

Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting

Geneva, 6-7 November 2014

Co-Chairpersons' Conclusions

DRAFT 14 November 2014

Introduction¹

1. The Beijing+20 regional review meeting was organized jointly by the UNECE and UN Women from 6-7 November 2014 in Geneva. The regional offices of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO, WHO and FAO also substantively contributed to the meeting. The intergovernmental review meeting was preceded by the Beijing+20 Geneva NGO Forum from 3-5 November.
2. The review meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Hijran Huseynova, Azerbaijan, and Ms. Carlien Scheele, Netherlands. It was attended by about 500 participants, including experts and representatives of Governments, civil society, private sector and other international organizations.
3. The key objectives of the meeting were to review progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the UNECE region; identify current challenges and highlight good practices and provide directions for further action in the region.
4. The inter-active panel discussions focused on five broad issues: closing gender gaps through economic and social policies, women's representation in economic and political decision-making, elimination of violence against women, governance and gender justice, and gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda.
5. These co-chairs' conclusions, together with the recommendations from the NGO Forum, will be submitted to the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, as a regional input to the Beijing+20 global review.

Long-term trends in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the ECE region

6. The Regional Synthesis Report, which was prepared on the basis of 46 national reports submitted by the governments of ECE member States², identified progress in all areas throughout our region since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. Participants in the meeting concurred that advances have been widespread, although unequal.
7. Particular progress has been observed in developing legislation regarding gender equality and women's rights and setting up national gender mechanisms. There have been strong advances

¹ [Note: Most text of the introduction will be moved to the formal meeting report. The Co-Chairs' conclusions and the recommendations of the NGO Forum will be annexed to that report.]

² Another 7 national reports were received after the preparation of the Regional Synthesis Report.

in the criminalization of gender-based violence and public acceptance of violence against women and girls has declined.

8. Access to education has improved and in some countries women outnumber men in high education. Progress has also been observed regarding a number of health indicators.

9. In addition, governments have increased collaboration with civil society organizations on gender issues. Women's organizations have made an important contribution to positive change and increased awareness of inequalities and their implications.

10. However, despite the observed progress, multiple challenges remain. The Synthesis Report and the interventions of many participants pointed to the existence of a wide gap between legislation and its implementation in all areas of the Beijing Platform for Action.

11. In particular, violence against women remains prevalent, despite the introduction of legal provisions. New issues, such as cyberstalking, have emerged. In some areas, the situation of migrant and refugee women poses particular challenges to governments and societies, and their specific needs have to be addressed. Discriminatory stereotypes remain widespread, and affect women's education and participation in the economy and in public life. Despite improvements, which have been supported in some cases by the introduction of quotas or other temporary measures, the participation of women in political and corporate decision-making remains low. However, there are significant differences in countries across the region.

12. Progress and setbacks are often difficult to identify because no sufficient sex-disaggregated statistics are being collected or there is a lack of common definitions, methodologies or analyses to make possible comparisons.

13. Funding continues to be a particular problem, as too often action plans, new institutions and other initiatives are not supported by appropriate resources. There is lack of an institutionalized approach to capacity development of governmental and public institutions.

14. While the participation of women in the labour market has increased, it remains too low. Even where women can be considered employed, they are disproportionately found in precarious employment, part-time employment, lower paid jobs or suffering wage discrimination. Child care and affordable social services are undersupplied in many countries. Unequal gender sharing of household work and unpaid care work prevail, thus creating obstacles for women to find appropriate employment. Discriminatory stereotypes influence education choices of women and restrict their future employment opportunities in science and technical areas. All these factors lead to a persistent gender pay gap and sharply lower pension payments for women as compared to men.

15. The economic and financial crisis has had a disproportionate negative effect on women, including by limiting their access to the labour market and the reduction of funding for programmes and services used by women.

Closing gender gaps through economic and social policies

16. Gender equality is not only a human rights issue but it will also have strong and positive effects on the economy. Excluding women from full and equal access to all sectors of the labour market represents an economic loss for society. Increased participation in the labour market and access to good quality jobs is not only a foundation for women's economic independence and empowerment, but also a driver of national economic prosperity. Improved participation in decision-making structures in private companies would have positive implications for corporate governance.

17. Challenges in regard to women and the economy were highlighted in the national reports, the panel discussion and the interventions. They vary across countries and subregions, reflecting differences in the economic structures and institutions. Well-designed labour market policies and laws on gender equality can make a difference. However, their implementation remains insufficient.

