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Accelerating women's economic empowerment: the path to peaceful, just and inclusive societies**Investing in women's economic empowerment: The path to inclusive, peaceful, prosperous and sustainable societies in the Economic Commission for Europe region****Note by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)****Summary*

This note provides a review of progress made by the 56 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in investing in women's economic empowerment (WEE) as a path to inclusive, peaceful, prosperous and resilient societies. The report covers two of the twelve critical areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA): Women and Poverty, and Women and the Economy. It presents the current situation, progress, and challenges in these areas and proposes actions for continued progress. The results indicate progress in several areas of WEE.

Notable efforts have been made in the economic rights and autonomy of women, promoting decent employment, supporting women's entrepreneurship, enhancing women's digital skills and supporting their participation in STEM education and careers. Additionally, reforms in parental policies and improvements in family care support services have been implemented. To a certain extent, policies and measures addressing poverty and providing various social protection schemes and services have also improved.

Governments are increasingly applying gender mainstreaming in policies, and the number of countries adopting and implementing gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) and other forms of financing for gender equality is growing. However, multiple crises since Beijing +25, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, regional conflicts leading to large population displacement, political instabilities such as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and other conflicts in the region, the rise of authoritarian and populist tendencies, and strengthening of backlash against women's rights, together with climate change-related adversities and natural disasters have undermined achievements, limiting opportunities for transformative changes and sometimes causing setbacks.

Support for civil society, particularly partnerships with women's and feminist CSOs, has weakened, along with attentiveness to their needs and views on societal transformation for justice, prosperity and equity. Policy gaps persist, and some critical areas for WEE are not prioritized (e.g., access to property, infrastructure, transport, assets).

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline for technical reasons beyond the control of the submitting office.



Overall, despite evident efforts and positive processes, policies change slowly and remain predominantly accommodative rather than transformative. This review highlights persistent gender inequalities across key areas of concern.

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I. Introduction

1. This note provides a review of progress made by the 56 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in investing in the economic empowerment of women as a path to inclusive, peaceful, prosperous and resilient societies. The thematic scope of the report covers two of the twelve critical areas of concern of the BPfA: Women and Poverty and Women and the Economy. The review is based on the transformative understanding of WEE as ‘*collective process through which economic systems become just, equitable and prosperous, and all women enjoy their economic and social rights, exercise agency and power in ways that challenge inequalities and level the playing field, and gain equal rights and access to, ownership of and control over resources, assets, income, time and their own lives,*’ as defined in the recently adopted UN Women ‘Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy’¹. This understanding of WEE recognizes three critical elements of economic empowerment: (i) Agency, power and autonomy, (ii) Equal rights and access to, ownership of and control over resources, and (iii) Policies, norms and institutions that create an enabling environment. The note provides insights into achievements under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and relevant targets within other SDGs, particularly SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 10, and SDG 17. The report is prepared by the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia based on survey data and national reports submitted by member States for the 30th anniversary of the BPfA, civil society consultations and available data and literature. It serves as a background note on the issue for the regional meeting to review 30 years of progress in implementing the BPfA in the ECE region.

II. Main trends in ECE region

2. Positive trends are evident, but changes are generally slow, small in scale and fragmented. Despite the transformative potential of many interventions and initiatives, contemporary policies remain predominantly accommodative rather than transformative. Significant differences within and between countries across the region hinder synergistic effects and the spread of transformative processes. The only subregion showing more convergence in positive trends is the European Union (EU) and Western European non-EU countries, such as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. In other subregions, positive converging trends are less prominent. Consequently, gender inequalities remain prominent in all sectors and areas of life – economic participation, access to economic resources, allocation of responsibilities related to family care and unpaid domestic work, poverty and access to social protection.

A. Economic participation of women

3. Across the region, gender inequalities manifest as women's lesser participation in the market economy, gender segregation by sector and occupation, reduced opportunities to occupy decision-making positions and gender pay gaps.

(a) Gender gaps in economic participation (activity and employment) are consistently present across the region. There is no single country where women participate equally as men in the labour force; their activity and employment rates are systematically lower, and inactivity rates are higher.² The gender gap in employment is particularly pronounced in Türkiye (36.4 percentage points), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH; 25.3 percentage points), Greece (18.0 percentage points), Italy (17.9 percentage points), Romania (17.4 percentage points), Malta (13.8 percentage points) and Poland (10.9 percentage points).³ In Ukraine, while Russia’s full-scale invasion has pushed many women into the

¹ UN Women, [Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy](#), (2024).

² For EU and candidate countries see Eurostat, [Employment and activity by sex and age - annual data](#); for Western Balkans, Türkiye, Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries, see UN Women (2024), [A Snapshot of Gender and Poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region](#), p. 20.

³ Eurostat, [Employment and activity by sex and age - annual data](#).

labour force to compensate for the lack of male workforce, 2.4 million jobs have been lost,⁴ narrowing space for WEE. At the same time, many women refugees lost employment or left the labour market,⁵ creating pressure on labour markets and social insurance systems in host countries;

(b) Gender segregation by sector and occupation is profound and persistent. Women are often concentrated in low-paid care sectors, while men dominate STEM fields, leading to disparities in employment prospects, job quality, career development opportunities, and employment compensation and benefits. For example, in the EU, women make up 25.6 per cent of the ICT sector, with high variations between member States.⁶ In the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe, women's involvement in STEM education does not translate into strong participation in technology sectors;⁷

(c) Conversely, participation of men in care sectors and occupations is very low, except in the highest professional ranks of university professors or doctors, contributing to the growing care deficit in ageing societies across the region. Men make up 27.2 per cent of those employed in the education sector at EU level, and 21.9 per cent of the health and social work sectors.⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic placed a disproportionate responsibility for care work on women, who made up the vast majority of healthcare workers;

(d) A gender pay gap (GPG) is present across the region. The unadjusted GPG for the EU amounts to 12.7 per cent.⁹ In the rest of the region, the GPG ranges from 6.2 per cent in Albania¹⁰ to 31.7 per cent in Georgia;¹¹

(e) Gender inequalities also appear in vertical mobility, with women facing barriers to achieving leadership positions in companies or institutions that shape economic policies. In the EU, only 33 per cent of board members in the largest quoted companies and 28 per cent within central banks are women.¹²

4. The increasing flexibility of the labour market can create opportunities for women and men to develop their careers differently, but often results in part-time or temporary jobs for women, career interruptions, employment insecurity, lower incomes and pensions and greater economic dependency.

