Eastern Europe

Progress of the World's Women (POWW) is UN Women's flagship report that tracks progress on gender equality around the world. Drawing on the 2019-2020 report*, Families in a Changing World*, and from the forthcoming regional companion report, Women and Families in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (forthcoming in 2020), this factsheet provides a brief overview of the key issues and relevant facts for the seven countries in Eastern Europe: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.[1]

1. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Family and household (HH) structures in the region are significantly diverse. A relatively large prevalence of couple-only, lone-parent (mostly female-headed) and one-person HH is observed compared to Central Asia and the Western Balkans, as couples with children HH account for a smaller share of all HHs. The region's population is declining and ageing as a result of low fertility and outmigration. Population projections indicate that the region's population will shrink a further 15 per cent by 2050.[2] International migration is a reality for many women and families in the region, who migrate to escape poverty and attain a better standard of living. Nearly two in every three women participate in the female labor force, a higher share than in Central Asia and the Western Balkans. Gender wage differentials have declined in most of the region's countries over the past two decades, yet these remain alarmingly high. Women in the region devote at least twice as much more time to unpaid domestic and care work than men. Women from marginalized groups, especially the Roma and women with disabilities, continue to face barriers to access education, decent work and social protection. Early marriages remain common in some countries, while intimate partner and family violence are a regular occurrence across the region.

2. FAMILIES ARE DIVERSE AND CHANGING

A significant diversity in family structures and relationships is observed across the region. Couples with children households account for a smaller share of all HHs compared to Central Asia and the Western Balkans. The relatively large shares of couple-only, lone-parent (mostly female-headed) and one-person HHs observed are a testament to the region's ageing, low fertility and significant gender differentials in adult mortality.

Household diversity

- The largest HH sizes are observed in Azerbaijan and Armenia averaging 4.5 and 3.5 persons per household respectively. In Belarus, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova HHs comprise an average of around 2.5 persons.[3]
- In Belarus and Ukraine one-person HHs are the most prevalent HH type (27 and 28 per cent of all HHs respectively), followed by couples with children HHs (27 and 22 per cent of all HHs respectively). Extended HHs account for 16 and 18 per cent of all HHs respectively, while one in every ten households in both countries is integrated by a lone-parent and her/his children (11 per cent).[4]
- The share of female - headed HHs is particularly high in Belarus and Ukraine, where around half of all HHs are headed by women (50.4 and 47.9 per cent respectively). Meanwhile, a third of all HHs are headed by women in Armenia (33.2 per cent).[5]
- In Armenia, extended HHs account for 41 per cent of all HHs, while 31 per cent are comprised of couples with children, 15 per cent of persons living on their own, and 8.5 per cent of lone-parents with children.[6] The prevalence of extended and female-headed HHs is likely to reflect both high male out-migration and divorce rates.
- The large proportions of lone-mothers living in extended HHs evidence that many lone-mothers rely on inter-generational support systems. In Armenia, nearly two-thirds of lone mothers live in extended households (65.3 per cent). In Ukraine and Belarus this share stands at around four in every ten (45.4 and 40.5 per cent respectively).[7]
- The prevalence of extended HHs in the Russian Federation and Georgia is lower, as is the case of Belarus and Ukraine. In the Russian Federation, couples with/without children HHs account for 16 and 22.8 per cent of all HHs respectively, while one-person HHs comprise one in every four HHs (25.7 per cent) and lone-parent one in every ten HHs (11.5 per cent). In Georgia, married and cohabiting couples with/without children and one-person HHs account for 75.7 and 13.3 per cent of all HHs respectively.[8]

