



Feminists want system change in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Russia

Policy brief with feminists' and women's rights activists' demands for Generation Equality in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russia and Ukraine

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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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Disclaimer: These consultations have been made possible with a financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Women 2030 and EuropeAid. The content of these consultations and this policy brief is the product of the civil society participants and should not be interested to represent the views of the financial donors, Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), UN Women's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia or the Moderators.



Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has thrown a spanner in the works in regard to the global policy processes on achieving gender equality (with the Generation Equality Forums and Beijing+25 meetings being postponed). The need for mobilising and engaging feminist organizations in the agenda setting for a post-COVID-19 and socially just world is more important than ever.

It is essential for the global feminist movement that we ensure that our post-pandemic world will not have thrown us decades back in time, and that the recovery will lead to a gender-just transformation of our economies and societies.

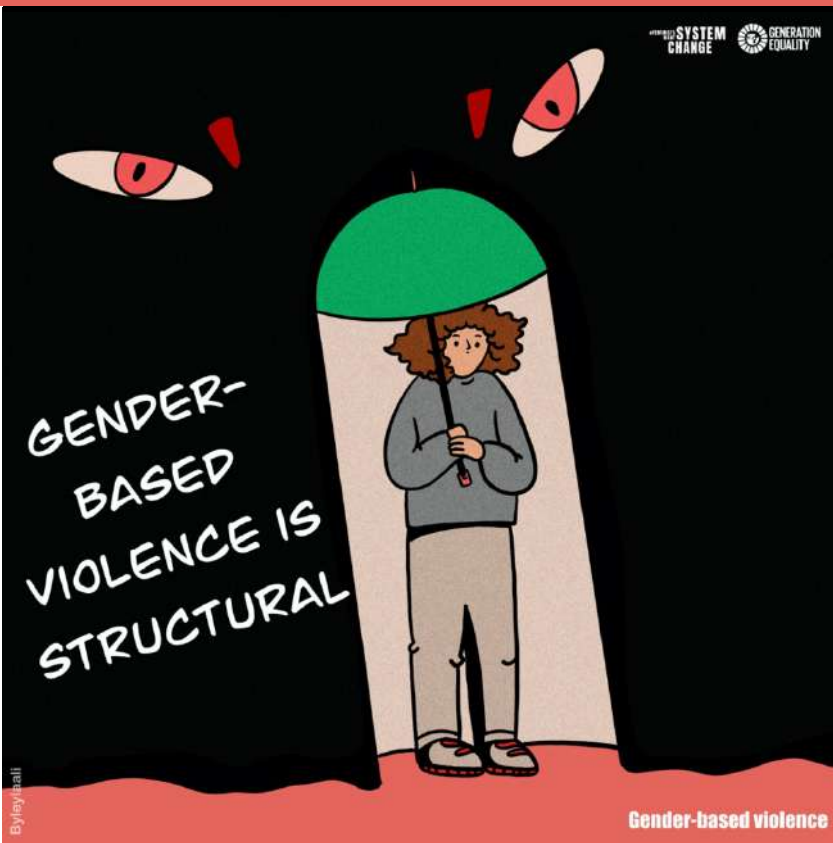
That is why we, a group of feminists from seven countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) in collaboration with Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) and the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, have conducted a **virtual consultation on the implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in our region** in preparation for the Generation Equality Forums to be held in 2021.

We met online with feminists and women's rights activists on October 6, with 48 participants (49% youth), and on October 19, with 31 participants. Together we discussed the themes of the Generation Equality Action Coalitions and set out our demands for a feminist post-pandemic world.

We discussed:

- Gender-based violence
- Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)
- Feminist movements and leadership
- Economic justice and rights
- Feminist action for climate justice
- Technology and innovation for gender equality
- Women, peace and security

All the structural and legal barriers, as well as our recommendations for the future from seven countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) are provided below.



Moderator: Valentina Bodrug-Lungu

Contributions made by participants

from: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Russia, Ukraine.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) has many dimensions. The COVID-19 crisis has shown a rapid rise in gender-based and domestic violence, also in the countries of this region. Deeply ingrained patriarchal structures reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and violate women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy.¹ During the consultations, structural and legal barriers that cause and perpetuate violence were analysed, leading to a series of recommendations to combat gender-based violence.

Structural barriers

Socio-cultural barriers include the prevalence of patriarchal approaches regarding gender-based violence issues across the region. It is especially problematic that within large parts of society gender-based violence, is perceived as “normal”. For example, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova (in the Transnistria region) and Russia, domestic violence is often seen as a private matter. Furthermore, the gendered nature of violence is often not recognized. In Belarus, for example, the emphasis is that “victims are victims” and gender is ignored. This lack of recognition makes it hard to take adequate measures.

Strong anti-gender rhetoric also prevents finding solutions. In countries like Armenia, Belarus and Georgia, GBV is often framed as a threat to the traditional values of the country. This is

¹ Beijing+25 - Civil society forum compilation report on Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for the UNECE region. (2019) page 14. Link: https://www.wecf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/CSO-report-on-Beijing25-UNECE-region_compressed.pdf

reinforced through the education system. In Belarus the subject of Domestic Violence is introduced in the secondary school curricula as “Basics of Family Life”, based on conservative values and mindset.

