

PRESENTATION

3rd Thematic session: “Inequalities, Social inclusion and Rights”

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EVENT: UNECE Regional Conference

“Enabling choices: Population priorities for the 21st century”

ORGANISER: UNFPA and UNECE

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In preparation for the regional conference, UNFPA and UNECE organized three thematic meetings to enable experts from governments, parliaments, academia and civil society organizations to reflect on relevant overarching issues of concern in the region; discuss future priorities, challenges and emerging issues; and identify key recommendations for action.

This presentation summarizes the second meeting on ‘Inequalities, Social Inclusion and Rights’, which took place on the 15th and 16th of April 2013 in Belgrade, Republic of Serbia.

Session 1: Equality, equity, social inclusion, rights and advancement of ICPD agenda in the region

Presentations were made by Ms. Marta Diavolova (Programme adviser, UNFPA EECARD), Ms. Violeta Neubauer (Member of the CoE Gender Equality Commission and a CEDAW Committee member), Mr. Andrey Ivanov (Human Development Adviser, UNDP), Mr. Sandeep Prasad (Executive director of Action Canada for Population and Development and a member of the High Level Task Force for ICPD), Ms. Pinar Ilkcaracan (Women for Women’s Human Rights, Turkey and a member of the High Level Task Force for ICPD).

What was agreed upon during the **discussion on the understanding of inequality** is that, while measures such as gross domestic product (GDP) are still important markers of

wellbeing in poorer countries, in middle- and higher-income countries average wellbeing is no longer dependent on national income and economic growth to the same extent. While the differences between countries are less obvious, the differences within countries are striking: nations with more in-country equality perform better on nearly every measurable health and social indicator than countries with more inequality.

Session 2: “Successes and Challenges in Implementing the ICPD PoA as a Rights-Based Instrument for Addressing Inequalities and Enhancing Social Inclusion”

When discussing the **successes in the region**, it has been pointed out that there has been progress in reducing maternal mortality, increasing access to modern contraceptives, increasing longevity, and advancing the access of young people to information and services. In some countries, there has also been progress in decriminalizing abortion and homosexuality. Another notable achievement is the increasingly strong and vocal role of civil society organizations.

Among the discussed **challenges** are the following: direct discrimination against women; persistent lack of comprehensive sexuality education in schools and a lack of or limited access to youth-friendly services; limited or no access to high-quality abortion services, post-abortion counselling and education, and family-planning services; unacceptably high levels of violence against women; women from disadvantaged or marginalized groups still have a low level of knowledge about their rights; laws aimed at protecting rights are not always comprehensively understood or effectively executed by key actors; national mechanisms for human rights protection are underfunded and under-supported.

The participants in the thematic meeting shared a **concern** that harmful attitudes and stereotypes related to gender are still prevalent in the region, and continue to hinder efforts to protect the human rights of women and girls and to promote empowerment.

Session 3: “Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women”

Family policies and gender equality: It was reiterated that in the UNECE region, women still perform the majority of the care burden in addition to working outside the home.

Division of household labor: The distribution of labour within families in the region has changed in some places, but less so in societies with more traditional gender roles.

Policy responses: There have been some policy responses in the region in terms of reconciling work within and outside the home.

Re-emergence of restrictive pro-natalist policies: The existing and re-emerging pro-natalist policies or measures are a persistent problem in the region.

Gender-based violence: One of the most ubiquitous and entrenched indicators of gender inequality is gender-based violence, which remains widespread in the UNECE region.

Session 4: “Inequalities and Vulnerable Groups”

Young people: Despite the diverse needs of young people, especially those affected by multiple vulnerabilities (e.g., LGBT youth, Roma and other ethnic minorities, young people living with disabilities), there are very few opportunities for young people’s voices to be heard.

Older persons: Among the major trends in the region are an increase in the number of women caring for their own children and for their ageing parents; an increase in the number of older persons caring for their grandchildren after their children migrate to find work; deterioration in social support and services and infrastructure for older persons living in remote or rural areas.

People with disabilities: In many countries, people with disabilities, of all ages, are not provided adequate care or support from the state, and this is left to their families, with the greater part of the care burden placed on women. At the other extreme, there are countries where disabled people (including those with mental disabilities) are taken from their homes or families and placed in care homes, sometimes in remote locations.

Migrants: Migrants can face multiple vulnerabilities, especially when they lack legal status in a country. Often, migrants cross international borders and do not have access to health care because they lack legal status in their destination country or they simply lack information about how to access services.

Sex workers: It was discussed that decriminalizing sex work reduces gender-based violence, including state-sanctioned violence, and makes sex work safer. There are a number of policy approaches related to sex work, but the overarching approach should be to move away from criminalization and to focus on services and justice.

Orphaned children: Children who are orphaned or who are removed from their families are at multiple risks, including being less likely to complete their education, and being more at risk for trafficking and sexual violence.

Ethnic minorities: Multiple discrimination was at the focus of the discussion. For instance, many Roma women face discrimination because of their gender and their ethnicity, which multiplies their vulnerability or disadvantage. Coercive sterilization is still inflicted on some ethnic minority women in a number of countries in the region.

Thank you for your attention!