



POWER SHIFT: GENDER EQUALITY ON THE GROUND

**REGIONAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND THE
SDGS IN THE EECCA REGION**

ALBANIA, ARMENIA, GEORGIA, KYRGYZSTAN, MOLDOVA,
NORTH MACEDONIA, SERBIA, TAJIKISTAN



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Design/layout and illustrations: WECF

Cover photo: Annabelle Avril/WECF International

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Abbreviations

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CSO – Civil Society Organisations

EECCA – Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

GAP – Gender Action Plan

GBV – Gender based violence

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SRHR – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

VNR – Voluntary National Review

UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission of Europe

RCEM – Regional Civil Engagement Mechanism

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Executive summary of the report

The Women2030 project is being implemented in more than 50 countries across different regions of the world. It is constituted by a coalition of 4 women's rights and gender equality organisations collaborating to realize the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a gender-equitable and climate-just way.

This report highlights emerging issues and areas of gender inequality that were observed based on our national alternative reports and community-based gender assessments in eight countries of the EECCA region. These critical areas of concern are:

- **women in power and decision-making** reviews the access to political mandates and representation at all levels for women.
- **economic empowerment** is measured by the proportion of unpaid labour, women in employment, gender wage gap, and representation of women in administrative and management positions.
- **marital status and cultural traditions** explore the persistence of customary laws that infringe on women's human rights whilst reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes (child marriage, sex selection at birth, and difficult access to divorce)
- **hygiene and sanitation** survey the link between poverty, lack of access to safe water and girls school dropout, especially in rural areas.
- and **gender-based violence** emerges as a growing concern in the EECCA region, demanding further study and data.

Findings from our alternative reports and community-based gender assessments in the thematic areas above constitute the basis of the recommendations made to governments and decision-makers to improve the lives of women, men, and children in the EECCA region in gender equality and the SDGs.

Our recommendations focus on achieving a feminist 2030 Agenda by improving access to sanitation and hygiene; improving the availability of gender disaggregated data for SDG monitoring, increasing women's political participation and access to paid labour. They also challenge gender stereotypes on women's work/family relationship and call for specific attention to the relationship between gender and climate change.

In summary, the reviewed alternative reports highlight similar challenges of varying degrees among countries in the EECCA region that are covered in this report. The majority of people in the urban and peri-urban areas are prone to poverty, lack access to safe water and sanitation, and are equally underrepresented in decision-making and paid work. It has become imperative to understand the roles that gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, economic and marital status play in widening the inequalities existing in each country.

We strongly recommend the execution of a deep and thorough intersectional analysis by governments, institutions, and policy makers to analyse and address these country-level discrepancies. The legal framework requires continuous improvement to become more gender-sensitive with an intersectional perspective and this can be achieved through inclusive participatory processes.

Although all the countries covered in the report have strengthened national institutions and policies for the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment; and have instituted initiatives to integrate these into national development policies, there are still concerns about the actual budget, the implementation and willpower invested in the actualization of these initiatives.

Many countries have not fully recognized the role and contribution of women to the economic sustainability of their societies beyond rhetoric. At every level, women are still not actively involved in decision-making processes; their access to positions of leadership and ownership of assets and productive resources remain limited and are much less than that of men across different regions.

A significant proportion of the population in the region are in persistent/extreme poverty, and many of them are women. These women are poor because of limited access to resources such as land, credits, or clean energy as well limited control of proceeds from trading.

There is also a lack of equal access to education which limits the capacity of women to access information and opportunities for advancement. This report clearly indicates that one of the most fundamental problems faced by women in the region is the lack of the implementation of legal reforms in areas governed by customs and religious laws. Non-uniform marriage and divorce laws result in women's discrimination; customary property laws still favour men's ownership of land, while women's freedom and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights are restrained through violence and patriarchal gender norms.

Introduction

"I believe very much that it is possible to achieve gender equality. Gender equality is not just our right, but also an important condition for a more prosperous, sustainable, and peaceful Tajikistan, and the world. as a whole" **Safarbi Davalatov, NOOSFERA. #HerstoryOfChange**

Women in the world still struggle to have their voices heard, and their struggles known. Attaining gender equality is not just about transforming belief systems and behaviours in terms of gender; it also means addressing other norms such as ethnicity, class, age or disability, which contribute to reproducing oppressive systems that affect gender equality. Indeed, women and other minority groups experience inequalities, precarity, conflicts and climate change disproportionately, and inequalities exist between women depending on other oppressions they might experience, which is why an intersectional perspective is crucial. Yet, they are also part of the solution through their resilience, innovation and mobilization.



Gender equality as key driver of Sustainable Development

Gender equality is a key issue that intersects with all 17 Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 and needs to be addressed and measured in order to progress. The input of women's rights and feminist civil society organisations is crucial and valuable when creating, implementing, and reviewing new policies and programmes.

This report provides data and insights into the evolution of gender equality in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) region. It summarizes the major trends and barriers faced by several countries of the EECCA region with regards to gender equality from an intersectional perspective. Recommendations for governments and policy makers are provided.

About Women2030

The Women2030 programme is being implemented in more than 50 countries across different regions of the world. It is constituted by a coalition of 4 women's rights and gender equality organisations collaborating to implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a gender-equitable and climate-just way: Women Engage for a Common

Future (WECF); Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD); Global Forest Coalition (GFC); and Women Environmental Programme (WEP). The coalition is part of a 5 year framework partnership agreement within the European Commission's Directorate-General International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) called "Women 2030 Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) implementing SDGs Agenda".