18. The meeting addressed the issue of the gender pay gap, focusing on existing practices and tools to collect and reveal data on wage differences in companies as well as incentives to provide equal pay for equal work.

19. A disproportionate number of women are still in low-paid and low-skilled jobs, and in particular the situation of domestic workers – who are usually women – remains largely invisible and ignored.

20. Discriminatory stereotypes persist that prevent women from making non-traditional choices and thereby perpetuate occupational segregation. Discriminatory stereotypes are a key cause of the gender pay gap.

21. The existing patterns of gender and family relations prevent both women and men from reconciling work and family life and reduce women's income potential at multiple points throughout the life cycle. Appropriate social policies are required to address systemic gender inequalities and close gender gaps, in particular for mothers.

22. Women engaged in entrepreneurial activities, both as self-employed and as providers of additional employment opportunities, benefit society as a whole and thus contribute to sustainable development as well as women's economic independence.

23. Policy recommendations:

a) Ratify and implement the 4 key gender equality ILO Conventions namely: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) in order to, among other things, ensure decent jobs.

- b) Introduce paternity leave schemes in order to decrease women's unpaid childcare burden, and shape public opinion about family care as being both men and women's responsibility.
- c) Provide sufficient resources to create enough pre-school and childcare services in parallel with childcare policies (for men and women) that allow women to participate in the labour market and encourage men to take more responsibility for childcare.
- d) Employers and their associations should put into practice flexible working arrangements for men and women having to take care of family members.
- e) Tackle gender pay gaps through promoting equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, with the support of social partners and professional and women's associations.
- f) Use policies to increase wages in female-dominated sectors.
- g) Encourage women's entrepreneurship through supporting and upgrading women's skills and knowledge.
- h) Introduce relevant tax policies, simplify bureaucratic procedures for starting a business, and provide long term and low interest rate loans with government guarantees/subsidies that would help enable women entrepreneurs.
- i) Use public procurement as a tool for supporting women-owned businesses and businesses that promote full equality of women employees.
- j) Increase leadership training and mentoring schemes for women.
- k) Address issues of pension coverage and social security for older women.
- l) Strengthen inter-ministerial co-ordination to leverage the state's regulatory and strategic role in achieving women's rights. National strategies must aim to bring together and achieve coherence between the disparate strategies implemented by different governmental institutions.
- m) Strengthen social dialogue and create new platforms for inclusive policy discussions involving women workers, including those in the informal sector.

Women's Representation in Policy and Decision-making

24. In the ECE region, equal representation of men and women in different power and decision-making bodies is still far from reality in most of the countries, despite notable advances in a number of countries.

25. In 2013, only 1 out of every 4 parliamentarians in UNECE countries was a woman, but the share varied from 9% to 40%. Despite the introduction of gender quotas in some countries, women remain underrepresented in key decision-making spheres, such as economic policy-making, local governments, law enforcement, political leadership, trade unions, civil society organizations and communities.

26. Policy recommendations:

- a) Well-designed legislative gender quotas should be considered and introduced as they have proved to be effective measures to promote women's participation in parliaments and other elected bodies, civil service as well as corporate boards. Quotas are particularly effective when they include clear quantitative objectives, timelines and sanctions for non-compliance.
- b) In addition to legislative quotas, complimentary measures supporting women with training, mentoring in education, job promotion, etc. should be implemented.
- c) Private business should be engaged in promoting women to board and other senior-level positions and take active measures, including gender training to ensure gender equality in the workplace. If gender equality is to be sustained, it has to be put at the center of the company's strategy.
- d) Attention should be drawn to female and male role models representing successful examples of reconciliation of work with private life to promote women's participation in public life and their advancement in the workplace.
- e) Promote women's representation in academic areas, think tanks and research institutions.
- f) Engage mass media and other opinion-makers in challenging traditional norms and ideas about the role of men and women and in eliminating derogatory gender stereotypes that hinder women's participation in decision-making.
- g) The role of male-dominated institutions should be redefined and better aligned to the interests and needs of women to facilitate increased women's participation at all levels.

Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls

27. Gender-based violence penetrates all areas of life and affects women of all ages worldwide today. Despite policy efforts undertaken over the last two decades, it continues to exist in all countries of the UNECE region.

