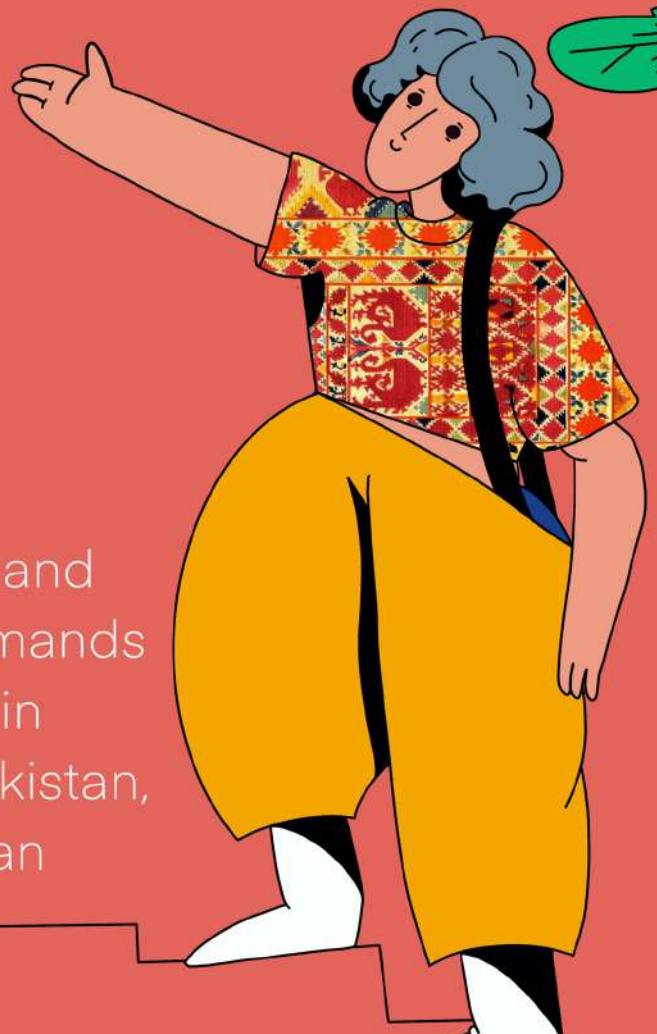


# Feminists want system change in Central Asia



Policy brief with feminists and women's rights activists demands for Generation Equality in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

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This policy brief was developed in line with the sub-regional consultations, organized by women's rights and gender equality CSOs from Europe and Central Asia region, with the support of UN Women's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and Women Engage for a Common Future. These consultations is a CSO-led initiative to centralize the voices of feminists, gender equality advocates and civil society actors in the period leading up to and during the Generation Equality Forums. They aim to mobilize partners around critical issues within the three sub-regions 1) Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Russia; 2) Western Balkans & Turkey; 3) Central Asia as well as the Region as a whole. To learn more about them, [visit our website](#).

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## Background information

On 20 October 2020, an online consultation was held with Civil Society Organisations from Central Asia aimed to discuss situations and recommendations on common vision and priorities for the Generation Equality Forum and Action Coalitions. Activists, representatives of feminist and youth groups, researchers, mass media representatives from Central Asia discussed the gender equality situation in the region, including the existing challenges towards women's rights as well as problems related to the COVID-19 crisis. The following topics were discussed:

- Feminist activism for climate justice
- Economic justice and rights
- Physical integrity, sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Elimination of gender-based violence
- Feminist movements and leadership

**94 activists and civil society organisations** representatives took part in the event, including 35 representatives of youth organisations and/or young activists, including, by country:

- Kazakhstan – in total 31 representatives, including 11 youth representatives (33%);
- Kyrgyzstan – in total 9 representatives, including 4 youth representatives (44%);
- Tajikistan – in total 33 representatives, including 12 youth representatives (36%);
- Turkmenistan – in total 2 representatives, including 100% of representatives of youth organisations;
- Uzbekistan – in total 13 representatives, including 1 youth representative (8%).

This document presents consolidated conclusions and recommendations proposed by the consultations' participants for further joint promotion through participation in dialogues and decision-making processes, specifically in relation to the Generation Equality Forum's Action Coalitions.



