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Key trends on gender equality across the Economic Commission for Europe region

Regional review of progress: regional synthesis

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The Economic and Social Council in its resolution E/RES/2022/5 called upon States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. It encouraged regional commissions to undertake regional reviews to feed into the “Beijing+30” global review to be undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-ninth session in March 2025.

As part of the preparations for the regional review, all member States of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) have been requested to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews based on the Guidance Note issued by UN Women. This report contains a synthesis of the responses received and is submitted for the regional review in the ECE region. It summarizes recent achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its intersection with the Sustainable Development Goals. It is complemented by document ECE/AC.28/2024/4, which highlights, by country, selected achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality.

* This note has been prepared by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.



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I. Introduction

1. This report presents a review of the progress in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and its interplay with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region. It has been prepared as a background document for the Beijing+30 regional review meeting as part of the global 30-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.
2. The review is based on the responses of 27 ECE member states to the United Nations questionnaire contained in the Guidance Note for the preparation of national reviews. It examines progress and challenges of advancing the agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action and SDG implementation from a regional perspective.
3. Section II of this report analyzes the priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks in the ECE region since 2014. Section III addresses key achievements and challenges in the twelve critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action grouped into six dimensions pertinent to the 2030 Agenda to accentuate the linkages between these frameworks. Section IV summarizes trends with respect to the collection and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics and Section V details emerging issues and future priorities.
4. The report highlights the priorities for advancing gender equality in the region, stressing specific achievements and key elements of best practice in areas such as the further development of legal and policy frameworks, the financial and human resource capacity to ensure the implementation and cooperative engagement with and support to civil society organizations. It also identifies common challenges across the region, and within specific subregions, as well as concrete setbacks.
5. The findings are based on the information obtained from the national reports for the Beijing +30 review, unless otherwise indicated. The report evaluates progress in light of international and regional standards. In addition to the mutually reinforcing aspects between the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs, it highlights the role of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
6. This report provides selected examples of country laws and policies. A more comprehensive review of information per country is detailed in the national responses.¹

II. Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks since 2019

A. Priorities and achievements

7. Countries have prioritized three main areas for accelerating progress for women and girls: eliminating violence against women; economic rights of women, including right to work and rights at work; and political participation and representation.
8. As emphasized in the last Regional Synthesis Report, efforts to combat violence against women reflect the impetus generated by the Council of Europe (CoE) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in driving many States' commitment on gender-based violence (GBV), and in establishing clear and measurable standards. The Convention establishes a comprehensive framework of legal and policy measures, supporting survivors and punishing perpetrators. Progress was sustained in this reporting period. 45 ECE members and the European Union have signed or ratified the Convention. Others engaged in more limited legislative reforms toward harmonization.

¹ Available at: <https://unece.org/gender/events/beijing30-regional-review-meeting>.

9. Preventing and responding to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (e.g., online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate visual material) has become a relevant area of legal and policy concern. Attention to sexual harassment at workplaces and in public and educational spaces has increased. Some countries use advanced technology and artificial intelligence (AI) to prevent or address gender-based violence and gender inequality.

10. Women's economic empowerment, the right to work and rights at work remain a priority, yet progress has been limited. Efforts in numerous countries focus on pay equity and active labour market policies. Improvements in low-wage sectors, including minimum wage regulations, have positively impacted women. Countries that introduced dedicated financial programs for women entrepreneurs report an increase in self-employment and a rise of women-led SMEs. Efforts are also undertaken to increase the number of women choosing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies.

11. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the relevance of unpaid and paid care work. Policies for work-family reconciliation, care services, the recognition of unpaid and remuneration of paid care work and its redistribution between women and men are being further developed in many countries.

12. Some progress was sustained in the participation and representation of women in all areas of decision-making. Several countries report increased women's political participation at the national level, but the trend is not unanimous. A few countries apply, or are debating, the application of quotas or other temporary measures to enhance political representation of women.

13. Mechanisms for women's participation in economic decision-making bodies have been further developed, mainly at enterprise level. Progress was achieved particularly in European Union (EU) member states who are transposing the EU Directive on balancing the gender distribution of members of the management bodies of listed companies (EU 2022/2381).

14. Some countries bolstered their legal and institutional frameworks for gender equality, including through improving national capacity for gender mainstreaming and applying tools such as gender-responsive budgeting and intersectional analysis. Civil society's contribution to progress toward gender equality is recognized in numerous countries.

B. Challenges and setbacks

15. Throughout the ECE region, the confluence of different crises has negatively affected the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). Member States have taken a wide range of measures to prevent and mitigate the impacts.

16. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp dislocation of labour markets, leading to unemployment and negatively affecting poverty reduction. The pandemic highlighted the centrality of care, while leading to an increase in workplace violence in the health and care workforce. The gender gap in providing care widened, particularly where care and education institutions were closed. While paid care work (overwhelmingly done by women) was considered 'essential' in the fight against the pandemic, its pay and working conditions in the care sector have not improved sustainably.

