



ACCELERATORS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The round table aimed to discuss how governments and development partners can promote gender equality and women's empowerment as part of the COVID-19 recovery process, considering gender-differentiated impacts of the pandemic. Policy makers and experts from member States presented

proven "accelerator" practices towards progress in specific SDG 5 targets that are contributing to meeting the 2030 deadline. The round table was moderated by Ms. Sylvie Durrer, Director, Federal Office for Gender Equality, Switzerland.

I. What does data say about gender inequality in the UNECE Region?

Since the adoption of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), good progress has been made towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Europe and Central Asia. UNECE 2022 SDG Progress Report has concluded that over 57% of tertiary education graduates are women and that women in all subregions expect to live past 65 years. Representation in parliaments nearly doubled between 2000 and 2019. The UNECE region has made notable progress in the development and enforcement of legal frameworks to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls. However, gaps remain in the areas of public life, violence against women, employment and economic benefits, and marriage and the family. 9 of 40 UNECE countries have successfully implemented overarching

legal frameworks that promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality in public life: Albania, Croatia, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Moldova, and Spain. Fifteen countries are close to achieving the target, all scoring 92 per cent on assessments of legal frameworks in this area: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Iceland, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. However, there is still much to be done.

Large gender gaps remain in labor force participation and time spent on household chores. Women's workforce participation has moved closer to men's, however large gender disparities persist among the prime working-age population.

Labour force participation among mothers this age approaches a high level – 80 per cent or more – in only six countries, (Austria, Croatia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovenia). Women continue to bear a disproportionate responsibility for household chores and care duties in most of countries. Even prior to Covid-19 women already spend up to twice as many hours performing unpaid care and domestic work tasks than men in Canada, Switzerland, the United States, Kyrgyzstan, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Belarus. In some countries like Serbia, North Macedonia and Kazakhstan, this ratio stands between 2 and 3 times and at over five times in Turkey.

Only twenty-one countries impose sanctions on childhood marriage and only 34/47 countries have ratified the Istanbul Convention. Discrimination in laws, policies and practices must be eliminated and equality must be guaranteed for all women in the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The SDG5 Roundtable provides an opportunity to exchange the experiences on where we stand and how we can promote gender equality and women's rights as part of the COVID-19 recovery process considering the gender-specific effects. SDG5 targets long standing and

emerging challenges, which are focused on equal opportunities to enable women and girls to enjoy human rights in economic, social, and political spheres.

Brief overview of progress and key challenges on SDG5 implementation and the role of institutional gender equality mechanisms was provided by Ms. Samra Filipović- Hadžabić, Director of the Agency for Gender Equality, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Ms. Samra Filipović- Hadžabić addressed the importance of catering for the needs of women and girls, who are among the first to get disproportionately affected by crises. She stated that the pandemic has been particularly hard on self-employed women. Twenty-two percent of them have lost their jobs and another 15% have had to reduce their working hours. Globally, 45 million women have left the market labor altogether in 2020; however, Ms. Filipović- Hadžabić stated that experts estimated that if women were to participate equally in the economy, Eastern Europe and Central Asia could see a 1.1 trillion- dollars boost to overall GDP. She noted the importance change as we now look ahead to building a more equal, inclusive, and sustainable world.



II. Accelerator practices

1. How Action Plans to Develop, Introduce and Implement Gender Responsive Standards (GRS) Contribute to Achieving SDG5 Targets

Contributors:

Ms. Michelle Parkouda, Manager, Research at the Standards Council of **Canada**.

Ms. Amira Ramhorst, Team leader, Economic and Social Affairs Platform, Regional Cooperation Council.

