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Closing the Gap: Gender Equality in Europe and the CIS

An overview of UNDP gender equality results in 2015

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the dedication and consistent efforts of all colleagues in UNDP Country Offices to advance gender equality in the Europe and the CIS region. We also express our sincere gratitude to gender equality specialists in the region for making this annual report a genuinely collaborative effort. *Closing the Gap* has drawn extensively from their inputs to the UNDP Results-Oriented Annual Report and their contributions to communication materials and outreach.

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Introduction

Gender equality and women's empowerment are increasingly critical in achieving the global sustainable development agenda in the years to come. Progress towards the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) adopted during an historic United Nations Summit in September 2015 to tackle poverty, inequalities and climate change will depend on the realization of women's rights as equal partners to men in sustainable, prosperous societies.

The Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS) region has been undergoing significant political, economic and social changes over the past 25 years. However, these changes have not necessarily diminished gender inequalities. In fact, as noted by the [2016 UNDP Regional Human Development Report](#), they have put at risk some of the gains in women's rights achieved in many countries during the socialist period.

The 2015 [Global Gender Gap Index](#), developed by the World Economic Forum, shows that countries in the region vary substantially in gender inequalities (see Figure 1). The index ranks countries based on their progress in closing gender gaps in the areas of economic opportunity, political empowerment, education and health. Regardless of their ranking, all countries face persisting imbalances between men and women in access to the labour market, control over natural resources and participation in politics and local governance. Moreover, women continue to face gender-based violence, discrimination and exclusion.

With many economies in the region facing slowdowns, economic advancement is a challenge for their societies as a whole. Weak prospects for economic growth have increased the vulnerability of families, in particular women-headed households. Women continue to have lower rates of employment than men, and are increasingly found in informal, low-skilled and non-skilled jobs. Women do much

Figure 1. Global Gender Gap Index



Source: World Economic Forum – Global Gender Gap Index (2015)

more unpaid care work than men, which limits their opportunities in the labour market. Meanwhile, the gender wage gap for equal work persists.

In the political realm, women's presence in national parliaments in the region has risen, but 11 countries remain below the global average of 22.6 percent. Gender parity in elected office remains a distant goal, and women have to strive hard to be a part of decision-making at local levels. At the same time, challenges arising out of shifts in political and security contexts in the region and changes in migration patterns are heightening

social and economic tensions which in turn worsen inequalities between women and men.

Violence against women and girls remains a serious violation of human rights in the region, with one in three women suffering intimate partner violence. In spite of recent legislative successes and rising levels of awareness, stereotypical gender roles and cultural norms render women and girls vulnerable to patriarchal traditions like early and forced marriage and exclude them from better educational, health and employment opportunities.

UNDP has a critical role in addressing these challenges and ensuring progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in the region continues. In 2015, UNDP Country Offices implemented many initiatives to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in key areas like sustainable development, economic empowerment, political participation and local governance, social inclusion, and ending sexual and gender-based violence.

UNDP supported sustainable livelihoods initiatives for women, focusing on rural development ([Georgia](#), [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#), [Turkey](#)), clean energy generation ([Moldova](#), [Tajikistan](#)), climate change mitigation ([Albania](#), [Belarus](#), [Tajikistan](#)) and disaster risk reduction and recovery ([Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Serbia](#), [Tajikistan](#), [Uzbekistan](#)).

Women's economic empowerment through employment generation, support for entrepreneurial initiatives and advocacy for legislative and policy change ([Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Kosovo](#)¹, [Tajikistan](#), [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#), [Turkey](#), [Ukraine](#)) was another key area of focus for UNDP.

To advance women's empowerment in national politics and local governance, UNDP worked to further improve legal frameworks to enable women's access to decision-making positions ([Albania](#), [Moldova](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)), encourage their participation in elections and local governance ([Albania](#), [Armenia](#), [Moldova](#), [Georgia](#), [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)) and involve them in greater numbers in matters of peace and security ([Cyprus](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Western Balkans](#)).

Targeted efforts to prevent and reduce sexual and gender-based violence carried out with UNDP support focused on building legal frameworks, widening access to services, and raising awareness ([Albania](#), [Croatia](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Montenegro](#), [Serbia](#), [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)).

In addition, a number of UNDP initiatives were geared towards the protection and inclusion of vulnerable women in marginalized communities, such as the Roma ([Albania](#), [Croatia](#), [Moldova](#), [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)), people living with disabilities ([Kazakhstan](#), [Tajikistan](#), [Turkmenistan](#)) and people living with HIV/AIDS ([Belarus](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Tajikistan](#)).

This report captures the key results achieved by UNDP Country Offices in the ECIS region in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in 2015. Sustained engagement with women's organizations and partnerships with other United Nations organizations contributed to the success of many of these efforts. UNDP will continue to build on these alliances and initiatives to ensure that women's needs, experiences, knowledge and agency are part of the region's efforts to build more equitable and sustainable societies.

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



1

Sustainable development

UNDP promoted the involvement of women as equal partners in the sustainable development of communities and in efforts against climate change and environmental degradation. Particular areas of focus in 2015 were sustainable rural development, renewable energy production, climate change mitigation and adaptation and disaster risk reduction and resilience.

Context

Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns and stresses that contribute to climate change also exacerbate poverty and inequalities. In particular, they worsen gender inequality. This is because traditional gender roles and unequal power relations between men and women translate into different experiences and different risks and vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. As such, women and girls in low-income families are especially affected by social, economic and environmental shocks. Conversely, there is growing evidence that gender equality, by building women's agency and capabilities, can enhance and reinforce sustainable development. This is why the post-2015 development agenda needs to simultaneously address the twin challenges of building a more sustainable world and addressing deep-rooted inequalities, particularly gender inequality.

In the ECIS region, challenges pertaining to achieving both gender equality and sustainable development persist. According to the [SDG Index and Dashboards](#), a global report developed in 2016 by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Bertelsmann Stiftung to assess the initial status of the 17 SDGs in 149 countries, the ECIS region presents varying levels of progress towards achieving the goals (see Figure 2). However, the report identifies gender inequality, addressing renewable energy and climate change, sustainable consumption and production, and protecting ecosystems as the main challenges facing the region as a whole.

With growing evidence that gender equality and sustainability are strongly interlinked, empowering women to participate in and benefit from the development of their communities and reaching sustainability has become a core component of UNDP's mandate.

This chapter looks at some of the ways in which UNDP has supported countries in the

Figure 2. SDG Index



Source: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Bertelsmann Stiftung – SDG Index and Dashboards Global Report (2016)

ECIS region in 2015 to increase the role of women as agents for sustainable development and community adaptation to climate change. The areas of focus include sustainable rural development, sustainable energy production, climate change adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk reduction. Some common approaches employed by UNDP Country Offices in the region to address these challenges include:

- Advocating for measures and policies that respond to the needs of women farmers at local and national levels;
- Providing women's enterprises in sustainable agriculture and energy production with technological and mentoring support;
- Supporting evidence-based policymaking and gender mainstreaming in planning frameworks for resilience to climate change and disasters;
- Adapting post-disaster recovery interventions to include gender-responsive approaches.

Sustainable rural development

Although agriculture plays an important role in the economies of countries in the region, men and particularly women in rural areas still struggle with high levels of poverty. A key consequence of the transition to a market economy in former socialist countries has been the feminisation of poverty in rural areas, with more women in the ranks of low-wage earners with fewer assets, less access to jobs, and higher number of dependents. [Research by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization](#) has found that closing the gender gap in agriculture would not only improve the lives of women but increase agricultural productivity. UNDP drives the empowerment of women in rural areas and agriculture to reduce gender gaps, give women access to decent work and sustainable livelihoods and secure their rights to land, assets and food security.

Close-up 1: Driving progress for women farmers in Georgia

Despite the fact that women in Georgian villages are primarily responsible for the well-being of their families and participate in agriculture production equally, they have less access to productive resources and decision-making than men do.

The Association of Women Farmers of Kakheti had ambitious plans to change that paradigm. Set up with support from UNDP, it became a region-wide success, growing from an initiative of only seven women to a network of more than 180 members.

From 2013 to 2015, the women worked tirelessly to train their members in agriculture, financial management, and sustainable development. They set up seven demonstration plots where they could pilot new agriculture products and innovative farming technologies. The women also received advice in writing business proposals, negotiating with the banks and getting easier access to finance.

