

Regional Dialogue on Linking Past and Future Regional Cooperation and Partnerships (UN DA 11th Tranche Project Event)

Wednesday, 26 January 2022, 12:00 -15:00 (Bangkok time)¹

Concept note

Background

As the world is dealing with the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is becoming increasingly evident that countries which invested in ICT energy and transport infrastructure, and whose people and businesses are better connected, including through digital platforms, are faring better than others. Weak connectivity is causing an economic slowdown, limiting internal and cross-border freight and passenger operations, trade, and transit transport.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the link between digitalization and development, both by showing the potential of digital solutions, and by laying bare the significant digital divides that still exist. The use of ICT policy and tools, within different sectors, provides solutions on how to equip policymakers to implement resilience measures and create foundations for an inclusive digital economy. As the pandemic continues to pose challenges, digital technologies enable everything from information-sharing to contact tracing and lockdown enforcement, and from online education, to telework and to cooperation for vaccine development. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as millions of people shifted to teleworking and online schooling, data traffic increased by at least 20 per cent within the first few months of the crises, while cyberattacks on the health sector infrastructure and mobile networks increased by 150 per cent.² In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the coming years, policymakers in the Asia-Pacific region must lay the foundations for digitally-served economies and livelihoods, including for transboundary transport operations and energy exchange.

Through its four-year project³ cycle of cross-sectoral cooperation, divisions of the ESCAP secretariat have delivered several analytical knowledge products, including online tools and capacity-building workshops on seamless connectivity and resilience of integrated infrastructure corridors, e-resilience, and digital transformation. These knowledge products consist of over 38 analytical reports at the subregional and regional levels, including three country reports for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia on: (1) co-deployment of ICT Infrastructures with energy and transport infrastructures, (2) resilient infrastructure, (3) financing infrastructure, (4) linkage of rural transport systems to regional

¹ 12:00 (Bangkok); 11:00 (Almaty)

² World Bank, "[COVID-19 Crisis Response: Digital Development Joint Action Plan and Call for Action](#)", 2021.

³ Project is titled "Addressing the Transboundary Dimensions of the 2030 Agenda through Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) in Asia and the Pacific" from 2018 to 2021.

and international transport networks, (5) methodological notes and assessment of the e-resilience framework, and (6) Central Asian digital cooperation strategies and approaches.

Objective

The key objectives of this Regional Dialogue are to:

- a. Share key findings and outputs of the four-year project cycle; and
- b. Discuss the use of knowledge products, opportunities, and new initiatives to strengthen transboundary economic cooperation and integration.

Format of the meeting

The meeting will be held virtually through the KUDO platform. YouTube streaming will be arranged to broadcast the event for the public at the ESCAP event page.

Date/time

Programme Date: Wednesday, 26 January 2022, 12:00 -15:00 (Bangkok) / 11:00am (Almaty)

Participants

ESCAP has invited high-level decision makers, experts, and government officials from the target countries and from the Asia-Pacific region. These include:

- Senior government officials from Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea, among other countries;
- Concerned stakeholders from the region.

The Regional Dialogue on 26 January 2022 is organized as follows:

- **Session 1:** focuses on key framing messages on opportunities for digital economic cooperation and integration and on financial and social inclusion. The overall guidelines built on the experience of the four-year project cycle will be highlighted.
- **Session 2:** focuses on illustrating key findings, outputs, and achievements of the project with case studies and policy messages built on successful policies and tools of the region, including analytical tools on integrating ICT, energy and transport sectors and social/financial inclusion.
- **Session 3:** focuses on case studies and key policy messages on building disaster risk reduction and pandemic resilience, including assessment of the project impact, and discussion of the e-resilience monitoring framework from the perspective of pandemic management. Case studies demonstrating resilience of connectivity and recovery will be discussed.
- **Session 4:** focuses on summarizing the way forward in terms of increased collaboration, economic cooperation and integration based on lessons learned and recommendations highlighted by the high-level policymakers.

Project Brief Summary

ESCAP has implemented the United Nations Development Account (11th Tranche) project (UN-DA Project) titled “Addressing the Transboundary Dimensions of the 2030 Agenda through Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) in Asia and the Pacific”, from 2018 to 2021. The project aims to strengthen the capacity of selected countries to develop sustainable and inclusive policies and mechanisms for promoting transport, energy, and ICT transboundary infrastructure connectivity within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The project is implemented in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia, as main beneficiary countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the objectives and relevance of the project, in terms of recovery and resilience of infrastructure.

As a specific output that led to an impactful outcome, the project, in collaboration with the International Think Tank for Land Locked Developing Countries (ITLLDC) initiated the establishment of a single information platform with automation and simulation modules for determining compatibility and economic efficiency, and for identifying infrastructure projects that lend themselves to ICT deployment for smart corridors. In collaboration with e-World Wide Group, the project built an e-resilience monitoring dashboard, and developed methodological guidance associated with the e-resilience readiness index for last mile digital foresight planning scenarios. In addition, the project also supported the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry (MDDIAI), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Kazakhstan to build a subregional Digital Solutions Centre for Sustainable Development, tentatively in Almaty, to support Central Asian countries to advance digital connectivity and digital transformation.

The RECI project has strengthened the regional partnership with CAREC of ADB, established on-line networking groups as part of the [SDG Help Desk Community of Practice](#), and promoted exchanges of regular, timely and relevant information with subregional and national networks. As a result, the project community is growing and currently consists of over 100 members. It is expected to further expand from 2021 onwards.

The RECI project has also shared findings and outputs of the project with regional stakeholders at several regional events, such as the UN Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), in particular through the Working Groups on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD), the Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity (WG on STTC), and through KazAID subregional workshops in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, through the Central Asia Internet Governance Forum (Bishkek 2021), and many such regional and subregional events. The [Asia-Pacific Energy Portal](#), an online repository for energy data, policy and infrastructure has also promoted such online tools.

More information on the strategic plans of the energy sector development is available on the energy portal at <https://asiapacificenergy.org/> and in the knowledge product titled [Policy Perspectives: Sustainable Energy in Asia and the Pacific](#).