17. Efforts to promote gender equality in the region are negatively affected by military conflict, including Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Numerous documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence highlight the urgent need for judicial responses and comprehensive survivor support, including access to lifesaving health services. Displacement and refugee flows exacerbate the vulnerability of women and girls, who face increased risks of exploitation and abuse in transit and within refugee camps. Addressing gender-specific needs requires dedicated financial commitments, enhanced preparedness, and strengthened implementation capacities to ensure that the unique challenges faced by women and girls in conflict zones are effectively met.

18. Several countries report ongoing debates around gender equality policies. Opposition to gender equality, including the expansion of individual rights and empowerment of women and girls and sexual/gender minorities has slowed progress. Support for civil society

engagement for women's rights and collaboration of state actors with civil society groups has diminished in some countries.

19. Environmental protection and climate change, alongside efforts to steer a gender-sensitive socio-ecological transformation, are areas with limited advances across the region. A few countries have expanded gender mainstreaming in environmental policies, but progress overall has been too limited. ECE-supported Environmental Performance Reviews² indicate the need to address gender issues in water and sanitation, land resources, access to energy or environmental risk management. Women's participation and leadership in environmental and climate change policies continue to be constrained by their poor representation in STEM professions.

20. In many countries, the implementation of the BPfA has been affected by fiscal consolidation, yet very few countries conduct assessments on the gender impact of austerity and develop targeted responses.

21. A fundamental challenge lies in combating violence against women through the effective implementation of internationally recognized standards for protection, response and access to services and justice for survivors. Limited resources for the expansion of services, the lack of capacity of front-line actors, as well as persistent patriarchal attitudes and traditional gendered social norms impede the application of a survivor-centered, gender-sensitive approach.

22. Institutional conditions for the advancement of women and girls remain weak. Gender equality machineries are underfunded in several countries and lack clear mandates and human capacity. Some are marginalized within government structures and have insufficient political support.

23. Despite increased recognition of their importance, the application of fundamental tools for women's advancement, such as gender mainstreaming, the application of temporary special measures, gender-responsive budgeting and gender impact assessments across the region remains uneven.

24. Progress in women's political participation is unequal. Participation remains particularly low at the local level in numerous countries and is negatively impacted by women's disproportionate unpaid workload and care responsibilities. Violence against women in politics and in public life representatives or candidates, including online violence and harassment, is widespread.

III. Progress across the twelve critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action since 2014

25. Progress in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern³ of the Beijing Platform for Action encapsulates advances in the achievement of SDG 5 – gender equality—and cuts across the other SDGs with gender-specific targets. To highlight the alignment of the two frameworks—the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Beijing Platform for Action—achievements and challenges in progress towards gender equality are addressed in six overarching dimensions, resonating the importance of the systemic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in sustainable development for all.⁴

A. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

² See <https://unece.org/gender-mainstreaming-environmental-performance-reviews>

³ The 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action include: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl child.

⁴ For more information on the links between the 12 critical areas of concern and the six dimensions see the Guidance Note.

26. Women's economic situation and equality between women and men in all their diversity are critical for sustainable development and shared prosperity. Reflecting the priority assigned to economic rights, prosperity and decent work, member states are implementing a variety of policies and programmes. Women's employment participation is promoted as a prerequisite for gender equitable and inclusive growth. Pay equity and equal access to career opportunities are among the top shared priorities in ECE countries. Also, countries are addressing the opportunities and challenges of digitalization in the world of work.

Achievements

27. Diverse measures, including active labour market policies, are implemented in several member states to incentivize women's workforce participation (e.g., Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Romania Russian Federation). In many countries, women's employment rate has fluctuated over the reporting period, often as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specific programmes are dedicated to foster female entrepreneurship (e.g., Azerbaijan, Armenia, Italy, Latvia, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Romania, Spain).

28. Horizontal and vertical segregation still characterize labour markets. Segregation is an effect of choices and structures in education and skills development. To different degrees, women in the region continue to be overrepresented in lower-paying services and care sectors and underrepresented in higher paying jobs and STEM. Member States are engaging in policies to enhance opportunities for women and improve pay and working conditions of predominantly female employment, including care services. Measures include training and opportunities for women to enter middle- and high-skilled occupations, as well as wage increases and improved working conditions.

29. Several countries are combining the promotion of women's economic empowerment with gender-responsive policies in the fields of STEM, environment and energy, thereby advancing gender mainstreaming in social-ecological transformations (e.g., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Moldova, Romania).

30. Countries continue focusing on work-life balance and the fact that family/care responsibilities are a key obstacle to women's labour force participation. Measures include expanding leave entitlements for employees with care responsibilities, equalizing of parental leave entitlements for women and men (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Spain, Sweden), the extension of maternity leave (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Greece, the Netherlands). Self-employed women and entrepreneurs have been included in maternity and parental leave entitlements in some countries (e.g., Cyprus, Greece, Hungary). Also, many countries are dedicating attention to the expansion of childcare services (e.g., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Moldova).

31. Promoting or supporting men's role in care has become more common. Paternity leave was introduced or extended in several countries (e.g., Albania, Armenia, Belgium, Canada, Ukraine), parental leave made accessible to fathers (Georgia), and a portion of the parental leave reserved for the other parent in some countries.