In the framework of Agenda2030 and the Paris Climate Agreement, the Women2030 programme facilitates the participation of women+ and gender network organisations in policy development and monitoring, mobilizing citizens' support, and sharing of best practices. The Women2030 programme engages local, national, regional and international women's rights and gender equality organisations in order to build capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) and to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The regional alternative report provides a synthesis of the following country reports: Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia and Tajikistan. Situated in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). These countries have produced reports based on desk research, multi-stakeholder consultations, focus group discussions and partners' own gender assessments. The alternative reports have been presented to government delegations in different policy processes (High Level Political Forum, the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, and the Commission on the Status of Women) to highlight the expertise, needs and priorities of women's rights and feminist groups to policy discussions. For example, view EASD's intervention during Serbia's VNR session here: www.women2030.org/serbia



The Gender impact assessment and monitoring tool (GIM tool¹) has been developed within the framework of the Women2030 programme, with the objective of providing a methodology to assess and monitor the implementation of the SDGs at national and local levels, and to support women and gender CSOs to implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, focusing on SDG 5 - Enforcing Gender Equality. Following the methodology of the GIM tool, a total of 2117 respondents have been interviewed in the region, 1314 women and 803 men.

¹ <https://www.wecf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FINAL-GIM-Tool-Jan-19.pdf>

This report provides an analysis of the progress, gaps and challenges identified in implementing the SDGs, with specific regards to gender equality (SDG5). It also explores each of the critical areas of concern, providing country-specific examples and some of the significant contributions that have been made by women's CSOs in the region. Finally, the report offers concrete recommendations to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs over the next 5 years and translate the many commitments made to the women of the EECCA region into concrete actions.

All figures used in this report are taken from the Countries' Reports unless when other sources are mentioned.



Example shadow reports of Armenia and Serbia

Gauging EECCA region's progress

The countries that form the basis for the EECCA (Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia) regional alternative report vary in size, population, customs and policies. All of them range between lower and upper-middle-income economies, with a population between 2 million and 9 million inhabitants. Some of these countries (Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan) formerly belonged to the Soviet Union and have relatively new political institutions struggling to find equilibrium.

| Country | Population in millions (2018) ² | Type of economy (2019) ³ | GNI per capita (2018) ⁴ | Political regime ⁵ | CEDAW ratification ⁶ |
|------------------|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Albania | 2.87 | upper-middle income | \$4860 | democracy | 1994 |
| Armenia | 2.95 | upper-middle income | \$4230 | democracy | 1993 |
| Georgia | 3.73 | upper-middle income | \$4440 | democracy | 1994 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 6.32 | lower-middle income | \$1220 | democracy | 1997 |
| North Macedonia* | 2.08 | upper-middle income | \$5450 | democracy | 1994 |
| Moldova | 3.55 | lower-middle income | \$2980 | democracy | 1994 |
| Serbia | 6.98 | upper-middle income | \$6390 | democracy | 2001 |
| Tajikistan | 9.10 | low income | \$1010 | Closed anocracy | 1993 |

*NB: During the period of the Women2030 program, the country Macedonia changed name, becoming North Macedonia. In this publication, there might be occurrences where the old name is used, particularly in references of previous assessments and reports.

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

³ <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>

⁴ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD>

⁵ <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/political-regime-updated2016>

⁶ <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>



Map of the Eastern European, the Caucasus, and Central Asia region

International and Regional Human Rights Instruments for Gender Equality

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 232 indicators and prompts all countries to cooperate in order to achieve them. They are not legally binding, which means that countries can decide on their individual focus on the SDGs and choose the relevant indicators, goals and targets according to their national contexts. For example, the Georgian government chose to omit target 5.4 “recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work”.

All the countries in this report are parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and signed on to Agenda 2030. However, the degree of commitment to the national level implementation of the SDGs varies from one country to another.

As clearly noted in most of the alternative reports, these countries have introduced constitutional, legal and policy reforms since the beginning of the millennium. In recent years, this process has intensified, through drafting of new constitutions and introduction of several gender responsive legislation or reforms to address discrimination and disregard of women’s rights. Gender policies and plans of action, land reforms, and macroeconomic policy reforms have been undertaken, and these have facilitated the implementation of the SDGs. The reforms also attempt to address other critical issues like violence against women and women’s participation in decision-making.

Some governments have been especially pro-active regarding the national implementation of the SDGs. Albania hence dedicated an Inter-Ministerial Committee on the SDGs, while

Moldova created a National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development. Serbia was however most involved with regards to the SDGs as a member of the Open Working Group on the SDGs and it took an active part in formulating the Agenda 2030.

The accession to EU membership is considered a key priority by some of the countries in the region, such as Serbia or North Macedonia. This goal prompts governments to try fulfilling international standards that align with the EU accession criteria, such as the Agenda 2030.

Overall, significant progress has been made in terms of improving and harmonizing the legislative framework for the defence of human rights, however, there are still additional efforts to be made in terms of its implementation. Gender equality has been legislated upon, but the regional situation reflected in the country reports appears more nuanced as these initiatives do not pervade through all of society, despite gender equality efforts having a long institutional Soviet tradition.

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women's rights are known as one of the key factors in ensuring that gender equality is anchored within the policies and structures of national governments. State VNRs indicate that various countries have created a Ministry of Gender as well as gender desks, and have appointed gender officers in various ministries and state agencies such as police stations. However, in practice, these structures are rarely located at the highest level within the different institutions, thus limiting their capacity to influence decisions and practices. They also tend to lack technical capabilities and resources. Nevertheless, in terms of progress, almost all countries reporting indicated that national policies on gender are now in place and others have gone ahead to develop an Action Plan to facilitate its implementation.