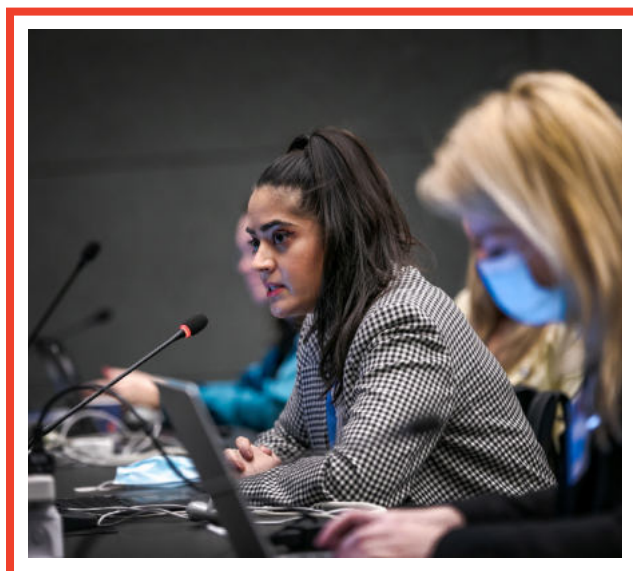
Rashima Kwatra, youth activist, Policy and advocacy specialist for the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights (nominated by Youth Forum).

Ms. Parkouda, Manager of Research at the Standards Council of Canada reported that less than 2% of national standard of Canada are linked to SDG5 for gender equality, which has consequences. When the standards are so pervasive, if not gender responsive, they exacerbate structural inequalities. During COVID-19, even though we saw that rates of cases were higher among men, there was evidence that female health-care workers were at a greater risk of developing COVID-19 because the personal protective equipment they relied on was developed using standards based on males. Right now, Standards Council of Canada is tracking the participation of standards development by gender gap, which allows the institution to monitor progress towards increasing representation of women and to tailor its new interventions. The Canadian government recognized this work, and they launched a challenge to end this. 30% of the challenge refers to underrepresented groups including racialized individuals, LGBTQI+ and disabled individuals.

Ms. Ramhorst, the leader of Economic and Social Affairs Platform at the Regional Cooperation Council noted that more than half of the productive potential of women in the Western Balkans economies remains untapped. She added that this means half of the productive potential that the economies and our societies could leverage is untapped. There is currently a gap of activity rates of over 20% between men and women in the region, whereas, in the EU, this gap is

currently 11%. The employment rate of women in Western Balkans stood in 2020, an average about 41% compared to men, which was close to 60%. There is again a gap of 20%, whereas in the EU, this gap is 10%. Ms. Ramhorst expressed that despite the evolving emphasis on the innovation hubs, the number of women in business remains low. To counteract this, the RCC launched the regional Network of Women entrepreneurship aimed to connect women entrepreneurs through mentorship and networking while at the same time from a policy perspective, highlighting the interconnection between women's economic empowerment and sustainable growth and development in the region. RCC has initiated the regional Network of Women in STEM through which women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics will be given a voice to cause change in society in giving support to progress in STEM professions. It is jointly implemented with the ILO and funded by the E.U.

Rashima Kwatra pointed an importance to be norm critical in the approach to ensure that policy, programme, standards that are being set to achieve SDG5 are not sexist, ableist, he had row normative, and apply to people of color, among others. This means



considering the lived realities of all people, including Wong from rural, nonurban areas, LGBTI, racial, ethnic minorities, racial majorities like black, brown, other people, indigenous persons, persons living with disability, migrants, refugees that are historically marginalized. Disaggregated data needs to be collected by

the gender sensitize institutions to inform the standards and the policies that are being designed to push gender equality. Data is not just about designing policies that are evidence-based but about tracking and measuring the achievement of gender equality as well as the successes and the gaps.

2. Towards a New Generation of Policies, Actions, and Investments for Overcoming Inequality and Violence in the Frame of COVID-19 Recovery

Contributors:

HE Ms. Tanzila Narbaeva, speaker of the Senate, **Uzbekistan**

Ms. Monika Kocaqi, expert to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, **Albania**

Ms. Ana Pelaez Narvaez, CEDAW Committee's Vice-Chairperson, **Spain**

Ms. Narbaeva, speaker of the Senate for Uzbekistan stated that the country's cooperation with UN Women has become systematic. The Council on Gender Equality in Uzbekistan approved a national strategy for achieving gender equality before 2030. The parliament is also actively participating in consultations to implement the recent declaration and priorities and the development of a global forum on equality during the crisis. According to the UN, women and girls faced greater risk of all forms of domestic violence due to the higher level of stress and tension in the family. Eradicating all forms of violence against women and creating an atmosphere of tolerance and peace is a constant focus of the council's attention. Under the presidency of the country, the council created an organization providing shelters for women, providing medical, psychological, legal assistance for women who have found themselves in a difficult situation related to domestic violence. This has created a special service for direct social and legal assistance to women who have faced violence and harassment just in the past year. Women in this group has been issued with more than 41 different orders for protection.

Ms. Narbaeva further noted that funds need to be allocated for social protection, considering the specific

circumstances in which women find themselves, the specific characteristics of the household economies, and the need for care. The government in Uzbekistan has allocated 200 million for social assistance to over 900,000 women and girls, while also adopting a new strategy that will run up to 2026, which includes a key area of support for women and increasing their social and political activity in public life in the country. This strategy will ensure that women have more time spent caring for their children; young children will be considered when calculating pensions; women will be included in decision-making processes in the work environment. This initiative will be supported by a national program from 2022 to 2026, for which the government has allocated USD 700 mln.

The Uzbek government also has new legislation and bills passed through a special gender equality analysis process. It has created a state Committee for Women and the Family as part of the state governance to expand the rights and opportunities of women. The committee includes the members of the senate, and the representative of the presidency. In line with the reforms the government has implemented, women are working at the highest levels of the government in the parliament, which is currently 33%.

Ms. Koçagi reported that a survey showed that 52.2% of women experienced one or more types of violence during their lifetime. She stated that Albania has a positive experience using gender responsive budgeting at the central level with five budgetary programs and an increased percentage from 2.4% to 6.3% of the total expenses for gender responsive budgeting in the major budgetary plan of 2019 to 2021, compared with

the previous one. Albania has been using gender responsive budgeting as a methodology and as a tool to promote more equitable allocation and utilization of the government resources. For example, the ministry of Health and Social Protection has supported financially five shelters for abused women and girls, with a number of Euro 590,000 for 2020, which was increased to Euro 612,000 for 2021.

Additionally, the support provided through the social fund to establish services against domestic violence was tripled. At the local level, the government has been complementing gender responsive budgeting with costing exercises to data mine the funding needed to deliver all of the services required with the laws and policies against gender-based violence. Through the combination of Civil Society expertise and international supports, particularly U.N. Women's support, Albania has made possible to data mine costing of case management, of especially supported services or the costing of reintegration models. Now they are

considered during budgetary planning processes. In parallel with support provided to public institutions Albania is also strengthening civil society organization capacities to use gender responsive budgeting as a monitoring tool.

Ms. Thompson, member of CEDAW Committee addressed the long-term effects of gender-based violence. She stated that the committee published a guidance note, with recommendations to state parties in relation to ensure the consideration of violence against women or inequality for women in different areas during the pandemic. She also highlighted the concern of the CEDAW Committee in relation to the effort to combat violence against women around the world. This is why the committee has published a statement in July 2021 regarding the situation about the Istanbul Convention. During the pandemic, the committee revised 19 countries' information with an approach that specifically focused on the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls.



3. Addressing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women: Policy and Actions

Contributors:

Ms. Tamar Gabunia, Deputy Minister, Ministry of IDPs from Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, **Georgia**

Ms. Lyubov Vorontsova, Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS (CSO)

Ms. Gabunia, the Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs in Georgia explained how the needs of persons with disabilities, including sexual and reproductive health needs has been a priority. She stated that Georgia ratified the UNCRPD Convention in 2014 and in 2015. The country nationalized the SDG agenda. A new law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted in 2020, which underlines the rights of Persons with Disabilities to have access to services and information about reproductive health as well as their right to have a family and children. A separate article in this law, is on the rights of women with disabilities and it underlines principles of gender equality as well as the right to access reproductive health on an equal basis with others. Approval of the law was followed by the ratification of the optional protocol of the UNCRPD in 2021, which confirmed that Georgia is committed to the implementation of the CRPD principles.

