



# UN WOMEN INNOVATION FACILITY 2020-2021: CO-CREATING FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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This report is part of a series of knowledge  
products on innovation across the UN Women  
Europe and Central Asia Region developed  
to strengthen and improve our responses to  
gender equality and women’s empowerment  
challenges across the region.

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# The UN Women Innovation Facility

The UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia established the [Regional Innovation Facility](#) in 2019. Capitalizing on UN Women's regional leadership as a knowledge broker on gender equality and women's empowerment, the Innovation Facility is boosting leadership and learning within UN Women and among its partners.

The Innovation Facility also supports Field Office efforts to explore and pilot novel initiatives that address gender-based issues. The Facility's goals are to continuously foster safe spaces for conversations and experiments to address critical regional issues. The Facility regularly monitors, evaluates and documents its experiences.

The Facility's approaches include using human-centred programme design, user-led research and evidence, behavioural insights, agile development, big data, tech-based solutions and

atypical partnerships. These approaches challenge existing norms and the ways that development actors typically look into societal issues. Via the Facility, all stakeholders are encouraged to creatively deconstruct existing social norms and to examine unconventional solutions in order to repurpose tools and processes (or to replace them with better ones).

UN Women provides the institutional expertise and experience that is required to support the deep, intersectional and evidence-based understanding of the



Turkey Mural Piece, 2021, The inauguration of the mural "Half of the population = Half of the power" by Gökhan Tüfekçi in Ankara, Turkey. Photo by Ender Baykuş, UN Women.

issues, challenges and needs related to achieving gender equality and women and girls' empowerment. UN Women also recognizes that innovation processes that include hypothesis testing, human-centred ideation and design, prototyping, iterating and implementation are essential for social change. By adopting an innovation approach, UN Women aims to deliver impactful and cost-effective solutions in support of gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Innovation Facility initiated the [Innovation Conversations](#) series and [Innovation Bootcamps](#) (the [Ideas Campaign](#) and the [Innovation Labs for Gender Equality](#)). Both initiatives utilize UN Women's regional leadership as a knowledge broker on gender equality and women's empowerment to facilitate the exchange of ideas and a growth and development mindset.



# The Ideas Campaign, 2019



UN Women Europe and Central Asia, Ideas Campaign, Ideation and Collaboration of Colleagues, Photo: UN Women/Giulia Angelini Gustavsen.

In 2019, the Innovation Facility launched the Ideas Campaign for UN Women Offices in Europe and Central Asia. The Ideas Campaign offered a bootcamp-style learning platform that built institutional expertise, facilitated experience sharing and developed a cadre of innovation champions.

Under the Ideas Campaign, UN Women offices developed proposals on societal gender issues and put forward innovative solutions. Three of the proposals were supported with technical assistance, interactive training and remote coaching to refine and implement their innovative ideas:



## 1. Why Your Money Counts

The Takeaway Stories: two different engagement mechanisms (storytelling and user experience) were tested within the framework of UN Women's regional Gender-Responsive Budgeting project implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and North Macedonia.



## 2. I Say No to Plastics

A women-led community mobilization initiative in Serbia used behavioural change to reduce single-use plastics among households and coffee shops.



## 3. Girls in STEM

An existing STEM training curriculum in Kyrgyzstan was embedded in a broader community-led empowerment methodology to transform communication patterns and norms within the ecosystem.

[Read the full report here](#)



Continuation of the Ideas Campaign, 2020

## 1. Why Your Money Counts



Through the campaign **Why Your Money Counts? - The Takeaway Stories**, women from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia were introduced to storytellers that related how gender-responsive budgeting affected their lives.

The campaign combined the region's coffee culture with new technologies, including QR codes and short videos that featured success stories from four women narrators.

The campaign's 56,000 views on social media platforms were made up of views from each of the three countries (notably over 15,000 from North Macedonia

and over 30,000 from Bosnia and Herzegovina). Campaign implementation was unfortunately limited by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which closed down coffee places.

Follow the links to watch the short stories from [Albania](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) and [North Macedonia](#) from the **Why Your Money Counts? - The Takeaway Stories**.



UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina, photo of Sabina Krivdic.

Continuation of the Ideas Campaign, 2020

## 2. I Say No to Plastics



The **I Say No to Plastics** initiative focused on women and coffee shop owners giving insights into the behavioural drivers of change.

Women said that they were very successful and managed to cut their generation of plastic waste

Sixteen women were asked to collect all the plastic waste that they generated over the course of a week and to bring the waste to the next workshop session. A total of 626 plastic items were collected. At the end of the workshop, all participants signed the "Seven Days without Plastic" pledge and were invited to a 'No Plastic' party at the Zaokret cafe on Cetinjska street in Belgrade (known

to be the heart of coffee and culture). The party kicked off the challenge and supported local coffee shops that are joining the challenge to shift to plastic-free solutions.

At follow-up workshops, most of the participating women said that they were very successful and managed to cut their generation of plastic waste by 20 to 80 or even 90 percent (some women were already seasoned low- /no-waste practitioners). However, many noted that in the long term, the limited financial and logistical opportunities for alternatives makes adopting such a lifestyle difficult to sustain.

UN Women provided the nine participating coffee shops with awareness-raising branding materials for customers, paper straws, wooden stirrers and reusable cups. Such support is crucial to inspiring the owners to embrace new practices such as supplying straws on an on-demand basis. During the campaign, 3600 coffee shop visitors were introduced to the campaign's goals; coffee shops saw a 90 per cent reduction of the use of disposable plastic accessories.



UN Women Serbia.



Continuation of the Ideas Campaign, 2020

### 3. Girls in STEM



**The Girls in STEM project focused on high-school students from vulnerable communities in the Osh and Naryn provinces of Kyrgyzstan. Partnering with the Kyrgyz Space Programme, the project used the GALS (Gender Action Learning System) methodology to train over 16 children and 16 families.**

Participants from Ideas Campaign held on 6-9 August 2019 in Istanbul.  
Photo by Giulia Gustavsen Angelini UN Women.

