



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

Tenth Session of the SPECA Governing Council

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

I. WATER AND ENERGY RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

The focus of the work in 2015 continued to be on water and dam safety cooperation between SPECA countries. Important developments in the region linked to the SPECA activities are the start of exchange of hydrology data on the Pyanj river between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in 2015 as well as support to the establishment of a national agency in Tajikistan responsible for the safety of hydro-technical infrastructure.

Main work on energy focused on energy efficiency, renewable energy resources and “Sustainable Energy for All” including the implementation of the outcomes of the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum as well as exchange views and good practices between SPECA countries and others.

The directions of work include the following:

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

The project aiming to improve safety of dam operations in Central Asia started in 2006. Project results of previous phases include a model national law on safety of large hydraulic facilities, including dams, intended to be a base of national harmonized legal frameworks for dam safety; a draft regional agreement on cooperation on dam safety, which stipulates, inter alia, exchange of information and notification of other countries in case of accidents with dams; expertise provided to the development of dam safety legislation in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as joint training for experts in the region.

The third project phase started in 2012 with the focus on cooperation on training of experts and students in the region and to continue the work to safeguard the safety of individual dams. A safety monitoring system funded by the UNECE project on the Ortotokoi dam in Kyrgyzstan on the transboundary Chu river was inaugurated in September 2015. In 2015, work on the regulation of low-pressure dams and the renewal of Rules for Exploitation for hydraulic infrastructure continued as was work on national institutions and policy in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Presently a grant from the Russian Federation provides the main funding of the project.

A regional project meeting will take place in Bishkek on 3-4 December 2015. Information about the project can be found at: <http://www.unece.org/env/water/damsafety.htm>.

Development of Cooperation on the Chu and Talas Rivers

In 2006, the Kazakh-Kyrgyz Chu and Talas Rivers Commission was inaugurated with the support of UNECE and ESCAP. The establishment of the Commission created a mutually beneficial way for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to share responsibility and funding of water infrastructure used by both countries. Project support has also contributed to the further broadening of cooperation to improve the joint management of the Chu and Talas rivers.

Funds have been approved for support by the Global Environmental Facility to broaden the bilateral cooperation, including on environmental issues, and after the development of the project document in 2014 the project has been initiated in 2015. UNDP and UNECE are responsible for the implementation of the project. The project inception meeting was held in May and the first major set of activities was initiated in connection with a bilateral meeting held 16-18 September at Issyk Kul.

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 is being initiated during 2015. This UNECE-UNDP 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.

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. A meeting of a coordination group for the shared information space involving regional organizations was held 1-2 September 2015 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 is being initiated in October 2015. The project will be 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.

During 2015 the cooperation intensified. In August a technical bilateral meeting was held and a joint expedition organised. A high-level bilateral meeting took place in October in Dushanbe. Two major developments in 2015 are the start of exchange of hydrology data on the Pyanj river between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and the negotiations of a separate bilateral environmental agreement.

Project activities are funded by Russia and Finland. More information including an “Atlas of cooperation” can be found at <http://www.unece.org/env/water/centralasia.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.

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 aims 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.

Database of Policies and Regulations on Sustainable Use of Energy and Renewable Energy Sources in Countries of North and Central Asia

As one of the outcomes of the ESCAP project “Enhancing energy security through regional cooperation” funded by the Russian Federation, the Database of policies and regulations on sustainable use of energy and renewable energy sources in countries of North and Central Asia has been developed and is now openly available online at www.asiapacificenergy.org.

The database currently contains over 1000 documents from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is continuously updated and reflects the current policy and regulatory framework for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources development in North and Central Asia.

The database has been developed to serve as an information tool for policymakers and researchers to compare policy and legal frameworks of the countries covered by the project and to identify the trends in their development. It can be a useful source of information on the experiences and the approaches of the countries in developing relevant national policies and legislation. There are plans for further expansion of database to cover more countries of the subregion.

The **Inter-regional Workshop and Study Tour on Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Projects and Policies**, held from 8 to 12 February 2015 in Israel, was jointly organized by the UNECE and MASHAV – Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation and ESCAP. For the UNECE, this event was organized in the framework of the United Nations Development Account (UNDA) projects “Promoting energy efficiency investments for climate change mitigation and sustainable development”, and “Promoting renewable energy investments for climate change mitigation and sustainable development”. Nine government officials and experts from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan participated in the event. The Workshop aimed at strengthening capacity of decision-makers and practitioners from these countries to increase share of renewable energy in energy mix and improve energy efficiency. In this context, the participants learnt about the experience of Israel in promoting and implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy policies and measures.

