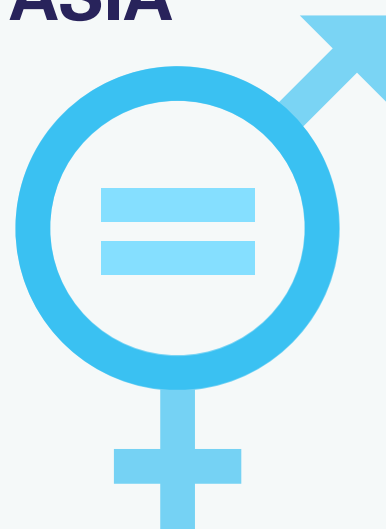


GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA 2021-2025



UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
(ECARO)



FOREWORD

UNICEF in ECA region is committed to the protection, survival and development of girls and boys, women and men and persons of all genders on an equal basis and, more broadly to their equal rights. Gender equality has always been a core value across our programmes and operations.

This Regional Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025 provides direction and scope for advancing gender equality in UNICEF's programmatic activities as well as organizational policies and practices. This will guide our operations into the future and is in support of our Global Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan 2018-2021 and beyond. The strategy also relates to the commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child that upholds equality, protection and rights of all children without discrimination of any kind including sex, race, ethnic origin or any other status.

Promoting gender equality is the responsibility of all UNICEF staff.

In our collective effort towards an equitable, safe and progressive environment for the growth of every child, it is necessary to address gender as a key programming principle.

We must take a comprehensive approach to address the structural barriers that perpetuate gender inequality as well as the deep-rooted complexity of harmful norms and practices that prevent progress and growth across the region.

I am pleased to share this strategy and welcome your active leadership and commitment towards our collective implementation.

Let us together take this forward and ensure greater reach and equitable impact across our region.



Afshan Khan

Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia

Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe

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Europe and Central Asia refers to UNICEF country coverage which includes 22 countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Kosovo (UN SC resolution 1244), Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

C4D	Communication for Development
CO	Country Office
CPD	Country Programme Document
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
ECA	Europe and Central Asia
ECARO	(UNICEF) Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EU	European Union
GAP	(UNICEF) Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GBViE	Gender Based Violence in Emergencies
GFP	Gender Focal Point
GPR	Gender Programmatic Review
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, intersex, queer/questioning
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PSN	Programme Strategy Note
RO	Regional Office
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SP	(UNICEF) Strategic Plan
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STEM	Science, Mathematics, Technology, and Engineering
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
T4D	Technology for Development
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAC	Violence Against Children
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Introduction

Countries in Europe and Central Asia (ECA) have gone through significant socio-economic, cultural and political transitions accompanied by rapid social change, gradual economic growth and some improvements in living standards. The region has also broadly eliminated glaring gender gaps, but significant inequities remain that disproportionately impact the lives of girls and women. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, gender inequalities persist in ECA region and it will take 107 years to fully close its overall gender gap.¹ Valuing the untapped potential of every girl and every woman is the key to realizing the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Gender equality is a critical corporate priority for UNICEF and a normative principle of programming that supports UNICEF's vision of "leaving no child behind". This principle is upheld by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989)², the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979)³ and other international conventions. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a sustainable world where all girls and boys, women and men and people of all genders can enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protection. UNICEF's commitment to an equal future recognizes that promoting gender equality is not only crucial, but necessary since it has a profound impact on the lives of children. Children's rights and well-being often depend on women's rights and well-being, and childhood investments in gender equality contribute to lifelong positive outcomes for children and their communities.⁴ UNICEF has the strategic advantage of addressing the root causes of gender-based disparities that start from birth, because of UNICEF's programmatic focus on early childhood to adolescence when discriminatory gender norms and roles are internalized and intensified. This advantage is strengthened by UNICEF Strategic Plan (SP), 2018–2021⁵ that commits the organization to address gender inequality across all outcome areas. Closely aligned with the SP, the Gender Action Plan (GAP), 2018–2021⁶ articulates the commitment of UNICEF to an equal future for all girls and boys and provides a road map for promoting gender equality throughout the organization's work.

In line with the SP and the GAP 2018-2021, and newly emerging SP and Gender Action Plan for 2022-2025, this Regional Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025, developed by the UNICEF Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECARO), outlines its strategic direction, objectives and approaches with its priority actions and minimum standards to support country offices (COs) to advance gender equality in both development and humanitarian contexts. This internal document is not a 'how-to' guide, it reinforces why a focus on gender equality is fundamental for achieving UNICEF's vision for all children, and the important role every staff must play in translating this strategy into action. While UNICEF is committed to achieving all impact results of the SP 2018-2021, this strategy sets the direction to integrate gender perspectives into four Regional Flagship Result areas (Learning, Thriving, Protection, and Participation) of UNICEF in Europe and Central Asia region as a cross-cutting theme. This strategy comprises of five parts: an overview of gender issues in the region, followed by guiding principles of the Regional Gender Equality strategy, and Programmatic, Institutional and Partnerships guidance to ensure gender dimensions are embedded into UNICEF-assisted programmes and organizational level. The Annex includes an ECARO Gender Action Plan, mapping of existing partners in the region and a list of key gender-related tools and resources. The main objectives of the Regional Gender Equality Strategy are:

1

Address prevailing gender inequalities in ECA countries and strengthen integration of gender perspectives across UNICEF's programming areas (including in humanitarian contexts).

2

Guide all staff and implementing partners to address and mainstream gender inequality concerns in their work.

3

Create an enabling environment for promoting gender equality at all levels.

I. Regional Context: Gender Issues in Europe and Central Asia

Gender inequality is a root cause of many barriers to sustainable development and is an obstacle for fulfilling UNICEF's vision. Although the situation varies within the ECA sub-regions, in many countries, certain indicators of gender equality remain strong, such as equitable primary and secondary school enrollment for girls and boys and growing numbers of female tertiary graduates as well as reduction of maternal and infant mortality, while others, such as girls' school to work transition and women's economic opportunities, accessibility and acceptability of sexual and reproductive health services, female representation in politics and economic decision making, prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) and unequal care work distribution between men and women show little sign of improvement. In some countries, boys and men also face specific challenges and disadvantages. These and all other aspects of inequality which stem from deep-rooted patriarchal norms, low value for girl child and persistent gender stereotypes and prejudices must be overcome. Challenges are most pronounced for those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as rural and migrant girls and women, girls and women with disabilities, single mothers, girls and women from ethnic minorities (i.e. Roma, Egyptian) and the LGBTIQ⁷ groups.

■ Politics and economy

Progress in women's political and economic participation and representation has been slow. Women are largely underrepresented in governance bodies and are rarely leading core ministries, top judiciary ranks and major political parties. In 2018, women held less than one in every four parliamentary seats with 21 per cent.⁸ While women's labour force participation rate is fairly high at 52 per cent⁹ (although still lower than men in all countries) and women outperform men in educational achievements,¹⁰ this advantage fails to translate into women's economic empowerment. The gender pay gap is at 24 per cent to the detriment of women, resulting in a higher risk of poverty for women than men.¹¹ Occupational segregation persists with women concentrated in low-paying informal sectors without social insurance and is perpetuated through educational choices based on gendered stereotypes about types of work "suitable" for women and men.¹²

■ Care and domestic work

Throughout the region, a disproportionate load of unpaid care and domestic work provided by girls and women remain largely unrecognized and undervalued and average, in the region, women perform two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work than men.¹³ The high dependency of families on girls' and women's unpaid labour keeps all girls and women, including those educated and highly skilled, away from formal employment and good career opportunities, and undermines their ability to accumulate lifetime savings. This also has the potential of deprioritizing girls' education and preventing girls and women from realizing their full economic, social and political potential.

■ Health

Maternal mortality decreased by half between 2000 and 2017, from 34 to 17 deaths per 100,000 live births.¹⁴ However, levels remain unacceptably high in some countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and Central Asia and reductions in Government's healthcare spending in many countries impede the access of girls and women (even more so, women and girls with disabilities, those in rural areas, those from ethnic minorities, or poverty stricken areas) to crucial reproductive and sexual health services.¹⁵ Early pregnancies remain a concern in a few countries. While the adolescent fertility rate is 26 per 1,000 women in the region, it can go up to 52 births per 1,000 women ages between 15-19.¹⁶ The top risk is HIV, however, as the number of HIV-positive pregnancies in the region has risen in recent years.¹⁷

■ Education

Although on average, key education-related indicators in the region are the most advanced globally, gender gaps are still seen. While enrolment rates are almost similar for girls and boys until lower-secondary school, gaps appear at the upper-secondary level. Boys are more likely to be out of school in some countries, but the largest gender disparity is seen in countries where girls are more disadvantaged, especially among girls from Roma communities and those with disabilities.¹⁸ As a result, young women are more likely than young men to be not in education, employment or training (NEET). In 12 out of 22 countries in the region, more than 15

per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 are NEET.¹⁹

■ Harmful practices and gender-based violence

Harmful traditional practices such as child, early and forced marriage and unions persist in some countries despite legal prohibitions. Child marriage is estimated to affect girls, with estimates for individual countries ranging from 15 per cent to 3 per cent.²⁰ Child marriage is reported to be more prevalent in certain population groups such as Roma communities with 2.5 to 7 times more likely to have married before the age of 18 than non-Roma women.²¹ Child marriage is often associated with early school dropout and early childbirth, making girls more vulnerable to domestic violence and social exclusion.²²

