



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 August 2019

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting

Geneva, 29 and 30 October 2019

Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Key trends on gender equality across the ECE region

Regional review of progress: regional synthesis

Note by the secretariat¹

Summary

The Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2018/8 called upon States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the achievements made and challenges affecting the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development from a gender perspective. It further encouraged regional commissions to engage in regional reviews to feed into the “Beijing+25” global review to be undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-fourth session in March 2020.

As part of the preparations for the regional review, all member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) have been requested to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews based on the Guidance Note issued by UN Women. This report contains a synthesis of the responses received and is submitted for the regional review in the ECE region. It summarizes recent achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its intersection with the Sustainable Development Goals. It is complemented by document ECE/AC.28/2019/4, which highlights, by country, selected achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality.

¹ This note has been prepared by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia.



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I. Introduction

1. This report presents a review of the progress in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and its interplay with the implementation of the first four years of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the ECE region. It has been prepared as a background document for the Beijing+25 regional review meeting as part of the global 25-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the sixty-fourth session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2020.

2. The review is based on the responses of 46 ECE member States to the United Nations questionnaire contained in the Guidance Note² for the preparation of national reviews. It examines progress and challenges of advancing the agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women enshrined in the Beijing Platform for Action and SDG implementation from a regional perspective.

3. Section II of this report analyzes the priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks in the ECE region since 2014. Section III addresses key achievements and challenges in the twelve critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action grouped into six dimensions pertinent to the 2030 Agenda to accentuate the linkages between these frameworks. Section IV summarizes trends with respect to the collection and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics and Section V details emerging issues and future priorities.

4. The report highlights the priorities for advancing gender equality in the region, stressing specific achievements and the key elements of best practice, such as the establishment of strong legal and policy frameworks, the financial and human resource capacity to ensure the implementation and cooperative engagement with and support to civil society organizations. It also identifies common challenges across the region, and within specific subregions, as well as specific setbacks, many of which are both political and economic.

5. The findings are based on the information obtained from the national reports for the Beijing +25 review, unless otherwise indicated. The report evaluates progress in light of international and regional standards. In addition to the mutually reinforcing aspects between the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs, it highlights the role of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the European Union (EU) legal framework in setting standards and guiding priorities.

6. This report provides selected examples of country policies. A more comprehensive review of information per country is reflected in the document ECE/AC.28/2019/4 and is detailed in the national responses.³

II. Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks since 2014

A. Priorities and achievements

7. Over the last five years, countries have prioritized three main areas: combating violence against women, women's economic empowerment and political participation. Efforts to combat violence against women and domestic violence within the region reflect the significant impetus generated by the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in driving many states' commitment, and in establishing clear and measurable standards for its implementation. Opened for signature in 2011, 45 countries in the region signed or ratified the Istanbul

² The Guidance Note can be found at:

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/documents/Beijing_25/18-359nve_Annex_1_-_Guidance_note_English_ANNEX.pdf.

³ Available at: https://www.unece.org/b25_national_reports.html.

Convention; numerous others engaged in national legislative reform to ensure harmonization as the Convention entered into force in 2014. It has been less of a driving force outside of the Council of Europe member States.

8. Given the long-standing priority of addressing violence against women in the region, momentum was sustained and continued to grow. Significant progress was made in criminalizing all forms of violence against women, including: stalking, female genital mutilation, early, child and forced marriage and sex-selective abortion, among others. Protection measures were introduced into legislative frameworks and the adoption of protocols set standards to guide their implementation, such as through the application of risk assessments and sanctions for non-compliance. The strengthening of institutional mechanisms to combat violence against women, including the establishment of national coordination bodies, local-level referral mechanisms and improvements in disaggregated data collection, constituted important advances in many countries.

9. Women's economic empowerment is a prominent past and future priority across the region. Significant efforts were made to support women's inclusion into the workforce through the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, addressing the gender pay gap and proactive labour market policies.

10. Work-family reconciliation was targeted by many countries as a critical means of removing barriers to women's workforce participation. The expansion of kindergartens, subsidization of the costs of child and eldercare, and expanding maternity, paternity and parental leave to reduce women's unpaid care and domestic work were widespread. Paternity leave was introduced for the first time in several countries; a few countries within the EU increased financial incentives for parents to share leave, fostering men's participation in unpaid care and domestic work.

11. Some countries in the EU are close to parity in women's political participation at the national level, and numerous others have applied or are initiating the application of quotas.

12. Addressing horizontal segregation in education, including through initiatives to promote women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields is a strong trend. The gender pension gap is being tackled in a number of countries through such measures as non-contributory or pension sharing schemes. A growing positive trend is seen in the health sector of several countries in policies that place women's and infants' well-being at the center of childbirth-related care options, including the expansion of midwifery units, individualized birthing plans, and treatment for pregnancy-related mental health issues.

