



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 August 2019

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting

Geneva, 29 and 30 October 2019

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**Ending violence against women and girls:
lessons and solutions from the region**

Eliminating all forms of discrimination against the girl child

Note by the United Nations Children's Fund¹

Summary

At its sixty-fourth session in 2020, the Commission on the Status of Women will review and appraise the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA), their contributions toward gender equality and empowerment, and the challenges that remain. The Regional Commissions are encouraged to undertake regional reviews to assess progress, challenges and priority actions in 12 critical areas, including the elimination of all forms of discrimination against the girl child. This Report provides background information on girls' discrimination in the UNECE region, analyzing current trends, progress and challenges, and identifying priority actions.

¹ This note has been prepared by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO).



Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction.....	3
II. Main trends in the ECA region.....	3
A. Education.....	3
B. Transition from school to the workforce.....	5
C. Child marriage and discriminatory gender norms.....	7
III. Progress and challenges in eliminating discrimination against the girl child.....	9
A. Progress in line with the SDGs.....	9
B. Challenges.....	12
IV. Priority actions.....	14

I. Introduction

1. The report provides a review of progress by States in the UNECE region towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals 5 and other gender-related SDG targets, as well as Strategic Objective L1-9 of the Beijing Platform on the Girl Child. It is prepared to provide background for the Regional Progress Review meeting for the UNECE Region, as part of the global 25-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action.

2. The region covers 56 member States in Europe, North America, and Central Asia, as well as Israel. Information is drawn from programming supported by UN agencies, available statistical databases as well as National Beijing+25 Reports submitted by member States. Given the critical phases of childhood and adolescence, the report examines critical milestones in girls' lives as well as social and structural impacts on their wellbeing and development throughout the life cycle.

3. Part II provides a review of current trends in the region, focusing on education, transition from school to the workplace, and child marriage and other gender discriminatory norms. Part III describes and analyzes progress made towards achieving Strategic Object L1-9 and SDG 5, and challenges that persist. Part IV recommends priority actions for eliminating discrimination against the girl child.

II. Main trends in the UNECE region²

A. Education³

1. Pre-primary and transition to secondary school

4. Life-long learning begins with early childhood development and access to pre-primary school attendance. There has been a steady and significant improvement in both girls' and boys' early childhood education enrolment in the region, particularly in Western Europe. However, there remain low national averages in Central Asia and pockets of deprivation in communities where access to early childhood education is limited. For boys and girls, combined, pre-primary enrolment has decreased in Europe from 83 per cent in 2012 to 66 per cent in 2017 and has plateaued in Central and Eastern Europe (51 per cent, 2017) and Central Asia (31 per cent, 2017).

5. Transition rates from primary to lower secondary school level are relatively high in the region and gender disparities slight. The gender parity index (the ratio of females to males) in reaching the last grade of lower secondary school (gross intake ratio) is equal in most countries in the region, with a small number of countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia favoring girls and a small number favoring boys.⁴

6. Educational attainment statistics for South-Eastern Europe show that males have higher levels of education; roughly 98 per cent of boys and 94 per cent of girls on average have completed at least primary education and a higher proportion of boys complete at least upper secondary education.⁵ Moreover, the rate of lower secondary school age out-of-school children is higher for girls in most (ten out of 15) countries, and, in absolute numbers, there are more lower secondary school age girls out of school than boys. For children who complete lower secondary school education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, data suggest that girls are more likely than boys to complete upper secondary school. In Tajikistan, investments

² Unless otherwise noted, most of the data for this report have been drawn from the national reviews on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Beijing+25.

³ Unless otherwise noted, UNESCO education statistics have been consulted and reflect data from 2014 onwards.

⁴ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. <https://tellmaps.com/uais/gender/#!/tellmap/77058700/6>.

⁵ Fuller, S. (2019), The Intersection of Gender Equality and Education in South-East Europe: A Regional Situation Analysis of the Nexus between SDG4 and SDG5. UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe. The statistics indicate 74 per cent vs. 64 per cent for women for nine countries in the region.

made since 2016 have resulted in an increased number of girls enrolling in and completing lower secondary education.

2. Intersection with poverty and other forms of exclusion

7. Children from ethnic minority groups, such as the Roma, are far less likely to be enrolled in and complete primary and secondary education. Gender disparities are also more pronounced and in favour of boys in Roma settlements. Roma girls are more exposed to gender inequalities within their cultural group and subject to structural discrimination at the same time. In Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia investments are being done to increase access to learning and address the specific barriers and bottlenecks that girls face.

8. Among children with disabilities, girls are nearly twice as likely as boys not to be in school in a sample of countries.⁶ The percentage of girls with disabilities attending school is never higher than 40 per cent. Intersectional data, such as this, shows that girls from marginalized groups experience multiple vulnerabilities.

