UN WOMEN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA (ECARO) REGIONAL STRATEGIC NOTE 2026–2029

Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Peace, and Resilience Across a Region in Transition

Photo: UN Women Europe and Central Asia

SITUATING THE REGIONAL STRATEGIC NOTE

Europe and Central Asia have made significant progress since the Beijing Platform of Action 30 years ago. Progress is particularly noteworthy for women's political participation where between 2000 and 2024, the share of seats held by women in national parliaments more than tripled. We have also seen a critical surge in legislation to eradicate violence against women and girls. Regional integration processes – most notably through the EU Accession process – and renewed cooperation on peace and security further present unique opportunities to advance GEWE.

At the same time, this Regional Strategic Note for Europe and Central Asia was developed amid complex and intersecting global crises marked by widening geopolitical divides, escalating conflicts, climate change, disruptive technologies and rising inequalities. Globally, democratic values are eroding and there is an unprecedented backlash against gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), putting decades of progress for women and girls at risk. In parallel, multilateralism is increasingly under strain; coinciding with a sharp decline in GEWE funding.

These trends are global and with specific manifestations across the Europe and Central Asia Region (ECA). Unresolved conflicts, including the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, continue to drive displacement, protection risks and gender-based violence. Over 7.7 million people are internally displaced in Ukraine; 90 per cent are women and childrenii. ECA has become the global epicenter of "foreign agent" legislation, which stigmatizes and restricts CSOs receiving international funding. This has spread to eight countries and is under consideration in an additional three.

On average, women of prime working age are 25 per cent less economically active than men. The regional gender pay gap is 20.4 per cent, peaking at 31.7 per cent in Georgia . Central Asia and the South Caucasus are climate hotspots facing water scarcity and ecosystem collapse. By 2050, up to 5.1 million people in Central Asia may become internal climate migrants.

The Regional Strategic Note responds to this pivotal moment. Anchored in our triple mandate — normative, coordination, and operational — it translates international commitments into national action, promotes coherence across the UN system, and strengthens partnerships to ensure that GEWE are not deprioritized in times of crisis but instead invested in to drive transformative change.

ECARO supports 18 countries and territories

Western Balkans and Turkiye, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, and Central Asia

Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo*, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

* All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

WHAT IS A REGIONAL STRATEGIC NOTE?

The Regional Strategic Note Strategic (RSN) articulates the multi-year strategy, providing a roadmap and strategic compass to improve the lives of women and girls in the region.

The RSN was designed based on consultations and lessons learned from programming and partnerships with key stakeholders, including UN agencies, governments, civil society, women's movement, and regional organizations. The strategy aligns with UN Women's global Strategic Plan, the Secretary General's UN80 initiative and his Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, and key global and regional GEWE commitments and priorities.

It envisions a region where women and girls, particularly those most marginalized and affected by conflict, crisis, and displacement, can lead, participate, and thrive in inclusive societies governed by accountable institutions that uphold their rights and foster peace, resilience, and sustainable development.

REGIONAL PRIORITIES: FORWARD-LOOKING ACTION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

UN Women will focus on four regional priorities that reflect the intersection of governance, economy, social norms, and resilience.

1. **Women's Leadership and Gender-Responsive Governance**
2. **Women's Economic Empowerment and Resilience**
3. **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG)**
4. **Women, Peace, Security, Humanitarian Action, and Disaster Risk Reduction (WPS-HA/DRR)**

Leveraging UN Women's normative, coordination and operational mandate, we will advance these priorities by supporting stronger laws and policies and building institutional capacity, working hand-in-hand with governments, civil society, the UN, International Financial Institutions, and development partners.

In parallel, we will invest in shifting social norms, harnessing the positive power of technology, actively engaging men and boys as allies, and strengthening women's rights movement and civil society to drive long-term, transformative change.

ADVANCING STRONGER LAWS, POLICIES, AND INVESTMENTS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

ECARO will work with governments, intergovernmental organizations including UN agencies, and civil society to translate global normative commitments[1] — into national legislation, policies, and budgetary frameworks.

Through integrated policy advice, technical guidance, UN coordination and multi-stakeholder engagement, ECARO will:

- Strengthen gender equality norms and standards across all priority areas.
- Support governments to meet global commitments.
- Facilitate the active participation and contribution of regional stakeholders in global normative gender equality.

[1] Including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Beijing+30, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, the Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions, and SDG 5 as well as regional instruments such as the Council Of Europe Convention On Preventing And Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the OSCE Action Plan on Gender Equality, and EU *aquis communitaire* on gender equality and non-discrimination.

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ECARO will support public and private institutions in the region to institutionalize gender-responsive budgeting, financing, and accountability mechanisms to address discriminatory social norms, advance women's economic empowerment and ensure access to resources for the most marginalized groups. It will also strengthen partners' capacities to produce and use gender statistics and evidence systems to inform decision-making.

Through its coordination role, ECARO will:

- Promote the use of UN system-wide tools and frameworks on gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Strengthen UN system collective responses to gender backlash as a systemic trend.
- Mainstream gender in climate action, digital governance, and recovery and Disaster Risk Reduction frameworks.

INVESTING IN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND CIVIC SPACE

ECARO will invest in women's organizations to strengthen their financing, leadership, and advocacy capacities, enabling them to shape policymaking, peacebuilding, crisis response, and recovery processes.

ECARO will also enhance partnerships with media, academia, and civic actors to:

- Amplify women's voices and leadership and **protect and expand civic space for feminist and civil society engagement.**
- Counter discriminatory narratives and gender backlash.
- Support feminist movements as a driving force for inclusion, accountability, and peace across the region.

PARTNERSHIPS, INNOVATION AND LEARNING

We will put learning, innovation, and evidence at the center of our work. A new regional knowledge strategy will strengthen foresight, knowledge-sharing, and innovation, ensuring successful models are scaled and adapted across countries.

Feminist leadership, inclusion, and staff well-being will underpin ECARO's internal culture and approach to partnerships.

As host of the Secretariat of the UN system-wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (GEAP) and chair or co-chair of UN regional and country-level gender coordination mechanisms, UN Women ECA drives coordinated planning and action for GEWE.

In this coordination role, UN Women facilitates joint regional UN action, promotes joint normative engagements and programmatic approaches and strengthens cross-country civil society engagement, ensuring grassroots perspectives shape policymaking at regional and global levels.

We will continue working closely with governments and intergovernmental organizations, International Financial Institutions, UN system entities, private-sector, and civil society and women's rights organizations to deliver greater impact for women and girls across the region.

UN Women exists to advance women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As the lead UN entity on gender equality, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviours and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. We keep the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere.
Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.

UN Women Regional Office
for Europe and Central Asia

eca.unwomen.org
www.unwomen.org

UN WOMEN FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS