

# Inequalities, social inclusion and rights



**ICPD** =  
International Conference on  
Population and Development  
Beyond 2014



## Highlights

### **The UNECE region is at the forefront of promoting human rights and gender equality**

In the past two decades, there has been an upsurge in support for global frameworks on freedoms and rights, anti-discrimination laws, and independent institutions aimed at protecting human rights in many countries. Gender equality is now recognized as a right and a principle that is critical for achieving all human development goals. UNECE countries have been some of the biggest champions of these progressive changes.

### **Vulnerability has become better understood**

Research has revealed the drivers of vulnerability and inequality, and shown the importance of addressing social exclusion more comprehensively. For example, while in the past it was common to assume that obvious groups (e.g., migrants, ethnic minorities, single mothers) are the most vulnerable, we now know vulnerability is linked as much to individual characteristics and contexts as to group membership.

### **More equality benefits not only the poor, but society as a whole**

Nations with more in-country equality do better on nearly every measurable health and social indicator than countries with more inequality. Greater equality in a society makes the most difference among the poorest people, but also has positive effects on those in the middle and at the top. Addressing inequalities is a fundamental principle of the ICPD Programme of Action, and remains a vital intervention for all societies.

### **Inequalities are on the rise, but national statistics do not reflect this**

There are indications of increasing levels of vulnerability and disadvantage in most countries of the UNECE region. Yet indicators of vulnerability reflect averages, and therefore do not generate accurate data about, for example, persistent pockets of poverty or the needs of special groups or populations. While national averages often indicate increase in access to SRH services, coverage remains unequal, in particular among young people and those from disadvantaged groups, such as the Roma, LGBT people, migrants, and people living in poverty or living in remote areas.

### **Some people and groups experience multiple forms of discrimination**

Women, young people, ethnic minorities (including Roma), migrants and LGBT people are among those who often experience multiple levels of discrimination and disadvantage. In addition, child marriage and bride abduction persist, particularly in Central Asia, and this compounds the levels of inequality experienced by girls and women. Early pregnancy, violence and trafficking are other factors that increase vulnerability.

## THE ICPD BEYOND 2014 REVIEW

Two decades after the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994, governments, parliamentarians, civil society, academics and youth representatives around the world have taken part in the ICPD Beyond 2014 review.

This has involved taking stock of what has been achieved since the ICPD, and agreeing on priorities for the future. The process has renewed political support for the ICPD Programme of Action, which has been extended beyond 2014 by the UN General Assembly, and will continue to inform the post-2015 development agenda.

In the UNECE region (comprising Europe, Central Asia, North America and Israel) the review has been led by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). It has consisted of a series of national consultations, three regional expert meetings, and regional forums involving youth representatives and parliamentarians. The process will culminate in the high-level conference "Enabling Choices: Population Priorities for the 21st Century" in Geneva on 1-2 July 2013.

This brief is part of a series summarizing key issues and recommendations from the review leading up the July 2013 conference in Geneva. The briefs are meant to inform discussions on how to move ahead with implementing the ICPD agenda in the region in light of recent trends and developments.

Note: This brief captures highlights from the region and is therefore not exhaustive. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of UNFPA, the United Nations, or any of affiliated organizations. All data presented is taken from the report "Population Trends and Policies in the UNECE Region", prepared by the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) and the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Human Capital, and the regional report on the *Global ICPD Beyond 2014 Survey*.

## Women still shoulder the majority of the care burden and experience violence

While men are more involved in childcare than in the past, women still do the majority of family and household work as well as working outside the home. In addition, more women are now taking care of their ageing parents, at the same time that austerity measures are cutting care services that could help to alleviate the burden. One of the key indicators of gender inequality is gender-based violence, which remains widespread in the region.

