



## GENDER

# Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: an unfinished agenda

2010 was a year of anniversaries which has drawn particular attention to the unfinished agenda of women's empowerment and gender equality. Fifteen years have passed since the Fourth World Conference on Women, ten years since the Millennium Declaration and the establishment of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality as one of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and ten years since the Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The implementation of the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women was the theme of the Annual Ministerial Review held during the High-Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council in July 2010, to which UNECE contributed a regional perspective. Taking stock of achievements worldwide has shown that only partial progress has been achieved and that concerted efforts are needed to create an equal playing field for women and men. UNECE welcomes the establishment of the new United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) as an important step in this direction.

### **Women's Economic Empowerment**

In line with UNECE's mandate to focus on economic aspects of gender relations, activities in 2010 have focused on ways to advance women's economic empowerment in the UNECE region. UNECE is dedicated to assisting member States in strengthening women's potential and improving the quality of information on gender equality, particularly through capacity building activities in South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Member States of the United Nations have reaffirmed their commitment to “develop and implement gender-sensitive policies and programmes aimed at promoting women’s economic empowerment, including through enhancing their access to full and productive employment and decent work and to equal pay for work of equal value, and at supporting women’s technical, managerial and entrepreneurial capacities and initiatives, with a view to ensuring sustainable and adequate income generation and empowering women as equal partners with men”<sup>1</sup>. UNECE is committed to supporting them in these efforts. In 2010, activities have focused on the promotion of women’s entrepreneurship through capacity-building workshops, policy-oriented research on the business environment for entrepreneurs and a forum for women entrepreneurs in South-Eastern Europe.

## **Women’s Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is an important avenue for women to generate income and to gain economic independence. Self-employed women increase the welfare of their families, create new job opportunities and by that add to growth and sustainable development in their countries. UNECE considers the promotion of women’s entrepreneurship in the region to be an important avenue for women’s economic empowerment.

### *First Forum for South-Eastern European Women Entrepreneurs*

UNECE co-organized, in cooperation with the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Development Administration of Turkey and the Regional Cooperation Council, the First Forum for South-Eastern European Women Entrepreneurs in Istanbul on 21 and 22 September 2010. The Forum was held under the auspices of the Turkish Chairman in Office of the South-Eastern European Cooperation Process to promote women’s entrepreneurship in South-Eastern Europe.

Fifty-nine women entrepreneurs, policymakers, representatives from Chambers of Commerce and regional organizations met to discuss the support needed for women entrepreneurs in South-Eastern Europe, ranging from improved access to training, finance, role models and networking opportunities. To address the latter, the Forum marked the first of what is intended to become a regular form of dialogue and interaction among women entrepreneurs, women’s business associations, policymakers, civil society and international organizations in South-Eastern Europe, providing a platform for information exchange, networking and mutual support.

One of the conclusions drawn at the Forum is that a clear policy objective for the promotion of women’s entrepreneurship is of paramount importance. Women’s entrepreneurship can be a job creation engine for South-Eastern Europe. For it to thrive, a gender-sensitive policy environment is needed. Policies for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises should be designed to create an enabling entrepreneurial climate for both women and men.

### *Assessing gender differences in the business environment for entrepreneurs*

With the financial support of the Governments of Finland and Sweden, two assessments of the business environment for women and men entrepreneurs have been brought under way in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in cooperation with the International Labour Organization

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<sup>1</sup> Ministerial Declaration on “Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women”, Outcome document of the 2010 High-level Segment of the Economic and Social Council, New York, 28 June – 2 July 2010.



(ILO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In addition, an update of the assessment of the business environment for women and men entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan has been initiated under the same framework. These assessments build on previous research undertaken in cooperation with ILO to analyse the achievements and perspectives of women's entrepreneurship development in pilot countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan). The Assessments will generate new knowledge and improve our understanding of the gender differences in the perception of the business environment and of gender-specific factors and constraints to entrepreneurship development. They will provide the evidence-base for policy recommendations for the improvement and further development of entrepreneurial opportunities for women in the region. First findings will be available in early 2011 and will be discussed at national workshops with a broad range of stakeholders. A subregional forum planned for the summer of 2011 will take stock of the findings in these countries and disseminate lessons learnt from the evidence to a broad range of stakeholders in Central Asia.

*Gender equality  
is an important  
dimension of  
sustainable economic  
development*

### ***Building capacity***

Two international training workshops organized in 2010 at the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre focused on "Support systems for women in small business at national and local levels" (13-29 April 2010) and on "Women entrepreneurs and information communication technologies" (2-19 August 2010). These workshops are the result of continued successful cooperation with the Centre for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel and the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Centre.

These capacity-building workshops, held in Russian, are targeted at women entrepreneurs from various sectors and provide support, guidance and managerial tools on the use of new technologies in the management of small business. They further address government institutions in charge of small and medium-sized enterprise development at national and local levels, women's business associations and other civil society organizations to build their capacity to strengthen the support environment for women entrepreneurs. Over the years, the training scheme has not only played an important role in strengthening the support for women entrepreneurship but has also facilitated networking among women entrepreneurs across Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The biannual workshop series is held under the work programme of the SPECA Working Group on Gender and Economy. In 2010, 53 participants received training.



## National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

New research completed by UNECE in 2010 draws a comprehensive picture of the diversity of types, mandates, roles and functions of national mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The two regional studies:

- focusing mainly on the European Union and the other on South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia;
- identify major trends in the institutional developments for gender equality which have taken place since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995.

They enhance our understanding of both the enabling and constraining factors experienced by national mechanisms for the achievement of gender equality goals. Widespread legal reforms for gender equality are among the key achievements over the past fifteen years, but many hurdles remain. Among the key challenges for national mechanisms for gender equality is the need for a clear and strong mandate, sufficient resources and enhanced synergies among the diversity of mechanisms now in place.

*Women's entrepreneurship can be a job creation engine for South-Eastern Europe*

National mechanisms for gender equality include bodies and institutions within different branches of the State (legislative, executive and judicial branches) as well as independent, accountability and advisory bodies. They include, but are not limited to, the national machinery for the advancement of women within Government, inter-ministerial bodies (e.g. task forces/working groups or similar arrangements), advisory and consultative bodies with multi-stakeholder participation, gender equality ombudspersons, parliamentary committees and gender equality observatories.

The studies are part of the project “Strengthening national mechanisms for gender equality and women’s empowerment” which is led by the Division for the Advancement of Women (now part of UN Women) and implemented in collaboration with the United Nations regional commissions with financial support from the Government of Italy. It aims to strengthen the collaboration and synergies between the different mechanisms at national level to facilitate achievement of the goals of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In the second phase of the project (2010-2011), training manuals will be developed to address the key challenges identified in the regional studies.

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## Challenges for 2011

Looking ahead, the key challenges for 2011 are to:

- Strengthen the skills of national mechanisms for gender equality to collaborate at national and regional level through the development and wide dissemination of a training manual.
- Encourage the creation of a more enabling business environment for women entrepreneurs in Central Asia through the formulation of concrete, evidence-based and policy-oriented recommendations drawn from the country assessments and stakeholder consultations at national workshops.
- Create synergies through enhanced regional collaboration between United Nations Agencies and regional organizations through the establishment of an inter-agency working group on gender equality under the Regional Coordination Mechanism.