Overall, the region has made significant progress in the adoption of sub-regional, regional and international instruments that promote and protect the human rights of women, but the mainstreaming of gender equality within institutions and legislation, policies and programmes has not yet been reached.



Installation of solar water heating systems in Georgia

Women in Power and Decision-making



Target 5.5
Target 5. A



Target 16.7
Target 16. B

With regards to the timeframe, women's hold of power and political representation has improved over the years in all the countries surveyed for the report. Political representation has been one of the major instances of change for women and one of the easiest to measure for countries.

For example, during the 2017 Albanian's election, women comprised 40% of the candidates, and 28% of elected parliamentarians. With an increase of 10% compared to 2013, this share of female representatives is the highest achieved in Albania to date. It was also the first time that the Deputy Prime Minister elected, Senida Mesi, was a woman. However, she only kept the position for little more than a year. In Moldova, 41.8% of the registered candidates for the parliamentary elections of 2019 were women.

A similar trend appears in all countries in this report. Women made up 12.4% of Serbia's parliament members in 2002 and 35.6% in 2015. However, despite 26% of Government members being women, including the Prime Minister, Ana Barnabic, women only represent 6% of mayors (2018). This stresses a major barrier: while national representation has globally improved, it is not necessarily the case at the local level.

**IN 2019, 41,8% OF THE
REGISTERED CANDIDATES
FOR PARLIAMENT IN
MOLDOVA WERE WOMEN**

**28% OF THE ELECTED
MEMBERS FOR PARLIAMENT
IN ALBANIA WERE WOMEN
IN 2017**

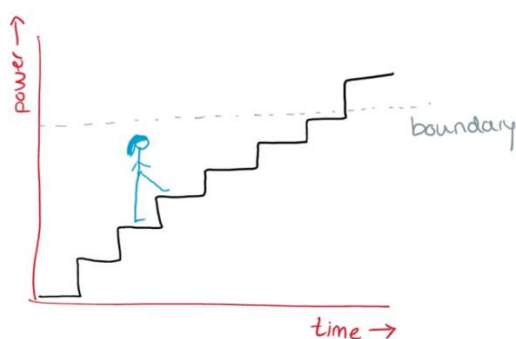
**THE PORTION OF FEMALE
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN
SERBIA GREW BY 23.2%
BETWEEN 2002 AND 2015**

In Georgia, only 15% of parliamentarians are women. The situation is even worse at the local level where women hold no governorship, filling only one mayoral post out of 64 and just 13% of seats in local councils. Furthermore, the latest legislative initiative to enact gender quotas was supported by more than 37,000 Georgian citizens, but Georgia's parliament rejected the bill in March 2018, because it did not receive enough support from Members of Parliament.

In Moldova, an increase in women's participation was noted at the local level. The share of women mayors increased from 18.0% in 2011 to 21.8% in the elections of 2019. These progresses can be explained by the introduction of the 40% representation quota of both sexes in the political and public decision-making process, as well as the distribution of women and men

on the party list in the electoral rolls (out of 10 places, 4 places were covered by each of the sexes), with sanctions for the parties that do not comply with these provisions. Programmes were launched to provide training on political empowerment for women running for local and parliamentary elections. These programmes targeted women from disadvantaged groups, such as women with disabilities and Roma women to run for local elections.

The Gender Assessments conducted stress similar results: respondents tend to describe women's political participation as low or show less proclivity to support it. Accession to power remains therefore a severe disadvantage for women in all the assessed regions despite governmental and civil society efforts in several countries to favour political representation of women.



Although the power of women is increasing over time in the EECCA countries, women continue to face boundaries in, for example, decision-making processes.

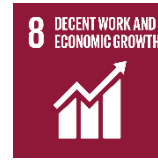
Women and Economic Empowerment



Target 1.5

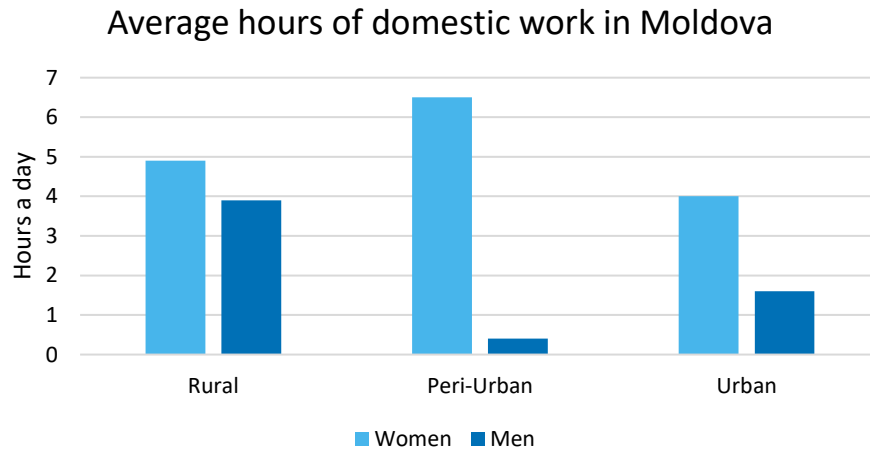


Target 5.4
Target 5.5
Target 5. A



Target 8.5
Target 8.6
Target 8.8

Women's lack of empowerment is not limited to political representation. Disparities appear in employment as well. Due to persisting gender stereotypes, unpaid care work is still considered women's responsibility, which leads to various forms of discrimination against women. It is mostly women, who leave their jobs, work part-time or do not take on any income generating activity at all in order to be able to take care of children and family members. Rural women are particularly at risk compared to women from urban and semi-urban areas.



