



## UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN) & Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

### Technical Meeting on the Role of Transformative Innovation in supporting the Green and Digital Transition of the Western Balkans

Date: 20 & 21 September 2023, Hybrid  
Venue: Hotel Maestral, Pržno Montenegro

#### Background

Over the past decade, technological and other innovations have successfully addressed numerous socio-economic challenges, improving living conditions for millions. However, the world has yet to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and with the Triple Planetary Crisis, mounting migration, and poverty challenges, there is an urgent need for improved preparedness for the future, to create synergies and pave the way for more systemic societal transformation. In light of this, new policies initiatives, such as Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement, the EU Green New Deal, and the Horizon Europe programme emphasize leveraging societal challenges as opportunities for development and economic growth. Yet, while this highlights innovation as an important vehicle for broader societal change, it also raises the question whether our existent innovation ecosystems and coordination processes are set up to foster a future that allows for transformative innovation for sustainable development.

The uncertainty, complexity and accelerating pace of the present changes are daunting. Hence, to meet these challenges, and simultaneously explore the opportunities that they provide, it is imperative to **combine lessons from past experiences with more elaborate strategic forecasting practices**. One distinguishing feature of sustainable societal transformations is that they require the promotion and coordination of **multiple and mutually reinforcing innovation processes**. Through technologies, ideas, business models, and partnerships various parallel innovation processes can bring about fundamental changes to the way we consume, produce, or create social value. In that sense, transformative innovation is principally about paving the way for creative, agile, and interlinked solutions. More concretely, transformative innovation emphasizes the need to **create an adaptive environment that not only absorbs but also stimulate additional innovations** that simultaneously address the social, environmental, and economic challenges inherent to sustainable development. This, in turn, will require a parallel process of strategic learning, in which ongoing policies and measures are continuously assessed against past experiences, while simultaneously integrated into a future-oriented perspective that allows us to proactively identify and navigate potential challenges, to ensure that innovation leads to holistic progress.

Thus, for the Western Balkans transformative innovation is not just a tool but an essential pathway towards sustainable development and prosperity, helping to address current challenges, for example enabling the region to foresee future demands and strategically tailor innovations to address them. The introduction of this topic, amidst the region's multitude of ongoing initiatives, could help leverage the untapped potential of innovation, opening new avenues of sustainable growth and stability.

## Objective

The UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) will host the Technical Meeting 'The Role of Transformative Innovation in supporting the Green and Digital Transition of the Western Balkans' with the aim of:

- a. promoting innovation-related collaboration among key stakeholders in the Western Balkans and the UNECE region; and
- b. accelerating transformative innovation for sustainable development and economic growth, leveraging strategic learning and future-oriented thinking to anticipate and address upcoming challenges.

More specifically, the event will explore:

- a. the emergence and importance of transformative innovation as a pathway for sustainable growth
- b. the role of transformative innovation and innovation policy in shaping the innovation ecosystem, promoting research and development, incorporating foresight and future analysis approaches, and fostering collaboration between businesses, academia, and government entities for long-term prosperity; and
- c. the ways to monitor and support these efforts, inter alia using the analytical framework of a new, proposed UNECE flagship publication "The Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO) for the Western Balkan region".

The event is inspired by the success of the Sub-regional Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO), a UNECE flagship publication which provides a comprehensive assessment of innovation policies, identifying best practices and areas for improvement. By offering comparative analysis and recommendations it is an instrument to enhance economies' innovation policy and performance, foster sustainable development, and boost competitiveness on the global scale. Applying the IPO methodology to the Western Balkans may support Western Balkan policy makers to identify the critical instances and pursue the policies and measures necessary to support transformative innovation. Additionally, by learning from past experiences, while simultaneously adopting future-oriented thinking, we can better understand the historical and contextual forces that have moulded the present and anticipate trends poised to impact society in the future.