Marriage and fertility

- Globally, the age at which women and men first get married has increased, and this is also true for the region, where it rose from 22.2 to 24.6 years among women and from 25.0 to 27.1 years among men between 2000 and 2014. In 2014 the mean age at first marriage for women stood at around 26 years in Armenia and Georgia; around 25 years in the Belarus; 24.5 years in the Russian Federation; and around 24 years in Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova.[9]
- Despite the legal age for marriage being 18 in all countries, early marriages remain common in some of the region's countries. The share of women aged 20-24 that were first married or in a union before age 18 ranged from 3.2 per cent in Belarus to 9.1 per cent in Ukraine, 11 per cent in Azerbaijan, 12.2 per cent in the Republic of Moldova and 14 per cent in Georgia.[10] Such prevalence levels are considerably lower than the global average (27.7 per cent).[11]
- In the region, the total fertility rate stood at 1.7 live births per woman in 2015-2020, up from 1.3 live births in 2000-2005, but still well below replacement level (2.1 live births). Total fertility rates from 1.2 live births per woman in the Republic of Moldova to 2 live births in Azerbaijan and Georgia.[12] In

the Republic of Moldova, low fertility levels are partly due to the high prevalence of secondary infertility.[13]

- Adolescent birth rates declined from 53.4 to 28.6 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 between 1990-1995 and 2010-2015, although a stagnation or even increases are observed in some of the region's countries since 2005-2010.[14] This is due to a combination of delays in marriage, access to modern contraceptives, and increases in educational attainment.
- The contraceptive prevalence rate among women 15-49 is 67.4 per cent, with 54.7 per cent using modern contraceptive methods and 12.8 per cent using traditional methods. 22.5 per cent of women have an unmet need for modern contraception.[15]

Non-marriage, divorce, and widowhood

- In the region, the percentage of women aged 45-49 who are divorced is high compared to the global average of 4.7 per cent - and increasing. Around 2010, it ranged from 3.9 per cent in Azerbaijan to 6.1 per cent in Armenia, 6.2 per cent in Georgia, 10.3 per cent in the Republic of Moldova, 17.5 per cent in Belarus, 18.4 per cent in the Russian Federation and 20.5 per cent in Ukraine.[16]
- Widowhood among women aged 45-49 circa 2010 fluctuated between 6.5 per cent in Ukraine and 8.8 per cent in Azerbaijan, compared to the global average 6.4 per cent[17]. Widowhood is driven by the fact that women tend to live longer than men, marry older men, and are less likely to remarry after divorce or the death of a spouse.
- The proportion of never married women aged 45-49 around 2010 exceeded the global average (4.3 per cent) in Belarus (4.5 per cent), the Russian Federation (5.1 per cent), Azerbaijan (6.9 per cent), Armenia (7.4 per cent) and Georgia (8.2 per cent).[18] In contrast, the same share stood at 1.2 per cent in the Republic of Moldova. International migration is likely to influence non-marriage rates in some of the region's countries.
- Social attitudes and values regarding marital affairs differ significantly across the region, supporting the trends presented above. For instance, less than 15 per cent of women and men in Belarus and Ukraine and less than 10 per cent in the Russian Federation think divorce can never justified, compared to nearly 50 per cent of respondents in Armenia and Azerbaijan.[19] It also indicates social view held on family as an institute and marriage as a union – that can affect divorce, widowhood, and childbearing. Similarly, in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, less than 17 per cent of women and men agree sex before marriage can never justified, compared to between 50 and 80 per cent of respondents in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.[20]

3. POLICIES AND REGULATIONS SHOULD SUPPORT MIGRANT FAMILIES AND PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS

- International migration is a reality for many women and families in the region. While migration opens new economic opportunities, it also affects population outcomes in originating and destination

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countries alike. For instance, the average annual net migration rate in Georgia stood at 14.9 per thousand, meaning that 15 emigrants leave the country per 1,000 population.[21] The impact of outward migration on national population is also evident in Armenia and the Republic of Moldova.