Although prohibited, sex-selective abortion continues to be practiced in some countries.²³ The practice, based on tradition of son preference, generated a skewed ratio between male and female births and has already resulted in an estimated 171,000 “missing” girls across the region.²⁴ The practice inflicts a lasting damage on women’s health, reinforces a culture of low value placed on girls and in two decades, it will translate into a demographic imbalance affecting men’s marriage prospects as well as the potential to increase human trafficking and gender-based violence (GBV).²⁵

Violence against girls and women is widespread across the region, driven by harmful gender norms. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 26 per cent of women in Eastern Europe and 23 per cent in Central Asia have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.²⁶ Crisis-affected areas have even higher rates of GBV in emergencies (GBViE).²⁷ Tolerance towards violence against women and girls is highest in Central Asia with 38 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men believe it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife under some circumstances.²⁸ Implementation of GBV-related laws often lag behind, and people’s awareness on GBV, data collection on the issue, referral systems and quality and accessibility of services for survivors remain inadequate.²⁹

■ Digital skills

A substantial divide persists between women and men and between girls and boys in Internet access and use. Throughout the region, the proportion of women using the Internet is 69 per cent, compared to 74 per cent of men.³⁰ Situation in Central Asia is even worse- women have 30 per cent less access to Internet compared to men,³¹ undermining their chances to obtain skills necessary for labour market transformation in the “Fourth Industrial Revolution.”³² Underrepresentation of girls and young women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields continues to be a common challenge across the region, which reduces their diverse and skilled employment prospects. Just one third of graduates from STEM programmes in tertiary education are female in Europe and Central Asia, with only 32 per cent.³³ At the same time, they are overrepresented in education, health and welfare programmes.³⁴

■ Impact of emergencies

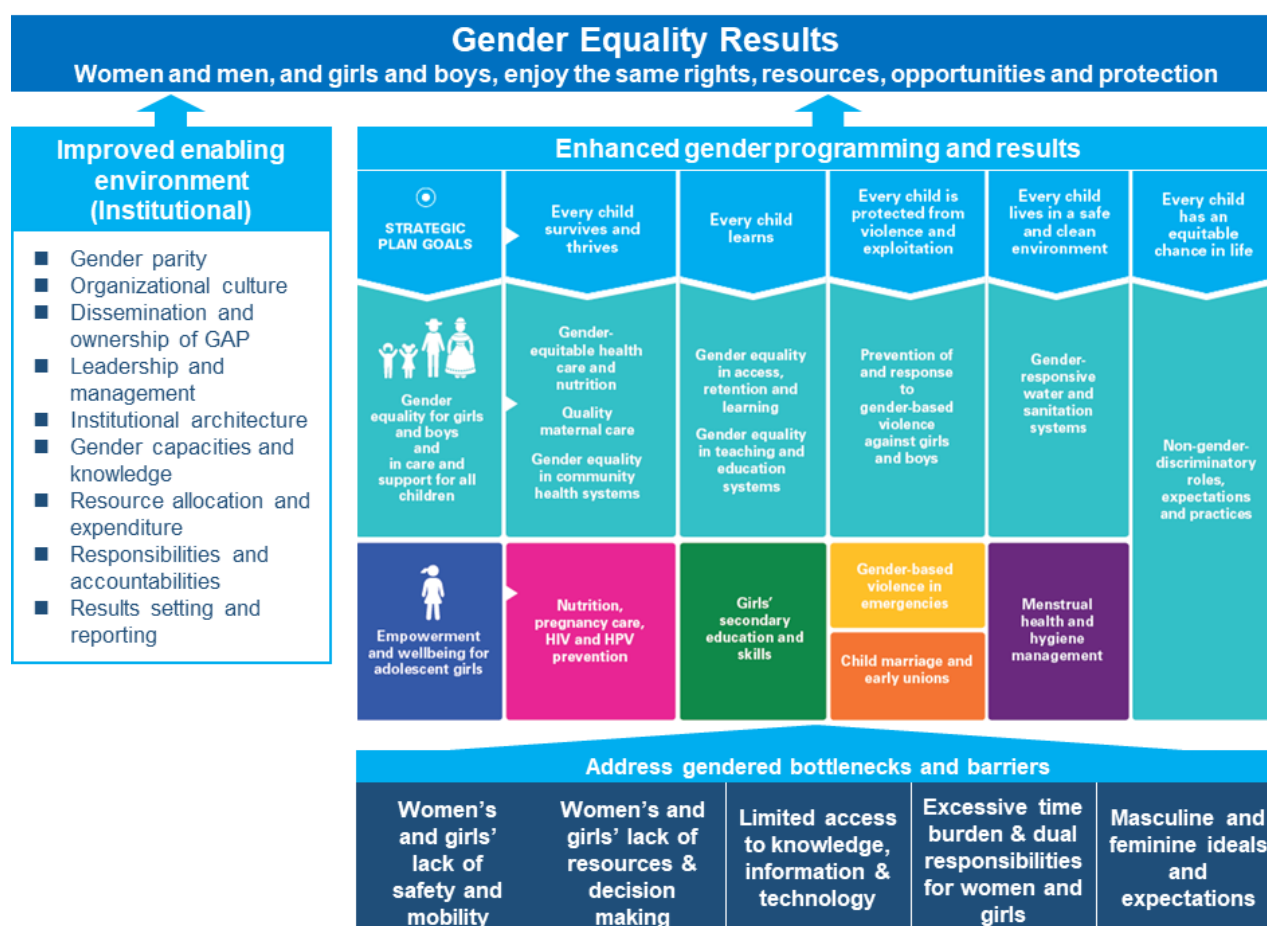
More than a million refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe to escape conflict, persecution and poverty. Adolescent girls, specifically those who are unaccompanied or separated, face a unique set of GBV-related risks before, during and after migration.³⁵ Among people who are trafficked in the region, 90 per cent are female victims, mostly for sexual exploitation and girls under 18 represented one fifth of all female victims.³⁶ Girls and women with disabilities in humanitarian context are more likely to experience GBV. However, services and programmes to address violence against women and girls in emergencies remain largely underfunded.³⁷ Evidence shows that the impact and implications of COVID-19 are also intensifying inequalities for girls and women, and social norms place an even heavier caregiving burden on them. Furthermore, girls’ and women’s access to sexual and reproductive health care is paramount. In some countries in the region, 60 per cent of women are reported to have had trouble accessing gynaecological and obstetric care as a result of COVID-19.³⁸ The shift to online distance learning could disadvantage girls who are less likely than boys to use the Internet, especially in Central Asia.³⁹ Moreover, the correlation between the pandemic, GBV and domestic violence is also well-established. The loss of household income and protracted school closures may also place adolescent girls at an increased risk of child marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. UNICEF's Approach to Gender Equality

The UNICEF Strategic Plan (SP) 2018-2021 emphasizes gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women as a guiding principle; and commits to mainstreaming gender across the organization's work. The associated Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2018-2021, underlines gender as a key principle of programming by elaborating the gendered dimensions of the programmatic results across the five goals of the SP (see below figure) and outlining the steps to strengthen gender across change strategies and institutional systems and processes. Building on the successes and lessons learned from the first GAP 2014–2017⁴⁰, UNICEF's second GAP aims to accelerate progress on UNICEF's priority gender results.

Both GAPs focused on two areas: First, they sought to improve the internal environment for gender equality mainstreaming within UNICEF, including building the gender architecture and corporate systems for gender equality. Second, they aimed to enhance the integration of gender equality within UNICEF programming. For the latter, UNICEF adopted a dual approach. This comprised of:

- i. directly targeting five specific issues focusing on adolescent girls – promoting gender-responsive adolescent health; advancing girls' secondary education; ending child marriage and addressing GBViE; and (under GAP 2018-2021) improved menstrual health and hygiene (MHH); and
- ii. enhancing gender equality integration across UNICEF's core programmatic areas linked to the seven outcome areas of the SP 2014-2017 and the five goal areas of the 2018–2021 SP.



