

Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the 25th anniversary of the platform

Spotlight: Europe



Women on the front line in the fight against COVID-19 in Georgia. Photo credit: UN Women

Highlights of the celebration of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) include review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by the 73rd United Nations (UN) General Assembly; the Sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64, March 9, 2020) and events curated under the umbrella *Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future* led by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women); and the intergovernmental process under the leadership of Mexico and France. In the run up to CSW64, which produced a political declaration on the BPfA, a number of national and regional meetings and conferences on women in the context of Beijing+25 took place in 2019. Some regional meetings occurred at ministerial level where ministers and government officials agreed to specific outputs including political declarations and regional reports.

This Update presents a snapshot of the important elements from the European region. Previous Updates focused on [Africa](#), [Asia Pacific](#), [the Arab region](#) and [Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

Spotlight: Europe and the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

On 29-30 October 2019 member states of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) met in Geneva for the “Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting” which reviewed the progress and challenges in implementing the BPfA and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective. The forum was jointly organized by UNECE and the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. Participants at the meeting discussed the issues presented in the “Regional review of progress: regional synthesis”, the synthesis report and background document prepared for the forum.

The report was compiled on the basis of the 46 national level reviews prepared by member countries. These national reviews were developed based on a guidance note for reviewing progress drafted by UN Women. The note included a questionnaire that countries could make use of to evaluate and report their findings.

The synthesis report highlights the recent developments, achievements and obstacles in achieving gender equality since 2014 in the region and emphasises and builds on the interplay of the BPfA and the SDGs. The twelve critical areas of concern identified in the BPfA were clustered to six dimensions that are relevant to the SDG commitments. These six dimensions underlying the progress review are:

1. *Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work* – this area is concerned with the unequal participation of women in the economy and its linkage to domestic and care work.
2. *Poverty eradication, social protection and social services* – here the linkage is drawn between poverty and women’s access to social services and protection and health and education.
3. *Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes* – this is related to violence, in its many forms, against women which has severe impact on women’s mental and physical health and on the enjoyment of basic human rights.
4. *Participation, accountability, and gender-responsive institutions* – this dimension focuses on the extent and type of participation of women in decision-making processes.
5. *Peaceful and inclusive societies* – concerns women, peace and security and the level of participation of women in peace processes and post-conflict recovery.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the landmark visionary agenda for the empowerment of women and girls, the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. 2020 is also the five-year milestone in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda. In recognition of this, the South Centre’s Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Gender (SDCCG) Programme is issuing this bi-monthly update on the state of play of discussions on gender and development issues in the context of the BPfA.

6. *Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation* – acknowledging the gendered impacts of environmental degradation and climate change, this dimension focuses on the level of women’s participation in decision-making in climate action.

The progress has been varied across the sub-regions of the ECE constituency underpinned by the backlog of South Eastern Europe (SEE)¹ and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)² countries in some areas. An exemplary list of selected progress and setbacks reported under the six dimensions for the ECE region are provided hereinafter.

1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Different policy measures and initiatives addressing the asymmetric participation of women in the economy were highlighted. These include:

- Strengthening work-family reconciliation through paternity leave, flexible parental leave, expansion of child care and eldercare support and facilities.
- Subsidies that incentivize women employment and women entrepreneurship.
- Skills trainings to women in order to address occupational segregation, in particular in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) fields where women are significantly underrepresented.
- Targeted programs were implemented that aimed at employment of marginalized groups, including women, disabled women and also victims of domestic violence.

Challenges and setbacks were premised upon the following issues:

- At the policy level, gender has not been sufficiently mainstreamed in national economic or rural development policies especially in the SEE and EECCA region.
- Gender pay gap continues to exist in the region and while countries increasingly acknowledge this issue, countries outside the European Union have done little to address this.
- Labour legislations are not always effectively implemented and in particular the SEE and EECCA region have inadequate or no provisions on workplace sexual harassment.
- Traditional social norms in the EECCA region are still dominant and constrain women’s economic participation and have led to women seeing their property and inheritance rights violated, thus limiting their income and wealth and also their access to finance due to the lack of collateral.

2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

Areas of progress:

- Gender perspectives are increasingly and widely incorporated into policies in health, education and social protection areas, allowing for a more targeted approach to vulnerable female groups.
- More efforts were taken to tackle gendered segregation in education, with focus on the STEM fields and countries report in general a balanced educational attainment between the genders, with women even constituting a majority in higher education.
- Most countries have advanced their actions to widen access to affordable health care services, free counselling and health information. For instance, more possibilities for breast and cervical cancer screens were offered free of charge or mother- and infant-centred approaches to birthing were promoted.

Challenges:

- Barriers constraining women’s access to social services, education and health continue to exist, albeit progress being made in reducing such obstacles.
- Educational segregation is substantial and women, despite attaining higher education more often than men, are underrepresented in senior academic posts and in the STEM area.
- Early marriage is an issue especially in the SEE and EECCA region and impedes girls’ access to education.
- Women in rural and remote areas are often cut off from adequate health services and information, including on reproductive health care, thus affecting maternal mortality especially in the EECCA region.

3. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

Areas of progress:

- A wide range of measures were taken in the region to address the different forms of violence against women, concentrated in the forms of domestic and intimate partner violence and human trafficking. Many countries have in fact defined these issues as a priority area to focus on.
- Most countries in the region have signed or ratified the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, strengthening commitment and action plans at national levels and triggering adoptions and amendments of legislations, including for new forms of violence against women such as cyber-bullying.
- Strengthened judiciary and police capacity to enhance investigations and protect the rights of victims in the process. Countries have also improved their services for victims of gender-based violence.

