the subregion;
- finalize a 2-3 page document on how trade facilitation helps implement the SDGs; and
- work closely with UNCTs and other development partners, including the IFIs and development agencies in assisting the countries achieve the SDGs.

The Chairperson of the session suggested holding the next session of the SPECA WG on Trade in Almaty, back-to-back with the next Trade Policy Forum in Almaty.

Projects, activities and capacity-building:

Kazakhstan WTO TF Agreement readiness assessment

The UNECE, in collaboration with UNCTAD and a national expert, carried out an assessment of the readiness of Kazakhstan to implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. A seminar validating the assessment report by the relevant government agencies took place on 14-15 January 2016. The report provided a basis for the notification, on 1 March 2016, to the WTO Secretariat of Category A measures for Kazakhstan (measures, which Kazakhstan is ready to implement). It suggested to the Government the categorization of measures B (measures for which Kazakhstan needs more time) and C (measures for which it needs more time and external resources). Areas for further cooperation (notably, the establishment of a National Trade Facilitation Committee) were identified.

Kazakhstan Single Window Seminar, 26-27 November 2016

The Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and UNECE finalized a joint project assisting the EEC and its member States in developing the environment for Single Window (UNECE project E217) with a series of national implementation review seminars. At the one for Kazakhstan, new directions were set out, notably, on how to implement the “Main Directions” and methodology for

Single Window development (a major product of the project), as well as other trade facilitation instruments in the Eurasian Economic Union.

UN Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide training for SPECA countries, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 13-15 June 2016

UNECE, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the OSCE Border Management College in Dushanbe organized a **3-day training on trade facilitation for SPECA countries** (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) in order to raise the capacity of senior experts from these countries to achieve tangible results in 5 key areas of trade facilitation, using the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG). The seminar identified gaps and future areas of work in trade facilitation for the SPECA countries. Participants (middle to senior level managers from ministries of economy and trade, Customs and other regulatory agencies, and the business community in the four countries) improved their capacity: to analyze trade facilitation issues discussed at the seminar; to use the TFIG for this purpose; to identify solutions; to suggest ways for improving regional cooperation in trade in the SPECA subregion; and to use trade facilitation for the development of cross-border supply chains.

Studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade

A Russian funded project is being prepared to build on the recommendations of the studies, undertaken by UNECE at the request of the Governments, on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (<http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/studies-on-regulatory-and-procedural-barriers-to-trade.html>). The Trade Policy Forum, organized on 11-13 May 2016, in conjunction with the 10th session of the SPECA WG on Trade in Ashgabat recommended organizing a regional study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in the SPECA countries.

Agricultural Quality Standards

Activities organized and financed under UNDA-9 with a focus on Central Asia continued in 2016. UNECE and UNDP organized a **workshop on nuts and dried fruit** in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on 11-13 July 2016 ([http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42531#/#/](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=42531#/)). UNECE international experts from USA, Turkey, France, Italy, China, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan trained participants from Central Asia, as well as project managers from ESCAP, UNDP and FAO, on how to improve food security, food quality, food safety and trade in the Central Asian region.

A new UNECE Standard for Dried Apricots was adopted on 29 June 2016 by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (GE.2). It is expected to boost significantly trade in Apricots to the benefit of the countries sharing the Fergana Valley (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). At the Geneva session of GE.2, representatives from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan expressed their intention to possibly adopt this standard as the basis for their national standard to help harmonize the quality of apricots and combine the harvest in a cross-border production scenario. This would give Fergana Valley dried apricots potentially new markets and the Valley's family farmers a sustainable economic base. Please see <http://www.unece.org/info/media/news/trade/2016/why-the-new-unece-standard-for-dried-apricots-matters-for-fergana-valley-and-peace/doc.html>

UNECE sponsored a **study on regional supply chains in the SPECA countries based on trade in apricots**. The objective is to use this experience as a first step in developing more activities in

support of building regional supply chains, or integrating the Central Asian economies in broader international supply chains.

Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation: Capacity Building and Framework Agreement

Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan participated in several capacity-building workshops on cross-border paperless trade facilitation held by ESCAP. These events were held in conjunction with intergovernmental steering group and working group meetings working on the development of a United Nations treaty to facilitate electronic exchange of trade-related data and documents across borders in Asia and the Pacific for intra-regional trade facilitation. Several SPECA countries also participated in this initiative. The text of the treaty was adopted at the 72nd ESCAP Commission in May 2016. It opened for signature and ratification or accession by any of the 53 ESCAP member States on 1 October 2016. More information available at: <http://www.unescap.org/resources/framework-agreement-facilitation-cross-border-paperless-trade-asia-and-pacific>

IV. STATISTICS

The objective of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics is to strengthen the statistical capacity in the SPECA countries to produce statistical information in order to monitor demographic, social and economic progress, and the regional integration of their economies. It aims particularly to implement international standards and guidelines for enhancing the capacity of the SPECA countries to produce internationally comparable and reliable data. Particular attention is paid to promoting the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, which provide the basis for a sound legal and institutional framework for national statistical systems.

UNECE and ESCAP, including the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), its statistical training institute, provided the following main types of technical cooperation services:

- Advisory services, aimed at assisting beneficiary countries on the implementation of international guidelines and methodology, and formulation of specific technical cooperation projects/programmes.
- Capacity-building workshops aimed at promoting international guidelines, stimulating the exchange of best practices and supporting the establishment of an active network of experts at subregional level.
- Technical cooperation projects, including those with multi-sectoral and/or subregional focus, in areas where the UNECE or ESCAP have mandate and expertise.

Technical cooperation activities conducted by UNECE are demand-driven, results oriented and strongly rely on ongoing “Global Assessment” reviews of national statistical systems, undertaken in partnership with the European Union and the European Free Trade Association.

The 10th annual session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on 1-3 December 2015. It addressed issues identified in Global Assessments related to the legal and institutional frameworks of national statistical systems. It also covered implementation of the key standards for the modernization of statistical production. Modernization is essential to fulfill the requirements for adequately monitoring progress towards the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), and leads to improved efficiency and effectiveness of statistical production.

A new round of Global Assessments has started, with the initial stage of the assessment of Azerbaijan taking place in September, and Kazakhstan in October 2016. The objective of such assessments is to provide a comprehensive analysis of institutional, organizational and technical capacity of a country to produce official statistics and comply with international standards and recommendations. They cover all national producers of official statistics, including the National Bank and the Ministry of Finance. Global assessment reports provide detailed recommendations for the further development of national statistical capacities with the objective to help national authorities, as well as international organizations and other bilateral partners, to better coordinate and prioritise statistical capacity-building programmes.

Global Assessments reports for SPECA countries provided detailed recommendations for the sustainable development of national statistical systems that were incorporated into statistical capacity-building programmes and strategies (e.g. Master Plans or National Strategies for the Development of Statistics from the World Bank). These strategies were then made operational through annual statistical programmes of work and implemented by the beneficiary countries, with the support of the multi-lateral and bilateral partners, including the UNECE and ESCAP.

In Tajikistan, a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics is being developed with funding from the World Bank, and will build on findings and recommendations provided in the Global Assessment. This follows similar activities in Kyrgyzstan last year.

In 2014-2017, the implementation of Global Assessment recommendations is supported through the UNDA 9th tranche Project on Statistics. This project aims to strengthen national capacity of selected SPECA countries for sustainable development of statistics. In 2016, UNECE organized subregional meetings on national accounts, the measurement of poverty, and human resources management and training for statistical organisations.

In April 2016, the Conference of European Statisticians endorsed the Generic Law for Official Statistics, developed under the UNDA 9th tranche project for EECCA countries. This is not a binding document but rather supports EECCA countries in the process of amending or redrafting their own national statistical laws.

Also in 2016, agreement was reached on another major project, funded by the World Bank, on “Enhancing Coherence and Integration of Economic and Social Statistics in Support of the Implementation of 2008 System of National Accounts”. This project will run from 2017 to 2020, and will include several activities targeted at SPECA countries.

ESCAP organized the Subregional Workshop on Data and Statistics for the SDGs in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in September 2016 for North and Central Asia, including SPECA countries. The Workshop discussed the development and implementation of national monitoring frameworks for the SDGs, as well as priorities for collaboration at the regional level, presented in the form of a collective vision and framework for action for advancing statistics in Asia and the Pacific for the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, Azerbaijan is an active member of the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, which is developing a statistical framework and guidance on disaster-related statistics for SDGs monitoring.