The GAP describes five key principles that underpin the best strategies for quality gender programming to ensure that locally owned solutions can be delivered sustainably for greater reach and impact. Interventions should be:



at-scale



innovative

evidence-based/
data generating

expert-led

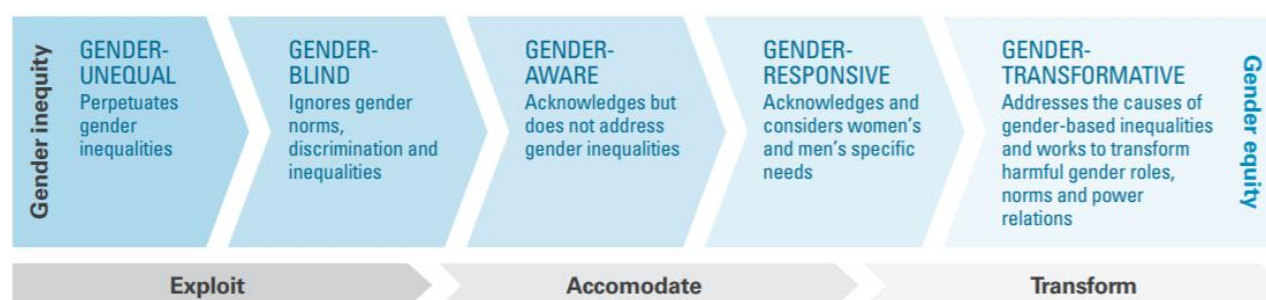


well-resourced

III. Guiding Principles of the ECA Regional Gender Strategy

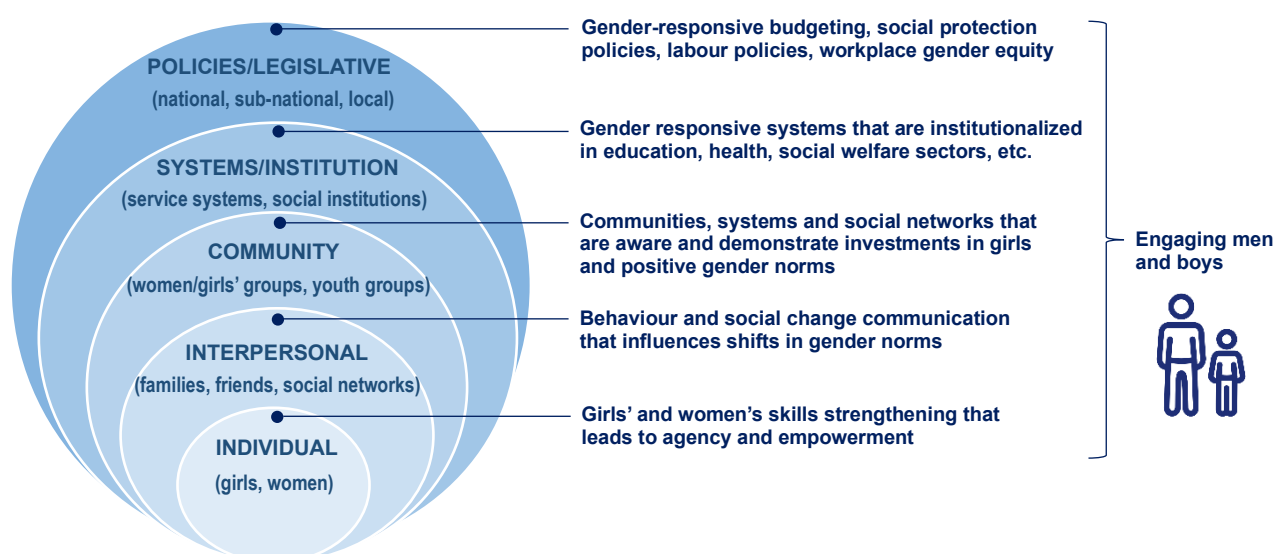
All UNICEF's interventions in ECAR should apply gender equality as a key programmatic principle, aim for gender responsive approaches that tackle the root causes of gender inequality and should eventually lead to gender transformative outcomes that reshape unequal power relations including in humanitarian contexts. Such programmes should go beyond increasing sensitivity and awareness, and specifically undertake interventions that removes gender inequalities. The level of gender integration in programmes is measured on a Gender Equality Continuum as reflected in below Figure 1. Gender transformation actively examines, questions and changes rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women. Furthermore, it moves beyond individual self-improvement among girls and women towards redressing the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities.

Figure 1: The Gender Equity Continuum



Gender transformative approaches need multisectoral interventions and work across the socio-ecological model for shifts in unequal power relations (see Figure 2 below). For example, successful gender-transformative approaches work from the individual level of girls who are not empowered to advocate for their rights through to the level of communities where girls' choices are limited, and through systems such as education where gender-unequal pedagogies flourish. Using a socioecological model helps to understand and track changes in social expectations of boys, girls, and male and female roles, and in gender-based values, beliefs and practices.⁴¹ The socio-ecological model also helps to design programmes more effectively, by combining interventions that effect change at different levels. For example, decline in GBV may contain a generational shift in the perceived acceptability of violence against girls and women among people, resulting from a combination of legal reforms, improved availability of services, and increased understanding by girls and women of their rights.⁴² All gender interventions need to consider this inter-related socio-ecological model when designing programmes.

Figure 2: The Socio-Ecological Model and Opportunities for Gender-Transformative Programming⁴³



UNICEF in ECA region seeks to advance gender equality in all aspects of programmes and across the organization. To this end, this Regional Gender Equality Strategy will apply the following six core principles to guide the overall approach which are interconnected and mutually reinforcing:

1 Addressing root causes of gender inequality	Discriminatory gender norms reinforce gender roles in the society and support toxic masculinities, whereby people foster bias towards sons and undervaluing of daughters. It is critical to identify and work to transform the root causes of gender inequality which requires addressing social norms and institutions that reinforce gender inequalities, as well as advocating for and fostering legislation and policies that promote gender equality. UNICEF offices in ECA region must prioritize gender analysis as a core element of strategic planning, programme design, monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning.
2 Empowering and investing in girls and women	Gender equality can be achieved only when all girls and boys, women and men engage as change agents, and not merely as beneficiaries. While improving their conditions (daily needs) is essential, the most important focus of work for UNICEF should be improving the social position (value or status) of girls and young women. It is essential to listen to and work with girls and women of all backgrounds as partners to build their agency over the decisions that affect them, as well as to build their knowledge, confidence, skills and access to and control over resources by increasing their access to quality education and skills-build training, health, social and protection services, food, nutrition and WASH. Cultivating and amplifying girls' and women's voices and engaging them in developing, executing and evaluating programmes is also essential. In line with the principle of "leaving no one behind," UNICEF offices in ECA region also needs to pay attention to intersectionality with other social variables (i.e. ethnicity, region, poverty, disability, etc.).
3 Engaging boys and men	While gender-focused work has been primarily targeted toward girls and women because they are disproportionately affected by systemic and severe gender discrimination, gender inequality is also harmful to boys and men, despite the many tangible benefits it gives them through resources, power, authority and control. These benefits to boys and men do not come without a cost to themselves, often translated into risky and unhealthy behaviours and reduced longevity. For a truly gender transformative approach, it is critical to engage boys, young men and men to embrace positive and diverse masculinities, while also achieving meaningful results for them. Boys and men could shift the dominant norms and ideas about gender and masculinity and challenge the patriarchal stereotyped expectations they face and promote girls' and women's empowerment.
4 Mobilizing communities for change	Acknowledging that gender equality is about power and relationships, transformative gender approaches require working with whole communities, and at all levels, equally engaging stakeholders from all gender perspectives to foster environments that enable gender equality. Community mobilization is crucial in interpersonal, behavioral change and mass media communication to raise awareness and transform discriminatory gender attitudes, norms and behaviours. It is essential to work with and build capacity of community-based organizations especially women's and girls' rights machinery to promote community dialogue, social inclusion and collective actions to work on gender equity, diffuse resistance to change, increase access to services and sustain gender transformative norms and practices.
5 Addressing gender issues at system, legal and policy level	Achieving gender transformative change calls for fundamental changes in social systems, legislation and policies at a deeper level. Legislative and policy change are critical instruments in ushering gender justice and can also play a significant role in shifting practices by offering incentives that can deter gender discriminatory practices. Capacity building on gender equality among service providers (i.e. teachers, health workers, social workers, justice sector etc.), enhancing gender disaggregated data for policy change as well as accessibility and quality of services will be essential.
6 Building partnerships for collaboration and learning	UNICEF in ECA region will continue to build partnerships to promote gender equality by collaborating with governments, United Nations agencies, the private sector, NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) who share a common vision for gender equality. UNICEF will work with all partners to identify and implement best-practice solutions for overcoming inequalities that affect the rights of girls and boys. It is also critical to leverage partnerships with key players influencing and supporting programmes to overcome political and social-economic challenges such as the European Union (EU) and relevant European institutions and international financial institutions (IFIs), as well as the broader United Nations system. It is also essential to maintain collaborative work with academia and the private sector to promote awareness, better standards and practice, regulation, incentive structures, etc. and opening new insights and innovative solutions for gender equality.