Considering leaving no one behind principle, a new three-year cost of maternal and neonatal plan has been adopted, which envisages the rights of the most vulnerable and hard to reach. In order to identify the specific needs of women with disabilities, the government put special emphasis on collection and analyzing of desegregated data and strengthening the role of the primary healthcare workers. The government program that funds institutional, community care services, and persons with disabilities has been modified to include access to sexual, reproductive health.

Special sessions were provided to service providers to increase awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities with regards to their access to health and in particular reproductive health services. Over the last few years, special emphasis was made on developing new guidelines and protocols, specifically aimed at managing special needs of persons with disabilities in relationship to sexual, reproductive health. With assistance of the UNFPA, Georgia has developed and approved the perinatal care for guidelines for people with mental health disabilities as well as trained over 100 reproductive health service providers, which is around 50% of all providers in Georgia in new guidelines and protocols.

Ms. Vorontsova stated that in order to achieve the SDG target on universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, it is of critical importance to apply comprehensive approach to ensure that

SRH services are provided as part of the Universal Health coverage and there is a conducive policy and legislative framework guaranteeing this right; Services are tailored to respond to rights and needs of groups that are furthest behind, including women with disabilities, through introducing updated service guidelines and protocols; skills and knowledge of service providers are enhanced and their attitudes changed for provision of quality, rights-based, stigma-free and gender-sensitive SRH services to all, including to women with disabilities;

The awareness on and demand for SRH services are boosted among women, including women with disabilities and their caregivers.

Ms. Vorontsova further noted the importance of creating sustainable policies for women living with HIV in the region, whose lives have been disproportionately affected during the pandemic.

4. Equal and Effective Participation and Opportunities for Leadership at All Levels of Decision Making

Contributors:

Ms. Eirini Dourou (Greece), Spokes-person on Gender Equality, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe.

Ms. Alia El-Yassir, Regional Director, UN Women Europe and Central Asia.

Dr. Yulia Netesova, Chief of Democratic Governance and Gender Unit in **OSCE/ODIHR**.

Ms. Dourou, Spokesperson on Gender Equality from Council of Europe reiterated the Congress recommendations. The Congress recommendation of 2016 placed an emphasis on several key factors to accelerate the women political participation and representation at local as well as regional levels:

First was the adoption of electoral law, electoral system requiring the parity of women and men at least in the financial penalties for non-compliance, which meant forcing political parties to put forward the women candidates and also to work with them to build their capacities. Second was the implementation of quotas for candidates in election to guarantee the meaningful representation and the Congress itself. For this, the council introduced the 30% minimum requirement of women in national delegations which has led in practice to the actual representation of 42% today to 20% back in 1994 when the congress was established. This proved that the implementation of quotas could serve to change the perception and attitudes to women's participation, establishing a new norm on women in leadership roles. The third recommendation concerned the introduction of the system of women and men appointed to elected seats following the election and the proportion of systems. The parity system in the local or regional electoral schemes had been implemented in almost 77% of cases in the Council of Europe. The proportion of women in the municipal council for example has increased from the 23% in 2008 to 30%.

Ms. El-Yassir, the regional director of UN Women Europe and Central Asia, talked about the recent data

that was compiled by UNDP. Looking at this data that covers 2020 and 2021, it is evident that women remain excluded from the planning for pandemic response and recovery efforts. There were about 462 task forces across 130 countries that were reviewed, and women made up only 24% of these task forces as members, and only 8 countries had taskforces with gender parity and membership on having a woman lead or co-lead. Ms. El-Yassir underscored the importance of quotas, stating once again that gender sensitive laws, electoral arrangement, financing, and training can foster women's political participation.

