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**REGIONAL REVIEW OF PROGRESS**

Regional Synthesis

Note by the secretariat

*Summary*

The Commission on the Status of Women in its Resolution 53/1 noted the relevance of the regional reviews and outcomes of the regional level intergovernmental processes in preparation for the “Beijing +15” global review which will take place at its annual session in March 2010.

In line with this resolution, all United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) member States have been requested to respond to the United Nations questionnaire on the Implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly in 2000. This note provides a synthesis of the responses received and is submitted for the regional review in the UNECE region.

It summarizes trends and policy developments in the twelve areas of concern covered by the Beijing Platform for Action in the UNECE region since the last regional review in 2004. It is complemented by document ECE/AC.28/2009/4 which highlights, by country, selected achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality.

## INTRODUCTION

1. This review of the implementation of the Platform for Action reflects the specificity of the UNECE region, in particular its diversity which is reflected both in the variety of situations across countries and subregions concerning gender equality and in the different policies and measures which were adopted in response to these situations.
2. However, beyond this variety, the responses of UNECE member States to the questionnaire converge on a number of fundamental trends and developments. Most countries have placed their priority fields around three main areas: violence against women, in particular domestic violence and initiatives to address trafficking; women in the economy, mainly through reconciliation of work and family life and specific measures combating women's poverty; and the extension of the national mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment.
3. Progress has been more uneven and slower in promoting gender equality in the fields of decision-making, the media, and social sectors (health and education). Only little progress can be recorded in engendering activities and policies in the area of environment.
4. In view of the space limitation, this note cannot fully reflect the richness of the national reports received. The references to countries in the boxes or in the text itself are examples which serve the purpose of illustrating the points made and do not mean that no other countries could be referred to for these points. Where statistics are mentioned they are drawn either from national reports or established international sources. For a more complete review of individual countries, document UNECE/AC.28/2009/4 can be consulted as well as the full version of the national reports which are posted on the UNECE website, <http://www.unece.org/gender>.

### I. REVIEW OF PROGRESS IN THE 12 AREAS OF CONCERN

#### A. WOMEN AND POVERTY

**Achievements:** In some countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-East Europe (SEE), there have been efforts to introduce a gender perspective into the strategies for poverty reduction. In Western Europe, increasing attention is paid to women's employability and work-family reconciliation as measures to alleviate female poverty. This is done in particular through social inclusion strategies where the gender dimension is taken into account.

**Challenges:** The incidence of poverty for women varies across countries and is particularly critical in the Eastern part of the UNECE region. A compounding factor is the economic crisis which is set to increase the number of persons living in poverty.

5. Women continue to be more strongly affected by poverty than men. The risk of poverty is increased through single parenthood and old age, particularly for migrant women and women from ethnic minorities. Especially in EECCA countries, women's poverty in rural areas continues to be particularly acute.

6. Throughout the region, the higher poverty risk of women is associated with their greater share of unpaid work and family care, their lower participation in the labour force and, where employed, their over-representation in low-paid and precarious employment.

7. In EECCA and some SEE countries, poverty reduction strategies and policies increasingly acknowledge the specific vulnerability of women to poverty (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Uzbekistan).

8. Most European Union (EU) countries address women's poverty within the framework of gender-sensitive national action plans for social inclusion (e.g. Ireland, Luxembourg, Slovakia) and focus primarily on measures increasing women's employability and opportunities for labour market participation (Denmark, Malta, Netherlands).

9. Additional policy instruments to combat female poverty in the UNECE region include the reform of labour market regulations in order to narrow the gender wage gap and pension disparities (e.g. Ukraine, Uzbekistan), measures aiming at a better reconciliation of paid work and family responsibilities (e.g. Switzerland), and measures benefiting in particular female entrepreneurs, such as microcredit schemes (e.g. Turkey) and the removal of administrative barriers to market entry for micro and small enterprises, which in some countries are heavily dominated by women (e.g. Kazakhstan, Russian Federation).

In **Kyrgyzstan**, measures were taken to legalize informal economic activities, including a government decree on the further development of the textile (particularly sewing) industry.

10. Some countries stress the crucial role of social transfers in combating poverty for both women and men (Bulgaria, Lithuania). In particular, income transfers to single parent families are regarded as an important measure to alleviate women's and children's poverty (Finland, Russian Federation, United Kingdom). In the Nordic countries, social transfers have contributed to an important reduction in the gender differences in the at-risk-of-poverty rate. Increasingly, gender-sensitive measures are taken in the area of social services delivery and in social protection benefits.

According to a 2006 report, the introduction and progressive enhancement of the Child Tax Benefit system in **Canada** led to a 9.5 per cent reduction in the number of lone parent families living in low income.

In the **Republic of Moldova**, social assistance law focusing on vulnerable families, including female-headed households, was gender-mainstreamed in 2008.

## B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

**Achievements:** Almost full parity in primary and secondary education has been achieved and women now outnumber men in tertiary education in most UNECE member States. In some EECCA countries, investments in road infrastructures and public transport are made, especially to boost secondary attainment in rural areas, benefiting in particular girls.

**Challenges:** Significant gender segregation prevails in the educational choices made by men and women which risks reinforcing occupational segregation in the labour market and thereby the gender pay gap.

