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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPERegional Symposium on Mainstreaming Gender into Economic Policies
28-30 January 2004.**REPORT**

The **Regional Symposium on Mainstreaming Gender into Economic Policies**, was organized jointly by the **United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)** and the **Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI/DAW)**. Its purpose was to exchange experiences and good practices at the regional level in selected areas of economic policy and to review institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming and regional cooperation among international agencies.

The Symposium launched a dialogue among stakeholders in the gender and economy area. It was the first regional event gathering representatives of gender machineries and line economic ministries from 35 UNECE member States in Eastern and Central Europe, CIS Countries as well as Western Europe and North America. It was agreed that policies supporting women's employability, engendering budgets, access to assets and financing, pensions and social reforms are essential to implement the Beijing Platform. They will also have measurable impact on economic growth, security and social cohesion within the context of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and other United Nations global processes.

Symposium recommendations included: (i) organization of training workshops for line ministries at sub-regional and country levels; (ii) strengthening of synergies between plans for women's empowerment and national plans for poverty reduction, sustainable development and industrial restructuring prepared by line ministries ("multi-ministerial gender desk"); (iii) promotion of partnership among all stakeholders involved in gender equality, including new actors (such as chambers of commerce,) (iv) improvement of cooperation among agencies and (v) strengthening of links between regional processes and United Nations global processes.

The Symposium supported the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the region specific priorities agreed at the UNECE Regional Meeting for the 5-year Review of the Platform (Geneva, 2000). It was also a contribution of the UNECE region to the 10-year review, which will take place in 2005. Background papers are available at: www.unece.org/oes/gender activities.

Background

1. The Regional Symposium on mainstreaming gender into economic policies was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI/DAW). It was the third in the series of regional meetings organized at the initiative of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Division for the Advancement of Women (OSAGI/DAW) and respective United Nations regional commissions¹.

2. The Symposium focused on the region-specific priorities agreed at the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Beijing Conference (Vienna, October 1994) and the UNECE Regional Meeting for the 5-year Review of Implementation of the Platform for Action (Geneva, 2000) (E/ECE/RW.2/2000/7). The exchange of good practices on gender mainstreaming² in economic policy areas in the regional context assisted countries in implementing the agreed conclusions from these meetings, particularly those related to women's employability and social protection.

3. In a broader sense the Symposium aimed at supporting the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing +5). It was also a contribution of the UNECE region to the 10-year review, which will take place in 2005.

Attendance

4. The Symposium was attended by representatives from: Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan. They represented national gender machineries as well as line economic ministries (ministries of economy, finance, and labour and social affairs). Representatives of regional programmes of United Nations Development Program, United Nations Development Fund for Women, International Labour Office and the European Commission as well as regional NGOs also took part in the Symposium. Among the participants there were 15% of men.

Objective, programme and documents

5. The Symposium aimed at identifying approaches, challenges and entry points for gender-sensitive policies in the economic field based on good practices from individual countries. The main areas of economic policies addressed included: (i) access to finance and assets; (ii) women's employability and employment; (iii) gender budgets; (iv) pension systems v) institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender into economic policies. Regional cooperation among international organizations was also discussed.

6. The Symposium was opened by Ms. Brigita Schmögnerova, UNECE Executive Secretary. She underlined that progress in mainstreaming gender into economic policies had been very uneven across the region. While a number of countries advanced, supported by the EU legislative framework, especially in the area of women's employability and child care, most transition countries experienced a serious setback in women's position in the economy. There was thus a

¹ The first such meeting was hosted by ESCAP (Bangkok, 11-13 December 2001) and the second by ESCWA (Beirut, December 2003).

