



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific**Seventy-eighth session**

Bangkok and online, 23–27 May 2022

Item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda*

**Theme topic, “A common agenda to advance sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific”:
subregional perspectives****Report of the Governing Council of the Special Programme
for the Economies of Central Asia on its sixteenth session***Summary*

At its sixteenth session, the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2021 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum, “Sustainable transport and trade for a green and inclusive economy after the pandemic”, held in hybrid mode on 17 and 18 November 2021.

The Council called upon the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, international and regional organizations, international financial institutions and donor agencies to provide active support to the efforts to build back better the economies of Central Asia, with special reference to improving connectivity and building a circular economy after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Council adopted the Tashkent Statement, entitled “Sustainable transport, trade and connectivity in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia region for a greener, circular and inclusive post-pandemic recovery”, which is focused on promoting sustainable transport and trade, using the United Nations legal norms, standards, best practice recommendations and other tools, in support of sustainable development and a circular economy in the region. The Council requested the participating countries and development partners to support the implementation of that strategic document.

In addition, building upon the consensus decision to establish a Special Programme secretariat on a rotational basis to ensure organizational support for the activities of the Programme, and considering the official positions of the participating countries on the financing and staffing mechanisms as expressed at its sixteenth session, the Council decided to carry out additional consultations and establish an expert group to draft the terms of reference of the secretariat and the modalities of its operation, using the concept note proposed by the Government of Kazakhstan as a basis. The Council also noted the Government’s offer of Almaty as the first location to host the secretariat.

* ESCAP/78/L.1/Rev.1.

Furthermore, the Council reaffirmed the agreement of the participating countries of the Special Programme to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of the Programme as a regional cooperation platform by establishing a flexible, inclusive funding mechanism for practical programmatic cooperation, namely a Special Programme fund. The Council recommended considering other formats for the fund, including the United Nations multi-partner trust fund format, guided by the will of the participating countries to preserve the functioning of the Special Programme under the auspices of the United Nations. The Council requested the secretariats of ESCAP and ECE to prepare concepts for establishing the Special Programme fund in the multi-partner trust fund format and invited the participating countries to participate actively in the process.

The Council decided to establish a Special Programme working group on investments and financial technical cooperation. It welcomed the offer by the Government of Uzbekistan to chair and fully support the new working group.

The Council adopted the 2022–2023 workplan of the Special Programme and encouraged the participating countries, thematic working groups, development partners and partner organizations to support the implementation of activities contained in the workplan.

The Council decided that the Chair of the Special Programme for 2022 and the exact dates of and venue for the seventeenth session of the Council and the 2022 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum would be agreed upon through diplomatic channels.

I. Decisions

1. At its sixteenth session, the Governing Council of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia took the following decisions:

Decision 1 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/1)

The Council notes with satisfaction the outcomes of the 2021 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum, “Sustainable transport and trade for a green and inclusive economy after the pandemic”, held in Tashkent on 17 and 18 November 2021. The Council calls upon the participating countries, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), other United Nations agencies and programmes and other international development partners to provide active support for the efforts to build back better the economies of Central Asia, with special reference to improving connectivity and building a circular economy after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Decision 2 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/2)

The Council adopts the Tashkent Statement, entitled “Sustainable transport, trade and connectivity in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia region for a greener, circular and inclusive post-pandemic recovery”, which is focused on promoting sustainable transport and trade, using the United Nations legal norms, standards, best practice recommendations and other tools, in support of sustainable development and a circular economy in the region. The Council requests the participating countries and development partners to support the implementation of the strategic document.

Decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/3)

The Council takes note, with appreciation, of the progress reports on the activities of the Special Programme thematic working groups, held online or in hybrid format since its previous session, and expresses satisfaction with the implementation of the activities covered in the reports.

The Council notes with appreciation the activities of the Special Programme thematic working group on trade in the implementation of the Special Programme trade facilitation strategy and the principles of sustainable trade in the subregion; the activities of the Special Programme thematic working group on sustainable transport, transit and connectivity; the activities of the Special Programme thematic working group on trade in the implementation of the recommendations of the Ashgabat initiative on reducing barriers to trade and transport, using United Nations legal instruments, norms, standards and recommendations while bolstering connectivity in the Special Programme region; and the activities of the Special Programme thematic working group on innovation and technology for sustainable development in the implementation of the Special Programme innovation strategy for sustainable development.