In Denmark, the parental leave is by default equally split, with 24 weeks for each parent, 11 of which are earmarked and non-transferrable between them. New legislation provides better possibilities for diverse family forms to share parental leave.

32. Several member States allow adjusting working time and workplaces to the needs of persons with care responsibilities, including through remote work or compressed work weeks (e.g., Iceland, Canada, Sweden, Finland). Some of these measures have been carried over from the COVID-19 pandemic.

33. Countries have adopted laws and measures to address the persistent gender pay gap. Enhancing transparency and information about pay structures has become a central focus, particularly for EU member states who are in the process of transposing Directive 2023/970 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal

value between men and women. Measures include obligatory reporting for the private sector concerning gender equality and pay levels.

In France, since 2019, companies have been required to calculate and publish an annual gender equality index, measuring the equality of wage levels, equal access to promotions and pay raises, and the proportion of women in the highest salaries. If the score is below 75 points out of 100, the company has three years to implement a corrective plan. If the score is still lower after this period, a fine is imposed.

34. Several countries are supporting women entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized businesses through credit lines and training programs on business-specific skills and knowledge. A few countries have introduced criteria promoting gender equality and prohibiting discrimination in the allocation of funds for small and medium-sized enterprise development (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Iceland, Moldova, the Netherlands).

35. Some countries have expanded support and incentives for enterprises led by women or those where at least half of the top managerial positions are held by women. A few have launched campaigns encouraging businesses to hire more women and prioritize female leadership (e.g., Albania, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Republic of Moldova).

Challenges

36. Despite the attention dedicated to women's economic rights and poverty reduction, women's financial independence remains elusive: In the EU, an estimated 21% of women in couples aged 18-64 in 2019 lived with a partner who is the single earner, compared to 6% of men in this position.⁵ Active employment does not always guarantee a decent standard of living for women in the region, for example when earnings are too low to rise above poverty levels.

37. Women continue to be overrepresented in insecure, precarious or informal employment. Such work is characterized by low remuneration, poor working conditions and limited access to social protection. Women in precarious employment face a double penalty, receiving lower wages than workers in regular and well-recognized employment, and lower wages than men in those sectors.

38. While the gender pay gap is acknowledged, few outside of the EU have taken concrete measures to reduce it. Where measures have been implemented, progress was limited. Only limited policy attention focuses on the more pronounced gender pay gaps in health and care jobs, or gaps in lifetime earnings, a key factor for old age women's poverty.

39. Labour markets continue to reproduce gender inequalities, and the structures of horizontal and vertical segregation have proven persistent despite interventions. More women have entered STEM over the years, especially as post-secondary qualification holders in sciences and science technology, but they remain vastly underrepresented. Women also remain concentrated in early childhood education and the service sector (e.g., Albania, Belarus, Canada, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova).

40. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the unequal gendered division of unpaid and care labour in private households that holds women back economically.⁶ Under the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, unpaid care work increased, leading to an even greater workload of women and girls, with disproportionate health consequences.

41. Economic equality and the closing of gender gaps in lifetime income are also dependent on the share of capital income in total income, a topic that few countries collect data and conduct gender-aware analyses. In Sweden, for example, data show that the average gender gap in capital income is larger than in earned income. There are also gender differences in entrepreneurship income and in women's and men's ability to benefit from tax rules.

⁵ Source: <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/financial-independence-and-gender-equality.pdf>

⁶ See the UNECE publications on Care Economy and Pandemic.

B. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

42. Poverty eradication is intertwined with social protection and social services, including access to financial services. Equality of access to and the attainment of educational qualifications and equitable health services, including reproductive health services, are necessary for empowering women in all areas of their lives.

43. The interlocking crises and shocks of the past years have posed severe challenges to poverty eradication in the region, including the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical tensions and wars, and climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.

Achievements

44. Important efforts and resources are dedicated to social protection and social services in member States, including investment in equitable, high quality and accessible public services and benefits, with the goal of greater gender equality. Social protection benefits or services provide enhanced support especially to single mothers, women with disabilities, ethnic minorities and refugee/ internally displaced persons (IDP) groups, among others. Some countries have further developed tax policies for social protection purposes (e.g., tax exemptions for single parents in Denmark, working mothers with young children in Spain, or families with many children in Hungary).

45. Efforts to expand access to affordable childcare services continue in many countries in the region. Only few countries boast a legal entitlement to childcare or offer care free of charge.

46. Countries have advanced the development of digitally-supported social service provision.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy has created an electronic case management system to ensure a systematic approach to organizing social services. The system facilitates the collection and management of data on providers and recipients of social services.

47. Several member States have focused successfully on expanding policies on old age women, such as closing the gender pensions gap (e.g., through accounting for gender-specific employment patterns), minimum pensions, services, as well as benefits and support for those providing elderly care.

The Elderly Care Initiative in Sweden supports municipalities to strengthen skills in municipally funded health and social care for old age persons. New and existing staff, mostly women as they constitute 90% of the workforce, undergo skills training in the interest of enhanced quality and safety of care for old age persons.