Significantly, in Serbia, 80% of people who give up their jobs for "family reasons" are women. 98% of those who work in households, without other paid activity on the side are women. Moreover, 79% of single-parent families are made up of mother and children. The Serbian example applies to the rest of the region as well: family care responsibilities appear to be the primary cause of the labour force participation gap between men and women, in countries where unemployment and poverty are already high.

Such family configuration leads to impoverished participation of women in the labour market and allows the glass ceiling to remain for most women surveyed in this report. In the area of women and the economy, despite their strong presence in the informal and agricultural sector, women's access to and participation in the management of resources is very low. According to the FAO, in 2014 there were almost seven times fewer female managers of

agricultural enterprises compared with male managers, and women represented a 13% share in the management of agricultural enterprises.⁷

Another indicator of the obstacles faced by women in employment is the gender pay gap. In North Macedonia, where women make up only 39.5% of the employed, they earn 17.9% less than men per hour of work and represent 64.2% of the country's economically inactive population. In 2018 in Serbia, women account for only 44% of those employed and face a pay gap of 11% compared to men. Additionally, women are mostly employed in low paid service sectors compared to men. These figures, however, are not dissimilar to employment rate and pay gap in high income countries: the average pay gap in Europe is 16% (EIGE, 2019).

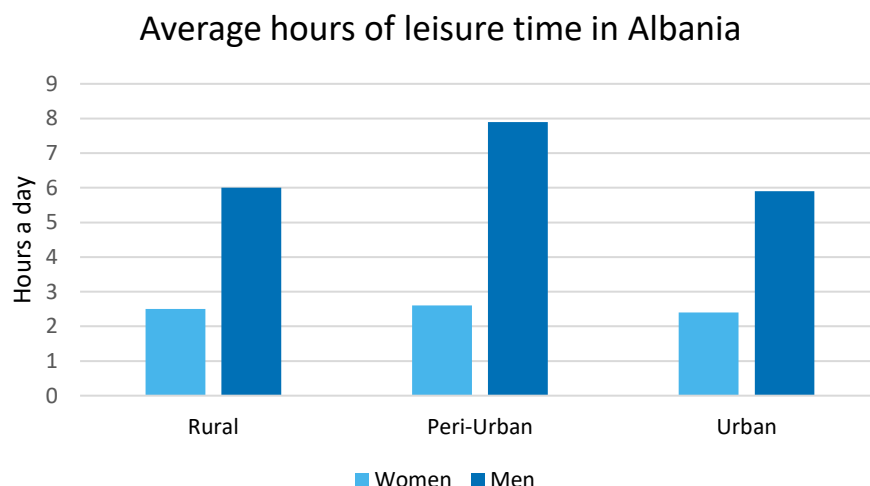
Another dimension to consider when looking at the gendered repartition of paid work, is that labour migration mainly concerns men. In Tajikistan, almost all men (90%) migrate in order to find employment, which leads the majority of people who are not in paid work to be women. This provokes large differences in the distribution of unpaid labour, where women are often left behind, making them solely responsible for childcare, domestic work and generating income on their own.



Fetching water in Kyrgyzstan – Annabelle Avril

The logical consequence of the EECCA region's patriarchal mentality and gender norms that discourage women from accessing paid employment, is that women are required to bear the additional burden of housework, food preparation, caring and teaching of the children. This additional unpaid work performed by women has a cost on their wealth, recognition and well-being. One indicator is the comparison between men and women's leisure time according to the data that CSOs have gathered and analysed in their gender assessments. In Albania, for example, in peri-urban areas, women spend 4.2 hours less than men on leisure activities everyday (2.4 hours in urban areas).

⁷ Gender equality, social protection and rural development in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Insights from the Region, FAO 2017



The same pattern appears in North Macedonia. Women in rural areas have 2.7 hours daily less leisure time and they spend 4.6 hours daily more than men doing domestic work. The gender gaps in peri-urban and urban areas are similar: women from these regions spend 1.5 hours daily less than men on leisure activities, and 1.7–1.8 hours daily more than men on domestic work. Despite regional variations and differences between rural and urban inhabitants, women spend significantly more time on domestic labour, leaving them less time than men for leisure activities. Over 60% of women respondents in Georgia name equal distribution of domestic labour among the most important challenges to gender equality.

Hence, despite significant legal changes, gender gaps and inequalities continue to exist across all levels. Domestic and unpaid care work continue to burden women, depriving them from accessing the labour market, equal pay and equal opportunity. It is hard to tell whether the economic growth most of the countries in the sub-region have experienced has positively affected women's labour participation due to the lack of pre-existing data.

Women's marital status and cultural tradition



Target 1.4



Target 5.3 Target 5.C

In terms of women's human rights, most countries have customary laws that still contain discriminatory provisions against women. Discrimination is manifested in the inequalities regarding control and decision-making within households, in relation to inheritance, divorce and custody of children- which are all important aspects of the promotion, protection and fulfilment of women's rights.

In some of the countries surveyed, ancient cultural traditions persist and reinforce gender stereotypes. While marriage under 18 is prohibited by the Criminal Code (article 140) in Georgia, the practice continues unabated in the unofficial realm. While no official data is available to measure the extent of the practice in the country, the data on underage parents can provide some insight: based on the childbirth data of the Ministry of Justice, in 2018, there were 715 underage mothers, and 23 underage fathers registered. Underage marriage also negatively affects girls' access to education in the country: in 2016, out of 11,741 total school dropouts from young people, 257 were officially recorded to have been caused by marriage (576 in 2015), but a large percentage of cases were unclassified. In Tajikistan, the implementation of the UN Committee's recommendation on CEDAW to increase the minimum age of marriage from 17 to 18 years played a significant role in improving access to education for girls. However, the number of girls choosing to leave school prematurely is on the rise, due to economic reasons and early marriage. Child marriage also still happens in Albania, as well as sex selection at birth. In Kyrgyzstan, while polygamy is illegal, it remains practiced and 22% of the population would support its legalisation. Cultural practices, such as the kidnapping of brides and early marriage for girls also persist, though they are being increasingly challenged by women's rights NGOs.

**41% OF WOMEN IN
KYRGYZSTAN HAVE NOT
REGISTERED THEIR MARRIAGE**

**ONLY 3% OF THE KYRGYZ MEN
HAVE NOT REGISTERED THEIR
MARRIAGE**

Women's marital status translates these inequalities. 41% of Kyrgyz women who are married have not registered their union, while only 3% of men have not. This is explained by customary laws, such as early marriage, unregistered civil marriage (including religious marriage, such as Muslim marriage), limited or no access to education and inheritance practices. These laws govern women's access to economic resources and continue to dictate women's lives. They cause women to stay in unwanted marriages, so as not to lose their rights in the household or child custody as these rights are typically vested in the husband. Additionally, men often

register property, cars or equipment on their parent's or unmarried sibling's name, to circumvent any rights their wife may have in this property upon divorce.

Gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are therefore still prevalent in families and society at large. Customary laws limit women's access to education and economic resources and violate their inheritance rights.

Living conditions: hygiene and sanitation



Target 6.2

Despite the region's economic growth, poverty remains the number one threat for most of the countries that comprise this report, where a third of inhabitants live under the poverty line. Women are more severely affected than men, notably because they are more represented in rural areas, which are less developed.

For instance, in Tajikistan, poverty correlates with residence in rural areas, a high number of children, low education and a high level of employment in agriculture, where earned incomes are very low.⁸ In North Macedonia, almost 15% of the population, mostly Roma, live without legal homes, which means that they do not have access to basic services, such as water or electricity, or even an official identity document.

**15% OF THE POPULATION
OF NORTH MACEDONIA
HAVE NO LEGAL HOMES
AND THUS, NO ACCESS
TO BASIC NEEDS**

Such level of poverty strongly impacts living conditions. In all country reports, water and sanitation were the most recurrent priorities listed. Water scarcity burdens families, as well as institutions and schools. Women in rural areas also face the additional burden of collecting and treating water, as well as serious health risks resulting from poor health management conditions during their periods or pregnancies. Lack of proper wastewater treatment services in rural and peri-urban areas significantly affects proper living conditions and causes problems in water quality in regions with scarce drinking water supply.

Children and young people often avoid using school toilets because of inadequate hygiene practices. This results not only from a lack of water but also from a lack of maintenance – schools lack toilet paper, soap, towels and waste bins. Additionally, public toilets often lack door-locks or even doors and are sometimes even shut down, as a result of poor hygienic conditions. This situation is particularly problematic for people who menstruate, who need healthy sanitary conditions and privacy whilst menstruating.

⁸ Migration, remittances and climate resilience in Tajikistan. CAREC (2017).
https://carececo.org/eng_P2%20WP1%20Migration,%20remittances_FIN.pdf

In Georgia, 45% of surveyed women declare that their daughters or an adolescent girl they know do not have satisfactory sanitary conditions at school, while 46% of the surveyed population in Moldova reported that they have no decent sanitation and hygiene conditions

**46% OF THE
PARTICIPANTS OF THE
GENDER ASSESSMENT IN
GEORGIA INDICATES TO
HAVE NO DECENT
SANITATION AND
HYGIENE CONDITIONS
AT HOME**

at home. In North Macedonia, respondents are satisfied regarding access to sanitation at work, but more than 90% of girls are dissatisfied with access to sanitation in school. In addition, Armenia still has about 570 rural communities that have no drinking water and sanitation service providers.

Consequently, many female students and pupils stay out of school during their menstrual period, which has serious and far-reaching consequences. For instance, in Tajikistan, sanitation issues limit young menstruators' access to quality education, and contributes to high rates of unemployment and low wages: only 1 in 3 university students are female.

Sanitary conditions hence emerged as a core issue for all countries. This lack of access to sanitation threatens the health of people who menstruate and place a barrier between youth's access to education, especially in rural areas where decent amenities can be non-existent.

Menstrual health remains a taboo subject in many cultures and countries. Countless women and girls face the challenge of managing their periods safely, hygienically, confidently and with dignity. They suffer not only from socio-cultural discrimination and economic disadvantage but are also vulnerable to serious health problems due to lack of access to information or hygiene products such as sanitary pads.

Case study: ECOSAN toilets in North Macedonia



To counter shortage of water, WECF in the rural areas of North Macedonia has supervised the installation of **ecological sanitation- Ecosan** (WASH Project). Urine-diverting dry toilets reduce the use of chemicals, are affordable and produce contents that can be used as organic fertilizers, among other things, while improving access to safe sanitation.

Climate Action and Access to Clean Energy



Target 7.1
Target 7.A



Target 13.1
Target 13.2
Target 13.3

In many countries in EECCA's region, the degradation and pollution of the environment, loss of biodiversity, and climate change disproportionately affect women and widens gender inequalities.