28. No custom, tradition, culture, religion or practice can justify violence against women and girls nor serve to avoid state obligations to prevent and eliminate it and to prosecute the perpetrators.

29. Violence against women and girls is a severe violation of human rights and a particularly severe form of discrimination. It has short- and long-term adverse consequences on women's and girls' health, including their sexual and reproductive health.

30. Violence against women continues to exist in many forms in the region: honour killings, trafficking, stalking, sexual harassment, physical abuse and rape. Child, early and forced marriage robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects and cannot be justified on cultural

grounds. New forms of assaults against women and girls increasingly occur online and through social media.

31. Governments have made some, however insufficient, progress towards achieving Strategic Objective D of the Beijing Platform for Action. Violence against women is now widely condemned by law and both awareness and attention have grown. More countries have set up comprehensive national policies and national co-ordinating bodies. There are also increased efforts to train professionals working with women victims of violence. The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) has been ratified by 15 countries in the region, with another 21 having signed it.

32. Policy recommendations :

a) All countries in the ECE region should ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention. The Convention is the “prime example” of a legal and policy framework that provides a blueprint for national authorities to draw up and implement comprehensive and co-ordinated policies involving government agencies, CSOs as well as national, regional and local parliaments and authorities, and international organizations.

b) All governments should develop comprehensive strategies and policies to prevent violence against women and girls, to protect and support the victims and to punish the perpetrators. Specific actions are required to fight against women trafficking and domestic violence.

c) Measures should be designed to reinforce the institutional capacities for the implementation of the respective legislation and policies, including training of service providers – health professionals, teachers, police, prosecutors, etc.

d) Specialized services and care for women and girls victims of violence should be established country-wide and strengthened. Increased budgetary allocations should be accompanied by a holistic response to their needs, including financial support when returning from shelters to the community.

e) The role of media in spreading perceptions and stereotypes that reinforce gender inequality should be addressed, as well as new forms of online and social medial violence.

f) Educational campaigns in various forms should target the entire population, including potential victims, perpetrators and key actors that can prevent victimisation. Education should include the sensitization of boys and men, and address social norms and attitudes that regard women and girls as subordinate to men and boys or as having sterotyped roles that incite or perpetuate violent or coercive practices.

g) Strengthening data collection, expanding research work and surveys on root causes on gender-based violence need to be given priority attention. Administrative data systems need to be strengthened and data and survey results made available for the public. The UNECE Statistical Division can contribute to fill this gap.

h) Cross- regional cooperation and exchange of experience and lessons learned in the implementation of legislation and polices aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls should be strengthened.

Governance and Gender Justice

33. Access to justice is not only a right in itself but also a strategy to realize other rights, challenge discrimination and achieve equality between men and women. It is not only a human rights issue, but also a rule of law issue and a sustainable development issue: there cannot be rule of law and sustainable development without access to justice for women and girls.

34. Despite increased awareness and advance in legal expertise on discrimination and women's rights, possibilities for women and girls to claim redress when their rights have been violated are insufficient. In many countries, it is still not accepted that a woman, and even less a child, would seek redress in case of being discriminated.

35. Barriers to women's and girls' access to justice include lack of awareness about their rights and where to seek redress, court fees, fear of stigma, lack of support services for women seeking justice and social and cultural barriers that make it unacceptable for women and girls to bring about a complaint against a family or community member. Women from disadvantaged groups, including migrant and trafficked women, women from minority communities, women with disabilities and women from rural areas often face particular difficulties in reporting violations of their rights.

36. Although most ECE countries are Parties to the CEDAW Convention, many face difficulties in fully implementing it. The CEDAW Committee is currently developing a General Comment on Access to Justice.

37. Across the ECE region ad-hoc bodies and inter-ministerial structures have been created. Women's human rights and gender equality have been integrated into the work of national human rights bodies. The capacities of national mechanisms to implement, coordinate, and monitor gender equality policies, and their possibility to hold others accountable, however, remain limited. They often lack adequate resources, and good coordination between the various parts remains a challenge.

38. Policy recommendations:

a) Gender equality policies and mechanisms for legal enforcement of these policies should take into account the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women, particularly women from vulnerable groups.

b) Discrimination against women and girls should be clearly defined by law so as to be enforceable in courts. Legislation should not only protect, but also promote gender equality and prevent rights violations.