**Moderator:** Olga Djanaeva, Kyrgyzstan

**Contributions made by participants from:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

# Feminist activism for climate justice

## Existing structural barriers

During the discussions, the following structural barriers were identified:

- An extremely low level of the population's and local authorities' awareness on the climatic situation, disaster risks and effects of climate change, as well as on Framework Agreements on climate change, negotiation processes, political positions of Central Asian states, existence of relevant national legislation, politics, and programmes.
- Gender- and socially-blind emergency plans and no system in place to provide gender responsive support for people affected by natural disasters and conflicts, particularly for women and girls with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ and ethnic minorities who face intersectional discrimination and violence.
- A lack of access or limited access for rural women to modern farming technologies and practices of climate change adaptation, as well as strong patriarchal attitudes and practices limiting women's rights and opportunities, which also contributes to an increase in gender-based violence (GBV). Rural women's incomes stay very dependent on natural resources and climate conditions and climate change such as a reduction in water resources, due to glacier melting as well as changes in temperature, impact seriously to their livelihoods.
- The absence of information exchange channels as well as practices of disaster risk

reduction (DRR) and conflict prevention, given that most of the population of these countries live on the countryside as well as in mountain regions, there is no single channel of dissemination of information among governmental structures and the population of rural areas. It creates risks of normalizing inequality, discrimination, and can potentially lead to conflict situations.

- Availability of National Action Plans (NAPs) (on gender equality, UNSCR 1325 ‘Women, Peace and Security’, etc.) does not guarantee their implementation, since the monitoring and evaluation systems with specific indicators are not elaborated and do not have accompanying budget and resources. In general, there is no integrated approach towards the elaboration of strategic documents on climate and security for women.
- A weak intersectoral and inter-agency cooperation, both on horizontal as well as on the vertical level, as well as insufficient coordination between donors. Non-availability of analytical information on the conducted assessment of the situation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. There is no succession in governmental structures due to staff turnover.
- Limited awareness on regional projects and initiatives on climate change.
- Problems in the interaction between government bodies, researchers, environmentalists, human rights advocates, and business entities in relation to ecosystem destruction as a result of natural resource extraction. Diffusion or absence of responsibility of transnational companies exploiting natural resources for ecosystem restoration. There is also a high level of corruption.

## Proposed solutions and recommendations

Feminists and activists in Central Asia recommend:

- Strengthen and develop women’s leadership and capacity building for better understanding of issues of climate change, risks of natural disasters, peace and security. Enhance women’s resilience to climate change as well as their ability to manage the risks related to climate change.
- Create conditions for the active participation of women in the processes assessing the current situation and risks, ensure their engagement in the elaboration of policy and planning at every level: local, national, regional, and global.
- Introduce environmental education and research on environmental protection with a gender equality analysis to contribute to preservation, restoration, and expansion of planted forests and biodiversity protection.
- Establish an early warning and response system for natural disaster and conflicts on community level with the participation of women and youth.
- Stimulate investment friendly policy- and agenda-setting through interagency and intersectoral cooperation aimed at the promotion of alternative renewable energy

sources, agri-environmental technologies, and practices in farming. Set up support programmes for women and youth in the development of agroecology. Create platforms for experience-, knowledge-, and strategy-sharing within the Central Asian region.

- Increase women's participation in water resource management. Develop women's regional cooperation on efficient and inclusive water resource management.

## How to advocate

- Create constantly working, intersectoral, **platforms for development of social dialogue** on priority policies and actions. Focusing on climate change risk mitigation and resilience-building, just transition to a green economy, integration of gender-responsive budgeting, safeguarding peace and security considering the interests and needs of the most marginalised groups of women and girls. A social dialogue will contribute to developing effective principles and policies through inclusion, participation, and engagement.
- Develop **closer cooperation with art- and media experts**, the use of innovative art-technologies for education and advocacy, as well as of social networking sites.
- Make the issue of climate change and existing adaptation, disaster and risk resilience practices more visible by creating a safe and secure environment and sustainable peace.
- Strengthen the role of local authorities in **joint situation analysis** with community outreach, including the active participation of women and youth, in climate change response as well as “Women, Peace and Security” programmes.

## How to promote solidarity

- Undertake research and analysis of underlying causes of discrimination, inequality, and vulnerability.
- Carry out large-scale information and advocacy campaigns to overcome existing gender and social stereotypes regarding marginalised groups of women.
- Facilitate conditions and platforms for public debates to gain a deeper understanding of the origins of inequality, discrimination, and injustice. Create a safe space enabling women and girls to exchange their knowledge, experience, plans and collective action.
- Enhance and strengthen Central Asian interaction and cooperation with women, girls and civil society in general, on issues concerning climate change, peace, stability and security, enhancing governments' international and national commitments on the advancement of gender equality, sustainability and adequate financing for a green economy.

