



Outcome of the virtual peer learning round table on SDG5 - Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

1. **COVID-19 disproportionately impacted women because it exacerbated underlying structural inequalities.** The ongoing crises in the region are resulting in an increase in violence against women (VAW). The forced movement of populations comes with a high risk of reversing decades of progress in the fight against poverty, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and VAW. Patriarchal social norms and discriminatory gender practices need to be addressed. National institutional gender equality mechanisms and women's organizations need to be resourced to drive policy, legal changes, and actions for gender equality.
2. **The equal participation in political and public life and in decision-making in the context of COVID-19 recovery is crucial.** In 2020-2021 women remained largely excluded from the planning for pandemic response and recovery efforts ¹. To make participation in decision-making in public life equal, meaningful, and effective for all, well-designed and enforced temporary special measures, including quotas ², are key. The introduction of a system of "pairing" women and men, appointed to elected seats from party lists, following the elections in proportional systems ("zipper system") is one practice applied in the region.
3. **Gender equality needs to be mainstreamed in all policies, services and systems and gender responsive standards** need to be applied by institutions and systems to contribute to elimination of underlying structural inequalities. Standards need to be developed in a participatory way that meets the needs and priorities of all people and respond to the specific needs of those who are and have been historically marginalized. **Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) needs to be used as standard for policy making and implementation as well as a methodology and a tool to promote more equitable allocation and utilization of financial resources.**
4. **The effective prevention of gender-based violence, including the consideration of intersectional factors such as age, disability, migration, needs to be prioritized.** Important progress has been made in strengthening legal and policy frameworks to address VAWG in the region, yet critical shortcomings remain. The COVID-19 response and recovery policies should prioritize prevention of VAW and need to be localized to meet survivors where they

¹ <https://data.unwomen.org/resources/women-have-been-hit-hard-pandemic-how-government-response-measuring>. Only 8 countries globally had task forces with gender parity in membership and a woman lead or co-lead - In the ECE region these countries are Canada, Estonia, Finland, Switzerland and the US.

² 40 out of the 56 UNECE countries now have electoral quotas for women in lower chambers and unicameral parliaments.

are. GRB provide guidance in determining the adequate level of funding to deliver services to address VAW. CSO initiatives and practices on GRB need to be incorporated in the planning, spending, and monitoring of implementation of policies to prevent VAW. The Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating VAW requires full implementation as the most far-reaching international treaty on tackling VAW.

- 5. To achieve the SDG target on universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), it is of critical importance to apply a comprehensive approach** to ensure that 1) SRHR services are provided as part of the Universal Health coverage with guarantees of this right to marginalized groups; 2) services are tailored to respond to rights and needs of marginalized groups; and 3) capacities of service providers are enhanced to provide quality, rights-based and gender-sensitive SRH services to all. In the crisis and post-crisis recovery, uninterrupted access to SRH services needs to different groups must be ensured, including access to antiretroviral treatment, opioid substitution therapy, etc. NGOs and community organizations at the forefront of the response, linking women with HIV, disabled and other groups of socially vulnerable citizens to life-saving services, need to be supported further to deliver these services. The level of funding for HIV prevention programs for women must not be reduced.
- 6. There are long-standing gender disparities in access to economic resources and opportunities across the region.** Unequal labour force participation persists for women in the region - women are less likely than men to have paid formal employment and are more likely to be employed in frontliner jobs. To support a sustainable recovery, women's access to decent work must be supported. Special measures are needed for women entrepreneurs to recover from the impacts of emergency measures and to overcome unresolved barriers. **Unpaid care and domestic work need to be recognized and redistributed and special efforts are needed to support the care economy** – such as investments in early childhood education and care and paid parental leave policies. Best practices by the private companies on alternative childcare for their employees, promoting flexible work schedules, and adjusting paternity leave need to be replicated. Efforts are needed to change expectations connected to gender roles and to increase awareness of the contribution that unpaid care work makes to economies.
- 7. Quality disaggregated data need to be collected and used to inform standards and policies and to track progress.** We need stronger institutions collecting data, provide greater legitimacy to the data that is being generated by the expert society to measure the achievements and gaps of gender equality.