SPECA participating countries: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan

ESCAP and ECE 2020 webinar series in preparation to CICTSTI

Virtual session of the SPECA WG on ITSD

Concept Note

Scope: The Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD) is a subsidiary body under the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), comprising senior policymakers, researchers, decision-makers, and implementers from the SPECA countries responsible for developing guidance and finding practical solutions to problems identified by the countries. The WG provides a platform for sharing experiences and discussing issues within the SPECA framework. The consolidated recommendations of the webinar, as outcomes of the WG session, will be presented at the SPECA Governing Council (GC), tentatively scheduled on 20 November 2020. The SPECA GC, provides overall guidance to the work carried out within the SPECA framework. The GC oversees the work of the SPECA Thematic Working Groups, takes stock of progress achieved, identifies priorities for the future and approves the SPECA work plans, with ESCAP and ECE providing joint support as secretariat. The SPECA GC comprises senior policymakers at the level of Ministers or Vice Ministers for trade and economics from the SPECA countries, as well as UNECE and ESCAP Executive Secretaries.

Background: The SPECA WG on ITSD builds on existing forms of regional cooperation in the relevant areas, with updated TORs[1] including, but not limited to, the following thematic areas:

(i) ICT for development;
(ii) Promotion of innovation and innovative technology applications;
(iii) Promotion of transfer and commercialization of innovative technologies; and
(iv) Development of effective infrastructure for innovation support and financing, including through PPPs.

The WG on ITSD pursues the following objectives:

(i) provides a platform to facilitate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs with a focus on SDGs directly related to the development of innovation and technology, including digital technology (among others, Goal 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure); Goal 8 (Decent work and economic growth); Goal 13 (Climate action) and Goal 17 (Partnership for the Goals);

(ii) strives to raise among the SPECA countries awareness of the SDGs related to the development of innovation and technology, including digital technology, provides information and shares best practices on the implementation of these SDGs, taking into account the links between the SDGs;

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[1] These may be found at http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=52447

(iii)   facilitates cooperation among the SPECA countries on strategic approaches to using innovation as a driver of future sustainable development in the subregion.

Expected outcomes: ESCAP, in cooperation with ECE efforts and strategy, seeks to:

✓ establish new opportunities for sharing of good practices among SPECA countries and of best practice by international experts on digital connectivity as well as innovation policy for sustainable development.

✓ establish new opportunities for sharing of experiences among SPECA countries in the implementation of digital inclusion, e-resilience and innovation projects targeting sustainable development.

✓ seek synergies among SPECA countries in their technology transfer activities and in the practical implementation of digital connectivity and innovation policy for inclusive and sustainable development.

✓ organize joint capacity-building events on digital connectivity, digital inclusion and innovation policy for sustainable development.

*Target institutions and participants***:** will be nominated by Governments of the SPECA countries. They shall be senior officials involved in the formulation & implementation or be aware of national policies and programmes affecting national policies related to digital connectivity, innovation & technology development in their respective countries and able to effectively follow up on the recommendations and decisions of the SPECA WG on ITSD.

The virtual meeting will include the discussion points for next steps for:

a) *Enhancing seamless digital connectivity for e-resilience under the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative:*
   • Discuss e-resilience, digital inclusion and the pandemic and make recommendations that will guide the next phase of the AP-IS Master Plan and Regional Cooperation Framework for 2023-2026.
   • Discuss the development of an e-resilience index that can help monitor network performance and e-resilience readiness index for better crisis preparedness in future.

b) *the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development:*
   • *Timeline:* The SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development could have an implementation horizon which matches the target date of the SDGs, namely the year 2030, subject to consultations among the governments of the SPECA countries which would also agree on its starting point. The starting implementation date may also depend on the available and accessible resources to be allocated for strategy implementation.
   • *Resources:* allocation of adequate resources by the SPECA countries, including organization and hosting of events and support to networking among stakeholders. The main resource input expected from the SPECA countries will be human resources in terms of expertise and effort.

- *Governance operations:* Oversight of progress on the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development will rely on existing intergovernmental structures, such as the SPECA Governing Council and the SPECA Thematic Working Groups (in the first place, the SPECA WG on ITSD).
- *Funding sources:* The operational costs of the WG on ITSD as well as the costs of participation of national representatives and experts in its sessions shall as a rule be borne by the Governments of the SPECA participating countries. UNECE and ESCAP shall support, within their available resources, the functioning of the WG on ITSD.
- *Solutions and the Way forward: Action Plan for the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development.*

Resource materials:

- ToR of the SPECA WG on ITSD
- Draft decisions of the SPECA WG on ITSD
- Updated Programme of Work of the SPECA WG on ITSD
- SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development (gap analysis methodology & outline)
- AP-IS Master Plan and Regional Cooperation Framework for 2023-2026
- UN Secretary General's Strategy for Digital Cooperation (launched on 11 June 2020)
- Calendar of ESCAP activities in Q3-Q4

TENTATIVE AGENDA (Almaty time)

12:30-12:40	Welcome remarks: • ESCAP: Ms Tiziana Bonapace, Director, ICT&DRR Division, and Mr Nikolay Pomoshnikov, Officer in Charge, Subregional Office for North and Central Asia • ECE: Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk, Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (tbc) • SPECA focal point from Kazakhstan, Chair of the SPECA WG on ITSD	Moderator: Aida Karazhanova, IDD, ESCAP (Bangkok) SONCA Interpreters
12:40-13:15	Synergies and transformations for the innovation system: • Digital connectivity and e-resilience as a foundation infrastructure: perspectives during COVID-19: ESCAP, ICT and DRR Division • The SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development: ECE and ESCAP (Mr. Christopher Athey - ECE, Mr. Jonathan Wong – ESCAP, and Mr. Rumen Dobrinsky - Lead Consultant)	Moderator: Kazakhstan (tbc)
13:15-15:00	Perspectives of the SPECA countries: • Afghanistan • Azerbaijan • Kazakhstan • Kyrgyzstan • Tajikistan • Turkmenistan • Uzbekistan Dialogue and reflections	Moderator: Kazakhstan
15:00-15:30	Wrap up: recent activities, updated programme of work and adoption of decisions: • ESCAP • ECE On-line evaluation of the session	Moderator: ESCAP

Simultaneous interpretation.