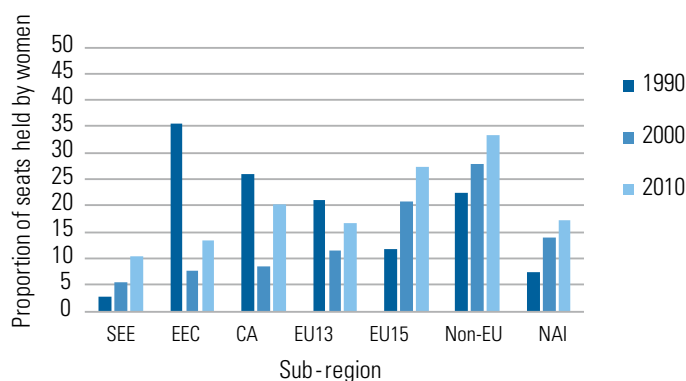
## The regional picture

**The UNECE region has been leading on progressive policy development and ratification in relation to gender equality, human rights and addressing social exclusion over the past 20 years.**

For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been ratified by 187 states, including all but one state in the UNECE region. Since Cairo, there has also been good progress implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in the region, especially with regard to gender and empowerment. Many countries have harmonized their national legislation with international standards, including through the introduction of favourable policies.

However, some of the important policy successes have not resulted in implementation nor translated into changes for people. Reviews of CEDAW, the ICPD Programme of Action and other conventions and commitments have revealed persistent gaps in the development and implementation of national policies. In the UNECE region, practices discriminating against women still exist, for example related to family issues and access to justice, even in some of the more equal societies. More countries now provide both maternity and paternity leave after the birth of a child. However, there are few examples of countries with policies that support women's choices with regard to employment and family care and increase men's involvement in childcare and the household.

**Figure 1: Women in national parliaments (% of seats)**

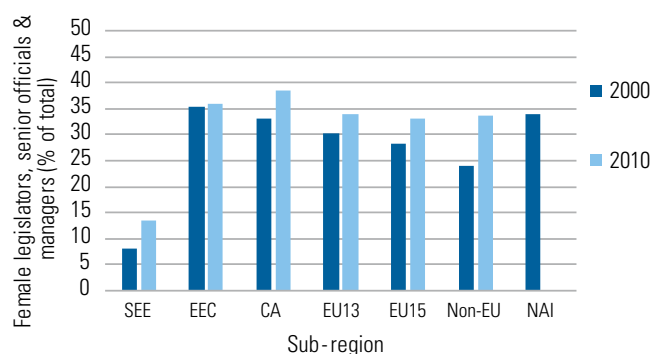


## Lack of political will and increasing opposition are perpetuating gender inequality

Some decision-makers believe that gender equality can wait until other priorities have been achieved, despite the well-documented links between gender equality and all other areas of economic and social development. There is also increasing opposition to the sexual and reproductive rights of women among some politicians and civil society groups. However, policies are not the only thing needed to improve gender equity and promote social inclusion: values also need to change. The media plays an important role in influencing values – both conventional media and social media outlets.

In the political arena, the proportion of women in national parliaments is still lower than that of men, though this varies across the region (Figure 1). In Western Europe and in North America and Israel, women have increasingly gained seats in national parliaments over the past two decades, while Eastern Europe and the Caucasus have the lowest representation of women in parliaments in the region. The number of female legislators, senior officials and managers has increased slightly in most countries, and is generally above one-third, but South-Eastern Europe has significantly lower numbers of women in these positions (Figure 2).

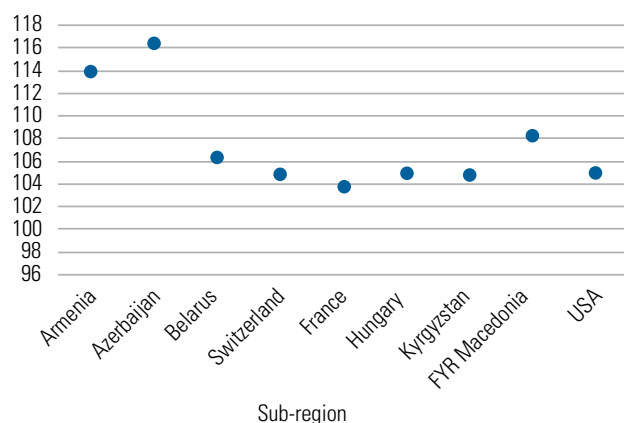
**Figure 2: Female legislators, senior officials, managers (% of total)**