11. In all parts of the UNECE region, primary and secondary education enrolment continues to be very high for both girls and boys. Educational attainment of adult women has increased substantially over the past two decades in most countries, with the highest share of adult women with tertiary education being observed in North America, Israel, the Nordic countries and the Baltic States.

12. In Central Asian countries, remaining gender disparities in education appear more pronounced in rural than urban areas, especially in countries with a significant rural population such as Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Shortages in public funding, impoverishment of the population, and a return to traditional practices (especially marriage of girls) are contributing factors.

13. In most countries in the UNECE region (including Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sweden, Ukraine and especially the Baltic States), women now outnumber men in tertiary education, with Tajikistan being a notable exception. There remain however large gender differences in the fields of study chosen. Men continue to dominate in the fields of science, mathematics and computing while women dominate business administration, law, social sciences, journalism, humanities and arts. Many governments have taken special measures to make male-dominated careers more attractive to women (Malta, Slovenia).

**Austria** set up in 2006 a girl's day in the federal service where schoolgirls have an opportunity to get an insight into a broadened panel of professions beyond traditional stereotyped occupations. Girls still tend to opt for "typically female" work and 50 per cent of gainfully employed girls and young women are working in just three service areas: trade and retailing, the health and social services sector, and restaurants and catering enterprises.

In **Croatia** an analysis of primary-school textbooks for teaching the mother tongue and literature, conducted in 2007, shows that 74 per cent of the characters shown in the drawings, photographs and other artistic-graphic design accompanying the texts in the textbooks are male. Additional efforts will be made to consistently meet the requirements with respect to gender-sensitivity prescribed by the Textbook Standard.

In **Switzerland** the project "School of Equality" was developed aiming at a gender-sensitization of learning and teaching. The project includes modules addressing pupils of different age groups and schoolteachers. Proposed activities are designed such that they can easily be included in existing courses (e.g. mathematics, history, geography, sciences) without over-charging the regular programme.

14. In the EU but also in Serbia, early school leavers continue to pose a challenge. Youth dropping out of education face a higher risk of being socially excluded. Although boys tend to be more affected than girls, their opportunities of finding higher paying work are better than for girls with uncompleted basic education. Girls in certain socially disadvantaged groups (e.g. ethnic minorities including Roma, migrants, poor neighbourhoods) are also at a high risk of leaving school early.

### C. WOMEN AND HEALTH

**Achievements:** Resources and policies to improve maternal and infant health have been strengthened in a number of Central Asian and SEE countries. Many countries have improved programmes for the early detection and treatment of breast and cervical cancer.

**Challenges:** Privatization and decentralization of health care are a challenge in many UNECE member States, as well as insufficient gender mainstreaming in medical research, training and health care services.

15. Life expectancy in most Western and South-East European countries has continued to rise for both women and men, with women living longer than men in all countries. The most significant gender gaps in life expectancy (more than ten years) are found in the Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The discrepancy is partly associated with self-destructive life styles, particularly alcohol consumption by men. The problem has been linked to the economic hardship following the collapse of the Soviet Union which appears to more negatively affect men's health than women's.

16. Progress in the area of reproductive health and infant mortality was reported especially in Central Asian countries. Since 2004, the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel, especially for poor women, has increased in Armenia, Georgia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Between 1990 and 2007, infant mortality fell by 40 percentage points in Azerbaijan, and 25 percentage points in Tajikistan. However, there continue to be gaps in the availability of information about reproductive health, especially for young people (e.g. Kazakhstan).

In **Kyrgyzstan** the programme of state guarantees of 2006 stipulates that the costs of basic services related to pregnancy and birth, including treatment in hospital due to pregnancy complications, are exempt from payment.

In the **Netherlands** a pregnancy and childbirth allowance scheme for self-employed persons was introduced in order to protect the health of mother and child. This allowance will financially enable self-employed women and co-working spouses to stop working in the period prior to and after childbirth.

17. Access to and affordability of basic health services remains problematic especially for women in EECCA countries. This problem is exacerbated by the privatization of health care in many countries and the associated increased price of services.

18. A number of countries in the UNECE region have begun to introduce or have further strengthened gender mainstreaming in their public health systems, both in the provision of services and in the internal management of services. Norway for example has an explicit national strategy for women's health. In Austria guidelines for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in hospitals were issued covering among others gender-sensitive medical care and nursing.

19. HIV/AIDS is of growing concern in the region with several countries reporting a higher HIV incidence among men than women. A number of countries have improved access to HIV

testing (Croatia). Special attention has been paid to the prevention of mother-child transmission of HIV (Canada, Ireland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine).

20. With respect to female-specific illnesses, programmes for the early detection and treatment of breast and cervical cancer have been introduced or widened in many countries across the region (France, Lithuania, Monaco, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). A few countries mention the gender dimension of old-age related health problems (Finland).

**In Ireland** the Women's Health Council identified the role of women as caregivers as an important health policy area. The higher incidence of physical and mental stress in balancing work, personal and family life with little support from partners or the public sector has a high impact on health costs. This is usually not taken into account in the formulation of public policies.

21. In Western Europe, there is growing concern about weight-related health problems (Denmark, Italy). While the incidence of obesity seems to be higher among men, eating disorders like anorexia nervosa and bulimia, which are among the most under-estimated diseases, predominantly affect women – girls and young women in particular.