The Sixth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development was held in Yerevan, on 29 September - 2 October 2015. The Forum was organized in cooperation with ESCAP and other UN Regional Commissions and became one of the important events of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All, 2014-2024. Over 270 delegates, including representatives of five SPECA countries, attended the Forum.

Under the framework of the Forum, UNECE held a Workshop on Access to Energy in Remote Areas, which focused on the most effective institutional, legal, financial, technical and other mechanisms to improve energy access, in particular in remote rural areas. National experts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan presented national assessments on access to energy services 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.

Enhancing regional cooperation on sustainable energy including the implementation the outcomes from the Asian and Pacific Energy Forum

As one of the outcomes of the ESCAP project “Enhancing energy security through regional cooperation” funded by the Russian Federation, the Database of policies and regulations on

sustainable use of energy and renewable energy sources in countries of North and Central Asia has been developed and is now merged with the Asia and Pacific Energy Portal and the information related to sustainable energy policies and strategies from SPECA countries are available online at www.asiapacificenergy.org

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:

- 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

II. TRANSPORT AND BORDER CROSSING

Efficient international and regional transport plays a key role in addressing the economic development challenges faced by landlocked SPECA countries. Therefore, transport infrastructure development, facilitation of border-crossing and transit procedures and improvement of road safety is a priority for cooperation in the SPECA subregion. Since 1998, UNECE and ESCAP have been supporting these developments as alternating secretariat to the SPECA Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing (PWG-TBC).

The 20th jubilee session of SPECA Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 10-11 September 2015. The session was hosted by the Ministry for Investment and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan and co-organized by UNECE and ESCAP. Representatives of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan participated, alongside with the Islamic Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, TRACECA and members of national transport institutions and the private sector. The aim of the session was to take stock of the progress of the SPECA transport cooperation, and to address topics related to sustainable development of transport systems, with special emphasis on connectivity and more efficient international transport. During the meeting PWG members presented their plans in transport infrastructure development, activities undertaken to remove bottlenecks (both physical and non-physical), and progress related to accession to and implementation of UN transport conventions. Actions to improve road safety in the region were discussed as well. The PWG encouraged SPECA countries:

- To harmonise transport infrastructure development plans relying on established frameworks (Euro-Asian Transport Linkages; Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway network, Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports).
- To further facilitate international road and rail transport.
- To take actions to respond to the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety, 2011-2020.

The quality and reliability of transport data remains to be a concern in most SPECA countries. As transport is included as target under several Sustainable Development Goals, addressing this issue is rather timely. Thus, it was agreed that future technical assistance activities will give priority to data collection and processing in the transport sector, but with a special attention to road safety. All

documents and presentations of the 20th session are available at http://www.unece.org/trans/main/speca/speca_20.html.

During the SPECA Road Safety Capacity-building Workshop (Almaty, September 2015), which was held back-to-back to the 20th SPECA PWG-TBC, SPECA countries presented their current road safety situation, shared experiences on developing road safety legal and regulatory architecture, as well as on developing their national strategy, and setting up a road safety management system. Collection and analysis of road safety data for monitoring and evaluation was considered to be one of the key challenges.

Representatives of SPECA countries presented their efforts in improvement of two-wheelers road safety at the Round table on exploring the use of UN road safety legal instruments to address powered two-wheeled vehicles safety policies in low and middle income countries (Geneva, March 2015). Round table was initiated by the Governments of France, Italy and United States, supported by UNECE and held in conjunction with the 70th session of Working Party on Road Safety. In the conclusions, member countries were invited to do more in improvement of road safety legal framework, to strengthen the capacities of national transport research institutes, to focus on the most critical issues for power two-wheelers and to use modern technologies to address road safety problems (<http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/doc/2015/wp1/ECE-TRANS-WP1-149-e.pdf>).

In 2015, SPECA countries have benefited from several UNECE workshops and advisory missions. The capacity-building workshop on UN legal instruments on Inland Transport (accession procedures and benefits of the conventions) was organized back-to-back to the Inland Transport Committee Annual Meeting (Geneva, February 2015). Presentations and discussions during the workshop reaffirmed the need to access and implement UN legal instruments in order to create more efficient, safer and environmental friendly transport systems ([http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38839#/#/](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38839#/)).

