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

First Session of the SPECA Working Group
on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development

(Country chair: Kazakhstan, 30 July 2020)

REPORT

The first session of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD) was jointly organized by ESCAP and UNECE, in a webinar format due to the exceptional COVID-19 situation, and chaired by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 30 July 2020.

Delegations from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan participated in the session along with representatives of the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats. Representatives from other international and regional organizations, as well as the business and academic community also participated in first session of the WG on ITSD. The List of participants of the first session of the SPECA WG on ITSD is attached (Annex III).

<u>Opening of the session</u>

Mr. Abylaikhan Ospanov, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan, welcomed session participants. Mr. Ospanov thanked ESCAP and UNECE for organizing the session, as well as the experts presenting during this first, virtual session of the SPECA WG on ITSD. Mr. Ospanov highlighted the importance of the work of the SPECA WG on ITSD given the impact of COVID-19 and the importance of digital connectivity for all, particularly in the areas of education and public health – a theme also been put forward by the UN Secretary General. Mr. Ospanov informed that Kazakhstan is taking steps to ensure remote access for all to key Government services.

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace, Director of the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD) of UN ESCAP welcomed participants and thanked Mr. Ospanov for chairing this inaugural session of the WG as well as the member States for their commitment to SPECA. Ms. Bonapace emphasised that digital connectivity has proven to be a lifeline for physically distanced but real-time human interactions during the pandemic. However, she noted that it is estimated that

around 30% of households in SPECA countries do not have access to the Internet at home, and that the impact on this group has been significant. In this regard, there was a need to accelerate implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative to bridge the digital divide.

Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk, Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of UNECE welcomed this inaugural session of the SPECA WG on ITSD and praised the commitment of the SPECA countries, as shown by their recent adoption the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. She also welcomed the request from Uzbekistan to undertake a UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Review.

Discussions during the virtual session of the WG on ITSD

National participants presented on latest developments in the area of innovation and technology for sustainable development in the SPECA countries, following ESCAP's presentation on the status of the digital connectivity and e-resilience as a foundation of infrastructure perspectives during COVID-19 and related project implementation progress. Countries discussed possibilities to enhance seamless digital connectivity for e-resilience under the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative carried out by ESCAP. To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, it was proposed to develop a framework for the post-pandemic recovery period, which would also build upon the ESCAP toolkit on e-resilience from a pandemic management perspective. The WG agreed to develop a common work plan for digital transformation in the SPECA countries and an associated e-resilience readiness index for better crisis preparedness in future.

The SPECA WG on ITSD discussed SPECA countries' efforts to harness innovation and enhance regional cooperation in the area of innovation and support to implementation of the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development, adopted by the SPECA Governing Council in November 2019. Participants were briefed on the methodology of a science, technology and innovation (STI) gap analysis that is underway in each of the SPECA countries and will help identify central common STI challenges and opportunities in the region. It will help identify ways forward for cooperation among the SPECA countries on innovation policy to promote sustainable development, including recommendations to support a sustainable post COVID-19 recovery and transition to a circular economy.

The WG members noted with appreciation the recent activities of ESCAP and UNECE under the WG and stressed the importance of digital connectivity, innovation and regional cooperation for sustainable development in the context of the Covid-19 recovery.

Key documents and presentations made by participants at the session, as well as the results of interactive polls on the topics of e-Resilience, the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development and participant evaluation of the webinar, are available on the meeting page.

Review of the Programme of Work of the WG on ITSD for July 2020-December 2021

Mr. Athey of UNECE and Ms. Karazhanova of ESCAP presented the updated Programme of Work of the WG on KBD for July 2020-December 2021.

The WG adopted the updated Programme of Work (Annex II) and agreed that the details of the envisaged activities could be further elaborated in consultation with the host countries of these future activities.

Date and venue of the next session of the WG on ITSD and other business

The WG agreed to hold its next session in 2021 and that the exact date and venue of the second session of the WG would be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.

Adoption of decisions

The proposed draft decisions were adopted by the delegations of SPECA countries through a two-week silence procedure. The decisions of the first session of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development are attached to this report (Annex I).