The Council approves the action plan of the Special Programme innovation strategy for sustainable development. It expresses its gratitude to the ECE and ESCAP secretariats and the participating countries of the Programme for preparing the present report. The Council also takes note of the recommendations from the sixteenth session of the thematic working group on trade. The Council expresses its appreciation to the participating countries for supporting the sessions and meetings of the thematic working groups. In particular, the Council expresses special gratitude to the Governments of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan, the Islamic Development Bank and other development partners for supporting the activities of the working groups.

Decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/4)

In view of decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2020/3) of its fifteenth session in 2020, the Council expresses gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan and the ECE secretariat for conducting consultations among the Special Programme participating countries in order to holistically reach a final decision on the Programme secretariat and fund.

Building upon the consensus decision to establish a Special Programme secretariat on a rotational basis to ensure organizational support for the activities of the Programme, and considering the official positions of the countries on the financing and staffing mechanisms as expressed at its sixteenth session, the Council decides to carry out additional consultations and establish an expert group to draft the terms of reference of the secretariat and the modalities of its operation, using the concept note proposed by the Government of Kazakhstan as a basis. The Council also notes the Government's offer of Almaty as the first location to host the secretariat.

Decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/5)

The Council reaffirms the agreement of the participating countries to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of the Special Programme as a regional cooperation platform by establishing a flexible, inclusive funding mechanism for practical programmatic cooperation, namely a Special Programme fund.

The Council, with reference to decision 5 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2019/5) of its fourteenth session and decision 3 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2020/3) of its fifteenth session, once again expresses its appreciation to the ECE secretariat for the elaboration of the draft legal documents for establishing such a fund, namely an agreement on the establishment of the Special Programme fund, the statute of the fund, a headquarters agreement and a business case for the fund developed in 2021.

The Council recommends considering other formats for the fund, including the United Nations multi-partner trust fund format, guided by the will of the participating countries to preserve the functioning of the Programme under the auspices of the United Nations. The Council requests the ECE and ESCAP secretariats to prepare concepts for establishing the fund in the multi-partner trust fund format and invites the participating countries to participate actively in the process.

Decision 6 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/6)

In view of decision 4 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2020/4) of its fifteenth session, the Council decides to establish a Special Programme working group on investments and financial technical cooperation. The Council welcomes the offer by the Government of Uzbekistan to chair and fully support the new working group. The Council elects Uzbekistan as a Chair country of the working group. The participating countries will request other relevant United Nations entities and international development partners to support the working group. The Council encourages the working group to be led by the participating countries.

Decision 7 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/7)

The Council reiterates its request to the participating countries to appoint/confirm their focal points for the Special Programme and for each of the thematic working groups in writing to the ECE and ESCAP secretariats no later than 31 March 2022.

Decision 8 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/8)

The Council adopts the 2022–2023 workplan of the Special Programme as presented at the session and encourages the participating countries, thematic working groups, development partners and partner organizations to support the implementation of activities contained in the workplan.

Decision 9 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/9)

The Council acknowledges the importance of the circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, supporting economic prosperity and resilience, addressing environmental challenges, mitigating climate change and recovering from the COVID-19-induced crisis. The Council recognizes the value of the Environment for Europe process as a unique pan-European platform for addressing environmental challenges, improving environmental governance and promoting environmental and cross-sectoral cooperation and information-sharing among countries.

Decision 10 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/10)

The Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan for its active work as Chair of the Special Programme in 2021.

Decision 11 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/11)

The Council decides that the Chair of the Special Programme for 2022 and the exact dates of and venue for its seventeenth session and the 2022 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum will be agreed upon through diplomatic channels.

Decision 12 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/12)

The Council expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of Uzbekistan for its excellent work in organizing the sixteenth session of the Council, the 2021 Special Programme Economic Forum and the sixteenth session of the Special Programme thematic working group on trade, held in hybrid format, as well as the warm hospitality offered to the participants of the “2021 SPECA Days” event in Tashkent.