The project organized two ‘tech camps’ — training sessions in the format of summer camps. The tech camps, which adjusted to the students’ capacities and computing skills, combined sessions on hard and soft skills, such as teamwork, how to successfully enter the university and sessions on environment protection (e.g. recycling, zero-waste life), and ended with a graduation ceremony. The camp also inspired participants through Skype-based meetings with prominent Kyrgyz women and girls pursuing STEM careers. Through camp discussions, it was clear that the majority of households had

unequal labour divisions between female and male members; unpaid care work was predominantly shouldered by women and girls, whereas men and elderly women had control over resources and decision-making. During the camps, both children and guardians worked out action plans to redistribute the chores in a more balanced manner.

The tech camp initiative went very well. As UN Women Project Coordinator Nurai Mamytova noted, “the children and their family members enthusiastically started their GALS trainings. Strikingly, those families, whom we believed to be ‘difficult’ in view of their living conditions grasped on the methodology much more efficiently and quickly.”

**The tech camps combined sessions on hard and soft skills, such as teamwork, how to successfully enter the university and sessions on environment protection**

The carefully designed project impacted targeted families’ attitudes regarding girls’ engagement in higher education, particularly in the STEM fields. According to family testimony, 63 per cent of them improved their interpersonal communication, 75 per cent were more willing to support their children’s educational aspirations and 25 per cent of children decided to pursue STEM careers instead of their initial post-education plans. Participating families’ spread of positive norms through GALS tools and their personal experiences will result in long-term community impacts.

UN Women: Innovation Report 2021–2021



# Innovation Conversations

**In 2020, the Facility initiated the Innovation Conversations as a way to continue and create space for necessary conversations about addressing the challenges of today and tomorrow.**

Initiated during a critical time in which innovative approaches must face the new and urgent requirements of the pandemic, the Innovation Conversations were intended to spark conversations and the exchange of ideas among colleagues and UN Women partners.

Each Innovation Conversation focuses on a different issue, bringing practical examples to the fore and providing opportunities for questions and collaborative thinking. By keeping women and girls at the centre of solutions, the Innovation Conversations ensure that no one is left behind in recovery.

Each Innovation Conversation session provides a platform for stimulating discussions and debates across UN agencies, donors, partners, academia, the private and public sectors and civil society, allowing us to reflect and re-imagine and to build back better.

Session topics have included the digital economy and the workforce of the future, applying behavioural insights, new models of social financing, reshaping the work of women and innovation during COVID-19, artificial intelligence and climate change. Innovation Conversation agendas have included ›

## Innovation Conversations I

### Innovation in the Time of COVID-19



COVID-19, digital solutions and behavioural science.



Gender equality and innovation, mobile money and mobile-based financial and the economic inclusion of women.



Climate change, economic development and environmental sustainability.



Artificial Intelligence for development impact.

## Innovation Conversations II

## Blending Creativity and Finance for Lasting Change



How we can use creative capital to improve the lives of women and girls?



Systems thinking and innovative finance mechanisms, such as development impact bonds.



How genEquality programmes and initiatives advance gender equality around the world.



UN Women Turkey office's experiences developing their innovative Light the Dark project and building private-sector and non-traditional partnerships.

**Guest panellists:** **Gayle Peterson** (Director of Oxford Impact Investing and Social Finance programmes at Oxford University, Said Business School), **Sherry Hakimi** (Founder and Executive Director of genEquality).

## Innovation Conversations III

## Applying Behavioural Insights for Social Impact



Using behavioural insights to make changes and to affect outcomes and understanding: the golden rules when applying behavioural insights and nudges.



The importance of testing and for interventions to be in the best interest of beneficiaries.



Measuring and involving policymakers and the private sector.



Examples of behavioural insights used at the national governmental and local levels (including Serbia's no plastics project and unpaid care work).

**Guest panellists:** **Tiina Likki** (Behavioural Scientist, Behavioural Insights Team), **Kai Ruggeri** (Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Policy & Management at the Columbia University Medical Center).



## Innovation Conversations IV

## How Do We Shape the Workforce of the Future?



Involving women and girls in the digital workforce, given COVID-19 and the digital divide.



Accessibility and inclusion of digital solutions and technology courses and skills.



Examples from the Google Women Will Programme and the Girls Who Code programmes (including code at home), the Microsoft AI and DigiSkillz programme, the UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina IT Girls programme and the UN Women Moldova GirlsGoIT programme.

**Guest panellists:** **Andrea Jordan** (Vice President of Programmes, Girls Who Code), **Natalie Cano** (Brand and Reputation Marketing, APAC, Google), **Kate Barnes** (Manager of Strategic Partnerships for Philanthropies, Microsoft).

## Innovation Conversations V

## How Can Virtual Reality Change the Way We See the World?



Virtual reality (VR), what it is, how it brings out the empathetic side of technology and how it can change behaviours.



How to use VR with a positive deviance approach.



How UN Women is using VR.



The benefits and limitations of using VR.

**Guest panellists:** **Lars Thuesen** (Global change leader and founder of the Welfare Improvement Network), **Gayatri Parameswaran** (Award-winning journalist, creator and co-founder of NowHere Media).

# The Innovation Labs for Gender Equality, 2020-2021

## Building on previous Ideas Campaign successes, UN Women in Europe and Central Asia, under the Innovation Labs for Gender Equality (ILGE) initiative, implemented the next bootcamp style series and follow-up experiments in 2020.

The process was supported by a leading innovation network, States of Change, which brings together the world's best public innovation practitioners and experts. This comprehensive initiative targets the leadership, culture and learning processes in UN Women offices throughout the region by building on UN Women's institutional expertise and experience and the curiosity of our innovation champions.

The **ILGE** convened regional gender focal points to use an exchange of ideas, know-how and best practices to develop creative and rapid solutions to the COVID-19 crisis. This **ILGE initiative** consists of six modules that covers areas such as building innovation teams and ways of working, leadership, the

conditions for innovation and the six key principles of innovation developed by Nesta, the UK's innovation agency for social good (see Graphic 1).