## How to protect the rights & safety of human rights activists

- Increase legal awareness of population and civil servants.
- Capacity building of lawyers and defenders aimed at protecting the rights of human rights advocates and activists.
- Enhance solidarity within the feminist movement as well as foster cooperation between the feminist movement and civil society as a whole.
- Engage with UN entities and mechanisms: prepare alternative reports on the situation of women's human rights to UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), etc. Cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the UN special rapporteur on human rights and the environment.
- Collaborate with international women's and human rights networks and advocates.
- Use social media and technologies extensively, e.g. art, documentary film festivals.

## How technologies can assist our work

- Develop capacity-building of women and girls in harnessing information technologies (IT).
- Close access gaps to IT and internet; due to location (city/countryside), poverty, access to education, etc.
- Develop a database for sharing of knowledge, technologies, and practices of adaptation to climate change, alternative energy sources, water conservation, agroecology, etc.

## How to rebuild after the pandemic

- Revise measures of social protection and provision of economic benefits.
- Ensure equal and full access to educational, medical, social, physiological, legal services, information, and consultations.
- Invest in the social and economic advancement of women by creating opportunities for income-generating activities and the development of new professional skills and competencies.
- Realise behavioural change programmes in families and communities through women and girls, i.e.: water- and energy-saving, switch to alternative energy sources, non-usage of plastic, recycling of household waste, organic waste processing (composting), consumption of local products, etc.



**Moderator:** Dildora Amirkulova,  
Uzbekistan

**Contributions made by participants from:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

# Economic justice and rights

## Existing structural barriers

During the discussions, the following structural barriers were identified:

- The existing system of token equality of rights poses impediments towards the realization of the economic rights of women and girls.
- Inequality in women's access to economic results. Women participate in achieving economic results, in the formal and informal economy, but their access to economic benefits is not equal to that of men.
- Women are still actively engaged in unpaid domestic work. There are no statistics on the domestic workload.
- 'Traditional' gender stereotypes influence the occupational choices of women and girls. Occupations offered to women are low-income.
- Technological development created a gap between men and women, older and younger women.
- Poor IT-infrastructure slows the country's economic growth, as well as limits women's access to new job skills and markets, especially for women living in rural areas.
- The share of women entrepreneurship in small business is 45%. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected small businesses which are mostly represented by women's entrepreneurship. More than 30% of small businesses, in which women were employed, have gone bankrupt during the lockdown. The state anti-crisis measures



involved the allocation of funds to support middle and large businesses, but the government assistance did not include the support to small businesses.

- The existing paradigm “business solves all problems” is not relevant anymore. The approach of expecting businesses to “absorb” unemployed/jobless women requires systematic changes.
- The share of women employed in the public sector is extremely low. The public sector provides jobs mostly to men.
- The population’s well-being indicators on the global level are being measured by GDP growth, but these indicators do not allow to make a realistic assessment of women’s well-being.
- Economic conditions, i.e. market environment, to do business in the countries are often unfair for women entrepreneurs.
- Employers often ignore the reproductive needs of female employees.
- The pandemic has worsened the state of women, particularly, the state of migrant workers’ families. Women and their families have lost their source of income, and the women’s employment has become a key for their families’ well-being.
- Regionally there is unfair access to financial and natural resources to start or do business.
- Marginalised groups of women do not have opportunities to learn a profession, e.g. women released from incarceration (prison/jail), women living with HIV/AIDS, and migrant women.
- The budgets of governments and municipal authorities are closed for public scrutiny, providing no opportunity to access whether these budgets are gender-sensitive or not.
- A social vulnerability of women and girls in the informal sector. There are cases of GBV/sexual violence against women in informal employment.
- The labour rights of women in the informal economy are being violated more often than the labour rights of women in the formal economy.
- Religious fundamentalism impacts women’s access to education, employment, entrepreneurship. Cultural and religious norms affect occupational choices of women and girls, as well as their willingness to enter a workforce. Affecting women’s right to work and be economically independent – to not depend on their partners.
- Existing labour legislation does not include terminology on various marginalised groups of women (e.g., a parent with multiple children, a stateless person).
- Women are being discriminated against in the spheres of employment and vocational training based on their place of residence (city/village), sexual orientation/gender identification (LGBTIQ+).
- Feminization of migration and the intersectional discrimination against female domestic workers and migrants, based on the patriarchally constructed roles and duties such as childcare, unpaid domestic work, exclusion from the decision making in their families.