During the III International Transport Logistics Forum “New Silk Way” (Astana, May 2015) UNECE moderated “New Silk Way – the economic integration of East and West” panel where representatives of international financial institutions, transport organizations and enterprises exchanged experience on development of Euro-Asian transport links. Panellists discussed the prospective and challenges for the development of inland transport corridors, position and possibilities for the landlocked countries in global transport routes and the latest trends in the development of regional transport systems.

UNECE organized a Regional Seminar on the application of the TIR Convention in Dushanbe (May 2015) with the participation of officials from Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Azerbaijan, among others. Afghanistan has resumed its TIR operations only in 2013. The Seminar demonstrated the increased use of TIR in Central Asia, as well as the readiness of many countries in the region to proceed with computerization of customs procedures and establishment of single window concepts. The main message that emerged from the Seminar is that several countries in the region are now mature in their policy goals and strategic plans to achieve deeper integration and modernization of their trade and transport processes, especially border crossing procedures (<http://www.unece.org/tir/seminar/dushanbe-tajikistan/sem-tajikistan-english.html>).

The United Nations Development Account Project “Capacity Building for Control Authorities and Transport Operators to Improve Efficiency of Cross-border Transport in Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries”, implemented by ESCAP and completed in 2014, assisted Kazakhstan,

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the application of the ESCAP transport facilitation toolkit and, in particular, to support the clusters' activities for practical implementation of action plans on transport facilitation at both national and corridor levels. SPECA countries were encouraged to use the above-mentioned toolkit and other ESCAP transport facilitation models.

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. As part of the project, a workshop on Customs-to-Customs Electronic Data Exchange has been organized in Issyk-Kul (Kyrgyzstan) on 7-8 September 2015 and was attended by delegations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

III. TRADE

The ninth session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade was hosted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on 3 July 2015, at the Palais des Nations, in Geneva. It was combined with the High-Level Seminar on Regional Trade Cooperation. The objective was to identify key issues for trade in the SPECA region; establish dialogue between the SPECA countries and international organizations on re-shaping the SPECA PWG on Trade: how these organizations (UNECE, UNCTAD, ITC, development partners) could support the Group in the medium to long term to unlock hitherto unused resources to develop the region and support efforts to lower high trade costs.

The session identified the following areas for concentration of SPECA work on trade: trade facilitation (notably, a regional trade facilitation strategy); implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA); integration into the global rules-based trading system (Global Goal 17.10); regional mechanism to exchange information on WTO negotiations; monitoring implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in trade; overcoming obstacles to cross-border supply chains in Central Asia; regional and national studies on non-tariff barriers to trade, benefits from regional trade, the economic impact of WTO membership, and trade with major partners outside the region.

The following goals were identified: (a) make SPECA a more action-driven platform to implement projects identified by Central Asian States and to share experiences; (b) connect to other regional economic initiatives, including the Istanbul process of confidence building measures, CAREC, ECO, the Eurasian Economic Union, TASIM, etc.; (c) focus on fostering good governance and robust institutions; (d) use SPECA as a forum for facilitating information exchanges on WTO issues; (e) reinforce the SPECA Aid-for-Trade initiative; (f) organize the next regional trade event in Ashgabat with special focus on WTO. It was suggested to establish a position in the Joint ESCAP/UNECE SPECA Office in Almaty to support trade work.

Projects and activities

Aid-for-Trade. UNECE supported 19 representatives from SPECA countries to participate in the biannual Aid-for-Trade review meeting and UNECE side events on 1-2 July 2015, as well as a meeting between a Vice Minister of Turkmenistan with the Director General of WTO.

Single Window in Uzbekistan. UNECE provided support and expertise to the Government of Uzbekistan in implementing the second phase of the Single Window project in Uzbekistan through two seminars in 2014.

Capacity-building. The UNECE Regional Adviser offered training on readiness assessments and implementation of the WTO TFA at two seminars: for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in June 2015 and for Kazakhstan in October 2015. UNECE also organized on 24-26 August 2015 in Dushanbe, together with OSCE, training on the UNECE Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) for Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. It also organized, in cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Commission on Trade Facilitation and ESCAP, training on Business Process Analysis and assessing progress in building Single Window mechanisms on 15-16 May and 23-25 September 2015 (see: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40729#/>)