Structural barriers were mainly found in survivors' access to protection and assistance services. This barrier is reinforced by a lack of political will to recognise gender-based violence issues, for example in countries like Belarus and Russia. The lack of clear procedures for registering and reporting GBV leads to problems in assisting survivors of violence, as seen in Russia. In Armenia, there are no special investigative procedures for investigating sexual and domestic violence cases. This results in a double victimization of the survivors.

Across the region, there is a structural lack of state support for access to services. CSOs trying to provide this access often have to deal with a lack of funding. COVID-19 further exacerbated the issue of lack of access to services for domestic violence survivors in all countries.

Legal environment and barriers

In the last few years, a number of special laws, regarding domestic and family violence prevention were adopted in Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. The legal framework is very impressive, but implementation is not efficient (according to participants from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan). Women's access to justice and protection is limited by the legal framework's poor functionality.

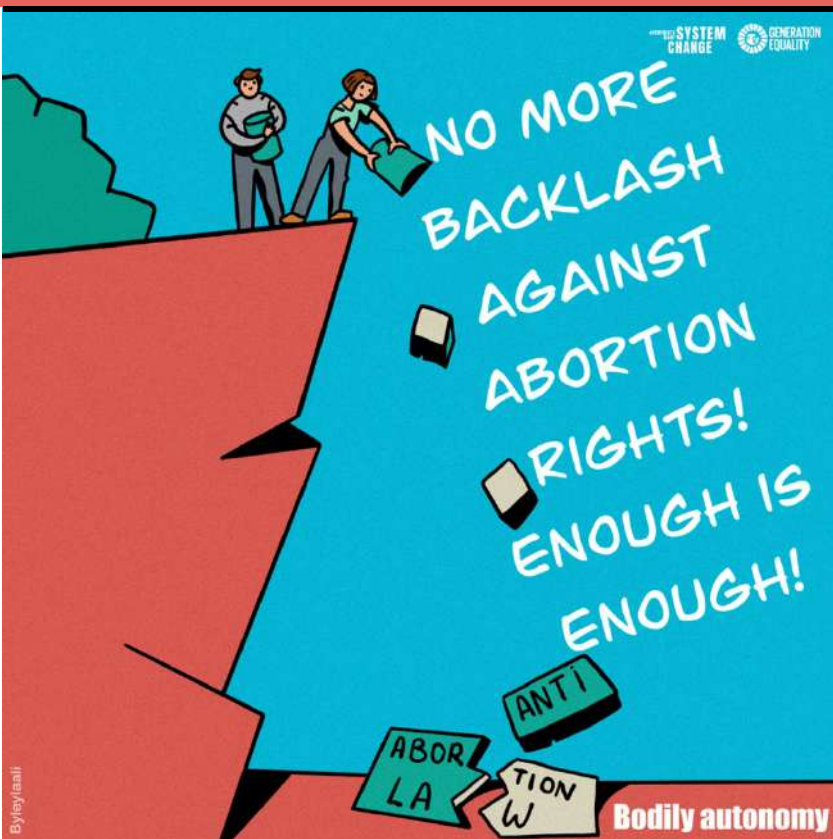
One such example is the so-called “protection order” in Belarus. If someone experiences domestic violence two times in a row during a calendar year, the survivor has to make an official complaint that violence has occurred to initiate the protection order procedure. This legal procedure takes time and only lasts for 30 days. It can be extended but only through more court cases. It has not proven to be efficient. Another example, in Belarus, is the fact that neither marital rape nor stalking is legally seen as a form of violence.

Another example is the law on domestic violence in Ukraine and Moldova: abusers can be sent to correctional programmes after conviction. This is a step in the right direction, but there is a lack of implementation measures, especially due to COVID-19. In Ukraine, it is common that the survivors of violence, often women and children, have to go to a shelter, while abusers stay in their mutual place of residence. In a few cases, regulations are still lacking clear protection for GBV survivors. There are no special provisions in the Criminal Code on Sexual violence and domestic violence in Armenia. In Belarus the National gender plan doesn't include the development and introduction of the specialized law on domestic violence.

Across the region there is a lack of political will to ratify the Istanbul Convention. Georgia is the only country in the region that ratified the Convention. Despite civil society organisations' efforts to advocate for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, no significant progress has been made. In Armenia the process stopped due to the attack of patriarchal groups. In Moldova and Ukraine civil society organisations continue the advocacy work focused on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, exploring Georgia's experience. At the same time, Belarus and Russia are not considering joining the Istanbul Convention.