In 2015, the association realised the need to speak on behalf of all women farmers in Georgia and started engaging with the Government on issues of land ownership and registration and the legal status of men and women farmers.

As the Association of Women Farmers of Kakheti transitions to a national platform, UNDP continues to assist this process, creating new networks, promoting professional development and supporting efforts to give a voice to women farmers in shaping national policy and legislation.

Key results

In **Georgia**, UNDP helped establish the first women-led organic agro-farming cooperative in Bojormi and five women-led agriculture cooperatives in Ajara. The cooperatives serve as models to encourage women to start their own agribusinesses in other regions and led to a 10 percent increase in their income. UNDP also continued to support the Association of Women Farmers of Kakheti to engage with the Government on national policy issues affecting women farmers (see Close-up 1). UNDP also helped the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture to set up a national platform for women farmers to develop practical skills.

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, 20 women farmers received technical assistance and equipment that helped them raise incomes and productivity through more environmentally friendly farming practices. Ten other women farmers received training and equipment through a

UNDP small grants programme dedicated to women. By increasing women's control over resources, these initiatives improved agricultural outcomes and gave women a pivotal role in their families and in the economic and social life of their communities.

Other achievements

In **Turkey**, as a result of informal consultations about the needs of rural women in the Ardahan province, UNDP set up greenhouses for 20 women farmers, helping them to improve their agricultural production and better provide for their families. In addition to covering building costs, UNDP provided seedlings and practical on-site support, leading to a substantial increase in production for the women-headed households. In **Uzbekistan**, women farmers and women-led households in areas vulnerable to climate change were able to identify the best adaptation practices for their farmlands and plots following needs assessments conducted by UNDP. In **Turkmenistan**, water user associations piloted



Woman celebrating a rich cranberry harvest following UNDP-led wetlands restoration measures in Belarus, *UNDP Belarus*

Close-up 2: Women fuel energy independence in Moldova

Ludmila Abramciuc is the first woman in Moldova to head a renewable energy company, a sector traditionally dominated by men. “Ecobricheta,” the company she manages in her hometown of Balti, uses by-products of the cereal and forestry industries to produce biomass fuel briquettes. In 2015, her business took off with support from a programme funded by the European Union and implemented and co-financed by UNDP.

This support from the UNDP Energy and Biomass Project helped Ludmila’s business purchase high-performance briquette production equipment and increase its output threefold, from 90 tonnes of briquettes per month to more than 300 tonnes, enough to heat five schools and kindergartens during the winter months.

The Energy and Biomass Project assists entrepreneurs like Ludmila to contribute to the achievement of national targets set by the Moldovan authorities to reduce the country’s energy dependence. Women are thus involved in shaping the future of energy production in Moldova and building a more sustainable future for the country.

Moreover, since women play an important role in the decision-making processes associated with heating in beneficiary communities, they are also critical in conversations about the need for a transition to reliable energy sources and the identification of best practices to help reach that goal.

in three areas adopted gender-sensitive recruitment to ensure that local decision-making processes on the use of water and land resources address women’s concerns and needs. In **Belarus**, where rural women tend to outlive men by more than 10 years and face increased risk of poverty, a UNDP initiative to restore peatbogs by rewetting drained lands helped provide additional sources of food and income for rural women in two districts.

Energy and environment

With a number of Sustainable Development Goals focused on clean energy and the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, these issues have become critical priorities of the global development agenda. Building green economies is increasingly becoming a goal in many countries. But without the right social policies, green economies do not inherently contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment. Men and women differ significantly in social and economic empowerment, consumption patterns and ecological footprint, access to higher education and technical skills and the use and control of environmental resources. It is therefore important that green economy approaches acknowledge these differences and pay particular attention to the roles of and opportunities for women – whether as workers in green jobs, consumers of green products, or as citizens for green governance – to ensure equity and sustainability. In the ECIS region, UNDP continues to empower women to have access to the right tools and resources to participate in the transition to green economies in their communities.

Key results

In **Moldova**, an initiative using biomass for energy production led to an increase in women’s participation in community planning activities (see Close-up 2). Through community mobilisation, more than a thousand local leaders, most them women, managed to



Women piloting solar energy installations for water heating with support from UNDP in Tajikistan, *UNDP Tajikistan*

significantly supplement municipal financing for biomass projects in their respective communities.

In **Tajikistan**, UNDP piloted a successful do-it-yourself initiative for rural women to build solar energy installations to heat water, avoiding the use of firewood. As a result, 20 women heads of households learned how to assemble and maintain solar water heaters for domestic purposes. The women are also able to generate income by providing their community with maintenance services. In addition, about 200 women in remote areas received energy-efficient cooking stoves.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNDP supported the Ministry of Economy to mainstream gender equality in the national strategic planning framework for sustainable development. Research on the gender aspects of poverty, environment and biodiversity was carried out through a partnership between UNDP and three universities, whose findings are expected to inform national strategies and partnerships to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Additionally, with technical

support from UNDP, national partners are now able to collect, analyse and use qualitative and quantitative data on gender-responsive natural resources management.

Other achievements

In **Ukraine**, UNDP carried out an analysis of national legislation and produced recommendations that included measures for the expansion of women's engagement in environmental programmes implemented across the country and advocated for gender-sensitive budgeting. In **Armenia**, with support from UNDP, 11 women's NGOs enhanced the capacities of women to address environmental issues at the local level.

Disaster risk reduction and resilience

As climate change is likely to intensify and multiply the risks associated with natural disasters and extreme weather, building the resilience of communities to withstand the shocks and stresses of disasters is becoming increasingly crucial. Since natural disasters and extreme weather affect people according to

pre-existing vulnerabilities, women face different and sometimes more risks than men do. Including a gender perspective in climate change and disaster risk reduction efforts is a priority for UNDP. In building the resilience of communities affected by natural disasters or those at risk, UNDP mainstreams gender in national and regional strategies and policies, and helps develop national gender-sensitive indicators and procedures for data collection.

Key results

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UNDP mobilised resources and know-how to provide adequate support to women in territories affected by floods. Single mothers were given priority in housing rehabilitation programmes and 31 percent of the 1,500 reconstructed homes were women-headed households. Moreover, financial grants for the recovery of small and medium enterprises included gender-sensitive criteria that rewarded maximum scores to enterprises employing between 30 to 60 percent women.

Similarly, in **Tajikistan**, recovery interventions recognise that women and men are affected differently during disasters and addressing their recovery needs require gender-responsive approaches. As such, women-headed households were prioritised in 2015, with more than 14,000 women in disaster-hit areas reached through livelihoods initiatives that provided dairy cows, fodder, and winter stoves. Moreover, recovery efforts in infrastructure also took into account the needs of women and girls, with drinking water supplies and community roads being prioritised to ensure continuous access to schools and health centres.

In **Serbia**, UNDP assisted 11 civil society organisations to promote the participation of women and gender-responsive approaches in disaster risk reduction projects in 20 municipalities. The CSOs trained 69 women anti-hail shooters, 22 women rescuers, and educated 316 women through 38 workshops

Close-up 3: Improving access to water in Uzbekistan

UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, WHO and UN Volunteers have worked in Uzbekistan's far western region to combat the impacts of the Aral Sea disaster, with a primary focus on improving the region's level of human development.

In eight isolated communities in the Aral region, workshops held under a UN Joint Programme identified and prioritised the needs of residents, particularly women. Unsurprisingly, the need for easier and more secure access to water emerged as a top priority.

The daily struggle of obtaining water for households, farms and businesses is in most cases the responsibility of women, costing them time and energy and limiting their opportunities for better livelihoods. As a result of consultations in the workshops, the UN Joint Programme improved water access plans, providing 6,500 rural households with clean water, and eliminating the risks associated with securing water in the winter months.



The plans have particularly benefited women. With water on tap, hygiene has improved in homes and schools. Women are also happier and healthier, with more time for other activities.

on volunteering, civic engagement, and psycho-social support in the context of emergencies. The organisations also applied a gender lens to various management and planning issues, advocating for gender-responsive local disaster risk reduction plans and volunteering centres, empowering women to take proactive roles in emergencies and improving the security of women in crises.

In **Uzbekistan**, gender-sensitive community development plans implemented in the Aral Sea region improved access to basic social services, such as drinking water and electricity, for 1,000 women and their families (see Close-up 3).