She stated that gender-sensitive laws, electoral arrangements, financing and training can foster women's public participation. As seen in Albania, after the 2021 general elections, women now represent well over one-third of the members of parliament. That is the highest number of women in its history and among the top five globally. Furthermore, Ms. El-Yassir addressed the importance of women's organizations and feminist movements as catalysts for change. She emphasized the need to support such movements. Finally, living up to the aspirations of the 2030 agenda and its promise of ensuring security, justice, and equality for women and girls, Ms. Al-Yassir stated that building and maintaining a pipeline of young people who will be future leaders and activists is of crucial importance.

Dr. Netesova underlined three successful and evidence-based strategies to improve women's political participation:

- **First**, states and democratic institutions should introduce and further develop affirmative measures, including gender quotas;
- **Second**, political parties and parliaments should be made truly gender-sensitive and inclusive institutions to ensure gender equality in politics and in democratic institutions as well as to guarantee that a gender perspective is considered when approving policies and budgets, developing new legislation or conducting parliamentary oversight;

- **Third**, supporting women's movements and their efforts is crucial, as they have been throughout the history advocating for gender quotas and

policy changes as well as acting as a link between women politicians and citizens.

5. Reforms in Labor Market and Rethinking Care Economy for Women's Economic Empowerment

Contributors:

Ms. Sandra Ribeiro, President of the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, **Portugal**.

Ms. Felicia Bechtoldt, Secretary of State for labour at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, **Moldova**.

Ms. Nihan Alhan, Executive Vice President, People, Corporate Development, Environment and Sustainability, BORUSAN Mannes-mann, **Turkey**.

Ms. Lyazzat Ramazanova, head for National Commission on women's affairs and socio-demographic policy under the President of **Kazakhstan**.

Ms. Ribeiro, President of the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality in Portugal, shared her country's approach to address the gaps and challenges related to employment and economic participation from leaving no one behind perspectives. One of the major achievements of the Portuguese government was the adaptation of the national strategy for equality and non-discrimination from 2018 to 2030, aligned with the 2030 SDG Agenda. Under this strategy, several tactical areas have been chased with tangible results, in the labor market. In the beginning of 2021, the Portuguese government approved an exceptional bill to pay the financial benefits to single parents or families. In 2021, the employment tax was 6.2% for men and 6.5% for women. Since 2017, a law, which mandated at least 33% gender balance representation in boards and supervising bodies of public sector and in private listed stock market companies, was adopted. Regarding the detection on parenting, reconciliation of professional, personal, and family lives, the government had an initiative work-life balance program in December 2018 to bring issues to social dialogue. The shared parenting system allows parents to share at least 30 days of parental leave, and they have bigger financial support. Plus, in the recent

years, Portugal introduced legislation to address gender pay gap and since 2018, the labor statistic service published every year the statistical information about pay differences by company and by sector. Companies now have the obligation to ensure a transparent policy based on objective, non-discriminatory criteria. The government is also working to decrease the gap of girls and women on ICT technology. It launched a big program and called engineers to work directly with lower secondary or secondary students to challenge the stereotypes and incentivize more girls to choose engineering and ICT areas through practical exercises and mentoring.

Ms. Bechtoldt, Secretary of State for Labor at Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, Moldova, noted that the childcare problem in Moldova is among the most critical issues that hinder women at work and reduces the rate of employment for women with small children. In 2020, a study by UN Women identified four options to help create and enforce such alternative childcare services, namely creation of a center of an in-house service for employees, employers, childcare centers on-site, co-financing services for parents and establishing a public private partnership in the field of educational services. The government Action Plan for 2021 and 2022 includes a series of measures focused on strengthening the gender responsive family policies that includes improving the care services and also stimulating the creation of childcare services by employers. This year the parliament voted on a law that will allow the employers to open alternative childcare services.

The regulation for alternative childcare services is being currently elaborated. In addition, the parliament has improved the provisions regarding the flexible working schedules for a better harmonization of work

and family life. Another accomplishment of the government was amending a law and the labor code on allowances for temporary capacity award and other social security benefits in order to adjust maternity leave from the perspective of time flexibility and childcare leave. Other priorities for the Government of Moldova are to develop the normative act for the transposition of an E.U. directive on the work-life balance for parents and caregivers.