Closing of the session

The Chair of the session thanked the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for their support to the organization of these important events. He thanked delegates and experts for their active participation in the work of the first, virtual session of the SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development.

Delegates thanked the Government of Kazakhstan for chairing the session and the ESCAP and UNECE secretariats for the excellent organization of the virtual session.

DECISIONS
OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE WG ON ITSD

1.   The Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD) noted with satisfaction the discussions and country presentations of its virtual session, a summary of which is included in the annex and at the event page.

2.   The WG reviewed the activities carried out by United Nations ESCAP and ECE secretariats within the framework of the WG since its last session and expressed its appreciation of the usefulness of these activities for the SPECA countries

3.   The WG recommended to continue enhancing seamless digital connectivity and monitoring of e-resilience under the 2019-2022 Master Plan of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (AP-IS) initiative that should guide the next phase in 2022-2024. The WG requested ESCAP to develop a single information platform with automation and simulation modules on determining compatibility, economic efficiency, and identification of infrastructure projects that lend themselves to ICT deployment for smart corridors.

4.   The WG proposed to develop a framework for the post-pandemic recovery period, which may build upon the ESCAP toolkit on e-resilience from a pandemic management perspective and agreed to develop a common work plan for digital transformation in the SPECA countries and an associated e-resilience readiness dashboard for better crisis preparedness in future.

5.   The WG noted that with climate-related extreme events on the rise, there was a need to develop capacity on the utilization of ICT, GIS and geospatial data innovations for disaster risk reduction. In this regard, there was a need to enhance the institutional capacity of Central Asian countries to integrate geospatial and statistical information with a focus on slow onset disasters, notably drought monitoring and the development of land accounts in Central Asia

6.   The WG took note of the presentation on the methodology for undertaking national STI gap assessments of each SPECA country and outline of the final report for the SPECA subregion. The WG stressed the importance of these assessments to identify key STI issues of common interest for all SPECA countries. The WG recommended wide dissemination of the outcomes of these studies to help the SPECA countries develop action plans to implement the SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development. The final study will also outline a way forward for the SPECA countries in terms of innovation policy to promote sustainable development, including recommendations to support a sustainable post Covid-19 recovery and the transition to a circular economy

7.   The WG welcomed the initiative to carry out a UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Uzbekistan, subject to availability of extrabudgetary resources, building on the experience of previous reviews of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

8.   The WG adopted its updated Programme of Work for the second half of 2020 and 2021 and recommended more active involvement of the private sector in the implementation of goals and objectives.

9.   The WG agreed to hold its next session in 2021 and that the exact date and venue will be decided through consultations with the SPECA countries.

10.   The WG expressed its sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for being Chair of this virtual 1st session of the SPECA WG on ITSD and requested the Chair to inform the Governing Council of SPECA of this outcome.

11.   The WG expressed its appreciation to the secretariats of ESCAP and ECE for their efforts in organizing virtual session of the WG in exceptional circumstances, and their active work to support the activities of the WG on ITSD.

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ANNEX II

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PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE SPECA WG ON ITSD
FOR JULY 2020-DECEMBER 2021

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The activities to be carried out by the Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (WG on ITSD) are demand-driven, focused on a limited number of priority topics and matched with available resources.

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ACTIVITIES ENVISAGED FOR JULY 2020-DECEMBER 2021

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1.   Capacity-building on policy options and practical instruments to promote innovation and technology for sustainable development

Objectives:

To strengthen the national capacity of the SPECA countries to advance knowledge-based development by developing relevant substantive skills, increasing the organizational capacity of the institutions involved, promoting regional cooperation and fostering investment in modern infrastructure.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i)   Organization of a regional/subregional capacity-building event on innovation and technology for sustainable development, possibly in conjunction with the annual session of the WG on ITSD (tentatively envisaged for 2021);

(ii)   Participation of experts from SPECA countries in UNECE policy-oriented meetings and capacity-building events on promoting knowledge-based development for policymakers and practitioners; and

(iii)   Policy advisory services and other events promoting innovation and technology for sustainable development at the request of Governments of SPECA countries.

2.   Implementation of the UNECE project on Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews of selected countries

Objectives:

To increase the role of innovation in promoting further economic development of the SPECA countries.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

Undertaking Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews and supporting implementation of policy recommendations in selected countries of the SPECA region (envisaged for 2020 and 2021).