Recommendations

- Advocate for the ratification and successful implementation of the Istanbul Convention across the entire region.
- Advocate for the adoption of special laws on protecting GBV survivors across the region. In Belarus, for example, domestic violence should be recognised as an aggravating circumstance (criminalisation), and it should be considered during divorce procedures. In Armenia, special investigative procedures should be added in the Criminal Code to investigate sexual and domestic violence cases.
- In countries with domestic violence laws there should be focused efforts to push Governments to ensure better implementation.
- Improve the system for registration/reporting of GBV and domestic violence cases.
- Recognise the gendered nature of violence as “gender-based violence”.
- Implement SDG 5 - eliminate violence against women in the private sphere.
- Governments should allocate appropriate financial and human resources for the adequate implementation of measures and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence. Including for services addressing survivors of GBV.
- Governments should support non-governmental organisations' activities in assisting GBV survivors by using “state requests/command” to commission NGOs' services.
- Extension of services and access to all survivors, especially those from disadvantaged and marginalised groups.
- Create a mechanism for interaction and cooperation between state structures, police, NGOs, other stakeholders on issues related to assisting GBV survivors. This partnership should be institutionalised.
- Organise informative campaigns and education programmes with focus on GBV prevention and services for survivors etc.
- Make the state services women and trans-friendly.
- Provide effective correction programmes for abusers (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine).
- Create safe spaces for survivors of GBV, including domestic violence, away from their abusers. They should not be forced to leave their place of residence (Ukraine).



Moderator: Anna Hovhannisyan

Contributions made by participants from: Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova, Russia

Bodily autonomy, sexual and reproductive health and rights

Structural barriers

Sexist discourse is present in almost all spheres of life, creating an atmosphere of oppression and marginalisation of women and girls which severely limits their rights and opportunities within both the public and private domains. These discourses deprive them of the possibility of fully realizing their rights to bodily autonomy, agency and freedom. It also negatively impacts many aspects of their sexual and reproductive health. Gender stereotypes and biases create an overall discriminatory environment perpetuated by health workers providing services to women including those from socially excluded and marginalized groups. Many doctors show discriminatory attitudes and behaviour towards women with HIV, disabilities, and LGBTI persons. There is a systemic problem with the violation of the rights of the patient in the pre- and antenatal care.

Growing opposition and retrogressions on SRHR in all countries is of grave concern, and is based on ideology or religion, as well as on strong anti-gender rhetoric.

Lack of comprehensive, evidence-based and rights-based sexuality education is the challenge which all countries from the region face. Menstruation health (access to water at schools, access to menstrual products) is another challenge for many young girls from the region.

Accessibility and affordability to a wide range of modern contraceptives is another structural barrier which faces many women from the 7 listed countries. Though abortion is legal in all countries, restrictive legal and policy measures have been introduced in many countries which influence the accessibility of these services especially for rural women.

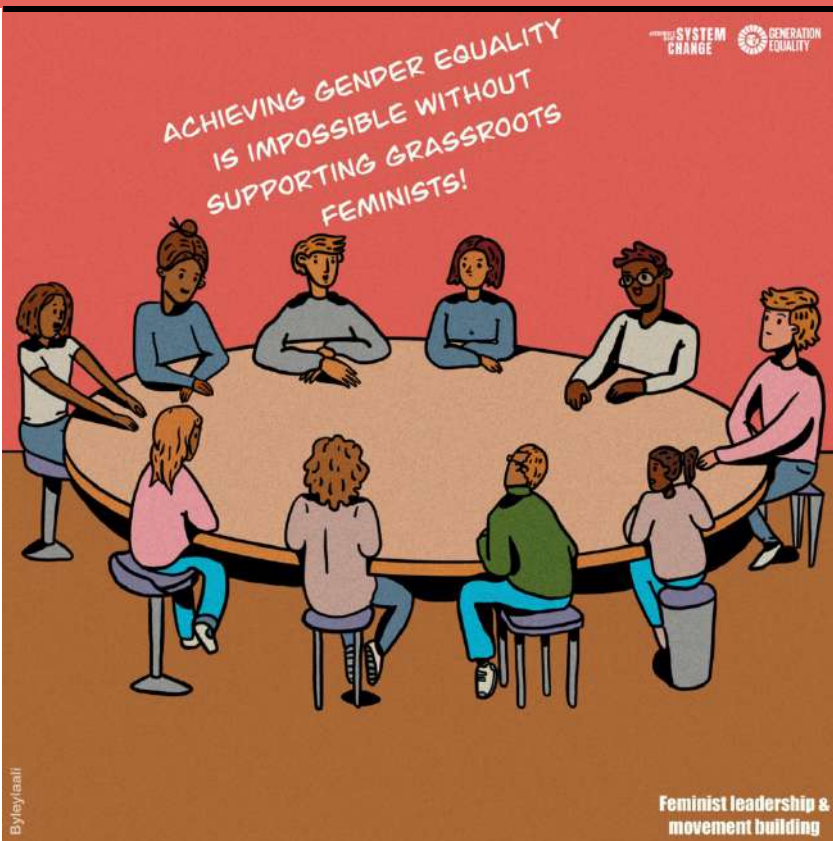
Pro-natalist/pro-birth policies (public policy which seeks to create financial and social incentives for populations to reproduce) are applied by some countries of the region focusing on fertility and population growth instead of on women's autonomy and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Legal environment and barriers