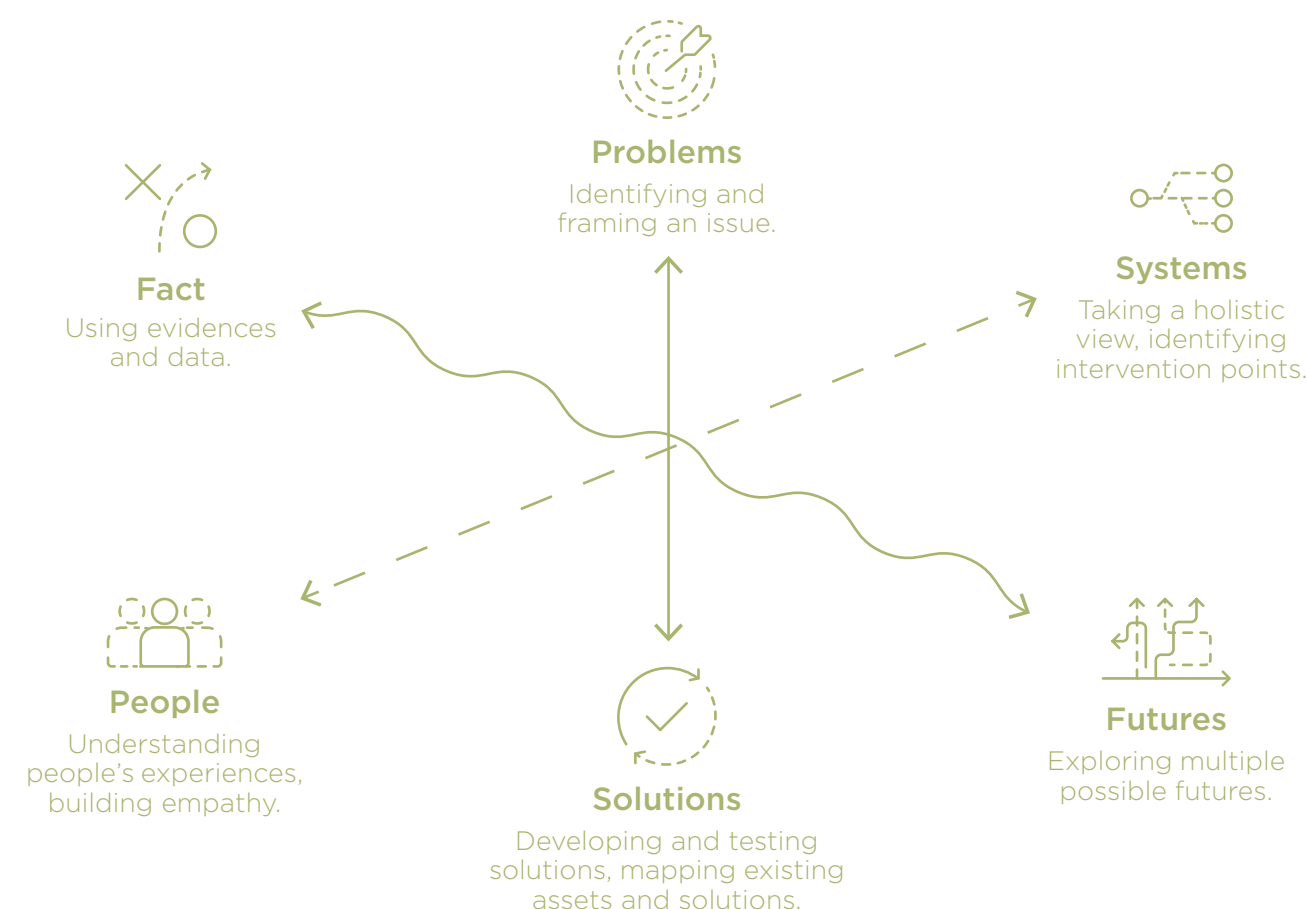
To ensure that learning extends beyond the theoretical, each participating team was asked to formulate a project or experiment to serve as the space for teams to practise applying new ways of working and thinking within ongoing or planned activities. In addition to the modules, the initiative provided coaching sessions to participants in order to support project teams working on their experiments. Using UN Women's offline knowledge exchange platforms, participants used self-learning, reflection, application and experiences to learn from each other. Participants were

also encouraged to practice learnings in everyday work and to spread the knowledge throughout their teams and partners.

Integrating the principles contained in the learning modules and the results of the experiments into UN Women's Field Office innovation strategies will further systematize the promotion of social innovation in gender equality and women's empowerment in Europe and Central Asia. This integration will include practical approaches for cross-learning and scaling of innovation knowledge for future initiatives, continuously improving the UN Women Innovation Facility's

capacity for partner collaboration. This is particularly important for resiliency, quick response and equitable recovery from crises, such as the current pandemic.

The Innovation Labs for Gender Equality (ILGE) was delivered across three months, where participants benefited from six webinars and coaching sessions, including one-to-one sessions. The ILGE was geared towards building innovation teams, competencies, and experiments by Nesta's six key principles. The motivation behind these principles is to go beyond existing methods of working and fixed mindsets and to "explore the unobvious."



Graphic 1: Six Principles for Exploring the Unobvious, 2018, [Nesta.org.uk](https://www.nesta.org.uk).



These principles have typically been used to help governments improve their problem-solving and take on new and more systematic approaches to original yet effective solutions.

Over a period of three months, the Innovation Labs for Gender Equality supported 30 UN Women colleagues (from 12 country offices and the regional office) to further 13 innovation experiments. Colleagues split into teams, proposing innovation experiments to address gender inequality challenges of their choice. Each week, the Innovation Labs used the 'six principles' framework to support the teams' development of their experiments.



Graphic 2: Word cloud created on menti.com by the UN Women colleagues involved in the ILGE.

As a result of the Innovation Labs, two teams (one from Georgia and one from Serbia) have already secured funding for their projects; six additional teams have been taking their experiments forward for development in 2021 (Albania, Georgia, Kosovo<sup>1</sup>, Moldova, the Regional Office, Serbia, Turkey). The remaining teams are continuing to conduct user-led research and to refine and adapt their experiments according to current needs. Results are shared across all teams

through a network of regional innovation focal points. Further, session learnings are being disseminated across country office programmes.