22. As an area that has so far received only insufficient attention, a few countries underline the need for gender-sensitive medical research, especially with respect to gender-differentiated medical treatment and therapies. Sweden for example points out that in cardiology, symptoms of heart attacks have been shown to differ between women and men. In Germany and Switzerland, gender-specific prevention, counselling and therapy of drug addiction has been encouraged.

#### **D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

**Achievements:** Violence against women (VAW) has received considerable attention throughout the UNECE region with many countries citing this area as key priority. Most governments have strengthened legislation, especially with respect to domestic violence and trafficking.

**Challenges:** Effective implementation of legislation and in particular the coordination and cooperation between social services, health workers and the police is a key challenge. The collection of reliable data on domestic violence remains a problem across the region with the majority of cases staying unreported.

23. Most victims of physical, sexual and psychological violence are female. Young women, women from minorities, migrant women and women in rural areas are among the most vulnerable. Across the region, countries have strengthened legislation and have established national action plans and multi-annual strategies to combat VAW, in particular with respect to trafficking and domestic violence. Compared to the legislative situation in 2004/2005, progress has been particularly noticeable in the countries of the EECCA and SEE subregion (Azerbaijan, Republic of Moldova, Turkmenistan, Russian Federation, Ukraine).

With the law on “measures against violence in domestic relations”, which entered into force in 2007, **Albanian** legislation comprises for the first time a law on the prevention and reduction of domestic violence as well as the protection of its victims.

24. Legislative improvements range from better definitions of what constitutes violence (especially domestic violence) to more severe sentences against perpetrators as well as strengthened victim and witness protection. Several countries also report on their efforts to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

25. In order to help victims of violence, many countries have established crisis centres (Hungary, Portugal, Uzbekistan). In addition, the number of shelters for victims has increased, especially in EECCA countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan).

In the **Russian Federation**, more than 3,000 institutions, including crisis centres, crisis branches at hospitals, social rehabilitation centres and shelters, provide assistance to almost 50,000 female, 12,000 male, and 20,000 child victims of violence annually.

26. Regarding domestic violence, an increasing number of countries provide for the possibility that the violent partner is expelled from home rather than the victim moving to a shelter (Denmark, Slovakia, Switzerland). Research suggests that this measure helps to reach more victims than before.

27. With respect to victims of trafficking, several countries report on programmes for reconciliation and reintegration in society (Bulgaria, Romania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Other measures include the availability of information material in multiple languages in order to better reach victims (Greece) and preventive measures such as programmes aimed at the countries of origin of trafficked persons (Czech Republic, Finland).

28. Many countries emphasize the role of training in order to improve the detection of gender-based violence. Across the region, training is provided to police staff, health workers, and other service providers, but also to government officials (training for trainers).

In **Turkey** the General Directorate on the Status of Women is organizing in-service training aimed at law enforcement officers, health care personnel and religious officials. So far, more than 40,000 police officers have received training and 75,000 health care workers are to be trained by the end of 2009.

29. In addition to addressing the consequences of violence, preventive measures have been strengthened, including research about the causes of violence (see box below), self-defense courses for women (Israel), and awareness-raising campaigns to sensitize the public in general (Slovenia, Kyrgyzstan, Spain) and young people in particular (United Kingdom) about VAW. Increasingly, prevention efforts are specifically tailored to men and boys (Austria, Azerbaijan, Montenegro).

In **Estonia** the first qualitative sociological study among perpetrators was conducted in 2007 to analyse their behaviour and to better understand how to stop violent behaviour. The study showed that most of the perpetrators had themselves been victims of domestic violence (corporal punishment, witnessing violence between parents, parents’ alcohol problems) in their childhood.

In **Luxembourg** since 2006, during interventions at family homes, one professional is exclusively responsible for the child(ren) and another exclusively for the adult victim. Furthermore, the provision of psychological services for child victims/witnesses of domestic violence has increased. These measures aim at helping children to overcome their traumata and to teach them the values of a non-violent culture.

30. Under-reporting of cases continues to be a concern, making VAW a predominantly hidden and non-quantified problem. The lack of data is widely recognized and some efforts have been made to improve statistics on violence (Azerbaijan, Czech Republic, Italy, Kyrgyzstan).

31. Another area to be developed is the estimation of the economic and social costs of VAW. In France for example, the cost of intimate partner violence (including cost of hospitalization and lost earnings) has been estimated to be more than one billion Euros per year. Such insights could be useful for mobilizing adequate resources for addressing and preventing the problem, and thereby help to implement the existing legislation more effectively. The latter remains a key challenge, especially in EECCA countries.

## E. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

**Achievements:** Donor countries in the region have increased resources and supported actors dealing with the direct consequences of conflicts for women in affected countries. Many countries have established national action plans for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

**Challenges:** Most countries currently involved in conflicts or in post-conflict situations have not addressed this area of concern in their national reports although there are particularly adverse consequences of armed conflicts for women.

32. Most countries reporting under this item refer to their activities with respect to resolution 1325 (Albania, Israel), in particular national action plans for its implementation (several EU members, Norway). In addition, some stress their commitment to resolution 1820 on sexual violence in armed conflicts (Ireland, Montenegro).

Several countries, including **Belgium**, have supported United Nations agencies in preparing holistic approaches for the re-integration of victims of sexual violence during armed conflicts. In cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the *Brussels Call for Action to Address Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond* was adopted in the framework of an international conference addressing these problems.