## Proposed solutions and recommendations

Feminists and activists in Central Asia recommend:

- Practical actions to reduce women's and girls' professional segregation, including overcoming the influence of gender stereotypes on their careers.
- Introduce quotas for girls, as a temporary measure, in the sphere of IT education and other high-tech sectors of the economy. Replicate the "Young programmers' league"<sup>1</sup> which was conducted in the single-industry towns<sup>2</sup> of Kazakhstan. The programme provided teenagers (focusing on girls) with free programming and IT-skills courses. Drawing on this example, allocate funding to teach girls, especially those living in rural areas, the basics of digital technologies and 3D-modelling. A special attention needs to be paid to marginalised groups of women with a particular focus on ensuring their access to developing digital technologies skills.
- A radical change of the paradigm "business solves all problems," the search of new approaches to ensure women's and girls' access to employment opportunities.
- A systematic increase in the share of the women employed in the public sector. Introduce quotas to achieve real gender parity in the public sector.
- Markers and indicators of the population's, including women's, wellbeing must be revised on the global level. Socially- and gender specific indicators and data must be used, including (but not limited to) the gender pay gap, the gender responsive quality-of-life measurements, not only economic performance such as GDP.
- Carry out a study on the employability of women living in rural areas from the perspective of employment opportunities as well as the creation of additional social and economic conditions for women's employment, including the availability of childcare facilities.
- Ensure transparency of state and municipal/local budgets, introduce gender-sensitive budgeting. Pay special attention to the budgeting of childcare facilities, provision of potable water, provision of vocational training, etc.
- Monitor women's labour rights in the informal economy and in the private sector.
- Strengthen the states' national labour legislation through the introduction of various terms related to the special needs of marginalised groups of women and support the creation and development of social entrepreneurship for particularly marginalised groups of women and girls.
- Ensure state recognition of diplomas/certificates of female migrant workers in receiving countries.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ybyraikz/>

<sup>2</sup> Single-industry town (\*monotown\*) – a locality, established near city-forming enterprises to provide these enterprises with the labor force. Since the single-product orientation of the locality is effective in the medium term, the single-industry towns have spread throughout the world. However, this term is mostly used concerning the towns built in the region.

## How to advocate

- Create and support women's trade union organisations.
- Strengthen rural women's participation in water usage associations, as well as their engagement in integrated water resources employing IT.
- Engage researchers in gender studies and research.
- Increase awareness of media and bloggers on the existing issues and the problem-solving process.
- Make use of the potential of progressive religious leaders and organisations to interpret correctly issues of women's rights and attitudes towards them in compliance with religious teachings.

## How to promote solidarity

- Support the practice of exchange of experiences among countries and ensure wide media coverage of the positive experience of women's inclusion in economic processes and its results.
- Promote interregional and international cooperation in the field of advancement of women's economic rights.

## How to protect the rights & safety of human rights activists

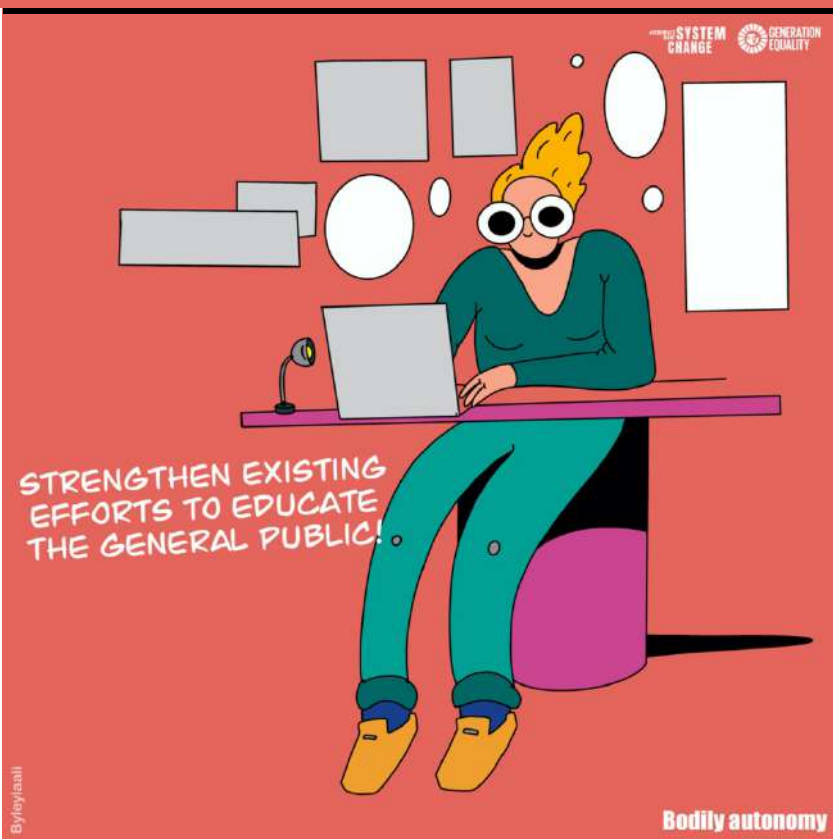
- Lobby for the adoption of a law on free legal assistance.
- Encourage the establishment of inter-state coalitions for women's and girls' rights.
- Widely use international human rights mechanisms.