- Female migrants represented more than half the total international migrant stock in the ECA region in 2017 (52.9 per cent), contrary to the global average (48.4 per cent). In Eastern Europe, women form higher proportions among migrants than men (53 per cent).[22] For example, women make for 64.6 per cent of the international migrant stock in the Republic of Moldova, 59.4 per cent in Armenia and 57.0 per cent in Ukraine, but only 50.9 per cent in the Russian Federation.[23]
- The Russian Federation is the main country of destination for many women from and beyond the region, hosting over 5.6 million female migrants, followed by Ukraine (2.5 million). Among women from the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region who migrate to the Russian Federation, the majority are from Ukraine (31.1 per cent), followed by Kazakhstan (24.5 per cent) and Belarus (7.8 per cent). The share of female migrants from Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia accounts for less than 6 per cent.[24]
- In 2017, the mean age of international migrants in Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, and Belarus stood at 52 years, followed by Ukraine (49 years). On average, migrants are much younger in the Russian Federation (44 years), Azerbaijan (43 years) and Georgia (40 years).[25]
- Female migrants from the region and often engaged in the care sector, including as domestic workers. Data indicates that high-skill female migrants from the Republic of Moldova and Georgia work in low-skill jobs or jobs that do not necessary require a skill. For example, 81 per cent women migrants from Moldova and Ukraine work in Italy's care industry.[26]
- While the Convention on the Protection of Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members has been signed by Armenia and ratified by Azerbaijan, no country in the region has signed the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.[27]

The drivers, benefits and challenges of women's migration

Women in the region chiefly migrate to escape poverty and attain a better standard of living. In 2014, the share of women that fell below the absolute poverty line was 30 per cent in Armenia, 11.1 per cent in the Republic of Moldova, 8.8 per cent in Ukraine and 4.6 per cent in Belarus.[28]

- Similarly, 23 per cent of Ukraine's population lived in HH at-risk of poverty in 2014, a share that was lower in Georgia (21 per cent), the Republic of Moldova (18 per cent) and Belarus (12 per cent). At-risk of poverty was highest in lone-parent households and households with two adults and three or more dependent children.[29]
- Remittances account for a large share of GDP in the Republic of Moldova (16 per cent), Armenia (13 per cent), Georgia (11 per cent) and Ukraine (11 per cent).30
- Countries in the region seek to lower emigration -except for Azerbaijan- while encouraging the return of their citizens living abroad. At the same time, Armenia, Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine promote immigration as a measure to address ageing, with the latter three also employing it to counter population decline.[31]

- Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova have penalties for employers of migrants in an irregular situation; whereas, all countries impose fines or deport migrants found working in informal settings without proper documentation.[32]

4. WOMEN'S ACCESS TO AN ADEQUATE AND INDEPENDENT INCOME' UNDERPIN THEIR RIGHTS WITHIN FAMILIES

For women, to have their own resources, such as owning assets or receiving income from a paid job puts them on a more equal footing with men in their intimate relationships, strengthens their bargaining position within families, and enables them to exit abusive partnerships if they so choose. A women's independent income directly affects the wellbeing of young children.

Women's labour force participation

- Nearly two in every three women in the region aged 15-64 participate in the labor force (62.4 per cent), a higher share than in Central Asia (53.6 per cent) and the Western Balkans (50 per cent).[33]
- Differences in labour force participation rates (LFPRs) emerge when disaggregated by sex and age. LFPRs are higher among women aged 25-34 (75.9 per cent) than among those aged 35-64 (69.2 per cent). Among these two age-groups, men's LFPRs are considerably higher (89.1 and 79.3 per cent respectively).[34]
- Marital status and childbearing significantly impact women's labour force participation. Whether married, never married, divorced or widowed, women are generally less likely to be employed than men. In Armenia, married and divorced women aged 25-49 are less likely to be employed (48 and 47.2 per cent respectively) than never married and widowed women (57.2 and 69.7 per cent). In Azerbaijan, two in every three married women are employed (66.5 per cent), a much higher share than never married (17.9 per cent), divorced (3.1 per cent) and widowed (0.9 per cent) women. In Belarus and the Russian Federation, employment rates are highest among married women, but no large differences are generally observed, with employment rates exceeding 80 per cent across all marital statuses.[35]
- Childbearing is closely associated with declines in female employment. In Belarus and the Republic of Moldova, employment rates among those with no children are higher for women than men. On the other hand, male employment rates are higher among those with at least one child compared to those with no children, as female employment declines with increased childbearing. In the Russian Federation, gender gaps in employment favour men regardless of number of children in the household. [36] In Ukraine, almost every third young rural woman in 25-29 age is neither in education nor in employment and 58 per cent of them due to fulfillment of household duties while the proportion of young men who fulfilled household duties is only 15 per cent[37].