3.   Support to SPECA countries to foster innovation to deliver the SDGs

Objectives:

Policy advisory support to SPECA countries to stimulate the private and public sector innovation required to deliver the SDGs.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of UNECE extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i)   Capacity building activities upon request from SPECA countries, for example on integrating innovation policies into national strategies for sustainable development and supporting participation of SPECA countries in wider UN initiatives in support of Agenda 2030; and

(ii)   Development of a SPECA Innovation Strategy for Sustainable Development, identifying innovative joint initiatives between SPECA countries with potential to support delivery of Agenda 2030 within the sub-region.

4.   Implementation of ESCAP activities in support to the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative

Objectives:

To enhance regional cooperation and strengthen connectivity through implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. Implementation is subject to the availability of ESCAP extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i)   Participation of stakeholders (policymakers, senior officials and private sector) from SPECA countries in the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee meetings;

(ii)   Participation of stakeholders (policymakers, senior officials and private sector) from SPECA countries in subregional Steering Group meeting(s) of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway;

(iii)   Participation of stakeholders (policymakers, senior officials and private sector) from SPECA countries to the Expert Group Meetings and Subregional Capacity Development Workshop (planned in Kazakhstan) and National workshops (planned in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan);

(iv) Subregional and national reports on Fibre-optic cable co-deployment to explore fibre- optic route diversification capitalizing on opportunities created by infrastructure sharing and co-deployment;

(v) Study on Operation Models of Trans-Border Terrestrial Cable Networks for the Implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway to foster building of consensus on cross-border, cross-sectoral fibre optic co-deployment;

5. **Enhancing national capacities to use ICT for socio-economic development**

Objectives:

To enhance the capacities of policymakers, government officials and other relevant stakeholders to promote, adopt and utilize ICT for achieving national sustainable development goals.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in its Terms of Reference. The activities will be funded through the extrabudgetary resources of APCICT and co-funding mobilized through national and subregional partners.

Proposed activities:

(i) Conduct capacity-building workshops on APCICT's flagship ICT for development programmes (e.g. training on Data-Driven Governance in Kazakhstan, tentative envisaged for last quarter of 2019);

(ii) Development of localized versions of the APCICT training modules, targeted at SPECA countries;

(iii) Provide advisory services to SPECA countries in areas related to ICT for socio- economic development, subject to funding and resource availability; and

(iv) Conduct capacity-building workshops on the application of ICT tools for renewable energy resource assessments at the national level in SPECA countries, subject to funding and resource availability (APCTT).

6. **Capacity development on the utilization of ICT and GIS for disaster risk reduction**

Objectives:

Develop knowledge-based tools for disaster risk management and strengthen resilience into development policy and planning of SPECA countries.

Rationale:

The project contributes to the objectives of the WG on ITSD as specified in the Terms of Reference, in particular to objective of knowledge-based disaster risk reduction and management. Implementation will be financed from the ESCAP extrabudgetary funds.

Proposed activities:

(i)   Assist SPECA countries to use decision making tools for drought monitoring and early warning;

(ii)   Organize the 2019 KOICA-ESCAP Fellowship Programme: capacity building on drought monitoring; and early warning by using geospatial information systems (GIS).

(iii) ESCAP provides continued support on disaster risk reduction by promoting innovative technology applications including ICT and GIS.

7. Strengthen institutional capacity on integrating geospatial and statistical data, with a focus on drought monitoring and land accounts in Central Asia

Objectives:

Enhance the institutional capacity of Central Asian countries to integrate geospatial and statistical information.

Rationale:

The project is in line with the objectives of the WG on ITSD to support drought management and land-related SDG challenges including disaster risk reduction as specified in its Terms of Reference.

Proposed activities:

(i) Conduct assessment of country profile on drought monitoring and land accounts with a diagnostic tool and template (patterned after ESCAP's environment statistics diagnostic tool) to identify policy priorities, available information, data sources, stakeholders and institutional mechanisms necessary to develop or strengthen the land accounts.