IV. Gender Integration into Programmes and Institutions

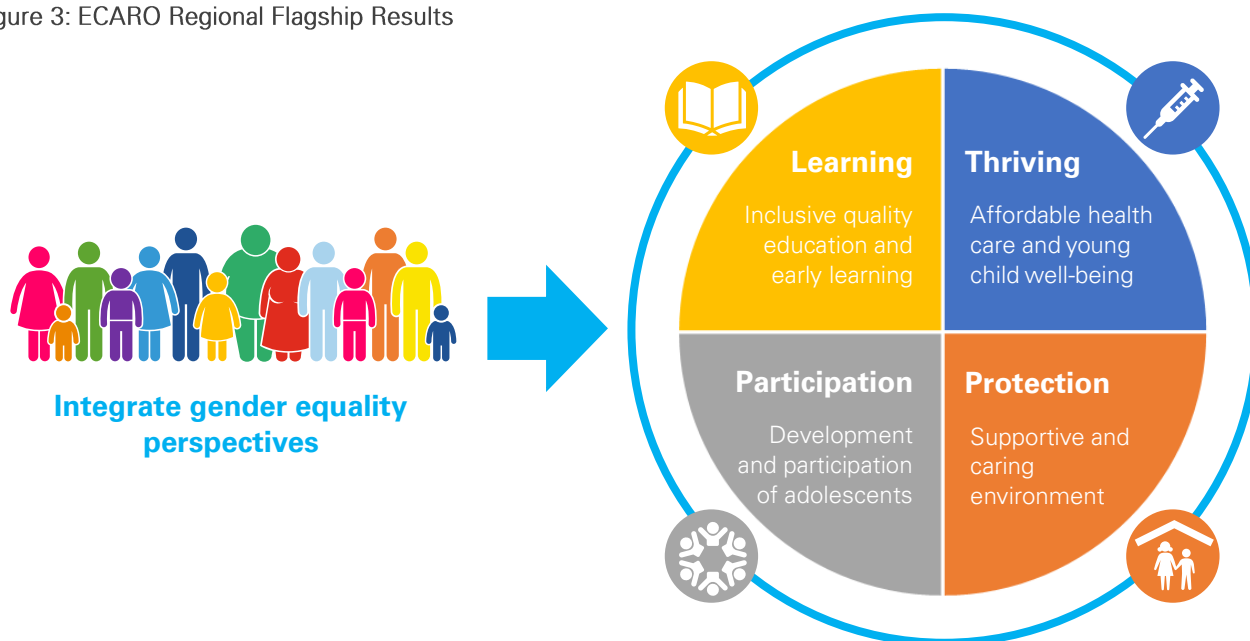
UNICEF continues to strengthen its gender programming and organizational systems to accelerate positive outcomes for both girls and boys. Key programmatic priorities include improving adolescent girls' skills and agency, ending all forms of violence against girls and women, gender responsive parenting and caregiving, and gender responsive social protection. UNICEF will also prioritize gender in humanitarian action, particularly in the organization's response to COVID-19. Institutionally, UNICEF will continue to contribute to building gender data and statistics, evidence and gender capacity. The work towards achieving gender equality cannot be done alone – the strategic partnerships UNICEF has with the EU, other United Nations agencies, governments, multi and bi-lateral donors, IFIs, regional banks, civil society, NGOs, academia, the media and the private sector, all provide valuable expertise, reach, resources and influence that are indispensable to further progress. UNICEF will continue to strengthen the breadth and depth of these partnerships to empower and transform the lives of millions of disadvantaged girls, boys, women, and all other genders worldwide. The ECA Gender Equality Strategy is comprised of three parts: **1) Programmatic strategy, 2) Institutional strategy, and 3) Partnerships.** This guidance is based on a review of the Regional Annual Gender Results Report 2019⁴⁴, the Regional Gender Capacity Assessment 2020⁴⁵ and a 2019 global review of the implementation of UNICEF's GAP 2018-2021.⁴⁶

While all UNICEF offices are committed to achieving all impact results of the UNICEF SP 2018-2021, UNICEF in ECA region has directed particular leadership, representation and technical assistance in achieving four priority Regional Flagship Results:

1. **Learning** – inclusive quality education and early learning;
2. **Thriving** – affordable health care and young child well-being;
3. **Protection** – supportive and caring environment; and
4. **Participation** - development and participation of adolescents.

This regional Gender Equality Strategy sets the direction for the staff to integrate gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women in these four Regional Flagship Result areas. While not all proposed actions may be contextual for all country offices, the list offers guidance as to what is possible and desirable, to fulfill truly integrated gender programming. All the suggested activities are categorized into three main pillars of programming related to the socio-ecological model: I) Policies and legislative; II) Systems and institutions; and III) Individuals (households) and communities.

Figure 3: ECARO Regional Flagship Results



1) Programmatic strategy



Priority Area 1: Inclusive Quality Education and Early Learning

SDG Target	Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
UNICEF ECAR Target	By 2021, 700,000 out-of-school girls and boys are enrolled in high quality, inclusive pre-primary, primary and secondary education
GAP 2018-2021 Target	Gender equality in access, retention and learning; Gender equality in teaching and education systems; Advancing adolescent girls' secondary education, learning and skills including STEM; Preventing and responding to child marriage and early unions

What are the Gender issues?

1. About 7.8 million children of pre-primary school age (3-6 years old) in the region are out of pre-primary programmes.⁴⁷ Access to early childhood education is very low in many of the countries in the region, especially in Central Asia and countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina. Existing data shows that pre-primary schooling is a gap for all children regardless of gender considering the declining infrastructure after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and for regions with higher poverty levels.
2. While enrolment rates in the region are similar for girls and boys from pre-school to lower-secondary school, gaps appear at the upper-secondary level. Across the region, women's educational attainment of at least upper secondary education (67 per cent) is lower than male (73 per cent).⁴⁸
3. Boys are more likely to be out of school in some countries, but the largest gender disparity is seen in countries where girls are more disadvantaged.⁴⁹ Low value of girls' education and traditional gender stereotypes that see girls as future housewives and mothers, and boys as breadwinners and household heads lead to unequal power relations and fewer opportunities for girls.⁵⁰ Similarly, the expectations of boys to become breadwinners lead to drop out of school to work early and support their families.⁵¹
4. Roma and Egyptian children are far less likely to be enrolled in and complete pre-primary, primary and secondary education, and there is evidence to show that gender differences are much higher – for example, Roma adolescent girls are far more likely to be out of secondary school than Roma adolescent boys.⁵² The limited access to education and high dropout rate of girls (as well as boys) with disabilities, children on the move, children who are involved in child labour as well as those living in rural and remote areas, owing to poverty, poor school infrastructure and lack of teachers also remains a concern.⁵³
5. Education shows a very strong inverse correlation with child marriage - girls with higher education married later in their lives. There is no systemic data that is available of pregnant girls and young mothers who drop out of school.
6. Gender stereotypes in schools drive the process of early segregation that occurs in the choice of fields that girls and boys are encouraged to pursue. The segregation according to the fields of education is still prominent in the region, with girls concentrating in the areas of traditionally female-dominated fields such as education, health and welfare, humanities and arts, social service, and are underrepresented in STEM, which reduces their employment prospects. Females account for only 32 per cent in STEM programmes in tertiary education.⁵⁴ The exclusion of girls from STEM and countering gender norms and stereotypes is a regional challenge and issue to be taken up as a regional gender equality area of focus.
7. Due to women's lower educational/vocational training attainment and rigid gender roles, girls (age 15-24 years) are more likely than boys to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) (female 16 per cent, male 12 per cent).⁵⁵ Youth unemployment rate is also higher for girls (age 15-19 years) than boys (female 23 per cent, male 19 per cent) making girls economically and socially excluded which continues the cycle of poverty.⁵⁶

8. Women's economic opportunities are also affected by the occupational segregation and gender stereotypes that exist equally in the job market, as in schools.⁵⁷
9. Education also shows poor learning achievements in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The regional gender disparities in performance in both reading and math tend to be small but consistently in favor of girls.⁵⁸ However, this advantage fails to transit girls from education to work.
10. Making schools a safe environment for girls, boys and all other genders is also crucial for children to not drop out. Violence and bullying at schools, the poor quality of teachers especially, outdated resources and teaching practices, distance to school, school fees, lack of water and sanitation facilities, lack of language of instruction for ethnic/specific groups can all be negative factors affecting children, especially girls at risk of drop out.

To address these gender-related issues, UNICEF in ECA region will:

	Reduce out-of-school rates for girls and boys of pre-primary, primary and secondary age and gender disparities in enrolment and completion rates at all levels, with special focus on children of high-risk groups (i.e., Roma and Egyptian, disabilities, refugee/migrant, working, geography, LGBTIQ persons).
	Work with governments, communities, parents, teachers and other partners to keep girls, boys and all other genders longer in schools by removing gender-specific barriers and make schools a safe and protective environment free from violence and gender stereotypes and prejudices.
	Empower adolescent girls to make their own choices in education, work and marriage which include ensuring their completion of secondary education and promoting access to STEM, Skills 4 Girls, digital, financial, technical and vocational skills and training opportunities.