13. Some countries bolstered their legal and institutional frameworks for ensuring gender equality, including through improving national capacity for gender mainstreaming and applying essential tools, such as temporary special measures, gender-responsive budgeting and intersectional analysis. These countries (e.g., Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Sweden) are seeing the fruits of their implementation over time, including the achievement of gender parity in political decision-making, and gender mainstreaming in government policies.

B. Challenges and setbacks

14. Environmental protection and climate change constitute the areas with the least advances across the region. Only a few countries within the EU have begun to adopt meaningful laws and policies in these fields and mainstreaming a gender perspective into these fields has yet to occur. There are isolated examples of women's leadership in environmental and climate change policies throughout the region. Women's participation in this area has partially been constrained by their poor representation in STEM professions, with few exceptions.

15. A fundamental challenge in combating violence against women within the region lies in ensuring effective implementation of internationally recognized standards for protection, response and access to services and justice for survivors. The lack of capacity of front-line actors and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes and traditional gendered social norms impede the application of a victim-centered, gender-sensitive approach.

16. Gender equality machineries remain weak and underfunded in several countries. They are marginalized within some government structures and lack political support. Gender equality policies and mechanisms remain non-existent in a few countries. Weak gender equality mechanisms result in the limited application of the fundamental tools for women's advancement: gender mainstreaming, the application of temporary special measures, gender-responsive budgeting and gender impact assessments. Despite increased recognition of their importance, the application of these tools across the region remains uneven. Some countries have not yet, or have only recently, begun incorporating these concepts into policy documents and legislation, with limited results to date.

17. Progress in women's political participation across the region remains uneven, and particularly low at the local level. A few countries experienced setbacks, reflecting, *inter alia*, the absence of effective mechanisms to ensure women's equal political participation, such as temporary special measures. While some countries demonstrate long-standing use of quotas, their unsuccessful introduction in a few countries constitutes a notable setback. Similarly, women's representation in the security sector remains a challenge in a majority of countries.

18. Efforts to ensuring women's participation in higher-level economic decision-making occurred in only a few countries. Most of the initiatives for promoting women's entrepreneurship remain gender neutral, resulting in limited uptake by women in many countries.

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

19. Progress in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern⁴ of the Beijing Platform for Action encapsulates advances in the achievement of SDG 5 – gender equality—and cuts across the other SDGs with gender-specific targets. To highlight the alignment of the two frameworks—the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Beijing Platform for Action—achievements and challenges in progress towards gender equality are addressed in six overarching dimensions, resonating the importance of the systemic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in sustainable development for all.⁵

A. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

20. Achievements in inclusive development and shared prosperity are underpinned by the advance of women's participation in the economy, including entrepreneurship, and legal framework. Structural barriers to gender equality and direct and indirect forms of discrimination manifest as unequal labour force participation, occupational segregation, unequal working conditions and remuneration. Due to the burden of unpaid domestic and care work, compared to men, women are more likely to work part-time, be employed in lower-paid occupations and less likely to advance in their careers, resulting in a gender pay gap.

Achievements

21. Fostering women's economic participation constitutes a priority for most of the countries, with a strong emphasis on work-family reconciliation. The establishment of paternity leave in some countries across the region, flexible parental leave, leave-sharing schemes, partnership bonuses and the use of tax incentives in few EU countries aims to

⁴ The 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action include: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and, the girl child.

⁵ For more information on the links between the 12 critical areas of concern and the six dimensions see the Guidance Note, available at: https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/documents/Beijing_25/18-359nve_Annex_1_-_Guidance_note_English_ANNEX.pdf.

address women's unpaid care and domestic work and draw women into the workforce. In the United Kingdom, for example, working parents can share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay in the child's first year.

22. The expansion of childcare and eldercare support and facilities were undertaken throughout the region, including through the use of state subsidies and tax deductions.

In Austria, the Public Employment Service provides a childcare allowance to cover the cost of education and child care expenses to enable reconciliation of work and family life. The aim is to improve the conditions, primarily for women, to gain access to employment, take part in training courses and improve job security. Families with a low income who need full-day, half-day or hourly care for their child can receive this allowance for up to 156 weeks in total.

23. The gender pay gap is widely recognized, with several countries adopting policies and measures to ensure its reduction, including the development of methodologies to calculate the gap and the adoption of action plans (i.e., Finland, Georgia, Sweden). Specific initiatives to tackle the issue through wage transparency were undertaken in a few EU countries and Canada, mostly focused on large enterprises.

The Transparency in Wage Structures Act adopted in Germany in 2017 creates an individual right to information about the wage structure for all employees of a company with more than 200 employees. The employer must also disclose the statistic median of the average monthly gross remuneration received by the opposite gender.

24. Persistent occupational segregation is addressed primarily by initiatives to eradicate educational segregation, particularly the greater inclusion of women and girls in STEM. Numerous countries provided skills training to women among other efforts to foster their employment.

25. Providing subsidies to companies that employ women and supporting women's entrepreneurship, such as by establishing favorable conditions for women applicants, were the primary strategies employed by several countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA).