## How technologies can assist our work

- Poor digital infrastructure hinders the training of young women/girls to modern professional skills.
- Education of women/girls facilitates their development, raises awareness of their constitutional rights and obligations, strengthens their capacity, and increases their opportunities.
- Awareness-raising through digital technologies promotes better use and development of women's potential.

## How to rebuild after the pandemic

- The governments' crisis response measures must include special measures ensuring financial security (financial cushion) of small-scale businesses and women's entrepreneurship.
- Authorities must adopt a set of measures providing grants/technical support/consultations, aimed at the "survival" of women's entrepreneurship in the post-pandemic period. A reduced tax rate for micro-business (which is in general female-led) must be introduced on state level, accompanied by loans aimed at rehabilitation of female-led businesses (since during the COVID-19 pandemic many women lost their businesses).
- Prioritize the support of social entrepreneurship.
- Support small scale economic initiatives by setting up a group of women (5-9 people) aimed at mitigating the crisis's consequences and generate incomes.
- Develop programmes providing training and grants for migrants and their family members.



**Moderator:** Assiya Khairullina,  
Kazakhstan

**Contributions made by participants from:** Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

## Physical integrity, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

### Existing structural barriers

During the discussions, the following structural barriers were identified:

- Discrimination and violation of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls, in particular those living with HIV/AIDS, disabilities, or whom are in incarceration. This includes a lack of freedom of choice regarding sexual relationship, denial of medical care, denial of provision of assistance in family planning and SRHR in healthcare facilities and penal institutions, forced sterilization.
- Gender imbalance in the system of provision of legal and medical assistance to teenagers. A ban on the decisions regarding the medical examination of teenagers without parents'/adults' participation, forced sterilization.
- A lack of funding for the expansion of activities of NGOs supporting and assisting women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, women and girls with disabilities, incarcerated women, and other marginalised groups.
- There is lack of teenagers' and young adults' access to sources of reliable information on safe, effective, affordable and appropriate family planning methods in national languages.
- Gender stereotypes, insufficient support of SRHR promotion among the public due to the lack of understanding of the issues of sexuality, sexual and reproductive rights as well as physical integrity.

- Patriarchy and the increasing impact of religious norms that discriminate against women's status and rights, inadequate informational and analytical support.

## Proposed solutions and recommendations

Feminists and activists in Central Asia recommend:

- Conduct a range of **independent analytical case studies** of practice and legislation ensuring SRHR, ensuring the protection of physical integrity of women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, women and girls with disabilities, incarcerated women at country and regional levels to identify gaps and make recommendations.
- **Provide financial, educational and training resources to strengthen joint efforts of feminist organisations**, aimed at ensuring the full implementation of Central Asian states' commitments to the principles of the Beijing Platform for Action, in particular, on the issues of elimination of discrimination and violation of sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls, with special focus on marginalised groups and their physical integrity.
- **Establish a process of knowledge-sharing between regional NGOs** on the issues of lobbying on norms and legislation in Central Asian countries. Including a wide range of sexual rights: freedom of sexual relations and the right to free reproductive choice; freedom of emotional expression, the right to sexual integrity; the right to sexual privacy; the right to freedom of conscience concerning sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identification and sexual rights; the right to sexual health and its protection; the right to the information on human sexuality as well as the right to sex education.

## How to advocate

- **Develop a long-term joint action strategy** of the feminist movement in Central Asia on the promotion of SRHR tailored to the local context of the countries of the region (commonalities and variations).
- **Strengthen the efforts on informing and educating the general public** on the issues of SRHR and bodily integrity with the mandatory inclusion of informational materials in national languages.
- **Seek support from the general public, activists, and opinion-leaders to change policies** and influence the decision-makers dealing with issues of women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, women and girls with disabilities, incarcerated women.

## How to promote solidarity

- **Exchange relevant information and increase social activity** and commitment of youth and feminist activists in the process of public participation and addressing the state and social problems.
- **Intensify the work of feminist public movements** in Central Asia to carry out solidarity actions and information campaigns, raising public awareness of the serious problems of gender equality and SRHR.
- Create a constantly working **discussion platform for mutual support** and exchange of experience between Central Asia's feminist youth movements.