Study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in Kyrgyzstan

UNECE undertook a study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Kyrgyzstan (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40565>) at the request of the Government. The study uses the UNECE evaluation methodology in order to capture both behind and at-the-border regulatory and procedural barriers to trade; highlight their impact on transaction costs; and detailed recommendations, including for action at a regional level. The Deputy Minister of trade of Kyrgyzstan reported on the steps that the Government would take in order to implement the recommendations emerging from the study. The study also sets the stage for generating synergies between interventions targeting improved productivity and export growth, as stipulated in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2013-2017 and the Programme for the Transition of the Kyrgyz Republic to Sustainable Development for 2013-2017. The study would be followed by concerted efforts to mobilize the required financial resources for implementation. The Government will develop a prioritized action plan, to be integrated into Kyrgyzstan's United Nations Development Action Framework (UNDAF) and used as a basis for a national Aid-for-Trade (AfT) plan. It would also work with the UNECE to develop multi-agency technical assistance projects to implement the recommendations. The Governments of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are following up on the recommendations of the studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in these countries. There are no explicit plans for future studies in SPECA countries, even if Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are considering this possibility. The SPECA Governing Council (or the PWG on Trade) might wish to pass a decision on a joint request for a regional study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade.

Agricultural Quality Standards

Activities organized and financed under the UNDA 9th tranche with a focus on Central Asia included: (1) a business process analysis (BPA) and a case study of the dried apricot sector in Tajikistan; and (2) International training for Central Asian countries, Izmir, Turkey, 20 June - 3 July 2015 "Agri-Food Supply Chains in Cross-Border Trade of Nuts and Dried Fruit". 21 participants from Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) attended that training. The delegations from Central Asia were trained in the many aspects of nuts and dried fruit trade including UNECE standards, inspection procedures as well as trade and business process analysis; marketing practices and the latest trends in sales. The presence of importing and exporting countries (both well-established and emerging), public and private sector representatives, UNDP and donor agencies such as GIZ, which run projects on nuts and dried fruit in the field multiplied the capacity-building and knowledge transfer effect of the workshop. Standardization agencies from several Central Asian countries present at the workshop expressed the need for their continuous involvement to

improve their standards and inspection services. One outcome of the workshop was the decision to set up an informal group of experts to advise Central Asian countries and Afghanistan in their endeavour to improve production and export possibilities. Concrete requests for workshops and advisory services were received from several countries including Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. A regional meeting in 2016 to solicit further assistance is envisaged. UNECE helped with the set-up of a dried fruit laboratory to improve inspection processes and extended help in Kyrgyzstan.

IV. STATISTICS

The objective of the SPECA PWG on Statistics is to strengthen the statistical capacity of countries of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) 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 technical cooperation provided senior government officials and professionals from SPECA countries with high-level expertise in the field of statistics.

UNECE provided the following main types of technical cooperation services:

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

Technical cooperation activities conducted by UNECE are demand-driven, results oriented and strongly rely on recent reviews of national statistical systems (Global Assessments - GA).

To accomplish these tasks in an efficient and effective way, linkages are actively developed with other multi-lateral and bilateral involved in statistical capacity-building activities in the subregion.

The annual session of the SPECA Project Working Groups on Statistics, to be held on 1-3 December 2015, will address key issues identified in Global Assessments, conducted in most SPECA countries, related to the legal and institutional frameworks of National Statistical Systems (NSSs) and other international agreed standards. Implementation of these is a prerequisite for the modernization of statistical production. Modernization is also crucial for being able to fulfil the requirements for adequately monitoring progress towards the agreed global, regional and national Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It leads to improved efficiency and effectiveness of statistical production.

Results from the GAs undertaken in the region show that in the area of environmental statistics, strengthening and consolidation is recommended with a focus on their usability for both environmental indicators and environmental-economic accounts. Technical cooperation activities in the field of environment statistics should not only cover SPECA countries but all EECCA countries in order to better share good practices and experience. SPECA countries also stressed the importance of technical support from international and bilateral partners during the process of the implementation of the System of Environment-Economic Accounting (SEEA).

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) need to be monitored with indicators that matter nationally and are comparable internationally. It is expected that regional reporting mechanisms will also play a significant role in facilitating the reporting at regional level, taking into account regional priorities and ensuring a link between the national and the global levels. The Workshop on Measuring Poverty and Vulnerability (Geneva, May 2015) promoted the exchange experience and build statistical capacity for the measurement of multidimensional poverty and vulnerability to poverty, with focus on the SPECA countries.