(a) In 18 EU member states, women make up the majority of workers employed with temporary contracts,¹³ and in all EU member states (except Romania), women are the majority of part-time employees (74.8 per cent at the level of EU-27). Many are involuntary employed part-time due to a lack of options for full-time employment. Women's involuntary part-time employment is particularly high in Italy (69.3 per cent), Cyprus (57.2 per cent), Spain (52.1 per cent) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (50.4 per cent);¹⁴

(b) Informal employment is higher among women than men in Türkiye (36.3 vs. 24.2 per cent), Serbia (20.7 vs. 16.39 per cent) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (24.8 vs. 16.6

⁴ ILO (2023), *World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2023*, p.78.

⁵ UNHCR reported more than 6 million refugees from Ukraine in Europe as of July 2024 (UNHCR, accessed on 27 July 2024 at <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>).

⁶ Eurostat, *Employment by sex, age and detailed economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2 two digit level) - 1 000*.

⁷ ITU, UN Women (2021) *Digitally empowered Generation Equality. Women, girls and ICT in the context of COVID-19 in selected Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership Countries*.

⁸ Eurostat, *Employment by sex, age, occupation and economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2) (1 000)*.

⁹ Eurostat, *Gender pay gap in unadjusted form*, accessed on 23rd June 2024.

¹⁰ Instat (2023) *Women and Men in Albania 2023*, p. 82.

¹¹ National Statistics Office of Georgia (2023) *Women and Men in Georgia*, p. 75.

¹² EIGE, *Gender Equality Index*, (accessed on 19 June 2024).

¹³ In Belgium 54.8 per cent, in Czechia 58.1, in Denmark 55.3, Ireland 55.5, Greece 56.4, Spain 54.6, France 52.9, Croatia 56.9, Cyprus 60.4, Lithuania 51.5, Luxembourg 51.2, Netherlands 53.3, Poland 52.7, Portugal 52.6, Slovenia 56.1, Slovakia 56.3, Finland 58.1, and Sweden 55.1 per cent. Eurostat, accessed on 23rd June 2024, *Temporary employees by sex, age and educational attainment level (1 000)*.

¹⁴ Eurostat, accessed on 23rd June 2024 at *Full-time and part-time employment by sex, age and educational attainment level (1 000)*.

per cent).¹⁵ This includes women engaged informally in farming, services such as hospitality and personal services, those informally self-employed, those helping family members and domestic workers.

5. For many women, employment is a source of anxiety and frustration due to discrimination, sexual harassment or uncertain prospects related to pregnancy and childcare.

(a) Many forms of discrimination are still present in the labour market but rarely documented, including discrimination against women related to potential pregnancy, childbearing and the need for maternity and parental leave. One research initiative in the Netherlands found that 40 per cent of women who had a child in the past four years experienced discrimination in employment or the workplace;¹⁶

(b) Sexual harassment in the workplace, including through digital technologies, harms many women across the region. The proportion of ever-employed women who have reported experience of sexual harassment in the workplace varies between 11 per cent in Latvia to 41 per cent in France.¹⁷ Across 12 countries of the Western Balkans, Türkiye, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 12.8 per cent of women who were exposed to technology-facilitated violence were harassed by colleagues or peers, while 2.1 per cent were harassed by supervisors.¹⁸

6. Women are the minority among entrepreneurs. Research in Serbia showed that between 2011 and 2021, women consistently made up less than one-third of entrepreneurs.¹⁹ Women's self-employment in the region is often linked to precarious and informal employment, predominantly subsistence farming or low-skilled services.

7. Women's potential to transition to the green economy is still low. The share of women in green jobs²⁰ varies across the region, from 20 per cent in Italy to 33 per cent in Poland. The rates of women within senior management across the green economy are very low, ranging from 13.9 per cent in Greece to 32.7 per cent in Ukraine.²¹ The main barriers to greater participation in the green transition are gender stereotypes, low participation in relevant education fields (e.g., STEM), absence of female role models and support networks, lack of training opportunities and unsupportive working environments.²²

8. Women from disadvantaged and marginalized social groups face significant barriers to finding employment, particularly decent employment.

(a) Women in rural areas are mainly employed in low-productivity agricultural work on small family farms, including subsistence farms that are not market oriented. This creates a fragile foundation for satisfactory livelihoods, leaving these women vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change largely without adequate insurance;

(b) Migrant women, including refugee women, often perform jobs in the low-paid informal care and household maintenance sector. As a result, they are often deprived of welfare rights and security;²³

¹⁵ ILO. Undated. SDG indicator 8.3.1, "Proportion of informal employment in total employment by sex and sector (%)" – Annual." ILOSTAT. Retrieved 21 January 2024.

¹⁶ College voor de Rechten van de Mens, cited in the Kingdom of the Netherlands Review Report Beijing +30, (2020), p.6.

¹⁷ [EU Survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence \(EU-GBV\) – first results](#), 2022 edition, p. 10.

¹⁸ UN Women ECA *Dark side of digitalization: technology facilitated violence against women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia* (2023), p. 49.