In this pursuit, the UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN) provides a platform for knowledge exchange and peer learning, in which actors from UNECE member States, through different case examples, will engage in a discussion on the opportunities and challenges of

pursuing transformative innovation in the Western Balkans. To stimulate this discussion, ETIN will convene prominent innovation stakeholders from the region, including the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), local innovation agencies, along with government representatives from Estonia and Georgia and actors such as the European Commission. Furthermore, the active involvement of ETIN members, among them Nesta (UK Innovation Agency) and German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) will build on ETIN's prior initiatives and use the collective knowledge and expertise to discuss the future of transformative innovation for the region.

## Preliminary Programme

### Welcome and Introduction

Date: 20 September, 09:00 – 10:00 CEST | Hybrid

09:00 – 09:30

#### Registration and Networking Breakfast

Attendees are advised to arrive earlier to register and enjoy coffee and breakfast provided by Maestral Hotel.

09:30 – 10:00

#### Welcome and Introduction Session

- **Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin**, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE
- **Ms. Pranvera Kastrati**, Acting Head of Programme Department, Regional Cooperation Council, RCC
- **Ms. Biljana Šćepanović**, Minister of Science and Technological Development, Montenegro
- **Ms. Signe Ratso**, Deputy Director-General, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission
- **Ms. Christina Schmidt-Holtmann**, Head of Unit, Data Availability, Digital Sovereignty, SPRIND (Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation), Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK), Germany

### Session 1: UNECE and its Approach to Innovation

Date: 20 September, 10:00 – 10:30 CEST | Hybrid

10:00 – 10:30

This session will provide an overview of UNECE's capacity building work in the Western Balkans and its current and future work on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI). UNECE will present its flagship initiatives, including the UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN) and most recent initiatives in the field of foresight and future/horizon scanning.

- **Mr. Jakob Fexer**, Economic Affairs Officer, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE
- **Mr. Mikael Román**, ETIN Project Coordinator, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE

10:30 – 10:45

**Coffee break**

Guests will be invited to enjoy a selection of hot beverages, provided by the Maestral Hotel, during this networking coffee break.

**Session 2: Transformative Innovation and its Importance in the Past, Present, and the Future**

Date: 20 September, 10:45 – 12:45 CEST | Hybrid

10:45 – 12:45

This session will highlight the increasing significance of transformative innovation in the current economic, social, and environmental context, infused with a strong emphasis on future-oriented strategies. Experts will present and discuss the history of transformative innovation, its current trends and developments, while simultaneously exploring potential future opportunities – all with the help of concrete examples and case studies. Why is transformative innovation specifically central to the future of our society and planet? What can we learn from past experiences? How can future insights guide our path? What are the challenges and opportunities moving forward?

**Keynote presentation:**

- **Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin**, Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE

**Moderation:**

- **Mr. Jakob Fexer**, Economic Affairs Officer, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE

**Panellists:**

- **Mr. Uri Gabai**, CEO, Start-Up National Policy institute, SNPI
- **Mr. Till Moldenhauer**, Project Manager, Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation (SPRIND), Germany
- **Mr. Anders Jönsson**, Chief, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE
- **Ms. Bojana Femić Radosavović**, Executive Director, Innovation Fund Montenegro
- **Ms. Ekaterina Paniklova**, Resident Representative a.i., United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Montenegro
- **Ms. Katerina Kreceva**, Head of Department for Development of Programs, Fund for Innovation and Technological Development, FITD, North Macedonia

**Q&A session:**

In this interactive session, participants will have the opportunity to engage with the speakers, ask questions, exchange views, and delve deeper into the discussion. This open dialogue encourages active participation, knowledge sharing, and the exploration of diverse perspectives to enhance the overall understanding of the subject matter. Building on the conversation's momentum, participants will be able to share insights on the current innovation trends, focusing on existing foundations and unmet needs for future-ready transformative innovation capacities.