Environmental degradation and pollution have led to lack of clean drinking water supply systems and food insecurity, which pose serious health risks for communities. In Tajikistan, while the agricultural sector remains the largest consumer of water, accounting for 90% of water use in the country, the irrational use of water is causing degradation of the soil, soil infertility and soil erosion. Meanwhile, over 2/3 of the rural population in the country depends on agriculture to earn an income.⁹ Women living in rural areas are particularly at risk of not having proper access to drinking water supplies. In North Macedonia, 3% of the population does not have access to clean drinking water, and the rate of access to clean drinking water for marginalised populations is at an intermediate level. Many of the countries surveyed have a strong reliance on agriculture, a sector where women predominate and experience difficulties to access water and sanitation because of water scarcity or lack of proper infrastructure.

Energy poverty has an important gender dimension as it disproportionately affects women. This is especially true in rural areas, where women have less economic opportunities and spend more time at home, providing for energy sources, such as collecting biomass, fulfilling household chores and preparing meals with unclean sources of energy, causing indoor air pollution. In Georgia for instance, air pollution in homes is 30 times higher than the levels recommended by the WHO (World Bank, 2015). Pollution from firewood puts people, and particularly women who are more exposed, at higher risk of developing cataracts, cardiovascular diseases, asthma, perinatal diseases and other health conditions (World Bank, 2012).

Armenia's report denounces, among others, governmental economic investments in polluting sectors, such as mining, and calls for governmental attention on prioritization of investments into sustainable economic sectors. Examples of actions taken by women's rights

⁹ Migration, remittances and climate resilience in Tajikistan. CAREC (2017).
https://carececo.org/eng_P2%20WP1%20Migration,%20remittances_FIN.pdf

organisations and grassroots groups include the increased participation of women in the **development and management of alternative sources of energy**, energy saving devices for home use and capacity building of women on the use of natural resources such as water and fuel wood in a most sustainable manner.

It is to be noted that energy efficiency and renewable energy is largely absent in the nationalised SDG framework of the reviewed countries. The progress in this respect is primarily driven by CSOs and despite the efforts from civil society activists, lack of political will at the governmental level stalls the process.

Case study: Solar-water heaters in Georgia



Important steps have been taken by CSOs in reducing energy poverty and increasing the use of clean and sustainable energy sources. Hence, in Georgia, **low-cost solar water heaters** have been installed by energy cooperatives in rural parts of the country which provide easy access to clean and sustainable energy, reduce fuel costs and contribute to the mitigation of environmental degradation.

Gender-based violence



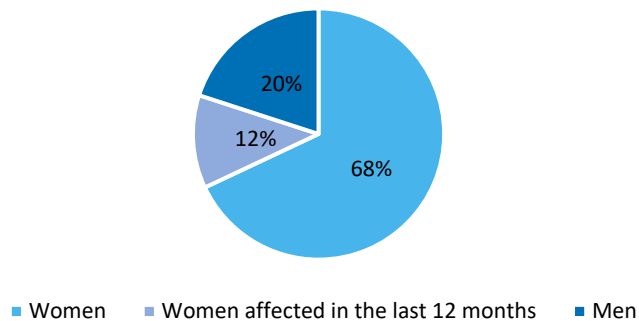
Target 5.2

Target 5.3

In Albania, figures show that gender-based violence remains prevalent, but more importantly, is gaining more visibility: while less than ten cases had been reported ten years ago, the year 2017 had 4,543 reports of gender-based violence. This translates increased concern and decreased taboo surrounding the issue.

Domestic violence is a major issue in Georgia, since almost one quarter of women (22%) and one third of men (31%) believe that wife-beating is justifiable under certain circumstances. Meanwhile, in Serbia, women make up about 80% of those affected by this form of violence and between 9% and 12% of women declare having been subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by their current or former intimate partner within the last 12 months according to the Serbian Gender Voluntary Report (2018).

Percentage of women and men affected by domestic violence in Serbia



In spite of the above, we have little information on the most prevalent forms of GBV and which populations are most at risk, especially from an intersectional perspective. In Georgia for instance, sexual violence is not recognised within the marital sphere. The definition of sexual violence does not include the lack of voluntary and genuine consent from the victim; and investigative procedures to measure the prevalence of GBV are outdated, and discriminatory towards its survivors. Although this issue is getting more attention, the lack of pre-existing or recent data makes it difficult to deduce whether any progress has been made in recent years, which calls for more campaigns and polls.

RECOMMENDATIONS from WOMEN2030 on the SDGs

The countries' alternative reports have provided recommendations regarding the critical areas of concern discussed above.

1. Increasing awareness and accountability for a Rights-based Agenda2030

For the most part, people are uninformed about the SDGs and women are unaware of their rights.

In order to ensure an implementation of Agenda 2030 which is rights-based and gender-just, organisations working on gender equality and women's rights should have their capacities built on the SDG processes as well as its relations to gender equality, including trainings and subgranting to grassroots groups to support local initiatives which contribute to the implementation of the SDGs. Capacity building initiatives should be combined with advocacy activities in which women's groups engage with their decision-makers to hold them accountable on existing gaps and barriers to reach a gender-just implementation of the SDGs. Countries are advised to organise public consultations with CSOs, and especially to provide a policy space for women's organisations, and integrate their recommendations into the VNRs.

