



GENDER PERSPECTIVES FOR THE REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT 2022

BACKGROUND

How to build back better from the COVID-19 crisis while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE region?

The 2022 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) aimed to uncover concrete policy actions to accelerate Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) progress and support efforts to build a resilient and sustainable economic recovery. The RFSD was convened by UNECE, in close cooperation with the UN Regional Collaborative Platform in Europe and Central Asia.

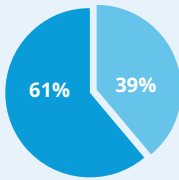
The sixth session of the RFSD was held as a hybrid meeting at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 6 and 7 April 2022 and was chaired by the Deputy Chairman of the

Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic, H.E. Mr. Edil Baisalov.

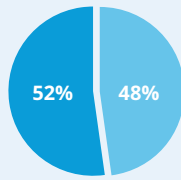
The following review summarizes how gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) perspectives were included into the RFSD session. This review includes:

- Gender parity and mainstreaming overview for the sessions, including attendees, speakers, moderators and side events.
- Overview of key GEWE issues raised during each session, including relevant policy actions.
- Key insights related to discussions on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 Gender Equality.

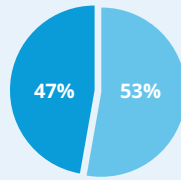
GENDER PARITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING AT RFSD 2022



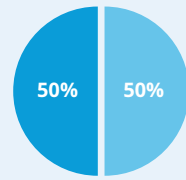
Participants
(n=958)



Speakers
(n=143)



Speakers, excluding SDG 5 session
(n=129)



Moderators
(n=16)

Representation Females Males

38%

of **Round Tables** did not address GEWE (n=8)

26%

of **Side Events** related to related to GEWE (n=34)

1

Male Chair for RFSD

GENDER EQUALITY AT SDG ROUNDTABLES



A gender perspective should be mainstreamed through all education policies. Inclusive and non-discriminatory digital learning is essential.



No relevant GEWE topics raised.

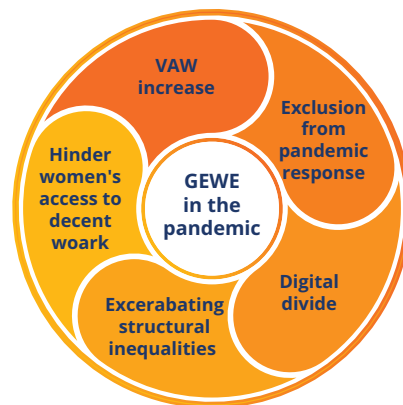


Gender-inclusive restoration initiatives and decision-making are needed and provide an opportunity for women's empowerment.



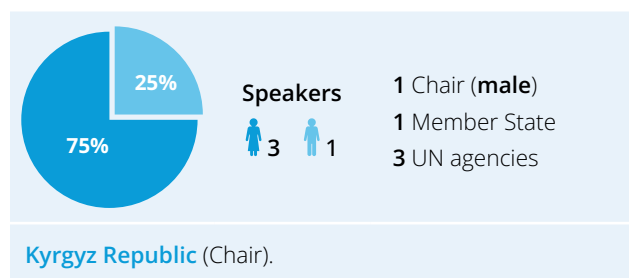
Gender inequalities are worsened by the digital divide.

GENDER EQUALITY AND COVID-19 IMPACT



OPENING AND HIGH-LEVEL POLICY SEGMENT

Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the UNECE Region.

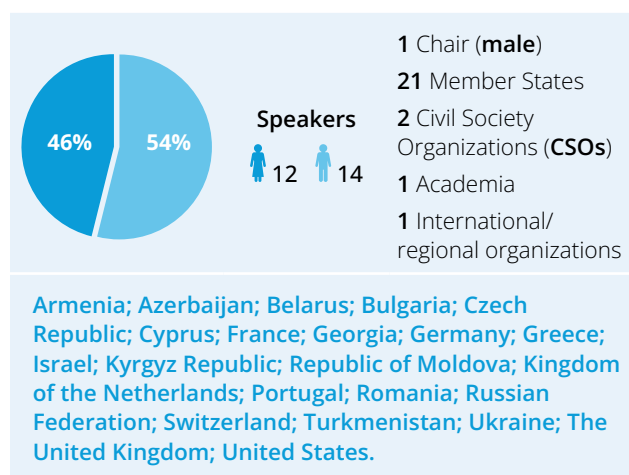


Gender-specific points

- With the negative effects of COVID-19 not yet fully reflected in available data and the impact of the war in Ukraine, the region faces challenges ahead to achieving SDGs. The devastating war has radically changed the outlook for SDGs in the region.
- **Gender equality is at the core** of response to the international cooperation in managing the rippling effects of multiple crisis.
- Gender equality is central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but progress is well behind what is required, with **only one target on track** for SDG 5: the use of technology to promote the empowerment of women.