² A definition and the mandate for gender mainstreaming is provided in the ECOSOC agreed conclusions 1997/2, the twenty-third special session of General Assembly (Beijing+5) and ECOSOC resolution 2001/41.

need to raise awareness on these negative trends, identify problems and promote the process of convergence of mainstreaming policies based on good practices. UNECE, as a regional arm of the United Nations system, would continue to provide a regional platform for such dialogue and exchange of experiences in order to support national efforts. Ms. Angela King, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women in her message sent to the participants stressed that the results of the Symposium would serve as a preamble to the discussion on the implementation of ECOSOC's agreed conclusions 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming as well as the 2005 Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and of the Beijing Platform for Action. She underlined that ensuring a strong gender perspective in economic policies was essential to reverse the observed negative trends in women's position in the economy in the UNECE region.

7. A list of speakers is given in Annex I.

8. The discussion was based on background papers prepared by experts as well as the UNECE Secretariat. The papers addressed key issues, progress made, good practice cases and policy options in all themes of the Symposium (see Annex II). All documents and papers are available at <http://www.unece.org/oes/gender/gensymp.htm>

Summary of the discussion by theme

I. Increasing Women's Access to Finance and Assets

Impact of external debt, macroeconomic reforms and privatisation in women's access to finance and assets in transition economies; policies and practices of credit allocations by financial institutions; other public and private schemes for ensuring women's access to credit and financial services.

- In all UNECE member countries women have less access to finance and assets and are also more hurt by the "side effects" of macroeconomic policies;
- In Eastern Europe and the CIS countries, the privatization process was strongly biased against women, and affected their opportunities in the new market environment,
- Access to land and the situation of rural women needs urgent attention, in particular in countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus;
- There are already good practices in improving women's access to financing in Eastern Europe and CIS countries, such as micro-credit schemes (Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan; Russian Federation, Ukraine, Uzbekistan) or Credit Union Programme (Ukraine); though Governments in some of these countries play an active role in setting such schemes (Kazakhstan), in many cases NGOs supported by international community play a lead role;
- The proposed new EU directive on Equal Access to Goods and Services, because of its innovative character and comprehensive focus, could become a powerful legal instrument for gender equality and a tool for equality advocates with a reach well beyond the European Union.

II. Improving women's employability and supporting women's employment

Measures for ensuring compatibility of work with family responsibilities; women's access to education and training, including the use of ICT; women's access to self-employment and entrepreneurship.

- The European Employment Strategy (EES) has raised the profile of equal opportunities and gender mainstreaming. There is now a widespread recognition, at least at the formal policy

- level, that women's employment has to play a significant role in employment policies and strategies of all EU member states;
- Less progress has been made in mainstreaming the promotion of gender equality, as a goal in its own right, of EU employment policy. Positive spin-offs, such as enhanced childcare facilities, come from the recognition that women's employment growth is an essential part of the overall strategy to improve competitiveness and growth;
 - In most transition countries in Eastern Europe and the CIS countries, women's employability has seriously declined along with the disproportional losses of women's jobs and employment; raise of discriminatory practices (especially in the private sector) and cuts in social protection were among factors affecting women's employability;
 - Some countries, including Poland, Russian Federation and Slovenia, target women in their Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs); measures include subsidies for employers, mainstreaming gender into training, job fairs and labour exchanges. This includes municipality and local initiatives (St. Petersburg);
 - Support to women's self-employment and entrepreneurship are among the most frequently used measures to improve women's employability. This includes good practices of Governments (such as in Slovenia, a programme of Women professional promotion implemented by the governmental Small Business Development Centre), but also civil society, especially women's business associations, which provide training for start-ups, counselling, access to networks and financing (such as in Georgia);
 - The prospects for mainstreaming gender into employment policies depend particularly on the political will of Governments, social partners and other actors. Even within the EU, uneven and patchy pattern of progress in the development of gender mainstreaming through and within the employment policies could be expected;
 - A challenge for all countries will be to align employment strategy with the broad economic policy guidelines to ensure more compatibility between employment and more general macro policy. However this alignment with economic policy may make it more difficult to develop a broad approach to employment policy that encompasses social and welfare policy, in line with a gender mainstreaming perspective.

III. Gender budgets

Good practices and lessons learned in engendering budgets (central and local): overall process; tax policies; selected types of public expenditures (e.g. pro active employment policies, health, housing); price of public services.