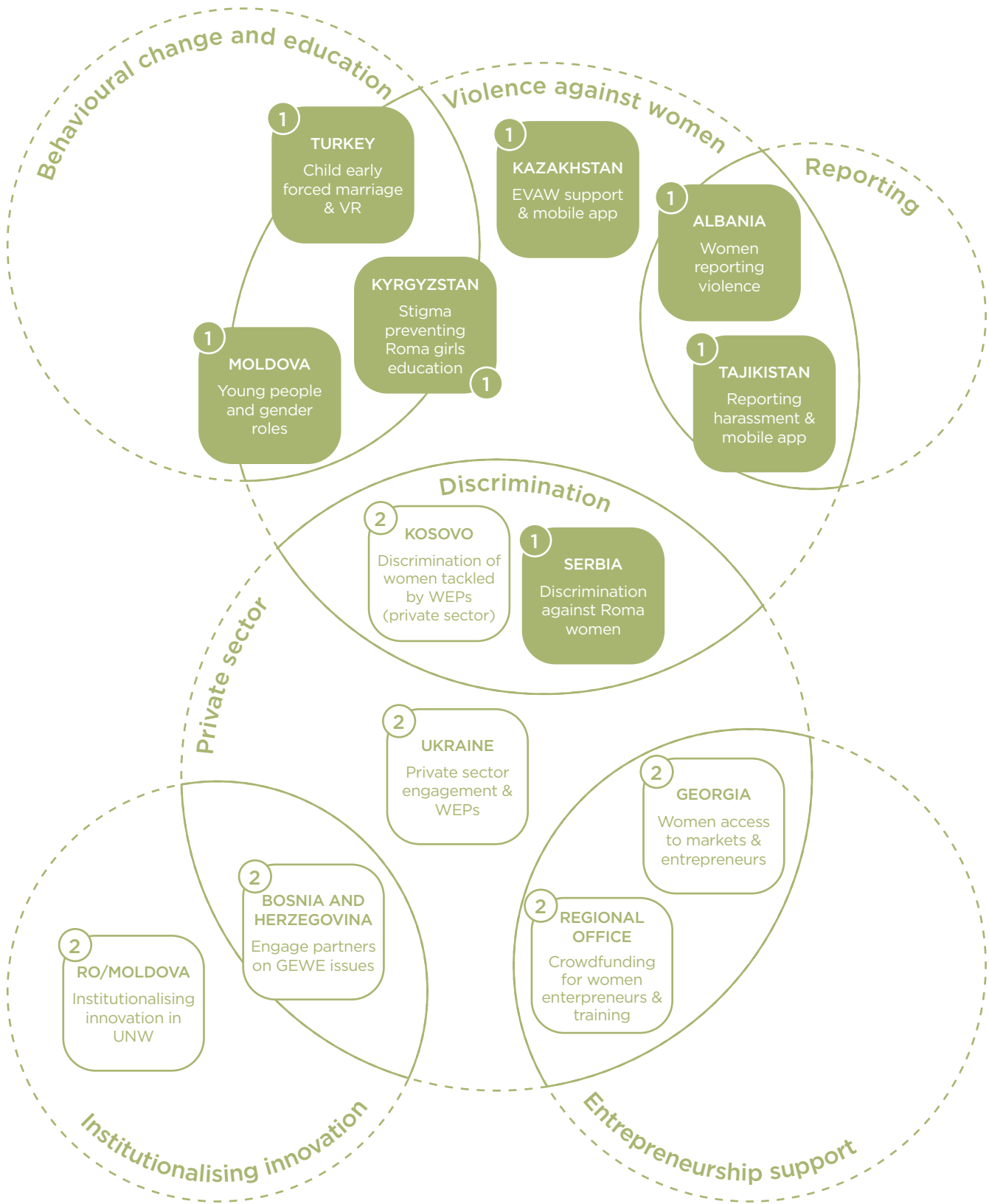
As part of the Innovation Labs, colleagues reflected on what innovation means in the region, resulting in a word cloud (see graphic 2).

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

# The experiments

- EVAW** Ending Violence Against Women
- GEWE** Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
- VR** Virtual Reality
- WEPs** Women's Empowerment Principles

**Groupings of 1 and 2:**  
Each country group was assigned a coaching group based on the overlapping thematic areas for their experiments to increase knowledge and experience sharing.



Graphic 3: Thematic overlaps of experiments by the Regional Office and 12 Country Offices.

Each field office, based on the contexts they are working in, identified needs and gaps, and on UN Women strategic priority areas, is targeting specific challenges with their experiments. The experiment proposals first identified the challenges and the citizens and users who are most directly affected by the challenges and then outlined project aspirations for the duration of the ILGE.

UN Women's approach to innovation also connects with our core values, hence in the spirit of collaboration, transparency and inclusivity, we share the following report summaries of the experiments from the Europe and Central Asia Innovation Labs for Gender Equality.







## The experiments

### 1. Albania Office



#### Challenge

**Violence against women and girls continues to be rampant in Albania.**

Successive studies have shown that women in Albania continue to under-report gender-based violence. The reasons are varied but frequently relate

to a lack of awareness of reporting mechanisms, a lack of institutional trust and, most concernedly, the normalization and justification of violence that leads to the belief that it is part of family life and should therefore be endured. The lack of reporting is among the most important areas to address in the fight against violence against women and girls in Albania.



#### Citizens and users

This challenge affects women and girls from different backgrounds in Albania, especially those at the margins of society, those from vulnerable groups and those from remote and rural areas. Women constitute the vast majority of survivors of gender-based violence in Albania. Their reporting ability is hampered by a combination of societal norms, availability of reporting mechanisms and knowledge of the existence of such mechanisms.



#### Aspirations

The experiment will use innovative ways to reach out to a large number of women and will inform, educate, raise awareness and provide options to those facing gender-based and domestic violence. Key campaigns and opportunities will be used, such as the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, International Women's Day and more. To target the lack of reporting, project outcomes will include more women coming forward to report violence and more services being offered to those who need them.



Orange the world, Albania, Roma Women Rights Center representative visiting Roma camp and Iliria neighborhood in Shkodra, to inform the community about the services available for women victims of violence. Photo by UN Women Albania.





The experiments

## 2. Bosnia and Herzegovina Office



### Challenge

**There are difficulties in engaging external and new partners in gender equality and women's empowerment work.**

Partners often lack the capacity to address the area or lack gender

perspectives in their work. The limited resources available for gender equality have not been used in the most efficient way, making it difficult to explore opportunities for more collaboration and cooperation with UN Women.