PLENARY DEBATE

Statements by high-level representatives of Member States and reporting of key messages from pre-meetings (Forum of Mayors, Civil Society Forum, Joint IPU/ECE webinar with parliamentarians).



Gender-specific points

- **Armenia:** Gender equality remains at the forefront of the country's agenda and **women's meaningful participation** in all aspects of public life as a key priority.

- **Germany:** The country advocates for women and girls social and economic empowerment, a life free from violence, access to family planning and education as well as **equal participation in decision-making** at all levels.
- **Kingdom of the Netherlands:** The pandemic demonstrated that women are more negatively affected by crisis and are more vulnerable in different ways. Focused policies are needed in the recovery phase to ensure strengthening the position of women and girls, **especially women in the labour market**.
- **Portugal:** Portugal is working to **mainstream a gender perspective** into all policies. To respond to the increase in domestic violence during COVID-19, Portugal launched a public information campaign, strengthened helplines and increased the number of support facilities and emergency centers. Portugal also adopted measures to combat early and forced marriages.
- **Republic of Moldova:** The **pandemic deepened the gender inequalities** and generated new economic, social, and psychological challenges for women, including gender-based violence. More women were forced to change their work schedule or even leave their jobs because childcare

services were closed. The insufficiency of childcare solutions is an important issue that **hinders women's advancement in work**, reducing the rate of employment of women with small children.

- **The United Kingdom:** The country is taking **action to educate girls, empower women and end violence against women and girls**, including ensuring that every girl has the right to 12 years of quality education, shattering the culture of impunity around sexual violence in conflict and championing sexual and reproductive health and rights
- **United States:** Women's **political participation** promotes strong democracies, growing economies and stable and lasting peace which are critical to achieving all SDGs.
- **Representative from Civil Society Organization (CSO) Forum:** The war in Ukraine has led to sexual violence and rape of women, children and men.

They are also at risk of human trafficking. Refugees need access to sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion services. The representative stressed that the **discrimination of refugees from marginalized groups**, including disabilities, LGBTQI+ and other vulnerable groups is unacceptable.

- **Representative from Youth Forum:** The representative stressed the need for financial resources and the opportunity to drive decision-making and lead action on sustainable development. Young people in the region experience sexism, racism, ageism, misogyny, gender-based violence and other **intersecting forms of discrimination**. The patriarchy and the systemic forms of oppression must be tackled, including the western binary and the socially constructed notions of gender that drive inequality.

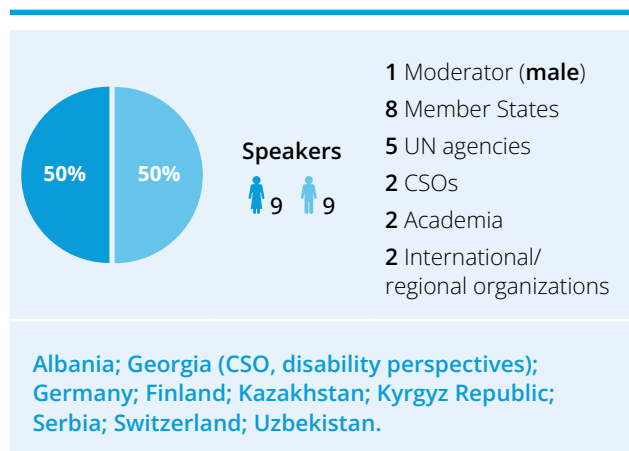
ROUND TABLES

Through peer learning round tables the RFSD offered a unique learning space where participants could interact

with peers and relevant stakeholders to exchange experiences and get new impulses for national policy-making.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION | SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION (I)

Regaining the momentum: advancing inclusion policies and strategies in the context of Covid19.