ESCAP also continues to support SPECA countries in the implementation of the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, including through technical and

financial support to improve the analytical capacity in national statistical offices. During 2016, two studies to improve the quality on economic statistics were supported by the Programme: A study on the first trade-related survey in Tajikistan, and a study to improve data sources for better economic statistics, with a focus on business statistics, in Kyrgyzstan. The preliminary results of the studies will be shared with the broader Asia-Pacific region at the fifth session of the Committee on Statistics to be held in December 2016.

UNECE in cooperation with the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Committee on Statistics and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) organized the **11th session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics** in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 19-21 October 2016. It was attended by representatives from the statistical offices of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as well as Norway, Switzerland. This event also benefited from the participation and substantive contributions of the Statistical Department of the Eurasian Economic Commission.

The aim of the session was to support the SPECA participating countries in their efforts to further develop their national statistical systems in line with the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and other international standards and best practices. There was a particular focus on preparations to meet the requirements for data to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to develop a sound basis for coherent economic statistics through the strengthening of statistical business registers.

The meeting was targeted towards senior managers of national statistical organizations of SPECA countries and senior staff with responsibility for SDGs and statistical business registers. Experts from the national statistical organizations of Norway and Switzerland were invited to present examples of good practices from leading statistical organizations.

The meeting included three substantive sessions:

- Progress in developing indicators for the sustainable development goals
- Implementation of international recommendations for statistical business registers
- Priorities for future technical cooperation activities in the SPECA region

The agenda of the session, contributions and background documents can be found on the UNECE webpage: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43265#/>

The main outcomes and conclusions of the substantive sessions

A. Progress in developing indicators for the sustainable development goals

The UNECE presented the ongoing work under the Conference of European Statisticians to support member countries to meet the challenges of the SDG data requirements. SPECA countries presented national progress, issues and priorities.

SPECA countries are currently able to provide between 26% and 43% of the data required. Discussions are ongoing with other government agencies to identify additional data sources and determine national priorities.

Three main priorities were identified at the institutional level:

- How can national statistical organizations ensure effective cross-government coordination to ensure SDG data requirements are met to the greatest extent possible? Participants agreed that further exchanges of experiences and good practices on this topic would be very useful. This topic is therefore proposed for discussion at the next meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics.
- How to manage demands for disaggregation of data by many different dimensions (age, gender, disability, geography. etc.)? The UNECE informed participants that this topic will be treated in specific workshops to be organized in the context of the United Nations Development Account 10th tranche project.
- How to ensure an effective flow of information about good practices, so that national statistical organizations can learn from the experiences of others? Participants highlighted the value of discussions such as those within the SPECA Working Group on Statistics, and also welcomed the wider activities of the Conference of European Statisticians to develop a road map for developing official statistics for SDGs.

Due to ongoing cross-government discussions in many countries, participants felt that it was too early to identify clear priorities in terms of statistical domains in which technical cooperation activities would be needed. However, most countries mentioned that areas such as environment, water management and climate change were likely to emerge as priorities.

In summary, the SPECA countries expressed a strong wish to continue the dialogue on SDG implementation at future SPECA meetings, and in the context of other technical cooperation activities at the national, subregional and global levels.

B. Implementation of international recommendations for statistical business registers

The UNECE introduced the Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers. Since recently, the Guidelines are also available in Russian and all participants received paper copies of them. Statistics Norway presented their Generic Statistical Business Register project.

SPECA countries presented their national experience in building, maintaining and improving statistical business registers. The presentations by the Swiss Statistical Office mainly focused on the maintenance aspects of the Guidelines taking up issues from participants and enriching the discussion with concrete examples from Switzerland.

Discussions focused on the following main topics:

- Common guidelines and new technologies are important drivers of development.
- On-line data flows from administrative sources and regional offices have been integrated into statistical production processes in many SPECA countries. Well-established cooperation with administrative data providers and agreements defining data transfers are vital.
- Unique identifiers are key to proper maintenance of the statistical business register. It is important to define who is responsible for assigning unique identifiers and do these identifiers include any information about the unit.