26. Several countries implemented programmes designed specifically to foster employment of migrant, ethnic minority and disabled women, as well as domestic violence victims. A few countries focused on public-sector hiring, including health, social work and care giving (e.g., Croatia, Hungary, Israel, Italy); some focused on training and skills development (e.g., Germany, Latvia, Spain).

27. Anti-discrimination laws and provisions within labour legislation are prevalent throughout the region. Several countries have required private employers to establish gender equality plans. In Finland, this applies to private employers with over 30 employees, and plans must include a sexual orientation and gender identity component. National human rights institutions, independent bodies with a mandate to promote and protect human rights, also play a strong role in ensuring the effective implementation of anti-discrimination laws in many countries, fostering women's access to justice in case of workplace discrimination.

Challenges and setbacks

28. Important gaps in policies and their effective implementation continue to impede progress. Women continue to experience lower employment rates, shorter working hours, higher absence rates and lower pay and capital income than men. Gender has not been effectively mainstreamed into national economic policies, including for rural development particularly in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) and EECCA.

29. Women continue to face vertical and horizontal occupational segregation, as well as a persistent non-negligible gender pay gap. While many countries acknowledged the gender pay gap, few outside of the EU have taken concrete measures to reduce it.

30. Anti-discrimination laws are not always effectively implemented and the legal frameworks and mechanisms for combating workplace sexual harassment remain inadequate or non-existent, particularly in SEE and EECCA.

31. Paternity leave has not yet been introduced throughout the EECCA, where women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work remains a barrier to their economic opportunities, and to their educational prospects in some Central Asian countries. Low uptake of paternity leave in some countries is prompted by the influence of traditional social norms. A significant shortage of kindergartens and pre-schools in parts of the region also impedes women's workforce participation.

32. Women's entrepreneurship remains underdeveloped for most of the region. In several countries, especially in EECCA, these efforts were limited to rural development policies, and support has been ineffective in breaking away from the concentration of female entrepreneurs in traditional sectors, like handicrafts. Women entrepreneurs remain concentrated in small and micro enterprises with low growth potential.

33. Despite *de jure* equality in the right to own property and inheritance, socio-cultural norms and practices impede women from owning and inheriting property in several countries in the Eastern part of the region, limiting their access to the income and security flowing from capital and its use for accessing credit.

B. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

34. Access to social protection and social services, including health and education, is crucial for poverty reduction. The equality of access to and the attainment of educational qualifications is necessary for empowering women in all areas of their lives. Similarly, improved health and longevity play an important role in poverty reduction.

Achievements

35. Some countries in the region have integrated a gender perspective into their policies in the health, education and social protection sectors. Widespread recognition of women's risk of poverty as particularly acute in old age, for single mothers and mothers with many children, disabled and rural women, and women belonging to ethnic minorities has led to a more targeted approach to these vulnerable categories.

36. Many countries in the region have equalized the retirement age for men and women in order to reduce the pension gap. In general, countries efforts to strengthen social protection schemes tend to benefit women. Countries across the region reformed contributory social protection schemes, which improved women's access and the benefits they receive. Many also adjusted non-contributory social pensions in order to ensure an adequate minimum income. To reduce the gender pension gap, Austria adopted a pension-splitting scheme that enables women to build up their own independent retirement income, allowing partial credits to be transferred by a partner for up to seven years per child.

A 2019 amendment to the Pension Insurance Act in Croatia attempts to mitigate the gender pension gap by establishing a category of additional working years for mothers (biological and adoptive). Six months is added to the total number of working years for each child, irrespective of the use of maternity leave and with retroactive effect.

37. Because women take on most of the informal long-term care, they benefit from social protection measures that aid in reconciling care responsibilities and work. Several countries provided assistance to carers in order to compensate for their inability to engage in economic activity (e.g., Austria, Hungary, Spain, the United Kingdom).

In Switzerland, efforts were made at the cantonal level to identify and prevent discrimination against migrant women in public institutions (schools, health and social services) including by individual accompaniment and by organizing roundtables addressing diverse topics such as health, violence and employment in native languages, in order to facilitate integration.

38. Educational attainment constitutes a critical means of escaping poverty. In most countries, women and girls either equal or exceed men and boys in educational enrollment and attainment overall, and women represent a majority of all graduates from tertiary education.

39. Several countries made efforts to combat gendered segregation in education, many with a focus on encouraging girls' study in STEM. For example, in several countries, ICT-days and STEM summer camps were organized to attract girls to this field.

Denmark created a 3-month introductory period for upper secondary students in which they are exposed to the full range of subjects prior to specialising in particular academic areas (technical, commercial, foreign language, etc.) The students then receive guidance before making their choice. The programme aims to open students' mindsets regarding their initial preferences.

40. Many EU countries have implemented mandatory comprehensive and age-appropriate sexuality education in schools. In other parts of the region, including SEE and EECCA, these courses tend not to be mandatory and/or are provided after school or not at all.