### Citizens and users

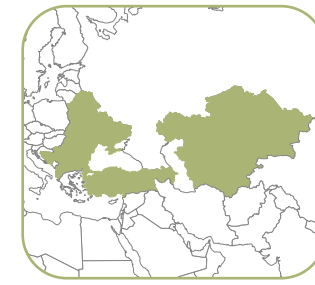
Country office coordination work covers activities with several different groups of partners, including UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina colleagues, UN Country Team partners, civil society organizations, and private-sector actors.



### Aspirations

This experiment intends to uncover new and innovative methods of working with partners in order to better animate them, thereby using common resources and influence to benefit the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda. Expanding work with the UN Country Team and civil society organizations demands new and creative approaches. Such approaches should increase cooperation and coordination efforts in the short term and should increase capacities and motivation for gender mainstreaming in the long term.

**This experiment intends to uncover new and innovative methods of working with partners in order to better animate them**



The experiments

## 3. Europe and Central Asia Regional Office



### Challenge

Women entrepreneurs, especially during the COVID-19 crisis, have limited financing opportunities and are often unaware of innovative options to raise funds. There is a gap in initiatives that provide direct financial support to women-owned and run businesses. There is also a gap in initiatives that provide small and medium-sized enterprises with expansion training modules to promote women's economic empowerment. At the regional level, opportunities in this space for entrepreneurs (e.g. crowdfunding, networking and upskilling platforms) are scarce and underutilized. Further, initiatives are often unable to provide entrepreneurs with the type of post-training support that enhances the likelihood of sustainability.

The lack of capital makes it difficult for women entrepreneurs to make initial investments to start a business or to expand an existing one. If training only provides knowledge development, beneficiaries may be discouraged from pursuing their business ideas. Weak trainings and obstacles to business development can also strengthen the stereotype and traditional norm that women should not be engaged in entrepreneurship.



### Citizens and users

The target audience includes start-up and experienced women entrepreneurs and business founders and owners. However, the users must have a business idea, plan and knowledge of their business vision and basic business development.



### Aspirations

The experiment aims to launch a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds that could be used as capital for training beneficiaries. The campaign may be launched in several countries in the region, potentially through the National Committee of UN Women. There would be visual materials and compelling messages developed for the fund-raising effort. Contributors would receive a report of how the funds were utilized or what services/products were produced by fund beneficiaries. Advocacy and communication efforts to strengthen funding sources and support for women entrepreneurs would complement the campaign.





The experiments

## 4. Georgia Office



### Challenge

**Women producers and artisans, especially those living in rural areas or who are otherwise disadvantaged, often lack access to markets due to multiple intersecting factors.**

As traditional business models seem to struggle under the COVID-19 pandemic, digital technologies and tools are coming to the forefront when it comes to sales. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional outlets for women entrepreneurs' products are being lost, with more demand for e-commerce. Many women-owned businesses have been reporting zero profits. A UN Women Georgia country office survey found that over 50 per cent of grass-roots women entrepreneurs reported a significant drop in sales due to restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 crisis. Access to markets, particularly in the COVID-19 context, is lagging the most; providing such access has the greatest potential to benefit these women.

The UN Women Georgia country office has been actively trying to link women producers and artisans to existing e-commerce platforms that are popular in Georgia (e.g. [soplidan.ge](http://soplidan.ge) and [vendoo.ge](http://vendoo.ge)). However, these platforms are not sufficient, especially in terms of marketing and selling non-agricultural products. The larger, uniform e-platforms cannot accommodate the stories of women producers or their creative and personalized approach to products (which have great potential to contribute to sales). To close this gap, UN Women Georgia has developed [bywomen.ge](http://bywomen.ge) on a pro bono basis. Currently in test mode, the site has the potential to be scaled up to the regional level and further developed.



### Citizens and users

Women-led small businesses, female artisans and producers who have been systematically disadvantaged in their economic activities due to various reasons (e.g. access to economic resources and skill-sets, time poverty



Ethnic minority women in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia Photo: Maka Gogaladze/UN Women.

due to unpaid care and household responsibilities). As such, these women have been lacking sufficient access to markets for a long time in Georgia and other countries across Europe and Central Asia.

of other regions and will explore the possibilities of realizing this idea, including considering different business models, logistical solutions and forms of outreach to women and end customers who might be interested in using the platform.



### Aspirations

This experiment will enable the exploration of the development of a regional online e-commerce platform that would help empower women entrepreneurs and enhance their opportunities. Accessing and making full use of online e-commerce platforms represents a real opportunity for grass-roots, women-led small businesses to promote their products and to increase their incomes. Via the experiment, the team will learn from the experiences

The country office aims to create a team of focal points who will help to establish the platform in each participating country, ultimately developing a web-based interface with at least 30 women producers per engaged country displaying their products. Establishing an Eastern Europe and Central Asia regional e-commerce platform will enable women artisans and producers to reach more and diverse markets and to enhance their opportunities to create a sustainable living.



## The experiments

## 5. Kazakhstan Office



## Challenge

In 2015-2016, the Statistic Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan (with support from UNFPA, UN Women and WHO) undertook the first specialized survey to measure the prevalence and patterns of violence against women in Kazakhstan. Analysis of survey results indicated that violence against women is prevalent in Kazakhstan. About 17 per cent of every-partnered women aged 18 to 75 reported having experienced physical or sexual violence — or both — by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Among women who reported any physical and/or sexual intimate partner's violence, 7 per cent reported having had a miscarriage following their partner's violent behaviour.

Stigma towards female victims of sexual violence is high; according to a UNICEF study, 59 per cent of adults hold the view that girls who are sexually abused are partly to blame because they probably acted in a sexual manner

toward their perpetrator. Additionally, legal frameworks do not specifically criminalize domestic violence.



## Citizens and users

Analysis of the age structure of women who have been subjected to violence reveals that intimate partner physical and sexual violence is highest in younger age groups; women aged 18-39 are at a higher risk of partner violence. Patriarchal stereotypes play an important role in this, forcing women to continue living with the perpetrator of violence (husband, partner or other relative) without seeking external help. There are also fears of being left alone, leaving children without a father, and being left without financial support due to women's generally high economic dependence on men.



