

CSW68 EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL CONSULTATION

CIVIL SOCIETY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

January 2024

In preparation of the United Nations sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), 180 women's rights activists, academics, advocates, and civil society and women's rights organizations, organizations working on the intersection of gender equality, poverty and financing across Europe and Central Asia (ECA) joined a Regional Consultation for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). This consultation took place on 24 January 2024 and was convened by the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO). The convening mapped out the current context in the region, in relation to the priority theme of CSW68: *“Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective”*. The session culminated in a common advocacy position and policy recommendations with key messages that are contained in this document. These recommendations will be used to advocate with governments prior to and during CSW68. The common position, the regional strategy meeting and the policy brief prepared by UN Women ECARO will be key tools in sustaining advocacy momentum and the exchange of ideas, information and strategies, for CSW68 and beyond. This key policy recommendations document provides an overview of some of the main issues pertaining to the priority theme and highlights recommendations from across the 15 participating ECA countries.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

In an overwhelming number of countries in the region, poverty is higher among women than men. However, throughout the region, there is a deep **lack of gender-disaggregated data** in relation to women and the economy.¹

The CSOs of the region have observed many challenges towards the realization of gender equality and the economic empowerment of women and girls, in all their diversity, including but not limited to the below points, which they consider to be the priority issues.

Harmful gender stereotypes and established patriarchal gender norms continue to hinder women and girls' economic empowerment, participation and decision-making.

Unpaid care work, disproportionately placed on the shoulders of women and girls, continues to subsidize much of the economy, without due recognition or support. Multiple crises caused by military conflicts and disasters in the ECA region further amplify the care burden of women and girls, and impact women's organizations, which are at the forefront of addressing the consequences of this crisis.

¹ Babovic. 2024. “Gender and poverty in the Europe and Central Asia” (*forthcoming*).

Structural changes in economies, the rise of precarious employment, gender-based discrimination, unbalanced domestic and care work, and lack of property and assets are the key reasons for **women's lower access to employment**. For those who are able to access employment, informal employment, career disruptions and the persistent gender pay gap impact the benefits women are able to obtain from employment.

These are further strongly linked to lower access to social protection systems for women in the region, coupled with underdeveloped social protection systems, which are not gender-responsive.

“By mobilizing resources equitably and by targeting investments and policies towards ending women's and girls' poverty, it is possible to move towards a new development paradigm centred on care for people and the planet.”

Report of the Secretary-General to CSW68 on the priority theme



Women's **lower access to essential services**, including quality education and financial services, continues to hinder their economic well-being. Moreover, **women's property rights**, including land, are continually denied in much of the region, resulting in a precarious economic situation for women.

Women and girls in all their diversity are disproportionately affected by poverty, and this is exacerbated by other **intersectionalities** such as age, ethnicity, geography, disability, marital status, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, education, migration and refugee status, the impacts of climate change, among others.

As AI (Artificial Intelligence) and other new digital technologies become increasingly integrated into daily life, women, girls and especially older women, who may not be as adept at using them due to their disadvantage in reaching life-long educational opportunities, can find themselves at a greater disadvantage in the job market, or in accessing and/or using the financial tools available online. This can lead to the social exclusion of older women and women from marginalized groups, exacerbating the discrimination, neglect and challenges they already face due to age-related and other intersecting factors.

As civil society organizations are vital to the implementation and monitoring of international and national norms on gender equality, their work needs strong, untied, flexible, long-term support. Yet, civic space is closing down through restrictive laws and women and LGBTIQ+ organizations in the region face serious barriers towards **participation in decision-making structures** that impact their economic well-being and their access to funding from international development partners and the private sector. This, in turn, restricts their opportunities to participate in conflict-related dialogues, peacebuilding talks, as well as the formulation and implementation of gender-transformative disaster and humanitarian response and recovery programmes.

Insufficient implementation of gender-responsive budgeting by governments and international funders alike, including multilaterals, contributes to insufficient funding towards gender equality as well as for women's rights organizations. The international funds allocated for independent CSOs, especially women's and LGBTIQ+ CSOs, should not be restricted. Moreover, this funding should be increased.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS FROM THE REGION

EMBRACING INTERSECTIONALITY IN ADDRESSING POVERTY, STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS AND FINANCING WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