Other achievements

In **Georgia**, UNDP advocated for the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the development of the Tbilisi Disaster Recovery and Vulnerability Reduction Plan. The action plan, adopted by the Tbilisi City Hall in 2015, identified the need for disaggregated data on different groups in the capital, particularly women-led households in poor urban areas, to assess the ways in which efforts to reduce disaster risk influence poverty-reduction initiatives. In **Moldova**, with UNDP support to ministries and local authorities, guidelines on mainstreaming gender in the context of climate change were produced and disseminated in the energy, transport, forestry, and health sectors. In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, sex-disaggregated data was collected and analysed for the development of the National Risk and Hazard Assessment as a first step towards the creation of gender-sensitive measures and budgeting.



2

Economic empowerment

UNDP invested in the economic empowerment of women in the region and advocated for their equal participation in labour markets. In 2015, initiatives and activities focused on providing employment opportunities for women, supporting women entrepreneurs, investing in the continuous professional development of women and girls, and creating gender-responsive legislative and policy frameworks.

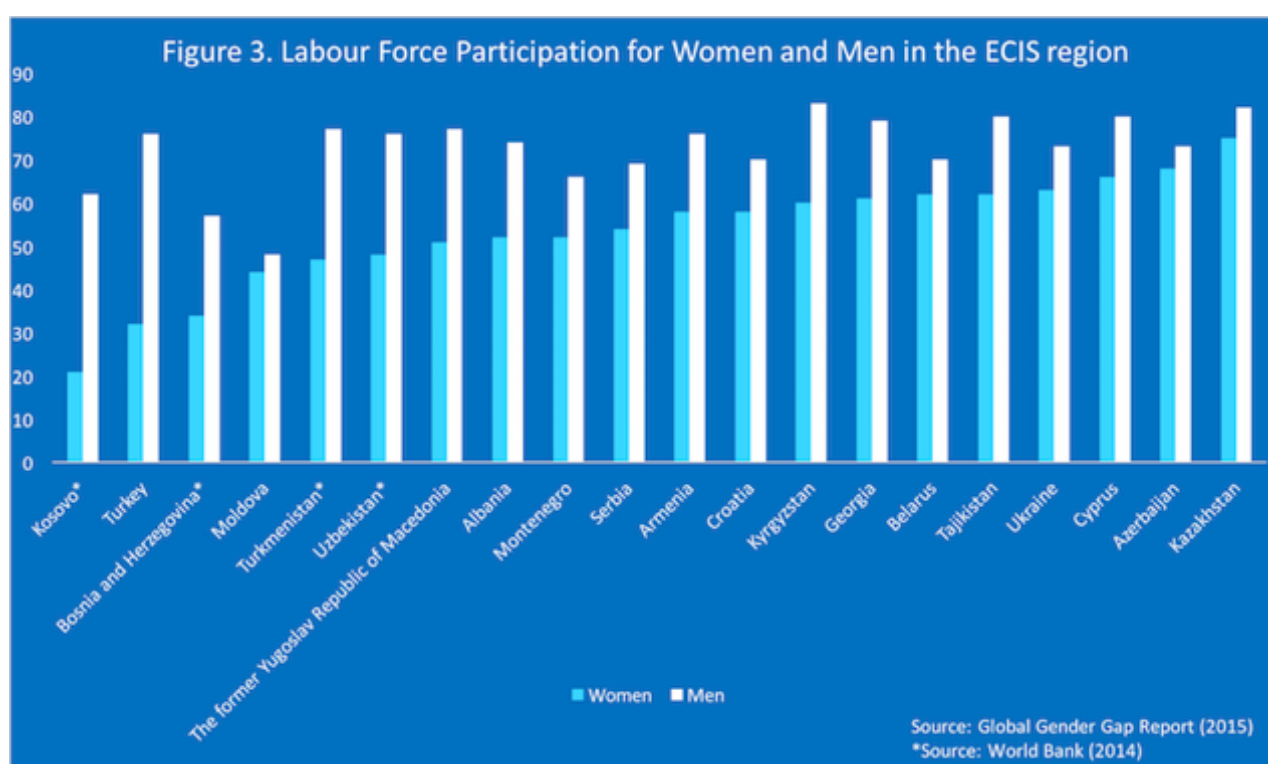
Context

Economic growth and gender equality are closely linked. However, while greater gender equality contributes to economic growth, economic growth may not necessarily lead to gender equality. Without active measures to address gender imbalances, market-led growth can intensify poverty and inequality, especially gender inequality. This is because gender inequalities overlap with, and often magnify, the effects of other forms of inequalities based on age, ethnicity, race, disability, occupation and income. Gender inequalities in work and employment remain a challenge in the ECIS region. Most countries and territories register a **10 to 20 percentage point** difference between men's and women's labour force participation rates (see Figure 3). In the Western Balkans and Turkey, which have some of the lowest employment rates for women in the region (**21 percent** in **Kosovo**, **32 percent** in **Turkey**, and **34 percent** in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**), the impact of the 2008 economic crisis is still being felt, with falling rates of employment for both men and women. In the South Caucasus, Western CIS,

and Central Asia, there has been little improvement in women's labour force participation rates, except in **Azerbaijan** and **Kazakhstan**, where women's active participation in the labour market has risen to **68 percent** and **75 percent** respectively.

One of the major causes for women's under-representation in the labour market continues to be the unequal distribution of domestic and care work in the household. As elsewhere, women in the region bear most of the burden of child care and unpaid household work, which has a direct influence on their ability to opt for paid work.

In addition to lower employment rates, women face a persistent gender income gap. Whether it is receiving less pay than men for similar work, working in sectors that are less financially valued and rewarded, or facing challenges in advancing their careers, women earn less than men do. Women in the region earn on average **68 percent** of what men earn with ratios as low as **57 percent** in **Croatia** and **58 percent** in **Serbia**. The countries that register the least discrepancy in earned income between men and women are



Tajikistan and **Albania**, where women earn **76 percent** and **81 percent** respectively of what men earn.

Women fare marginally better in entrepreneurship. Even though women have been involved in the transition to a market economy and the growth of the private sector, with business ownership by women at one-third in many countries, gender inequalities persist in access to finance, credit, skills, technology and networks.

These trends highlight the need for stronger support to women to overcome systemic obstacles in entering the labour market, breaking glass ceilings, and achieving economic freedom and opportunity.

This chapter looks at some of the ways in which UNDP has supported countries in the ECIS region provide women with more economic opportunities and improve their access to labour markets. In particular, UNDP focused its efforts on:

- Implementing programmes aimed at job creation in fields such as agriculture, small-

scale manufacturing, the services sector and the public sector;

- Providing grants, vocational training, mentoring and business development support to women's cooperatives and enterprises;
- Supporting research on public policy initiatives to increase decent work and gender equality;
- Advocating for measures aimed at women's economic empowerment in national development strategies through partnerships with the private sector and civil society.

Employment and entrepreneurship

Creating opportunities for meaningful employment for women and supporting women's entrepreneurship are key priorities for UNDP on the pathway to sustainable development. In 2015, through its job creation programmes, UNDP has helped create more



Woman at her pastry shop, set up through a UNDP self-employment programme in Kosovo, *UNDP Kosovo*

than 7,000 new jobs for women in the region. In addition, UNDP offices in the region have supported more than 800 women-led businesses and encouraged women to pursue entrepreneurship as a means to earn income and a livelihood.

Key results

In **Turkey**, UNDP, UN Women and ILO supported [new research](#) proving that public investment in social care services would not only create more and better jobs for women and men, but it would address gender and socioeconomic inequalities and support better child development. The research highlights that a lack of quality and affordable public social care services in Turkey is a key factor in women's low labour market participation and underlines the benefits in terms of decent jobs and gender equality of public investment in this sector, compared to a more traditional sector like construction (see Close-up 4).

In **Tajikistan**, jobs were created for 2,160 women in agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, schools and health-care points. Multiple UNDP programmes contributed to efforts at women's integration in the labour market through vocational training, support to business centres and civil society organisations, access to microloans for small businesses and private entrepreneurs, as well as local economic initiatives aimed at better access to water, irrigation, and farming resources. Moreover, 288 women-led businesses improved their market access through microfinance, business advice, and vocational training. UNDP also successfully advocated for the inclusion of gender considerations in the new National Development Strategy 2016-2030, with particular attention paid to the promotion of women's employment.