¹⁹ UN Women, *Women's Entrepreneurship in Serbia – 10 Years Later* (2023)

²⁰ According to ILO's definition, [green jobs](#) are 'decent jobs that contribute to preserve or restore the environment, be they in traditional sectors such as manufacturing and construction, or in new, emerging green sectors such as renewable energy and energy efficiency'.

²¹ UNICEF, *A Gender Mapping of Green Economic Transition in Europe and Central Asia*, (2023), p. 15.

²² Ibid.

²³ For example, more about precarious work of Ukrainian women refugees working informally as domestic workers, see Klakla, J.B., Koss-Goryszewska, M., Kulesa, A., Pająk-Załęska, K., Zarychta, M. (2023). In the Shadows: Ukrainian Domestic Workers in Poland. Warsaw: Care International Poland.

(c) Among the most vulnerable are women from marginalized Roma communities, who have among the lowest employment rates in Western Balkan countries, ranging from 3 per cent in Montenegro to 13 per cent in North Macedonia. This is usually informal employment, often related to waste collection.²⁴

B. Unpaid care and domestic work

9. Unpaid care and domestic work remain primarily the responsibility of women, who dedicate a significant portion of their time and resources to activities crucial for the reproduction of societies and economies. This work is still considered as 'reproductive' and as such is less visible and valued. The unbalanced division of care responsibilities is rooted in patriarchal gender norms and perpetuated by persistent structural barriers, such as inadequate parental leave policies, insufficient childcare services and lack of long-term care services.

(a) In the EU on average, 34 per cent of women aged 18-74 care for children or other family members daily, compared to 25 per cent of men. 63 per cent of women perform household chores and cooking every day, compared to 36 per cent of men of the same age;

(b) Mothers in Moldova dedicate 2.4 hours daily to their children compared to 1.3 hours for fathers.²⁵ In rural areas of Tajikistan, women spend 6.9 hours per day on average on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 0.7 hours spent by men.²⁶ Time-use data reveal only part of the picture, as they cannot capture the full scope of responsibilities carried by women regarding family well-being, particularly in situations of resource constraints and poverty when they have to care for family with insufficient resources.

10. Maternity, paternity and parental leave policies have been improved in the EU by introducing the Work-Life Balance Directive,²⁷ but available data show suboptimal uptake of paternity and parental leave by fathers.²⁸ Other countries in the region have also been improving parental leave and other work-life balance policies, but childcare and long-term care services are still insufficiently available in many countries. The enrolment of children in early care and education is particularly low in Western Balkan countries and Türkiye, with 8.8 per cent of children below age three enrolled in Montenegro, 14.9 per cent in Albania, 18 per cent in Serbia and 0.8 per cent in Türkiye (by comparison, Barcelona's target is set at 30 per cent).²⁹

11. Women's unpaid care work contributes significantly to the economy but remains invisible and unvalued, despite supporting all forms of paid productive work. In Switzerland in 2020, households accounted for 41.4 per cent of gross value added in the extended total economy of the country. Domestic work accounted for 73.4 per cent, care activities 18.9 per cent and voluntary work 7.7 per cent of the total value of unpaid work. The contribution of women in the total value of unpaid work was 59.6 per cent.³⁰ In Serbia, the value of unpaid care work accounts for 20 per cent of total GDP.³¹ In Ukraine, the value of women's time spent on childcare is estimated around 72.5 billion USD.³² Development of comprehensive policies and programmes at all levels to recognize, reduce, redistribute, represent and reward paid and unpaid care and domestic work can contribute significantly to social and economic development of the countries in the region. Rewarding and representing paid care workers

²⁴ UNDP. 2018. "Marginalized Roma community still most excluded in Western Balkans." 11 May.

²⁵ UNDP Moldova. 2014. "The Importance of Unpaid Work in Moldova." Analytic Note.

²⁶ Asian Development Bank, *Women's Time Use in Rural Tajikistan* (2020).

²⁷ The overview provided by European Parliament available at [www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/739346/EPRS_ATA\(2023\)739346_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/739346/EPRS_ATA(2023)739346_EN.pdf).

²⁸ Eurofund (2019) *Parental and paternity leave – Uptake by fathers*.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Federal Statistical office of Switzerland, www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/work-income/employment-working-hours/balancing-unpaid-work/household-production-satellite-account.html (accessed on 23 June 2024).

³¹ Ibid.

³² World Bank, *Ukraine: Third Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA3)*, February 2022-December 2023, p.77.

by ensuring decent work and social protection, will ensure improving of current care jobs and creating new quality, decent care jobs.

C. Access to ownership of and control over economic resources

12. There are consistent gender inequalities in access to key resources for economic engagement, quality of life and wellbeing. Women do not have equal access to land and property, particularly in rural areas where inheritance plays a significant role in intergenerational asset transfer. Women also face disparities in access to technology, including ICT, climate-smart agricultural technologies and others. Additionally, women do not access financial markets, products and services on equal terms as men, undermining their economic potential as entrepreneurs and their ability to save, maintain a decent standard of living and/or stay resilient during crises. Women's mobility often depends on others or on public transport, reducing their career options and access to services, especially if they live in remote areas. Poor infrastructure, lack of access to renewable and clean energy, underdeveloped circular economies and inadequate waste management place additional burdens on women in performing domestic tasks and undermine their potential for green transition as entrepreneurs.