UNICEF support could include:

1. Policies and Legislative	2. Systems and Institutions	3. Individuals and Communities
1.1 Support Governments to develop national education sector plans addressing gendered socio-cultural and financial barriers to quality education, disaggregated at subnational level and for different vulnerable population groups. 1.2 Integrate and advocate for a gender-based assessment of budgets into national education budget processes. 1.3 Establish an early warning system for girls/boys/all other genders at risk of school drop-out to be integrated in the Education Management Information System (EMIS). 1.4 Scale up evidence generation/ data collection especially sex-disaggregated data, to better identify who the most vulnerable children are; where they are located, with emphasis on further disaggregation by locality, ethnicity, disability and other social variables.	2.1 Integrate into school curricula at all levels of education: a) inclusive and accessible content on gender equality, including on women's rights, female role-models; prevention of gender stereotyping and gender-based discrimination, and b) age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). 2.2 Support governments and schools to remove gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in teaching materials and pedagogy. 2.3 Building mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, including gender auditing and the examination of gender-biased practices within schools. 2.4 Train teachers in gender-responsive pedagogy and equip them to ensure children's safety (including violence) in schools.	3.1 Invest in life skills, vocational training or marketable skills, and mentorship programmes, especially for girls. 3.2 Build synergies between adolescent girls' skills development and women's economic participation to address persistent gender divides, in areas such as STEM, digital skills through trainings, career counseling and choices, internships etc. 3.3 Develop and implement plans to scale up secondary education and improve transition especially for girls and children with disabilities, children from ethnic minorities and refugee children. 3.4 Involve women and adolescent girls and their participation in community-based education committees and associations. 3.5 Awareness raising for social norms change to eliminate child marriage and child labour.

1.5 Support adoption and implementation of further targeted policies and programmes, to overcome the educational barriers faced by Roma/Egyptian children, migrant and refugee children, children with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, etc. 1.6 Ensure continued investment of resources targeting the unmet needs of vulnerable girls and boys as well as their families, especially for those in child labour. 1.7 Transform adverse social norms and promote positive gender socialization by investing in early childhood education and improving family-friendly legislation and policies. 1.8 Support female role models in education, such as female teachers, school heads and senior officials.	2.5 Schools are built to be friendly, safe and welcoming to girls, boys and all other genders. 2.6 Teacher training, beginning with early childhood education on positive gender socialization and gender barriers and stereotypes. 2.7 Tailored approaches to meet the gender differential needs of girls, boys and all other genders including children with disability, those living in remote area, those with different linguistic requirements and pregnant girls. 2.8 Increase innovative outreach/online education and accelerated learning programmes for girls, boys and all other genders who missed out on education. 2.9 Holistically address gendered barriers at all levels of education, such as child marriage, GBV, discrimination to sexual minority groups, inadequate WASH facilities in schools, child labour and the burden of household tasks.	3.6 Engage men and boys as supportive partners for girls' education, and work with them to challenge attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequality. Promote mutual respect in the curriculum. 3.7 Undertake communication for development (C4D) interventions at the community level to address the issues of low value attributed to girl children and their access to education and marketable skills. 3.8 Address financial constraints and ensure affordable access for families to conditional cash transfers, stipends and scholarships to keep girls, boys and all other genders in schools. 3.9 Address gender socialization processes and promote effective, non-discriminatory and positive parenting in early childhood including promotion of roles of men in caregiving.
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Priority Area 2: Affordable Health Care and Young Child Well-Being

SDG Target	Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
UNICEF ECARTarget	By 2021, all countries in ECA region have 95% of children at national level and at least 80% of children in every district vaccinated with DTP/Penta 3
GAP 2018-2021 Target	Gender-equitable health care and nutrition for girls and boys; Quality maternal care; Gender equality in community health systems; Promoting adolescent girls' nutrition and pregnancy care, and preventing HIV/AIDS and HPV

What are the Gender issues?

- Europe and Central Asia region has exceeded global progress in reducing the rate of children dying before their fifth birthday. Most countries have systems of universal maternal and child health services as well as home visiting programmes linked to the health care outreach system.⁵⁹ However, that progress has masked an alarming fact: almost 70 per cent of under-5 child mortality occurs within the first month of life.⁶⁰ Moreover, in countries, such as Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Turkey, almost 1 in 10 babies are born with low birthweight.⁶¹
- Poor nutrition continues to be a challenge in the region. Low exclusive breastfeeding rates (33 per cent in 2019) are associated with stunting.⁶² Lower levels of knowledge of positive child rearing practices at the household level contributes to poor developmental outcomes in every area and this is exacerbated by economic distress and poor quality and coverage of services.⁶³

3. More than 500,000 children have missed out on routine measles vaccination, and many countries across the region continue to face outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases that threaten children's lives and well-being. In 2019, 88,554 cases of measles were reported in the region.⁶⁴
4. Over 70 per cent of the region's unvaccinated infants are from middle-income countries, with Ukraine presenting the lowest coverage rate and the greatest challenge. National averages also mask disparities, with Roma and Egyptian children and those from other ethnic and vulnerable groups, including refugee and migrant children, all lagging.⁶⁵
5. As evident from the measles outbreaks in the region, there are also concerns about 'vaccine hesitancy' – a growing mistrust of immunization among some parents, fueled by myths and misinformation and interpersonal communication skills of health professionals to address parent's concerns.⁶⁶
6. Most gender barriers in relation to child immunization have to do with constraints on mothers in their role as caregivers. Women's access to health care for their children, particularly in rural areas, may be affected by transport costs and safety to reach vaccine services.⁶⁷ In some country contexts and among marginalized population, women's lower status (especially young mothers) in the household and community limits their capacity to act on their own and their child's behalf.⁶⁸
7. Furthermore, women's (or other household decision makers') lack of accurate health literacy and low education levels leads to limited understanding of the importance of immunization, low motivation to vaccinate, weak capacity to negotiate the health system, and a susceptibility to false information.⁶⁹
8. The mother-provider interaction at a health facility is an important determinant of health service utilization. The responsiveness of services, the range available, the availability of female providers, and the extent to which privacy and confidentiality are respected feature strongly.⁷⁰
9. Women's triple burden of assuming domestic, reproductive and productive roles, as is especially the case for working mothers, may discourage them from seeking immunization/health services if they are not readily available, free of charge and gender-sensitive enough.⁷¹
10. The gender norms that project women as caregivers and fathers as breadwinners are a driver behind the non-engagement of men in caregiving and support for the health and well-being of both mothers and children.⁷²
11. The gender bias is also reinforced by health care services that target mothers as the primary caretakers in the way immunization services are presented, the kind of information they provide, and how they are organized and managed. The health care system may therefore discourage fathers as caregivers and from playing an active role in the health and care of their children.⁷³
12. Differential outcomes in immunization rates by sex, and in general in disease prevention and treatment, exist in some countries at sub-national and among specific population groups (i.e. Roma and Egyptian), owing to both socio-economic exclusion and adverse gender norms.⁷⁴
13. Gender-biased sex selection can also be seen in some countries in the region.⁷⁵
14. Adolescent girls in the region face gender specific vulnerabilities, with lifelong consequences: early pregnancy, higher risks of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) and HIV, risk of human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer, and high prevalence of anaemia.⁷⁶

To address these gender-related issues, UNICEF in ECA region will:

	Improve delivery of and access to immunization services for infants and children and reduce gender disparity in immunization protection, as well as HPV for adolescent girls and boys.
	Increase the agency and decision-making power of women and girls, especially young mothers as well as engagement of men and boys in support of child and women's health and well-being.
	Ensure quality maternal and child health care and development services including immunization which are respectful, gender-responsive, youth-friendly and non-discriminatory with enough trained female health care workers and vaccinators to increase access to health care services for women and girls.

UNICEF support could include:

1. Policies and Legislative	2. Systems and Institutions	3. Individuals and Communities
1.1 Collect more robust data and evidence on gender barriers in combination with other socio-economic determinants to explain pro- and anti-vaccine behaviors, sex and gender-based differences in child mortality and health risks, and differential treatment of girls and boys using innovations and T4D, especially in countries where son preference is prevalent. 1.2 Support governments with integration of gender lens into Health/Nutrition/ECD sector policies to systematically address gender related barriers to care. Ensure to prioritize adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating mothers. 1.3 Undertake studies to identify the root-causes, driving factors, engaged actors and hot-spots/locations where the practice of sex-selective abortion is most prevalent. 1.4 Support development and inclusive, multisectoral and gender-responsive national plan to achieve targets for adolescent health and well-being. 1.5 Conduct comprehensive and qualitative studies on early gender socialization and develop a strategy to promote positive gender socialization and child-rearing practices starting with pregnant mothers and expectant fathers.	2.1 Increase the accessibility and coverage of reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health facilities using innovations and T4D that integrate respectful, gender sensitive/responsive services (e.g. provide safe and confidential escorts to facilities; make opening times convenient even for fathers; ensure universal access for persons with disabilities; eliminate/reduce service fees, etc.). 2.2 Ensure free and secure public transport to access healthcare services. 2.3 Strengthen targeted approach to under-immunized areas and socially excluded populations focusing on women and girls including the poor, living in rural, migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities and with disabilities. 2.4 Provide technical support for HPV vaccine delivery to adolescent girls using gender-sensitive communication on health information and services (i.e. pregnancy prevention). 2.5 Enhance maternal and adolescent girls' nutrition, with a focus on anaemia prevention. 2.6 Increase capacity of health workers to share accurate information and benefits of immunization with caregivers. 2.7 Provide gender training to healthcare workers and home visitors to provide gender sensitive/responsive services and to be aware of the vital role male partners and fathers play in maternal and child health. 2.8 Expand home visitor models and family centres to support hard-to-reach households. 2.9 Developing inter-sectoral collaborations between health, education, social and child protection as mechanisms for delivery of multi-sectoral ECD packages.	3.1 Raise awareness among mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and other caregivers equally about the services and benefits of vaccinations through social media and public campaigns. 3.2 Engage men and boys (including fathers and male relatives) in support of women's and girls' health and as equal partners in childcare. Increase awareness on the importance of male's involvement in childcare (fathers will be a good role model for sons). 3.3 Implement and scale up comprehensive community-based positive parenting programmes that promote healthy development of girls and boys in the most disadvantaged families including counseling of mothers and fathers on how to engage with their children, stimulate and support them. 3.4 Support women's empowerment (especially those living in rural, migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities and with disabilities) to build the capacities to enable them to take control of resources and their own well-being and development and increase decision-making power. 3.5 Promote tailored approaches for adolescent mothers to empower them for decision making for healthy and safe choices and active management of their reproductive health. 3.6 Invest in better health outcomes for adolescents through interventions such as work on HIV prevention/sexual and reproductive health; prevention of adolescent pregnancy; and reducing adolescent anaemia.