48. Reproductive and maternal health have been strengthened in numerous countries, including cancer prevention and care. The access of previously excluded or marginalized groups (such as ethnic minorities, refugee or IDP groups, women with disabilities, among others) to comprehensive health services was improved in some countries (e.g., Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Greece, Romania). Access to contraception improved (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Iceland, Tajikistan), as have access and take-up of HPV vaccination in numerous countries through dedicated outreach and public information campaigns (e.g., Albania, Denmark, Hungary, Italy).

49. In education, in many countries focus on including more women in STEM, including through special initiatives, career guidance or financial incentives, as measures to address discriminatory stereotypes and facilitate women's access to higher paid labour market segments (e.g., Belgium, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Romania, Spain, Ukraine).

In Belgium, the “Women in Digital Strategy 2021-2026” combats prejudices and structural barriers to women's participation in the digital world. Its five pillars are: ensuring that more women graduate in the digital sector; promote the inclusion of all women; encourage the retention of women in the digital sector; construct new images and eliminate the gender gap in specific target groups.

50. Measures in education have also focused on integrating sexuality education, reproductive health and family planning into curricula (e.g., Albania, Cyprus, Belgium, Denmark, Netherlands). In some countries, GBV prevention is integrated in the education system.

Challenges

51. Women, especially single older women, still experience higher poverty rates than men, despite some positive developments in individual countries. Women’s poverty is caused by lacking economic opportunities and access to economic resources, education and services, and low levels of participation in decision-making. Households with children, especially single mothers with children, face a higher risk of poverty across the region.

52. Additional efforts are necessary to expand fiscal space and strengthen institutions to end women’s poverty. Women in many countries are still overrepresented among those who are excluded from social protection based on individual entitlements, and gender-specific vulnerabilities are not evenly addressed in social protection systems.

53. Care work sustains economies and societies but is undervalued and unequally distributed. It remains a central obstacle to women’s access to decent work and economic resources and a key reason for women’s poverty. Numerous countries in the region are experiencing a crisis of care, so that quality care services are not always available and affordable, and there is an unfilled demand for care workers. Population aging poses additional challenges. Increased public investment to reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women and to ensure access to high quality early childhood education and care services can be important levers.

54. Access to contraception and reproductive health services throughout the life cycle, including for termination of pregnancies and for oncological screening, as well as health support during perimenopause and menopause continue to be limited, in particular for specific groups.

C. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

55. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant obstacle to achieving full and effective equality between women and men. Countries are recognizing the interlinkages between violence, stigma and stereotypes, requiring holistic responses. All countries are prioritizing legal and policy measures addressing GBV in the public as well as the domestic context, including human trafficking.

Achievements

56. Most countries focus their efforts on three main types of violence: intimate partner/ domestic violence, sexual harassment and digital violence.

57. The Istanbul Convention has provided a framework for legal and policy development, including coordination of responses, protection, and support systems, data collection and capacity development. 45 states and the European Union have signed or ratified the Istanbul Convention, but harmonization is happening also in countries that are not Council of Europe (CoE) members.

58. Legal progress on GBV included expanded protection in relation to intimate partners irrespective of cohabitation (e.g., Denmark, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Romania), cooperation of different institutions (e.g., police, prosecutor, judiciary), and protocols on the rights

protection of victims in investigations and judicial proceedings (e.g., Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine).

59. Countries have continued action on sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings and workplaces, and have focused on capacity-building of first responders and service providers, including non-governmental actors. Cooperation with civil society remains crucial for response and service provision (e.g., Albania, Andorra, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Finland).

In Armenia, amendments to the Labour Code have strengthened the prohibition of violence against employees by explicitly including sexual harassment.

Legislative reform in Finland has introduced tougher responses to sexual offenses, including for sexual harassment committed through acts other than touching.

In Kazakhstan, tougher penalties for convicted perpetrators have been introduced and the option of seeking “reconciliation” between partners has been eliminated.

60. Countries have introduced or strengthened services for survivors of violence (e.g. shelters, help lines, dedicated health/ legal services, counselling, housing, socioeconomic rehabilitation). Good practice examples include programmes to enhance economic independence of survivors, including through entrepreneurship support or dedicated credit lines.

61. Combatting harmful practices is a priority, targeting female genital mutilation (FGM), so-called “honour killings”, child and forced marriage as forms of violence.

The Swedish Migration Agency has made an effort to detect cases of violence, combat and prevent female genital mutilation. Key groups have been trained, including employees in housing, reception, asylum case officers and other service staff, relying on online training courses, as well as filmed lectures on honour-based violence and FGM in Sweden and abroad.

62. Action against femicide as extreme form of gender violence is a priority in several countries, focusing on dedicated legislation and prevention, including through improved data (e.g. Denmark).

Belgium has adopted a comprehensive law containing concrete instruments to fight femicide/gender-based homicide. The Stop Féminicide Law includes the creation of a Scientific Committee which studies feminicides, homicides based on gender and publishes evidence-based recommendations for response and prevention.

63. Most countries address new forms of violence such as stalking, grooming, sextortion, psychological violence, technology-facilitated violence and sexual harassment through proactive responses and victim support. Public awareness campaigns are the most common prevention strategy. Some countries have perpetrator programmes and address inter-generational violence.