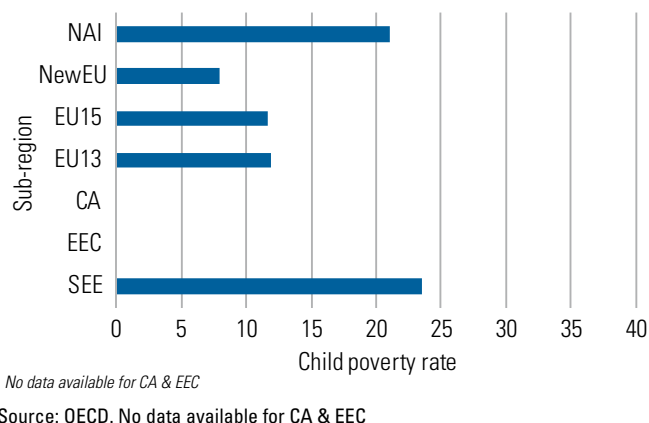
Overall, harmful attitudes and stereotypes related to gender are still prevalent in the region. This is one of the key factors that limits access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, and other essential services. Moreover, sex selection is increasingly occurring in certain parts of the region, with the greatest gender imbalances at birth recorded in Armenia and Azerbaijan (Figure 3).

The nature and level of poverty varies substantially across the region, and this particularly affects children. For example, South-Eastern Europe, the United States and Israel have the highest levels of children living in poverty in the region, while rates in Western Europe remain low (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Sex ratio at birth (selected countries, 2010)**



**Figure 4: Child poverty rate (2008)**



**KEY FOR INCLUDED GRAPHS:**

- CA - Central Asia:** Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
- EU13 - EU new member-states:** Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
- EU15 - EU older member-states:** Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, United Kingdom
- EEC - Eastern Europe and Caucasus:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russian Federation, Ukraine
- SEE - South-Eastern Europe\*:** Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey \*includes Kosovo
- Non-EU - Western Europe Non-EU members:** Andorra, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland
- NAI - North America and Israel:** Canada, Israel, United States

## Solutions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

### Increase governments' accountability in relation to international agreements and conventions

Ensure that all governments in the region ratify and uphold human rights agreements, and that mechanisms are in place to ensure implementation, enforcement and monitoring. National-level legislation related to gender and other forms of discrimination must be brought into line with international conventions such as CEDAW, and monitored through gender impact assessment and use of robust human rights indicators. Parliamentarians can and should play an important role by encouraging accountability and drafting legislation that reflects legally binding and non-binding agreements, such as the ICPD Programme of Action, and standards on equality, social inclusion and human rights.

Governments must also be held accountable for implementation of ICPD-related legislation, including providing adequate budget allocations, and ensure the effective functioning of gender mainstreaming mechanisms. Governments are also responsible for protecting people's access to sexual and reproductive health services, including, where legal, safe abortion. There are differing opinions about what role public-private partnerships should play in public health and welfare, and decisions should be made based on the best interests of the public, with particular emphasis on increasing equity of access and quality of care.

**Promote evidence-informed, human rights-based policies that enable choices**

Promote flexible working arrangements and full participation of women in the formal economy, and avoid women being

segregated into part-time or low-skilled jobs. Whether or not women take time off to have and rear children, they must receive equal pay for equal work and not be penalized in terms of pension contributions. Efforts to reconcile work and family must address the need for child and elder care services, including parental leave. Paternity leave should be available and non-transferrable, so that it encourages fathers to take up their leave. In addition, policies should be designed to support older persons, for example, by increasing their options for receiving care or providing care and support to young family members.

**Encourage positive, non-discriminatory attitudes to gender and ageing**

Redress negative gender stereotypes through public awareness campaigns and by integrating positive values into educational curricula (formal and informal, in and out of school). Work with boys and men, in particular, to change restrictive notions of masculinity. Promote positive values in relation to ageing, for instance through the creation of intergenerational spaces and opportunities for children and young people to interact with older persons. Engage the media in reinforcing positive norms, but also hold them accountable for actions that reinforce discriminatory stereotypes.

