



**CSW68 Europe and Central Asia Youth and Adolescent Consultation Analysis Report**  
December 2023

**Introduction**

In preparation for the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), on 13 and 14 December 2023, a youth and adolescent consultation involving 123 youth, all aged 20 and over, and 21 adolescents, aged 19 and under, was conducted virtually across Europe and Central Asia. This consultation aimed to gather insights on the dimensions of poverty, the role of strengthened institutions, and the critical need for effective financing strategies in promoting gender equality. The session was a platform for young voices to contribute to the discussions on these pressing issues, offering a diverse array of perspectives from various regions within Europe and Central Asia.

**Perceptions and Experiences**

The participants viewed poverty not just as an economic issue but as a multifaceted challenge impacting various aspects of life. They highlighted how poverty in their communities manifests as a lack of access to essential resources, including education, healthcare, and viable employment opportunities. A significant emphasis was placed on how poverty disproportionately affects young women and girls, leading to exploitation, health issues, and a perpetuation of the

cycle of poverty. The young women stressed that poverty is deeply intertwined with gender inequality, limited access to education, and economic exploitation.

### **The Role of Strengthened Institutions**

Participants underscored the importance of robust institutions in tackling the root causes of poverty. They identified governance issues such as inadequate leadership, corruption, and the lack of effective policies as major barriers to addressing poverty and gender inequality. The need for institutions to be more responsive, transparent, and inclusive in policy-making was highlighted as crucial for sustainable development and gender equality.

### **Financing for Gender Equality**

The consultations revealed a strong consensus on the necessity of dedicated financing to combat gender disparities. Participants called for more gender-sensitive budgeting and funding mechanisms that specifically address the needs of young women and girls. This includes targeted investments in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, along with support for grassroots movements and community-led initiatives.

### **Causes of Challenges**

#### **1. Economic factors**

The consultation revealed that young people perceive poverty in Europe and Central Asia as being significantly driven by economic challenges such as limited job opportunities, historical injustices, and prevalent income inequality. The scarcity of employment opportunities particularly affects young women, limiting their financial independence and exacerbating gender-based economic disparities. Historical injustices, including uneven distribution of resources and economic exclusion of certain groups, have perpetuated a cycle of poverty that disproportionately impacts women. Income inequality, especially evident in the widening income inequality gap, further marginalizes young women, restricting their access to economic resources and opportunities for advancement.

#### **2. Educational Barriers**

Inadequate access to education, particularly for girls with disabilities and those living in rural areas, emerged as a critical barrier. Education is a fundamental tool for empowerment and escaping poverty, yet many young women in the region face significant obstacles in accessing quality education. The lack of educational opportunities not only hinders personal and professional development but also limits young women's ability to participate fully in the economy. Vocational training, which could provide practical skills and enhance employability, is often inaccessible, further contributing to the cycle of poverty.

#### **3. Gender Inequality**

Systemic gender discrimination, including gender-based violence and entrenched patriarchal norms, was identified as a root cause of poverty. These forms of inequality often restrict women's access to resources and opportunities, leading to economic dependency and limited agency. Gender-based violence, both physical and psychological, further exacerbates women's vulnerability to poverty. The persistence of patriarchal systems and norms in many societies in

Europe and Central Asia continues to hinder women's full participation in the economic, social, and political spheres.

#### 4. Governance Issues

Participants highlighted poor leadership and corruption as significant factors affecting the effective implementation of policies aimed at reducing poverty and promoting gender equality. Ineffective governance and lack of accountability in institutions hinder the development and execution of policies that could address the economic and social challenges faced by young women. Corruption diverts resources away from essential services and programs, further deepening poverty and inequality.

#### 5. Social and Cultural Norms

Practices, such as early marriages and gender biases, contribute to the perpetuation of economic dependency among young women. These norms often prioritize traditional roles for women, limiting their educational and economic opportunities. Early marriages interrupt education and personal development, leading to a lifetime of economic disadvantage. Societal biases and stereotypes further reinforce these inequalities, creating barriers to women's full participation in the workforce.

#### 6. Environmental Challenges

The impact of climate change, particularly on rural and pastoralist communities, exacerbates vulnerabilities and deepens poverty. Young women in these areas are often the most affected, as they face the dual challenges of gender inequality and environmental degradation. Climate change can lead to resource scarcity, affecting livelihoods and increasing the burden of poverty on these communities.

### Required Changes and Solutions

The consultation resulted in a set of comprehensive recommendations across several domains:

#### 1. Disability Rights:

- a. Recognize socio-economic status in legal definitions of disability to ensure policies are inclusive and directly address the varied needs of disabled women, intersecting with poverty and requiring nuanced solutions.
- b. Implement financial literacy programs, specifically tailored to the unique challenges faced by young women with disabilities, and provide healthcare support addressing both their disability and gender-specific needs. These measures are essential for empowering disabled women economically and enhancing their well-being.
- c. Enhance communication methods and bolster financial support systems for women with disabilities, as current mechanisms inadequately address the specific needs of adolescents with disabilities.
- d. Ensure financial support and resources are more accessible and effective for adolescents with disabilities, emphasizing poverty alleviation.
- e. Establish an independent body to monitor and ensure the equitable distribution of resources and support for disabled individuals, advocating for fairness,

transparency, and inclusivity in support systems.

## 2. Rural Areas:

- a. Collect and utilize disaggregated data to understand the specific needs of young women in rural areas, essential for designing targeted poverty alleviation strategies and effectively allocating financial resources.
- b. Ensure young women in rural areas have access to digital tools and business education, empowering them to participate in the digital economy and enhancing their economic opportunities.
- c. Involve young women in policy-making and develop infrastructure that supports their needs, key to creating sustainable solutions to poverty and ensuring that financing is directed towards impactful initiatives.
- d. Provide targeted support to young women in rural areas, helping them make informed decisions about property ownership, recognizing it as a key factor in economic empowerment.
- e. Strengthen financial education tailored for young women, alongside improved access to loan facilities, to enhance their literacy and economic opportunities in rural communities.

## 3. Gender-Based Violence:

- a. Implement educational programs and awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and biases, essential in preventing gender-based violence, a cause and consequence of poverty.
- b. Advocate for legal reforms and establish support systems within educational institutions to assist survivors of gender-based violence, financially backed to ensure their effectiveness.
- c. Provide financial support and leverage NGO assistance for survivors of gender-based violence, critical for their recovery and reintegration, helping to break the cycle of poverty linked to violence.
- d. Create dedicated centers offering support and legal assistance for adolescents experiencing gender-based violence.
- e. Include gender-based violence education within school curricula, emphasizing the importance of early and effective education to prevent and raise awareness among adolescents.

## 4. Climate Action and Sustainability:

- a. Offer funding opportunities accessible to youth, including multilingual options, key to engaging them in climate action and sustainability efforts.
- b. Invest in education and advocacy programs that incorporate indigenous knowledge, essential for sustainable environmental practices and providing economic opportunities for young women in affected communities.
- c. Create and fund opportunities for young women in green jobs, a strategic approach to addressing poverty and environmental challenges.

- d. Develop workshops providing advocacy skills, coupled with creating digital platforms for knowledge exchange on climate issues, enabling adolescents to learn, share, and collaborate on climate action initiatives.
- e. Ensure active involvement of adolescents in decision-making processes related to climate action, for their voices to be heard and considered in shaping climate policies and actions.
- f. Acknowledge adolescents' contributions, especially in terms of unpaid care work, in climate action and sustainability efforts.

## **Conclusion**

This youth and adolescent consultations provided valuable insights into the complex nature of poverty and its intersection with gender equality in Europe and Central Asia. The participants emphasized an intersectional approach in addressing these issues, highlighting the necessity for concerted efforts from all sectors of society. Engaging young women in these dialogues is crucial, as their unique perspectives and experiences are essential in crafting effective, sustainable strategies to address poverty and advance gender equality.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the consultation, key recommendations include:

- Allocate increased funding for educational initiatives targeted at girls with disabilities and those in rural areas. Investment in education is a key strategy for poverty reduction, as it empowers young women with knowledge and skills necessary for economic independence and better job prospects.
- Expand economic empowerment programs, including microfinance initiatives and entrepreneurship training. This approach directly addresses poverty by providing women with the capital and skills needed to start and grow their own businesses, fostering economic self-sufficiency and community development.
- Strengthen legal frameworks to protect women's rights and ensure equal opportunities. Enforcing these legal reforms requires dedicated financial resources to ensure their effective implementation, which is crucial for addressing the legal and systemic barriers that perpetuate poverty among women.
- Provide financial and logistical support to grassroots movements that work towards community-driven solutions to poverty. Local initiatives often have a deeper understanding of the specific challenges their communities face, making them well-suited to develop effective, context-specific strategies.
- Invest in awareness campaigns aimed at changing cultural norms that disadvantage young women. Such campaigns require funding to reach a wide audience and can play a critical role in shifting societal attitudes, ultimately leading to a reduction in gender-based disparities that contribute to poverty.
- Promote international and regional cooperation to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices. Enhanced cooperation can lead to more effective poverty reduction strategies and provide young women with access to a broader range of opportunities, both educational and economic.