The **United Kingdom** provides Peace Support Operations training to a wide array of potential and existing troop contributing countries, regional training centres and multilateral organizations, such as the African Union.

33. Several countries refer to gender-sensitive development cooperation projects in conflict and post-conflict countries (Germany, Luxembourg), while others mention the increase in the number of women in the national army (Latvia, Romania, Spain).



34. Women remain most vulnerable in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations, especially to sexual violence and organized crime groups specializing in trafficking. The problem of integration of a sizeable number of displaced people and refugees has only recently received increased attention in the Caucasus where efforts have been made to provide training in order to reduce unemployment among refugees and the displaced population.

The “Complex Programme of the Republic of Azerbaijan on combating daily violence in democratic society” of 2007 includes measures aiming at the social rehabilitation of refugee and internally displaced women and children subjected to recurring violence under conditions of forced displacement and increased cases of domestic violence.

In Cyprus a Women’s Multicultural Centre was established aimed at bringing together women from all communities in Cyprus in the promotion of gender equality, reconciliation, and peace. In addition, the National Machinery for Women’s Rights supports bi-communal initiatives, involving Turkish Cypriot women’s organizations as full participants in its activities and funding schemes.

## F. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

**Achievements:** Women’s economic position has been improving along with the economic boom that had reached most of the region before the crisis. Across the region, efforts have been made to increase women’s employability and to reduce the gender pay gap. More and more countries involve men in measures to improve the reconciliation of work and family.

**Challenges:** Vertical and horizontal labour market segregation continues to be a major concern and despite improvements, women still earn considerably less than men and are vastly under-represented as entrepreneurs. The economic value of unpaid work remains widely unrecognized. There are concerns that the economic crisis endangers the achievements of the past years.

35. In all countries, women’s economic activity rate is lower than men’s and with few exceptions (Latvia), no significant progress has been made since the last review. The highest rate is found in Iceland where nearly 80 per cent of women of working age are economically active. In contrast, only about 25 per cent of Turkish women participate in economic activity. On average, women’s employment rate tends to be higher in EECCA countries and the Baltic States than in other EU member States (especially the new members from Central Europe) and the Balkans.

36. In EECCA countries in particular, many women continue to work in the informal economy, including in home-based market-oriented production of goods and services (sewing, souvenir production, home care services, etc.), and subsistence food production.

37. Unemployment remains generally higher for women than for men. Where female unemployment is lower than men’s (Baltic States, Ireland, Romania, Russian Federation, Ukraine), some countries refer to the possibility that women are more likely than men to accept jobs below their qualifications or to retire from the labour market (Estonia, Italy).

38. Part-time employment has a female face throughout the region, with some countries reporting women’s share of part-time workers to be as high as 91 per cent (Luxembourg). In

Norway, more than 40 per cent of employed women work part-time. More men than women are part-time workers in only a few countries (Romania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

39. In the area of women and the economy, there are notably three areas where most countries are directing their efforts: equal pay, reconciliation of work and family life, and entrepreneurship.

40. Despite widespread legislation against wage discrimination, women across the UNECE region continue to earn considerably less than men. Compared to the rest of the region, the gender pay gap tends to be relatively high in EECCA countries, especially the Caucasus where female average wages are only about 50 to 60 per cent of male average wages. In all countries there are important variations by sector (the gap tends to be higher in the private than the public sector), by occupation and educational level (the gap is generally larger for people with higher education).

41. Most countries link the persisting wage differences to the continuing vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the labour market. Even in female-dominated occupations, men continue to occupy the higher posts (Hungary). Other explanations for the gender pay gap include women's greater share in part-time employment, general undervaluing of women's work as well as direct discrimination. Policies to address the pay gap are accordingly cross-cutting.

42. Targeted measures addressing the wage gap include monitoring wage disparities (Nordic countries), information and sensitization campaigns (Poland), and legislation requiring employers to address the problem (see ECE/AC.28/2009/6). Little has been reported by EECCA countries about concrete measures addressing the gender pay gap.

In 2006 the former Equal Opportunities Ombudsman of **Sweden** was assigned to strengthen the monitoring and support of employers through pay surveys and analyses. Employers within both the private and public sector were examined. As a result, more than 5,000 people, 90 per cent of them women, had their pay revised.

43. Throughout the region, efforts are made to increase female employment, with policies aiming principally at women re-entering the labour market after childbirth (Croatia) and unemployed women (Greece). Some countries have introduced special programmes for particularly vulnerable women such as women with disabilities (Czech Republic, Latvia). In many EECCA countries, legislation granting childcare benefits and parental leave have been strengthened (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine).

In **Poland** a project was introduced aimed at increasing the employability of women aged over 45. Measures included a media campaign underlining the experience and commitment of more mature women and addressing stereotypes of employers.

In the **Russian Federation** family benefits were introduced in order to raise the status and standard of living of women who gave birth to (or adopted) a second or third child. Single fathers are also eligible for these benefits. In addition, child benefits for working mothers were raised.

44. The difficulty reconciling paid work with family responsibilities continues to be one of the main obstacles to female economic activity. Many countries, mainly in Western Europe, have therefore increased the number of childcare facilities or introduced or expanded the number of all-day schools (Cyprus, Netherlands).