41. A majority of countries in the region prioritized efforts to expand access to affordable health care to women and girls. Several countries, such as Albania, Spain, Switzerland and Ukraine, initiated gender-sensitive training for health care providers, including for those responding to the health needs of victims of gender-based violence, and those responsible for ensuring quality maternal and neo-natal care.

42. Access to the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination has expanded beyond the EU to countries across the region. Several countries within the EU have established or expanded free counseling and access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and contraception to adolescents. Access to free breast and cervical cancer screenings have expanded throughout the region, as have the protection and treatment of HIV-positive pregnant women and newborns, particularly in the Eastern part of the region.

43. A few EU countries have undertaken initiatives to ensure mother- and infant-centered approaches to birthing in line with WHO recommendations. These include the development of individually tailored birth plans, enhancing outreach toward vulnerable pregnant women, targeting pregnancy- and childbirth-related depression, anxiety and psychosis, and support for breastfeeding (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom).

Challenges and setbacks

44. Despite advances, barriers continue to impede women's and girls' access to education, health and social services.

45. Austerity measures have a disparate impact on women, yet a majority of the countries in the region that implemented them during the reporting period did not consider their gendered impact. Only four countries (Denmark, Finland, Italy and Slovenia) assessed the gendered impact of austerity measures prior to their implementation.

46. While many countries have equalized retirement ages for men and women, several countries have established pension reform schemes that provide for scheduled extensions of women's retirement age, foreseeing parity in 8, 9, and in one case 30 years.

47. In education, a key challenge is the segregation - both horizontal and vertical - which affects students and the workforce in the sector in much of the region. Women are significantly over-represented as teachers at the levels of primary and lower secondary education, with the exception of Finland. Yet, despite women's over-representation in tertiary education, men remain over-represented in senior academic posts. Although women's rising STEM education levels are necessary for their equal participation in the future workforce,

almost all countries reported that significantly fewer women than men complete university degrees in STEM fields, and few initiatives to strengthen STEM sectors had incorporated a gender perspective.

48. Gender mainstreaming of the national school curricula has not yet been conducted in several countries. In these countries, gender stereotypes remain present in teaching materials, and not all teaching staff have the requisite gender sensitivity. Early marriage continues to impede girls' access to education, particularly in parts of the SEE and EECCA sub-regions. In Uzbekistan, many higher education institutions have re-opened part-time programmes to widen the opportunities for women with childcare and household responsibilities.

49. Women in rural and remote areas, especially in SEE and EECCA, often lack access to healthcare due to the distance required to travel to healthcare facilities and the costs of service. Access to reproductive health care, modern contraception and information and counseling also remains a challenge, with consequent negative implications for maternal mortality, particularly in EECCA. Despite significant efforts, the number of HIV positive women has increased in Central Asian and Eastern European countries (Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine).

50. In some countries, women continue to face gender bias and discriminatory treatment, as well as the provision of inadequate and inappropriate medical services by health care personnel. Women with disabilities and LBTQ women face limited access to health care, including reproductive health care, in a few countries.

51. Early pregnancies remain a concern in a few countries. Although prohibited, sex-selective abortion persists in a few countries (e.g., Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia).

C. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

52. Violence against women is an obstacle to women's equality and to their ability to enjoy all other basic human rights. It is "one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men".⁶ It takes many forms. Intimate partner violence can entail physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, coercion, arbitrary deprivation of liberty and stalking. Other forms of violence include, *inter alia*: femicide, human trafficking, sexual harassment, violence committed through social media, female genital mutilation, early, and child and forced marriage, forced sterilization and abortion, and prenatal sex selection.

53. Both the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs address the need to eliminate violence against women and girls, including human trafficking.

Achievements

54. A large majority of the countries identified combating violence against women as both a past and future priority, with efforts concentrated on two forms of violence: domestic and intimate partner violence and human trafficking.

55. Opened for signature in 2011, the Istanbul Convention generated strong impetus, driving States' commitment to strengthen national mechanisms for coordination, response, protection and assistance, and establishing clear and measurable standards for their implementation. Most Council of Europe member States have ratified the Istanbul Convention, and several countries either signed or ratified the Convention during the reporting period.

56. A few countries adopted new legislation to combat domestic and intimate partner violence (e.g., Croatia, North Macedonia, Serbia). A clear trend was discernible in countries' efforts to harmonize their laws and policies with the approaches of the Istanbul Convention. Georgia and Romania expanded their domestic violence laws to encompass the broader concept of violence against women, for example. The United Kingdom passed legislative amendments that captured the nature of intimate partner and domestic violence by

⁶ Beijing Platform for Action, para 117.

criminalizing "controlling or coercive behavior in intimate or family relationships". Some countries within the EU amended the definition of rape during the reporting period.