- In Georgia, women are 30 per cent less likely to be employed if they have children under 14 or elderly in the HH.[38] The high costs of care in the country partly explain this differential. When employed, women are more likely to engage in agricultural work than men, affecting their capacity to accumulate wealth.

- Entrenched gender stereotypes can negatively affect women's participation in labor markets. For instance, in Georgia, 68 per cent women and 61 per cent men believed working mothers contribute to child neglect. Comparatively, this social view is held by 49 per cent of women and 59 per cent of men in Armenia, 39 per cent of both women and men in the Russian Federation, and 31 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men in Belarus.[39]

- Most women in Georgia (73 per cent), the Russian Federation (61 per cent), Ukraine (61 per cent) and Belarus (58 per cent) believe that having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person. This is not the case in Armenia (47 per cent) and Azerbaijan (35 per cent). Among men, only a majority agree with this statement in Georgia (55 per cent).[40]

- Nearly nine in every ten employed women in the region are employees (89 per cent). This suggests, on average, a smaller prevalence of vulnerable and informal employment and increased access to decent work compared to other regions. For instance, female own-account workers account for 7 per cent of all female workers in the region, a much lower share than that observed in the Western Balkans (14 per cent) and Central Asia (28 per cent).[41]

- Gender wage gap, despite declining in all of the region's countries over the past two decades except for Belarus, remain alarmingly high. The gender pay gap in average monthly earnings during 2015-2017 stood at 13.7 per cent in the Republic of Moldova, 23.6 per cent in Belarus, 23.9 in Ukraine, 25.3 in the Russian Federation, 35.2 per cent in Georgia, 33.2 per cent in Armenia and 48.4 per cent in Azerbaijan.[42]

Women's financial inclusion and access to social protection

- In the region, 70.1 per cent of women aged 15 or older have bank accounts, a share considerably higher than the ECA regional average (62.5 per cent). Yet significant differences at the country level prevail, as female account ownership ranges from 27.7 per cent in Azerbaijan to 81.3 per cent in Belarus. Debit card ownership is particularly low among women in Armenia (20.9 per cent), Azerbaijan (24.5 per cent) and the Republic of Moldova (28.1 per cent).[43]

- 13.2 per cent of women aged 15 or older have set aside some money for old age and 55.8 are able to raise funds if faced by an emergency. Another, 30.5 per cent women over 15 report receiving some form of financial support from their governments, not including pensions or payments related to work, compared to 21.4 per cent of men.[44]

- The share of women above statutory pensionable age receiving an old-age pension is universal or nearly universal in the Russian Federation (100 per cent), Azerbaijan (95 per cent) and Georgia (90 per cent). In Armenia, just under three in every four older women receive a pension (73 per cent).[45]

5. FAMILIES NEED TIME, MONEY AND SERVICES TO PROVIDE CARE

Families are sites of care where children are nurtured, and older people are supported. Without government support, women and families cannot provide adequate care. Governments need to invest in providing time (maternity & parental leave); money (social transfers to families with young children); and services (of high quality for children and older persons). On the societal and social level, there is a need for equitable distribution of care work between women and men.