The Workshop on Population and Housing Census (Geneva, September 2015) provided an opportunity to census managers and experts from SPECA countries to discuss their plans for the next census of the 2020 round, and of possible issues related to the implementation of the new *Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations for the 2020 Censuses of Population and Housing*, that were adopted by the CES at its June 2015 Plenary Session (the draft Recommendations are available here: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=38920#/>).

Beside regular capacity-building activities, and at the request of all SPECA countries (with the exception Uzbekistan and Afghanistan), the UNECE, jointly with Eurostat (Statistical Office of the European Union) and EFTA (European Free Trade Association), recently conducted global assessments of national statistical systems. The objective of such assessments, covering all national producers of official statistics, including the National Bank and the Ministry of Finance, 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. 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 Kyrgyzstan, the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) developed jointly by national statistical authorities and the World Bank builds on findings and recommendations provided in the GA report. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway decided to start an ambitious 10-year statistical capacity-building programme (twining) in Tajikistan that strongly rely on the outcome and recommendations of the GA report. In 2015, UNECE and UNDP jointly conducted the GA in Turkmenistan.

In 2014-2017, the implementation of recommendations from conducted GAs in EECCA countries will be supported through the UNDA 9th tranche Project on Statistics. The project aims to strengthen national capacity of selected SPECA countries for sustainable development of statistics. During the implementation phase, UNECE will provide advisory services and organize national and subregional workshop and training seminars, in particular on the development of web-based dissemination and communication tools and strategies. In 2015, UNECE organized subregional meetings on the implementation of the SEEA, on the institutional arrangements and harmonization of key macroeconomic statistics.

Under the UNDA 9th tranche, UNECE launched the work on the Generic Statistical Law for EECCA countries (the Law) based on the requests from the project beneficiary countries, including selected SPECA countries. The Law has been drafted and presented as an explanatory guide for EECCA countries and provides for each proposed article clear explanations and links to the UN-FPs and the European Statistical System Code of Practice. The Law is not a binding document but rather supports EECCA countries in the process of amending or redrafting their own national statistical laws. If requested, further assistance and advisory services could be provided for the implementation process by the partner organisations at the national level.

The project will draw on existing mechanisms and established partnerships with national and international statistical agencies under the Conference of European Statisticians and SPECA.

ESCAP capacity development work is guided by the leaders of national statistical systems comprising the ESCAP Committee on Statistics and the subordinate domain-specific steering/technical advisory groups (where several SPECA countries are represented, e.g. disaster-related statistics and population and social statistics) and it spans the provision of technical advisory services, long-term and short-term training courses designed and organized by the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP) (using face-to-face, e-learning or blended modalities) and the implementation of regular or extrabudgetary projects.

V. KNOWLEDGE-BASED DEVELOPMENT

The seventh session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD), jointly organized by UNECE and ESCAP and hosted by the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, was held in Dushanbe on 17 June 2015. In conjunction with the session, UNECE organized an International conference on practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy in collaboration with ESCAP and the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies of the Republic of Tajikistan in Dushanbe on 16 and 17 June 2015.

The PWG noted the usefulness of the policy recommendations of the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan, to be published as an official UN publication. The PWG appreciated the value of the work of the UNECE secretariat in carrying out Innovation Performance Reviews in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and asked them to consider the possibility of continuing this activity in other SPECA countries. The PWG also noted the crucial need to improve broadband connectivity in the SPECA region. The PWG took stock of the work being carried out in this regards, including the ESCAP Asia-Pacific information superhighway initiative. The PWG welcomed ESCAP resolution 71/10 on “Strengthening regional information and communications technology connectivity through the Asia-Pacific information superhighway”. The secretariat provided a briefing on the strengthening of SPECA, a theme which will be discussed further at the tenth session of the SPECA Governing Council. The PWG on KBD adopted its Programme of Work for 2016-2017 at its seventh session.

This progress report contains activities carried out/to be carried out by the UNECE and ESCAP secretariats either within the framework of the SPECA Project Working Group on Knowledge-based Development (PWG on KBD), or addressing topics within its thematic areas that were held since the ninth session of the SPECA Governing Council in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 5 December 2014.