Upon entry into force of the Istanbul Convention, Georgia passed a comprehensive package of legislative amendments, recognizing all forms of violence against women, created specialized units within the police and prosecution, risk assessment protocols and guidelines on investigations, a registry for protection orders and a national coordinator and monitoring body. In 2019, the Government of Georgia adopted legislation regulating sexual harassment in the workplace and public spaces.

57. Several countries undertook initiatives to ensure the criminalization of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, in particular: stalking, female genital mutilation, and early and forced marriage. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan penalized child marriage and bride kidnapping. After female genital mutilation was criminalized in 2015, 2019 marked the first conviction for his crime in the United Kingdom.

58. Examples of legislative amendments to harmonize national law with the Istanbul Convention include removing justifications and/or mitigating circumstances based on honor (Armenia, Romania), and including intimate partners within the scope of protection, irrespective of cohabitation. Several countries made gender-based violence crimes *ex officio*, and established specialized units within police, prosecutorial offices and the judiciary, and adopted protocols to ensure best practice in the rights protection of victims in investigations and judicial proceedings (e.g., Armenia, Croatia, Georgia, Latvia, Ukraine).

59. The significant increase in the availability of protection orders across the region constitutes an important positive trend. Their practical implementation requires the adoption of guidelines or protocols, including on risk assessments, which were introduced in several countries to ensure the necessary level of protection to victims.

60. Countries also prioritized an increase in the scope and quality of services provided to victims of gender-based violence. Rape crisis centers and 24/7 hotlines were established in several countries for the first time. A "Revenge porn helpline" opened in the United Kingdom and has received 15,000 calls since 2015. Referral mechanisms were established, and the scope of multi-sectoral services for victims expanded significantly in several countries.

61. Capacity-building initiatives for responders and service providers, both governmental and non-governmental, were undertaken throughout the region. Several countries took steps to assume the costs of service provision, including by funding NGO service providers. Numerous countries in the region have created or strengthened institutional coordination mechanisms at the national and local level, and improved data collection practices.

62. A majority of countries engaged in public awareness campaigns as the primary prevention strategy. Several countries established perpetrator programmes for the first time, and a few countries addressed toxic masculinities. Numerous countries developed a violence prevention component for primary and secondary education.

63. One of the areas where the digital transformation yields worse outcomes for women and girls than for men and boys is exposure to cyber-bullying. During the reporting period, countries within the EU, and a few beyond, enacted legislation and policies to address diverse forms of cyber violence.

The United Kingdom (Scotland) adopted the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm Act, creating the offence of sharing private intimate images without consent with a maximum penalty of 5 years. It also established custodial sentences for up to two years for revenge pornography and the Voyeurism (Offences) Act, criminalizing upskirting.

64. Several countries addressed gender stereotypes in the media by providing media trainings, legislative reform, fostering voluntary codes of conduct and developing guidelines and regulations by national media authorities.

The Council for Advertising in the Slovak Republic established an annual anti-award for the most sexist advertising: the Sexist Blunder (www.sexistickykix.sk).

Challenges and setbacks

65. Thirteen Council of Europe member States have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention. In several countries in Eastern Europe, opposition to ratification of the Convention has been a focus of rising conservative movements. The Central Asian Republics are not members of the Council of Europe and have not ratified the Convention.

66. Although combating violence against women constitutes a clear priority in most countries in the region, challenges remain, especially with regard to the practical implementation of international standards and the persistence of traditional social and cultural norms.

67. Not all countries have prioritized combating violence against women, and a few countries have no dedicated legislation on domestic violence or other forms of violence against women (e.g., Belarus, Liechtenstein, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan). Significant legislative and *de facto* gaps remain in several countries, compromising the scope of protection and response provided to victims, including the absence of shelters and referral mechanisms for services.

68. Many countries have not yet defined rape in terms of lack of consent in line with the Istanbul Convention. In several countries, domestic violence laws provide protection and services to family members only, excluding intimate partners. In a clear setback, elements of domestic assault were decriminalized in two countries. The United Kingdom Government committed to an 'end-to-end' review of the criminal justice response to rape cases to address reductions in the number of police referrals, prosecutions and convictions.

69. Ensuring the effective implementation of protection orders has been and remains a challenge for many countries in the region, those in both the initial and more advanced stages of developing systematized forms of protection. A few countries have emphasized the rights of the perpetrator over the victim's safety. Several countries have not yet criminalized the violation of a protection order.

70. Early and child marriage and female genital mutilation primarily affect girls from minority ethnic, religious and migrant communities, and conflict-affected populations. Consequently, limited efforts to combat these crimes disproportionately affect vulnerable girls. Forced and child marriage, and prenatal sex selection remains a serious concern in some countries in SEE and the EECCA.

71. Girls face diverse forms of gender-based violence at school, including: verbal or sexual harassment, sexual abuse, corporal punishment, stalking, cyber-harassment and bullying. Yet, efforts to address the gendered nature of sexual harassment and other forms of violence in schools remained generally limited to countries within the EU. Many countries adopted a gender-neutral, child rights approach to cyber security.