9. When combined with poverty and rural settings, gender barriers increase the likelihood of being excluded from education, as is evident in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro. Differences by income level suggest that poverty is associated with other risk factors such as social norms (e.g., child labour, child marriage, the gendered division of labour), ethnicity, disability and location.

3. School-related factors

10. The quality of schooling is critical throughout the region, with gaps in equipping children with 21st century skills and competencies, as well as strengthening education systems capacity for planning, budgeting, monitoring and support to schools, as well as more outcome-focused budget allocation and more efficient use of financial and material resources. The impact of systems weaknesses in education go beyond learning, and can include health consequences, with negative gender socialization and social norms that mitigate against girls being involved in sports impacting on wellbeing of girls and boys, and a major cause of obesity among girls and women.⁷ On the other hand, investments in a gender-responsive whole school approach can result in positively addressing gender stereotypes and building resilience and capacity for gender equality and healthy relationships.⁸

11. A gender-responsive whole school approach would include the offer of sexuality education. While monitoring of sexual and reproductive health in the region has improved, some countries continue to have limited to no data on the availability, coverage and impact of comprehensive sexuality education which, as seen in Western Europe, can result in later sexual debut, fewer sexual partners and higher contraceptive use. While some Western European countries, such as Belgium and France, are strengthening comprehensive sexuality education in schools or through community-based programs, in others, taboos relating to sexuality education persist. Even in some countries that have introduced school programmes, the focus is largely on the biological aspects, without the emphasis on positive, healthy sexual development.⁹

12. In Central Asia, in particular, quality education has a gender dimension. Tajikistan's lack of water and sanitation facilities is particularly severe as is the lack of privacy and separate toilets for girls and boys, which discourage some from going to school, especially teenage girls.¹⁰ In Tajikistan, the quality of the school environment is also a question of safety; girls report receiving threats of violence and intimidation in school or on the way to

⁶ See <http://transmonee.org/dashboard/Transmonee2018#/>.

⁷ www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/399063/GenderApproachAndNCDsPreventionAndControl-eng.PDF?ua=1 accessed 26 July 2019.

⁸ <https://www.bzga-whocc.de/en/publications/standards-in-sexuality-education/>; <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/technical-guidance-sexuality-education/en/> accessed 26 July 2019.

⁹ UNFPA. "Investing in Young People in Eastern Europe and Central Asia," n.d.

¹⁰ See <https://www.unicef.org/tajikistan/safe-environment>, accessed 11 September 2019.

school, by both boys and teachers. Gender stereotyping in schools can have an impact on girls' health as a result of their limited access to sports and physical activity, as noted above.

4. Displaced, refugee and migrant children, and children left behind

13. Displaced and migrant children and “children left behind” constitute another vulnerable category in access to and completion of school. Children may be left in the care of relatives, neighbors, or in State-run institutions, in conditions that are ill-equipped to tend to the needs of the children left in their care. The impact of migration on children left behind is difficult to generalize. Some will benefit from remittances and have a better enjoyment of their economic, social, and cultural rights, in particular in the field of access to education, housing, and health care. Others will be at greater risk of psychosocial trauma; family instability; drug abuse and violent behavior; school drop-out; teenage pregnancy; destitution and neglect; discrimination and social stigmatization; vulnerability to traffickers; abuse and violence.¹¹ Children's education, especially girls' education, is also adversely impacted in countries with high rates of labour out-migration.

14. Refugee children face multiple barriers – they may not have the legal right to attend school or may face economic pressures from their families or social or language barriers. Girls face specific gendered barriers in access to education and other livelihood opportunities. After a conflict, evidence shows that most children do not return to school.¹² Turkey is host to the largest registered refugee population in the world, and although all refugee children have the right to attend school, they may face economic pressure from their family, or social or language barriers; a number of policies and programmes are in place to address girl's access to education.

5. Academic performance

15. In terms of academic performance, the gender gap in reading in favor of girls narrowed by 12 points between 2009 and 2015, according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015.¹³ This is because boys' performance on average improved, particularly among the highest-achieving boys, while girls' performance deteriorated, particularly among the lowest-achieving girls. In mathematics, girls perform better than boys generally, however more boys than girls are above Level 4. Girls also have better average performance in science, but career expectations for girls and boys are based on traditional roles and stereotypes rather than achievement. Teacher training and continuous professional development, and gender-responsive curricula as well as competency-based approaches would promote academic performance and promote quality life-long learning.

B. Transition from school to the workforce

1. Disparities in “Not in Education, Employment or Training” (NEET)

16. Gender discrimination affects girls throughout the lifecycle. In school, the lack of gender-sensitive curricula, teaching practices, and pedagogy reinforce traditional gender roles, as well as harmful masculinities. Parent expectations of sons and daughters have a strong influence on their future opportunities; boys in Central Asia are expected to become breadwinners and household heads, while girls, who set lower expectations of themselves, are encouraged to marry and perform domestic chores. In most Central Asian countries, after leaving school, girls and young women (15-24 years) are more likely than male counterparts

¹¹ Kyrgyzstan Final Report (2018), Gender Study for Central Asia, EuropeAid, January 2018, p. 44.