- Initiatives to build the capacities of institutions engaged in supporting women in need were introduced and some countries provided financial assistance to such service providers.

Challenges:

- More than a dozen countries have not ratified the Istanbul Convention and some Eastern European countries, experiencing the rise of conservative movements, have opposed the ratification.
- While eliminating violence against women is a priority, countries struggle to implement international standards and counter the dominance of detrimental and traditional social norms.
- On the legislations side, despite the progresses made, gaps in the legal framework remain with some countries failing to draft specific legislation on violence against women or aligning to the definition of rape as in the Istanbul Convention.
- Child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) are found in minority communities in the region and the SEE and EECCA sub-region continues to face in particular the issue of forced and child marriage and prenatal sex selection.

4. Participation, accountability, and gender-responsive institutions

Areas of progress:

- Advancing participation of women in policy- and decision making has been supported by strong political will in the region. In addition, most countries have designed specific national and, in some cases, sub-national level policies for progressing gender equality.
- The region reported an uptake in gender-responsive fiscal budgeting and a few countries introduced gender impact assessments.. Countries have also facilitated the inclusion of gender components in their overseas development assistance (ODA).
- Many ECE countries have made efforts to institutionalize gender issues at the political level. In the public domain, most countries have established and strengthened mechanisms to advance gender equality. Some countries designated gender focal points within ministries and different governance levels and a few created gender equality bodies with a dedicated mandate in this regard.
- Countries have further introduced temporary special measures such as quotas to push for a certain level of representation of women in political bodies, executive boards of companies listed on public exchanges or in the highest positions in public broadcasting.

Challenges:

- While gender equality policies are found in most countries, some have not budgeted and allocated resources in order to sustain such policies. It was found that in some cases the policy implementation was tied to projects through donor support rather than direct fiscal contributions and, as such, short-term and volatile.
- Women's representation in politics has indeed increased, but remains in the majority of countries clearly below parity and in a few instances women's political representation had been as low as 12%.
- Special measures to support increased political participation of women remain scarce and while there are quotas it was found that these are not always met.
- The institutionalization of efforts to achieve gender equality are in some countries undermined by the lack of support by the government. Bodies mandated to work on gender equality were constrained due to transfer from one authority to another or through parliamentary vote to abolish such body, as in the case of Sweden.

5. Peaceful and inclusive societies

Areas of progress:

- Overall, the whole region has advanced on issues related to women, peace and security with Canada, France and Sweden as frontrunner countries with their development of a feminist foreign policy and assistance.
- Policies targeting the women, peace and security nexus were established in most countries and some countries awarded more ownership to the local level, including conflict-affected women through a bottom-up approach in policy formulation.
- Countries facing large inflows of migrants have made efforts to provide access to healthcare, social welfare services and employment opportunities for women migrants.

Challenges

- Despite the achievements made in the area of women, peace and security, it was reported that progress in this area continues to materialize slowly.
- Representation of women in decision-making bodies in the military and diplomatic sectors remains low.

6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

Areas of progress:

- Some countries have incorporated gender into their national plans, for example, at sectoral level or at project level, while others adopted the gender action plan set out by the UN Climate Convention

(UNFCCC). A few countries have mainstreamed gender into their climate and environmental policies.

- A few countries that experienced natural disasters in the region addressed specifically the gendered impact of such events.
- Gender and climate change considerations were also integrated in donor countries' development assistance.

Challenges:

- Gender considerations in policies related to climate change remain the exception and women's participation in these domains is constrained, also as a result of the underrepresentation of women in the STEM field.
- Women tend to be underrepresented in the in decision-making processes in both the public and private sectors that engage in climate action and only a few initiatives were noted that promote an uptake in women's participation.
- Gender mainstreaming in natural disaster management was only pursued post-disaster in a few instances, while some others have refrained from integrating gender in their responses.

Acknowledging the importance of sex-disaggregated data for informed and evidence-based policy making which target the SDGs and gender equality, the review stressed that the region has indeed made good progress in collecting and using disaggregated data, but that limited technical capacity, financing and lack of political will in some countries hinder the process. A clear disparity between the Northern and Western ECE countries and the SEE countries was observed in this regard, with the latter lagging behind in establishing a systemic framework for gender-sensitive and SDG indicators.

The ECE's review process has brought forward some key trends and priorities for the future. First, the importance of STEM in uplifting women's participation in high technology and environment and climate change fields has been understood and educational segregation was spelled out as an important issue that needs to be tackled accordingly. Second, while climate action has gained strong momentum the report has called for a stronger integration of gender perspectives in national (climate) policies and the inclusion of women in the drafting process. Third, special provisions that address women's unpaid care and domestic work are key in furthering women's economic participation. Fourth, preventing and addressing violence against women require "a comprehensive response involving intervention across the educational, criminal justice and ICT [Information and Communications Technology] sectors".

Endnotes:

¹ SEE countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

² EEECA countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

Source:

EUROPE: Regional review of progress: regional synthesis http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM/Website/ECE_AC.28_2019_3-e_rev.pdf

Previous Beijing+25 Updates:

No. 1, 13 March 2020 – Political Declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women

No. 2, 30 March 2020 – Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform. Spotlight: Africa

No. 3, 21 April 2020 – Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform. Spotlight: Asia-Pacific

No. 4, 20 May 2020 – Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform. Spotlight: Arab Region

No. 5, 30 July 2020 – Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the platform. Spotlight: Latin America and the Caribbean

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