Gender-specific points

- A **gender perspective should be mainstreamed** through all education policies.
- GEWE was explicitly mentioned by only two speakers (civil society representatives) in their presentations. Switzerland and Finland also referred to overall equality and leave no one behind. The civil society representatives highlighted:
- **Skills women acquire** and develop via (mostly unpaid) **care work** should be properly recognized and valued.
- **LGBTQI+ students have limitations to access to education.** Due to the social norms pressing their identities and lack of anti-discrimination legislation, their motivations to continue education are decreasing and they either leave school or cannot focus on their education, leading to failures in schools.

- **Many trans women are not able to continue their education** due to their gender identity and end up engaging in sex work. Access to healthcare services, such as hormone medicines and HIV treatment, was worsened during the pandemic and caused interruption for schooling especially for trans women.
- There is a lack of statistical data on **access to education for women or men with disabilities**.
- The **intersectionality** regarding being a woman and a minority affects access to rights, including right to education. The provision of **safe learning environments** for all, especially women refugees and minorities shall be ensured (e.g. Ukrainian women and girls).

- **Inclusive and non-discriminatory digital learning** is essential for all, including vulnerable groups (e.g. women and girls, minorities, refugees and people with disabilities). The growing use and reliance on technology for education brings challenges and risks to increased learning inequality, exclusion and inadequate digital skills and competencies, **especially among women and girls**.

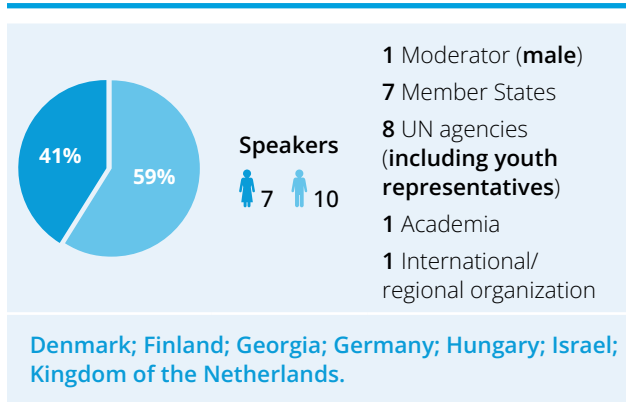
Policy action

- **Finland:** The minimum school leaving age is determined as 18 which has an added value for all, including youth, to continue their education in line with “leave no one behind” approach.
- **Switzerland:** Equity approaches are incorporated in the education system, including gender equality.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION (II)

Rebalancing people, planet and prosperity: ESD as key enabler for the 17 SDGs and Agenda 2020 – fully virtual format.



especially women, children and youth. The European Education Area aims to remove barriers to learning and improve access to quality education for all. One of the priority topics is **gender equality and inclusion**.

- **Education contributes to gender equality,** poverty reduction and building prosperous, resilient economies and peaceful, stable societies.

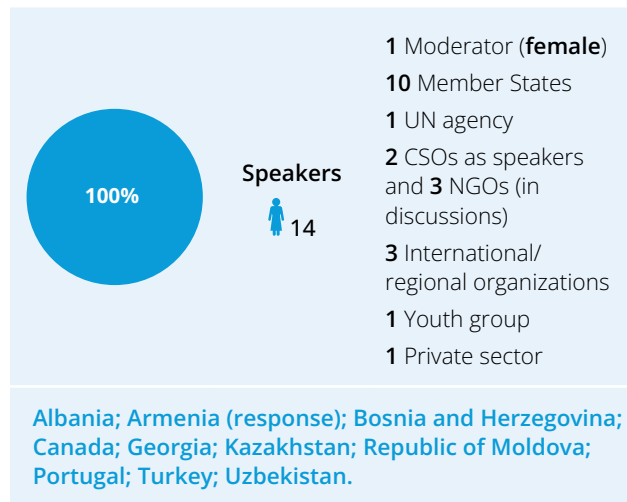
Policy action

- **Denmark:** A tool is developed which enables systematic assessment that **human rights education** is engaged in school curricula, including gender equality.
- **Kingdom of the Netherlands:** The “Whole School Approach to Sustainable Development” platform for school development includes a focus on SDG 5.