72. In several countries, gender issues have not yet been incorporated into national media policies, and no specific gendered initiatives have been envisaged.

D. Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

73. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women aim to ensure a central policy coordination unit within government with a mandate to support mainstreaming gender in all government policies and programmes. The equal participation of women and men in decision-making reflects the actual composition of society and is "a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account".⁷ The SDGs further call for "responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels," as well as the social, economic and political inclusion of all.⁸

74. The following section covers national laws and policies on gender equality, gender equality machinery, gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting, gender impact

⁷ Beijing Platform for Action, para 181.

⁸ SDG Targets 10.2 and 16.7.

assessments, temporary special measures and tracking gender as a component of overseas development assistance. It also includes women's participation in decision-making within the governmental and the private sectors, including in the media.

Achievements

75. Women's participation in political decision-making is a priority in a number of countries. Several countries put a strong focus on strengthening gender equality policies and machineries in order to institutionalize the tools and practices necessary for ensuring that issues affecting women are appropriately considered in policy formation.

76. Important achievements were made with respect to women's political participation at the national level in the region. There are 14 women heads of state and of government. Women have achieved parity or near parity in political participation in some EU countries (Finland, Norway, Spain, Sweden).⁹ Several countries across the region reported the highest level of female parliamentarians yet (Albania, Italy, Israel, Norway, Republic of Moldova).

77. Many countries in the region have implemented temporary special measures, some with sanctions for non-compliance, to ensure a minimum level of representation by both men and women in political bodies at national and local levels. A few countries adopted quota.

The recent adoption of a new Electoral Code in Ukraine introduces a proportional system with a 40 per cent quota in open lists. Parliamentary elections in July 2019 resulted in the largest number of women members of Parliament ever, a rise from 12 per cent to 20 per cent.

78. Women are highly represented within the judicial branch across the region, exceptions exist at the highest levels in some countries. Several countries within the EU have also adopted quotas to ensure increased women's participation on executive boards of companies listed on public exchanges (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, the United Kingdom). Women have achieved parity within several countries in the EU as presidents and board members in public broadcasting, but are under-represented as executives in this field, with few exceptions. In several countries, media authorities have developed internal regulations on gender equality; media or advertising laws also prohibit discriminatory images and messaging based on gender.

79. Almost all countries in the region have established a mechanism for advancing gender equality within the public administration, and significant efforts were made in a number of countries to strengthen it. Several countries, such as Spain, have robust mechanisms for advancing gender equality from the national to local levels, reflecting strong political will. A few countries established gender equality bodies during the reporting period (i.e., Sweden, North Macedonia). Some countries created gender focal points within each ministry and/or at the local level during the reporting period. Within the EU and SEE, many countries indicated that gender equality mechanism representatives were formal participants in SDG processes.

80. Almost all countries indicated the existence of a national-level policy on the advancement of gender equality. A few countries developed local-level gender equality plans.

⁹ See, EIGE, Gender Statistics Database: National parliaments: presidents and members, available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_pol_parl__wmid_natparl/bar.

81. Advances were made in the application of gender-responsive budgeting. One-third of the countries from across the region reported applying some version of it. Some countries have included gender-responsive budgeting within the national policy document. Several countries have also implemented gender impact assessments within legislative processes. Of those countries that provide overseas development assistance, some dedicated a significant proportion to gender equality (e.g., Canada, Finland, Sweden).

Challenges and setbacks

82. Advances in women's participation in decision-making and the institutionalization of their rights and needs into governmental processes through effective policies and mechanisms were not generalized.

83. Women's political representation in most countries remains below the 40 per cent recommended by the Council of Europe. In some countries (Hungary, Liechtenstein) it is as low as 12 per cent, and not much higher in a few other countries. In a significant setback, the percentage of women parliamentarians in Liechtenstein halved in the 2017 elections and dropped significantly in Kyrgyzstan.

84. Many countries within the region have not adopted quotas or other temporary special measures and attempts to do so were unsuccessful in Georgia and Estonia. Existing quotas remain unrealized in a few countries (i.e., Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan). Women's political participation at the local level remains low in most countries in the region.

85. Violence against women in politics prevents women from seeking political office. Violence against women in politics was described as widespread in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kyrgyzstan.

86. Women's participation in decision-making in the private sector continues to lag behind men's significantly, in particular in managerial roles and on the boards of private companies.

87. Government support to national gender equality machineries is insufficient and, in a few countries, gender equality bodies were transferred from one authority to another, sometimes multiple times, disrupting progress. In one setback, Sweden's parliament even voted to abolish the recently-established Gender Equality Agency.

88. Although most countries have gender equality policies in place, not all of them were effectively costed and budgeted. Gender mainstreaming across all policy sectors is largely lacking in the region, particularly in the economic, financial and environmental spheres; and in some parts, no gender mainstreaming has taken place. In some countries, gender equality initiatives were limited to short-term projects reliant on donor support, without state budgetary contribution.