Priority Area 3: Supporting and Caring Environment

SDG Target	Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
UNICEF ECAR Target	By 2021, there are zero children in institutional care in the Europe and Central Asia region
GAP 2018-2021 Target	Prevention of and response to gender-based violence against girls and boys; Non-gender discriminatory roles, expectations and practices

What are the Gender issues?

1. ECA region has the highest proportion of children separated from their families and placed in institutions worldwide, with 666 children per 100,000 living in institutional care – more than five times higher than the global average of 120 children per 100,000.⁷⁷
2. However, the sub-region does not have an overall vision for de-institutionalization, childcare and justice reform. Alternative care service systems are undeveloped, as are referral and case management, inclusive education and social service workforces.⁷⁸
3. At risk children include children with disabilities, children among ethnic minority groups, children living with HIV, children born out of formally recognized union, single parent or teenage mothers, children with migrant/refugee parents, and children who demonstrate anti-social behavior.⁷⁹
4. Because the idea persists across the region that caregiving is inherently a female role, it underlies and perpetuates a gender imbalance in care work between mothers and fathers, and the burden of childcare and caregiving due to the absence of appropriate childcare systems disproportionately falls to mothers which can be the cause for deepening vulnerability for mothers and their child.⁸⁰
5. Because of the responsibilities associated with both unpaid care work and productive employment, women often resort to part-time or insecure employment, or completely withdraw from the labor market.⁸¹ In ECA region, female labour force participation rate is much lower than male (female 52 per cent, male 68 per cent)⁸² and consistency below the EU average (female 67 per cent, male 79 per cent).⁸³ In addition, they earn on average 24 per cent less than men.⁸⁴
6. High levels of women's poverty combined with strong cultural norms of 'motherhood' are identified as root causes for baby abandonment and relinquishment in the region.⁸⁵
7. Violence and domestic violence is also one of the factors that can lead to placing children in residential care, while alcohol and substance abuse, as well as household dysfunction can be contributing factors.⁸⁶ Intimate partner violence (IPV) in some ECA countries ranks high in a worldwide comparison, with 54 per cent of women in the study countries having experienced some form of violence by a current partner.⁸⁷
8. Teenage pregnancy is also associated with institutionalization since teenage mothers, especially with low educational attainment level and low level of knowledge on sexual and reproductive health, have a higher incidence of children in public care.⁸⁸
9. Sex-disaggregated data on children in residential care are not systematically available in the region, but among a few countries with data available, it clearly indicates that more boys than girls are in residential care across the region.⁸⁹ However, evidence in some countries show that girls in Roma communities and girls with disabilities are more disadvantaged than boys.⁹⁰
10. The risks of child abuse or GBV in institutional care are well-documented, and research shows that children experienced violence by their peers or even by the staff and officials charged with their safekeeping.⁹¹ Research suggests that girls in care or detention are more likely than boys to become victims of sexual and physical abuse and those with disabilities have even greater risks.⁹²

11. Violence against children (VAC) at home is commonplace across the region, with around half of all children in East and Central European and Central Asian countries experiencing violent discipline.⁹³ Global evidence reveals clear overlaps between IPV and VAC that childhood exposure to IPV and VAC leads to increase risk of later adulthood violence experience and perpetration.⁹⁴
12. The region lacks information regarding the differential impact of the de-institutionalization gains on girls and boys.

■ **To address these gender-related issues, UNICEF in ECA region will:**

	Support the well-being and protection of girls and boys born to (a) mothers, out of formally recognized union; (b) single or teenage mothers; (c) Roma parents; d) dysfunctional families; e) poor and vulnerable families; f) migrant families, paying particular attention to children with disabilities to prevent separation.
	Ensure mothers and fathers in vulnerable situations have access to gender-responsive, non-discriminatory and child-friendly social and legal assistance and services (i.e. day care, protection, employment, etc.) to support their children and themselves, and promote shifting gender norms to share childcare responsibility between fathers and mothers.
	Strengthen gender-related evidence generation of girls and boys in institutional care, beyond gender parity, with capacity building of social service and justice workforce professionals including skills in gender equality, inclusion and disability and in providing responsive services.

■ **UNICEF support could include:**

1. Policies and Legislative	2. Systems and Institutions	3. Individuals and Communities
1.1 Undertake a systematic gender analysis of the causes of abandonment and barriers to re-integration. 1.2 Conduct a thorough gender analysis of the risks posed to girls and boys and persons of all genders in foster and spontaneous care situations. 1.3 Ensure gender analysis and gender- and child-responsive budgeting in the design, implementation and evaluation of child protection and social protection policies and programmes considering vulnerabilities of young and single mothers, Roma mothers, mothers of children with disabilities. 1.4 Support routine intersectional and sex-disaggregated data collection systems in social protection to identify the most at-risk groups paying attention to the age- and gender-specific risks of girls and boys and persons of all genders (especially with disabilities).	2.1 Promote a multi-sectoral approach and support education, health, child and social protection workforce to improve their capacity to detect and support mothers/fathers at risk of child abandonment and children at risk of separation (especially children with disabilities). 2.2 Promote integration of gender equality, inclusion and non-violent discipline into the curriculum of health and social services providers and strengthen monitoring of child well-being in institutional and other alternative care. 2.3 Increase and strengthen home-visiting by social workers, nurses and community-based support groups for early detection and intervention of at-risk children, promote positive parenting or relieving the pressures of poverty. 2.4 Ensure childcare and other social assistance services meet the needs of target population (i.e. working hours, location, gender of work teams etc.).	3.1 Ensure delivery of holistic packages of support to families through health and social protection systems. 3.2 Promote awareness raising, education and communication campaigns so that women (especially young mothers) with limited education and access to information are aware of the available services. 3.3 Consider targeted interventions combining cash transfers, access to social services and skills building targeted towards single parents (especially young mothers) as a separation prevention measure. 3.4 Increase access to higher education and gender-responsive, youth-friendly reproductive health services and family planning for adolescent girls and boys. 3.5 Make special provision to reach girls and boys who are particularly vulnerable and excluded including persons of all genders.

1.5 Increase women and girls' voice and agency in programme planning, participation, and leadership in social policy programming. 1.6 Undertake a research/study/assessment on social and gender norms and implications for programming and strategies and use them to address the underlying causes of GBV and VAC. 1.7 Work with government and the private sector to implement family-friendly policies to improve working conditions (e.g. flexible work, telework, paternity leave, childcare) both for women and men to increase men's participation in care work and facilitate women's economic participation. 1.8 Support justice reforms to enforce alimony payment. 1.9 Promote acts and bills that identify and address the gender dimensions of child protection issues, such as the different risks and threats girls and boys face. 1.10 Expand government funding for ECD and early childhood intervention (ECI) services.	2.5 Support legal systems reform to be more child and gender-responsive and accessible. 2.6 Bolster staffing, training and resource for hotlines, shelters and other services to respond to VAC and GBV through new and innovative delivery models. 2.7 Advocate for the allocation of adequate human, technical and financial resources to provide support to single mothers and mothers with children with disabilities. 2.8 Undertake a study on the de-institutionalization gains on girls and boys as well as different impacts, challenges and needs (including of persons of all genders). 2.9 More comparable research on IPV and VAC across the countries of ECA region to address intersectionality of IPV and VAC.	3.6 Strengthen the role, engagement and participation of men in early childcare and nurturing roles and promote family friendly policies/paternity leave. 3.7 Enhance awareness of the rights of women and children to access legal services. 3.8 Strengthen awareness raising to address harmful social norms and its detrimental effects such as child marriage. 3.9 Work with boys and men as change agents against GBV and IPV. 3.10 Invest in parenting programmes that strengthen parenting skills and confidence in support of positive child development, including positive discipline. 3.11 Expand advocacy and community mobilization/C4D to reduce stigma (i.e., single parent, disabilities), discrimination and increase demand for services.
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Priority Area 4: Development and Participation of Adolescents

SDG Target	Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
UNICEF ECART Target	By 2021, 20 million adolescents in the region, including the most vulnerable, have a chance to be connected, engaged and empowered
GAP 2018-2021 Target	Promoting adolescent girls' nutrition and pregnancy care, and preventing HIV/AIDS and HPV; Advancing adolescent girls' secondary education, learning and skills including STEM; Preventing and responding to child marriage and early unions; Gender-based prevention and response to violence against girls and boys; Non-gender discriminatory roles, expectations and practices

■ What are the Gender issues?