Gender-specific points

- There was no specific focus on GEWE topics.
- The UNECE Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2030 framework aims to respond to issues of inclusion and equity, regarding trade-offs related to health, nutrition, livelihoods and education which mainly affect vulnerable and marginalized people,

Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Gender-specific points

- The **pandemic disproportionately impacted women**. It exacerbated underlying structural inequalities and resulted in **increased VAW**, threatening the reversal of decades of progress in the fight against poverty, human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Patriarchal social norms and discriminatory gender practices must be addressed. National institutional gender equality mechanisms and women's organizations need to be sufficiently resourced to drive policy and legal changes and actions for gender equality.
- Equal participation in political and public life and in decision-making remains crucial. **Women have remained largely excluded from the planning of pandemic responses** and recovery efforts. Special measures, like quotas, are necessary. Other useful practices are the "pairing" of women and men appointed to elected seats from party lists following the elections, in proportional systems ("zipper system").
- With regards to leadership in the region, only **a few countries are close to gender parity in leadership**

positions. There are eight countries across the region in which women's representation in national parliaments stands below 20%. **Managerial positions also reflect a gender imbalance**: only ten countries in the region have reached or surpassed 40% of women in managerial positions.

- **Gender equality needs to be mainstreamed in all policies, services and systems** and gender responsive standards need to be applied to contribute to elimination of the underlying structural inequalities. Standards should be developed in a participatory way while responding to the specific needs of those who are historically marginalized. **GRB** should be used as a tool to promote more equitable allocation and utilization of financial resources.
- The **effective prevention of gender-based violence, considering the intersectionality of factors** such as age, disability and migration, needs to be prioritized. Important progress has been made in strengthening legal and policy frameworks to address VAW in the region, yet critical shortcomings remain. GRB would help to determine the adequate level of funding to deliver the services needed. **Initiatives and practices on GRB led by civil society organization need to be applied** to plan, spend, and monitor the implementation of policies preventing VAW. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating VAW requires full implementation as the most far-reaching international treaty on tackling VAW.
- To achieve the SDG target on universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), **SRHR services should be provided as part of Universal Health coverage**, including for marginalized groups. Services should be tailored to meet the needs of those who are left behind and the capacities of providers should be enhanced. HIV prevention programmes and treatments to meet needs of particular groups should be supported, including though assistance provided to community organizations.
- **Long-standing gender disparities** in access to economic resources and opportunities across the

region remain. Women are less likely than men to have paid formal employment and are more likely to occupy jobs as front-liners. Women's access to decent work must be supported. Special measures are needed for women entrepreneurs. Unpaid care and domestic work need to be recognized and equitably redistributed. **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 private companies on alternative childcare for their employees, flexible work schedules, and paternity leave need to be replicated. Efforts are needed to change expectations about gender roles and to increase awareness of the contribution that unpaid care work makes to economies.

- The pandemic has been **particularly hard on self-employed women**; 22% of them have lost their jobs and another 50% have had to reduce their working hours. However, experts estimate that if women were to participate equally in the economy, Eastern Europe and Central Asia could see a 1.1 trillion-dollar boost to GDP.
- **Quality disaggregated data** need to be collected and used to inform standards and policies and track progress. The role of alternative data generated by civil society experts to measure achievements and gaps of gender equality should be recognised.

Policy action

- **Albania:** The country reported the commitment related to gender-responsive budgeting and to **increasing indicators on gender** in annual statistics, with dedicated publication on Women and Girl in Albania.
- **Canada:** The representative called attention to the gender gap of standards. Less than 2% of national standards in Canada are directly linked to SDG 5. **Standards should be gender-responsive**, and without the representation of women, they further exacerbate structural inequalities.
- **Georgia:** The representative noted the new law on the Rights of **Persons with Disabilities in 2020, which underlines the right 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.