## Aspirations

During the experiment, UN Women Kazakhstan intends to engage local partners to launch a national girls' hackathon. The objective of the hackathon will be to develop a mobile application (online platform) on national policies that address ending violence against women. The platform will provide information on existing support mechanisms and crisis centre and shelter contacts and will foster a community of practice for violence survivors and potential victims of violence.

The long-term aim of the intervention is to institutionalize digital services provision in real-time for violence

survivors in partnership with the Kazakhstan Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. The intervention would build on the current electronic government initiative and focus on the 'Family Social Card' being implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. This will deliver integrated and synchronized disaggregated data from key government agencies (e.g. health, social, law enforcement and labour) and will result in a one-stop-shop system, whereby violence survivors can have all their needs handled by one caseworker.

**59% of adults hold the view that girls who are sexually abused are partly to blame because they probably acted in a sexual manner toward their perpetrator.**





## The experiments

6. Kosovo<sup>2</sup> Office

## Challenge

**As a result of many economic activities temporarily closing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, women in Kosovo, who bear the majority of the burden of care responsibilities and housework, are more exposed to violations of their rights.**

Approximately 30 per cent of women employed in the private sector in Kosovo work informally. Because they are unable to benefit from social security support, they are more likely to experience financial distress. Self-employed women, women in family businesses and women performing essential activities (such as retail, pharmaceutical, health and social work), also face a plethora of risks. Private-sector social intervention and support are very limited in Kosovo. The lack of public- and private-sector awareness of principles for furthering gender equality and women's empowerment is highlighted by the fact that only one major corporation in Kosovo has adopted the Women's Empowerment Principles.



## Citizens and users

The target users are private sector organizations because private-sector female employees have been particularly affected by economic insecurity resulting from the pandemic. During the crisis, women have been facing the increased burden of unpaid care work in addition to being more likely to lose their jobs, which stalls their careers and jeopardizes their financial security.



## Aspirations

Working with the private sector can generate meaningful, environmentally sustainable and opportunity-stimulating employment for women, including those from vulnerable groups, such as women from non-majority communities, gender-based violence survivors and women with disabilities. This experiment aims to identify and increase the number of private-sector companies that are willing to adopt the Women's Empowerment Principles. Over the following 12 months, the aim is for at least five companies to have adopted and incorporated the Principles and to have created meaningful and decent work for female employees.



UN Women and KultPlus Talks.



## The experiments

### 7. Kyrgyzstan Office



## Challenge

### The Lyuli (Central Asian Roma) community in Osh remains southern Kyrgyzstan's most marginalized ethnic minority.

There are no reliable statistics about the number of Lyuli in Osh; according to Eurasianet, as of July 2009, there were more than 3,000 Lyuli in Osh. About 60 per cent of them had no passports or birth certificates.

Prior to the pandemic, the Lyuli community faced endemic discrimination, stigmatization and social exclusion, including lack of access to adequate health care, water and sanitation, food security and education. The enforcement of anti-pandemic measures further deteriorated their human rights. The primary income source for many Lyuli individuals, particularly women, is begging or searching city landfills for scrap items to sell.

Most Lyuli do not speak Kyrgyz or Russian languages 'properly'. Most girls do not

attend school, and most marry and have children early. Local self-governments lack the political will to help them. There is growing pessimism among Lyuli girls in southern Kyrgyzstan; social norms prevent them from getting an education and accessing their rights or being protected from harmful practices. The lack of proper gender-based research about Lyuli girls prevents understanding the actual depth of the problem.



## Citizens and users

The project focuses on Lyuli women and girls because they have always been a deeply vulnerable group. Further, they have been especially negatively influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because poverty prevents them from attending online classes, Lyuli girls are cut out of the world, and it is very challenging for the community's women and girls to secure their rights.



## Aspirations

This experiment project will work with the Lyuli girls to better understand power relations in the community that affect their well-being and their ability to attain an education. A horizon scanning (including a review of any studies or ethnographic research conducted by NGOs and academic institutions) will help determine what is known about this community. This would be followed by interviews with the heads of the Lyuli diaspora in order to better understand existing social developments in the community.



Receiving certificates for participating in Technovation Coding Caravan in Talas, Kyrgyzstan. Photo: Mirdan Akinov





## The experiments

## 8. Moldova Office



## Challenge

**Gender-based violence is an endemic problem that is deeply rooted in cultural norms and entrenched behaviours.**

Despite legal and policy-level progress, Moldova still has a high rate of gender-based violence among women. Reports by the Moldova Country Office on domestic violence and violence against women in Moldova have found that 63 per cent of women have experienced either physical, psychological and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (7 out of 10 women in rural areas and 6 out of 10 women in urban areas). The prevalence rates of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 are 25 per cent by a current partner and 37 per cent by a previous partner.

Studies have found that high percentages of women and men, girls and boys in Moldova perpetuate gender stereotypes, especially about family and societal roles. These gender roles tend to perceive men as breadwinners and

women as mainly responsible for care and household chores (the number of hours women spend on unpaid care work is 2.5 times higher than the number of hours spent by men). These roles allow women fewer opportunities to advance in their careers or to participate in political or other decision-making activities.



## Citizens and users

Focusing on the Cahul and Ungheni regions in Moldova, the experiment is designed for newlyweds, couples and betrothed women and men. The experiment also encompasses informal couples because they too will benefit from combating gender stereotypes regarding family and care work roles. Indirect users include young girls and boys who will benefit from the initiative by informing themselves, thus contributing to destroying archaic social norms.



## Aspirations

The experiment intends to develop and test new approaches in changing and challenging the gender stereotypical behaviours and norms that are prevalent among newly created families from Cahul and Ungheni districts in order to enhance women's rights and women's empowerment. By promoting critical reflection on gendered behaviours and norms, the experiment will offer young women and men the opportunity to learn and discuss positive family behaviours in order to promote gender equality, reduce the risks of violence in newly established families and to share family responsibilities in a balanced manner.

The experiment will organize a hackathon to develop ideas on how to better share positive behaviour messages and to advocate for zero tolerance to domestic violence among newly married couples. The goal is to develop an application and/or course idea in a participatory manner between young people, younger and older families, progressive priests, feminist activists and civil service representatives.