1. In ECA region, the rights of adolescents to participate, express opinion and to be heard is not valued and adolescents are not seen as key partners in the development of their communities and are rarely engaged in policy development.⁹⁵ As a result, the existing legal frameworks, policies, programmes and services are designed for wider populations and do not fully meet the specific needs of adolescent girls and boys.
2. By the time girls and boys reach adolescence (age 10-19), they have already internalized female and male identities and discriminatory gender norms and practices which are largely a result of prevailing gender norms that perpetuate unequal gender relations.⁹⁶
3. Child marriage, for example, can be found in parts of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Turkey, where it is linked to the intersection between gender and social exclusion and migration, barriers to secondary education for girls, and lack of access to youth-friendly health services. Child marriage is reported to be especially high in Roma communities.
4. Insufficient sexual and reproductive health education and services with limited power of girls' decision making over sexual relations, are leading to unprotected sex, sexually transmitted infections (STI) or unintended and unwanted pregnancies.
5. Early pregnancies remain a problem in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia, amid widespread opposition to comprehensive sexuality education in schools. The disparities in the region show that adolescent girls in rural areas, from poor communities and ethnic minority families are at most disadvantaged.⁹⁷
6. Adolescents who are NEET are more vulnerable to becoming socially excluded. Girls are more likely to be NEET in most countries.
7. Of the estimated 77,000 young people aged 15-24 living with HIV in ECA region, 42,000 (54 per cent) are girls and young women and 35,000 (46 per cent) are boys and young men.⁹⁸
8. There is a high level of acceptance of violence against women among adolescent girls, with more than 1 in 10 girls (aged 15-19) in the region think that wife-beating is justified under the specific conditions.⁹⁹ Partly due to this normalization of violence among women and girls, low reporting rates of GBV continue to be a major issue region-wide.
9. Given the lack of mechanisms to address violence, boys are at risk of falling prey to the justice system with little chance of rehabilitation or reinsertion; while violence against girls is often not prosecuted and even tolerated by society.¹⁰⁰
10. Substance abuse affects both boys and girls. In Europe, 25 per cent of boys and 17 per cent of girls aged 15 report drinking alcohol at least once a week, and almost one third report having been drunk at least twice.¹⁰¹ In Central Asia, boys demonstrate higher levels of tobacco smoking and drug abuse than girls.¹⁰² The mortality rate due to suicide is also higher for boys than for girls among 15-19 years old in Central Asia¹⁰³ and boys are also more likely than girls to die from road traffic accidents.¹⁰⁴ These risky behaviours of boys have been linked to masculine norms and peer pressure that discourage vulnerability, emotional expression and help-seeking behavior.¹⁰⁵
11. The increasing reach of the internet, the rapid spread of mobile information, and the widespread use of social media, coupled with the existing pandemic of violence against women and girls has led to the emergence of cyber violence (i.e., cyber stalking, online sexual harassment) as a growing problem.¹⁰⁶ It is estimated that one in ten women in the region have already experienced a form of cyber violence since the age of 15.¹⁰⁷
12. Exclusion of adolescents who identify themselves as LGBTIQ prevails in the region. In addition to abandonment and rejection by family or society, children whose sexual orientation or gender identity that does not conform to social norms are likely to be exposed to discrimination at school, in communities, in hospitals and many other settings and lack appropriate services tailored to their needs.¹⁰⁸

To address these gender-related issues, UNICEF in ECA region will:

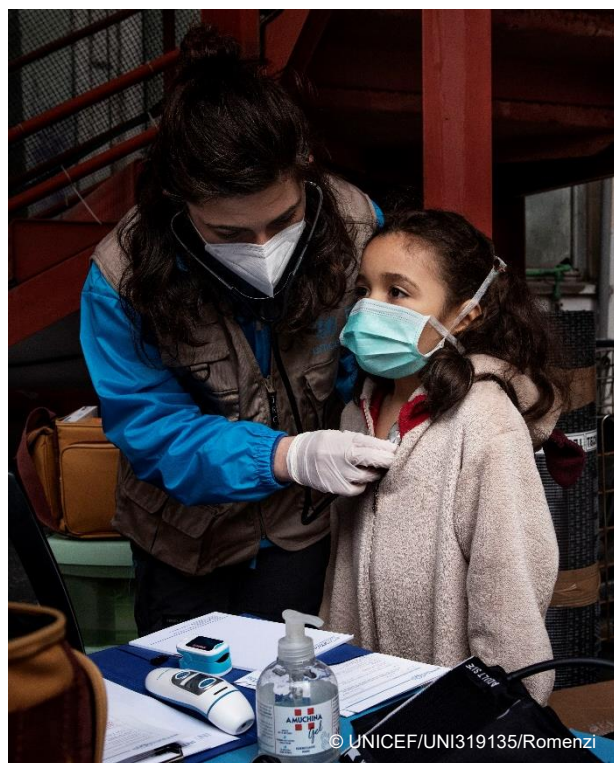
	Support development of universal and inclusive services and systems that are responsive to adolescent girls' and boys' different needs (i.e., health, nutrition, education, protection, SRHR), with attention to the most disadvantaged groups, such as adolescents with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants and refugees, and LGBTIQ persons.
	Provide leadership in generating, analyzing and promoting the use of evidence and development of adolescent-friendly and gender-responsive policies and programmes.
	Expand opportunities for girls to be the changemakers, actively engage their voices and opinions in their communities and political processes to transform the low value placed on girls.

UNICEF support could include:

1. Policies and Legislative	2. Systems and Institutions	3. Individuals and Communities
1.1 Strengthen disaggregated qualitative and quantitative national database (i.e., gender, age, education, wealth quintile, disability, ethnicity, geographic), research and gender analysis on adolescents to identify the most vulnerable girls and boys. 1.2 Undertake studies to consider gender stereotypes and gender roles that influence skills development and work expectations of girls and boys. 1.3 Strengthen policy advocacy for increased political and financial commitment for prioritizing programmes on adolescents' issues such as adolescent pregnancies, anaemia, SRH, child marriage, GBV, girls' high unemployment and NEET rates, female's underrepresentation in STEM, HIV/STI, etc. incorporating voices of youth. 1.4 Support development of a multi-sectoral, adolescent [girls] policy/action plan (reflecting sectoral commitments for adolescents). 1.5 Support developing and implementing policies, strategies and programmes that protect girls and boys against VAC and GBV including child marriage. 1.6 Support legal frameworks working with community based LGBTIQ experts to promote non-discrimination for LGBTIQ persons of all ages.	2.1 Build the capacity and enhance skills of justice actors, health workers, teachers and social workers to address their own gender barriers, biases and stereotypes towards vulnerable girls, boys and all other genders. 2.2 Support efforts for the strict enforcement of the prohibition of child/forced marriage and GBV as well as persecution of perpetrators of such acts. 2.3 Undertake cross-sectoral, evidence-based, at-scale and innovative programmes to address child marriage and GBV. 2.4 Use social mobilization and technology-based innovation (i.e. mobile apps) to provide vital and accurate information on SRHR. 2.5 Improve access to gender-sensitive, adolescent-friendly and well-equipped juvenile justice services including recovery and reintegration support to their communities and families. 2.6 Continue effort to ensure girls and boys complete secondary education and advance girls' agency and school retention. 2.7 Provide social and economic alternatives to child marriage and girls' and boys' dropout. 2.8 Conduct outreach activities to ensure that girls and boys in marginalized communities are aware of available services and can access them easily.	3.1 Work with entire communities, the media, social and youth networks to facilitate the discussion and collective decision to abandon harmful social norms and traditions. 3.2 Provide adolescent girls opportunities to develop life skills and IT skills considering barriers such as gender norms, obligations in the household, marriage, pregnancy, etc. 3.3 Support girl's school to work transition, such as career guidance and counselling. 3.4 Build skills of girl and boy leaders to serve as mentors and role models for younger adolescents in promoting gender equality. 3.5 Increase girl's participation in STEM and digital skills learning. 3.6 Use technology and social media to reach adolescent girls and boys with key messages on health, SRHR, education, protection, GBV/VAC, etc. 3.7 Invest in programmes for girls and boys with disabilities that focus on skills building, network strengthening and mentoring. 3.8 Reduce GBV by empowering disenfranchised young men groups to develop livelihoods. 3.9 Strengthen delivery of psychosocial health services for adolescent's mental health.

Gender in humanitarian crises

The principles of gender equality programming outlined in this strategy apply to both development and humanitarian contexts. Promoting gender equality in the humanitarian crises, however, can pose even greater challenges. Emergencies can exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities, leading to increased discrimination and violence, further exclusion and disproportionate risks. For example, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls through job losses, reduced access to online information and educational opportunities, health risks due to limited access to sexual and reproductive health services, additional burden of unpaid house and care work, and increased risk of GBV. All these impacts are further amplified in contexts of fragility, conflict and emergencies where social cohesion is already undermined, and institutional capacity and services are limited. At the same time, however, humanitarian crises may lead to shifts in traditional gender roles and can, in certain situations, create openings for greater gender equality. For instance, girls and women may take on decision-making or income-generating roles left by men and boys.