- **Kazakhstan:** The government is committed to developing **entrepreneurship among women**, including assistance to create additional resources and open credit lines for female entrepreneurs.
- **Portugal:** **Gender mainstreaming is a priority** for the government. The government is working to decrease the gap of girls and women on ICT technology through programs targeted at students. The state budget for 2021, for the first time, included a **gender budgeting process**.
- **Republic of Moldova:** The government is focused on strengthening gender-responsive family policies to include increasing access to childcare services to improve employment rates and the quality of employment for women.
- **Uzbekistan:** **Women and girls must be at the centre** of our efforts for SDGs, and they must be a leading force.
- **Council of Europe:** The local level is a springboard for women's participation at all levels of decision-making, serving as a school for building capacities, experience and self-confidence. This is also the level where women's engagement in decision-making can be more easily achieved due to the proximity of public authorities to citizens – and where women's leadership and achievements are more visible as well.
- **CSO statement:** With regards to SDG 5, the CSO statement highlighted the needs to:
 - ◆ Provide a **holistic and intersectional approach**, including via gender mainstreaming into all policies and programs, in all areas of development
 - ◆ Ensure **gender and sex disaggregated data** collection and analysis and promote gender-responsive budgeting
 - ◆ Ensure a **gender-responsive, intersectional approach** to humanitarian work
 - ◆ Ensure that **women are included in the peace negotiation process and bodies**, in line with the UNSCR 1325 and its following resolutions
 - ◆ Invest in creating **decent and climate-friendly jobs in the care economy**
 - ◆ Invest in solidarity between movements that is based in human rights and gender equality
 - ◆ Supporting involvement of civil society, specifically feminist and women's organisations, in

national and regional SDG implementation by sustainable financing of the SDGs.

- ◆ For the Voluntary National Reviews, long-lasting solutions are needed in order to sustain 2030 agenda by including all stakeholders, all groups including LGBTI, people with disabilities, women and girls, Roma women and other **intersecting identities**.
- **Eurasian Women’s Network on AIDS:** Reproductive and sexual health services are lagging. Countries in the region need to advocate for **women in vulnerable groups and with HIV status**. Funds provided to protect women must be increased, and HIV prevention programmes must not be defunded during the pandemic.
- **Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights:** The representative highlighted three successful and evidence-based strategies to **improve women’s political participation**: States and democratic institutions should introduce and further develop affirmative measures, including gender quotas; political parties and parliaments should be made gender-sensitive and inclusive institutions to

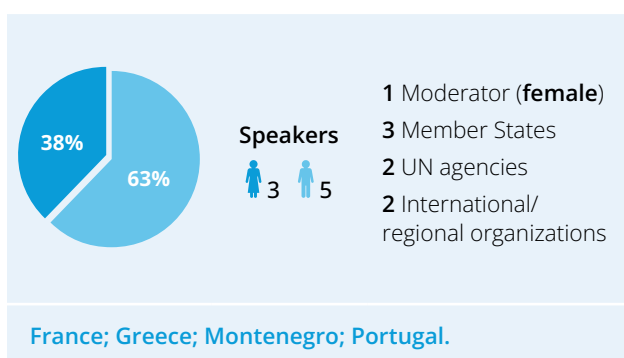
ensure gender equality in politics and democratic institutions as well as to guarantee that a gender perspective is taken into account when approving policies and budgets, developing new legislation or conducting parliamentary oversight; and supporting women’s movements and their efforts.

- **Regional Cooperation Council:** Without data, it is difficult to measure and monitor the structural challenges and discriminatory practices in labour markets. The representative highlighted findings from the Western Balkans where women face low rates of activity and low employment. Only 7% of Roma women are employed. **Gender disaggregated data are key to informing and driving policy.**
- **Youth statement:** The representative highlighted the need to ensure that education systems are inclusive and meet the needs of young persons with disabilities; that women girls, and gender non-conforming people are paid equally for the value of their work; and to ensure better budgeting on gender equality and that civil society actors have resources and opportunities to drive decision-making and lead action on gender equality.



SDG 14: LIFE BELOW WATER – OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES

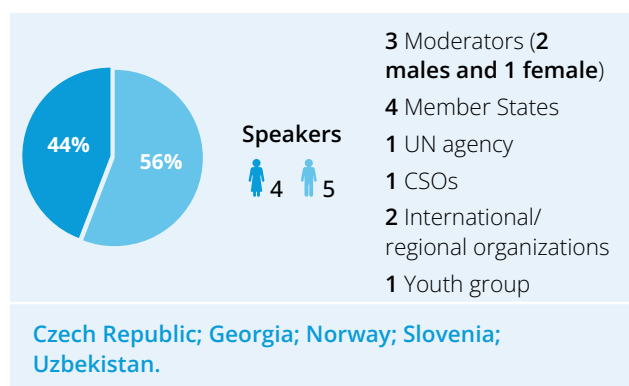
Enhancing ocean literacy and the sustainable development of regional seas.