## How to protect the rights & safety of human rights activists

- **Monitor, and make visible, the safety situation of feminist activists** and ensure the protection of their rights.
- If it is impossible to achieve justice in national courts and institutions, it is advised to address more often the UN and OSCE human rights committees as well as international organisations.

## How technologies can assist our work

- Information technologies (IT) provide access to data collection and analysis, consolidation, rapid exchange of information, joint activities and response, exchange of experience, and online education.

## How to rebuild after the pandemic

- Greater flexibility is required as the project-oriented approach is not effective in emergencies.
- Every opportunity must be used to enhance the professionalism of NGOs in building unity and defending their interests.
- **Expand financing sources**, with paid services, consultations, and social services among them.
- Strengthen cooperation and **participation of local communities**.
- Enhance the building of **horizontal communities** in the civil sector.



**Moderator:** Nodira Abdullaeva,  
Tajikistan

**Contributions made by participants from:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan

# Elimination of gender-based violence

## Existing structural barriers

During the discussions, the following structural barriers were identified:

### Legislative barriers

- Gaps in sectoral laws on the prevention of violence as well as poor implementation of these laws. These laws do not cover all forms of violence, protection order mechanisms are not effective, a range of persons protected by law, and those implementing the law must be expanded. Supervisory and monitoring bodies are not provided with sufficient funding, experts lack sufficient knowledge and capacity to deal with gender-based violence.
- Intervention programmes are not effective due to the gaps in the legislation. Besides, such programmes have not been launched in all Central Asian countries or they have not been institutionalized.
- Different forms of violence against women and girls are not criminalized. The legal liability for harassment in public spaces and on the streets is insufficiently addressed.
- Criminalization of acts of “intentional transmission of HIV” as well as an administrative penalty for sex work leads to blackmailing and violence against certain categories of women (sex workers; women living with HIV).



- The access of victims and survivors of violence to justice is limited; systems and mechanisms of effective detection and investigation of cases of violence, as well as the cases of bringing the perpetrators to justice, are not elaborated.
- There is no institute of independent forensic expertise; the right of a victim/survivor and lawyer access to forensic examination is limited hindering the effectiveness of investigation of cases of violence.
- In Central Asia, the anti-discrimination legislation remains underdeveloped.

### Other issues and barriers

- In Central Asia, polygamous, forced, early, and unregistered marriages are not eliminated, and the international obligations, norms and recommendations are not sufficiently fulfilled.
- In the countries of the region, there is a notable adherence to the family preservation policy. As a result, in some countries, a family reconciliation approach is used which might not consider the interests of victims/survivors of violence.
- There is poor inter-agency coordination on the implementation of policies of comprehensive action against violence against women and GBV in general. Support and assistance services for survivors of violence do not consider the diversity of survivors. For instance, the needs of persons with disabilities, female migrant workers, women from various ethnic groups, etc. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most relief efforts for survivors of violence have been placed upon non-state support centres.
- The general public as well as the survivors are ill-informed about the existing safeguards and mechanisms of protection against gender-based violence.
- LGBTIQ+, women living with HIV, sex workers, women with substance abuse experience intersecting forms of discrimination and violence but are afraid of seeking legal assistance from the state bodies.
- The collection of statistical data on gender-based facts and crimes is either insufficient or non-existent.
- The legislation does not protect inspectors dealing with the issue of violence prevention, in particular female inspectors.
- Mass media often retranslate and perpetuate entrenched gender stereotypes.

## Proposed solutions and recommendations

Feminists and activists in Central Asia recommend:

- Establish **comprehensive and effective mechanisms/approaches of violence prevention and protection**. Support to survivors of violence must be provided from the survivors-centred perspective rather than from the family preservation one. Vigorous action must be taken to **ensure access of all women** – survivors of violence

in all their diversity - to special social and rehabilitation services. Develop government-supported shelter networks.

- Allocate **a sufficient budget for the implementation** of policies and programmes aimed at GBV prevention and response.
- Develop and support the **systematic training of entities** responsible for the implementation of laws and policies aimed at the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence, including law enforcement officials, judges, and lawyers.
- Take urgent steps to **address the gaps in criminal procedures and administrative laws** to bring them in line with the states' international commitments as well as to remove obstacles faced by women, survivors of violence, seeking justice. All forms of GBV must be criminalized.
- Develop and implement effective and modern **response measures**, investigative techniques, and evidence-gathering methods for cases of GBV depending on the form and type of violence.
- Create an environment enabling non-governmental institutions to **conduct a comprehensive assessment** of the physical and psychological harm inflicted on the survivors of violence to receive compensation for the damage suffered.
- Improve the process of record-keeping and the collection of **statistical data on violence**.

