



**MULTISTAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS
FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TÜRKIYE
TO PREPARE FOR THE 68TH SESSION OF
THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**“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”**

ORGANIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
AND UN WOMEN REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



DRAFT SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

On 9 February 2024, the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia convened a pivotal subregional multi-stakeholder consultation for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, involving Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo,¹ Serbia and Türkiye.

Member States, civil society organizations, private sector entities, academia, UN partners and regional institutions gathered to take stock of progress and critical challenges in preparation for the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) and its priority theme: *“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 consultation focused on key issues, including poverty alleviation, social protection, the recognition and redistribution of unpaid care work, the promotion of women’s participation in the labour force, and the integration of gender perspectives into financing and investment decisions.

This document encapsulates the key outcomes, recommendations and commitments arising from the consultation, laying the groundwork for national delegations’ participation at CSW68. It also serves as a testament to the subregion’s united commitment to the priority theme.

¹ All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

A SNAPSHOT OF GENDER AND POVERTY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TÜRKIYE

Poverty is widespread in the region and its incidence is higher among women than men in most countries, particularly among rural women, older women and women who are lone parents or heads of households.

WOMEN'S PROPERTY RIGHTS

In the Western Balkans, **two-thirds** of all property and mortgages are in men's names – **62%** in Albania, **75%** in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and **83%** in North Macedonia.²

ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL GOODS AND SERVICES

In Kosovo, a mere **47%** of women have a bank account, compared to **69%** of men.³ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, **69%** of women used the Internet during the last three months preceding the survey, compared to **78%** of men.⁴

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND DECENT EMPLOYMENT

Employment rates are **26.3%** for women vs. **59.8%** for men in Türkiye; **28.39%** for women vs. **52.1%** for men in Bosnia and Herzegovina; and **37%** for women vs. **54.5%** for men in North Macedonia.⁵ Working-aged women from marginalized Roma communities have among the lowest employment rates in: Albania (**11%**), Bosnia and Herzegovina (**4%**), Kosovo (**4%**), Montenegro (**3%**), North Macedonia (**13%**) and Serbia (**9%**). This usually means informal employment, often related to waste collection.⁶

WOMEN'S UNPAID CARE WORK

Across the region, women do a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. In Serbia, women spent less time daily on paid work than men (on average **51 minutes less**) but much more time on unpaid work (on average **1.5 hours more**) in 2021. Therefore, their total work hours (paid and unpaid work together) were longer (**11 hours and 51 minutes** for women compared to **10 hours and 53 minutes** for men).⁷

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOCIAL INVESTMENT

In Albania, Serbia and Türkiye, fewer than **half** of women who gave birth received maternity cash benefits in 2020.⁸

² FAO and World Bank. 2013. *Gender disaggregated data – Western Balkans. Statistical Reports 2005-2013*.

³ World Bank. Undated. *Findex data base*.

⁴ Agency for Statistics of BiH. 2021. *Women and men in BiH, 2021*. pp. 56, 58.

⁵ Eurostat. 2023. "Employment rates by sex, age and citizenship (%)." Retrieved 14 December 2023.

⁶ UNDP. 2018. "Marginalized Roma community still most excluded in Western Balkans." 11 May.

⁷ SORS. 2022. *Time-Use Survey in the Republic of Serbia 2021*.

⁸ ILO. Undated. *World Social Protection Database*. Retrieved 12 December 2024.



1. KEY CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1. ADDRESSING THE MULTIFACETED NATURE OF WOMEN'S POVERTY

UNPAID CARE WORK AND GENDER ROLES

The consultation underscored the traditional expectations placed on women to fulfil caregiving responsibilities within households, often at the expense of their participation in the labour force. Women are not only expected to fulfil roles as daughters, wives and mothers, but are also subjected to societal judgment if they deviate from these expectations, exemplified by the term “non-mother” used in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This societal pressure contributes to the invisibilization of women's needs and their relegation to unpaid care work. The economic transition has further exacerbated these challenges, increasing the demand for caregiving services while failing to recognize the value of unpaid care work performed by women.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To establish transformative policies that address systemic inequalities, including measures to support work-life balance, enhance social protection and promote women's participation in the workforce.
- To put in place care policies that prioritize marginalized and vulnerable groups of women.
- To implement the systematic use of gender-sensitive planning and budgeting practices.
- To develop initiatives to eliminate barriers hindering women's employment and economic empowerment.