In addition, there is a need to raise awareness on the Sustainable Development Goals and their interconnectivity in the region, among the general public, and among national and local authorities, to ensure a broader support to a rights-based implementation of Agenda2030. The inclusion of women, youth, marginalised groups, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities is particularly important in this regard. To this end, it is recommended to initiate awareness campaigns to mobilise civil society: systematic and targeted efforts should be undertaken in order to raise awareness and build the capacity of marginalised groups on their opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. This could be done through organising targeted educational programs for women, targeted financial support to feminist and women's rights CSOs, initiatives and networks which promote gender equality and financial support to women entrepreneurs.

2. Ensure access to sanitation and hygiene

As stated above, there is an urgent need for action to improve living conditions. National programs are needed to ensure the provision of safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, especially menstrual health, affordable and reliable energy, as well as adequate funding for implementation. Rural populations in particular are severely affected and specific programmes and actions that address their needs and priorities should be implemented. The interconnections between SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 6 (Water and Sanitation) need to be fully recognised, and specific programmes addressing the gendered dimensions of access to water and sanitation need to be developed and implemented in the region. Government programs should be implemented in order to ensure that girls and women have access to clean private toilets as well as to sanitary products at home, at school, at work, and in public institutions.

Menstrual Health Management – MHM

- Menstruation must no longer be a taboo subject. This requires information campaigns as well as compulsory school lessons on menstruation – for all genders.
- Nationwide standards for school toilets can be introduced that include adequate MHM.
- In some cases, financial support is needed for menstruating people to be able to afford sanitary products: tax reductions on those products; free training in how to produce their own sustainable and affordable products

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene – WASH

- Funds invested in the WASH sector should be allocated to the poorest of the poor – to support the gradual realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation. Investment decisions should not focus exclusively on achieving the SDG indicators, but should give priority to reducing inequalities and protect human rights.
- All people should be supplied with sanitary facilities and with drinking water. In addition, financial support is needed for accompanying measures that support a change in sanitation and hygiene behaviour.
- Investments in governance structures, institutions, legal framework and anti-corruption must be ensured to ensure the sustainability of WASH activities.
- The strengths of NGOs should be used here: in raising awareness and involving the population in a participatory way and approach for building local capacities and institutions, as well as in monitoring government action. It is recommended that every WASH infrastructure investment is accompanied by significant topic oriented measures to strengthen the system, worth 10% of the total budget.

3. Data availability and SDG monitoring

There is a lack of sufficient data to measure the implementation progress of the relevant SDGs and their indicators at national level. It is therefore strongly recommended to develop further data collection on the SDGs so they can be fully monitored. In particular, **gender disaggregated data** is needed. This priority has been especially stressed in the shadow reports of Armenia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Serbia.

The Armenian report, for example, could not deliver gender disaggregated data in several areas because they did not exist, which makes it very hard to monitor and evaluate SDGs and their gender-just implementation effectively. It should be governments' priority to provide sufficient and adequate data for NGOs and CSOs to produce their research: indeed, without measures, one cannot solve the issues faced. Data collected by civil society, which is participatory, in-depth and qualitative, should be taken seriously, and with the same weight as national census data.

Therefore, a measure considered important is **information, training and funding of women's rights and feminist organisations and other public stakeholders** on the gender-just implementation and monitoring of the SDGs and the development of their own alternative reports and assessments based on community-based data, to bridge existing data gaps and hold governments accountable on the development and implementation of gender-just policies.

These measures should aim to strengthen the supply of gender sensitive statistical information at national and regional levels necessary to monitor progress, conduct policy gender analysis, and effectively implement the Agenda 2030, including at the governmental level.

4. Increase women's participation in decision-making

Progress achieved in the area of women's participation in decision-making is due to ongoing pressure from civil society. To achieve equal participation of women, it is necessary to expand the involvement of civil society by raising awareness on the topic, but also to provide spaces and support enabling environment for women's rights and feminist CSOs to take part in policy processes both politically and financially at the national and regional levels, for instance by supporting the UNECE Regional Civil Society Mechanism (UNECE-RCEM) which enables cross-constituency coordination for regional policy processes. This will further strengthen women's forums and increase their influence.

Although women are engaged in decision-making at community level in some countries of the EECCA region, gender stereotypes and cultural barriers limit their meaningful participation at the local and national levels. In order to overcome structural barriers to women's participation in decision making, it is recommended to introduce legislation on gender quotas for the parliament as well as local government bodies. This recommendation has been stressed in several reports (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Serbia, Armenia) and requires quotas ranging from 30 to 40% of women in institutions. Some countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, already have quotas on a governmental level but none at the regional level.

Moreover, it is necessary to ensure the implementation of a respective legislation by monitoring and holding institutions accountable. Hence, there could be a sanction of deregistering candidates who do not respect this provision.

In addition, information about women's rights is essential and should go hand in hand with monitoring the implementation of existing laws. Communication campaigns to incite women to engage in decision-making on all levels and capacity-building and mentoring to provide them with the tools to make it happen are needed.

5. Challenge Gender Stereotypes on Women's Unpaid and Paid Work, Family Relationship and SRHR

In the region, family care responsibilities are the primary cause of the labour force participation gap between men and women. Education and raising awareness on these issues from an early age can help to overcome traditional gender roles and ensure equal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work. At present, women in the region who have access to paid work earn 10% to 30% less than men. Therefore, gender insensitive labour laws must be reformed to ensure women's access to formal paid work and equal pay.

The Moldova's alternative report suggests implementing 14 days of paternity leave to increase parental investment of men and allow women to share childcare with their partners. In Kyrgyzstan, the Gender Assessment participants listed improving pre-school childcare and getting official marriage and divorce papers as their highest priorities. The Georgian report recommends communication and better coordination between all relevant sectors –

education, law enforcement, church, healthcare – for effective prevention of childhood marriages.