- There are a number of successful cases of engendering the budget in the UNECE region initiated by central Government (Sweden, France), local governments (Italy, Spain, Switzerland) and civil society (Canada, Russian Federation, United Kingdom);
- The good practice case of the Gender budget project of the city of Basel (Switzerland) indicates that there are already methodologies and processes which could be used by other countries;
- The initiatives vary in the targeted budgetary area (tax and benefit systems; expenditure of various departments), instruments used (beneficiary assessment, gender-disaggregated public expenditure; revenue incidence analysis);
- A common problem is the difficulty in obtaining and correctly interpreting the right type of data to do gender budget exercises as well as proper sequencing;
- Beneficiary assessment can sometimes run into the problem of who receives the income transfers or services; women are often the recipients but not the final beneficiaries and can be mistakenly identified as receiving "too much" from the budget;
- There should be clarity between policy and budgeting;

- The assumptions about the gender neutrality of the budget can be deconstructed by showing that unpaid care work is saving the government money as cuts or insufficient social expenditure is assumed to be absorbed by households, and women carry this weight disproportionately;
- The arguments used by governments to honour commitments made to other international treaties or conventions, such as NATO, should have the same weight as the commitments made to protecting women's rights to economic security.

IV. Social security and pensions

Gender implications of social security reforms, good practices in compensating for women in unpaid care work; ageing and situation of older women in UNECE countries; gender implications of pension reforms; pension coverage for part-time and flexible work arrangements

- While there are references to gender equality in social protection in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform and ILO conventions, these issues are not explicitly addressed in the most relevant international documents and legislative frameworks on gender equality and gender mainstreaming: national commitment to gender equality varies greatly across the region;
- A number of EU countries, as seen in the case of France, have introduced maternity and childcare provisions, which helps to combine work with family responsibilities;
- Canadian experience in the area of gender sensitive pension systems, including at local levels, could serve as good practice to be considered by other UNECE members;
- So far there has been little attention to gender equality in social security and pension reforms in European transition countries; a good practice case is Slovenia, which has maintained its state supported child-care facilities;
- The proposed new EU directive on Equal Access to Goods and Services could be a powerful tool toward non-discrimination in the field of private insurance.

V. Institutional mechanism for mainstreaming gender into economic policies

National processes: sharing roles and responsibilities and promoting dialogue among the various actors involved in the gender mainstreaming process: governmental gender units, line ministries, civil society organisations, parliamentary institutions, academia.

- A number of countries have advanced in establishing a platform for dialogue on gender aspects in various areas of economic policies and partnership among actors (France, Spain); an increasing support for such dialogue is provided by academia (feminist economists);
- Establishing gender machineries in all CIS countries during the 1990s and progress made in developing effective tools for mainstreaming gender into economic policies, such as gender disaggregated statistics, was a big step forward to improving the institutional gender mechanism for mainstreaming gender into economic policies in the UNECE region;
- The EU legislation (*acquis communautaire*, European Employment Strategy) has had a positive impact on raising awareness and launching gender related activities in line ministries in the area of economics (such as in the case of the Ministries of Finance in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Poland); this impact may also be seen in some non-accession countries;
- The commissions and gender committees in most transition countries, however, have a very limited impact on decision making due among other things to the lack of expertise in the economic area and the ambiguity of their status, which is not clearly defined so their recommendations are frequently neglected by line ministries;

- A common hindrance in national programme of implementation of the Beijing commitments is the low gender awareness within government economic structures. Mechanisms to analyse the specific roles and responsibilities, and the consequential problems, needs and interests of men and women are therefore not in place;
- New actors, especially in the private sector (chambers of commerce, women's business associations) are becoming important allies in bringing gender concerns to the mainstream of discussing and lobbying for concrete policies (such as support to women's self-employment and entrepreneurship).

VI. Regional cooperation and a way forward: the role of intergovernmental organisation and regional and sub-regional NGO network in supporting gender mainstreaming in the economic fields.