- Maintenance of statistical business registers requires developing a strategy for dealing with the different groups of statistical units, such as individual entrepreneurs' data mostly derived from administrative sources; legal units with additional information from surveys and censuses; and complex enterprises or groups where profiling is needed to clarify the organization and activities.
- Updating the different unit characteristics (identification/contact, demographic, economic/stratification) also needs to be scheduled depending on the possible stability rules and validity period of each characteristic. Data sources for the updates need be clearly defined.
- Proper metadata and the use of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model considerably support the maintenance work.
- Confidentiality of data in statistical business register was discussed at length: What can be published on unit level? What kind of data flows can happen among producers of official statistics and administrative data providers? Should respondents be allowed to access and edit their own data any time? What kind of on-line services should respondents be provided with (schedule of surveys they belong to, feedback data to compare with other units in the same activity, etc.)?
- Statisticians should listen to users, both internal and external, when developing the statistical business register. Defining different user segments may be useful to take into account their varying needs. Users can be a catalyst for quality improvements.

In summary, participants noted that the Guidelines on Statistical Business Registers are very useful for development work. In addition, countries would benefit from concrete country examples (e.g. a web-based inventory) of cases to implement parts of the Guidelines. Examples on profiling would be useful. Countries asked UNECE to organize training workshops and opportunities to discuss with colleagues from other countries. The training should reach a wider group of experts either by organizing practical national training workshops or by offering training of trainers. Participants also highlighted the usefulness of bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries.

C. Priorities for future technical cooperation activities in the SPECA region

All participants indicated that support for implementation of the SDG indicators remains the top priority for technical cooperation activities in the SPECA region. Other topics suggested as priorities were the development and use of agricultural registers for statistical purposes, and the implementation of the 2008 version of the System of National Accounts. The latter topic will be covered by a new World Bank-funded project, managed by the UNECE, which is expected to start in 2017.

The provisional topics for the 2017 session of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics will therefore be:

- Progress in the implementation of the SDG indicators – due to rapidly evolving priorities, the exact focus of this topic will be determined nearer the time, to ensure maximum relevance for participating countries; and
- The development and use of agricultural registers.

The importance of subregional cooperation was highlighted by participants, and also stressed by the Chairman of the Committee on Statistics of Kazakhstan in his closing remarks.

V. KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

The eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (formerly the Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development, PWG on KBD), jointly organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) at the invitation of the Government of Kazakhstan and hosted by the Centre for Emergency Situations and Disaster Risk Reduction (CESDRR), was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 22 September 2016. In conjunction with the session, ESCAP organized a Regional Workshop on Resilient Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Goals from 20 to 22 September 2016.

The Regional workshop addressed the emerging issues of resilient ICT connectivity as a basis for the knowledge economy and knowledge-based development among the SPECA countries. The meeting specifically addressed how to enhance e-resilience in network design, make more efficient use of ICT for emergency communication and reduce the impact of disasters on businesses and governments, within the context of achieving internationally agreed goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the WSIS. The results of the Regional workshop served as a basis for discussion of the eighth session of the SPECA Working Group on KBD. The WG noted with appreciation the main outcomes of the Regional workshop, discussed the activities since its 7th session, reviewed its Programme of work for 2016-2017 and adopted decisions.

Implementation of the UNECE project on “Innovation Performance Reviews”

- The **Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan** was completed in 2015. It has been published as an official United Nations publication in English and Russian.
- An international conference was organized in November 2015 in Minsk, Belarus, to learn from the experience with the first five reviews, including those of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, to discuss the scope for methodological improvements, to prepare for the second round of reviews, and to adapt the reviews to generate insights and recommendations on innovation for sustainable development.

Implementation of UNECE capacity-building activities on policy options and practical instruments to promote knowledge-based development

- International UNECE Public-private Partnership (PPP) Forum on Implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda through effective, people-first Public-private Partnerships, Geneva, 29 March – 1 April 2016. One of the “people-first” PPP projects identified was the Pamir Private Power Project in Tajikistan.
- Meeting of the Business Advisory Board (BAB), held in Geneva, 31 March 2016, provided the occasion for Kazakhstan to present a number of PPP projects in the health sector, for feedback from the BAB.

Implementation of ESCAP activities in support of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative

- The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) Master Plan and Regional Cooperation Framework Document was presented at the Regional Workshop on Resilient ICT Connectivity for the Knowledge Economy, SDGs and the WSIS Goals in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 22 September 2016.
- In 2015, in collaboration with ADB and ISOC, ESCAP finalized a report, titled “Unleashing the Potential of the Internet in Central Asia, South Asia, the Caucasus and Beyond”, which assessed the status of Internet connectivity and identified key elements to transition from a basic Internet economy to a thriving digital economy and society.