¹² See <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/05/why-refugee-education-is-a-problem-and-six-solutions>, accessed 11 September 2019.

¹³ UNICEF ECARO (2019), “Mind the Gap: Gender Report of Europe and Central Asia Regional PISA 2015 Results.” Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. Geneva: UNICEF ECARO. The PISA results capture data for 11 countries in the ECARO region.

the same age to not access education, training and employment (NEET).¹⁴ In Belgium although young women are more likely to complete compulsory education as compared with boys, more girls than boys are NEET. Research on NEET trends globally reveal a widening gender gap as youth transition to adulthood; once out of school, if girls become economically inactive, they are more likely to get stuck in economic inactivity than boys, who are more likely to enter the labour force.¹⁵ Child marriage and early childbearing, as discussed in section C below, significantly curtail girls' opportunities for employment or continuing education.

2. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and gender stereotyping in career choices

17. Gender stereotypes in schools drive the process of early segregation that occurs in the choice of fields that girls and boys are encouraged to pursue. According to the PISA 2015 results, girls in parts of the region expect to become health professionals more than boys, while boys are seven times more likely to expect to become ICT professionals.¹⁶ Even where girls outperform boys in math and science, they are under-represented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields relative to boys. In South-Eastern Europe, girls begin to lose interest in STEM at an early age and pursue these opportunities at a lower rate than boys. Despite higher enrolment and completion of women in tertiary education in general in SEE, fewer women than men complete STEM degrees in most of the countries.¹⁷ While progress is being made in gender parity in STEM subjects, ICT programs and Engineering, Manufacturing, and Construction remain male-dominated.¹⁸

18. Some initiatives to counter gender stereotypes and barriers to employment in the ICT sector, in Armenia, Cyprus, Moldova, Denmark, Finland and Austria, are noteworthy. In the former two countries, gender responsive education measures were implemented in schools, including through promotion of inclusive education and teacher training. In Austria, Girls' Day were organized to introduce girls to STEM professions, and the Boys' Day, were organized to introduce boys to social sector occupations. Apprenticeships, mentorships as well as measures for promoting diversified options for girls in vocational and higher education were funded and organized, including in fields such as engineering and information technology. Finally, the government of Austria has implemented the Act on Compulsory School and Vocational Training (July 2016) and an education and training guarantee to promote compulsory education and vocational training among girls and adolescents.

3. Workforce barriers

19. Similar educational qualifications between girls and boys do not translate into the same workforce opportunities. Labour force participation for females age 15 and above in Eastern Europe and Central Asia is lower than for males, and consistently below the European Union average. Many factors inhibit their labour force participation; (a) women continue to face occupational segregation and gender stereotypes in the job market, (b) they experience difficulties in accessing childcare services that act as a disincentive to entering the labour market, (c) they find they are unable to reconcile family life and work life to advance their career, due to a lack of policies for care services (see below), and (d) in some countries, women's more limited access to the Internet is a barrier to having the necessary skills for the labour market.

¹⁴ Burnet Institute (2018), "Gender Counts: Sub-Regional Report for Central Asia." Victoria, Australia: Burnet Institute, August, p. 50.

¹⁵ ILO and UNICEF (2018), "GirlForce: Skills, Education and Training for Girls Now." October, p. 8.

¹⁶ UNICEF ECARO (2019), p. 5.

¹⁷ Fuller, S. (2019), The Intersection of Gender Equality and Education in South-East Europe: A Regional Situation Analysis of the Nexus between SDG4 and SDG5. UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe, p. 26.

¹⁸ Fuller, S. (2019), p. 27.

20. Because women bear the burden of domestic and care work, they have more difficulty balancing work and family. They tend to withdraw from the labour market at early stages to care for children and the household.¹⁹ It is also harder for mothers to re-enter the labour market after parental leave owing to the lack of accessible and good quality early childhood education and care. In France, a number of programmes have been introduced to support women to return to work after having children, including increasing access to childcare and job placement. In Belarus, a specific programme was established to support working single mothers with disabilities who have children to access child care in 2018.

C. Gender-based violence, child marriage and discriminatory gender norms

1. Gender-based violence

21. In a recent study of seven countries in the region, 70 per cent of women surveyed experienced some form of violence since the age of 15, the most common being intimate partner psychological violence. It also reported that 21 per cent of women experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence during childhood (up to age 15). Younger women aged 18-29 tend to have experiences of nearly all forms of sexual harassment in higher proportions compared to their older counterparts. Groups of women at higher risk include being younger, being a migrant or internally displaced, having a disability, being poor, or economically dependent or with children. Digital connectivity has also introduced online harms to both girls and boys, as noted earlier, and one study revealed that harassment of women online, particularly under age 30, is so common, it is becoming a norm.