Ms. Alhan, Executive Vice President of BORUSAN Mannesmann, Turkey, talked about the company's practice to address the causes and consequences of unequal unpaid care work and how it could contribute to the economic growth and women's empowerment. As part of the initiatives of the company, Alhan stated that they launched a platform with the focus of adapting inclusive policies aiming at eliminating the inequalities in all decision making and implementation processes in business life. As a result of the work conducted in cooperation with a university in Turkey, the company shared a guide for avoiding discriminative words and behaviors in business life with all of our employees and the families.

The gender lens program includes solutions such as private health insurance with maternity coverage for both female and male employees and the company offered support programs, gave paternity leave and increased that in all of our companies. In addition, the

company provides financial support for nursery, to all female employees who have children up to 6 years old.

BORUSAN also prepared a guide on gender equality and domestic violence. The guide published to demonstrate a 0-tolerance approach to violence and to raise awareness covering physical, psychological, economic, sexual, cyber violence. Based on the fact that gender equality starts in the family, the company developed another program and trained all fathers working in the company's factories. It was a 13-week long program to support the communication between fathers and their children. In order to increase the number of female employees in the factories, the company opened an application to the factory to recruit more female employees.

Ms. Ramzanova, head of the National Commission on Women's Affairs and Socio-Demographic Policy under the President of Kazakhstan, stated that the government signed a decree that removed the list that employed professions that were banned for women. The government also has created an online gender platform for gender initiatives. This was a joint achievement together with UN Women and Kazakhstan. A useful tool the government will be promoting is the creation of a resource center, now functioning in Kazakhstan to develop entrepreneurship amongst women.



III. Voice of civil society

Ms. Valentina Bodrug-Lungo spoke on behalf of the Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for Europe and Central Asia region and underlined that gender equality as a fundamental human right, is an essential condition for a peaceful, safe, prosperous and sustainable life, is at the core of Agenda 2030, and our progress towards it has been reversed due to the pandemic and the devastating war in Ukraine.

Some strong legal frameworks on Gender Equality have been adopted by majority of Governments in our region, including for women and girls with disabilities and for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. Yet still huge challenges remain for many countries, in all areas of life, including on economic inequalities, gender-based violence, bodily autonomy etc..

Women and feminist organizations are essential to pushing for better gender laws, providing gender services and fighting gender stereotypes. CSOs have valuable experience and expertise in all SDGs areas. It is important to recognize the contribution of women and feminist movements such as those working on WHR and gender equality for SDGs implementation. Dialogue with women CSOs, and to support them with the necessary resources and political space for voicing the needs and priorities of the grassroots women organizations are crucial to these goals.

The CSOs recommend:

- For just and equal systems, governments should invest in a gender transformative macroeconomic global structure, in universal social protection systems, in vaccine equity and in peace.

- Promote gender responsive budgeting, for gender transformative interventions in all areas.
- Invest in creating decent and climate-friendly jobs in care economy, which has an exciting potential for climate-friendly job creation and helps women be recognized as critical contributors.
- Ensure that women in all their diversity are included, at all levels, in COVID-19 recovery programs, also in peace negotiation process.
- Provide a holistic and intersectional approach, including via gender mainstreaming into all policies and programs, in all areas of development, which aims to transform our current systems to ones that are more equal and just, and that is centered on human rights, care and prioritizes the wellbeing of all people and the planet

An LGBTQ+ activist from Swedish Foundation of LGBT+ Human Rights stated a need to recognize the need to address criminal or penalty laws as well as those with discrimination, violence, stigma, addressing barriers to address the sexual reproductive health and rights. On that note as well, sexual reproductive health services should address the needs of all Women and Girls and gender non-conforming people. This is including access to abortion, gender affirmative care and reproductive services and free access to menstrual healthcare. The education systems need to be inclusive and meet the needs of young Persons with Disabilities, protecting the marginalized students from bullying and harassment issues. Women, girls, gender non-conforming people need to be paid equally for equal value of their work and our financial empowerment as well.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

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, 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 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 diverse groups must be ensured, including access to antiretroviral

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.

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 parental 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.