- There is room for strengthening cooperation among United Nations agencies working in the gender and economy area in the region (UNDP, ILO, UNIFEM, UNECE) based on the comparative advantages of each organization;
- The potential of cooperation between United Nations agencies and European Commission remains largely untapped and requires more attention;
- Beijing +10 process will be a good opportunity to discuss how regional cooperation could better contribute to creating a Wider Europe, and how progress made by EU member countries could be shared by all UNECE member states.

Recommendations and follow up

1. Continue the discussion and exchange of good practices related to mainstreaming gender into economic policies at sub-regional meetings and workshops related to each of the substantive areas of the Symposium (access to assets; employability; gender budgets and pensions). Such workshops could include practical training sessions. The first workshop of this type could focus on gender budgets for the staff of budget departments in ministries of finance of selected countries of central Europe and the Baltic States (proposal of a representative of the Polish Ministry of Finance supported by a representative of the Lithuanian Ministry of Finance). One of the training modules could be based on the methodology developed within the Basel project. Other themes proposed included: good practices in increasing employability of young women and women over 45; gender aspects of tax system and pensions.
2. Promote the idea and discuss good practices aimed at improving coordination and the linkages between the national strategies related to sustainable development, poverty reduction or industrial restructuring and plans of action to empower women prepared by gender machineries. One option could be establishing a multi-ministerial task force (or "gender desk") with administrative and budgetary power, which, in addition to the representatives of line ministries, would include gender sensitive economists, lawyers, women's NGOs and business organizations. Such a body could be an effective tool to ensure that gender concerns are addressed in the formulation, implementation and evaluation stages of policy making.
3. Promote the process of building networks and alliances among all stakeholders concerned with gender equality in the economic area, taking into account national and local conditions: encourage joint organization of projects and activities at national and sub-regional levels involving gender equality bureau line ministries, feminist economists (International Association for Feminist Economics) as well as women's business

associations, chambers of commerce (including at the regional level such as the women's network in EUROCHAMBERS).

4. Improve cooperation among UNECE, UNDP, UNIFEM, ILO, European Union and OECD in the gender and economy area, especially in themes covered by the Symposium. Such cooperation should cover projects related to the improvement of gender data and analyses as well as the exchange of practices in substantive areas. In some areas, such as measures to improve women's employability or access to assets and financing, the directives and other norms developed by the European Commission should be widely used including in programmes aimed at non-accession countries.
5. Strengthen the links between the Symposium follow up, regional Beijing +10 process and United Nations activities related to gender aspects of global mandates and conferences, such as gender task forces of the Millennium Declaration Goals, Financing for Development and Sustainable Development in order to better reflect the concerns of UNECE member countries, especially transition economies, at the global level.

Annex I

PROGRAMME

- Welcome by Ms. Brigita Schmögnerová, UNECE Executive Secretary and Ms. Angela King, Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Gender Issues

- Theme I: Increasing Womens' Access to Finance and Assets

Impact of external debt, macroeconomic reforms and privatisation in women's' access to finance and assets in transition economies; policies and practices of credit allocations by financial institutions; other public and private schemes for ensuring women's' access to credit and financial services.

Moderator: Ms. B. Schmögnerová, UNECE Executive Secretary

Ms. Barbara Helfferich, member of the Cabinet of the Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, European Commission

Ms. Oksana Kissyelova, President, Liberal Society Institute, Ukraine

Ms. Márta Szigeti Bonifert, Executive Director, Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary

Ms. Jela Bacovic, Assistant Minister, International Economic Affairs, Serbia and Montenegro

- Theme II: Improving women's employability and supporting women's employment

Measures for ensuring compatibility of work with family responsibilities; women's access to education and training, including the use of ICT.