Decision 13 (SPECA/GC/Dec/2021/13)

The Council expresses its deep appreciation to the secretariats of ECE and ESCAP for their efforts to organize the important annual events of the Special Programme, their active work aimed at strengthening the Programme and their continued support for its implementation.

II. Proceedings

A. Outcomes of the 2021 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum, “Sustainable transport and trade for a green and inclusive economy after the pandemic”
(Agenda item 3)

2. The 2021 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum focused on progress in the development of sustainable transport and trade in the Programme region and their potential contribution to making the economies of the region green, circular and inclusive in building back better after the pandemic. The COVID-19-related restrictions, lockdowns and border closures caused serious disruptions to supply chains and citizen’s mobility, which created additional costs. Therefore, the Forum placed emphasis on efficiency and best practices in handling transport operations during the pandemic and building back better in its aftermath. The session on sustainable transport tackled connectivity as a key issue for lowering transport and transit costs, which was crucial for the competitiveness and economic development of the landlocked developing countries in the region. Given the environmental benefits and high resilience of rail transport, greater rail transport development was important to increase the sustainability and resilience of the participating countries. The session on sustainable trade focused on the implementation of the Special Programme principles of sustainable trade and the digitization of multimodal transport data and document exchange in the region. A separate session was dedicated to the gender dimension of rebuilding the region’s economies better and empowering women who worked in sustainable development, transport and trade. Given that the Government of Uzbekistan had hosted the events of the Special Programme in 2021 and had strengthened its involvement as the Chair of the Programme, one session was focused on various studies and initiatives related to Uzbekistan.

B. Implementation of the Special Programme workplan for 2020–2021: progress reports of the Special Programme thematic working groups on the activities since the fifteenth session of the Governing Council

(Agenda item 4)

3. The Chair noted that, as the progress reports on the work carried out by the Special Programme thematic working groups since the fifteenth session of the Council had been uploaded to the ECE website (<https://unece.org/info/SPECA/events/359263>) and distributed to the participants before the present session, all delegates had been given the opportunity to review them. The Council approved the progress reports of the thematic working groups.

C. Special Programme fund, Special Programme secretariat and other organizational issues

(Agenda item 5)

4. At its fifteenth session, in 2020, the Council requested the ECE and ESCAP secretariats to help to conduct consultations among the participating countries to reach a final decision on the establishment of the Special Programme secretariat and fund. In 2021, the Government of Uzbekistan, as the 2021 chair, together with the ECE secretariat, conducted a series of consultations among the participating countries to reach a final decision in that regard.

5. The representative of the multi-partner human security trust fund for the Aral Sea region in Uzbekistan stated that the trust fund was a multi-partner financial and development institution of the Government of Uzbekistan, the United Nations, international donors and the financial community. The representative described in detail the governance structure and operational activities of the trust fund. He also shared his vision of modelling the Special Programme fund on the governance architecture of the trust fund, which would involve the following steps: elaborate a fund strategy; develop a strategy for resource mobilization and identify thematic directions for the fund; sign a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations agencies (this step would be obligatory, as the funds would be disbursed through the agencies); sign a standard administrative agreement with donor countries; and find additional organizations/donors besides the regional commissions, such as the Asian Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank. Projects could be submitted by several Governments or a single Government, and a steering committee would select the projects for implementation.

6. The Deputy Executive Secretary of ECE stated that a business case for the Special Programme fund, developed by the ECE secretariat in 2021, had been shared with all participating countries. The document had been prepared with an understanding of the fund as a separate intergovernmental structure. He informed the session participants of the following next steps to be taken to establish the fund:

(a) Request the Special Programme thematic working groups to prepare project proposals for the fund, based on their current areas of work; for example, the thematic working group on innovation and technology for sustainable development had a wide range of concrete ideas, and the thematic working group on water, energy and environment could concentrate on such topics as energy efficiency, sustainable use of water energy resources and coal energy;

(b) Submit the final document containing Special Programme project proposals to the national coordinators;

(c) Consult with other organizations that are considering funding in the Special Programme region; for example, look at other funds, look for synergies with existing initiatives, continue the dialogue with the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme; if participating countries trusted it to conduct the consultations, the ECE secretariat would carry them out;

(d) Prepare the concept of the future fund, consult with United Nations Headquarters and consider the experience of the multi-partner trust funds; as the participating countries wished to keep the fund within the United Nations system, additional consultations with the Executive Secretaries of ESCAP and ECE would be needed; reaching an agreement among the countries on operationalizing the collected funds for the Special Programme fund was of great importance;

(e) Report to the Executive Secretary of ECE on the results of the discussions and hold another round of fund consultations in Geneva, if necessary.

