Climate Change, Disaster Resilience and Gender Equality in Europe and CIS

What are the challenges?

Earthquakes, floods, droughts, hailstorms, temperature extremes and climate change are all natural hazards that occur in Europe and CIS. They impact entire communities, but men and women are affected differently. Unequal social, political and economic status, as well as physical differences, create specific vulnerabilities for women and girls and put them at greater risk.

CLOSE-UP: THE GENDER IMPACT OF THE 2015 FEBRUARY FLOODS IN SOUTHEAST ALBANIA

- Agriculture, mostly informal, is the main source of income in affected areas. Floods affected 15,000 farms and households, and 1,400 farmhouses were inundated.
- As the holdings were mainly registered in their husband’s name, only 10 percent of applicants for subsidies were women and a mere 5 percent benefited from technical services.
- The floods damaged crops and land, forcing women to spend hours on clean-up work, which reduced their productivity.
- Gender-based violence increased, and women-headed households faced higher risk.

1 UN Women, Gender Inequality and Floods Impacts in Albania, 2015.

Economic status:

- Because of their low ownership of resources, women have reduced access to recovery aid. If holdings are only registered in their husband’s name, women have fewer opportunities to benefit from the subsidies and support provided in the aftermath of a disaster. This prolongs the recovery process and affects their quality of life.

- Disaster-related damage increases women’s workload. They have to spend more time fetching drinking water, food and wood for heating, in addition to their family responsibilities.

Leadership and participation:

- Low participation of women in the design of disaster preparedness plans and the implementation of recovery programmes often results in their specific needs and priorities being neglected. Ignoring women’s need for privacy and security, for instance, leaves them vulnerable to gender-based violence in temporary shelters.

- Women’s exclusion from social networks translates into less fair treatment during rescue and recovery efforts.

Social norms:

- Social and cultural norms that restrict women’s ability to swim or climb also affect their ability to save themselves in emergencies.

- Women who have caring responsibilities or are in the final stage of pregnancy have a lower chance of survival.

- Maternal and child mortality rates increase when the basic healthcare infrastructure is damaged or health-related expenditures are reduced following a disaster.

Women and men, girls and boys jointly clean the streets of the capital Tbilisi after floods hit Georgia in June 2015 (Photo: David Khizanishvili).
UNDP Response

In response to these challenges, UNDP works with national partners to:

- Apply gender equality principles and ensure that women and men are equally involved in the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes, and strategies aimed at reducing disaster and climate risk.
- Collect, analyse and use sex- and age-disaggregated data to assess disaster risk and the impact for women and men.
- Ensure that disaster risk reduction, climate mitigation and adaptation programmes specifically support women and boost their resilience.
- Promote equality between women and men in decision making, job creation and reintegration programmes in post-disaster situations.

UNDP in Action

- In Armenia, UNDP is strengthening the risk reduction skills and knowledge of the government by integrating gender equality principles into national and local action plans. This includes raising awareness of the authorities and the society concerning the gender dimensions of disaster, and introducing gender-responsive measures such as assessing the different ways disasters impact women and men, collecting sex- and age-disaggregated data, and increasing women’s participation in decision-making and programme implementation. UNDP also works with local communities. In Tavush and Vayots Dzor, UNDP has supported women-headed farms and taught farmers how to adapt their agricultural activities to climate change through the implementation of climate risk mitigation plans.
- In Serbia, UNDP is enhancing partnerships and the capacities of women’s organizations to ensure equal representation and leadership in disaster planning and management forums and activities, including monitoring and reporting. UNDP supports 11 organizations for the implementation of gender-sensitive local community initiatives in disaster risk reduction.

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- Following a massive flood in Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2014, UNDP prioritized the rehabilitation of households headed by women and ensured that women benefited from cash-for-work and employment programmes. A total of 132 public institutions, including one-stop-shops, were reconstructed, enabling the recovery of a significant number of public jobs predominantly occupied by women. In cooperation with the International Organization for Migration, UNDP provided psychosocial counselling through centres for social work.
- In Kosovo*, UNDP conducted assessments, culminating in the publication of a report that identified critical factors for building up the resilience of women during disasters, such as overcoming ‘cultural’ vulnerability factors, taking into account women’s inability to swim and climb, as well as their responsibilities as carers for the most vulnerable members of the family.
- In Tajikistan, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, UNDP has worked with partners to incorporate a gender dimension into disaster risk reduction plans and policies, by using quotas to ensure that disaster risk reduction committees have at least 30 percent female members.

* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

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