13. Property is, in the majority of cases, owned by men in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In Armenia, only around one-third of homeowners are women.³³ In Montenegro, women own 36 per cent of residential homes and 31 per cent of commercial/business units.³⁴ In Serbia, women own 24.2 per cent of land parcels and 25.6 per cent of buildings.³⁵

14. Women demonstrate lower financial literacy and access to financial products and services. In the EU, only 19 per cent of women scored their financial knowledge as high, compared to 34 per cent of men.³⁶ Also, fewer women have an investment product (30 per cent of men vs. 18 per cent of women).³⁷ In BiH, 70 per cent of women compared to 89 per cent of men hold accounts at financial institutions; in Kosovo,³⁸ 47 per cent of women compared to 69 per cent of men; and in Türkiye, 62 per cent of women compared to 85 per cent of men.³⁹ Fewer women than men have savings at banks, and fewer women borrow money from banks.⁴⁰

15. The digital gender divide is narrowing in most countries in the region, but a gender gap favouring men is still present, particularly among older generations. Connectivity to the Internet is lower among women in many countries of the region,⁴¹ and gender gaps are present in digital skills as well. The proportion of persons with basic digital skills or above is higher among men than women in most countries.⁴² In the ECE region, only one-third of STEM graduates from tertiary education are young women.⁴³

³³ FAO., *National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods Armenia*. (2017), p. 15.

³⁴ OSCE, *Gender and Property ownership in Montenegro – Mapping the property gap* (2023).

³⁵ Data of Republic Geodetic Authority, cited from Network SOS Vojvodina. 2021. *Independent report of Network SOS Vojvodina on the implementation of priority recommendations from the CEDAW Committee for the Republic of Serbia, for the period 2019-2021*.

³⁶ Flash Eurobarometer 525: Monitoring the level of financial literacy in the EU, p. 12, accessed on 16 June 2024 at <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2953>.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 24.

³⁸ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

³⁹ World Bank. Undated. *Findex data base.*, cited from UN Women *A Snapshot of Gender and Poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region* (2024) p. 17.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Source for EU MSs Individuals - internet use.

⁴² For EU MSs, see *Individuals who have basic or above basic overall digital skills by sex*, for Western Balkans, Türkiye, Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries see UN Women, *A Snapshot of Gender and Poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region* (2024), p. 20.

⁴³ UNICEF, *Girls' STEM and Digital Skills. Thematic Results Report*. (2021)

16. Gaps are notable in access to infrastructure and transport. Women rely more often on public transport, while men rely more on their private cars.⁴⁴ In the EU, 59 per cent of women compared to 66 per cent of men use cars on a typical day, 46 per cent of women versus 38 per cent of men walk, and 31 per cent of women versus 24 per cent of men use public transport.⁴⁵ Outside of the EU, gender gaps in private car use are even bigger. In Serbia, only 35 per cent of women possess a driver's licence, compared to 71 per cent of men, and women make up only 32 per cent of car owners.⁴⁶ Data from Georgia show that only 23 per cent of women have driving license, and only 17 per cent of women were owners of registered vehicles.⁴⁷ Women are more likely to be forced to combine different means of transport for a single trip,⁴⁸ affecting their time poverty. Due to their greater reliance on public transport, inadequate transport systems can restrict women's access to education, economic opportunities and social and leisure activities, particularly for women living in rural areas.⁴⁹

D. Poverty and social protection

17. In most ECE countries, poverty is higher among women than men, even when calculated at household level. In 2023, the at-risk-of-poverty-rate in the EU for women was 17.0 per cent and 15.4 per cent for men.⁵⁰ Poverty is also higher among women than men in Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, the Western Balkans and Türkiye.⁵¹ Absolute poverty is higher among women than men in BiH and Moldova.⁵²

18. Food insecurity has increased across the ECE region, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵³ In 2021, around 116.3 million people (or 12.4 per cent) in the region faced moderate or severe food insecurity.⁵⁴ Central Asia and the Western Balkans had a higher prevalence than the ECE average (20.2 and 19.38 per cent, respectively). Women were more likely than men to be food insecure (15.8 versus 13.8 per cent) across all subregions.⁵⁵

19. Time poverty undermines the well-being of women due to working more hours in total, including paid and unpaid. Gender differences in time allocation to paid and unpaid work leave women with less discretionary time than men, endangering their health, limiting economic opportunities and preventing them from engaging in leadership, political and civic activities.⁵⁶

20. Energy poverty is also gender specific. Across the EU, a higher proportion of women than men aged 65+ experienced energy poverty: 10.3 per cent of women and 8.5 per cent of men.⁵⁷ The highest gender gaps are found in Lithuania, Bulgaria and Greece. Women and men of the same age living with disabilities were even more affected by energy poverty, with consistent gender gaps (12.6 per cent of women and 10.6 per cent of men from this group).⁵⁸

21. Access to adequate housing is not available for many women living in the region. The housing cost overburden rate, defined as total housing costs exceeding 40 per cent of disposable income, is higher for women than men across the EU, particularly for older

⁴⁴ Source for EU: European Parliament, *Women and Transport* (2021), p. 17, for Western Balkans, Türkiye, Eastern Europe and Central Asia countries see UN Women *A Snapshot of Gender and Poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region* (2024), p. 16.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Geostat, *Women and men in Georgia 2023* (2023), p. 120.

⁴⁸ Dornier, SeConS, *Gender equality in transport in Serbia* (2018).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Eurostat, "At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold, age and sex - EU-SILC and ECHP surveys".

⁵¹ Eurostat, "At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex".

⁵² UN Women *A snapshot of gender and poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region* (2024).

⁵³ FAO, *Europe and Central Asia: Regional overview of Food Security and Nutrition* (2022), p. 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵⁶ Hyde, E, Greene, M, Darmstadt, G. L. (2020) *Time poverty: Obstacle to women's human rights, health and sustainable development*, *Journal of Global Health*, 10(2).

⁵⁷ Eurostat: "Inability to keep home adequately warm by level of disability (activity limitation), sex and age".