In **Kosovo**, as a result of UNDP advocacy, the performance indicators of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare now include the percentage of women receiving services for

Close-up 4: New research in Turkey argues for public investment in care services

A report by researchers from the Istanbul Technical University Women's Studies Centre and the Levy Economics Institute, supported by ILO, UNDP, and UN Women, argues for public investment in the early childhood care and preschool education sector.

High quality early childhood care and preschool education is a profitable investment in itself, shaping the minds of children to become productive citizens. The new report simulates the impact of an additional 20.7 billion TRY expenditure on child-care centres and preschools - the estimated amount for Turkey to catch up with the average OECD preschool enrolment rate - on new employment opportunities, as well as on gender equality, income generation and poverty.

The results show that an expenditure of this magnitude would create more than 720,000 jobs in the childcare sector as well as 100,000 jobs in other sectors, 2.5 times more jobs than the number of jobs likely to be created with the same amount of investment in the construction sector.

Moreover, such an investment would greatly advance gender equality as 73 percent of the new jobs created are estimated to go to women. In contrast, only six percent of jobs created via a construction boom are estimated to go to women.

Beyond the Turkish context, the results of this study also have policy implications in other countries in the region, most of which lack social care infrastructure.

Close up 5: Challenging labour market gender norms in Kosovo

In Kosovo, where 36 percent of registered job seekers in 2014 were under the age of 24, UNDP has been tackling the issue of youth unemployment. Through the InTerDev project, young women and men seeking employment were provided with vocational training to boost their chances of finding meaningful employment. At the end of four months, UNDP offered each trainee additional support by providing them with working tools and promotional materials.

One of the women participating in the trainings was Tanja Dacevac. Before enrolling in the programme, the 21-year-old and her husband had been searching for work for over three years. The mother of a five-year-old, who had to drop out of secondary school for financial reasons, Tanja needed to find employment.

Tanja chose to enrol in a welding training, braving gender stereotypes that lead men and women to choose their professions. Four months later, she became the first woman welder in her municipality. By challenging gender norms and choosing a profession that is traditionally reserved for men, Tanja has paved the way for other women in Kosovo to do the same.

Programmes like these not only enhance livelihoods and prospects for young women from disadvantaged backgrounds, but they also have the ability to help break gender stereotypes in the labour market and contribute to gender equality.

labour market integration. In addition, a combination of improved selection criteria and equal training opportunities for women and men led to almost half of the 1,354 new full-time jobs being occupied by women in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, repair and maintenance services, tourism and social entrepreneurship (see Close-up 5).

The same rate of success was registered in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where women gained half of the 676 new jobs created through floods recovery programmes in rural areas and professional requalification interventions with a focus on manufacturing industries.

In **Ukraine**, UNDP mobilised low income households to form agricultural services cooperatives and assisted them in enhancing their productivity through input-output services, off-farm job creation and enterprise upscaling. This created more than 3,800 jobs for women in rural areas. In addition, UNDP provided start-up grants for 121 initiatives headed by women across eight regions.

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, 332 women-led businesses were established through UNDP's self-employment programme, amounting to four percent of new businesses set up in the country in 2015.

Other achievements

In **Montenegro**, through its National Human Development Report, UNDP advocated for a reconsideration of legislated financial benefits for women with three or more children. Although the benefits policy was aimed at helping women and mothers, the report shows how, in fact, it contributes to the proliferation of informal employment among women and also creates negative incentives for all participants in the labour market. In **Albania**, UNDP led the drafting of a national action plan to integrate beneficiaries of economic aid in the labour market and supported the design of an active labour market measure targeting

women-headed households. In [Kyrgyzstan](#), with UNDP support, 195 women gained full-time jobs and 2,304 women in cooperatives that are women-headed or have a high women labour contribution were supported to strengthen their trade potential. In addition, 33 women-led businesses such as sewing shops, bakeries, photo-video and IT services, were set up through UNDP grants. In [Uzbekistan](#), through a pioneering partnership facilitated by UNDP, between local authorities and a private company, a carpet weaving workshop was established in Sayram village, in which 30 women have been employed and trained to create carpets from natural silk. Additionally, 10 small household business projects were established by women in the Muynak district for the production of embroidered goods and souvenirs. In [Georgia](#), a special UNDP employment scheme in two pilot cities led to the employment of more than 60 women. In [Turkey](#), with UNDP support, a private sector-led initiative advocated for inclusive business models for Turkish private companies and promoted women's employment in the services sector. In [Azerbaijan](#), six women-led enterprises received UNDP support in the form of business plan development and entrepreneurship.



3

Political participation and local governance

UNDP worked to promote the involvement of more women in politics at national and local levels. In 2015, efforts were concentrated on supporting women to participate in elections as voters, candidates and electoral staff, advocating for policy changes to address gender gaps in decision-making positions, and promoting the involvement of women in peacebuilding and security.

Context

Gender equality is fundamental to responsive, inclusive and accountable democratic societies. The equal participation of men and women in decision-making is key to the credibility and legitimacy of governance processes and of parliaments, national assemblies and local councils. Despite incremental changes in a number of countries, the region is far from gender parity in legislatures at national and local levels and in decision-making positions in government and administration. Women wishing to enter public service have to overcome barriers in the form of discriminatory legislation and practices, and pervasive notions of politics as a masculine domain.

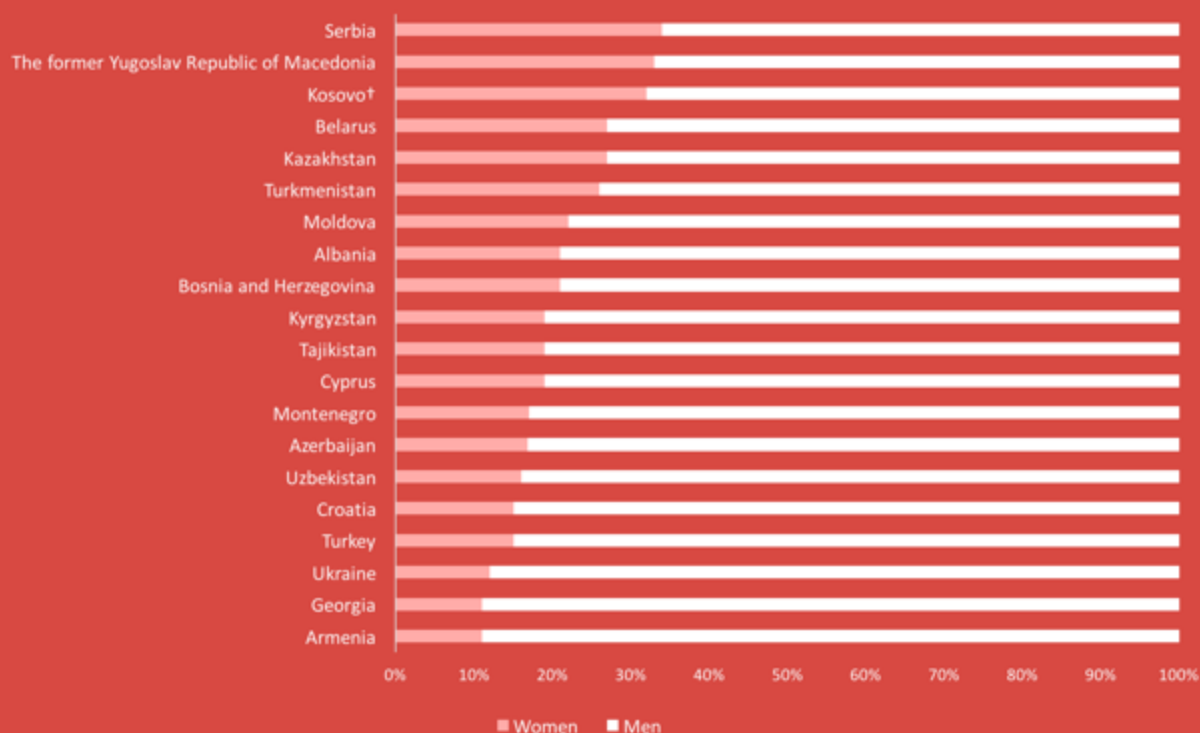
Women in the region occupy on average only **21 percent** of seats in national parliaments and only **13 percent** of ministerial positions (see Figure 4). **Serbia** and **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** have the highest levels

of women's participation in parliament, at **34 percent** and **33 percent** respectively – an achievement stemming in part from the adoption and implementation of mandatory gender quotas for their legislatures. At the other end of the spectrum, women in **Georgia** and **Armenia** are least represented in parliament, occupying only **11 percent** of parliamentary seats. Unsurprisingly, gender quotas in both countries are not mandatory.