Activities within the framework of UN-APCICT/ESCAP

- Organized a Roundtable on Academy of ICT Essentials for Government Leaders Programme (the Academy) during the Global Conference on Professional Civil Service for the Successful Implementation of Institutional Reforms, Astana, Kazakhstan, 25 May 2016.
- Developed a knowledge product on “Social Media for Disaster Risk Management” for government officials to supplement the Academy module ICT and Disaster Risk Management, and shared with Academy partner institutes in the region.
- Supported civil service training programmes and initiatives through localization and utilization of the Academy Programme in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
- Supported the localization and utilization of the Primer Series on ICTD for Youth (Primer Series) among institutions of higher learning in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
- Provided advisory services for curriculum development and institutionalization of the Primer Series programme in Kazakhstan.
- Collaborated with Public Fund Civil Internet Policy Initiative to enhance awareness of issues relevant to women’s economic empowerment and introduce the Women and ICT Frontier Initiative programme (WIFI) during the Media Engagement Workshop, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 11 August 2016.
- Localized ICT capacity development programme brochures to national languages of all seven SPECA countries in collaboration with national partners to promote greater awareness on the importance of ICT capacity development.

Capacity development on the utilization of ICT for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation

- ESCAP provided a government official of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kyrgyzstan with a study opportunity, a nine month post graduate course on remote sensing and geographic information systems, which was conducted at the Centre for Space Science, Technology and Education for Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP) in Dehradun, India, from 1

July 2015 to 31 March 2016. The course provided in-depth understanding and capacity-building on the use of remote sensing and geographic information systems in diverse, sustainable development sectors such as disaster management, resource management and urban planning.

- Although Kyrgyzstan is a pilot for the Regional Cooperative Mechanism for Drought Monitoring and Early Warning, work has not begun in the country yet. ESCAP is consulting with the Russian Federation and other donors on funding the implementation in Central Asian countries. Experts from Kyrgyzstan benefited from a nine-month master's degree in India, establishing a good technical basis for future activities in the country.
- ESCAP is also assisting the Government of Afghanistan with the disaster management system to be aligned with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), in particular capacity-building training to be incorporated as a strategic component of the disaster risk management system.

VI. GENDER AND ECONOMY

Achieving gender equality and empowering women in the area of economy continue to be of great importance for the economies of Central Asia. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development anchored gender equality in the broader sustainable development framework and acknowledged it as an indisputable prerequisite for achieving a just and equitable economic, social and environmental order. Engendering economic policies as a part of this order are in the core of the work of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy.

Capacity-building activities to support women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region

In line with the SPECA Work Plan for 2016-2017, UNECE continues the cooperation with the Centre for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre (MCTC) with MASHAV (Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in organizing biannual international training workshops for promoting women's entrepreneurship.

The capacity-building workshops are targeted mainly at women entrepreneurs from Central Asia, but participants include also government officials from various institutions dealing directly with entrepreneurship activities. The International workshop on "Supporting Women Entrepreneurs for Sustainable Development", held in Haifa, Israel, from 25 July to 19 August 2016, contributed to capacity-building for women entrepreneurs in the SPECA region through upgrading their skills and knowledge in doing business and working with private sector, governments and international institutions. This workshop was specifically tailored towards the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as a framework to address new challenges for entrepreneurs and look at how they can contribute to the SDGs implementation in their countries. It also provided support on how to create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs in doing business in their countries/regions. The participants were from government institutions and SME's support agencies, microfinance institutions, NGOs dealing with small business support and development, women's business associations and universities.

The workshop on the "Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the Advancement of Small Businesses" to be organised in cooperation with MCTC (14 November – 1 December 2016, Haifa, Israel) has also been updated to incorporate the new challenges of the 2030 Agenda and the needs of women entrepreneurs to respond to these challenges through

acquiring new skills and knowledge. Participants from Central Asia will discuss the promotion of gender equality and sustainable development by examining the possibilities of using ICTs in small business as a source of income generation and employment.