- Collect, analyse, distribute and use reliable gender-responsive data, transparently and regularly, that are disaggregated by income, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographical location and other characteristics, with standard indicators for developing evidence-based solutions.
- Use an intersectional approach when developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies, including through the participation of diverse voices (women and women's organizations).
- Address the issue of women's property and inheritance rights. There is a gap between the law and practice in inheritance issues, disproportionately affecting women and girls, especially in rural areas.
- Address the issue of economic violence as a type of domestic violence that is outlined in the Istanbul Convention. This type of violence is quite widespread but is almost unknown at the community and institutional level and, as a consequence, it is underreported as a form of domestic violence.
- Openly address and prevent the backlash on gender equality and women and girls' and LGBTQI+ people's rights. Do not support groups and movements that want to take away the rights of women and girls or LGBTQI+ people.
- Raise awareness among women and girls, throughout the life cycle and in an age-appropriate manner, on the impacts of digital engagement, AI and other emerging technologies; invest in digital literacy for older women and women from multiple marginalized groups; and support them in knowledge-enhancement and education, and utilizing technologies towards the greater enjoyment of their human rights and economic empowerment.
- Build the capacity of public/State institutions on gender equality and women, girls and LGBTQI+ people's rights, in both mentality and professional approach.

BRIDGING FINANCING GAPS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: BUILDING CAPACITIES AND SPACES TO INFLUENCE POLICIES AND BUDGETS

- Optimize the coordination of international assistance to effectively address social protection, eradicate the root causes of gendered poverty and strengthen care systems.
- Utilize progressive taxes to create fiscal space and implement tax breaks, where appropriate, to support the economic empowerment of women.
- Reform the international financial architecture, moving away from its current unequal structures towards more democratic decision-making that will allow for debt restructuring for countries in need and that can guide these countries to invest in care for people and the planet, for greater fiscal return, rather than towards conditionalities that push women and girls further into poverty.
- Systematically increase the participation of women and women's rights organizations in international, regional and national financial institutions' decision-making mechanisms.
- Increase the quantity and quality of financing for women's rights and feminist organizations to accelerate reaching gender equality and the economic empowerment of women in all their diversity, including for girls and gender-diverse people, through flexible, untied and long-term support.
- Improve the level of transparency and accountability of central and local public authorities that distribute public funds to support civil society organizations, and increase the level of public funds for CSO support from these authorities.
- Review and revise countries', multilateral organizations' and other funders' internal financial management systems to ensure gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors and to ensure greater accountability in financing towards gender equality commitments, based on civil society recommendations. Set concrete targets for both financing and impact in strategies.

- Follow up on and implement the [recommendations](#) made by 145 diverse women’s rights organizations in the Western Balkans to inform the Gender Equality Forum.
- Advocate for women’s economic empowerment as a precondition of economic security, including gender-based violence prevention and specialist support services for victims, as key elements for their economic well-being.
- Promote collaboration between the State, business and CSOs to increase employers’ sensitivity to gender equality and women’s empowerment in the work environment, with additional focus on migrant women and their specific needs.

TACKLING THE DISPROPORTIONAL BURDEN OF UNPAID DOMESTIC AND CARE WORK: SHIFTING TOWARDS CARE ECONOMIES

- Recognize, reduce, revalue and redistribute care work for a move towards human-rights-based care economies. Go beyond current metrics, such as gross domestic product (GDP), to capture the contributions of care work to the national economy.
- Address the issue of unpaid and paid care work in national plans, and scale up investments in the care economy. This approach has been shown to also support decent work creation, reduce the gender pay gap and reduce poverty.²
- Implement gender-transformative parental policies (e.g. mandatory paternity and parental leave along with maternity leave), and increase inclusive and intersectional care support services.
- Reform the international financial architecture towards more human- and planet-centred care economies.

² Kim, K., I. Ilkkaracan and T. Kaya. 2017. “Investing in Social Care Infrastructure and Employment Generation: A Distributional Analysis of the Care Economy in Turkey”, Levy Economics Institute Working Paper No.882, New York: Levy Economics Institute at Bard College.

IMPROVING SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS AND SERVICES AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

- Address the root causes of gender-specific poverty through empowerment programmes coupled with social protection schemes. This includes, but is not limited to challenging and changing harmful gender stereotypes that keep women away from the economic system and in multidimensional poverty.
- Address the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women and girls (VAWG); strengthen protection systems and legislation to eliminate GBV and VAWG in line with international conventions; allocate funding to specialist support services for survivors, such as shelters, helplines and centres; support vocational training and employment opportunities for GBV and VAWG survivors; facilitate coordination among relevant State institutions’ and ensure the meaningful participation of feminist organizations in policymaking.
- Design and implement gender-responsive and gender-transformative social protection as social investments.
- Increase the role and capacity of civil society organizations, both at local and international levels, to advocate for legal amendments and policy improvement.
- Implement international norms on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment, such as ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation (No. 202), ILO Convention No. 190, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, among others.
- Sustainably fund and support feminist, women’s, girl-led and LGBTQI+ civil society organizations through robust, flexible and multi-year funding schemes.
- Ensure the full, effective and meaningful participation of women’s associations, collectives and unions of women workers in gender-responsive policy and programme design, as well as in monitoring and accountability structures.