Legal provisions in many countries of the region guarantee access to non-discriminative SRHR services including access to contraceptive measures and comprehensive sexuality education but in practice, they are not properly implemented. Abortion is legal in all 7 countries, however, the access is impacted by mandatory waiting periods and compulsory counselling in almost all countries in the region. Conscious objection to abortion services by the medical staff is another challenge for many women in the region. There is a legal prohibition of gender-biased sex selection abortions in Armenia and Azerbaijan. International experience shows that this kind of legal prohibition does on the one hand contribute to the decline of the rate of son-preference abortions. On the other hand, it can also negatively impact women's and gender non-conforming people's access to medical services as physicians can use the legal prohibition to discourage abortions.

Recommendations

- Promote strategic planning of SRHR services during Covid-19 and acknowledge these services as essential.
- Guarantee sufficient state budgetary provision for women's sexual and reproductive health and ensure the availability of adequate human resources across all levels of the health system, in both urban and rural areas in all 7 countries.
- Using international best practices, reform the laws on abortion by removing the provision on a waiting period for an abortion and compulsory counselling.
- Mainstream mandatory, age-responsive, standardised, evidence-based and scientifically accurate comprehensive sexuality education curricula across the education system in all countries.
- Guarantee the practical accessibility, availability and affordability of a wide range of effective modern contraceptive methods and include them in national lists of essential medicines, also in national insurance schemes and subsidization.
- Ensure an equal dialogue between the authorities and non-profit organizations representatives who are on the frontline of dealing with SRHR issues, taking into account their opinions and expertise on improving the current situation.
- Provide adequate monitoring procedures to collect data on obstetric violence and conscious objections to abortion services by medical staff.
- Ensure the collection of more specific and accurate statistics related to the reproductive health of women who face multiple and intersecting forms of oppression.
- Invest more in awareness raising for reducing harmful gender stereotypes and practices related to SRHR.
- Adopt measures to ensure that all women can access affordable, good quality maternal health care, including prenatal and postnatal care.
- Review pro-natalist policies in the countries and replace them with rights-based population policies.



Moderator: Oksana Potapova

Contributions made by participants from: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Germany

Feminist movement building

Structural barriers

The feminist movement in the region is facing challenges at two different levels which prevents it from being more effective and impactful. The external structural barriers make up a larger context in which women's rights and feminist organisations operate. **Patriarchal norms and stereotypes** in society prevent women in some contexts from gaining access to education or employment and discourage or prohibit women from taking up positions of leadership in their communities. Organised conservative movements are growing in force and impact, gaining seats in parliaments and national governments. Despite their growth and impact, the understanding of these movements, their nature and social impact strategies is still lacking. Coupled with low effectiveness of existing government policies, which are process-oriented and underfunded, and high turnover of government officials, it has created an environment with little accountability for concrete results for gender equality. In addition to existing inequalities, women facing multiple forms of discrimination experience even less opportunities to access and visibility. For example: infrastructural barriers are the cause of additional discrimination for women with disabilities due to a lack of access to buildings and movements. The intersectionality of needs and rights of women has not yet become a foundational principle.

The impact of the movement is also reduced due **to internal structural barriers**, such as: the movement's fragmentation, with many sub-movements within, and lack of platforms

for cooperation and discussion. The movement itself is not well populated, which impacts its effectiveness. This is exacerbated by weak institutional capacity of feminist organisations and a lack of long-term strategies for fundraising, communication and planning. Topped with insufficient funding, this leads to lack of visibility of the movement, as well as challenges in achieving sustainable change and having an impact on the level of decision-makers and systems. Unavailable gender disaggregated statistics prevents feminist activists from making the barriers visible and fighting to change them.

COVID-19 created additional structural barriers for feminist organisations: women's organisations who were first to respond to the crisis, are becoming too focused on humanitarian work. This changes the focus of their work towards immediate response and takes their efforts away from advocacy and strategic work. Due to COVID-19 the importance of gender equality and the women's rights agenda is becoming less of a priority for governments, because there are "more important challenges connected with COVID-19". There is a risk for of backlash on achieved gains for women's rights, if gender equality is not seen as an essential part of the response agenda.

Legal environment and barriers

The legal barriers are multiple and vary in each country. However, there are also regional challenges which are similar across borders. The national gender machinery is weak in many of the above listed countries, which creates a barrier in advancing gender equality at different levels of society. The policy process is gender-blind, gender analysis of legislation is lacking in many countries. This is coupled with a lack of awareness about rights amongst women, especially women in rural areas, and by lack of gender sensitivity of available mechanisms and resources. Development of new policies happens in a way that is not inclusive of women's voices and is also not intersectional. Consultation mechanisms are weak or non-existent. Some context specific legal barriers mentioned by participants included:

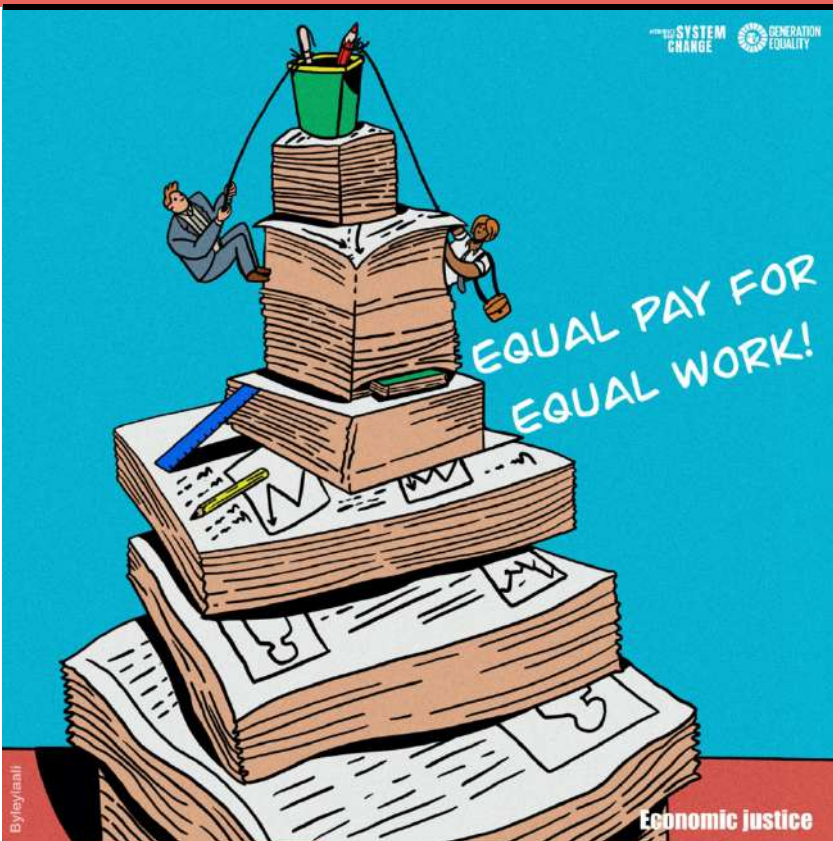
- COVID-19 and respective lockdowns may lead to infringements on the right to peaceful assembly.
- The needs and rights of rural women, especially around property, need to be considered, as this group is particularly exposed to poverty and domestic violence due to lack of property rights.

Country specific challenges mentioned:

- Advocacy for the Istanbul Convention in Ukraine has been going on for 5 years and has been met with a lot of resistance from conservative groups.
- In Belarus women are still not considered as important political actors. Svetlana Tihanovskaya became the main opposition presidential candidate only because all male candidates were put in jail or had to leave the country. A lot of sexist clichés are used in the media and the public sphere (“beautiful women marches”, “instead of cooking borsch, women have to protest”). Despite many protests in Belarus being organised and run by women, the way they are portrayed in the media is also full of stereotypes, such as “women who are protecting their men”, “where are the feminists now when women are marching in the streets” or by economist Sergeu Chaly “this is what I call normal feminism”.

Recommendations

- Increase women’s political participation and access to leadership roles.
- Increase representation and media coverage of feminist advocacy organisations to increase public awareness. Most people watch TV, channels rarely show social advertising, or political slogans. Increasing media representation is important.
- Representation: raise the public’s awareness of the work and success stories of women involved in various fields: politics, economy, etc.
- Alongside developing gender-sensitive legislation, require mandatory gender analysis of any piece of new legislation. Analyse how laws impacts gender equality.
- Ensure effective implementation and monitoring of gender-sensitive legislation.
- Collect gender-disaggregated data not only in regard to women’s organisations and movements, but within large institutions as well.
- Strengthen national machineries on gender equality.
- Advocate for more and better resources for the feminist movement and provide support for grassroots organisations.
- Provide opportunities for capacity building of the feminist movement.
- Create spaces in each municipality/local level for development of civil society.
- More information is needed on the work and leadership of Generation Equality Action Coalitions, so that feminists can collectively identify entry points to influence the process.



Moderator: Salome Chagelishvili

Contributions made by participants from: Armenia, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and observers

Economic justice & rights

Structural barriers

The consultation has shown that rigid gender roles, traditions and gender stereotypes remain as one of the main challenges that is prevalent in all 7 target countries. Patriarchal values are tightly interlinked with capitalist oppressive systems and create unjust and unfair conditions specifically for those most marginalised.

Wage gap, sexist labour markets, no social guarantees for women, unfriendly environment for women to take care of their children and work (no child-care services and kindergartens), and lack of women's ownership (lands and property) were recognised as quite common in most of the countries. Sexual violence and harassment at the workplace remain a challenge, and the normalized culture of not reporting it reinforces this due to the fact that there are no proper mechanisms and instruments to fight it.

