

## Concept note

# SPECA Network of Business Incubators and Accelerators for Sustainable Development

### Objective

The Network is an initiative that aims to provide a **platform for dialogue and exchange** on issues, challenges, solutions, as well as best practices related to **innovative entrepreneurship support through business incubators (BI) and accelerators (BA) in the SPECA sub-region**. The Network will aim to enable peer learning and to strengthen the capacities of BI and BA to effectively support innovative firms in the sub-region.

Against the background of similar policy challenges SPECA countries face in the area of science, innovation and technology and advancing on the UN Agenda 2030, as well as low levels of sub-regional integration, the Network is designed to **facilitate cooperation among the SPECA countries** for the sustainable and inclusive economic development with contribution to the circular economy transition and digital transformation.

### Members

The Network will target **managers and staff of business incubation and acceleration programmes** from across the SPECA countries. **Representatives from state agencies supporting innovation, technology, and entrepreneurship** are also invited to join the activities of the Network to ensure public-private dialogue on the issues related to innovative entrepreneurship with the objective to find solutions and promote co-operation between SPECA countries.

### Activities

The Network activities will include **workshops, roundtables, trainings, study tours** and other types of exchanges in the area of **innovative entrepreneurship support and related policy areas** (e.g., monitoring and evaluation of policy support measures, innovation and technology commercialization, transition to circular economy, green entrepreneurship, innovative high-growth enterprises, etc.).

The Network would **draw on the capacity-building activities carried out by UNECE**, expanding, and complementing certain aspects based on specific demands from stakeholders. Using the materials developed by UNECE for the design of the Network activities would be instrumental to strengthen the capacities of BI and BA in supporting innovative firms. In particular, these include:

- *Policy Handbook on “Business Incubators for sustainable development in the SPECA sub-region” (2020)*
- *Policy Handbook on “Supporting Innovative High-Growth Enterprises in the SPECA sub-region” (forthcoming)*
- *Policy paper on “New approaches to innovation policy in the transition economies of the SPECA sub-region” (forthcoming)*

Participants of the webinars and training activities conducted by UNECE for the SPECA countries on support to innovative high-growth enterprises in 2021-2022 and new innovation policy approaches (May 2022) would be invited to be part of the network.

Among the **potential activities** of the Network are:

- workshops for BI or BA on tools for supporting innovative firms, including supporting green ventures and digital start-ups;
- training activities for the staff of BI and BA to enhance skills to effectively support innovative start-ups (including bringing in regional and international expertise);
- study tours for the staff of BI and BA to successful BI and BA in the SPECA sub-region and ECE region more broadly (subject to availability of funds).

These activities will contribute to the implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development (adopted in November 2019) and the corresponding Action Plan (approved by the SPECA Governing Council in November 2021).

### **Implementation arrangement**

SPECA countries will **designate one or more Focal Points (FPs) for the Network in each country**. The FPs will ensure communication and coordination with the BI and BA in their country on the Network activities and should have appropriate experience of business incubation and acceleration, as either a policymaker or practitioner.

The **financial support** for the operation of the Network at its initial stage, i.e. until December 2023, will be provided by UNECE under the UNDA project *“Strengthening innovation policies for SPECA countries in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”*. UNECE will aim to facilitate the operations of the Network so as to **ensure the ownership by the SPECA countries** to provide for the sustainability of the Network beyond the UNECE project funding cycle.

**Additional funding** could be mobilized from national and international sources to cover specific activities, including on demand by participating countries.