64. Greater attention is paid to digital dimensions of GBV and to the potential of digitally-supported prevention and responses. For example, stalking is increasingly recognised as an indicator preceding intimate partner killings, with digital developments and social media allowing for new possibilities for digital stalking. Professionals in the social and health sector are better trained and have tools related to digital violence, especially targeting younger populations.

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare published an online training on digital violence, which was aimed at larger public, especially students from social and healthcare sectors, to help identifying the different forms of digital violence and the complexity of the phenomenon.

In Spain, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies automatically monitor and flag for removal digital content that is violent or threatening toward women and girls.

65. Numerous countries have strengthened institutional coordination mechanisms at the national and local level (e.g. Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Spain) and/or

increased budgets and human resources, including for improved the scope and quality of services provided to victims of GBV and data collection practices (e.g., Armenia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy). Authorities collaborate more closely, and monitoring of actions is promoted at the highest political level.

Bosnia and Herzegovina supported the establishment and development of municipal multisectoral teams and cantonal coordination bodies to strengthen implementation of the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence and institutional cooperation, including at cantonal level.

66. Many countries advanced their efforts to counter trafficking in persons, including by improvements to monitoring teams, strengthening functional links between relevant governmental authorities and civil society - in line with the whole of government and whole of society principles in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration - to better identify those most at risk (e.g., Bosnia and Herzegovina), advancing outreach within particular sectors such as prostitution (e.g., Cyprus, Netherlands), and enhancing support for survivors including children (e.g., Denmark, Greece, Romania).

67. Gender stereotypes persist broadly, to different degrees, across the whole region. One-off trainings or campaigns are viewed as insufficient. Some countries have committed to fighting stereotypes through long-term, continuous efforts in different areas of the society, including in the education system, focusing on educational/ professional choices as well as the essential role of consent in non-violent sexual interactions.

68. Countries are increasingly recognising the importance of intersectional approaches in combatting GBV, e.g., by including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities, women with disabilities or from vulnerable groups and minorities.

Challenges

69. GBV has not declined significantly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in GBV, and states' responses were inadequate. Many women and children faced domestic violence during lockdowns. Military conflicts have led to a rise of conflict-related sexual violence as well as general increases of GBV due to increased stress.

70. Numerous countries still have inadequate legal frameworks on GBV. Six Council of Europe member States have signed but not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention, Azerbaijan has neither signed nor ratified, Türkiye has denounced. Most countries still lack legal norms on digital violence. Often, definitions are inadequate or non-existent, for example on violence in public spaces and workplaces. The definition of rape in many countries is still based on the use of force or threats by the perpetrator rather than lack of consent.

71. Challenges also remain regarding the application of standards, including in the judiciary, the provision of services to survivors, and the persistence of stereotypes and social/cultural norms. Diversification and extension of services for survivors is needed and prevention is underdeveloped.

72. Despite improvements, the continued lack of data hinders evidence-based policy-making and public discourse on GBV. In several countries, the advancement of laws and policies on GBV, including the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, faces public resistance and budgetary constraints.

73. Girls face diverse forms of GBV in education institutions, including verbal harassment, sexual harassment and abuse, corporal punishment, stalking, cyber-harassment and bullying. Efforts to address the gendered nature of sexual harassment and other forms of violence in schools are most developed in EU members.

D. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

74. Women's equal participation in public life and decision-making within the governmental and the private sectors, and their access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media are essential for equitable sustainable development.

75. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women call for a central policy coordination unit within government with a mandate to promote gender equality, the empowerment of women and support mainstreaming gender.⁷ The effective implementation of the Platform of Action and SDGs relies on laws and policies on gender equality, a gender equality machinery, and processes such as gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting, gender impact assessments, temporary special measures and tracking gender as a component of official development assistance (ODA).

Achievements

76. Women's participation in decision-making continues to be a priority. Several countries report progress on strengthening gender equality policies and machineries in order to institutionalize gender mainstreaming. Almost all countries have national-level policies/strategies on the advancement of gender equality. A few countries developed local-level strategies. Some governments and national parliaments have, to varying degrees, established norms and mechanisms to prevent and tackle violence against women politicians.

77. Important achievements were made with respect to women's political participation at the national level, including as members of government and in parliaments (e.g., Belarus, Finland, Moldova, Tajikistan). Women's parliamentary participation is above 40 per cent in a number of countries (e.g., Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Sweden), but remains below 30 per cent in others (e.g., Hungary, Romania, Kazakhstan).

78. Closing the digital divide and ensuring women's access to the benefits of digitalization have become more important. Initiatives encompass capacity development and education, entrepreneurship development, e-governance, non-discriminatory AI, among others.

"Women in Digital" is a declaration from the European Commission aiming to increase women's participation in the digital sector, signed by all EU member states plus Norway. The declaration calls for national strategies for women's digital participation and more active role in the digital age. The strategy focuses on three areas: 1) promoting digital skills and education, 2) challenging digital gender stereotypes, 3) advocating for more women in the digital world.

79. A few countries achieved progress in planning and implementing gender-responsive economic and fiscal policies. Some countries have integrated the advancement of women into programmes responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery (e.g., Canada, Iceland, Albania, Sweden, Italy). The EU Post-COVID 19 Recovery and Resilience Facility Fund sought to motivate member States to include promotion of gender equality in their economic recovery plans.