12:45 -13:45

**Lunch break**

Participants are invited to join for networking lunch. The lunch will be provided by the Maestral Hotel

**Session 3: Innovation and Transformations: Implications for Governance and Policy**

Date: 20 September, 13:45 – 15:15 CEST | Hybrid

13:45 – 15:15

This session will concentrate on transformative innovation governance, specifically the role of innovation policy making bodies and implementing agencies in fostering functional innovation systems. The session will examine the policies and measures necessary for coordinating interactions among stakeholders engaged in broader transformation processes. Our aim is to identify the conditions under which innovation may support larger societal transformations and, in light of this, discuss the specific role of innovation policy to accelerate these processes. Critically, the session will also provide some initial thoughts on how and in what ways the dynamic applies in the Western Balkans context.

**Moderation:**

- **Mr. Mikael Román**, ETIN Project Coordinator and Economic Affairs Officer, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE

**Panellists:**

- **Ms. Marie Allikmaa**, Head, Business and Consumer Environment Department, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, Estonia
- **Mr. Nikola Radovanovic**, Team leader, Smart Specialisation and innovation ecosystems in the EU enlargement and neighborhood, Joint Research Centre, European Commission
- **Ms. Alex Glennie**, Head of Policy Engagement and Learning, Innovation Growth Lab by Nesta
- **Ms. Elke Dall**, Project Coordinator, Policy Answers Project
- **Ms. Christina Schmidt-Holtmann**, Head of Unit, Data Availability, Digital Sovereignty, SPRIND (Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation), Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK), Germany
- **Ms. Emilija Jovanova**, Regional Manager Western Balkans, RECONOMY

**Q&A session:**

During this session, participants will have the opportunity to reflect on the role of governance in transformative innovation and provide insights and experiences from their own region on the existing policy landscape and potential opportunities and gaps for supporting transformative innovation.

15:15 – 15:30

**Coffee Break**

Guests will be invited to enjoy a selection of hot beverages, provided by the Maestral Hotel, during this networking coffee break.

## Session 4: Measuring Innovation Policies in the Regional Context

Date: 20 September, 15:30– 17:00 CEST | Hybrid

15:30 – 17:00

This session focuses on the role of learning, measurement and evaluation in innovation policy and transformative innovation. While transformative innovation emphasizes the need for experimentation and innovation, the complexity and uncertainty also increase. Consequently, we need to learn as we move along. As a result, there is a growing need for more sophisticated processes and instruments for continuous assessment and evaluation of innovation policy. These instruments are not only important for assessing progress, but also increasingly valuable tools for strategic learning and development. By continuously assessing and evaluating our progress, we can identify areas for improvement and adjust our strategies, ensuring that we achieve our innovation and sustainability goals. Participants will gain insights into best practices and methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of innovation policies and understanding their impact on driving transformative change towards sustainable development.

### Moderation:

- **Ms. Alex Glennie**, Head of Policy Engagement and Learning, Innovation Growth Lab by Nesta

### Framing Presentation:

- **Mr. Jakob Fexer**, Economic Affairs Officer, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE
- **Ms. Stefani Stefanova**, Senior Policy Analyst, UNECE

### Discussants:

- **Ms. Annie Vashakmadze**, Head of International Relations, Georgia's Innovation & Technology Agency (GITA)
- **Ms. Ani Toroyan**, Project Assistant, Armenia National SDG Innovation Lab

### Q&A session:

In this interactive session, participants are invited to delve into the subject of measuring innovation policies and regional dynamics. Building upon the keynote presentation on the methodology of the Sub-regional Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO), attendees can pose questions, gain clarifications, and share insights and suggestions on the most useful collaboration in the region.

## Networking Dinner

20:00– 22:00 CEST

After the first day of the event, participants are invited to join for networking dinner at the Restaurant [Konoba Langust](#), provided by UNECE

## Welcome – Day 2

Date: 21 September, 9:00 – 9:30 CEST | In-person

9:00 – 9:30

### Networking Coffee

Participants will have an opportunity to network over coffee at the conference venue.