7. The representative of Azerbaijan discussed the model of the multi-partner human security trust fund for the Aral Sea region and the model proposed by the ECE secretariat. He noted that it was too early to discuss the format of the Special Programme fund. Consultations among the participating countries and the ECE and ESCAP secretariats on the model and funding mechanism should be held in advance, and consensus should be reached on a political level. The priority areas for the fund's activities should be flexible, as they might change over time.

8. After a thorough discussion, the delegations of the participating countries agreed that the format and operational activities of the Special Programme fund needed to be considered further.

9. With regard to the establishment of a Special Programme working group on investments and financial technical cooperation, the representatives of the ESCAP and ECE secretariats noted that ECE did not have a mandate to work on investment and ESCAP had too-limited resources. Consequently, if such a working group were created, its modus operandi should be different from the existing working groups, and it should be run by the Chair and the other participating countries, reflecting the recommendations of the 2018 Special Programme evaluation for greater country ownership and country leadership.

D. Adoption of the Special Programme workplan for 2022–2023 (Agenda item 6)

10. The Chair noted that the draft 2022–2023 workplan of the Special Programme had been uploaded to the ECE website (<https://unece.org/info/SPECA/events/359263>) and distributed to the participants before the present session, and all delegates had been given the opportunity to review it. The representative of Kazakhstan requested the ECE and ESCAP secretariats to add four planned activities to the draft workplan under the heading “Sustainable transport, transit and connectivity”. The Council accepted the representative's proposal and adopted the workplan.

E. Election of the next Chair country of the Special Programme
(Agenda item 7)

11. The ESCAP secretariat had discussed the idea that Turkmenistan would be elected Chair of the Special Programme and host the Programme's annual events in 2022. The representative of Turkmenistan noted that the Government had not endorsed the proposal. No other country volunteered to chair the Special Programme and host the events in 2022.

F. Date and venue of the 2022 Special Programme Economic Forum and the seventeenth session of the Governing Council of the Special Programme
(Agenda item 8)

12. The dates of and venue for the events would be agreed upon through the diplomatic channels.

G. Other business
(Agenda item 9)

13. No other issues were raised under the agenda item.

III. Organization

A. Opening, duration and organization of the session

14. The sixteenth session of the Council of the Special Programme was held on 19 November 2021. It was jointly organized by the Government of Uzbekistan, the Chair of the Special Programme for 2021, together with ESCAP and ECE. The session was held in hybrid format, allowing for participation both in person and online.

B. Participants

15. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as the ESCAP and ECE secretariats participated in the session. The representative of Afghanistan could not take part in the session. Representatives of other States Members of the United Nations, United Nations agencies and programmes, and the United Nations resident coordinators in the Special Programme participating countries, as well as representatives of international and regional organizations, the academic community, the private sector and civil society participated as observers.

C. Agenda

16. The Council adopted the following agenda:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Outcomes of the 2021 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia Economic Forum, "Sustainable transport and trade for a green and inclusive economy after the pandemic".

4. Implementation of the Special Programme workplan for 2020–2021: progress reports of the Special Programme thematic working groups on the activities since the fifteenth session of the Governing Council.
 5. Special Programme fund, Special Programme secretariat and other organizational issues.
 6. Adoption of the Special Programme workplan for 2022–2023.
 7. Election of the next Chair country of the Special Programme.
 8. Date and venue of the 2022 Special Programme Economic Forum and the seventeenth session of the Governing Council of the Special Programme.
 9. Other business.
 10. Adoption of decisions.
 11. Closing of the session.
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