22. It has become increasingly clear that migration and displacement are gendered phenomena. Gender-specific norms governing society are decisive factors, as are gendered expectations and differentiated power relations. The differentiated impact of economic inequality and gender discrimination shapes the reasons for which girls migrate or are forcibly displaced as well as it redefines their status while on the move. Girls on the move often do not have reliable access to health care or reproductive health-care services or GBV specialized services in transit and destination countries. Most countries do not maintain a comprehensive data management system that captures sex- and age-disaggregated information on arrival and departure and they do not differentiate between different types of movement; hence, separated and unaccompanied girls, married girls and other vulnerable girls are often not targeted by dedicated programming. Girls are also increasingly vulnerable to trafficking.

2. Child marriage

23. Child marriage, affecting girls under the age of 18, has major repercussions on girls' education and is linked to results in most of the other Sustainable Development Goals for girls. From a rights-perspective, a number of serious concerns about child marriage among girls arise. These include restrictions on personal freedom and development, reduced education opportunities and limitations to a girl's right to health, including reproductive health and psychological well-being. Child marriage has a number of negative health impacts - including being more likely to be forced into sexual intercourse; being more likely to experience domestic violence; having poor psychological well-being; being vulnerable to poor sexual and reproductive health, e.g. higher likelihood of early pregnancy, STIs including HIV; more likely to face complications from pregnancy; less access to health and contraceptive services.

24. Child marriage is a practice affecting all population groups in some countries and in others, it is more concentrated within specific ethnicity or language groups. According to

¹⁹ PPMi. "Conceptual and Programmatic Framework on Skills for Adolescents in Europe and Central Asia: Labour Market Trends Analysis," n.d., p. 30.

latest MICS and DHS surveys of the region (2010-2018), approximately 8 per cent of women age 20 to 24 were married before they turned age 18. The countries with the highest levels of child marriage, for which data is available, are Turkey, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Albania, Romania and Kyrgyzstan. Child marriage is a severe problem among the Roma population, with rates before age 18 ranging from 43 per cent in North Macedonia to nearly 63 per cent in Montenegro. The growing number of refugees in the region may also be driving up child marriage rates. In contexts of violent conflict especially, child marriage is seen by parents as a way to “protect” their daughters from the threat of sexual violence. Rates of boys marrying before age 18, where available, are lower than 3.5 per cent. Similarly, far fewer boys than girls are either married or in union in the age group 15-19.

25. A variety of factors contribute to a girl dropping out of school. In some cases, girls are removed from school in order to *prepare* for marriage; in others, she is removed to avoid the perceived risks of socializing with boys. And if a married girl stays in school, she may be pressured to drop out by her husband or in-laws in order to manage housework and/or children care. Other school-related factors may also put girls at risk of drop out – poverty and overcrowded conditions at home, giving priority to the schooling of younger siblings or brothers; no safe transport options for girls in rural areas to attend secondary school; and especially for minority groups, exposure to bullying and discrimination at school. Importantly, research shows that the longer a girl stays in school, the later she will marry.²⁰ In Turkey, programmes have been developed to support girls who drop out of school due to pregnancy or early marriage to continue their education through distance learning.

3. Girls’ unpaid work burden

26. Gender socialization begins at a very young age. By the time they reach adolescence, girls have been socialized to assume domestic responsibilities and boys to work outside the home. This is evidenced by the MICS data from seven countries in the region showing that girls on average are more engaged in household chores and boys are more engaged in economic activities.²¹ The gender division of labor underlies the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work provided by girls (and women). The reliance of families and the state on female unpaid labor diminishes their opportunity for formal employment and good career choices and reduces their chance to realize their full potential.²² This is also the reason for which child care services and parental leave policies are so important (see section III.A.1 below).

4. Teenage pregnancy and adolescent birth rates

27. Although the rate of teenage pregnancy has been declining in the region, the disparities in the region show that adolescent girls in rural areas, from poor communities and ethnic minority or migrant families are most disadvantaged. In France and Kazakhstan, programming to promote youth-friendly health services and access to supplies have been prioritized to address this issue.

28. Migrant girls and women may experience precarious living conditions and their access to medical services, sexual and reproductive health services and contraception can be limited. According to UNFPA, repeated abortions are not uncommon, and, compounded by other factors, can contribute to the complications during pregnancy and birth, as well as wellbeing of infants. Both tuberculosis and HIV are reported by the IOM to be increasing among 15 to 17-year-old girls.

29. Child marriage rates are associated with higher adolescent birth rates. Data from UN Women Tajikistan shows that most often unregistered marriages are early marriages and lead

²⁰ UNICEF (no date), “Child Marriage in Europe and Central Asia: UNICEF’s Response: Regional Overview,” p. 15.

²¹ MICS data 2011 – 2016.