Although **39 percent** of civil servants in public administration in the region are women, most positions they occupy are at lower levels, with most senior decision-making positions going to men.

Despite the fact that many countries have laws on gender quotas in legislatures and at different levels of government, a gender gap persists. Even after entering public service, women encounter a wide range of obstacles stemming from gender stereotypes, discrimination, cultural traditions and lack of networks.

Figure 4. Seats Held by Women and Men in National Parliaments in the ECIS Region



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016)
*Source: National Democratic Institute (2014)

To reduce these gaps, UNDP has worked in 2015 with parliaments, governmental bodies, civil society and other partners to support women's political participation and increase gender equality outcomes in governance at all levels. Some common approaches employed by UNDP Country Offices in the region include:

- Working with parliaments, political parties and government institutions to introduce gender quotas and gender-sensitive procedures and legal frameworks;
- Enhancing the capacities of women parliamentarians for gender analysis, advocacy and networking;
- Supporting electoral bodies to develop strategies and management practices informed by a gender perspective;
- Strengthening merit-based and transparent recruitment measures in public administration and government to attract men and women;

- Mobilising women to get involved in politics both at the local and national level;
- Partnering with civil society organisations to contribute to national discourse on gender equality in political representation.

Policy and legislative frameworks

Although legislation alone is unlikely to fix gender inequalities in politics in the region, policies and legal frameworks that actively promote women's political participation are a crucial first step. For example, introducing mandatory gender quotas can increase women's presence and visibility in politics and help to change cultural practices and public opinion that obstruct women's political empowerment.

Key results

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, UNDP partnered with UN Women



Women address their policy concerns during a meeting with Moldovan members of Parliament, *UNDP Moldova*

and women's rights NGOs to amend the electoral law and increase the quota for women in parliament from 30 to 40 percent.

In **Moldova**, UNDP supported the Central Electoral Commission to mainstream gender concerns in its strategic plan and ensure the equal representation of women and men in the senior management of electoral management bodies. This partnership led to the establishment of an International Association of Women in Electoral Management Bodies to address the under-representation of women in EMBs. UNDP also trained women MPs and strengthened the capacities of parliamentarians to assess legislation from a gender perspective and use sex-disaggregated data. With UNDP support, a cross-party women's caucus was established by all 21 women MPs. Known as the Women's Platform of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, the caucus is a forum for women MPs to engage across party lines on critical issues affecting women, particularly in the areas of education, health, social services, entrepreneurship, and migration. In addition, five Regional Policy Forums were organised, where more than 200 women representing women's organisations, particularly from vulnerable groups, presented their needs and priorities to members of parliament.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNDP with other UN partners supported the development of a gender sensitivity rating for political parties in an effort to raise public awareness about their level of commitment to gender equality (see Close-up 6).

Other achievements

In **Armenia**, UNDP led a joint initiative by multiple UN agencies to support the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in assessing the results of the Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan for 2011-2015. This paved the way for a new five-year National Framework and Action Plan on gender equality, aligned with Armenia's international commitments.

Close-up 6: Promoting gender-sensitive political parties in Kyrgyzstan

While national legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic guarantees equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the political sphere, determining the extent of political party compliance with this legislation is no easy task.

Within the framework of the Women as Peaceful Voters and Women as Candidates project, implemented by UNDP, UNICEF, and UNPBF, a gender rating of political parties was developed. The rating system publicly monitors the gender sensitivity of political parties, by analysing how they score in four key dimensions:

1. The party's democracy and openness;
2. The gender sensitivity of the party's documents and activities;
3. The party's portrayals of men and women in the media;
4. The public opinion on the party's support to gender equality.

The gender sensitivity assessments run between one and three months, after which materials identifying problematic areas and suggesting solutions are generated. This information is made publicly available, though its primary intended audience is political party management and activists.

It is critical that such innovative mechanisms are actually put into practice. Assessment tools like these help to enhance transparency and accountability in gender parity legislation, which can be difficult to determine and therefore enforce.

Moreover, the initiative also strengthened the monitoring and evaluation system for gender issues across multiple sectors. In **Ukraine**, gender equality considerations were included in the National Human Rights Strategy, with particular emphasis on equality of opportunity, anti-discrimination, and prevention of gender-based violence. In **Montenegro**, UNDP played a strategic convening role between state institutions and civil society organisations, thus helping to advocate for key changes in legislative frameworks and institutional mechanisms and contributing to national policy discourse on gender equality. In **Serbia**, UNDP supported the work of the Women's Parliamentary Network, an informal network of women MPs from all political parties, working in the areas of economic empowerment, education, healthcare, and domestic violence and violence against women. The network has proven particularly effective in enhancing women's representation in national and international parliamentary policy fora on issues outside the traditional sphere of women's issues. For example, representatives of the Network joined the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC) as a means to integrate a gender perspective into anti-corruption policy efforts and initiatives. In **Albania**, in the context of the first local elections held after the 2014 administrative territorial reform reduced the number of municipalities from 380 to 61, UNDP carried out a study to identify barriers to women's political participation. The recommendations produced by the study were picked up by the Women's Caucus in Parliament to create strategies to advance women's empowerment in politics and advocate for the introduction of a gender quota during general elections. In addition, the secretariat of the Central Election Commission and civil society organisations strategized with UNDP and UN Women on issues facing women as candidates, voters and members of the election administration. In **Georgia**, UNDP

supported an international high-level conference on achieving gender equality in the European Neighbourhood Policy Region, organised in Tbilisi by the foreign ministry. The conference was an opportunity to locate the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda within ENP processes, address challenges and share good practices on women's political and economic empowerment, enhance women's role in peace and security efforts, and end violence against women and girls.

Local governance

Local elections are critical moments for advancing gender equality. They offer women an opportunity to engage in local political process and gain access to decision-making positions, and are also occasions to influence public discourse on women's empowerment. However, for women to have an equal chance of getting elected, the systemic disadvantages they face in seeking public office must be redressed. Changes to legislative and policy frameworks must be accompanied by efforts to give women the tools and knowledge to successfully engage in politics and challenge traditional notions about political leadership. As such, UNDP works to empower women to get involved in electoral processes at the local level, gain access to decision-making, and change public opinion about women as political leaders.

Key results

In **Georgia**, gender-responsive budgeting is now part of the official guidelines for drafting state budgets at local and central levels. UNDP supported this effort and provided local officials and 1,100 women with training on gender equality and local governance. UNDP also mobilised local women's groups in 26 communities to advocate for and raise significant amounts of funds from local authorities for fixing local problems.

Close-up 7: Inspiring women to become leaders in Armenia

In Armenia, a joint EU-UNDP Women in Local Democracy initiative helps women to participate more actively in local governance. In advance of local elections, the project works at the regional level to identify women with the interest and potential to engage in the political process. These women are then supported with training, consultations and networking events.

Over the past three years, this initiative has reached about 1600 women from all ten regions of Armenia. Of the 135 women candidates supported by the project during this time, 82 were elected as heads of community and local council members. Once elected, the new leaders continue to receive support, knowledge and skill-building in local governance, gender equality, gender-sensitive planning and budgeting, and participatory governance. During 2015, preparations were made for the 2016 local elections taking place in more than 500 communities.

In addition to providing direct support, UNDP also brokers dialogues among different actors to promote legal and policy reforms for women's empowerment and equal rights and opportunities between men and women.

Initiatives like these have helped to amplify women's collective political voice, enabling them to effect change at the local level and contribute to policy processes through regular dialogue with legislators, Government representatives and regional authorities.

In **Albania**, 26 newly established municipalities were supported by UNDP to integrate gender concerns in the development of local operational plans through the collection of sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis, gender responsive priority setting, and specific interventions geared towards achieving greater gender equality. Moreover, women's participation was promoted and ensured in working groups on priorities and town hall meetings.

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, decentralisation efforts were strengthened with specific actions to prevent discrimination and promote equal opportunities at the local level through, for example, gender-responsive budgeting and participatory policymaking.

In **Armenia**, 658 women in 38 communities were empowered through trainings, consultations and networking events to become better leaders and get more involved in politics. In preparation for the 2016 local elections, local women leaders have been trained in community development, local governance, gender equality, and participatory democracy (see Close-up 7).