**Slovenia** is the only EU member where the employment rate of women (aged 25 to 49 years) with children under the age of 12 is higher than that of women without children. This high and full-time employment of women has been supported by comprehensive parental leave arrangements and the provision of affordable and quality care services and facilities.

In **Germany** the legal right to a crèche or nursery school place for all children from the age of one will take effect in 2013.

45. Other measures include tax and social security incentives for female employment (Canada, Malta, Spain, Turkey), and the promotion of tele-work (Slovakia). In addition, more and more countries are promoting family-friendly workplaces (see ECE/AC.28/2009/6).

46. In a number of countries, work-family reconciliation policies are no longer exclusively targeting women but increasingly also concentrate on men with measures promoting male involvement in family life and childcare (several EU countries), especially through provisions encouraging fathers to take parental leave (Greece, Lithuania, see also ECE/AC.28/2009/6).

47. Even though female entrepreneurship has slowly increased, including in EECCA countries, men continue to outnumber women as entrepreneurs in all countries and women's businesses are generally smaller than men's. In Ukraine for example, only 2 per cent of large enterprises are owned by women. Measures to increase female entrepreneurship are considered important for poverty reduction (EECCA, SEE) and increasing competitiveness (EU, North America).

48. As a consequence, several countries have introduced schemes to stimulate female entrepreneurship (Cyprus, Portugal, Serbia, United Kingdom). Special attention has been paid to access to finance for women entrepreneurs (France, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey)

In **Uzbekistan** the Social Initiatives Support Fund implemented a project to grant microcredits to female farmers in order to help them develop their business, raise economic performance, network, exchange experience, and improve professional skills. Participants in the project were trained among others in bookkeeping, management and the establishment of business plans.

49. Recognition of the economic value of unpaid work, which is mainly performed by women, remains a challenge. This is partly due to the lack of gender-disaggregated time-use statistics. In Montenegro for example, statistics show that women work on average 20 per cent more than men if unpaid work is taken into consideration.

50. The present economic crisis puts at risk many of the achievements attained over the past years and increases the level and the number of challenges identified in the economic area (see UNECE/AC.28/2009/5). There is a general lack of gender-sensitivity in government responses to the crisis.

In **Kazakhstan**, under the national anti-crisis programme, additional funds were allocated in 2009 to provide financial support for small and medium-sized enterprises owned or managed by women.

## G. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

**Achievements:** Women's participation in political decision-making has been increasing over the past five years in many countries across the UNECE region. Actions to address gender imbalances in decision-making in the private sector have multiplied and almost all countries have identified power and decision-making as a priority area for the next years.

**Challenges:** Improvements in women's access to power have generally been rather slow and uneven and women continue to be strongly underrepresented in all areas of decision-making in most countries. Where women are given more political responsibility, it tends to be limited to socio-cultural issues. There is a persistent lack of gender-disaggregated data on decision-making in the private sector.

51. Although there are no legal barriers for women to vote and stand for elections in the UNECE region, their significant under-representation in power and decision-making across the region implies that significant challenges to women's empowerment persist.

52. The percentage of women in top decision-making posts differs widely between countries. In national parliaments, in 2008 the weakest representation of women was found in Georgia (6 per cent), Albania (7.1 per cent) and Malta (8.7 per cent). In Turkey, even though still relatively low, the share of women in national parliament has doubled since 2004.

53. In most countries, between 15 and 25 per cent of members of parliament (MPs) are female (e.g. Luxembourg, Canada, Croatia, Poland, United States, Turkmenistan). Just a few, including Belgium and Denmark, report a share higher than 35 per cent. Only in Sweden has full parity practically been achieved with 47 per cent female MPs.

In **Belarus** the target of increasing women's political representation to 30 per cent has been reached. Women now hold 32.1 per cent of the seats in national parliament, up from 10 per cent in 2004.

54. In many countries (e.g. Czech Republic, Romania), women are better represented in decision-making at the local than at the national level. In Latvia for example, about one third of the deputies of the regional assemblies are women, compared to 20 per cent in national parliament.

In **France**, political parties are required to present an equal number of women and men to local, regional, senatorial and European elections and face financial sanctions in case of non-compliance. As a consequence, nearly 50 per cent of members of regional assemblies are women (up from 27 per cent in 1998) – in contrast to only 18.5 per cent in the National Assembly, for which such requirements do not exist. Similarly, in **Greece** and **Serbia** quotas for female candidates in electoral lists have been established.

55. In all countries of the UNECE region except Finland and Spain, men outnumber women as ministers in national government. Female ministers tend to be concentrated in social-cultural functions and rarely head the ministries responsible for the economy, infrastructure, home affairs, foreign affairs, and defense.

56. Although government is a large employer of women, they tend to be less represented in the higher administrative posts, especially in Western Europe where the share of female senior civil servants often does not exceed 30 per cent. In numerous countries (e.g. the Baltic States, Kazakhstan), this share equals more than 50 per cent.

57. In some EECCA countries (e.g. Uzbekistan), affirmative action has been undertaken to ensure women's representation in power and decision-making. In others (e.g. the Russian Federation), the introduction of transparent competitive selection procedures of candidates for an open vacant post in governmental organizations has been viewed as an instrument to ensure fair gender competition and promotion.