²² UN Europe and Central Asia Issue-Based Coalition on Gender (2017), “SDGs and Gender Equality: UN Interagency Guidance Note for the Europe and Central Asia Region.” UN Development Group ECA and UN Regional Coordination Mechanism ECA, August, p. 41.

to early pregnancy. Adolescent pregnancy has serious impacts on girls' education, health and long-term employment.²³ Teenage pregnancy can also result in early births, which is associated with low birth weight and worse health outcomes for infants.

5. Girls' self-efficacy and well-being

30. Adolescents with high levels of self-efficacy have higher levels of engagement and life satisfaction. In girls, self-esteem is deeply affected by gender-based violence and restrictive gender norms. The PISA 2015 study reveals that girls generally feel less satisfied with their life than boys and are more anxious in completing school tasks and taking exams, even if they are well prepared. The report suggests that lower life satisfaction among 15-year old girls may be linked to their self-criticism during the transition from childhood to adulthood especially in relation to body image.²⁴

31. The 2014 HBSC survey concludes that gender stereotypes drive girls in all countries surveyed to think they are too fat, a finding that increases with age from 11 to 15 years.²⁵ Forty-three per cent of 15-year-old girls in the surveyed were unsatisfied with their bodies – almost double the rate for boys in the same age category – and 26 per cent reported being on a diet, even though only 13 per cent were overweight (compared to 11 per cent of boys being on a diet and 22 per cent being overweight). Attempts to lose weight are a common feature of girls' lifestyles by the time they are 13 and increase with age.

6. Gender Biased Sex Selection

32. According to MICS and DHS data, skewed sex ratios at birth (in favour of boys) in a number of countries are among the top ten in the world, and some are at levels comparable to those in China and India. The most unbalanced sex ratios are found in the Caucasus (Azerbaijan and Armenia), but the sex ratio (male) at birth is also high in Tajikistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina²⁶. In Armenia, the Program on Prevention of Sex-Selective Abortions and the Schedule for Program Activities has contributed to a decline in the sex ratio from 113 boys to 100 girls (2016) to 110 boys to 111 girls (2018).

III. Progress and challenges in preventing and eliminating discrimination against girls

A. Progress

1. Parental leave policies

33. Girls are influenced by role models and gender socialization. The region has made some progress in parental leave provisions in recent years that will help advance shared responsibility within the family for childcare and domestic work. These policies hold the promise for a more equal division of household responsibilities between men and women, boys and girls in the future. However, research shows that women are still more likely to use paid parental leave than men, when leave is available to either parent. In Belgium, despite paternity leave policies and programmes, most men do not apply for this benefit. However, in Luxembourg reforms resulted in near-parity of parental leave for men and women by December 2018. In Belarus, paternity and maternity rights and state benefits are provided to men and women equally, with men able to access benefits when women return to work or continue studies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, new Labour Laws now prescribe the

²³ "Adolescent Pregnancy in Eastern Europe and Central Asia." UNFPA, n.d.

²⁴ UNICEF ECARO (2019), p. 5.

²⁵ WHO (2016), Women's health and well-being in Europe: beyond the mortality advantage, Regional Office for Europe, p. 58.

²⁶ TransMONEE database (<http://transmonee.org/database/>), and Tajikistan Demographic Yearbook 2016, (www.stat.tj/en/news/publications/the-publication-demographic-year-book-of).

entitlement of women to maternity leave of one year uninterrupted. After 42 days from the birth of the child in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 60 days in Serbia, the father has the right to paternity leave.

2. Health outcomes²⁷

34. Despite progress regarding health outcomes in the region, there remain critical gaps related to adolescent obesity, high rates of anemia among girls and immunization hesitancy. Between 2000 and 2016, the number of overweight children under 5 years old in the region increased from 2.1 to 4.5 million. Compared with other regions, this 214 per cent increase represents the biggest jump globally. Since 1995 to 2016 the prevalence of obesity has been 13.8 and 12.1 among boys and girls in the region²⁸. According to the latest WHO Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative, there are variances between and within countries on rates of overweight and obesity among children aged 6-9, due to influences related to lifestyle behaviors. While rates in general tend to be higher for boys, among the countries with the highest rates (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain), the difference are not substantial, and it can be addressed through a re-examination of gender norms for girl's engagement in sports and other physical activities, as well as mobility and access to public spaces and events (as opposed to roles and responsibilities that may encourage sedentary behaviors).²⁹

35. Despite significant improvements in promotion of maternal health in the region, and although more and more mothers and their newborns are surviving, between 30-35 per cent of women in reproductive age suffer from anemia in Central Asia, the Caucasus, South and Eastern Europe. Based on the available statistics, in targeted countries in the region over 35 per cent of the children under the age of five suffer from anemia, with lifelong consequences for girls as they grow and reach puberty.³⁰

36. Immunization coverage in the region has improved, and many countries in the region are close to achieving immunization of 95 per cent of all children with three doses of the diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DPT3). A few have already achieved it, such as countries in Western Europe, as well as North Macedonia and Albania, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. A variety of factors impact immunization rates, including a mother's marriage age, her access to internet and her level of education (Georgia).³¹ However, some countries are far from attaining this goal (Tajikistan and Ukraine) and in many countries the immunization rate of girls is well below that of boys. The largest gender disparities in favour of boys are in Albania, Turkey and Serbia.