In **Moldova**, UNDP support to women leaders and voter education campaigns was among the factors that led to 20 more women being elected as mayors compared to previous elections and to the historic election of two Roma women as local councillors. Gender-sensitive trainings for election administrators also resulted in a 10 percent increase in the number of women in leadership positions in district electoral councils.

Other achievements

In **Uzbekistan**, UNDP helped to strengthen the capacities of 45 local government representatives in the Aral Sea region, half of whom are women, particularly with techniques and tools to ensure more informed, gender-responsive and participatory decision-making. As a result, two

new community development plans incorporate the needs of women and youth. In addition, new regulations for merit-based recruitment systems in governmental institutions, including local governance bodies, were developed to make the civil service more open and attractive for women.

In **Turkey**, UNDP raised the awareness of grassroots women's movements in Izmir and Trabzon about accountability in local governance. This led to the development of integrity charters for local administrators that encourage values-based codes of conduct for public servants and promote transparency, responsibility and accountability in the health and social services sectors. In **Kyrgyzstan**, an awareness-raising campaign promoted the active participation of women in parliamentary elections. Public service announcements encouraged women, especially those representing national minorities, to participate in elections, while a TV series was created to change perceptions about women in decision-making positions.

The campaign also involved public consultations, engaging more than 40,000 people. In **Kosovo**, UNDP ensured that women civil servants participated in and contributed to the working groups drafting a civil service strategy and a new law on the organisation of public administration.

Peace and security

The involvement of men and women is key to ensuring peace and security. And yet, in conflict and post-conflict situations, which tend to have significant impact on gender equality and gender relations, women are often not included in political processes or consulted about issues that affect them. As a result, this leads to many post-conflict settlement and reconstruction efforts ignoring women's views and needs, further accentuating gender inequalities. In addition, women are under-represented in security and police forces, and lack a voice in matters of national and regional security. In 2015, UNDP



Leadership training for women in local democracy organised by UNDP in Armenia, *UNDP Armenia*

continued to promote the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution efforts as well as their increased participation in matters of regional security.

Key results

In **Cyprus**, UNDP helped to set up The Cyprus Dialogue Forum, a reconciliation platform between political parties, civil society and academics from both communities, which enabled increased participation of women in political dialogue and emphasised the importance of gender equality in the negotiation process. Notably, for the first time since the beginning of talks in 2008, the leaders of the two communities recognised the importance of gender perspectives in the negotiation process and established a committee on gender equality.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, with support from UNDP, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Internal Affairs developed a National Action Plan on [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#). The plan was developed with the full engagement of state institutions and civil society and it was endorsed by the government at the end of 2015. In addition, eight projects engaged women at the local level in peacebuilding activities, training them to be mentors in preventing conflict and extremism.

In **Tajikistan**, UNDP supported the integration of gender considerations in the National Mine Action Strategy for 2016-2020 submitted to the Government. In this new framework, gender considerations cross-cut mine action activities like mine risk education, land release, victim assistance and information management. In addition, the women's demining team established in 2014 continued clearance activities in 2015, and were instrumental in advocating for the active role of women in mine action.

At the regional level, in the **Western Balkans**, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe

Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), functioning under a UNDP mandate, launched a Regional Security Sector Reform Platform in the ministries of defence and armed forces in **Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**. The regional platform provides security sector personnel with technical support and expert advisory services for mainstreaming gender in policy development, establishing gender equality mechanisms in the police and the military, integrating gender perspectives in the planning of military interventions and establishing women's networks in the security sector. More than 3,300 staff in the police and the military also participated in seminars on gender equality taught by 33 trainers.

Other achievements

In **Moldova**, civil society organisations, local service providers, and representatives from local government from both sides of the Nistru River participated in capacity development activities on gender equality to establish cross-river cooperation for advancing women's empowerment in the conflict-affected area. In **Georgia**, UNDP programmes implemented in conflict-affected areas were enhanced with a gender equality focus through a strategic partnership with the Association of Women of Abkhazia. As a result, more women and girls were reached by and benefitted from UNDP interventions.



4

Ending violence against women

UNDP worked to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in the region. In 2015, key activities focused on engaging with national partners to develop legal frameworks and policies, providing survivors of violence with support and services and supporting public awareness and community mobilisation campaigns.

Context

Violence against women and girls remains a pervasive issue in most countries in the ECIS region. Despite much progress in legislation, prevention and prosecution, many women and girls experience violence throughout their lives. In **Moldova** and **Turkey**, almost **40 percent** of women report being physically abused by their intimate partners, while in **Kyrgyzstan**, **Tajikistan** and **Belarus**, this is true of **20 percent** of women. (see Figure 5) In **Serbia** over **54 percent** of women have experienced family violence in their lifetime and in Albania, gender-based violence has risen from **56 percent** in 2007 to almost **60 percent** in 2013. Despite these striking numbers, only one in ten women who experience violence seeks help or reports acts of violence to state institutions. Early and forced marriage, which is another form of violence, affects **six percent** of girls in the region.

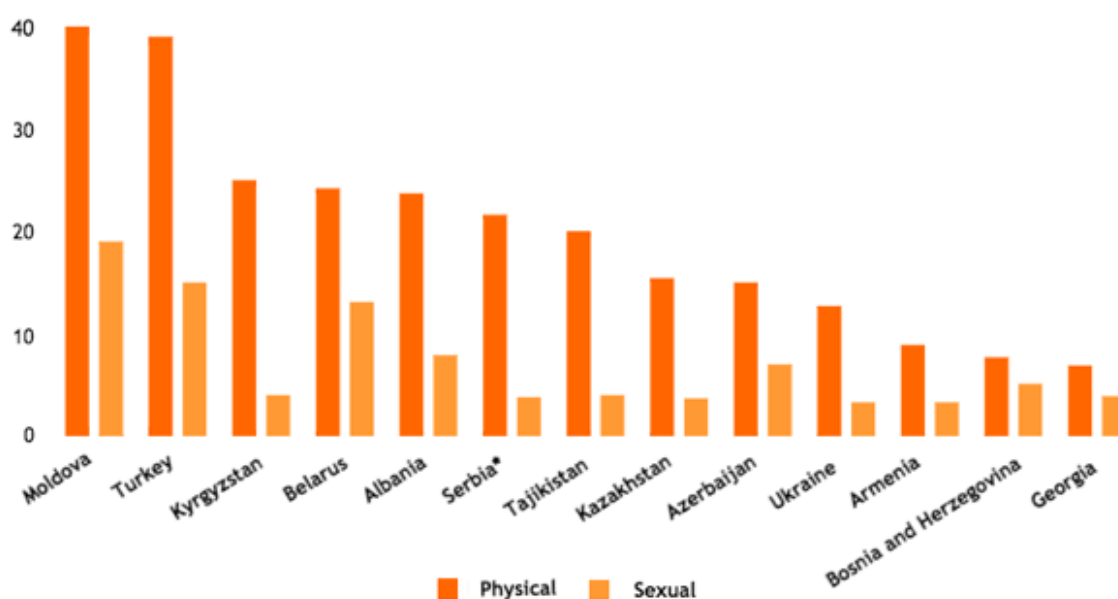
All forms of sexual and gender-based violence have multiple repercussions on the lives of

women affected, including economic disempowerment and diminished agency. As such, it remains a crucial issue to be addressed on global and national levels.

This chapter looks at some of the ways in which UNDP has supported countries in the ECIS region in 2015 to respond to these challenges. In particular, UNDP focused its efforts on:

- Supporting governments to develop legal frameworks and policies on combating violence against women and securing the rights of survivors;
- Working with parliaments, faith leaders and civil society to promote policies and measures that combat violence, early and forced marriage, human trafficking and other harmful practices;
- Strengthening tracking mechanisms to increase reporting on violence against women;
- Strengthening multi-sector support services for survivors.

Figure 5. Physical and Sexual Violence Against Women by Intimate Partner



Source: UNFPA (2014)
* Partner and Family Member Violence

Key results

In **Albania**, UNDP has achieved results on multiple fronts in the fight against gender-based violence. First, UNDP has supported the expansion of tracking and reporting mechanisms on violence against women and children in four municipalities, resulting in 27 out of 61 municipalities having such mechanisms in place. This led to a 30 percent increase in cases reported. Second, a rehabilitation and reintegration programme implemented by UNDP has led to 47 percent of domestic violence survivors gaining employment in 2015, compared to 38 percent in 2014. Third, UNDP helped the State Police Academy assess and upgrade its training curricula on gender-based violence for its 2016-2017 educational program and trained 232 police officers in 7 regions of the country on the principles of safe working environments for women. And fourth, a series of events organised jointly with UN Women, UNFPA, and local CSOs in many cities across the country raised awareness about gender-based violence among youth, particularly young men.