80. Some countries in the region have implemented or are considering temporary special measures, to ensure a level of representation by both men and women in political bodies at national and local levels. A few countries adopted quotas, predominantly on electoral lists. Several EU countries have quotas to raise women's representation on executive boards of companies listed on public exchanges (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Italy, Canada), which are measures transposing EU Directive 2022/2381 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies.

The Law on Election of Bosnia and Herzegovina contains a quota for the underrepresented sex. It prescribes a minimum of 40 per cent and a mandatory ranking rule. The Central Election Commission can reject any candidate list that has not been drawn up in accordance with that rule.

81. Women have achieved parity in several EU countries as presidents and board members in public broadcasting, but are under-represented as executives in this field, with few exceptions. In several countries, media authorities have developed internal regulations

⁷ See Critical Area of Concern "H" of the Platform for Action.

on gender equality. Media or advertising laws also prohibit discriminatory images and messaging based on gender.

82. Women are highly represented within the judicial branch (e.g., in Albania, Latvia, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan). Usually, there are more women at lower instance courts and family courts.

83. Efforts to strengthen the authority, resource base and technical expertise of national mechanisms for gender equality have continued. Countries have engaged in a range of capacity development programmes to strengthen national machineries and foster collaboration between stakeholders. The establishment of gender units within various government departments (e.g., Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Greece, Italy) and the appointment of gender coordinators and commissioners at national and regional levels (e.g., Azerbaijan, Belarus, Iceland, Romania, Ukraine) have been the most widespread strategies to ensure that gender considerations are systematically incorporated into the decision-making processes of government bodies.

84. Of those countries that provide ODA, some dedicated a significant proportion to gender equality and are committed to monitoring financial allocations (e.g., Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Spain, Sweden.).

Challenges

85. The generalized challenges of the reporting period, including the COVID-19 pandemic as well as widespread public violence against women in positions of decision-making have contributed to stalling and partial reversal of achievements. Some countries report a hostile public environment with respect to women's rights and gender equality.

86. Women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political decision-making as well as in political parties. Women's political participation at the local level remains particularly low in some countries. Violence against women in the political arena is a serious obstacle to political participation. It takes multiple forms, from physical attacks to psychological and symbolic abuse, including sexual and sexist comments, online hate speech and sexual harassment.

87. Many countries in the region have adopted quotas or other temporary special measures to increase women's participation. However, there is no consistent monitoring of implementation.

88. Women's participation in economic institutions is essential to combat gender bias and stereotypes. Yet, due to structural barriers women are often not represented in leadership roles in economic policymaking. Decision-making bodies often have limited capacity to analyse the gender impacts, are the least likely to have gender equality specialists available in-house and tend to have the lowest presence of women overall.

89. Resources and governmental support for national gender equality machineries are often insufficient. Gender equality policies and action plans are rarely effectively costed and budgeted. In a few countries, gender equality bodies were transferred from one authority to another, sometimes multiple times, during the reporting period, disrupting progress and institutional memory. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in sectoral ministries and public agencies continues to be a challenge, especially at local level. There is a risk that the emphasis on GBV limits resources for other policy areas.

90. Changes in the legal framework and gaps in financing for women's organizations limit their active engagement in policy development and in strengthening accountability. Women's participation in decision-making in the private sector continues to lag behind men's, in particular in managerial roles and on the boards of private companies.

91. Gender-responsive budgeting and gender impact assessments are not widespread in the region. In the context of multiple crises, political commitment has been difficult to uphold, and experiences are not well documented. Some countries have included capacity development for gender-responsive budgeting in the national strategies.

Ukraine has introduced gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) to ensure that budget allocations address gender inequalities. The Ministry of Finance has issued Guidelines for integrating gender perspectives into the budgeting process. Additionally, gender audits have been conducted in 2022 across all central executive agencies to assess the effectiveness of gender policies and identify areas for improvement.

E. Peaceful and inclusive societies

92. Women and girls, as civilians, often suffer human rights violations during conflicts, experience gender-specific crimes due to war, violent conflict, terrorism, and violent extremism. At the same time, women play a crucial role in conflict resolution, contributing to sustainable and resilient peace. The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda emphasizes that involving women in creating and preserving peace and in decision-making at all levels are necessary. Conflict prevention, peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction are acknowledged as women's human rights. Sexual and gender-based violence must be systematically prevented and punished.

93. ECE member States are actively engaged in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, including enhancing women's representation in military and security services, training of military and police personnel, those deployed on overseas missions, consideration of gender-specific needs in asylum, and in ODA financing for the WPS agenda. 48 of them have adopted National Action Plans on WPS.

Achievements

94. Countries have established inter-institutional coordination committees to supervise the implementation of WPS Action Plans. A more systemic introduction of the principle of gender equality in the work of the defence and security sector institutions was achieved. Gender equality trainings were included in regular training programs, networks of gender focal points appointed, and data collection improved. Women's interest in the military and police as professional options has increased, although to different degrees across countries. Civilian crisis management has promoted women's participation in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

95. Numerous countries provide training on gender equality and gender-based violence to military and diplomatic staff, and to those deploying on overseas missions. Training and guidelines on preventing gender-related persecution are systematically provided to the staff working with asylum services in a few countries (e.g., Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Republic of Moldova).