58. A number of countries (e.g. Estonia, Netherlands) mention the significant and persistent underrepresentation of women in management in the private sector. Across the UNECE region, documentation of progress proves to be difficult given the persistent lack of gender-disaggregated data on decision-making in the private sector.

In **Israel**, for companies in which all board members are of one gender, the Company Law stipulates that at the time of the appointment of an external director, the new director has to be of the other gender.

In **Norway**, following an amendment to the Public Limited Companies Act stipulating that both sexes are to be represented with at least 40 per cent in the boards of state-owned enterprises and privately-owned public limited companies, the proportion of women in the boards of these companies rose from 9 per cent in the beginning of 2004 to 40.1 per cent in 2009. A similar level was achieved through voluntary measures for state-owned enterprises in **Finland**.

## H. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

**Achievements:** Progress was reported by a significant number of countries in the region to extend and strengthen national mechanisms for the advancement of women including through gender mainstreaming strategies.

**Challenges:** National mechanisms for gender equality in many countries are understaffed, insufficiently funded and have marginal influence on key policy areas. This problem is particularly acute in the Eastern part of the region. There is still insufficient training and guidance on how to introduce gender mainstreaming in different government policies and therefore effective implementation remains a challenge.

59. There is diversity across the UNECE region with regard to the status and functions of national mechanisms. Institutions for the advancement of women range from advisory councils (Belarus, Slovakia), parliamentary committees (Serbia), institutes (Belgium), interministerial commissions (Republic of Moldova), to gender equality directorates in Ministries (Germany). Some UNECE member States have Ministers for Gender Equality (Spain). While some countries

report on strengthened mechanisms to promote gender equality (see box below), others report a shortage of both financial and human resources (e.g. Montenegro).

In **Albania** new legislation in 2008 redefined the functional duties for gender experts and focal points in central and local government. Prior to the reform, gender focal points were carrying out gender-related functions along with other duties. Following reform, gender equity and domestic violence issues are to be included in the job description and are to constitute the main function of gender focal points.

The gender mainstreaming strategy of the **Danish** Government implies that 19 ministers have an explicit responsibility for gender equality within their field of competence. The Minister for Gender Equality is responsible for coordinating and implementing the strategy.

60. Many countries have put in place gender focal points, special units, or institutes to promote the practice of gender mainstreaming throughout government activities (Azerbaijan, Canada, Netherlands, Poland, Uzbekistan).

In **Ukraine** a network of gender focal points was established comprising gender expert groups at 37 central government bodies and organizations and 18 gender councils at the regional administration level. A post of Gender Advisor to the Minister was established in all ministries. In addition, 12 regions of the country created a post of Gender Advisor to the Head of Regional Administration.

61. While gender mainstreaming strategies into all areas of public policy are widespread in the region, including in poverty reduction strategies in EECCA countries, relatively little is reported about the impact of training on the effectiveness of strategies.

62. Gender-responsive budgeting initiatives, a key tool of gender mainstreaming, have been reported by a number of UNECE member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova, Nordic countries). These initiatives tend to be at the early stages of implementation (issuance of guidelines, training activities).

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, work on gender-responsive budgeting started in 2008 with the provision of training for representatives from the budget sector of several ministries, coordinators for equal opportunities, representatives of the non-governmental sector, and several local self-government units. In 2009, the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (programmes for employment and social protection) was analysed to assess the integration of the gender concept in the budget policy as well as the expected benefits for women and men to be derived therefrom.

63. It is important to further empower women to take part in the planning, implementation, monitoring and/or evaluation of policies directly or indirectly affecting them. Countries like Serbia have taken additional steps to incorporate a more participatory approach by including a wide spectrum of women's NGOs and gender equality advocates in preparing national gender equality strategies.

## I. HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN<sup>1</sup>

**Achievements:** Many countries have enacted new or strengthened already existing legislation on women's human rights.

**Challenges:** Effective implementation of legislation needs to be improved, in particular with respect to financial resources and monitoring and complaints mechanisms. In some countries, international conventions are still the only instrument specifically covering human rights of women.

64. With respect to the protection of women's human rights, most countries mention provisions on gender equality in the national constitution or refer to their efforts to bring national legislation in line with international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the additional Protocol, or EU legislation.

In **Uzbekistan** national law and regulations were amended to incorporate international obligations under the international conventions on gender equality. Today, the Constitution and more than 80 laws and other normative acts constitute the legislative base of gender equality.

65. Many EECCA countries have adopted national action plans and strategies for gender equality (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Ukraine). Implementation of these plans is often still at an early stage. The Republic of Moldova for example reports on the low level of awareness of judicial staff and decision-makers in the judicial area on gender equality and women's human rights principles.

66. Effective implementation of legislation, notably for women from minorities and migrant women, remains challenging also in Western Europe. Extrajudicial mechanisms, such as ombuds(women) (Slovakia) and equality bodies (Cyprus, Hungary) help monitoring the implementation of legislation and investigating complaints relating to discrimination and violations of women's human rights.

67. In addition, countries have increased efforts to train government officials on gender equality in the legal framework (Lithuania, Poland) and emphasize the important role of NGOs in the promotion of women's rights (Azerbaijan, Croatia, Malta).