⁵⁸ Ibid.

individuals, affecting 11.6 per cent of older women and 7.6 per cent of older men.⁵⁹ Women experience homelessness at a concerning rate, yet their homelessness is often invisible and underestimated.⁶⁰ Women avoid emergency shelters designed for people sleeping rough because of fear or because services are not designed to meet their specific gender-related needs. Due to lack of visibility and low engagement with homelessness services, many vulnerable women are less effectively served and are more likely to be left without support as a result.⁶¹

22. Compared to global averages, countries in the ECE region have more developed social protection systems, but with significant intra-regional differences. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), pension benefits play the most important role in poverty reduction of all social transfers, particularly among older people. All countries in the region have reached near-universal coverage of older people with either contributory or non-contributory pensions. However, women's lower employment rates and lower wages strongly influence pension gaps.⁶²

(a) There is a prominent gender pension gap in most countries in the region because of shorter and interrupted careers of women and their employment in lower-paid service sectors. In Kyrgyzstan, women on average receive pensions equivalent to 88 per cent of men's pensions.⁶³ In BiH, women constitute only 33.8 per cent of old-age pensioners and 30.6 per cent of those receiving disability pensions, yet they make up 96.2 per cent of those receiving survivors' pensions as widows; thus, many women acquire pension rights only as dependent family members.⁶⁴ Consequently, pension gaps influence poverty gaps. In the population aged 65 and above, at-risk-of-poverty rates are consistently higher among women, with gender gaps ranging in EU-27 from 1.2 percentage points in Belgium to 20.2 in Lithuania;⁶⁵

(b) Maternity protection coverage varies significantly, from the lowest coverage in Türkiye to full coverage in BiH, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Tajikistan. Northern and Western Europe have high coverage of 99.4 per cent;⁶⁶

(c) Unemployment benefits coverage is very low in Central Asia, with only 14.7 per cent of employed people covered by some form of unemployment benefits, below the global average.⁶⁷ Consequently, the proportion of unemployed persons receiving unemployment benefits is also very low (only 5.7 per cent), much lower than in Eastern Europe (67.1 per cent) and Western Europe (61.2 per cent).⁶⁸ Unfortunately, gender-sensitive data are not available;

(d) Social assistance cash benefits programmes are still predominantly associated with tax-financed 'residual' safety nets for the poorest, implying short-term benefits for a narrowly targeted group of recipients.⁶⁹ The main challenge in this area is the lack of gender sensitive data. Reports by the ILO, World Bank and others usually focus on aggregate levels, with the aim of assessing the effectiveness of cash transfers;

(e) Some countries in the region have disability benefits for individuals who are characterized by official authorities as persons with disabilities. Gender sensitive data are not

⁵⁹ Eurostat, "[Housing cost overburden rate by age, sex and poverty status - EU-SILC survey](#)".

⁶⁰ FEANTSA, "[Housing First & Women. Case studies from across Europe](#)".

⁶¹ Bretherton, J., & Mayock, P.. *Women's homelessness: European evidence review*. 2021 Research Report. FEANTSA. Brussels.

⁶² ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22. Regional companion report for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia* (2021).

⁶³ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, *Women and Men of the Kyrgyz Republic 2016-2020* (2021)p. 138.

⁶⁴ ILO, *Issues in Social Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina: coverage, adequacy, expenditure and financing* (2022), p. 8.

⁶⁵ Eurostat, "[At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold, age and sex - EU-SILC and ECHP surveys](#)".

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020-22* (2021), p. 21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

available. While women are often the primary caregivers for children with disabilities, there is lack of financial assistance directed towards caregivers.⁷⁰

23. Social protection services – such as early childhood education and care, home care services for older populations, support services for children and adults with disabilities or other groups in need of care – are underdeveloped and underfunded across the region.

III. Progress

A. Enabling environment

24. The number of countries that have introduced gender responsive budgeting (GRB) as an approach to allocate and track budget allocations for gender equality has been growing. Iceland has established a Gender Equality Fund which streamlines the allocation of funds to gender equality. Countries emphasizing the implementation of GRB in review reports include BiH, Cyprus and Türkiye. UN Women provides significant support to this process.

25. Across the region, countries have improved legislative and policy frameworks for preventing and prohibiting discrimination based on sex, gender or gender identity as well as normative frameworks relevant for WEE. For example, Belgium has strengthened its legislative arsenal in the fight against discrimination, introducing compensation for victims and strengthening protection against reprisals for those who file or witness a complaint of discrimination or assist victims. The Netherlands has implemented initiatives to combat pregnancy-related discrimination at work.

26. Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia have revised or adopted legislation to grant labour market access to those registered with temporary protection status under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (Directive 2001/55/EC).⁷¹

27. Countries reported on improved legislation and policies aiming at closing gender pay gaps. EU member states have transposed EU Directive 2023/970 on strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women in domestic law. In Moldova, the Labour Code and Salary Law were amended to address the issue of equal pay for work of equal value.

28. Many countries have worked to ensure safe working environments, including from GBV and sexual harassment. Legal frameworks for prevention and protection from sexual harassment and workplace bullying have been improved. Some countries (e.g., Romania, Albania, Moldova) have ratified ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work and taken steps to improve legislation and institutional mechanisms for the implementation of the Convention. They also have enhanced the capacities of their labour inspectorates to be able to incorporate new standards and procedures into their regular work.

29. Many countries have improved legislative frameworks related to maternity, paternity and parental leave. For EU member states this has primarily meant the transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive (EU Directive 2019/1158), adopted in 2019 to better support parents and carers, encourage more equal sharing of parental leave between men and women and address women's underrepresentation in the labour market, which is strongly influenced by caring responsibilities. Reports submitted by non-EU countries also demonstrate their prioritization of this policy area.