## How to advocate

- Integrate behavioural change communication (BCC) when developing awareness-raising strategies on the issues of elimination of violence. Organize a creative session for civil society organisations to **develop a regional strategy** for Central Asia on the promotion of issues of population protection from GBV.
- Initiate the development and introduction of **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** on the provision of support to survivors of violence and advocate for the SOPs implementation.
- Establish an **Ombudsperson for women's rights** in Central Asian countries to address and raise the issue of gender-based violence in parliaments and governments.

## How to promote solidarity

- To promote solidarity between experienced human rights organisations, young activists and representatives of the feminist movement **joint advocacy activities aimed at the elimination of gender-based violence** must be organized. The international campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence should

be adopted at the community level, not only at the national-wide and international levels.

- Development of relationships between the experienced human rights organisations and young activists must be based on solidarity rather than on lecturing from the part of the older activists. Develop other forms of activism in the region.
- **Cooperation between crisis centres and organisations** working with marginalised groups of women (in particular, LGBTIQ+ community, sex workers, women with substance abuse) must be developed to make crisis centres' services more available for everyone.
- Support the crisis centres for survivors of violence, assist their collaboration with other movements, in particular, by expanding their access to the sources of funding.
- Introduce the standards of interagency cooperation and develop the referral mechanisms for survivors.

## How to protect the rights & safety of human rights activists

- Persecution of human rights activists, notably, those working with key populations and LGBTIQ+ community, are not uncommon in Central Asia. Such persecution can be expressed through intimidation, cyberbullying, as well as through actions aimed at closure or suspension of operations of human rights defending entities.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in cases of digital abuse, cyberbullying, dissemination of the activists' private information to intimidate the activists or damage their honour and dignity. These risks have an adverse effect on human rights activists' work and activities.
- International organisations and development partners should develop strategies within their programmes supporting /enhancing the security of human rights activists.
- Access of human rights activists to knowledge and skills of safe use of the internet and protection against digital abuse must be expanded and improved.

## How technologies can assist our work

- During the lockdown, technologies have facilitated the communication and relations between human rights defenders/activists and survivors of violence, as well as provided access to legal and psychological assistance. At the same time, technologies have been actively used to discriminate against various groups of people through editing of women's video images, changing their voices and faces to blackmail them in the future. While spending a lot of time seeking expertise and a retraction, survivors of violence faced shaming, criticism, reputational damage, all of which represent various forms of violence. Also, there was an increase in cases of

phishing attempts and hacking accounts of human rights activists and journalists. Although technologies represent an emancipation tool of young people, through blogging and other types of (online) activities, at the same time the technologies pose risks to young adults and children who are subject to catfishing and cyberbullying. A set of **preventive measures must be adopted to alleviate the negative effects of the Internet use** by children and adolescents, such as providing the skills of navigating and protection in case of danger.

- **Technologies must be made more accessible for marginalised groups of women**, in particular, representatives of the LGBTIQ+ community, women living with HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities, migrant and refugee women and girls.

## How to rebuild after the pandemic

- Develop and implement recovery programmes for crisis and rehabilitation centres' employees, activists, and human rights defenders.
- Strengthen the capacity of legislation to protect the survivors of violence, namely, by introducing the measures of temporary eviction of abusers from their homes and other sanctions such as administrative detention of abusers where necessary.

## CORE FUNDING TO ACTIVISTS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS!

SYSTEM CHANGE & GENERATION EQUALITY



**Moderator:** Leyla Zuleikha Makhmudova,  
Kazakhstan

**Contributions made by participants  
from:** Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and  
Uzbekistan

# Feminist movements and leadership

## Existing structural barriers

During the discussions, the following structural barriers were identified:

- Patriarchal norms of 'the power vertical' are transferred into all organisational structures and must be followed by any organisation willing to register. Such an organisational structure is not appropriate for horizontally operating feminist movements.
- Open LGBTIQ+ and feminist organisations and policy documents are not accepted by the state due to the marginalisation and discrimination of our views and the groups we represent by state bodies.
- There are more obstacles in the NGOs' registration process than in the procedures of registering business enterprises. For example, in Kazakhstan, a remote registration of business entities is available, whereas to register an NGO one must travel from distant villages to regional centres.
- The state is concerned with the civil sector development and its foreign funding.
- Regarding the mechanism of the state protection of women's rights, there must be an Ombudsperson for the protection of women's rights, like the Ombudsperson for protection of the rights of children. There are national women's machineries, however, instead of working with a broad spectrum of women's rights, these entities narrows women's agenda to family and demography.