The experiments

## 9. Moldova Office and the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office



### Challenge

**Via the Innovation Initiatives run by the Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, only a select group of colleagues have benefited from innovation knowledge, methods, approaches and processes.**

These colleagues are able to apply this to their projects and are expected to transfer their knowledge across projects and additional colleagues. However, this knowledge transfer can be limited, and knowledge sometimes stays within the projects that received training. The challenge is to institutionalize innovation knowledge and approaches across all colleagues and internal processes, thus ensuring that innovative ways of working and thinking are embedded throughout all of UN Women's work and offices.

**Innovation is at the heart of the progression of gender equality in society and must continue to be a core organisational priority for UN Women.**



### Citizens and users

The key targets for this experiment are UN Women colleagues in programmatic and operational roles, collaborative projects and implementing partners that we work with. The aims are to extend innovation knowledge and expertise across country offices, regional offices and headquarters and to establish a comprehensive strategy to be embraced throughout the institution.



### Aspirations

The experiment aims to outline changes that can be made to the ways that we work regionally and in the field in order to improve efficiency, productivity, organizational skills, communication and collaboration. The goal is to develop a sustainable regional innovation strategy that includes knowledge dissemination, the creation of organizational structures, building a community of practice, targeted talent sourcing and performance management, training and skills development and, overall, more innovation embedded in everyday work.







The experiments

## 10. Serbia Office



### Challenge

**Although discrimination undoubtedly exists in Serbia, it is hardly proven in everyday life — mostly because a large number of social actors close their eyes to discrimination or live in the belief that it does not occur.**

Proving discrimination in court is a significant challenge; evidence often proves insufficient for fair rulings. Many cases of discrimination remain hidden, justified by various excuses or happen in situations where the conduct occurs without witnesses (which prevents the victim from obtaining evidence and initiating protection proceedings). Many women remain silent regarding the discrimination they have experienced and consider the state of affairs as unchangeable.



### Citizens and users

Women from multiple marginalized groups who most often face discrimination in numerous areas of public and private life (e.g. Roma women, lesbians, transgender women, women with disabilities, elderly women, migrant women, single mothers and women living with HIV).



### Aspirations

The experiment intends to delineate the areas of public and private life in which women from multiple marginalized groups experience discrimination but rarely (or never) speak about it. Hence, the experiment looks to increase the media's interest in reporting on the issue and its possible solutions, thus raising public awareness. The outcomes would be to increase the use of discrimination protection mechanisms so that certain forms are no longer silenced and to establish (or improve existing) capacities of women's CSOs to use experimental methods to help prove discrimination in cases where it is difficult to demonstrate.

## Update from the results of the pilot by the Serbia Office:



### Pilot project 'Test it, if you tasted it!' – Discrimination testing

Two prominent experts in the field of antidiscrimination were engaged to provide training and mentoring support to three women focused CSOs to build the capacities needed to use innovative approaches in engaging existing normative solution of voluntary exposure to discrimination to prove the hidden discrimination against marginalized women.

The three-day training was conducted online via the Zoom platform in late May 2021 for selected women's CSOs. After the training, the engaged experts continued to develop the CSOs' capacities through mentorship. Each of the selected CSOs conducted discrimination tests during the summer 2021, with the support of their mentors, addressing the issues of the marginalized groups of women they represent (Roma women, women with disabilities and elderly women).

Discrimination has been confirmed in the area of employment and accessibility of ATMs to women with disabilities, and in the issuance of travel health insurance and bank loans to elderly women. On the positive side, discrimination has not been detected in the area of employment and renting apartments to Roma women. In accordance with existing legal norms, all of the confirmed cases of discrimination were reported to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, an independent, autonomous, and specialized state institution authority responsible for prevention of all forms of discrimination.

Finally, a comprehensive media campaign has been developed around the entire initiative, in partnership with the Commissioner. The campaign yielded great results: seven releases in most reputable national media with over 3 million people reached; two TV appearances on televisions with a national frequency; three OpEds placed in national media with highest circulation; three comics depicting conducted discrimination tests; and almost 80 thousand people reached through UN Women Serbia Facebook page.





The experiments

## 11. Tajikistan Office



### Challenge

**Sexual harassment and discrimination are still relatively taboo topics in Tajikistan; women still face harassment and sexual violence in society, on the streets and in public places.**

There are almost no other initiatives that address this problem. However, women have actively begun to talk about harassment on Facebook over the last few years. In response to their complaints, law enforcement structures began to pay attention to the problems of harassment and to punish those responsible. Further, the government provided feedback on all cases that were posted on Facebook.

The pandemic has unfortunately increased the incidence of sexual violence globally and in Tajikistan. A digital application or platform that will facilitate the registration of sexual harassment cases and that will contact the police when problems arise would help to reduce the number of cases of sexual harassment in the country.



### Citizens and users

This experiment is open to all but will most likely address issues related to the challenges faced by women as a vulnerable group. Community outreach programmes, commercial structures, NGOs (e.g. sports federations, youth and gender NGOs), media and hotlines may also be involved in this project to develop a digital platform that lets people report sexual harassment and discrimination.



### Aspirations

The experiment would develop an application and a website that provides women with an opportunity to report harassment on the spot and to connect with law enforcement agencies and public organizations.

Nearly everyone in Tajikistan has a mobile phone. A mobile phone can provide a tool to serve as a referral for users to report harassment and discrimination, to take action and to get help through a hotline. Anonymized data gleaned from the platform can help



Live radio show in Tajikistan with representatives of local CSO's on the topic of gender-based violence and women rights, Dushanbe, 9 December 2020. Photo by Guljahon Hamroboyzoda, UN Women.

map the issue to determine its size and scope and make it possible to observe harassment statistics in real time. An application map feature would enable people to track safer routes, thereby giving a sense of security.

UN Women Tajikistan would organize informational events in order to disseminate information about these initiatives and to increase cooperation between civil society and law enforcement.