3. Policy development in gender-based violence, including sexual violence and other harmful gender norms³²

37. There have been some advances in policy development to prevent and combat violence against women and girls. Countries continue to ratify and support implementation of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Finland, like a number of countries in the region, adopted an action plan for the Istanbul Convention for 2018-2021 in December 2017, and has allocated resources to support prevention and response measures, including expansion of shelters from 18 to 28, and engagement by municipalities.

²⁷ WHO, UN Global SDG Database cited in United Nations (2018), "Fulfilling the Potential of Present and Future Generations: Report on ICPD Programme of Action Implementation in the ECE Region, ICPD+25." New York and Geneva.

²⁸ Levels and Trends in Child Malnutrition: UNICEF, WHO, World Bank Group joint Child Malnutrition Estimates, 2018 edition.

²⁹ www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/372426/WH14_COSI_factsheets_v2.pdf, accessed 1 August 2019.

³⁰ State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, 2018, www.fao.org/3/I9553EN/i9553en.pdf, accessed 1 August 2019.

³¹ Country Profiles for Immunization, UNICEF 2018, www.unicef.org/eca/health/immunization, accessed 1 August 2019.

³² United Nations (2018).

38. Gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response services for women and girls directly address co-occurrence of violence in the home and the intergenerational transmission of violence. Azerbaijan is setting up a special database with information useful to government agencies and support centers for supporting survivors of domestic violence. Kyrgyzstan's new Domestic Violence Law adopted in 2017 includes measures to improve protections for survivors of domestic violence and strengthen the police and judicial response. In Armenia, support centers were established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to provide services for survivors of domestic violence. In Georgia and Cyprus, awareness raising initiatives involving sports associations target men and boys with GBV prevention messaging. At the household level, investments in gender-responsive home visiting services, is considered among the key prevention strategies.

39. Ukraine, Romania, Croatia and Serbia are among the countries that developed laws, strategies and action plans to address gender-based violence (GBV). Kazakhstan has programmes against harmful practices against children, including prevention of bride kidnapping, as well as psychosocial support services for survivors of violence. In Turkey, child friendly judicial services are in place to support victims of violence and crimes: child monitoring centers offer one stop shop services for victims of sexual crimes, and judicial interview rooms create a child friendly environment within the courthouse for vulnerable groups, including children in contact with the law. Child friendly environment and services for children involved in criminal proceedings are ensured in Croatia, as well. In Montenegro, Denmark, Belarus and Hungary, programming includes initiatives to address trafficking, including of women and girls.

40. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) prevails among some minority groups in Belgium, Luxembourg and France. In Belgium, a study was conducted in 2018 on the estimates of FGM, and health improvement strategies have been introduced, including identification of women and girls at risk. In France, new legislation (June 2019) places refugee and stateless children under protection because of the risk of FGM should they be returned to their country of origin. At the same time, the State Secretariat for Equality between Women and Men and the Fight Against Discrimination published the National Action Plan for the Eradication of FGM. Luxembourg is also taking measures by setting up a project to prevent, accompany and care for women victims of FGM through their Office for Reception and Integration. Georgia introduced the prohibition of FGM in May 2017 as part of its Criminal Code.

41. Trafficking of women and girls is another form of violence which some countries, both source and destination, are prioritizing. Cyprus has developed new legislation, a draft national action plan, and a national referral mechanism to strengthen anti-trafficking measures. Serbia adopted the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, in particular Children and Women, and Protecting Victims (2017-2019) and allocated funds to the Action Plan. Liechtenstein has formed a partnership with banks, associations and the philanthropic sector to release a roadmap for accelerated action against modern slavery and human trafficking.

42. Cyberbullying and online stalking are growing forms of violence against women and girls. Albania is taking specific measures with support from UNICEF to draft the 2017-2020 Work Program to strengthen the child protection system by addressing a comprehensive response against online violence. A number of countries are raising awareness in schools with teachers, students and parents to prevent risk behaviors and recommend actions to take in case children are exposed to this form of violence.

43. In response to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, countries such as Finland, Italy, Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey have taken measures to support girls to continue education, training, and/or access healthcare. In Greece, Italy, Serbia and Bulgaria, the Government of the United States and UNICEF have supported government and NGO programming to prevent and respond to GBV. The Conditional Cash Transfer for Education (CCTE) programme in Turkey aims to support child protection and children's education. Implemented by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services (MoFLSS) since 2003, it was extended to Syrian and other refugee families in mid-2017 with support from UNICEF and the EU. The payments depend on the gender and the grades of the school-going children and transfer amounts are slightly higher for girls attending any grade to support girl's school

enrolment and attendance. In Finland, the Government Integration Programme supports access to education and training paths for women and girls.