Moderator: Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, Senior Social Affairs Officer, UNECE

Ms. Jill Rubery, Professor, University of Manchester, UK and Expert, European Commission

Ms. T. Melnikova, Chief, Department of Children, Women and Family Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Development, Russian Federation

Ms. Valerie Suchod, Ministry of Employment and Solidarity, France

Ms. Erika Kvapilova, Director, Bratislava Centre for Work and Family Studies, Slov

- Theme II: Improving women's employability and supporting women's employment (continued)

Women's' access to self-employment and entrepreneurship

Moderator: Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, Senior Social Affairs Officer, UNECE

Ms. Jelena Krivograd, Counsellor the Minister, Ministry of the Economy, Republic of Slovenia

Ms. Nino Elizbarashvili, President, Georgian Association of Women Entrepreneurs (GAWB)

Ms. Alessandra Pasetti, Eurochambers women's network, Unioncamere, Italy

- Theme III: Gender budgets

Good practices and lessons learned in engendering budgets (central and local): overall process; tax policies; selected types of public expenditures (e.g. pro active employment policies, health, housing); price of public services.

Moderator: Mr. Guran Peter, Director General, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, Slovakia

Ms. Elizabeth Villagomez, Expert, Senior Partner, Almenara Estudios Economicos, Spain

Mr. Audrius Zelionis, Director, Budget Department, Ministry of Finance, Lithuania

Ms. Gabriella Matefi, Lawyer, member of the Women's Council of the city of Basel, Gender budget project, Switzerland

- Theme IV: Social security and pensions

Gender implications of social security reforms, good practices in compensating for women in unpaid care work; ageing and situation of older women in ECE countries; gender implications of pension reforms; pension coverage for part-time and flexible work arrangements.

Moderator: Mr. Kirner Andreas, Deputy Head of Division, Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany

Ms. Silke Steinhilber, Expert, Gender and Welfare Reforms in Central Europe, Germany

Ms. Sheila Regehr, Economic Policy Coordinator, Status of Women, Canada

- Theme V: Institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender into economic policies

National processes: sharing roles and responsibilities and promoting dialogue among the various actors involved in the gender mainstreaming process: governmental gender units, line ministries, civil society organisations, parliamentary institutions, academia

Moderator: Ms. Sheila Regehr, Economic Policy Coordinator, Status of Women

Ms. Tey de Salvador, General Director, Women's Institute, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Spain

Ms. Saida Iskakova, Head of the Secretariat of the National Commission on Family and Women Affairs, Kazakhstan

Mr. Bazac Dumitry, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity and Family, Division for labour Force Policy, Romania

Ms. Alisa McKay, International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE).

- Theme VI: Regional cooperation and a Way Forward: the role of intergovernmental organisations and regional / sub-regional NGO networks in supporting gender mainstreaming in the economic field

Moderator: Mr. Patrice Robineau, Acting Deputy Executive Secretary, UNECE

UNIFEM, Ms. Zina Mounla, Director, Europe and CIS countries

UNDP, Ms. Dono Abdurazkova, Regional Centre Bratislava, Gender Adviser

European Commission, Ms. Maria Tomassetti, DG Employment

UNECE, Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, Senior Social Affairs Officer, UNECE

Annex II

DOCUMENTS

Information Note: ECE/AC.26/2004/1

Background paper I

Women's economic empowerment and access to financing and assets in CIS countries: issues, good practice and policy options", by Oksana Kissyelova, President, Liberal Society Institute, Ukraine.

Background paper II

Gender Mainstreaming and Women employability in EU countries, by Jill Rubery, Professor, Manchester School of Management, University of Manchester - Institute of Science and Technology, United Kingdom.

Background paper III

Employability Policies in Transition Countries: Issues, Good Practice and Policy Options, by the UNECE secretariat.

Background paper VI

Women's Self Employment and Entrepreneurship in the UNECE region, by the UNECE secretariat.

Background paper V

Gender responsive budget: issues, good practice and policies options, by Elisabeth Villagomez, Senior Consultant, Almera Estudios Economicos y Sociales S.L; Spain.

Background paper VI

Gender dimension of social security reforms in transition economies, by Silke Steinhilber, Expert, Gender and Welfare Reforms in Central Europe, Germany.

Papers on data and statistics

- *The status of statistics on women and men's entrepreneurship in the UNECE Region*, by the UNECE secretariat.

- *Note on UNECE Gender Statistics Database*, by the UNECE secretariat.