These activities are in line with the Programme of Work of the PWG for 2014-2015 which was adopted at the fifth session of the PWG on KBD, held in Baku on 5 December 2013. The UNECE and ESCAP secretariats carried out the following capacity-building activities in SPECA countries:

Implementation of the UNECE project “Innovation Performance Reviews”

- Within the framework of this project, ***Innovation Performance Reviews of Kazakhstan*** has been completed. The Review is available in English and Russian.
- Within the framework of the preparation of ***the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan***, the UNECE preparatory mission on the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan and the fact-finding mission on the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan with participation of the International Team of Experts were held in November 2014 and March 2015, respectively. The policy recommendations of the Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan were discussed during the ***International Conference “Practical steps towards a knowledge-based economy”*** in Dushanbe on 16-17 June 2015. ***The Innovation Performance Review of Tajikistan*** is currently being finalized.

Implementation of the ESCAP project “Expanding connectivity of North and Central Asia with the Asia-Pacific region through the development of ICT infrastructure and networks”

- Within the framework of the Almaty Declaration on Strengthening Central Asia Connectivity through Enhanced Telecommunications Infrastructure, ESCAP has established a partnership with the Internet Society to carry out ***a joint study on Unleashing the Potential of the Internet in Central Asia and Beyond***. Early results of this study were discussed in Dushanbe on 17 June 2015.
- ESCAP also carried out an ***In-Depth Study on the Broadband Infrastructure in Afghanistan***, April 2015, focusing on an assessment of current fibre optic infrastructure and an analysis of broadband trends.

Institutional capacity-building for regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation

- ESCAP provided sustained technical support to Kyrgyzstan, which hosted a series of regional ministerial conference on disaster risk reduction, to prepare a framework for regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction and the accompanying short-term plan of action. The draft was presented to and endorsed by a pre-conference ministerial meeting at the World Conference on DRR in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015, with the presence of ESCAP Executive Secretary.
- ESCAP supported the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic in ***establishing national geoportal for disaster risk management (Geo-DRM)*** in 2014 to

address disaster by using integrated geospatial data. In addition, in May 2015 ESCAP dispatched an expert to provide technical advisory services and training in operating Geo-DRM. This should contribute to addressing disaster monitoring and management by using integrated geospatial data and socio-economic data in Kyrgyzstan.

Activities within the framework of the ESCAP - APCICT

- The National Training of Trainers Workshop on the “Primer Series on ICTD for Youth” was organized in Baku, Azerbaijan, 20 - 22 February 2015.
- Localization for APCICT Primer Series issue 1 “An Introduction to ICT for Development” in Azeri was completed, and the localization efforts for Primer Series issue 2 “Project Management and ICTD” are ongoing.
- Localizations of additional Academy Modules in Turkmen were completed, including modules 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Representatives of the SPECA countries participated in the following events:

- “PPP Days 2015” and seventh session of the Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships, London, United Kingdom, 16 - 17 June 2015.
- High-level International Conference on Unlocking the Economic Potential for Sustainable Development, Geneva, Switzerland, 2 September 2015, held within the framework of the UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Week 2015.
- Ninth session of the UNECE Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, Geneva, Switzerland, 3-4 September 2015.
- ESCAP Workshop on Promoting ICT for Inclusive and Disaster Resilient Development, Ulan Bator, Mongolia, 14 - 15 May 2015.
- ESCAP Working Group on the Asia Pacific Information Superhighway, Incheon, Korea, 1-2 September 2015.
- ESCAP Workshop on Promoting ICT for Inclusive and Disaster Resilient Development, Bangkok, Thailand, 26-27 and 29 October 2015.

VI. GENDER AND ECONOMY

Gender equality objectives continue to be of great importance for the economies of Central Asia. Engendering economic policies is crucial to advance women’s economic independence and empowerment and to achieve gender equality. It also makes economic sense from the perspective of innovation, employment and sustainable growth.

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

As in previous years, and in line with the Programme of work for 2015, UNECE continued to build capacity for women entrepreneurs in SPECA countries in cooperation with the Centre for

International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre. Two international training workshops were organized on “Empowering Women through Entrepreneurship” (18 May – 11 June 2015) and on “Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the Advancement of Small Businesses”, 24 August – 10 September 2015.

The capacity-building workshops, held in Russian, are targeted at women entrepreneurs from Central Asia. They provide support, guidance and managerial tools on the use of new technologies in the management of small businesses. They further address government institutions in charge of small and medium-sized enterprise development at national and local levels, women’s business associations and other civil society organizations to build their capacity to strengthen the support environment for women entrepreneurs. To date, over 400 professional women have participated in these trainings. Over the years, the training scheme has not only played an important role in strengthening the support for women entrepreneurship but has also facilitated networking among women entrepreneurs across Central Asia.