Educational curricula and teacher training must be infused with gender equality principles, and devoid of harmful gender stereotyping. Gender-sensitive parenting skills training should also be considered to instill positive attitudes to gender equality from a young age.

### **End gender-based violence and harmful practices**

Redressing harmful gender norms is vital, not least because it can help to prevent gender-based violence, but there must also be direct measures. These should include sensitizing health and social care providers, the police and justice systems to the needs and rights of people who experience gender-based violence. This requires more research on attitudes and values related to gender among health and social service providers. Finally, implement policies that will end harmful practices, which are sometimes justified as ‘cultural’ practices, including parental and spousal consent for health services (such as contraception or abortion), and early and forced marriage.

### **Consider the impact of multiple forms of discrimination and hidden vulnerability**

Despite adequate laws, many people – such as Roma, LGBT people, migrants, sex workers, ethnic minority groups and people living with HIV and AIDS – face double or even triple discrimination, curtailing their abilities to get services and exercise their human rights. In addition, vulnerability can come in the form of isolation and social stress, and is not limited to what are assumed to be the most marginalized groups (e.g., men who lose their jobs, as well as older persons, can become isolated, which can lead to vulnerability). These issues must be factored into policy discussions.

### **Increase and enable participation**

Young people, ethnic minorities (particularly the Roma), older persons, women, LGBT, youth and others must be encouraged and enabled to inform policymaking at all levels. This can be done indirectly through high-quality qualitative research that informs policymaking discussions, or more directly, by developing platforms and other opportunities (e.g., using social media, or outreach in remote communities) for dialogue and participation. Sex workers should also be part of policymaking discussions that affect their lives, and this requires the decriminalization of sex work.

### **Support civil society**

Civil society organizations and NGOs must be supported with long-term funding and an enabling environment that continues to build on the huge gains they have helped bring about in the region in terms of rights legislation and policies, data collection and analysis, changing norms related to gender and discriminatory stereotypes, social inclusion, and implementing programmes, especially among underserved populations. Governments and other stakeholders should continue to strengthen partnerships with civil society groups and NGOs.

### **Make better use of existing data and research**

Ensure that census data is adequately disaggregated by sex, age and, where appropriate, ethnicity and that data is made publicly available. Researchers and government bodies should aim to employ comparable methodologies across studies and sectors, within countries and the region, to help create a broader and more accurate picture of the reality of rights, equality and inclusion. Complement these actions with the sharing of best practices, for example by creating regional platforms for shared learning. These measures are particularly important in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where data are also needed on trafficking, bride abductions, early marriage, gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy, women migrants, and women with disabilities.

### **Encourage and fund research to understand the drivers of vulnerability**

Disaggregation of census and survey data should be a priority in all countries, and the data and analyses should be made available in user-friendly formats for use in advocacy and research. Specific recommendations include: the creation and use of good indicators that can help to reveal diversity among populations and groups; methodologies which reconcile individual agency with context and structural and cultural factors; qualitative methods that provide information about cultural context; and time-use surveys for understanding the dynamics of reconciling caregiving and paid work for women and men.

### **Ensure people know their rights and have access to justice**

Sexual and reproductive rights must be respected, protected and fulfilled through enabling public education and legal and policy reforms. This includes providing recognition and protections in national legislation that affirm fundamental human rights, specifically sexual and reproductive rights, and that guarantee people’s ability to exercise these rights free from discrimination, coercion or violence. All people must have these protections, regardless of their age, sex, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, marital status, disability status, national origin, language, sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status.

Justice systems need to be sensitized to the needs of people who face discrimination, and especially multiple forms of discrimination. For instance, European standards recommend penal, civil and other courts specifically designed to address the unique needs of young people, with staff trained to deal with and be sensitive to youth issues and needs. This could be extended to address victims of gender-based violence, and other groups who face multiple vulnerabilities, such as ethnic minorities.