89. Although in several countries, women are over-represented as journalists, men predominantly occupy high-level managerial and ownership positions in the media. Few countries provided data on the representation of women and gender issues in media and the status of state monitoring of mass media for gender discriminatory content.

E. Peaceful and inclusive societies

90. As civilians, women and girls experience violations of human rights and humanitarian law during conflict, suffering gender-specific crimes as a result of war, violent conflict, terrorism and violent extremism. At the same time, women have an important role to play in conflict resolution, contributing to sustained and resilient peace, and to peace and reconstruction activities post-conflict.

91. The following section addresses the women, peace and security agenda, entailing women's meaningful participation in peace processes, including conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation and post-conflict recovery, and ensuring that women's needs are fully reflected in peace processes and in recovery efforts, including access to justice for sexual and gender-based crimes committed during conflict. It covers women's representation

in military and diplomatic service, training provided to military and diplomatic staff and those deployed on overseas missions, the availability of gender-based asylum and the scope of ODA financing of the women, peace and security agenda.

Achievements

92. Progress in the field of women, peace and security continues throughout the region, with significant advancements occurring in a few countries. Three countries qualified their foreign policy and assistance as feminist (Canada, France and Sweden).

93. Most countries in the region have adopted a national strategy or action plan on women, peace and security. In Georgia and Ukraine, an emphasis was placed on localization of national-level policies. This bottom-up approach aims to increase ownership of the process within municipalities and among conflict-affected women. Specialized legislation in several countries in SEE regulates access to justice, services and indemnification for victims of sexual violence during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

94. Many countries have provided training on gender equality and gender-based violence to military and diplomatic staff, and to those deploying on overseas missions.

95. A few countries adopted their first national strategies, action plans or legislation on combating human trafficking during the reporting period. A few have also addressed the use of firearms in domestic violence situations in policies related to the control of small arms and light weapons (Serbia, Albania, Sweden).

96. Numerous countries in the EU and SEE affected by the migration crisis developed targeted initiatives to ensure access to healthcare, social welfare services and employment integration for women migrants. A few countries recognized gender-based forms of persecution for the purpose of asylum and international protection during the reporting period.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Albania issued an order in 2016 on the provision of sexual and reproductive health during humanitarian emergencies with a focus on pregnant women, women with children under six and victims of sexual violence as part of its response to the migration crisis.

97. In conflict-affected countries and in the EU, consistent support was offered to build the capacity and support the inclusion of women mediators in active negotiations. A series of trainings on high-level negotiations and mediation skills were provided to women civil servants in Georgia, for example. National and regional networks of mediators brought expertise to women mediators in conflict-affected areas within the region and beyond.

98. Donor countries continued to support diverse aspects of the women, peace and security agenda through active participation in and financial support to international fora and mechanisms, including the Trust Fund for Victims of the International Criminal Court, and the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, among others.

Challenges and setbacks

99. Despite the building of skills and networks, the creation of national policies, and a serious commitment to the issue by a few countries, progress remains slow in the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in the region.

100. Women remain under-represented in decision-making positions in diplomatic and military sectors in most countries, most notably in conflict-affected countries.

F. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

101. The necessity of environmental conservation and its links to climate change and disaster risk management is increasingly recognized as a pressing issue. Environmental degradation and climate change have a decidedly gendered impact, displacing communities,

interrupting income generation, increasing unpaid labour burdens and negatively affecting health, especially for women and girls.¹⁰

102. The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes the essential role of women in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns,¹¹ and the SDGs call on countries to improve capacity for effective climate change planning and management, including focusing on women.¹²

103. The following section considers the level of women's participation in decision-making in environmental protection, climate change and disaster-risk management. It examines whether gender has been mainstreamed into national policies in these fields, and thus whether States have examined the distinct gendered impacts of climate change and of climate change policies, and men's and women's distinct contributions to and perspectives on climate change, in order to address gender differences in adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Achievements

104. Notable but limited progress has been achieved in the fields of gender and environmental protection, climate change and disaster risk management.

105. A few countries within the EU have mainstreamed gender into environmental protection and climate change policies (i.e., Finland, Sweden); others have approached the subject at the project level. Some countries advocated for the adoption of the Gender Action Plan of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (Canada, Sweden); others have developed sector-specific gender equality plans, such as in forestry.

Canada adopted the Gender Action Plan of the UNFCCC and supported the participation of women from the Caribbean and Francophone Africa in climate change negotiations.

106. Efforts have also been made to increase women's participation and leadership in related private-sector enterprises, including the clean energy and technology sectors (e.g., Canada, Finland).

107. Gender and sustainable development, including environmental policy and climate change mitigation, has been integrated into the development assistance of several donor countries. A few countries affected by natural disasters during the reporting period began to address the disparate gender impacts and mainstream gender into disaster risk management.

Challenges and setbacks

108. Much more progress needs to be achieved in these fields in every country in the region, requiring significant political will at national and regional levels.