Knowledge sharing and exchange of information

Another form of exchange of information and sharing good practices among women entrepreneurs, supporting institutions and women business associations are the interactive discussions at the Roundtables in the areas of the economics of gender in Central Asia. Two Roundtables were organized on key issues during the workshops for women's entrepreneurship development (see the section on capacity-building). The discussion at the **Roundtable on "SDGs and women entrepreneurship: challenges and opportunities"** focused on role of women entrepreneurship in supporting the achievement of the SDGs in the countries of Central Asia. Participants looked at key SDGs for their countries and discussed how their business could make a direct contribution to these goals. Participants discussed their vision on how they see the steps towards achieving SDGs, what support they need for and how to overcome barriers to implementing specific goals in their work. The discussion at the **Roundtable on "Women and the ICT: impact on SDGs"** looked at some SDGs, which are explicitly related to the ICT. Participants proposed various ways to better incorporate their entrepreneurship activities to advance sustainable growth, innovation and aim at reaching social goals.

B. OTHER ACTIVITIES OF INTEREST TO THE SPECA COUNTRIES

WATER, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Representatives of the SPECA countries also participated in the work of the annual sessions of the following UNECE Groups of Experts held in Geneva in 2015-2016:

- Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels
- Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane (CMM)
- Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency
- Group of Experts on Renewable Energy
- Group of Experts on Resource Classification
- Group of Experts on Gas

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT, TRANSIT AND CONNECTIVITY

ESCAP and the World Bank jointly organized a Workshop on Legal Instruments for Subregional Connectivity on 5 and 6 May 2016 in Bangkok to provide a platform for discussing ways for building more efficient legal regime to facilitate cross-border and transit transport in the subregion, including Pakistan, Tajikistan and beyond. The Workshop elaborated on current issues and challenges related to cross-border transport and transit, on difficulties in the implementation of existing legal instruments, and analysed possible solutions and approaches.

China acceded to the TIR Convention on 5 July 2016, bringing the total of Contracting Parties to the Convention to 70. The accession of China will further foster the opportunities for economic growth and development of China and transit countries, facilitate trade with Central Asian countries, Mongolia and the European Union. China's neighbours on its northern and western borders are already Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The application of the TIR system will provide China the opportunity to shift its

export goods under a single, simplified transit procedure to EU countries for all modes of transport and opportunity to attract transit transport flows for all neighbouring countries on Euro-Asian links. Furthermore, various national, regional or global seminars were held in the course of the year, such as, a national workshop on the Mainstreaming of the Vienna Programme of Action for landlocked developing countries (LLDC's), Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) 27–28 April 2016, the global seminar on the importance of key trade and transport Conventions, New York (USA) 9 May 2016, OSCE-WCO Workshop on Enhancing Trade Facilitation through the improvement of regional transit in Central Asia, Astana (Kazakhstan) 27–29 September 2016.

The 2nd meeting of CAREC Railway Working Group which includes all SPECA countries was convened in Bangkok on 18-19 April 2016 to discuss the draft CAREC Railway Strategy and short-term and medium-term actions for the development of railways in the ESCAP member countries participating in the CAREC Programme. The meeting was co-organized by ESCAP and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- Seventh session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships, London, United Kingdom, 18 June 2015
- High-level International Conference on Unlocking the Economic Potential for Sustainable Development, Geneva, Switzerland, 2 September 2015
- Ninth session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, Geneva, Switzerland, 3 and 4 September 2015
- Eighth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies, Geneva, Switzerland, 16 and 17 December 2015
- Tenth session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, 23 and 24 May 2016
- International UNECE PPP Forum “Implementing the United Nations 2030 Agenda through effective, people-first Public-Private Partnerships”, Geneva, Switzerland, 30 March and 1 April 2016
- Eighth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships, Geneva, Switzerland, 20-21 October 2016
- Ninth session of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies, Geneva, Switzerland, 3-4 November 2016
- Expert Group Meeting on Engaged Learning in ICTD Education for Asia-Pacific Universities, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 18 and 19 August 2015
- Regional Dialogue on ICTD Capacity Building for Sustainable Development and Annual Partners Meetings for the Academy and Primer Programmes, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 1 to 4 December 2015
- Consultative Meeting on Women and ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI), Incheon, Republic of Korea, 14 and 15 April 2016
- Regional Forum on ICT Human Capacity Development and Launch of the Women and ICT Frontier Initiative (WIFI), Incheon, Republic of Korea, 9 and 10 June 2016
- Second session of the ESCAP Working Group on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, Guangzhou, China, 29 and 30 August 2016
- ESCAP Workshop on Knowledge and Policy Gaps in Disaster Risk Reduction and Development Planning, Bangkok, Thailand, 8 and 9 March 2016

- ESCAP Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) Private Sector Consultative Meeting, Bangkok, Thailand, 1 April 2016