Gender-specific points

- No GEWE points raised in discussion.

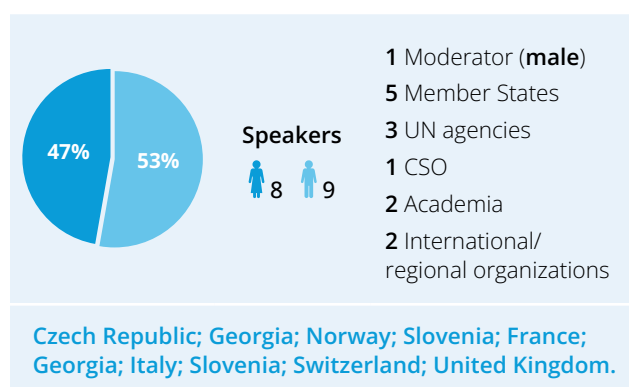
Action to protect and restore terrestrial ecosystems.



Gender-specific points

- Financing for ecosystem restoration needs to consider socio-economic aspects **including gender and the inputs of disadvantaged groups** to ensure long-term effectiveness and equitable sharing of benefits.
- **Gender-inclusive restoration initiatives** and decision-making processes that involve women can facilitate access to resources and provide an opportunity for women's economic empowerment, which ultimately enhances sustainable livelihoods.
- The youth representative highlighted representation in biosphere reserves: increasing access of local communities to regional planning and environmental planning, especially **women's participation is important**. Women should be part of the discussions for nature-based solutions

Urban forests for future proof cities.

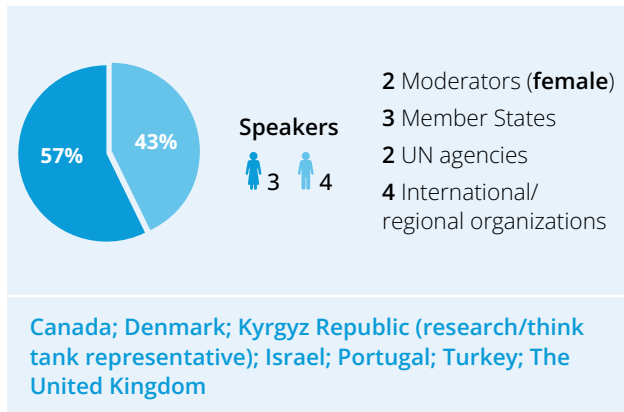


Gender-specific points

- There was no specific focus on GEWE topics.
- Urban forestry has benefits on both mental and physical health, especially in the context of COVID-19. Cooperation must also **empower communities, including women, youth and vulnerable groups**, as allies for awareness raising and outreach, catalysts of change and stewards of urban forests.

SDG 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS (I)

Data and Statistics for Sustainable Development.

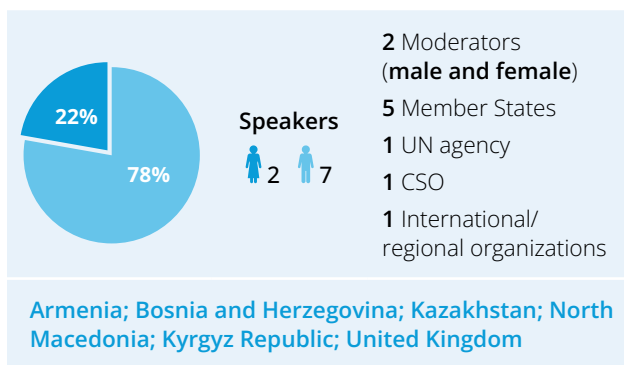


Gender-specific points

- **Gender indicators and standards for gender data** enable better human rights monitoring and SDG follow-up. Sexual orientation has been included as indicator in 2021 census in the United Kingdom. Gender-disaggregated data have been used for Albania’s report on men and women in 2021.
- There are **gaps with access to data on femicide**. In Kyrgyz Republic, 300 murders were identified as femicides in the last ten years. Story-telling techniques are effective for raising awareness on femicide and facilitating access to data.
- The leave no one behind applies not only to data disaggregation; **vulnerable groups should be actively involved** in the design, collection and analysis of such data.