96. Participation of women in peacebuilding and reconstruction processes are called for, as well as assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Programmes support women and girls forcibly displaced from their homes, including through counselling, psychological and social support, and basic necessities and hygiene kits in refugee-receiving countries.

97. Many countries have established a mechanism for early identification of women asylum-seekers' specific needs, supported by properly trained female officers and interpreters. Some countries report progress regarding women migrants and refugees' access to healthcare, social welfare services and employment integration for women migrants. (e.g., Belgium, Greece, Italy, Republic of Moldova, Romania).

98. A relevant share of donor support for women's participation in peacebuilding is channelled through development cooperation, including in partnership with multilateral organisations, such as UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF and others (e.g., Canada, Iceland and Finland).

Challenges

99. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of women's role in peace and security, institutional support and resources remain inadequate to equally integrate women into conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

100. Women continue to be significantly under-represented in decision-making positions within diplomatic and military sectors. This disparity is particularly pronounced in countries directly affected by conflict, where women's voices and perspectives are crucial but often marginalized.

101. Despite efforts to build skills, establish networks, and develop national policies, the implementation of the WPS agenda across the region remains sluggish.

F. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

102. Environmental degradation and climate change have gender-differentiated impacts, especially in vulnerable communities, including displacement, income disruption, increased unpaid labour, and adverse health effects. Climate change disproportionately affects women due to their roles as primary caregivers, water and food providers, and their reliance on natural resources. Women experience increased workloads, food insecurity, and displacement during climate-related disasters.

Achievements

103. Progress in integrating a gender equality perspective in environmental protection, climate change, and disaster risk management has been limited. Some countries have adopted Gender Action Plans under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (e.g., Albania, Belgium, Canada), while others have integrated gender-sensitive measures in the National Plans on Climate and Environment (e.g., Spain).

104. Few countries have made efforts to enhance women's participation and leadership in environment-related enterprises, particularly within the renewable energy, deforestation and climate-technology sectors, empowering women to drive innovation and sustainability. Women are involved in raising awareness and training projects (e.g., Moldova, Iceland, Canada).

Women of indigenous communities in Canada are at the forefront of climate-related programs. For example, the Nunavut Climate Change Youth Advisory Committee is made up of seven women and two men. A growing number of women are graduating from the Nunavut Arctic College's Environmental Technology Program.

105. Countries affected by environmental disasters have become more proactive addressing the unique needs of women and girls in the aftermath. Recognizing women's and girls' vulnerability, provisions were implemented to ensure their safety, well-being, and inclusion in the recovery process (e.g., Armenia, Azerbaijan, Canada, Iceland, Türkiye, Ukraine).

106. A few countries have focused on improving access to clean water and sanitation by modernizing water supply and sanitation services and designing improvements in access to basic infrastructure for residents of rural and remote areas, including women and girls.

107. Very few countries have focused on intersectional climate-related data collection, including qualitative and quantitative data for policy creation (e.g., Albania and Canada).

Challenges

108. Challenges faced by women and marginalized groups remain unaddressed. The lack of comprehensive gender-disaggregated and intersectional data raises significant difficulties for the effective implementation of international agreements and policy agendas on climate change and the environment.

109. Women are underrepresented in decision-making bodies on environmental protection and climate change. In some countries, women face specific barriers in accessing resources such as land, credit, and technology necessary for effective participation in environmental initiatives or disaster risk management, thereby limiting their influence on policymaking and

implementation, and perpetuating gender disparities in resource allocation and disaster response planning.

110. Deep-rooted harmful social norms and socioeconomic factors restrict women's agency and decision-making power in environmental and disaster management contexts. Discriminatory practices, limited education opportunities, and restrictive gender roles prevent women from fully participating in community resilience-building or from accessing leadership roles in environmental policymaking.

111. No progress is reported on the allocation of necessary budgets and necessary political prioritisation of gender equality in climate change adaptation and mitigation. References to the need to protect, respect and promote women's rights in environmental and climate policy remain marginal in national reports.

IV. Data and statistics

112. The collection, analysis and dissemination of robust and sex-disaggregated data is fundamental for evidence-based policymaking to advance gender equality. Transparency and access to data and information facilitates policy debate and opens space for civil society dialogue.

Achievements

113. Many countries report progress in the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics. Gender-sensitive indicators are more systematically calculated and applied to policy making. Dedicated expert bodies or working groups on the development of gender statistics have been appointed in many countries. National practices and experiences differ with respect to the systematic use of indicators for policymaking and monitoring. Progress has been more limited for data collection and use at the local (as opposed to the national) level.

114. Data dissemination is improved through data portals, internet applications and printed publications, stakeholder participation and parliamentary oversight (e.g., Albania, Azerbaijan, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Latvia).

The Disaggregated Data Action Plan (DDAP) led by Statistics Canada supports efforts to address inequalities and promote fair and inclusive decision making. Studies conducted during 2022/2023 examined trends in pay gaps and educational and economic outcomes of lesbian, gay and bisexual people from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, among other topics. DDAP-funded research improved sampling for better representation of diverse population groups.