- Feminist organisations and gender programmes are not sufficiently funded.
- A traditional stereotypical narrative on gender roles is being widely disseminated not only by the states but also by international organisations.
- Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action 25 years ago women's political participation and leadership are still lagging behind other targets. Women in politics, who assumed their posts through the gender quota system, partake in suppression of the feminist movement.
- Human rights defenders and activists are disproportionately exposed to state persecution and violence.
- Spaces for feminist interventions are shrinking, alongside with restriction of freedoms and rights of women human rights activists, including LGBTIQ+ people, and women living with HIV.

## Proposed solutions and recommendations

Feminists and activists in Central Asia recommend:

- **Bans on the registration of feminist/LGBTIQ+ organisations must be prosecuted locally**; UN agencies and other international human rights organisations must be informed about these cases to ensure better visibility of the proceedings.
- UN agencies and other international human rights organisations need to undertake advocacy with the states on the principles of non-discrimination of marginalised groups and non-violent communication with the civil sector.
- Reconsider the planned changes in NGOs' registration procedures and provide a clear justification for them.
- Request the national women's machineries to explain their role in the protection of women's rights.
- Feminists must address the donors and **examine to what extent women are able to influence the process of external funds distribution**. Preferably, this appeal should be written together with UN Women and the UN Commission on the Status of Women since the feminists' voices are still marginalised.
- At the Generation Equality Forum, all donor organisations must be urged to pay attention to the **gender inequality elimination programmes** in which gender agenda is an underlying principle, not an added one. This will demonstrate to our states that gender issues are not marginal but deserve a sufficient consideration and funding.
- While implementing the quota system it is important to consider not just the quantity but the quality of women's participation. It is necessary to **choose women promoting a feminist agenda and leadership**, as well as monitor their activities in the period of their political participation.

- **Wide awareness-raising and advocacy campaign on feminism and gender equality** must be carried out.
- It is necessary to assist rural women in developing entrepreneurial skills enabling them to participate in agriculture more actively.
- An **anti-discrimination law must be adopted** at the legislative level, a public hearing on this law must be conducted.
- **Feminist schools should be carried out at the regional level** and members of parliaments, activists, representatives of ministries must be invited to participate.

## How to advocate

- Urge the parties, participating in the forthcoming parliamentary elections, to announce their **clear strategies on championing women's rights**. These demands must be supported by reminding them of our country's accession to various gender equality Conventions. These advocacy actions can be carried out through social networking sites since these days civil servants pay more attention to the public outcry on social media than to the one in the real world.
- The statements made on the regional level as well as on behalf of groups of organisations work better than the country-level ones, let us, therefore, make joint appeals and statements on behalf of Central Asia.
- High-level meetings (SCO, OSCE, EAEU, etc.) take place in the capitals of Central Asian states every year, thus feminists need mechanisms for accessing these fora through appeals or statements, in compliance with women's rights agenda, namely, by establishing a **Regional Council on the Rights of Women** working on a voluntary basis but having a voice in the region.

## How to promote solidarity

- Even if there is still no anti-discrimination law, and we promote solidarity with diverse groups, including people with disabilities, HIV positive and others, we still continue to advocate for feminist leadership, participation and introduction of the term "discrimination" in our legislations.
- Undertake a broader discussion on solidarity, as well as involvement in the feminist movement of other country's movements – such as the environmental, human rights movements. Create horizontal and intersectional unions, and involve feminists in other movements.
- Conduct regular more general discussions on the regional level to build closer ties between feminists and civil society organisation activists.
- Raise awareness on the activities of women's movements in Central Asia, the more we know the more we are united, publicize via groups, mailing lists, make the videos

and demonstrate on Mir-24 TV-channel, ASIA programme, since these TV-channels are being broadcasted in Central Asian countries.

## How to protect the rights & safety of human rights activists

- More information on the aid organisations and their assistance to the human rights advocates must be disseminated among them.
- Support and finance the shelters for human rights defenders, develop a database in Russian, since there are many shelters but the information about them is in English which makes this information unavailable for many activists.

## How technologies can assist our work

- Issues of gender and feminism are gaining in popularity in recent years thanks to social media. Train and inform on the issues of feminism and women's rights on YouTube since this platform is widely accessible for a broader audience.

## How to rebuild after the pandemic

- Improve access to information technology for marginalised groups of women.
- Establish and support associations and discussion platforms, especially for women in isolation.
- Finance feminist support and assistance groups.