SOCIAL PROTECTION AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Participants recognized that gender-responsive public services are essential for addressing women's needs and promoting community development. Overcoming gender stereotypes and ensuring the inclusion of women facing intersecting forms of discrimination are identified as crucial steps in reducing poverty and vulnerability.

Efforts made by governments to enhance social protection systems and increase access to public services for women and girls were underscored. These include measures such as: doubling economic aid payments for families in need; increasing support for mothers with multiple children; establishing specialized services for victims of domestic violence; expanding community-based services for vulnerable groups; and legislative and policy reforms mainstreaming gender in public services and social protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To establish and implement comprehensive strategies that foster collaboration between government entities, civil society and the private sector, with a focus on integrating gender perspectives into policy formulation and budgeting processes.
- To develop transformative policies that address structural inequalities and prioritize gender equality in all aspects of public service-delivery.



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Speakers emphasized the importance of women's economic empowerment and their participation in the labour force as essential components to achieve gender equality and foster socioeconomic development.

Government representatives presented measures aimed at supporting women at different stages of their careers, from young girls to experienced professionals, including: initiatives to promote girls' education in STEM fields and programs targeting women's entrepreneurship; strategies to address the gender wage gap, such as tax exemption for the employment of women workers in male dominated fields and difficult environments (ex: agriculture); and expanded access to affordable childcare services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To adopt comprehensive policies and programmes that prioritize gender equality in all aspects of economic development.
- To foster collaboration between governments, the private sector and civil society regarding data collection and best practices.

1.2. MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN FINANCING AND INVESTMENT SCHEMES

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRATION OF GENDER AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The Western Balkans and Türkiye subregion has made significant efforts to integrate gender in institutional and legal frameworks, particularly through the adoption of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) as a comprehensive strategy. The integration of GRB as a core principle of budgeting has been instrumental in enhancing the understanding of gender issues among government officials and ensuring the effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies. Legal reforms have played a crucial role in solidifying these efforts, with gender equality being enshrined in budgeting laws. Additionally, initiatives to strengthen institutional capacities through capacity-building programmes and the adoption of regulations and guidelines have further facilitated the integration of GRB into public finance management systems. However, challenges remain in aligning gender-responsive policies with sectoral strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To enhance coordination between gender equality mechanisms and sectoral ministries.
- To promote intersectionality in policy planning through the continued training of public institutions.
- To allocate sufficient resources to support gender-responsive initiatives.
- To establish direct payments, grants and active labour market measures benefiting women, including survivors of domestic violence.



IMPACT ON POLICY, PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE:

Governments have increasingly recognized the importance of integrating gender perspectives into their decision-making processes. By mandating GRB and enshrining gender equality principles into budget laws, countries have taken significant steps to ensure that policy objectives are aligned with gender equality goals. This integration has led to the development of gender-sensitive indicators, participatory processes and policy analyses that prioritize gender equality outcomes.

As a result, sectors such as education, health and agriculture have seen targeted interventions to address specific gender disparities, such as increasing access to education for girls, improving maternal health services and supporting women entrepreneurs. However, challenges remain in fully translating gender-responsive policies into budget allocations and performance outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To strengthen capacity-building offered to ministries, public services and civil society organizations working with women.
- To collect data that integrates sex-disaggregation and other mechanisms.
- To develop monitoring and evaluation of gender equality interventions to ensure accountability and drive progress towards achieving gender equality targets.

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE AND INTERSECTIONAL POLICY PLANNING:

Participants noted the recognition of the intersectionality of gender issues, leading to targeted interventions to address the unique needs of different groups, such as women in rural areas, women with disabilities and survivors of domestic violence. Governments have implemented affirmative measures, including scholarships for girls in STEM fields, direct payments and additional social protection to women in agriculture, and increased support for women entrepreneurs. These initiatives reflect a comprehensive approach to gender equality, encompassing education, economic empowerment and social protection.

However, challenges persist in ensuring the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies across sectors and in securing adequate funding for targeted interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- To implement data collection and analysis to inform evidence-based policies targeted at women in all their diversity.
- To prioritize investments in programmes that address the specific needs of marginalized groups of women and girls.
- To enhance efforts to empower women through education, entrepreneurship support and access to finance. This should be prioritized to promote lasting gender equality outcomes.

This outcome document aims to encourage national delegations and partners to prioritize the presentation and defense of its findings at CSW68. By articulating the region's commitments, recommendations and innovative strategies, stakeholders can amplify their voices on the global stage, advancing the agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Beyond CSW68, this document stands as a testament to the collective dedication of participating countries and stakeholders to translate these commitments into tangible actions aligned with the priority theme.