- Globally, women on average do three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men. In the region, the female-to-male ratio on time spent on unpaid domestic and care work ranges from 2:1 in the Republic of Moldova (1.9), Belarus (2.0) and the Russian Federation (2.3), to 3:1 in Azerbaijan (2.9) and 5:1 in Armenia (5.0).[46]
- Gender stereotypes prevent the recognition and equal sharing of domestic and unpaid care work among women and men. The percentage of individuals who agree that women should do household chores even if the husband is unemployed is as high as 88 per cent in the Russian Federation, 73 per cent in Armenia and 65 per cent in Ukraine.[47]
- The proportion of women receiving maternity cash benefits is universal in Ukraine (100 per cent), but lower in the Russian Federation (69 per cent), Armenia (61 per cent), Georgia (24 per cent) and Azerbaijan (14 per cent).[48]
- One in every five persons in the region is aged 60 or older (22.1 per cent). Among these, women are disproportionally over-represented, accounting for nearly two in every three older persons (64.1 per cent).[49] In turn, women absorb a large share of the care provided to older persons.
- Gross pre-school enrolment of children 3-6 years varies greatly within the region. Enrolment is highest in Belarus (99.2 per cent), the Russian Federation (88.7 per cent) and the Republic of Moldova (86.5 percent) and lowest in Armenia (52 per cent) and Azerbaijan (36 per cent).[50] In the latter two countries, female women's participation in the labor market is consequently lower.

6. LAWS ARE NEEDED THAT PROMOTE EQUALITY, RECOGNIZE FAMILY DIVERSITY AND PROHIBIT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS (VAWG)

Violence has lifelong impacts on women and their enjoyment of rights within the family, and often goes unreported due to stigma, social norms and stereotypes.

- Regionwide, approximately 60 per cent of ever-partnered women 18-74 experienced psychological violence, at least once in their lifetime, including controlling behavior and economic control.[51]

- Among ever-partnered women aged 18-74, 9.4 per cent in the Republic of Moldova and 7.6 per cent in Ukraine have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the past 12 months.[52]
- In Armenia and Georgia, the percentage of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15-49 that have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner in the past 12 months is 3.5 and 19.8 per cent respectively. In Georgia, the prevalence of violence among ever-partnered women highest among girls aged 15-19 (24.3 per cent) and women aged 20-24 (23.1 per cent).[53]
- In the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, 34 and 26 per cent of women respectively experienced violence at the hands of an intimate partner since age 15, compared to 17 and 24 per cent respectively who experienced it from non-partners.[54]
- The participation of women aged 15-49 in decision making on sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive healthcare stood at 81 per cent in Ukraine and 66 per cent in Armenia. Women are more in control of their decisions on social aspects. For instance, their participation in decision-making to visit family and friends stood at 97 per cent in Ukraine and Moldova, 91 per cent in Armenia, and 67 per cent in Azerbaijan.[55]
- In 2017, 486 cases of female sexual assault were reported in Belarus, 448 in Moldova, 208 in Ukraine and 152 in Georgia.[56]
- In the region, more women than men think it can never be justified for a man to beat his wife yet the gap varies considerably by country: Armenia (88 vs. 76 per cent), Azerbaijan (78 vs. 61 per cent), Belarus (78 vs. 63 per cent), Russian Federation (75 vs. 58 per cent) and Ukraine (78 vs. 71 per cent).[57] In the Republic of Moldova, the proportion of Roma women who believe that it is ok for their husband to hit them is 2.5 times higher than non-Roma women.[58]
- Regionally, gender-based violence is inadequately addressed in laws and policies. For example, Armenia, the Russian Federation and Ukraine do not have clear criminal penalties on domestic violence, nor specialized courts or procedures for cases of domestic violence. Marital rape is only criminalized in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia.[59]
- Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine have signed the Istanbul Convention, while Georgia has ratified it.[60]

7. RECOMMENDATIONS TO BRING EQUALITY HOME – POLICY DIRECTIVES

The following policy directives are forwarded having in mind the core Sustainable Development Goals principle to *leave no one behind*. Policy directives are tailored to the problems faced by women and girls in the region and to increase gender equality in the home and the workplace. Foremost, they apply to governments – and on how countries can increase service provisions (or institutional capacity) for addressing them.