In **Serbia**, UNDP supported the landmark adoption of standards for SOS helpline services for survivors of gender-based violence that now recognise NGOs as specialist service providers. As a results, 11 women NGOs reached out to 20,000 women survivors in a single year. In addition, a specialised curriculum for judges and prosecutors on evaluating cases of sexual and gender-based violence has been developed and 342 prosecutors and 251 police officers have received training. With intensive UNDP engagement, an integrated approach in addressing violence against women is taking root. In addition to the police and judiciary, the healthcare, social protection and education sectors, as well as civil society in 30 municipalities are collaborating to scale up adequate response to women survivors of violence in a coordinated manner. UNDP was

Close-up 8: Unique law brings hope and justice to wartime victims of sexual violence in Croatia

During the 1991-1995 Homeland War in Croatia, an estimated 2,200 people, mostly women, were victims of wartime sexual violence. Over the last two decades, these survivors received no recognition or compensation for the horrors perpetrated against them, while widespread social stigmatisation of sexual violence in Croatia compounded the ongoing effects of trauma.

With support from UNDP, in June 2015, the government of Croatia passed the first law in the region to provide civilian victims of sexual violence in armed conflict with comprehensive reparations. Provisions of the law include: medical and psycho-social rehabilitation, financial compensation, legal aid, and symbolic acts of reparation. Financial compensation amounts to a lump sum of up to €20,000, depending on the severity of the crime, as well as a monthly allowance of about €320.

UNDP plans to further support the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs in implementing mechanisms to assess the eligibility criteria for women to obtain the status of a survivor of sexual violence in armed conflict.

It is hoped that the new law will help to reintegrate survivors into society and restore confidence in the system, while erasing the stigma and indifference they have suffered as survivors of sexual violence.



Women participating in launch event of SOS help-line for survivors of violence in Montenegro, *UNDP Montenegro*

also instrumental in establishing the first Work with Perpetrators Programme in the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, which was accredited by the Social Protection Institute. Nine social work centres provided 75 perpetrators with individual and group therapy sessions.

In **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, UNDP supported the formulation of the first gender-sensitive law on the prevention of domestic violence, which came into force in January 2015. It also conducted specialised gender sensitive trainings for people who work with survivors of domestic violence. The government's third periodic report submitted under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights incorporated issues related to gender-based violence, with UNDP support.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNDP supported a parliamentary initiative to debate legislation that would prohibit religious leaders from

performing child marriages, by including criminal liability for all parties involved. In addition, UNDP facilitated multiple interventions between civil society, religious leaders and state bodies to generate support for combatting this harmful practice. Despite the draft law being initially rejected, a strong movement coming together around the UNiTE to End Violence against Women national network successfully advocated for a revote and the law was signed by the Parliament in October 2016.

In **Croatia**, UNDP supported the Government with evidence and legal analysis to draft a law on the rights of victims of sexual violence during the conflict of the 1990s. The law entered into force in June 2015. This is the first law in the region to provide civilian victims of sexual violence in armed conflict with a comprehensive set of reparation measures (see Close-up 8). More than 100 applications were received by the end of 2015, 97 from

Close-up 9: Coordination improves response to domestic violence in Albania

More than half of Albanian women have experienced at least one form of domestic violence in their lifetime. Yet, few women manage to get the support they need. A new system, the Community Coordinated Response for the Prevention and Treatment of Domestic Violence, established with the assistance of UNDP and supported by other UN agencies in Albania, has started to change that.

The Community Coordinated Response, now adopted by 27 municipalities in Albania, offers domestic violence survivors and their children a wide range of services such as medical, counselling, legal services, vocational training, and support to increase their opportunities to enter the labour market. It is composed of local governmental and non-governmental bodies such as local police, municipality institutions, local health institutions, district prosecution and court, local employment and education departments, and civil society organisations.

There is strong evidence that the system has raised public trust and improved institutional responses to cases of domestic violence. Between 2013 and 2015, state police statistics showed a 30 percent increase in reported cases, a 35 percent increase in requests for protection orders, and a 24 percent increase in arrests of perpetrators for family crimes.

women. Out of 35 approved applications, 34 came from women.

In **Montenegro**, strengthening support systems for reporting domestic violence has led to a considerable increase in cases reported. A national SOS help-line for survivors of violence was introduced in September 2015, through a partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and SOS Line. In the first two months, the help-line reported half more than the total number of cases reported in 2014.

Other achievements

In **Turkey**, UNDP helped mainstream gender concerns in the Strategic Plan of the Ombudsman Institution. In addition, a UNDP initiative set up to explore the specific problems faced by Syrian refugees and their host communities assessed the needs of Syrian women and girls to inform future legal aid responses and policies. Particular attention was paid to sexual and gender-based violence, child marriages and human trafficking. . In **Ukraine**, UNDP supported the Office of the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare an alternative CEDAW report that captured women's rights violations in Crimea and the conflict-affected territories of Ukraine. In **Kazakhstan**, UNDP has supported two regional NGOs to establish special centres for women in difficult life situations in the regions of Mangystau and Kyzylorda. In **Moldova**, UNDP has set up basic services for women survivors of domestic violence in three regions: Rybnita, Slobozia and Grigoriopol. In 2015, 73 women and 47 children received psychological support, legal consultation, food supplies, and professional orientation. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, 536 women received victim witness support services as part of an effort to strengthen functional victim witness support, referral and forensics mechanisms for the most vulnerable, including victims of conflict and gender-based violence, where stigma and fear of repercussions often prevent

witnesses from testifying. In **Belarus**, UNDP ensured coordination between governmental entities, CSOs and the International Organization for Migration to provide assistance to 196 men and 91 women who were victims of human trafficking, facilitating their reintegration into society through psychological counselling, vocational training, protection and legal aid. A one-year information campaign was designed to raise awareness about trafficking in human beings and provide information on what protection and assistance services are available. The campaign encouraged people to report suspected cases and equipped vulnerable populations with the information to protect themselves from the recruitment tactics of traffickers. In **Tajikistan**, UNDP and UN Women developed and piloted mechanisms for implementing the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence in two districts



5

Social inclusion

UNDP advocated for social inclusion policies and interventions that pay attention to intersections between gender and other identities as amplifiers of systemic exclusion. In 2015, UNDP promoted the protection and empowerment of women and men belonging to vulnerable and marginalised groups – Roma communities, ethnic minorities, people living with disabilities or HIV/AIDS.

Context

The marginalisation of vulnerable groups and the exclusionary impact of income inequality continue to be major problems in the ECIS region. Women in vulnerable groups (Roma communities, ethnic minorities, people living with disabilities or HIV/AIDS) are particularly at risk due to their exposure to multiple layers of discrimination and disenfranchisement. Efforts to stop discrimination through legislation alone are often not enough because of unchallenged gender inequalities, social stigma, prohibitive cultural norms, difficulties in accessing justice, and even linguistic and physical obstacles in the case of ethnic minorities and people living with disabilities. A key aspect of exclusion also relates to labour market inequalities that put marginalised populations at risk of poverty, vulnerability, and exclusion from social services and social protection.

According to the [2016 Social Progress Index](#), a tool developed by the non-profit Social Progress Imperative, countries in the ECIS

region vary widely in terms of advancing social progress (see Figure 6). The index measures the extent to which countries provide for the social and environmental needs of their citizens by exploring fifty-four indicators in the areas of basic human needs, wellbeing, and access to opportunity. Only one country (**Cyprus**) is classified as enjoying high social progress. Six (**Serbia, Albania, Georgia, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** and **Turkey**) are clustered in the upper middle social progress group, while most countries are found in the lower middle social progress group, with Central Asia (**Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan** and **Tajikistan**) lagging behind.