30. Supporting and partnering with civil society networks contributes to better dialogue between governments and different groups of women, a better understanding of their interests and needs and opportunities to more adequately design policies and measures that foster an enabling environment for WEE. Many countries have demonstrated partnerships with CSOs

⁷⁰ UN Women, *A snapshot of gender and poverty in the Europe and Central Asia Region*(2024).

⁷¹ UN Women, *Gender brief: Livelihoods and access to work of refugees from Ukraine in neighboring host countries*, (2023), see also “[Ukrainian refugees: Council extends temporary protection until March 2026](#)”.

to implement WEE programmes, and some are particularly strong examples of such collaboration.

31. The improvement of statistics and gender-disaggregated data is ongoing and evident in many areas. Regular surveys provide extremely valuable information on key aspects of WEE. However, subregional differences are prominent. The EU produces advanced statistics on WEE through Eurostat's regular collection of standardized data from member states. EU candidate countries have significantly improved gender statistics in WEE areas largely due to synchronization with EU statistics. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, statistics are less available in certain areas, but improvements are evident, and some countries produce specialized publications with key gender statistics for diverse sectors, albeit without data on women from an intersectional perspective.

B. Economic empowerment through enhanced power, agency and autonomy

32. Countries have been systematically implementing programmes to support women's economic rights and autonomy. Active labour measures have become standard in national employment programmes. They include diverse measures such as on-the-job training, retraining, wage subsidy, internship programmes, self-employment support and diverse vocational trainings.

(a) In Albania, transportation and childcare subsidies support labour market integration for vulnerable job seekers, particularly women who are primary family caregivers;

(b) Italy incentivizes employers to employ women with children. Female employees on permanent contracts with three or more children are entitled to a 100 per cent reduction in contributions until the youngest child reaches the age of 18 (with an annual limit of 3,000 EUR);

(c) Some countries reported on specific activation programmes directed towards the most vulnerable women. For example, Greece implements a special active labour market measure for VAW survivors, gathering enterprises willing to employ survivors. In Hungary, Roma women's employment was supported through a programme which provided training, subsidized employment for 24 months and compulsory employment for 12 more months for Roma women. In Cyprus, there are special skill-building programmes for women in prisons to increase their chances for employment and reintegration;

(d) After the 2023 Armenian refugee crisis, the Armenian Government introduced special programmes for refugee women to facilitate their inclusion into the labour market;

(e) In Moldova, women from local communities and displaced women from Ukraine can obtain skills and start to work through online platforms;

(f) Tajikistan has been piloting a programme to develop microwork industry in the country, upgrading digital skills among youth and integrating them into trans-national labour markets with accessibility to basic digital infrastructure.

33. Across the region, governments implement initiatives to promote gender equality policies at the level of companies and improve gender equality in the workplace. Italy has introduced a national Gender Equality Certification System aimed at incentivizing companies to adopt policies aimed at reducing the gender gap in the most critical areas, such as opportunities for growth in the company, equal pay for equal work and maternity protection. Certified companies can benefit from exemptions from social security contributions and bonus points on project proposals to national and European funding authorities. Similar practices are reported by Greece and Cyprus.

34. Although most countries partly address gender segregation in the labour market, this is mainly done by supporting girls and women to opt for education and employment in STEM or ICT. Some countries, however, provide programmes to more broadly reduce segregation in different sectors. Türkiye supports the employment of women in the manufacturing sector,

including in occupations such as forklift operators, bucket operators, tower crane operators, CNC lathe operators, computerized machine operators and others.

35. Support to women's entrepreneurship is a high priority in many countries.

(a) Latvia implemented a measure which included consultations on developing and implementing business plans, start-up grants, monthly subsidies for first six months of business plan implementation and funding for the adaptation of the workplace or business plan for persons with disabilities;

(b) Italy established the Women's Enterprise Fund to promote and support women's start-ups and to strengthen women's enterprises;

(c) In Azerbaijan, the Agency for Small and Medium Business Development works to increase the number of women entrepreneurs running small and medium businesses;

(d) In Iceland, the Svanni-loan credit insurance fund only supports companies that are majority-owned by women;

(e) In Russia, women's entrepreneurship is supported through a programme which delivers training in 25 different subjects;

(f) Ukraine launched the Women's Business Empowerment Programme "Grow" under the Good Governance Fund Programme to support female entrepreneurs from war-affected communities.

36. Since a large part of the region is rural and engaged in agriculture, many governmental efforts are directed towards improving the economic engagement of rural women and agricultural production.

(a) In Albania, about 2,000 women were supported to cultivate wild medicinal and aromatic plants;

(b) In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a result of the Economic Empowerment of Women in Rural Areas Programme of Republika Srpska, in 2024, 22 per cent of registered agricultural farms were headed by women, compared to only 4 per cent in 2010;

(c) Over the last five years, Türkiye supported over 1.7 million rural women in 81 provinces by delivering training and extension services for many agricultural subjects.

37. Closing the digital divide and increasing women's engagement in STEM sectors was often the focus of WEE interventions;

(a) Albania has established the Network of Albanian Women in STEM, which aims to increase women's and girls' representation in STEM in academic settings and in scientific research and innovation;

(b) The Armenian government established a special scholarship policy in 2023 to encourage enrolment in STEM studies;

(c) The 'Türkiye's Engineer Girls Project' was implemented at the university and secondary school levels to support girls who aspire to become engineers.