109. Few countries in the region have integrated gender into policies on environmental protection and climate change. With few exceptions, women's participation in these fields remains limited, in part due to women's low representation in STEM. Few countries indicated existing and future initiatives to mainstream a gender perspective into national policies on these issues.

110. In most countries in the region, women are poorly represented among public and private sector decision makers on environmental and climate change policies. Few countries have undertaken initiatives to support women's decision-making in these fields and in climate negotiations.

111. The disparate negative effects on women of natural disasters and the absence of gender mainstreaming in the state response were identified only after such events in a few

¹⁰ Beijing Platform for Action, para 247.

¹¹ Beijing Platform for Action, para 246.

¹² SDG Target 13.B.

countries (i.e., Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina). Other disaster-prone countries have not mainstreamed gender into disaster-risk management policies.

IV. Data and statistics

112. The collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics constitutes a fundamental element of evidence-based policymaking to advance gender equality. This section examines efforts and effectiveness by national actors to collect relevant data, developing appropriate gender-sensitive indicators to measure progress across sectors, as a matter of national policy and as part of the process to nationalize gender-sensitive indicators to achieve the SDGs.

Achievements

113. Significant progress has been made with respect to the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics in many countries throughout the region.

114. The development and application of gender-sensitive indicators to policy making has become more systematic throughout most of the region. The countries in the region are at different stages of setting up a national mechanism through which indicators are systematically used for monitoring and formulation of the national, local and sectoral policies. Some countries, such as Austria, Canada, and Italy promote the use of gender sensitive data by integrating the gender-based analysis in the development of policies and programmes, including gender budgeting.

115. Most of the countries have made significant efforts to nationalize and mainstream SDGs into national strategic planning processes and established their own national framework of SDG indicators, with exception of SEE countries (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia, etc.), which did not start or are in the process of launching the nationalization process. SDG 5, as well as a large majority of other gender related targets are being addressed in one way or another by countries in the process of SDGs nationalization.

116. Major statistical surveys from the region provide disaggregation by sex, age, educational level and geographical location. A few countries (e.g., the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden) routinely compile statistics by immigrant background and disability status as well. In Canada, statistics is compiled by sexual orientation and labor force status of the respondents.

Challenges and setbacks

117. Progress in the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender-disaggregated statistics remains uneven in the region, in particular in SEE and EECCA, reflecting limited technical capacity, lack of financing for collection and analysis of data, and political will.

118. Some countries remain unable to provide national data for a specific gender-related SDG indicator, such as un-paid work, gender pay gap, prevalence of violence against women, etc. Several countries that have recently started collecting sex disaggregated data continue to face challenges in the de facto analysis and use of such data.

119. The lack of data disaggregation is a primary concern for all countries taking into consideration the increasing demand for monitoring and reporting on the most vulnerable groups of population, that poses a number of challenges for the statistical community. This involves additional disaggregation of administrative data by specific variables such as ethnicity, disability status, income, etc. as well as increasing the statistical sample in the surveys to draw statistically significant conclusions on gender differences in smaller groups of population.

120. The process of adopting global SDG indicators or nationalizing them for the purpose of monitoring implementation of the SDGs did not prompt most countries to improve their data collection practices in the field of gender equality.

V. Emerging issues and future priorities

121. This section outlines key emerging trends that fall within, and often intersect, across the six dimensions.

122. The importance of ensuring women's and girls' inclusion in STEM from early to higher education has been recognized as the best means of ensuring their ability to engage in and benefit from the growing demand for employment with a high technological component. Tackling the gendered stereotypes that perpetuate horizontal segregation in both education and employment in STEM fields also remains necessary. Women's limited participation in STEM was also identified as a barrier to their full participation in the fields of environmental protection, climate change and disaster-risk management, as well as their poor representation on boards and in senior management positions in the private sector, such as in the energy sector.

123. The absence of a gender perspective to environmental protection, climate change and disaster-risk management was indeed the most glaring gap within the national reports and marks an important opportunity for building women's concerns into policymaking in these fields at the early stages. Given the links between natural resource management and conflict prevention in sub-regions, such as Central Asia and the Caucasus, women's active participation has the potential to simultaneously ensure national and regional peace and stability.

124. A significant and growing trend are the diverse initiatives undertaken by States to address women's unpaid care and domestic work. Increased prioritization of the redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work through flexible parental leave schemes, tax incentives and flexible childcare allowance provisions, among others, not only facilitate women's return to work, but can simultaneously encourage men's and boys' increased participation in household and care-giving responsibilities.

125. The emerging challenge of online forms of violence like cyber-stalking, trolling, and the distribution of intimate images will continue to require a comprehensive response involving interventions across the educational, criminal justice and ICT sectors. Collective responses to sexual harassment have resurfaced as a political priority in light of the #MeToo movement, and violence against elderly women and obstetric violence have yet to be fully addressed.