4. Gender stereotypes in education and the media

44. Gender transformative health promotion and media can promote positive body image and wellbeing as well as challenge stereotypes, in order to advance on gender equality. Nordic countries continue to address gender-discriminatory advertising in the media, while promoting gender equality and positive portrayal of women and girls in the news and other media. The publication of a recent report on Regulation of Gender-Discriminatory Advertising in the Nordic Countries³³ has resulted in the review of legislation and policies in Finland. Norway has proposed new legislation to penalize the sharing of offensive images and films for consultation, through the Ministry of Justice and Public Security. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and France government programmes have included developing resources to combat gender stereotypes in the media. And in Belarus, laws on the media and advertising now prohibit the dissemination in media, advertising and the Internet of resources of violence and cruelty. It also prohibits the promotion and propaganda of the cult of violence and cruelty or incitement against women and girls.

B. Challenges

1. Gender inequality in unpaid care work

45. One of the targets of SDG 5 relates to gender inequality in unpaid care and domestic work. SDG target 5.4 aims to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. However, owing to the decrease in public investment in childcare, elderly and disabled care, the state and families have had to rely even more on women and girls' unpaid care work.³⁴ This dependency keeps all women, including those who are highly skilled, away from formal employment and the pursuit of career opportunities. It also undermines their ability to accumulate lifetime savings. This in turn may reinforce the de-valuing of girls' education and perpetuate the loss of women and girls' full contribution to a productive and prosperous society.

46. Even in cases where women and men are willing to share family responsibilities more equally, they encounter workplace challenges as a result of a lack of gender-responsive family-friendly practices. In Moldova, for instance, childcare policies more often target women only. Access to childcare services in the region as a whole has improved mainly in the EU countries through the setting of the Barcelona targets on child care as part of the 2011-2020 European Pact for Gender Equality.³⁵ Policies can better support families to distribute childcare tasks more equally, engage fathers in positive parenting practices, and make it easier for young female graduates to pursue their career choices. Gender-sensitive family policies that support child care services, day-care centers, single-parent families, flexible work schedules, telecommuting, among others can also help reduce women and girls' unpaid care work and advance their right to exercising a productive role in society.

2. Limited economic empowerment for girls

47. According to the ILO, governments in the region have been introducing austerity measures that include wage cuts and subsidy reduction. Many of these reforms affect mainly women, such as reductions in wages and jobs in public health, public education and social services, sectors where women are over-represented.

³³ Haggren, HJ, Kosunen, N, Asikainen, A-R, Lång, K & Gústafsdóttir, G 2017, Regulation of Gender - Discriminatory Advertising in the Nordic Countries, in: TemaNord 2017:534.

³⁴ UN Europe and Central Asia Issue-Based Coalition on Gender (2017), p. 41.

³⁵ WHO (2016), p. 33.

48. Structural discrimination in the job market is a major disincentive for young female entrants. Despite their impressive educational achievements in tertiary education, these girls are still less likely than men to be employed and less likely to move up the career ladder. Gender discrimination is also the driver behind the occupational segregation and concentration of women in low-paying sectors of the economy. Women's gross hourly earnings in 2015 were on average 21.8 per cent less in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, which is also a higher disparity than in European Union countries with an average of 16 per cent less. Further, women are more likely to be employed in insecure jobs, such as working without a contract, regular pay or protection of their rights. And because of their unpaid care responsibilities, women often resort to part-time employment.³⁶

49. Young girls who aspire to pursue their talents in STEM should have access to relevant education, and then offered opportunities to work in these fields. As such, there remains much to be done to create the enabling environment in education and in the job market for this shift to happen. This is partly due to a lack of female role models to inspire young girls to pursue a career in STEM, and to promote the confidence and self-esteem to operate in what has been a male-dominated field. Similarly, girls can be encouraged to consider careers in the growing digital world of work.

3. Children with Disabilities

50. Women and girls with disabilities, and those in rural areas or in impoverished areas are often more deeply affected by reductions in pensions and healthcare spending. These reforms may curtail their access to crucial services for reproductive and sexual health.³⁷ Further, to curb the incidence of teenage pregnancy, the legal, policy and regulatory environment impact girls' bodily autonomy, as well as access and use of sexual and reproductive health services. According to UNFPA, several countries in the region apply legal restrictions to accessing sexual and reproductive health services without parental consent (until age 18); countries where parental consent is not required for abortion, where SRH services are available in all areas and contraceptives are affordable for youth have lower pregnancy rates. To date, youth friendly services that offer family planning counselling and contraceptives to young people are not institutionalized in most countries in the region. Sex education in schools is also not widely available in the region and the national curriculum in several countries do not meet WHO standards. And the education system, to be more gender-responsive, should facilitate the return to school for any pregnant girl, and enable her to continue her education.