38. Initiatives to recognize, redistribute, reduce, remunerate and represent (5R) unpaid care work have been a strong focus of policies and initiatives over the last five years. Some examples include:

(a) In Azerbaijan, awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns were implemented to eliminate gender stereotypes, promote responsible parenting and allocate household work and family care more evenly. Initiatives have also been implemented to prevent son preference and encourage involved fatherhood;

(b) Belarus introduced special measures to recognize the time women spent on care work by reducing the minimum age for insurance requirements from 20 to 10 years for women caring for family members for long periods;

(c) In Sweden, a measure was introduced that ensures 90 days of non-transferrable parental benefits at the basic level for each parent, with the aim to increase fathers' uptake of parental benefit regardless of their income;

(d) In Georgia, through advocacy efforts of UN Women significant enhancements in maternity benefits have been introduced: the maximum ceiling for state-provided maternity benefits was removed. Consequently, the one-time state-provided maternity and parental benefits doubled, and full salary benefits during maternity leave were extended to public school teachers, aligning their benefits with those of civil servants;

(e) In Serbia, as a result of combined efforts by UN Women and its partners, the unpaid care work has been recognized and introduced into the legal and strategic framework. The Law on Gender Equality, 2021, for example, supported by UN Women, recognized in its provisions the unpaid care work and mandated its measurement.

39. Empowering women for the green transition were also reported by ECE countries. In Türkiye, an initiative has been launched to support women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses in the clean technology sector. In rural areas in Tajikistan, projects were implemented to introduce energy efficient stoves and improved water supply infrastructure, which significantly contribute to the quality of life of women who mainly perform tasks related to household maintenance.

C. Reducing gender income inequality and women's poverty

40. Countries reported on significant **initiatives to improve social protection policies**. For example:

(a) Romania adopted a National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the period 2022-2027;

(b) Belarus has improved pension insurance policies to compensate for women's career gaps due to childcare and prevent poverty among older women. Through a programme of labour pensions (contribution based) and social pensions (non-contribution based), almost 100 per cent pension coverage of women after the age of 60 has been achieved, and the gender pension gap is almost non-existent.

41. Many countries designed specific social protection measures for particularly vulnerable groups of women and/or crisis situations.

(a) Armenia introduced a food card system to ensure access to essential food supplies;

(b) Greece included survivors of VAW in the minimum guaranteed income programme to enhance their ability to move towards independent living;

(c) Sweden reduced poverty among older women through combined measures such as guaranteed pension, housing subsidies, and increasing pensions through indexation.

42. Some countries have invested in new, improved and/or expanded social services that can significantly improve the economic security, participation and resilience of women.

(a) Hungary established a 'Single Parent's Centre', which supported around 30,000 single-parent families, mainly women and their children, with more than 70 types of support services;

(b) Sweden funds an Elderly Care Initiative that supports municipalities with additional earmarked funds to strengthen skills in municipally-funded health and social care for the elderly by giving new and existing staff the opportunity to undergo training during paid working hours;

(c) In Türkiye, an ongoing project supports women with children up to 36 months old to keep their job by providing qualified childcare in their local communities by trained carers, both supporting young mothers and building the skills of care providers.

43. Some countries have prioritized investing in adequate housing and measures for ensuring women's access to it:

(a) Armenia has improved access to housing, especially for marginalized groups in rural areas, by easing mortgage burdens through one-off monetary assistance. A similar

programme for displaced families from Karabakh enabled over 4,000 families to acquire residential properties or construct individual homes through mortgage loans;

(b) In Belgium, between 2021 and 2024, the Walloon Region supported organizations providing support to homeless people. Specific subsidies were provided for service providers who targeted women;

(c) In Greece, the ‘Housing and Work for the Homeless’ programme provides women survivors of VAW hosted in shelters with rent subsidies for two years, subsidized salary and social security contributions for one year and psychosocial support.

IV. Challenges

44. The potential of transformative policies is undermined by multiple crises emerging since Beijing+25: the COVID-19 pandemic; Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine; war in Gaza; and natural disasters such as earthquakes, draughts, floods and other extreme weather conditions related to climate change.

45. The rapid development of artificial intelligence bears unprecedented potential to change the world of work, bringing opportunities for new achievements for humankind but also making redundant a large portion of human labour. In contemporary economic systems, one’s existence is almost fully reliant on employment, and current systems of wealth accumulation and redistribution cannot efficiently reduce inequalities and provide satisfactory livelihoods for all. In this context, this technological potential evokes a more bleak than positive picture of the future.

46. Since Beijing+25, increasing backlash against women’s rights and the growing power of conservative, anti-feminist forces create an unfavourable framework for the transformation of contemporary economies, which currently reproduce and increase inequalities, including those based on gender, and generate crises to which women are often less resilient due to their less favourable economic position.

47. Global economic trends and national macroeconomies do not provide favourable grounds for transformative processes through which more equitable gender regimes and more effective and just transition towards green economies and societies could emerge. High levels of illicit financial flows and corporate tax evasion and avoidance drain tax revenues crucial for empowerment, transformation and the elimination of poverty and inequality. Women are still excluded from high level decisions on economic policies. For example, of 190 member countries of the IMF, women serve as finance ministers in 26 and as central bank governors in only 17.⁷²

48. Gender-blind or ineffectively implemented policies persist. Some countries reported various social protection legislative improvements or new measures aimed at reducing poverty in various forms (financial, energy poverty, etc.) but without sufficient focus on gender specific objectives or impact. Many policies are still gender neutral or gender blind; in the area of social protection in particular, their focus remains on families, disregarding the specific position of women in intra-household decision-making and budgeting processes.

49. Even when they include some specific gender insights and/or measures, many policies and programmes are accommodative rather than transformative. For example, compensating women with young children benefits mothers economically and somewhat recognizes the value of their care, but it neither transforms care-related gender roles and imbalances nor removes stereotypes. As such, it does not bear the potential to transform gender regimes. Also, while all countries recognize the importance of supporting women to enter STEM in education and employment, there is little emphasis on including men in paid care sectors, which can be significant in societies with care deficits.

⁷² Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-Eight Session (2024) Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective. Report of the Secretary-General.