## Session 5: Transformative innovation and its implications for the Western Balkans

Date: 21 September, 9:30 – 11:30 CEST | In-person

9:30 – 11:30

This session will be designed as a workshop that builds on presentations delivered by experts in the preceding sessions. In a combination of plenary and smaller group discussions, participants and invited experts will discuss the concrete relevance of transformative innovation in their respective local contexts. What is already going on? What are the specific challenges and opportunities looking into the future? This interactive discussion will seek to concretize transformative innovation and how it applies to real-life situations, particularly in the Western Balkan region. Together, we will explore the main drivers and needs, and discuss how we can collectively contribute and bring innovative solutions to the table, considering present needs and future requirements of the region. The workshop promises to be an insightful and thought-provoking session, fostering collaboration and inspiring participants to embrace transformative innovation for sustainable development.

### Moderation:

- **Mr. Sinisa Marcic**, Senior Expert on Human Capital Development, Regional Cooperation Council

### Tour de Table

Questions for discussion:

1. What challenges and opportunities do you see in fostering an environment that accelerates transformative innovation for sustainable development in the Western Balkan region, including future trends and requirements?
2. What specific actions or collaborations do you believe are necessary to enhance coordination and support for transformative innovation within the region?

11:30 – 12:00

### Closing Remarks

- **Mr. Anders Jönsson**, Chief, Innovative Policies Development Section, UNECE

- **Mr. Sinisa Marcic**, Senior Expert on Human Capital Development, Regional Cooperation Council

**End of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Day**

## Additional Information

### About the UN-ECE Transformative Innovation Network (ETIN)

The [UN-ECE Transformative innovation Network \(ETIN\)](#) is a strategic platform and meeting place for peer learning, collaboration and a joint exploration of policies and practices that, through evidence-based analyses and shared national and international experiences, create value to its affiliated stakeholders in their effort to promote innovative processes to increase competitiveness and accelerate a sustainable transformation of societies in the UNECE region.

For that purpose, ETIN activities will facilitate evidence-based insight on critical aspects of transformative innovation, structured foresight on relevant trends affecting a future deployment of transformative innovation, continuous consultation among peers, extended collaboration between interested parties, and specific processes for exploration of policies and measures supporting transformative innovation. ETIN will pursue four distinct functions interchangeably serving as:

- Meeting place and discussion forum,
- Collaboration platform with systems perspective,
- Facilitator of discussions, strategic alliances, and explorative work, and
- Clearing house for information, debates, networking, and activities.

The network is a joint initiative between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the German Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation (SPRIND) and is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK).

### About the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

The [Regional Cooperation Council \(RCC\)](#) is an all-inclusive, regionally owned and led cooperation framework. This framework engages RCC participants from the South East Europe (SEE), members of the international community and donors on subjects which are important and of interest to the SEE, with a view to promoting and advancing the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region.

Within the framework of the general political guidelines set by the [South-East European Cooperation Process \(SEECp\)](#), the RCC works to develop and maintain a political climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and openness towards cooperation, with a view to enabling



the implementation of regional programmes aimed at economic and social development to the benefit of the people in the region.

### About the Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO)

The UNECE Sub-regional Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO) is a flagship UNECE initiative that assesses the scope and quality of innovation policies, institutions, and processes across several economies of the same geographic region. The IPO's goal is to help improve innovation policies, institutions and processes, and enhance economies' productivity, competitiveness and sustainable development, while serving to enlarge the evidence base for mutual policy learning.

The IPO was already successfully conducted in six economies of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus, with the ongoing requests from participating Member States to follow up on its recommendations with capacity building and national Innovation for Sustainable Development Reviews (I4SDR). The IPO methodology may also be used in other sub-regions, such as economies in Central Asia and the Western Balkans.