68. Knowledge of rights is an important element in the protection of human rights. Countries throughout the region have therefore invested resources to ensure that citizens, women in particular, become aware of those rights through translation of the relevant international treaties into the national language (Albania, Croatia, Greece, Portugal), awareness-raising campaigns (Turkmenistan), information websites (Israel, Sweden), or human rights education at school (Austria, Bulgaria).

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<sup>1</sup> See also areas of concern D and E.

The **Latvian** Human Rights Office provided free consultations on legal matters within the framework of the EU funded EQUAL-project “Opening the labour market for women!” in 2006-2007. Consultations covered labour rights and were provided via a free telephone line or in person, followed up by legal assistance where needed.

69. Many EU members regard human rights in general and women’s rights in particular as an important cross-cutting issue also in foreign policy and have engaged in projects promoting women’s human rights abroad.

In **Spain** the office of a Special Ambassador for the Promotion of Gender Equality Policies was created in March 2007 to give a higher profile to gender mainstreaming in foreign policy. In addition, the Sectoral Gender Strategy for Spanish Cooperation was drafted, a strategic instrument to promote economic, social, sexual, civic, political and cultural rights of women through development cooperation.

## J. WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

**Achievements:** Member countries have made efforts, through different means, to enhance the position of women in the media away from the usual stereotypes. Some countries have enacted legislation while others use campaigns or establish prizes to improve women’s image in the media.

**Challenges:** Stereotyping and representation of women in traditional roles and demeaning situations continues to be used by communication professionals. Not all countries have mechanisms to monitor women and the media.

70. Country responses in the field of women and the media are concentrated around three key issues: women’s employment in the media sector, gender stereotypes in the media, and media as a tool to promote gender equality.

71. Even though the number of female journalists has increased over the past years in many UNECE member States (e.g. Austria, Cyprus), many countries stress the continuing underrepresentation of women as editors-in-chief and directors (Montenegro, Norway) and in certain subject fields such as political and economic journalism (Albania).

72. Strong concerns are expressed with respect to stereotypical representation of women and sexism in the media, including in TV series and talkshows, particularly in EECCA countries, which could be related to the still prevailing patriarchal culture.

The **Republic of Moldova** implemented the project “Say NO to discriminative representation of women in publicity” and organized a campaign related to the image of women in publicity.

In **Uzbekistan** a series of radio and TV-seminars, talk shows and roundtables are organized as part of campaigns to eliminate patriarchal stereotypes of women’s role in the family and in society.

73. Policy responses range from legislation dealing with prohibitions to portray women in humiliating situations or discriminatory advertising (Estonia), to guidelines and codes for



broadcasting media (Bulgaria, Republic of Moldova, United Kingdom), and commissions and self-regulating bodies monitoring the presence of gender stereotypes (France, Romania).

74. Almost all countries use the media as a tool to raise public awareness on gender issues (Belarus, Czech Republic), in particular violence against women (Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Slovakia) and trafficking (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), or to disseminate information on projects on gender equality (Azerbaijan, Poland). In Kazakhstan, the total number of TV and radio information transmissions devoted to gender equality increased by 2.5 times between 2005 and 2008.

In **Hungary** an annual report of the National Radio and Television Commission examines the ratio of the two sexes in the programmes of the national broadcasters (news and background information, and other programmes). Sharp differences have been recorded in favour of men.

In **Portugal** the “Parity: Women and Men in the Media Award” has been established since 2005. It promotes a balanced and non-stereotypical image of women and men in the media and aims at giving more visibility to women and the political, socio-economic and cultural issues raised by them.

In **Turkmenistan** a journalist centre for women was established to improve female journalists’ training and to enhance public awareness about gender issues.

## K. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

**Achievements:** A few countries have undertaken ad hoc activities in the field of women and the environment or have applied a mainstreaming approach to their sustainable development plans and strategies.

**Challenges:** The majority of countries reported only little on this area of concern. Systematic gender mainstreaming in and gender impact assessment of environmental policies is virtually inexistent in the UNECE region.

75. Many countries in the UNECE region either report very little on women and the environment or do not address this area at all. Exceptions include Luxembourg and Montenegro which have incorporated a gender perspective in their national plans for sustainable development; and Turkey, where a section on “environment and women” has been included in the National Gender Action Plan.

76. Ad hoc initiatives cover research on the gender-differentiated impact of pollution (Belgium), a study on the existence of gender mainstreaming into national organizations dealing with sustainable development (Switzerland), a project on gender and climate change (Nordic countries), and a communication strategy on women and the environment aimed at sensitizing women’s organizations to environmental and sustainability issues (Germany).

In **Lithuania** 82 specialists of the Ministry of Environment attended gender equality training from 2006 to 2009 encouraging them to integrate a gender perspective into environmental protection.

In **Portugal** the first study for the diagnosis and creation of gender indicators in the area of environment and the “Guide for gender mainstreaming in environment and territory – Accessibility and transportation” were launched in 2009.

77. In EECCA countries, the gender dimension of environmental issues has only recently received some attention, mainly by civil society groups. Research studies on the impact of environmental degradation on women’s and children’s health were undertaken e.g. in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In addition, a number of pilot projects, mostly funded by bilateral and multilateral donors, were executed in order to demonstrate the possibility of inducing changes in consumption patterns that are harmful to environment. However, only few projects were found to be gender mainstreamed.