50. Gaps in national WEE agendas were identified based on national review reports. Access to resources such as property, financial markets, green technologies, transport and infrastructure is notably absent in national reviews. Almost no country has reported on measures and policies that address gender gaps in ownership of land and property. Very few reported on measures addressing financial inclusion and access to financial services and markets or measures to increase women's participation in corporate boards or in other positions of economic power.

51. The lack of gender disaggregated data reduces opportunities to recognize the importance of certain aspects of WEE and address them effectively. Despite progress in data availability, there are still areas that are not sufficiently visible or monitored, including: ownership of land and property, uptake of paternity and parental leave by fathers, access to transport and infrastructure, gender-specific insights into financial poverty or deprivation, among others. In many countries, time use survey data are not yet available, preventing precise insights in unpaid care and household work and their impact on well-being. The absence of a life course perspective means that the focus is almost entirely on young women and childcare. As a result, older women, who form a significant part of the workforce supporting families, remain invisible, along with concerns for their own well-being.

52. There are gaps in financing women's organizations, limiting their active engagement and potential to more actively contribute to WEE and to advocate and influence economic and social policies. The role of women's civil society in WEE was insufficiently addressed in national reviews.

V. Priority actions

53. Transformative policies and actions are needed. To address structural and cultural gender inequalities, it is important to intervene more deeply in the structures of economies and political decision-making arenas to remove barriers and create a more enabling environment for transformation and accelerated progress towards the SDGs. We need more women in positions of power shaping economic systems. We need policies informed by feminist economic and social research to unleash transformative perspectives in policymaking. To this aim, it is crucial to strengthen the availability of sex-disaggregated data.

54. More consistent gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting efforts are needed to ensure that reforms are designed in line with the principles of gender equality and that funds will be allocated and distributed for that purpose.

55. More investment is needed in policies focused on the economic activation of women in decent jobs, supporting women's entrepreneurship and improving women's engagement in agriculture on family farms (to be more autonomous, covered by social insurances, in higher proportion engaged as farm managers and to increase productivity and income from agricultural activity), as well as in promoting and supporting forms of social entrepreneurship where it is more appropriate (particularly among vulnerable women) than traditional private business.

56. More comprehensive interventions should target gender segregation in education and the labour market that continue to increase the share of women in STEM sectors at different levels of education and skills. At the same time, interventions should increase men's participation in care sectors such as education, health care and social work, particularly in a context marked by the care deficit.

57. Mobilize for transformative change by recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work and rewarding and representing paid care work. Paid and unpaid care should be captured by national statistics agencies through standardized time use surveys which should be regular, synchronized and published in open-source formats. Public spending on care services and infrastructure should be tracked, preferably using established gender-responsive budgeting approaches. Responsibilities for family and household should be more equitably shared between women and men, leaving to women more time for personal development, social relationships or leisure activities. Improvements in transport;

infrastructure (water, sanitation, energy); and access to care services, markets and labour-saving devices can significantly improve the allocation of time and quality of life of women. Unpaid care and domestic work should be redistributed to more equitably allocate responsibilities to men and women and between households and the state, businesses and non-profit sector.

58. In the area of paid care work, efforts should be invested to ensure decent work for care workers, formalizing their work and providing adequate compensation. It is crucial to respect their rights while improving their skills to ensure higher quality services. Their right to freedom of association should be ensured as well as social dialogue and collective bargaining to guarantee their labour rights.⁷³ Increasing public investment in social care services is key to addressing the care deficit. A study in Türkiye showed that the same investment (20.7 billion TRY) yields an estimated 290,000 new jobs in construction and related sectors but 719,000 in the care sector, meaning more decent jobs for women as they make up nearly three-quarters of employees.⁷⁴ Similar conclusions are drawn from studies in Kyrgyzstan⁷⁵ and North Macedonia.⁷⁶

59. Improving access to assets – digital, financial, property, infrastructure, transport – is key for economic empowerment.

60. Improved management of labour-related migration, protecting the rights of migrant women, preventing trafficking and exploitation, addressing irregular migration and ensuring decent employment for migrant women.

61. More efforts should be invested in changing persistent gender norms that restrictively define roles and responsibilities and limit the positive impact of formal legal norm reforms, such as in the case of property inheritance and the uptake of paternity leave.

62. More robust evidence is needed in certain areas that are not covered, such as wealth and property distribution, the effects of different taxation models on gender equality, uptake of paternal and parental leave by fathers and others. Standardized, comparable data is needed region-wide to be able to design, exchange, replicate and upscale solutions.

63. Voices from women’s civil society should be amplified and heeded to understand the needs of diverse groups of women and tailor solutions appropriate for them. At the same time, support to civil society enables them to make significant contributions to transformative processes by leveraging their agency to deliver services, raise awareness and provide various forms of support and empowerment to women.

64. Improve public sector practices in employment and procurement to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination and corruption and to enable better access for women to jobs, contracts and business opportunities.

65. Gender mainstreaming of recovery interventions, including in women’s employment recovery, access to assets and through consideration of the care responsibilities, which women will continue to have in post-conflict or post-disaster situations.

⁷³ More detailed recommendations in line with this framework could be found in UN Women (2022) *A toolkit on paid and unpaid care work: from 3Rs to 5Rs*.

⁷⁴ Levy Economics Institute *The Impact of Public Investment in Social Care Services on Employment, Gender Equality, and Poverty: The Turkish Case* (2015),

⁷⁵ Levy Economics Institute, *Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care in Kyrgyz Republic: An Assessment of Care Deficits, Costs, and Impact on Employment, Gender Equality, and Fiscal Returns*. (2019).

⁷⁶ UN Women, *Investing in free universal childcare in North-Macedonia* (2019).