(ii) Organize an inception regional workshop and expert group meetings to discuss preliminary estimates of assessment on drought monitoring and land accounts in Central Asia region, and assist capacity building on using the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) and the framework for integration of the geospatial and statistical information;

(iii) Organize policy forums to share key findings and methodologies to assess disaster-related SDGs implementations.

SUMMARY TABLE

Area of Activity	Lead Executive Agency	Timeframe
Ongoing and planned projects/activities with funding secured or expected. These activities would be implemented in mutually reinforcing way. Additional support from interested partners would expand the scope and the number of beneficiaries of these projects/activities.		
Capacity-building on policy options and practical instruments to promote knowledge-based development	UNECE	July 2020-December 2021
Implementation of the UNECE project on Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews of selected countries	UNECE	July 2020-December 2021
Support to SPECA countries to foster innovation to deliver the SDGs	UNECE	July 2020-December 2021
Implementation of ESCAP activities in support to the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative	ESCAP	July 2020-December 2021
Enhancing national capacities to use ICT for socio-economic development	ESCAP	July 2020-December 2021
Capacity development on the utilization of ICT and GIS for disaster risk reduction	ESCAP	July 2020-December 2021
Strengthen institutional capacity on integrating geospatial and statistical data, with a focus on drought monitoring and land accounts in Central Asia	ESCAP	July 2020-December 2021

ANNEX III

SPECA Working Group on Innovation and Technology for Sustainable Development (webinar)

30 July 2020

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Nesar Ahmad Abidi, Head of Foreign Relation, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Kabul.

Mr. Hayatullah Ibrahimy, Director of Innovation & Emerging Technologies, Ministry of Communications & IT, Kabul.

Mr. Rahmanullah Safi, Specialist/ IT Unions, Ministry of Communications & IT, Kabul

AZERBAIJAN

Mr. Emil Ahmadov, Leading Adviser, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, Baku.

Ms. Aygun Ahmadova, Senior Adviser, Innovation and Digital Development Department, Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, Baku.

Mr. Fariz Quliyev, Member of the Board of the Innovation Agency under the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies, Baku.

KAZAKHSTAN

H.E. Mr. Ospanov Ablaykhan Yesenovich, Vice Minister, Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry, Nur-Sultan.

Mr. Meirbek Mukatov, Deputy Director of Innovation Ecosystem Department, Ministry of Digitalization, Innovation and Aerospace Development, Nur-Sultan.

Ms. Gulnara Sembekovna Bukeeva, Director, Department of Public Policy and Infrastructure in the Field of Communications, of the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry, Nur-Sultan.

Ms. Duisembayeva Asel Serikkanovna, Deputy Director, Department of Digital Transformation, Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development (MIID), Nur-Sultan.

Mr. Ilias Ospanov, Director Center of Engineering and Technology Transfer (CETT) of the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry, Nur-Sultan.

Mr. Yelena Shevchenko, Director, Department of Innovations and Technology Development. QazInnovations (Center of Engineering and Technology Transfer), of the Ministry of Digital Development, Innovation and Aerospace Industry, Nur-Sultan.

Ms. Atanayeva Miraim, Deputy President of Information, Analytical center JCS, Information – Analytical Center JCS, Nur-Sultan.

Mr. Yerlik N. Karazhan, Advisor, Ministry of National Economy, Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan.

Mr. Sabit Dosmaganbetovich Rashev, Senior Manager on Strategic Direction, NCO Autonomous Cluster Fund "Park of Innovative Technologies", Nur-Sultan.

Mr. Dias Muttakov, Specialist, Analysis and Innovation Strategic Initiatives Group, NCO Autonomous Cluster Fund "Park of Innovative Technologies", Nur-Sultan.

KYRGYZSTAN

Mr. Ermek Sochialovich Omuraliev, Director 6th Department, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, Bishkek.

Ms. Albina Suinalieva, Attaché, 6th Political Department, Economic Diplomacy & Foreign Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bishkek.

Mr. Nourlan Mamyrov, Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bishkek.

Mr. Aibek Kurenkeev, E-commerce Association, Bishkek

Mr. Daniiar Arynov, Founder, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center under the Ministry of Economy, Bishkek.

Mr. Karatai Dzhangeldiev, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center under the Ministry of Economy, Bishkek.