SDG 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS (II)

Accelerating digital development through multi-stakeholder partnerships.

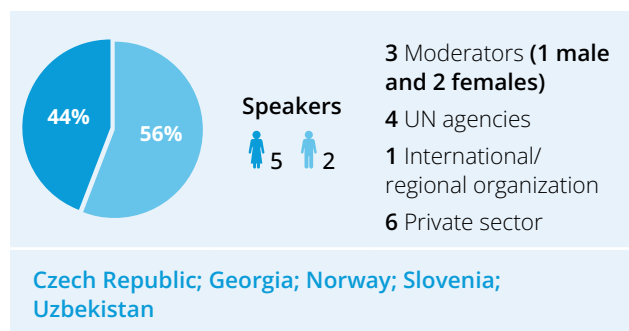


Gender-specific points

- The pandemic exposed how **inequalities can be worsened by the digital divide**. Policies focusing on digital inclusion, access, security, skills, and sustainability are necessary to advance the SDGs.
- Personalized and competency-based approaches which include both formal and extra-curricular education are needed **to advance gender equality**.
- **Digital transformation** for sustainable development includes children, women, girls, and vulnerable groups.
- In Tajikistan, only 36% of the population had access to the internet. More than 60% of the population do not benefit from the **digital development**, with most of them being women. In Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan, governments have made efforts to provide internet access to disabled people for greater inclusivity.

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN SELECTED INDUSTRIES

The Business Roundtable was led by the Global Compact with contribution from UN Women. The event brought together leaders from various industries to address how they are advancing gender equality in the workplace and marketplace and share their solutions.

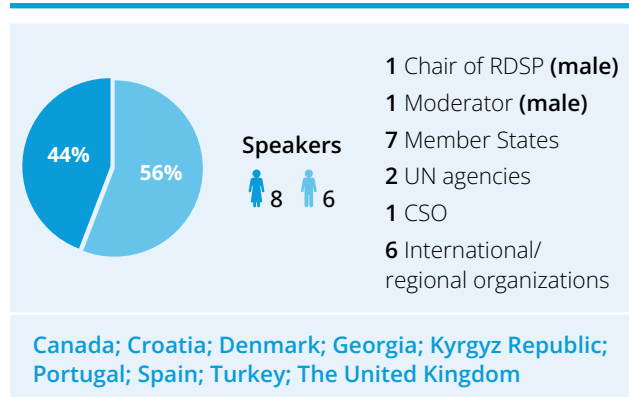


Gender-specific points

- There is a strong **business case for action on gender equality**. However, the **gap remains huge** between commitments and implementation. Only 39% of companies take proactive steps to recruit women in traditionally underrepresented roles.
- **Disaggregated data in companies** is required to allow the identification of inequalities, to fight stereotypes and to encourage women and girls to develop careers in areas where they are less represented.
- A systematic, collaborative approach that **engages male employees** is required to address underrepresentation.

PLENARY DEBATE AND CLOSING

Forward-looking policies for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery.



Gender-specific points

- The VNR process should be based on an integrated child and **gender-sensitive approach, identifying the links, cross-cutting elements** among all SDGs. This would ensure coherent and coordinated policies in line with the 2030 Agenda and regional and international standards, through mainstreaming protection of children and their rights as well as gender transformative and inclusive approaches.

- Spending on integrated cross-sectoral child and **gender-sensitive protection and violence prevention** should be an integral part of every government's economic growth and development strategy.
- Data, knowledge and expertise provided CSOs, which are key actors of change, should inform decision-making, in an inclusive process that **embraces historically excluded groups, such as the LGBTQI+ community**.
- The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated human rights inequalities in the UNECE region. Forward-looking policies should redress this situation, including by integrating human rights education as a key accelerator of the 2030 Agenda.
- Resilience-building of economic policies, the continuum of care services, gender equality including equal pay and women-friendly employment policies are key as countries recover from COVID-19. The digital divide and need for specific regulations of the gig economy are becoming even more important for economic recovery region-wide.