Ensure high-quality, accessible public services to support families and gender equality

- Increase maternity/paternity leave and social transfers to parents of young children as a push towards facilitating population growth. This will require the introduction of paid parental leaves and a more equal distribution of parental leave between mother and father of child and the strengthening of employment and social protection policies that support paid parental and paternity leaves.
- Extend state sponsored benefits in addition to pensions to avoid old-age-poverty. States have to invest in old-age care centers, support community-based long-term care and compensate for unpaid work being provided by women, to reduce the burden on working-age women for providing care to elderly people.

Supporting families, and increasing women's access to a gender equal and independent income

- Data suggests that women who have access to income/assets are better defended against intimate partner violence with an escape route from abusive relations. Further strengthen plans that, "recognize women's contributions to the accumulation and purchase of marital property through their unpaid care and domestic work" (POWW, p.123). In other words, women should have an equal and legal share in properties, investments, and capital acquired post-marriage.
- Greater efforts are needed in formalizing the economy and caregiving services and improving national minimum wage provisions. For instance, state can invest in more trade learning facilities for women to shorten the gender and income gap. This will also simultaneously help against large irregular and low-skilled outmigration flows, and a more gender-equitable labor force participation.
- Support women's entrepreneurship in a sustainable way through interventions such as improving access to financing and marketing, ensuring a fair taxation and appropriate employment protection. and supporting women's skills and career development. This will be a concrete measure towards formalizing participation in the labor force.
- Support equal pay and decent work measures and address gender horizontal and vertical segregation of labour market.

States are to prevent and respond to violence against women, and address gender stereotypes

- National legislations should incorporate, adhere and implement international legal standards and norms articulated in UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform of Actions, and explicitly criminalize all forms of violence against women, including marital rape. Countries should allow NGOs, civil society experts, and public-private partnerships to engage freely in addressing gender-based violence and VAWGs.
- Initiate a multisectoral approach focused on preventive and protective measures, such as shelters and free legal assistance. Increase national funding for care services for women and girls to curb issues of gender inequality, sexuality, and violence. Countries should prioritize the implementation of their National Action Plans in the reduction of all forms of violence in all settings.

- Focus on uprooting entrenched gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices and promoting transformative masculinities This is an area where top-bottom and bottom-up initiatives are needed, requiring the involvement of civil society, governments and mass awareness campaigns at the local and municipal levels.

Implement policies and regulations that support migrant families and women's rights

- Initiate new favorable bilateral agreements and regional frameworks concerning immigrants/migrants between countries of origin and destination.
- Ensure migration policies and management are gender-responsive, enforced in a prompt and orderly fashion, and reflect the challenges that immigrant women and migrant's families face.
- Greater efforts are needed to implement policies to protect the rights of women migrants and their families. All countries must prioritize adherence to the ILO convention on the *Protection of Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of their Families*, and on *Decent Work for Domestic Workers*. This will provide a much-needed standardized framework, along with guidance for member states.

Invest in gender-sensitive statistics on families and households

- The national statistical system in all countries form the region adhere to international standards and statistical recommendations. Nevertheless, timely and qualitative sex disaggregated data in relation to families and household's composition is one of the main challenges that should be addressed by statistical offices and other data producers during the collection, analysis and dissemination phase of statistical process.
- The data disaggregation shall be developed based on an intersectional approach, having in mind all aspects and criteria influencing to exclusion and vulnerability (age, disability status, ethnicity etc.). Furthermore, more frequent and accurate quantitative data in the areas of political participation, labor force participation, violence against women, and education and healthcare are needed towards better family policy inputs.
- These current data limitations, in all countries from the region, should be addressed through sustained investment in national statistical systems and in methodological development at global, regional and national levels.

[1] Where data is available Eastern Europe includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Any mention to 'region or regional' in this document refers to Eastern Europe and all the aforementioned countries. All data refer to the latest available.

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