**Such a platform would increase security and reduce anxiety among women by creating a safe space for people to anonymously talk about harassment.**





The experiments

## 12. Turkey Office



### Challenge

**The global problem of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is a violation of child rights, women's rights, a form of gender-based violence and an obstacle to sustainable development.**

Restrictive gender social norms play a leading role in driving CEFM. Globally, around 12 million girls under the age of 18 are married each year. In Turkey, according to UNFPA results, 20 per cent of girls and women aged between 18-45 got married at a child age (below 18), and 1 in every 3 women who got married at a child age also became a mother at a child age. Additionally, half of those married before 18 have experienced physical violence.

The UN Women Turkey country office conducted nationwide research on male perceptions of CEFM, finding that those with powerful influence and persuasion, condoning child and early marriages, 63 per cent are fathers, 22 per cent are

religious leaders and 46 per cent are male family elders. It is therefore critical to work with men and boys on this issue; doing so has been found to be an effective way to end CEFM.



### Citizens and users

Girls and women are mostly affected by CEFM, and the perpetrators are mostly men and boys. Therefore, the target group to work with will be men and boys to raise more awareness about how the practice denies girls and women several human rights and about the negative social, psychological, economic and health consequences for girls and young women, their children and communities at large.

**A quarter of men in Turkey see girls as children only up until age 15, according to a new report by UN Women on the perception and attitudes of men in Turkey.**



### Aspirations

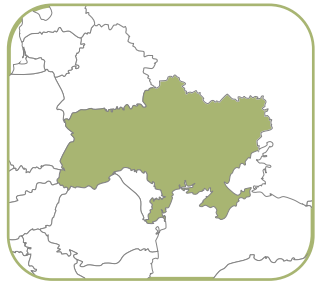
The experiment will raise awareness among targeted men and boys on CEFM as an existing gender inequality in society, its underlying causes and its negative outcomes for girls, women, families and communities. It will also strive to empower men and boys to become change agents within their social circles and communities. Via innovative technological tools, such as virtual reality (VR), the experiment aims

to transform perspectives and increase knowledge on CEFM and triggering emotions, which have a fundamental factor on attitudes and behaviours. VR will be used to stimulate emotions and to shape instinctive choices that influence behavioural change. The expansion of the experiment aims to reach 800 men and boys in three provinces in Adana, Gaziantep and Izmir.



Photo: UN Women, Generation Equality Starts With You in Turkey.





The experiments

## 13. Ukraine Office



### Challenge

**UN Women Ukraine is committed to strengthening and expanding its portfolio of initiatives on private-sector engagement.**

International and local businesses expressed their interest and support to implement and promote gender equality and women's empowerment in their corporate policies, human resources and operations. The private sector has the resources, access to technology and innovation and capacity to expand the gender equality agenda and to ensure its sustainability in Ukraine's post-COVID economic recovery. However, there is a lack of effective tools to engage with the private sector, to onboard more Women's Empowerment Principles signatories (there are currently only four in Ukraine), or to enhance private-sector collaborations.



### Citizens and users

This experiment will affect a broad range of audiences, including corporate management and all levels of employees, industry associations, procurement services, consumer networks, small and medium entrepreneurs, women and girls in the value chain and those in communities who face multiple forms of discrimination.



### Aspirations

During the experiment, the team will draft a private-sector mobilization strategy, will adopt an action plan on private-sector engagement and will map prospective partner networks that could become allies in creating a broader-sector think-tank/coalition on establishing industry standards for women's empowerment, equality and inclusion. In 12 months, the project will conduct due diligence in order to ensure that potential private-

sector partners are truly committed to gender equality and innovations and that they continue to promote environmental, diversity and human rights issues.

In order to support and promote women's leadership, representation and achievements, a coalition of private-

sector allies and partners should be developed and individual initiatives should be piloted on corporate leadership, human resources, corporate social responsibility, marketing and supply chains.

UN Women / Volodymyr Shuvayev.





# Looking Ahead and Learnings

UN Women and its partners have much to learn in terms of adopting innovative approaches and continuing experimentation across programmatic work.

The world is constantly changing, and new crises (health, climate, social and otherwise) will all require the adaptation of methods and operational and programmatic approaches. As the world looks to recover from the current crisis, UN Women must continue to leverage its expertise, skills and action in using and developing innovative methods to respond to fundamental issues and opportunities. In particular, in an increasingly divided future, UN Women must keep women and girls at the centre of design and response in order to achieve a better, inclusive recovery that does not leave behind gender equality and women's empowerment.

Although innovation is not new to UN Women and to the women and girls served, more can be done to ensure that innovation is integrated into all areas of work. Thus, UN Women must systematically promote social innovation in gender equality and women's empowerment within its operational work

and within all projects and interventions. There must be practical approaches for cross-learning and scaling of innovation knowledge for future initiatives and a comprehensive UN Women innovation service line available for partners. This is particularly important for resiliency, quick response and equitable recovery from crises.

Innovation can be embedded throughout the organization through specialized technical assistance, interactive training, remote coaching and through idea sharing, creation and experimentation. Further, innovation can be refined through user research, systems thinking, behavioural insights and design thinking.

The Innovation Labs for Gender Equality is one of the key activities that the UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office should promote. Designing frequent and consistent training and development and experimentation spaces

Photo: UN Women ILGE colleagues.



for colleagues is important to the creation of opportunities for more social innovation and collaborations with partners. Without limiting colleagues to 12-week programmes, cross country office learning should be a focus within this process. Co-delivering labs with different partnerships can bring different perspectives and diversity to experiments and solutions.

Innovation gets stronger with regular use and when teams have regular access to mentors and support to ensure that their practice is effective. Thus, using the results of previous bootcamps and leveraging the experience of UN Women colleagues equipped with innovation skills, future bootcamps and modules can be organized internally with lighter support from external partners. A specialized just-in-time mentoring support group for innovation should be created to draw support when needed; external partners can focus on

detailed coaching or recent innovation development. This mentor group can also run more regular internal training sessions.

**UN Women is continuously looking for more partners to collaborate with on such experiments, taking them beyond the labs and pilots and into widespread implementation. If any of the experiments in this report are of interest or if you would like to explore working with UN Women in innovative ways to directly address gender inequality in the Europe and Central Asia region, please contact our team lead, Blerta Cela, Deputy Regional Director, UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office at [blerta.cela@unwomen.org](mailto:blerta.cela@unwomen.org).**

UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION  
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND  
THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A  
GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND  
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED  
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING  
THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

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