Addressing inequalities and ensuring that marginalised populations are not being left behind is a key part of UNDP's global mandate. This chapter looks at some of the ways in which UNDP has supported countries in the ECIS region in 2015 to protect and promote the human rights of women and men belonging to vulnerable populations. In particular, UNDP focused its efforts on:

Figure 6. Social Progress Index



Source: Social Progress Imperative – Social Progress Index (2016)

- Strengthening national development strategies and action plans for excluded populations with a gender perspective;
- Connecting women from ethnic minorities and advocating for their rights;
- Promoting employment measures to integrate excluded and vulnerable women into the labour market;
- Supporting multisectoral services for populations vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and increasing public awareness about their rights;
- Improving economic opportunities and services for women living with disabilities.

Roma

Despite the fact that the Roma are one of the largest ethnic minorities in the region, they continue to face high levels of exclusion, exposing them to severe poverty, unemployment, health risks, and a lack of access to education and social services. Roma women are particularly affected by exclusion, with a third of Roma women having no formal education, and two thirds earning no income. Moreover, wages for the one third of Roma women who are employed amount to only 45 percent of those earned by non-Roma men, and 54 percent of those earned by non-Roma women. Widespread unemployment and employment in the informal economy among working Roma men and women, also exclude Roma households from health and social protection services. In light of these challenges, UNDP has been working to empower Roma men and women economically and politically, and to advocate for changes in legislation that would lead to better inclusion of Roma communities in the region.

Close-up 10: Creating opportunities for Roma women in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Unemployment in the Roma population in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is currently estimated at 53 percent, nearly double that of the non-Roma population. Among Roma women the figure is even higher: 70 percent are unemployed, compared to 35 percent of non-Roma women. Many are long-term unemployed, with 70 percent of young unemployed Roma reporting that they have no work experience at all.

A self-employment programme, implemented for the past eight years by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and UNDP, has helped over 6,000 people to start their own companies, and now extends opportunities to unemployed Roma men and women by providing direct services to Roma communities.

Due to scepticism about official state programmes and a general lack of information about the opportunities available, many Roma men and women simply don't know how to seek employment or register their own business. So the new initiative sends out employment trainers and mentors in four municipalities to inform the Roma community about different options and opportunities and identify those who can make the most of them.

By the end of 2015, 26 Roma women and 55 Roma men benefited from the programme, either by gaining employment, setting up their own business or participating in community works programmes for the long-term unemployed.

Key results

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNDP was involved in the elaboration of gender-sensitive national action plans for the implementation of the 2015-2020 National Strategy for Roma Inclusion. The gender perspective was mainstreamed in action plans on employment, education, housing and health. In addition, to elaborate specific actions that would tackle different aspects of discrimination and stereotypes, a separate National Action Plan for Roma Women Inclusion was developed, with particular attention to measurable indicators and achievable targets, as the lack of monitoring had been one of the major weaknesses of the previous strategy. UNDP also supported Roma women to enter the labour market through a self-employment programme that mentors them in setting up their own businesses (see Close-up 10). These and other issues were discussed at the fourth International Conference on Roma Women

Inclusion, organised in Skopje in November 2015 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with support from UNDP.

In Albania, 40 Roma women activists from four regions participated in a network of agents of change, through which they presented their platform for change to senior officials of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and local authorities. They also actively contributed to consultations for the development of a National Roma Action Plan.

In Croatia, the new National Roma Inclusion Strategy was strengthened with both targeted and mainstreamed approaches to gender equality and social assistance programmes were analysed and evaluated based on their impact on women.

In Moldova, two Roma women previously working as community mediators in a UNDP pilot project were elected as local councillors. It was the first time Roma women were elected to decision-making positions in



Roma women participating in the National Forum of Women from Ethnic Groups in Moldova, *UNDP Moldova*

Close-up 11: Empowering women living with disabilities in Turkmenistan

Social exclusion, low educational attainment, unemployment, and limited opportunities to participate in political and social life are constant obstacles facing people living with disabilities in Turkmenistan. A new coalition between UNDP, the Deaf and Blind Society of Turkmenistan, and national ministries is developing strategies to improve their situation. Particular attention is given to the experiences and needs of women living with disabilities and the additional challenges they face in securing a dignified livelihood.

The partnership began with an initiative that focused on increasing the practical skills and knowledge of women with hearing and visual impairments. Following a series of trainings on computer, management, and leadership skills, a number of women living with disabilities have found employment, opened up businesses, organised interest groups and even went back to school.

Some of the women also met with representatives of the highest governing and law making authorities in an effort to establish a policy dialogue with the government. These meetings were catalytic in changing the mindsets of both decision-makers and women with disabilities about what can be done to improve the lives of people living with disability in the country.

The next step is to develop a national disability strategy that would clearly set long-term priorities and specific targets for progress, and involve people with disabilities in its development and implementation, particularly in the areas of employment and changing public attitudes.

Moldova. In addition, a National Forum of Women from Ethnic Groups, organised for the ethnic minorities, including Roma, to identify barriers to political participation and decision-making processes. The forum resulted in a women's platform to help them have a voice in debates, public hearings and other events of public interest.

People living with HIV/AIDS

According to the [2012 UNAIDS Global Report](#), the number of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia has increased by half a million from 2001 to 2011, to an estimated total of 1.4 million. HIV infection disproportionately affects people living in poverty and socially marginalised groups. Gender inequality and other social factors exacerbate vulnerability to the virus. National responses to the crisis therefore need to be tailored to the experiences and needs of women and men.

In 2015, UNDP worked to protect and promote the rights of people living with HIV and at-risk populations (injecting drug users, sex workers, men who have sex with men) by helping to revise laws, supporting multi-sector planning on HIV and other infectious diseases, and improving health outcomes.

Key results

In [Belarus](#), a support centre for people who inject drugs was established as part of efforts to scale up HIV prevention services for key affected populations. The centre provides women sex workers and women who inject drugs with specific services such as social and psychological support, HIV prevention services, referral for legal assistance, and counselling by infectious disease specialists, gynaecologists and physiologists.

In [Kyrgyzstan](#), 571 HIV-positive women in the civil and penitentiary sectors, and 5,172 women who inject drugs and sex workers received community care and support services



Women living with disabilities employed at a sewing workshop in Tajikistan, *UNDP Tajikistan*

from NGOs and state institutions. In addition, the fourth national conference for programmes working with sex workers, supported by UNDP, produced a resolution with recommendations for the 2016 National Action Plan on the implementation of CEDAW in the Kyrgyz Republic.

In **Tajikistan**, as part of the UNITE to End Violence against Women Campaign, a radio programme on gender equality and the rights of women living with HIV was broadcast country-wide and reached an estimated 500,000 people. In addition, in partnership with local women's organisations, UNDP continued to advocate for the rights of women living with HIV.

In **Kazakhstan**, the Country Coordinating Mechanism established a working group on gender equality issues to analyse national policies in the sphere of HIV/AIDS through a gender-sensitive lens.

People living with disabilities

Even though countries in the ECIS region have made recent advances in legislation on disability rights, people living with disabilities still experience less legal protection, higher

rates of poverty, lower educational achievements, poorer health outcomes, and less political participation. Women are particularly affected as they are likely to face double discrimination and be vulnerable to gender-based violence, abuse, and marginalisation.

In 2015, UNDP offices in Central Asia have focused their efforts on providing professional development and economic empowerment opportunities for women with disabilities, as well as access to better services and opportunities to shape the policies that affect them.

Key results

In **Turkmenistan**, UNDP initiated a national dialogue on the rights of people with disabilities, focusing particularly on the rights of women with disabilities to inclusive education and equal job opportunities. Partnering with the Deaf and Blind Society, UNDP offered management, leadership, and computer skills training for visually and hearing impaired women. As the result, the women were able to initiate small projects which respond to the needs of people with

disabilities. At the same time, meetings with representatives of governmental and public agencies, convened with UNDP support, enabled women to share their concerns and suggestions and start a policy dialogue with the government (see Close-up 11).

In **Tajikistan**, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Ombudsman's Office, three UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, and WHO) and local CSOs launched a joint partnership programme to create an enabling environment where the rights of persons with disabilities, especially children and women with disabilities, are protected by legal and policy frameworks. To complement this initiative, UNDP also supported the provision of legal aid to more than 400 women with disabilities. In addition, as part of an initiative to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable communities in the Tajik-Afghan cross-border areas, a local sewing workshop for women with disabilities was set up in the Hamadoni district, providing employment for 25 rural women.

In **Uzbekistan**, UNDP in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry established a successful sewing workshop for people living with disabilities in Karakalpakstan, enabling 10 women and girls with disabilities to be employed and earn income.