115. Most countries report progress in the nationalization of SDGs into national strategic planning processes by establishing national frameworks of SDG indicators. SDG 5, as well as other gender related targets, are being addressed.

116. Statistical surveys in most countries provide disaggregation by sex, age, educational level and geographical location. Some countries report progress for enhanced disaggregation by ethnicity, disability status and immigrant background, as well as sexual orientation (e.g., Belgium, Canada, Greece, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden). Enhanced disaggregation allows for a more precise intersectional analysis of inequalities.

117. There has been continuous progress in the collection and analysis of data on GBV, partly as a consequence of the requirements of the Istanbul Convention. Dedicated reports on GBV are published regularly in numerous countries.

The Danish National Police collaborates with the Statistics Office to improve data on crime. Types of relationships between victim and perpetrator for specific types of crime (e.g., domestic violence and intimate partner violence) will be documented, and data about the age and nationality of the victims and perpetrators collected.

118. Composite indicators, e.g. the EU Gender Equality Index (GEI), facilitate public debate and evidence-based policymaking in EU member states. Some non-EU members are also moving toward the calculation of individual GEI domains (e.g., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Türkiye). Disaggregation requirements that come with international data coordination have increased data availability (e.g., European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) or European Health Interview Survey (EHIS)).

Challenges

119. Data limitations, including inadequate sex-disaggregated poverty data, continue to constrain policymaking and advocacy, in particular in some countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Despite reported progress, gaps in disaggregation on the basis of sex, age, residence, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity expression, civil status, employment, migrant, asylum seeker status persist, and in-depth data on the social, economic and legal situation is often lacking. There is no comprehensive data on violence against women in politics. Some countries remain unable to provide national data for specific gender-related indicators, such as unpaid work or the gender pay gap. The lack of data disaggregation is a primary concern considering the increasing demand for monitoring and reporting on the most vulnerable.

120. Additional efforts for data harmonization are called for, including with respect to GBV data, at both the national and international levels. The nationalization of SDG indicators for the purpose of SDG monitoring did not lead to improved data collection practices in the field of gender equality in many countries.

121. Time use surveys are an important tool for the promotion of gender equality in the world of work. The instrument is underutilized and has been discontinued in a number of countries, reflecting limited technical capacity, lack of financing for collection and analysis of data, and insufficient political will. In other surveys, it may be necessary to increase sample sizes to draw statistically significant conclusions on gender differences in smaller groups of the population.

V. Emerging issues and future priorities

122. Policy choices aimed at accelerating progress towards ending poverty and achieving inclusive, sustainable development for all are possible. Accomplishing those goals requires investment in comprehensive economic and social policies aimed at driving women's full participation and gender equality, supported by accountable institutions and mechanisms, including gender budgeting, and in women's health, including sexual and reproductive health.

123. Greater emphasis on women's economic empowerment and independence is urgent, including attention to economic violence in its diverse forms. Expanding effective work-family reconciliation leave and benefits and providing access to high-quality care services remain key. It is necessary to balance policies supporting women in the family context with policies addressing women and girls' individual economic and social rights.

124. Tackling gendered stereotypes that hinder women's and girls' progress remains a priority. Gendered stereotypes underlie gender-based violence and affect all areas of life, including educational choices, labour market success, economic empowerment, and political participation. Policy dialogue about experiences and good practices to address the negative impacts of stereotypes, especially in younger generations, is necessary. A few countries are developing policy action engaging with men and boys as actors for gender equality (e.g., Albania, Denmark, Iceland, Latvia, Sweden).

125. Capitalizing on the promises of digitalization, including the potential of artificial intelligence, and addressing its potentially negative gender impacts has emerged as a topic requiring greater attention. Especially the interconnection between digitalization and GBV, in the form of direct threats, cyber-stalking, trolling, and the distribution of intimate images,

calls for comprehensive cross-sectoral responses, including in the fields of education, criminal justice and media.

126. Far too limited progress has been achieved on the integration of a gender perspective to environmental protection, climate change and disaster-risk management. The gender-differentiated impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are becoming ever more visible in the ECE region, as well as globally, thus underlining the urgency of action. In some member States, the immediate gendered impacts of climate change are compounded by women's unequal access to land, natural resources such as water, and other assets.

127. Mainstreaming a gender equality perspective and ensuring women's active participation in conflict prevention and resolution is necessary to simultaneously ensure national and regional peace and stability. Including ensuring inclusive and transparent development, budgeting and monitoring of National Action Plans on UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

128. Applying lessons from effective gender mainstreaming and ensuring their regional dissemination remain crucial, including learning from the collaboration of different governmental bodies, the development of intersectional approaches, international cooperation, and the engagement with civil society.

129. Advancing gender equality must remain a bold and unwavering priority, especially given ongoing and emerging challenges. Ensuring that the progress achieved is not only maintained but accelerated while preventing any regression in women's rights and gender equality, is imperative. This requires a strong commitment to enforcing and improving existing gender equality frameworks, alongside innovative policymaking and appropriate resource allocation that recognize the critical importance of gender equality for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
