



Regional priorities on Gender Equality for the Post-2015 and Sustainable Development Goals framework

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The Women's Major Group members and representatives of other women's rights organizations¹, participants of the Regional Consultation "Inclusive and Sustainable Development: Perspectives from Europe and Central Asia on the Post-2015 Development Agenda" in Istanbul, Turkey on the 6-8th November 2013, have identified key issues of concern in the region that we ask governments from the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region to act on.

The Women's Major Group and other women's rights organizations call for a **stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's human rights** in the post 2015 framework. Furthermore, we call for gender equality as a crosscutting priority in all dimensions of sustainable development, and therefore to be reflected in the preamble and in the form of concrete targets within all other goals.

We urge governments to take action on the following needs and challenges of the region in the Post-2015 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework:

1. Ensure Gender equality

Gender equality needs to be fully recognized as a right and a principle that is essential to achieve human development. Gender equality include political rights, and although there have been improvements in the region, women still remain largely underrepresented in policy making bodies, parliament and government. Women are also only marginally represented in decision making boards of the private sector. The region still faces a gender pay gap, despite the fact that unequally distributed incomes and care burdens reinforce deprivation and social exclusion. Some women and girls encounter multiple discriminations making them highly vulnerable, such as Roma, migrant, disabled and LBT women, women and girls living in rural and deprived areas etc., and they need particular attention.

Necessary measures to address the root cause of inequality include amongst others: use of quotas and affirmative action aiming at gender parity at all levels and in all areas as well as full recognition and realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Investing in gender equality ensures healthier and more prosperous societies and is crucial to sustainable development. Governments therefore need to ensure that sufficient resources will be allocated to this.

¹The Women's Major Group (WMG) coordinates the input and participation of Women's rights and Feminist organisations in the United Nations processes on Sustainable Development Goals and the Post2015 development agenda. The WMG was created as one of nine Major Groups in the outcome agreement of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. This statement was prepared by members of the WMG and Women's rights movements from UNECE region, in particular Charlotte Nielsen (IPPF European Network), see <http://www.womenrio20.org>

2. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls

Cultural, traditional or religious justifications for violations of women's and girls' human rights are unacceptable. Nonetheless, violence against women and girls is still persisting across the region, and in some countries on the increase. In particular the increase in gender killings (honour killings) is of great concern.

Governments need to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe on Violence against Women, and ensure comprehensive, integrated policies and legislation to prevent, combat and protect women and girls from violence and all forms of discrimination.

3. Provide social protection

Universal economic and social rights should be recognised, alongside all other human rights. Defenders of women's human rights must be protected, along with their freedom of speech, association and assembly.

Education is a fundamental human right, and indispensable tool to a country's economic growth and for achieving gender equality and human well being. Gender equality should be ensured at all educational levels. Comprehensive sexuality education is crucial to obtain gender equality, and allow young girls and boys to understand their bodies and rights, and must be provided.

4. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

Sexual rights are human rights, and universal access to SRHR is crucial to human development. In the region economic, rural and urban disparities and increased migration are contributing to a limited access to sexual and reproductive health services, in particular for vulnerable groups. Governments should review legislation, practices and standards that restrict access to sexual and reproductive health services and also consider amending their laws, regulations, strategies and public policies relating to the voluntary termination of pregnancy in order to put women's right to health and a free choice as a priority.

In the countries where access to abortion is not legal, it should be decriminalized and ensured to be an accessible, affordable and safe procedure. Where abortion is legal in the region, it is often unsafe due to the poor quality of services, hardships in accessing the services and a lack of pre- and post abortion counselling. In many countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia there has been a decline in the contraceptive prevalence due to ignorance and diffidence towards modern contraceptive methods. Access to quality sexual and reproductive health services should be provided.

The region is facing rising opposition and conservatism that is violating women's and girls' human rights. Many new family forms have emerged in the region, and legislation needs to embrace this change. Individuals of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions should be guaranteed their rights and social protection. Governments need to ensure access to these rights for all population groups in the region.

5. Adopt a human rights based approach to population dynamics

A human rights based approach to policies and programmes on population dynamics is crucial to ensure sustainable development. Free movement of people is a basic human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Governments need to respect this right, and pay particular attention to undocumented migrant women as a highly vulnerable group, as they often lack access to information and basic services.

Due to the financial crisis more and more women face increased inequalities as they have to balance their work for pay and care work in the families. There is a need for policies that reconcile a work-life balance and prevent inequalities. The region is facing a growing ageing population, which will have consequences for women in old age, as they encounter a gender pension gap, and are subject to increased poverty. At the same time the region is also facing lower fertility rate, which should not be seen as a threat to societies.

Small populations can live long, healthy and prosperous lives. Governments must review and amend their policies and standards in order to meet the arising expectations of such dynamics and at the same time governments need to ensure that women's human rights are respected. Freedom from any form of violence and coercion, and respect the right to make conscious and informed choices and decisions about demographic behaviour and social well being must be part of the framework which embraces women's and human rights.

6. Ensure environmental justice

Economic development policies in the region continue cause irreparable damage to the environment and depletion of valuable natural resources. Unsustainable economic policies cause long-term damage to the environment and are a barrier to social development as they cause inequality, which in majority touches women and girls. Ensuring environmental justice is crucial to sustainable development. Conventions (UN chemical conventions, SAICM) to eliminate hazardous chemicals and protect all people, including the vulnerable population such as women and children must be universally ratified and fully implemented.

The rights of the indigenous peoples in the region must be recognised and their access to their traditional subsistence resources ensured, including the respect for and mandatory implementation of free prior and informed consent to resources.

Women should be recognized as key economic actors that can contribute to transforming production and consumption patterns towards sustainable development.