Legal environment and barriers

In most of the countries' legal environment, working conditions and economic welfare is quite well-reflected on paper, but the main challenge occur when it comes to implementing the laws. For example, equal pay for equal work for both men and women is well-written in relevant laws and conventions in Georgia, while in practice the wage gap is a huge challenge and according to monthly salaries, the gender pay gap in Georgia amounted to

37.2 per cent in 2017 (UN Women). While in practice the wage gap is a huge challenge, and according to monthly salaries the gender pay gap in Georgia amounted to 37.2 per cent in 2017 (UN Women). On the other hand, due to the above-mentioned structural barriers connected to gender roles and stereotypes, women sometimes refrain from or do not have access to fully participate in economic life.

In some cases, there is no paid maternity leave, or the pay is so low (for example in Georgia) that it encourages women/parents to go back to work as soon as possible, while in other cases the maternity leave is arranged so that women are away from their work responsibilities for so long they are not to be able to return to the workforce (for example, this happens in Belarus).

In most of the cases there are no quotas that would ensure women's and people with disabilities' participation in the workforce/companies. The Substantive Equality principle is either not mentioned or not sufficiently implemented on a national level. There are some professions where only women or only men can apply.

In some countries, there are no sexual harassment laws in place that would ensure women a safe working environment and instruments to protect their rights. In the countries that do have legislation on sexual harassment, it is not implemented efficiently.

Recommendations

- Remove artificial barriers for women to access certain professions and implement gender quotas (including quotas for persons with disabilities) to encourage women's meaningful and full participation in economic life.
- Have understandable information on relevant laws and conventions ratified by the country publicly available in native languages.
- Make training against sexual harassment, as well as regulations and clear procedures to follow, obligatory within companies and organizations.
- Develop a proper complaint systems on harassment in the workplace (including gendered policies, explicit laws and regulations against sexual harassment in the workplace and guidebooks for all the staff members available in native languages).
- Explicitly work on dismantling gender stereotypes on a national level, and in companies and organizations internally.
- Ensure access to high quality primary, secondary and higher education for women and girls, in all their diversity.
- Ensure access to informal training on skills development and mentorship programs, especially for young women.
- Ensure proper parental leave, including for partners, that includes sufficient financial and social guarantees. It should be regulated by legislation.
- Allocate funds in state budgets for the developing of proper infrastructure for men and women to be able to go to work, that would encourage women to join the workforce.
- Provide legal support for women, including pregnant women, in labour rights.
- Focus on protecting the most marginalised groups first.
- Develop proper mechanisms to ensure equal pay for equal work.



Moderator: Salome Chagelishvili

Contributions made by participants from: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and observers

Climate justice

Structural barriers

One of the biggest structural barriers identified during the discussions was the low level of awareness around climate justice and its connection with women's rights. Illiteracy and the current economic situation only aggravates the problem further.

Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities. In the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Russia region, large parts of the population live near regions affected by climate change. The most marginalized groups in society are often also the most affected, living in polluted areas. In the future, natural disasters will become more frequent, and will lead to increased internal and eco-migration. Existing gender norms and other forms of discrimination lead to a lack of access to information, giving women less time to successfully evacuate in cases of (climate) emergency. Despite this, they often have to choose between having a job or protecting the environment.

The **general awareness** is also low on using alternative eco-friendly sources of power (solar, wind energy, etc). At the same time, there are plenty of successful projects and organizations advocating renewable energy in the region, such as CLEEN in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia.

Women do not have **opportunities** to meaningfully engage in climate policy decision-making processes and consultations.

Our current economic model depends on continuous oil extraction and the corporate power that goes with that. While they talk about reducing carbon and developing eco-friendly approaches, they continue to profit of the environmental degradation of the earth. In order to achieve climate justice, these polluting industries need to be held accountable for their role in exacerbating climate change.

Within the region, warzones are a threat to water reservoirs and electricity plants. Rivers are polluted. The chemical industry and mining industry located in conflict-affected areas are a threat to the local population in case military action leads to destruction of industrial infrastructure.

Legal environment and barriers

Climate and environmental policies in the region often lack a gender lens. International conventions do give guidelines and requirements regarding integrating gender, such as the Gender Action Plan within the Paris Agreement, but there is lack of implementation. Climate Change Strategies have been adopted, though these are often not gender-sensitive.

Regarding a toxic-free environment, most countries in the region have signed and ratified international conventions such as the Stockholm Convention. However, the political will to properly research climate change and analyse it from a gender equality perspective is absent. Investments in fossil fuels and petrochemical industries continue, while investments into climate solutions, especially those that take gender equality into account, are lagging behind. Lack of regulations, in particular gender-sensitive ones, on GMOs, usage of chemicals, pollution, etc. on local and national levels is a common trait in all the target countries. There are some conventions signed and ratified, such as the Chemical Conventions and the Stockholm Convention, but overall women are not engaged in decision-making processes and marginalised groups are not even considered in legal documents, e.g. eco-migrants.

A lot of young people and activists are mobilising to clean up plastic, which on the one hand is a positive gesture, yet on the other hand, from a global perspective, leads to fragmental mobilization of different groups. This is not enough, as the collected garbage is stored somewhere out of sight and not taken care of properly, due to the lack waste management infrastructure. This kind of approach does not solve the systemic problems of lack of proper recycling and waste management policies and strategies to reduce the consumption of plastic.