Regarding SRHR, in Moldova, the levels of awareness of a healthy lifestyle, reproductive health and family planning among teenagers and young women, especially those living in rural and remote areas is very low. The total maternal mortality rate was 15.3% in 2018: in rural areas there are 24.3 (per 100.000 live births) more female deaths during pregnancy or childbirth than in urban areas.

In Georgia, family planning services and contraceptives are not covered by the state healthcare program. Accessibility of information and quality services in reproductive health are limited due to the absence of hospitals and consultation centres, particularly in rural areas. Despite the Georgian legislation guaranteeing that patients aged 14 and older have the right to seek certain medical services independently, medical professionals often notify the patients' parents against the patient's will and seek their approval prior to delivering any service. This practice limits accessibility of reproductive healthcare for young girls and drives them to seek illegal means to access health services, which puts their health and life at risk.

Access to information and sexual education, and elimination of discrimination, of ill-treatment, and violence towards women within the health care system, especially in perinatal or obstetrics services, are key elements to promote women's well-being and advance sexual and reproductive health and rights. Communication campaigns to prevent GBV and reinforcement of institutions that secure sustainable support and services for victims, for their protection, rehabilitation, empowerment, and access to justice are to be implemented.

6. Support gender-just climate solutions

Strong attention should be given to the role of women, indigenous peoples and local communities, who have taken the lead in developing local, targeted, and gender-just initiatives which benefit their whole communities and contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation. Their key role needs to be acknowledged: their participation in the renewable energy and resources sector should be stimulated and supported through accessible funding, and their full participation and sharing of experience in national and international climate negotiations facilitated.

Considering the negative consequences of climate change, governments should phase out investment in unsustainable sectors, such as coal or mining, and adopt the "polluters pay" principle. All funds should be reinvested to support and upscale local, clean and gender-just energy initiatives, such as energy cooperatives working on solar, or agroecological practices.

Under the new Gender Action Plan II (GAP) of the Lima Work Programme, adopted in December 2019 during COP25, governments are called to contribute to or lead actions for gender

equality in the UNFCCC processes, including in areas of capacity building and in the implementation of gender-responsive programmes and actions. In the implementation of the GAP, governments should work in collaboration with women's rights and feminist organizations at the national and local levels to fully integrate gender considerations within the UNFCCC processes. This includes building gender expertise on climate actions and programmes, for instance by conducting gender analysis, gender budgeting, and collecting of sex and gender disaggregated data to respond best to the needs and priorities of women's rights and feminist groups. This also includes sharing of knowledge and best practices to enhance the leadership of grassroots and indigenous women and fully recognize their contributions to climate mitigation and adaptation. Finally, this includes enhancing a gender responsive access to climate finance, by supporting capacity building of women's rights and feminist groups and simplified procedures to facilitate direct access to climate finance mechanisms.

Finally, targeted legislation is needed to ensure women's rights to land ownership and access to natural resources. In addition, national action plans and agricultural reforms are needed to improve climate resilience in all countries.

Conclusion: Emerging trends and priorities

This report provides the perspectives of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) NGOs and CSOs through a regional alternative report based on consultations, meetings, desk research, national alternative reports and Gender Assessments.

The reviewed alternative reports highlight similar obstacles of diverse degrees and high variability depending on the characteristics of the population studied. Hence, we saw that people living in rural or peri-urban areas are largely prone to poverty, lack of access to safe water and sanitation; but they are also marginalised in decision-making and paid work. Other characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, economic and marital status are key to comprehend the inequalities within each country. In Moldova, for example, the nationalization process of theSDGs involved many CSOs, including women's rights and gender equality NGOs. Unfortunately, many citizens from marginalised groups, in rural areas and migrants, as well as LGBTQI+ and gender non-conforming people, are not included in the Agenda 2030 (there are no specific targets or indicators focusing on these groups), partly due to insufficient measures from governments. A deep **intersectional analysis** should be carried out by governments, national institutions and policy makers to explore these country-level discrepancies and address them. The legal framework needs to undergo continuous improvement through inclusive participatory processes to become more gender sensitive with an intersectional perspective.

All countries in the region have strengthened national institutions and policies for the advancement of gender equality, equity and women's empowerment. Some of these initiatives are dedicated to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs and oversee the integration of gender concerns in national development policies, programmes and budgets at all levels. Persistent concerns remain about the actual budget, the **implementation** and willpower invested in those initiatives.

Many women continue to have limited access to productive resources, assets and opportunities to make and share critical decisions on how they are utilized and managed. Recognition of their contributions and significance to the maintenance of good economic performance of their countries remains more rhetorical and has not translated into clear measures. In short, women's access to decision-making processes, positions and ownership is systematically lower than men's and varies from one geographical region to another.

The situation is made worse by the **persistent poverty** that is affecting an important proportion of the region's population, namely women. Women's poverty is attributed to limited access to and control over productive resources such as land, credit or **clean energy** and limited control over the proceeds of their labour and lack of adequate support.

There is also **lack of equal access to education** (as seen with the issue of **water and sanitation**) thus limiting the capacity to access information and opportunities for advancement. The report emphasizes that one of the most fundamental and serious problems women in the region face is the lack of implementation of the legal reforms in areas traditionally governed by **customs and religious laws**. Women suffer discrimination due to non-uniform marriage and divorce laws, the application of customary property laws that still favour men's ownership of land, but also through violence and patriarchal gender norms that restrain their freedom and access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

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