4. Gender-based violence

51. Despite some progress in the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, there remain some states that have not signed and/or ratified. As long as the root causes of impunity for men and boys' violence prevails, girls and boys will reproduce the same gender inequitable patterns as their parents. A gender transformative approach is essential to tackle the negative impact that gender norms have on girls' and boys' development. Prevention and response to GBV should take into account both violence against women as well as violence against children through comprehensive policies and programmes. The challenge in the region, and worldwide, remains that too few survivors are sufficiently confident in response systems to disclose and seek assistance and care. Recent WHO baseline assessments in the region reveal that health systems are a critical entry point for care of survivors.

5. Girls' public participation and voice

52. Gender discrimination expresses itself across the entire life cycle. Statistics on women's public participation that indicate disparities in favor of men³⁸ do not bode well for

³⁶ UNDG ECA (2017), p. 3.

³⁷ UN Europe and Central Asia Issue-Based Coalition on Gender (2017), p. 41.

³⁸ See Gender Gap Index (GGI) for countries in the region.

girls in exercising their right to a public voice. The situation for young married girls merits particular attention, owing to their general state of isolation and the restrictions imposed by husbands and in-laws on their mobility outside the home.³⁹ Girls who are not in education, employment or training are also at higher risk of control and exclusion from public life, making it harder for them to reintegrate into the labour market and other spheres of life. In Roma communities where child marriage rates tend to be higher, girls who marry young experience multiple deprivations for belonging to a socially excluded population group for whom child marriage is also considered a Roma tradition.

6. Children on the move and girls' education

53. At the end of 2017, nearly 800,000 children migrants, both accompanied and unaccompanied, were present in Russia, and nearly half a million in Kazakhstan.⁴⁰ Among the migrant minors from Central Asia in Russia and Kazakhstan, some migrate with their parents, while others are sent alone to work in an attempt to earn money for the family. Still others remain behind with father, or mother or both migrating for work. Some studies reveal that parents may send daughters rather than their sons as migrants, because they believe girls to be more patient, hardworking and willing to make sacrifices for the family than boys.⁴¹ Few minors who leave for migration have completed ninth grade, and virtually none of them have received a complete secondary education. Thus, as migrants, they can only apply for low-skilled jobs and, as a result, generally do not have the opportunity to continue their education or obtain a specialization. Undocumented migrants' children are at particular risk of having no access to education in the countries of destination.⁴²

IV. Priority actions

54. Based on the findings of this review, the following priority actions on ending Discrimination against Girls.

- (a) Member States of the region should put in place the necessary measures for the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and optional protocols of the Convention, as well as related concluding observations, and the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review.
- (b) Member States that are part of the Council of Europe should sign or ratify the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, originally opened for signature on 11 May 2011, and after ratifying, should resource activities for prevention and response that include addressing co-occurrence of violence where children are witnesses and survivors, as well as primary prevention against the intergenerational cycles of violence.
- (c) Member States and NGO partners should push forward on commitments for girls to survive and thrive. Addressing gender-biased sex selection, promoting healthy and active lifestyle behaviors, insuring access to information and services – including accurate immunization information, age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly health services – as well as urgently reducing adolescent birth rates and STI/HIV rates are among the priorities for the region.
- (d) Support the public-private collaboration that includes United Nations agencies in a Global Partnership to End Violence against Children (#endviolence).

³⁹ UNICEF (n.d.), "Georgia Child Marriage Country Profile."

⁴⁰ UNICEF (n.d.), "Latest statistics and graphics on refugee and migrant children" (accessed on 07/11/2019).

⁴¹ IOM (2018), Summary Report, "The Fragile Power of Migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration", p. 35.

⁴² FIDH and ADC (2018), "Invisible and exploited in Kazakhstan: the plight of Kyrgyz migrant workers and their families members", June, p. 42.

(e) Special attention should be paid to the needs and vulnerability of certain groups, such as women and girls with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and migrant women and girls. Additional efforts in the form of awareness raising and special targeted services are needed to ensure that these groups can access the needed information, services, protection and rights that can help prevent them from experiencing violence.

(f) Invest in gender-responsive inclusive education, including in STEM and non-traditional areas of learning, apprenticeship, mentorships and school-to-work transition which is critical to progress for the next generation. This includes programmes in schools and in coordination with public and private sector partners. The aim is to improve quality of learning through systems strengthening for a whole school approach that includes disaggregated data collection and analysis, as well as teacher training and pedagogy that supports learning and builds foundational skills for life. An empowerment approach to learning is one that debunks gender myths and challenges restrictive gender stereotypes and gender socialization, thereby preparing girls to fully contribute to their family, community and national development goals.
