

Gender equality and women's empowerment in Europe and Central Asia

Results in 2016



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.



Introduction

Gender equality and women's empowerment are critical to achieving [Agenda 2030](#) and the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#). To successfully tackle poverty, inequalities and climate change, women must be equal partners to men in shaping the future of our societies.

In the countries and territories of Europe and Central Asia, there are persisting inequalities between women and men particularly in income and economic opportunities, political representation and the distribution of unpaid domestic and care work. Women also experience violence and discrimination on a daily basis.

Inclusive economic growth

Gender inequalities in work and employment persist in the region. In most countries and territories, the labour force participation of women is 10 to 20 percent less than that of men. A major barrier that women face in entering the labour force continues to be their unfair share of unpaid child care and domestic work. In some countries women do five times as much unpaid work as men. In addition, women earn on average only 68 percent of what men earn, an income gap with multiple consequences.

These trends underline the need to address the systemic obstacles women face in entering the labour market, breaking glass ceilings and achieving economic freedom. In 2016, UNDP supported efforts to boost women's economic opportunities by:

- Implementing job creation programmes;
- Providing women-led enterprises with grants and business development and mentoring support;
- Supporting research on public policy initiatives to promote decent work and gender equality.

In [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#), 500 women set up their own companies with UNDP support. Some of them participated in customized entrepreneurship trainings for women living with disabilities, the first initiative of its kind in the country.

Another successful initiative led to almost 200 women getting jobs in providing care services. Most of them had never done paid work before, but were able to harness skills gained from doing unpaid child care and domestic work to get part-time work in the care sector.

In [Tajikistan](#), a UNDP study on barriers to women's entrepreneurship captured the experiences and needs of 950 women entrepreneurs. As a result, UNDP will advocate for policy changes and promote women's access to specialised business management trainings and advanced knowledge of the market.

In [Turkey](#), 350 Syrian women under temporary protection were able to enhance their language and professional skills with support from UNDP. Some of them have also started to generate income through food production and manufacturing services.

In [Ukraine](#), more than 1,000 women who are internally displaced were employed in economic recovery activities, such as reskilling programmes and infrastructure rehabilitation, with support from UNDP. In addition, over 500 enterprises led by women in manufacturing, agriculture and green tourism received business development services and technical and financial support.

Political participation

Many countries in the region have laws on gender quotas in legislatures and government. But the gender gap in decision-making levels is significant. Women occupy on average only 21 percent of seats in national parliaments and only 14 percent of ministerial positions, below the global averages of 23 percent and 18 percent respectively. Even after entering public service, women encounter a wide range of obstacles stemming from gender stereotypes, discrimination and cultural traditions.

In 2016, UNDP worked with governmental bodies, parliaments, media organisations and civil society to increase women's political participation by:

- Supporting the introduction of gender quotas and gender-responsive legal frameworks;

- Enhancing women parliamentarians' skills in gender analysis and advocacy;
- Mobilising women to get involved in politics at all levels.

In [Armenia](#), during the 2016 local elections, out of 700 women who ran in local elections, 500 were elected as community leaders or local councillors – a 24 percent increase compared to the 2012 election. Of those elected, 180 had been supported by UNDP through workshops on local governance, community development, leadership and gender equality.

In [Georgia](#), UNDP worked with civil society to advocate for amendments to the Gender Equality Law that mandate local governments to create gender equality institutional mechanisms in each municipality. The new provision was successfully piloted in Tbilisi, where a gender equality council drafted a gender equality strategy and action plan to be implemented by the municipality in 2017.

In [Moldova](#), a partnership between UNDP, UN Women and the Women's Caucus in Parliament led to the adoption of a 40 percent gender quota in the cabinet and on political party lists. In addition, 321 women local councillors in their first term gained specific skills in gender-responsive budgeting and local development, with UNDP support.

In [Montenegro](#), UNDP helped to set up the first cross-party network of women politicians to increase their visibility as candidates during the electoral campaign. Following the 2016 national election, the number of women in parliament increased from 18 to 24 percent, partially due to a new gender quota law that UNDP supported.

Climate change and resilience

Women have distinct vulnerabilities that shape the way they experience natural disasters and extreme weather events and determine their ability to recover from them. Women from low-income families that rely on natural resources for their livelihood are especially vulnerable to environmental shocks. Disasters can also increase women's unpaid care and domestic work burden and exacerbate their vulnerability to domestic abuse and sexual assault. Conversely, growing evidence shows that building women's agency and capabilities enhances the resilience of households, communities and societies.

In 2016, UNDP engaged women in strengthening the resilience of communities affected by climate change and natural disasters by:

- Advocating for measures and policies that promote gender equality in the green economy;
- Mainstreaming gender in planning frameworks for resilience to climate change and disasters;
- Providing technological and mentoring support to women-led enterprises.

In [Armenia](#), UNDP supported more than 100 women to join environmentally sustainable agricultural cooperatives and businesses.

In [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), a new online platform that provides free access to hazard data draws attention to the

vulnerabilities faced by women and women-headed households in disasters.

In [Kosovo](#)¹, UNDP supported the central authorities to develop a new regulation for post-disaster damage assessment that takes into account the specific needs of women and men. Similarly, in [Moldova](#), UNDP helped to include gender-responsive measures in the national disaster risk management strategy.

In [Kazakhstan](#), a pilot initiative to restore vegetation in the drained Aral Sea region created jobs for rural women at a forest nursery growing trees for the greening of 40 settlements.

Ending violence against women

Violence against women and girls remains a pervasive violation of fundamental rights in most countries and territories in the region. Despite progress in legislation, prevention and prosecution, the incidence of violence against women persists, with multiple repercussions on their wellbeing.

In 2016, UNDP continued to support countries to end violence against women and girls by:

- Supporting legislation on combating violence against women and girls;
- Combating early and forced marriage and other harmful practices;
- Strengthening tracking mechanisms and multi-sector support services for survivors.

In [Albania](#), UNDP supported municipal authorities to better coordinate their response to sexual and gender-based violence. Community response mechanisms were set up or expanded in 12 municipalities to provide multi-disciplinary protection for survivors and carry out preventive actions.

In [Kyrgyzstan](#), UNDP supported Parliament to pass a law prohibiting religious leaders from performing religious marriages for underage persons. The new law considers marriage with a minor a criminal offence and extends criminal sanctions of three to five years in prison to both clergy and parents who facilitate the ceremony.

Reports and campaigns

In the [Western Balkans](#), a new study from UNDP SEESAC documents the different risks from firearms faced by women and men. The study shows how notions of masculinity can spark firearms incidents, with increased risk to women living in households that own firearms.

At the [regional level](#)², UNDP published [a graphic novel](#) depicting the profound impact of early marriage on the lives of Roma girls and women in the Western Balkans. UNDP also took on domestic violence with [a campaign](#) that was viewed one million times on social media and was promoted in 75 cinemas.

¹ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

² See more at: eurasia.undp.org. For more information, please contact the Gender Equality Team at UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub. © 2017