- c) Timely, quality and effective remedies for violations of their rights should be guaranteed to all women and girls. Free legal aid accessible to the most vulnerable population is to be institutionalized and sufficiently resourced.
- d) Civil and criminal courts should be sensitized to gender-based violence and trafficking issues, and enabled to hear girl victims in a child-sensitive manner.
- e) The specific rights of women and girls in justice processes should be systematically incorporated in national curricula for the police, prosecution and judiciary.
- f) Mediation and conciliation mechanisms should be encouraged to solve community and family disputes, but should not be used in cases of violence due to a high risk of secondary victimisation.
- g) Legal and paralegal aid, including free legal aid when necessary, should be promoted and professionals should be trained to adequately address the particular rights and needs of women and girls.
- h) Ombudsmen, national human rights institutions or similar mechanisms should be established in compliance with the Paris Principles and enabled to support women and girls seeking remedy.
- i) Outreach services providing women and girls with information about their rights and support when claiming redress should be promoted, with a particular focus on rural areas. These services should be owned by the community and employ trained community members able to provide paralegal support.
- j) Social norms that make it unacceptable for women and girls to seek redress for violations of their rights should be addressed, including through awareness raising campaigns and the involvement of respected role models.
- k) Gender equality should to be central to all national and local development strategies.
- l) The effectiveness of mainstreaming mechanisms should be measured with specific and measurable indicators. Women and girls' access to justice and the implementation of related laws should be closely monitored by the Government, using clear indicators of compliance.
- m) The role of civil society in supporting women and girls in accessing justice should be promoted and reinforced. Promoting community initiatives to access legal information and information in local communities can be cost effective ways of increasing the share of women seeking justice for rights violations.
- n) Where needed, efforts to increase birth registration for girls and women and registration of marriages should be stepped up in order to protect them from future rights violations.

o) The participation of women in decision-making in general and justice institutions in particular should be further promoted.

p) Gender should be made a top priority for Governments and Ministers to help overcome resource constraints and foster inter-sectoral cooperation. Gender impact assessments should be part of good governance to achieve gender mainstreaming.

The way forward: gender equality for inclusive and sustainable societies

39. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are as relevant today as they were twenty years ago. The meeting confirmed that they have proven their lasting specific value in guiding action in all member States for the advancement of women. Governments and all actors addressed in the Beijing documents should be encouraged to finally implement the commitments undertaken in Beijing in 1995.

40. Despite the progress, the current pace of change is too slow. There is a need to develop and implement comprehensive, well-funded strategies to accelerate change. This requires a transformational agenda. We call for actions by all stakeholders. It is now time for all actors addressed in the Beijing documents to redouble their efforts, at the national, regional as well as at the global level.

41. The Post-2015 Development Agenda represents an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of gender equality for sustainable development. There is a need to maintain high ambitions for gender equality and human rights for women and girls in the negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

42. The Post-2015 Development Agenda should ensure a human rights-based approach and have a strong focus on the empowerment and rights of women and girls and gender equality, including as a stand-alone goal with gender-sensitive targets and indicators in all other SDGs.

43. Gender equality should also be a priority for the allocation of public budgets and for the Means of Implementation for the post-2015 sustainable development goals.

44. Governments should lead change, introducing the necessary legal amendments and adopting ambitious policy goals. National gender machineries have to be strengthened to ensure that they have proper authority, capacity and resources to effectively mainstream gender in governmental work in all twelve critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. However, the scale of the transformation required also demands strong involvement of the private sector and civil society.

45. It is crucial to ensure human rights for all women and men, including national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, older women, migrant and indigenous women, women with disabilities, rural women, and LGBTI persons.

46. Preventing and combating violence against women and girls are essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development. Increasing women's economic participation is the best route out of poverty.

47. Sexual and reproductive health and rights remains an area where there is a critical need to carry out more effective actions. Without guaranteeing these rights, including by expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and health services, we will not be able to efficiently empower women, eliminate discrimination, achieve gender equality and improve quality of life for all.

48. Legal frameworks and instruments to protect women's rights have an important role to play, including implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Istanbul Convention.

49. The implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is crucial to address gender-based violence in conflict situations and to involve women actively in peace processes.

50. In order to speed up change, it is essential that more men and boys are involved in gender issues. Awareness and education initiatives appear as key elements to promote this engagement. There is a need to understand how social norms change and how this change can be influenced by policies in order to make gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a reality.