Recommendations

- Raise women's role and awareness in climate justice work.
- Create women farmer unions that come together at least once a year to exchange experiences and lessons learned with each other, on both a regional and national level.
- Provide women farmers with the necessary tools, including sustainable fertilizers, to enable them to work more in the field.
- Engage women's grassroots groups in decision-making processes and consultations.
- Develop laws and implement international conventions on chemicals.
- Advocate locally for EU directives on climate change reduction.
- Introduce legally binding principles of big polluters pay.
- Support green energy alternatives rather than existing fossil fuel systems.
- Advocate for investing more money in stopping climate change, with special focus on women and other marginalized groups.
- Enforce the instruments that are already in place and make locals and governments more conscious about environmental issues.
- Build women's awareness around pesticides, farmer education, GMOs, effect of plastics.
- Regulate GMOs by law, banning plastic bags, enforce laws on water sanitation, and impose relevant regulations to ensure better health of the local population.
- Connect local to global and vice versa – strengthen the interconnection between the feminist and environmental justice movements. Recognize that the feminist agenda is integral to achieve climate justice.
- Ensure that climate funding, from local to national levels, reaches local communities and especially women's organizations that have experience with gender-just climate solutions. This includes setting ambitious gender criteria in funding.
- Advocate with national governments to specifically provide funding for women's leadership and engagement in the energy transition.



Moderator: Anna Hovhannisyan

Contributions made by participants from: Belarus, Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova

Innovation & technology

Structural barriers

Gender stereotypes affect the progress of women in technology and innovation since the IT field in the region is considered to be male-oriented and male-centred. At schools there is a special division of subjects that promote boys' involvement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and girls' involvement in humanitarian subjects which also affects women's choice in terms of higher education. In Ukraine, the percentage of women in STEM education is low across all levels: colleges, technical high schools and universities. Only a limited number of women have a doctoral degree in sciences. Educational materials such as textbooks, visual and instructional materials and guides in STEM learning contain gender-based discrimination and stereotypes. The share of women in high academic positions or professional-level is extremely low. The role of women in the IT sector is slowly growing in Ukraine and Armenia. In Belarus, the biggest wage gap is in the IT sector -with the figure being over 50%. The wage gap is a common issue for many countries. Across the region it is obvious that women are underrepresented in bigger IT companies. Women in the IT field are more involved in administrative positions (HR, PR). There is a gender gap in 'future' sectors such as renewable energy as well.

In Moldova, 32% of the tertiary education graduates in STEM programmes are women (2008-2018). In the ICT sector the pay gap was 32.5% (2018). It should be noted that young people mostly apply for business in the field of ICT, but young men use ICT to a greater extent than

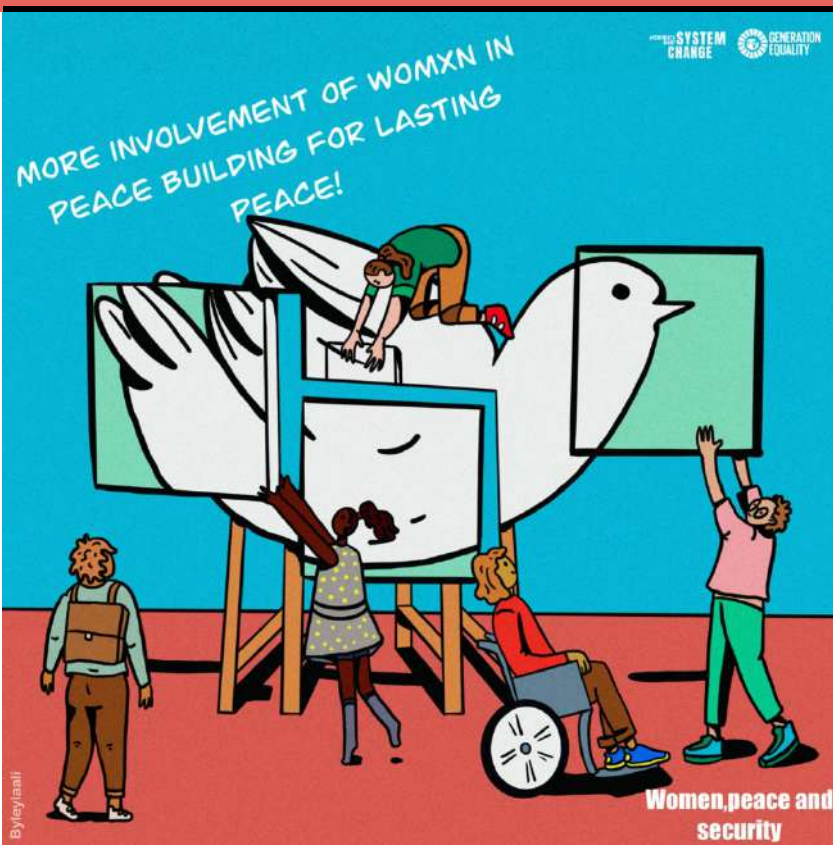
young women, thus more attention to ICT education at all levels is needed. Another structural barrier is the fact that modern technology and innovation products are designed by men and do not reflect the needs of women. Many women face gender discrimination and sexual harassment through IT products.