Mr. Urmat Mekishev, Lead Project Manager, LLC Put in Byte, High Technology Park, Bishkek.

TAJIKISTAN

Ms. Dilorom Jumakhonzoda, Chief of Department of Science, Innovation and Information Resources of Division of Development of Social Spheres, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, Dushanbe.

Mr. Anvar Kadyrov, Director, Center for Innovative Development of Science and New Technologies of the National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, Dushanbe.

TURKMENISTAN

Mr. Selim Tajiyev, Attache, Digital Diplomacy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ashgabat.

Mr. Dovlet Chotbayev, Third Secretary, Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ashgabat.

UZBEKISTAN

Mr. Nodirbek Khoshimov, Head of Department, Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade, Tashkent.

Mr. Shakhobiddin Sharifov, Director, Scientific and Practical Center for the Implementation of Innovative Projects under the Ministry of Innovative Development, Tashkent.

Mr. Alizhon Aliyev, Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade, Tashkent.

Ms. Anastasiya Belova, Chief Specialist, Administration for Tariff and Non-Tariff Regulation Measures, Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade, Tashkent.

Ms. N. Zufarova, Head of the Administration for Tariff and Non-Tariff Regulation Measures, Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade, Tashkent.

Mr. N. Khoshimov, Head of the Marketing Administration for Tariff and Non-Tariff Regulation Measures, Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade, Tashkent.

Ms. Shirin Khalmetova, Head, International Department of Scientific and Practical Center for the Implementation of Innovative Development, Tashkent.

Mr. Shokhrukhbek Nazarov, Head, Exhibitions and Laboratories Organization Sector of Scientific and Practical Center for the Implementation of Innovative Development, Tashkent.

EXPERTS ANDINTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Rumen Dobrinsky, Director of Strategy, European Alliance for Innovation, Bulgaria.

Mr. Aziz Soltobaev, National expert (STI gap analysis) for Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Ahsanullah Mohsen, National expert (STI gap analysis) for Afghanistan.

Mr. Bahodur Mengliev, National expert (STI gap analysis) for Tajikistan.

Ms. Yuliya Aliyeva, National expert (STI gap analysis) for Azerbaijan

Mr. Zafar Makhmudov, Executive Director, Regional Environment Centre for Central Asia, (CAREC)

Ms. Lyudmila Kikhtenko, Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC)

Ms. Shynar Toilybayeva, Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC)

Ms. Panisa Sermchaywong, University of Michigan, USA (Thailand)

ESCAP AND ECESECRETARIATS

Ms. Tiziana Bonapace	Director, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD), ESCAP
Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk	Director, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
Mr. Nikolay Pomoshchnikov	Officer-in-Charge of the Sub-regional Office for North and Central Asia (SONCA), ESCAP
Mr. Sanjay Srivastava	Chief, Disaster Risk Redcution Section, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, UN ESCAP
Mr. Keran Wang	Chief, Space Applications Section, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, UN ESCAP
Mr. Tsuen Yip Jonathan Wong	Chief of Section, Trade and Investment Division of ESCAP
Mr. Tae Hyung Kim	Economic Affairs Officer, Space Application Section, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, UN ESCAP

Ms. Aida Karazhanova	Economic Affairs Officer, IDS & Development Section (IDS), IDD, ESCAP
Mr. Christopher Athey	Economic Affairs Officer, Innovative Policies Development Section, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
Ms. Madhurima Sarkar- Swaisgood	Economic Affairs Officer, Disaster Risk Reduction Section, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, UN ESCAP
Ms. Ainur Dyussyubekova	SONCA, ESCAP
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Mr. Michal Podolski	Associate Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations
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Ms. Cristina Bernal Aparicio	Individual contractor, IDS IDD, ESCAP
Ms. Lyudmyla Tautiyeva	Consultant, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
Mr. Timur Nurpeissov	Interpreter, SONCA, ESCAP
Ms. Anna Adodina	Interpreter, SONCA, ESCAP
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Ms. Jiarui Wang	Intern, ICT and Development Section, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, UN ESCAP

Ms. Maya Ines Louise Barkin	Intern, ICT and Development Section, Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division, UN ESCAP
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Mr. Rahul Suman	Intern, UN ESCAP