The Asian Development Bank signed a Letter of Agreement with the Scientific Information Center of the Central Asian Interstate Commission for Water Coordination to establish a **Gender and Water Network (GWANET)** in Central Asia. It aims at promoting gender aspects in water resources management by improving gender awareness among the water sector stakeholders at regional, national and local levels, and strengthening their capacity in incorporating gender issues into the decision-making process.

## L. THE GIRL CHILD<sup>2</sup>

**Achievements:** Many countries have enacted legislation combating female genital mutilation and forced marriage and have strengthened laws against the sexual exploitation of children.

**Challenges:** Sexual exploitation of children in general and girls in particular, including via the Internet, continues to be a major concern. In some countries, the incidence of child marriages and child labour remains high.

78. Commercial sexual exploitation of children in various forms (trafficking, sex tourism, paedophilia and pornography) has been on the rise in many UNECE member States. In particular new technologies and the Internet pose additional challenges as they provide platforms for crimes against children that are very difficult to control.

In **Bulgaria**, an amendment to the Penal Code in 2007 introduced a definition of child pornography and criminalized both the establishment of contact with a minor for sexual purposes and the circulation of pornographic material through the Internet.

79. Many West European countries state that as a consequence of migration, female genital mutilation has increased within their countries. In Switzerland for example, 6,000–7,000 girls have been or are in danger of being affected by this practice. In response, legislation has been enacted and strategic documents have been elaborated in order to combat female genital mutilation both within (Denmark, Monaco, Netherlands, Portugal) and beyond national borders (Belgium, Malta).

<sup>2</sup> See also areas of concern B, C, D and I.

In **Italy** a law was passed in 2006 with the objective of preventing, assisting and rehabilitating women and girls subjected to the practice of genital mutilation. The new regulations introduced prison sentences of 4 to 12 years, to be increased by a third if the mutilation is carried out on a minor. Preventive measures include awareness campaigns and training courses.

80. In a number of EECCA countries, child marriage remains a concern. According to UNICEF estimates, in 2005/2006 the proportion of 20-24 year-old women who were married or in union before they were 18 years old, was 19 per cent in the Republic of Moldova, 17 per cent in Georgia, and between 7 and 13 per cent in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and the Central Asian countries. For the same countries, a relatively high incidence of child labour is found. In response, some of them have revised their Family and Criminal Codes in order to strengthen the mechanism of child protection. For example in Tajikistan, recent legislation criminalized child marriages and child trafficking and enhanced protection of children from prostitution.

81. While the incidence seems higher in EECCA countries, the issue of forced marriage has also received attention in the national responses of West European countries. Some countries have undertaken studies on the prevalence of forced marriage (Germany); others have strengthened legislation (United Kingdom), have included measures within existing strategies (France) or established new action plans (Norway) to address forced marriage.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

82. Since the last review of the Beijing process in 2004, significant progress has been made in developing legislation regarding gender equality and women's rights. However, the enforcement of such legislation is far from satisfactory throughout the region, particularly in countries with transition economies where institutions for gender equality and the promotion of women's rights continue to be weak. Similarly, some progress has been made in engendering national development strategies or adopting national plans for gender equality but the effective implementation of such strategies and plans significantly lags behind in most countries of the region.

83. Based on this review, the main challenges for the region can be clustered around four major areas:

(a) Women and the economy, including combating women's poverty. Policies aimed at reducing occupational segregation and the wage gap need to be actively pursued in order to raise women's income while measures for reconciling work and family responsibilities must also be strengthened and extended for furthering women's participation in the labour market. In addition, specific measures need to be taken for those women who are highly vulnerable to poverty (women in rural areas, ethnic minorities, migrant women);

(b) Violence against women and the girl child. The main challenge in this regard is to enforce new legislation against domestic violence, develop prevention (including through education), assist victims and facilitate their economic independence. Another priority policy area is the protection of the rights of the girl child and young women through the effective application of vigorous measures against trafficking in contexts of conflict, migration and

impoverishment of populations, as well as against early forced marriage and female genital mutilation;

(c) Women and decision-making. In view of the rather slow progress made in this area, there is a need to foster a mix of policies combining mandatory measures, incentives and awareness-building with a view to accelerating the pace towards gender equality in decision-making positions, both public and private, in all sectors of life – political, economic, social and cultural;

(d) Institutional mechanisms for gender equality and the advancement of women. In most countries, such mechanisms remain insufficient for promoting an effective process of gender mainstreaming cutting across all public policies. They need therefore to be strengthened, in terms of both financial and human resources, and extended to all line ministries, with a coordinating entity linked to the highest level of the governmental architecture. Within this framework, gender-responsive budgeting is of utmost importance since it is the main tool for implementing effective gender-sensitive policies.

84. The challenges highlighted above are of a structural nature: most of them were already identified during the 2004 review and this synthesis demonstrates that real but largely insufficient progress has been made since then. Furthermore the risk is that the present economic and financial crisis could even slow down the pace of progress by diverting issues related to women's rights and gender equality from the political, economic and social agenda of public authorities. At the same time new challenges are arising in the region such as the extension of migration flows and the acceleration of population ageing. It is all the more important to regain momentum on all issues covered by this regional synthesis, with the joint involvement of governments, civil society, international organizations and the international community as a whole. The most powerful justification for such a new momentum is that, in any society, promoting gender equality serves simultaneously the purposes of social justice, economic efficiency and respect of fundamental human rights for all.

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