Legal environment and barriers

There is lack of legal provision for prevention and response to sexual harassment in the IT field. This is relevant both among female employees and consumers. In many of the countries there is no specific legislation which regulates women's involvement and promotion in the IT field. In some countries, the actions are rather at the policy level and not legislative level.

Recommendations

- Create leadership courses for women in the IT field.
- Revise text-books and promote women's role in the IT field.
- Eliminate gender divided IT lessons.
- Introduce gender quotas at IT schools and universities to promote women's participation and provide state funding.
- Develop awareness raising campaigns with more women in STEM, provide awards to women for success in the IT field.
- Develop special measures that prohibit sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in the IT field and in online spaces.
- Build market awareness on those IT products which were developed by women.
- Use IT products, for example online applications which help women to receive counselling or report violence to the police, to fight GBV.
- Bring the IT products to the fields where women are the majority and use those products to ensure women's rights.
- Increase access to IT devices for girls during Covid-19.
- Organize more hackathons with women involved in the IT field.
- Develop and implement special projects which encourage women's participation in the IT field.



Moderator: Valentina Bodrug-Lungu & Oksana Potapova

Contributions made by participants from: Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, observer from Kazakhstan

Women, peace & security

Structural barriers

The region has many ongoing conflicts and countries that are still recovering from violent conflicts. Women have been, and continue to be, at the forefront of the response to the needs of conflict-affected communities. They are the ones driving forward the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the region. Their efforts are limited by a number of structural barriers mentioned during the consultations.

Participation of women at the decision-making level of conflict resolution, post-conflict recovery and security remains low, despite the fact that women constitute the majority of those who provide support and work on the ground. The same is true for peace negotiation processes. The women who end up participating, experience both sexism and gender stereotypes being imposed on them. The environment for women and girls in military institutions is not conducive, and opportunities for participation are low, which leads to low representation of women in peace operations. Career advancements and opportunities for professional development for women in these sectors are also low. There is a lack of academic education or formal training in the areas of gender, peace and security.

Implementation of the WPS agenda also remains weak. Localisation is insufficient in many contexts, connections between different issues, such as gender-based violence and WPS, is also missing. Access to working in certain areas of conflict-affected regions, such as the

uncontrolled territories of Ukraine, is limited, it is challenging to gauge the needs of women living in those regions and respond to their needs.

Overall media representation of the armed conflicts is focused more on the militarised aspects of wars, rather than on human dimensions.

COVID-19 has brought about risks of bullying of those who follow security regulations (often, girls and women), as this is seen as something “weak” and “feminine”. There has also been reports of [almost all health care workers](#) having contracted COVID-19 in the conflict area of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Legal environment and barriers

Three key legal barriers that are hindering the progress on the women, peace and security agenda in the region are:

- **Lack of representation of civil society** structures in the implementation of the National Action Plans (NAPs), lack of visibility and use of CSOs extensive experience and expertise in this area reduces effectiveness of the planned actions for successful implementation of the NAP.
- In certain cases, the **“performance indicators” of the NAPs are not clear**, they are difficult to measure and do not take into account medium-term and long-term impacts. A more comprehensive and detailed monitoring plan would increase the chances of effective implementation.
- **Lack of understanding among governments** about the purpose of the NAP, its effective functioning and implementation, leads to a lack of effective implementation of the WPS agenda.

Recommendations

- Increase the involvement of women in peace and security work.
- Increase involvement of women in formal and informal negotiations.
- Mainstream gender analysis in emergency responses, e.g. in Belarus, the response and analysis is gender-blind.
- Develop programs and projects based on comprehensive needs assessment of women affected by conflict.
- Abolish barriers for women in enrolling into military universities, e.g. there are limits on the number of women being able to enrol and not all faculties are available.
- Provide state support to the civilians who suffered from the fires in the Luhansk region, especially the contact line. Women who live in frontline territories are already marginalised, but the support available is mostly from civil society organisations.
- Introduce peace education for children.
- Support women-leaders of organisations working in the peace and security field.
- Include WPS as a subject in the programmes on women's empowerment.
- Express international solidarity with civilians suffering in the Nagorno-Karabakh ongoing conflict.
- Support grassroots organisations working to address conflicts in their region.
- Include more women participating in commissions, boards, decision-making groups, monitoring process, on global and local levels.
- Address the issue of personal and social security in connection with gender-based violence and gender equality.
- Form groups and coalitions together with boys, girls and gender non-conforming people.
- Encourage the media covering conflicts to focus more on human aspects of war rather than armament and military equipment.
- Assess and address the needs of women in the displacement settlements.
- Mainstream WPS and gender equality into local development plans.
- Effectively address the hate speech against internally displaced women and women from occupied territories, e.g. in Ukraine.