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Gender equality programming must be integrated across the spectrum of UNICEF-supported humanitarian action, including emergency preparedness, response and early recovery. This includes:

- Support multi-sectoral gender analysis to better understand a humanitarian situation and embed gender lens to prevention and response plans as well as recovery strategy.
- Ensure country and regional initiatives to advance the gender equality benchmarks in the 2020 Core Commitments for Children (CCCs) in Humanitarian Action.
- Prioritize investments in sex-disaggregated data collection and design of gender-sensitive data collection tools to ensure that assessments capture differential impacts of the crisis on girls and women. Data should be disaggregated by sex, age, disability, ethnicity and other variables.
- Ensure that humanitarian action is designed to meet the different needs of girls, boys, women and men, and ensure their equal access to relevant services. Develop targeted assistance to be carried out in a way that does not stigmatize or isolate certain groups (i.e. LGBTIQ, persons with disabilities).
- Maintain core health and education services and systems including alternative delivery structures.
- Support girls'/women's and youth organizations and women human rights defenders to be on the frontline for vital information flow and ensure girls'/women's leadership and participation in all aspects of preparedness and response processes.
- Gender expertise must be built into preparedness and response teams at all levels and resources allocated for gender and social inclusion.
- Ensure that social protection plans, and emerging economic schemes are gender-responsive and consider unpaid care work performed by girls and women.
- Expand and adapt essential services for prevention and response to GBV (i.e. hotline, shelter).
- Provide priority support to women on the frontlines of the response.

(Source: United Nations Europe and Central Asia Issue-Based Coalition, Gender equality and the COVID-19 outbreak, 2020)

2) Institutional strategy

In addition to strengthening gender equality focus in programming, the GAP 2018-2021 and emerging UNICEF global SP and the GAP 2022-25 underscores the need to integrate gender at the institutional level – across organizational policies, practices and accountability mechanisms. Commitment to gender equality must be sustained, with the full engagement of all staff, spanning from senior management to all levels, and effectively integrated into systems and strategies, ways of working and the overall organizational culture within UNICEF. To translate this goal into action and ensure gender equality is integrated across programmes of all sectors and organization, GAP Institutional Benchmarks were developed in 2019 as presented below. ECA Regional Annual Results Report 2019 revealed that the majority (90 per cent) of COs in the region have not yet fully met all the benchmarks.¹⁰⁹ The same report showed that insufficient knowledge and practical skills on gender integration, lack of appropriate data and evidence on gender, busy work schedule and insufficient human and budgetary resources are the main barriers for addressing gender mainstreaming in current work by the staff members, followed by insufficient priority given to gender in the office/section and lack of tools and training. Specific accountabilities – including deliverables, roles and responsibilities – for implementing this institutional strategy is articulated within the ECARO Gender Action Plan in ANNEX 1.

Figure 4: UNICEF GAP Institutional Benchmarks



■ Output 1. Aim for gender transformative programming, budgeting and implementation

UNICEF strives to achieve results at scale by prioritizing gender transformative approaches to create the greatest possible impact in the lives of girls, boys and all other genders, including those who are most marginalized. Using a comprehensive set of tools such as UNICEF ECARO Gender Toolkit¹¹⁰ on how to systematically apply gender analysis and mainstreaming in country programme design, planning and implementation, UNICEF in ECA region will improve the quality of gender reviews and provision of continued technical support from the Regional Office (RO) to countries. Inclusion of gender analysis also applies to humanitarian programmes. As per UNICEF guidelines- at least once during the Country Programme cycle (prior to the preparation of a new country programme or during the mid-term review), a detailed situation analysis with an integrated gender analysis and Gender Programmatic Review (GPR) must be undertaken. Management should ensure accountability to integrate GPR recommendations into their country programme documents (i.e., CPDs, PSNs). It is critical for all COs to undertake sector specific in-depth gender analysis to provide a foundation for integrating gender equality principles in the subsequent phases of programme design, implementation and M&E of the next Country Programme cycle.¹¹¹

■ Output 2. Strengthen technical knowledge and capacity on gender among staff and partners

To achieve adequate and systematic levels of gender responsiveness in UNICEF programming, besides GPR, strengthening the capacity and institutional support of UNICEF staff and partners to apply gender analysis skills and gender-responsive actions in their planning, programme and technical work is important. In the 2020 UNICEF Regional Gender Capacity Assessment Survey completed by all COs, 70 per cent stated the need for practical training and capacity building on gender and 66 per cent stated not having enough knowledge of gender mainstreaming for implementation. The capacity development should be a combination of training workshops/webinars, coaching and mentoring, experience with tools and methodologies with

periodic follow up and post assessment analysis to ensure that the acquired skills and knowledge are used in the programming. Furthermore, it is also important to address the diverse needs of staff by section, levels of position and length of service with UNICEF and adjust the training content accordingly. Country offices may also provide support to partners to undertake robust gender analysis so they can identify gender-related barriers to positive childhood outcomes and develop appropriate solutions. In 2019, one third of COs in the region were not supporting any capacity building programmes for frontline workers that include a focus on gender equality, which may greatly affect the outcomes of the interventions. To avoid making UNICEF-supported programmes gender blind, COs need to assess the capacity of partners and provide gender training where necessary, to ensure gender integration throughout the programming cycle.

A dedicated gender specialist/gender focal point (GFP) should also support as main technical focal point for gender mainstreaming within the COs. In 2020, although 21 gender focal points have been active, only three countries have a full-time gender specialist.¹¹² As per global GAP Staffing Guidance¹¹³, UNICEF should ensure COs with a budget over \$20 million hire a full time gender specialist for the CO and in ECAR, Ukraine must meet this criteria for compliance. Designated GFPs should receive assistance, more support and training. Moreover, specific capacities of GFPs and their role should be enhanced in compliance with the GAP Staffing Guidance. The creation of a Gender Task Force with more than one GFP can facilitate and coordinate exchange of information and documentation. Promoting gender equality, empowerment of girls and women and mainstreaming gender, however, is everyone's responsibility and should not be viewed as solely the duty of the gender specialist/GFPs; their role is to provide coordination, guidance, resources and technical support. It is also recommended to utilize the regional gender roster for national/regional level gender experts to be engaged on need basis.

■ Output 3. Strengthen knowledge base on gender (and its intersections)

Data availability and dissemination is central for a better and more informed dialogue around gender issues. However, all COs in the region face limited collection, use and analysis of gender data. Gender data is urgently needed to gather the real context of, for example, GBV, sex selective abortion, children with disability, children in institutional care, as well as in the areas where gender-relevant data are less commonly available such as online sexual exploitation and abuse, girls in STEM, NEET, poor learning outcomes, bullying and peer violence, obesity, mental health, etc. In addition to collecting data, disaggregated by sex, it is also crucial to address intersectionality and collect data disaggregated by other variables influencing gender equality outcomes, such as ethnicity, age, religion, disability, geographic area and socioeconomic background. UNICEF in ECA region will support regional, national and decentralized data collection efforts through global and regional partnerships to reflect existing gender concerns in the country-wide data collection systems and surveys such as MICS and DHS, monitor differentials and produce gender statistics on "what works for gender equality" in each sector and context. To that end, UNICEF will continue to support capacity development efforts for production and use of gender statistics and the generation of knowledge for gender-responsive policy and programming in partnership with research institutions and national statistical offices. Given that the region has several forms of gender-based discrimination that are common across countries and that the overall programming context has many similarities, there is opportunity for regional learning and knowledge sharing. The RO can play an important role in also identifying and disseminating good practices from HQ, regional and country offices and other local, regional or international organizations. UNICEF in Europe and Central Asia will also actively engage and leverage the work with the Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality to ensure a coordinated UN system approach to promoting gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in Europe and Central Asia.

■ Output 4. Ensure financial resources for programmatic and institutional gender mainstreaming

UNICEF offices must pay explicit attention to the resources needed for gender mainstreaming and include in their fundraising strategies and information to attract adequate funding for gender equality results. UNICEF uses a gender equality marker (GEM) and gender tags as the primary tool for tracking resource allocation and expenditure in relation to gender-related programme results. All of UNICEF financial expenditure is coded against the GEM. The institutional benchmark for gender transformative expenditure is 15 per cent in UNICEF. Programme expenditure allocated to gender in 2020 in ECA region is 25.5 per cent. Looking at the percentage of amount utilized for gender-related outputs rated according to the corrected Marker (GEM) in 2020, about a third (28 per cent) make none or marginal contribution to gender equality and/or empowerment of girls and women whereas 61 per cent made significant contribution and only 11 per cent made principal contribution.

Country offices should pay closer attention to strategize how to utilize investments to directly lead to the advancement of gender equality or empowerment of girls and women. Furthermore, in 2020, 15 out of 21 countries¹¹⁴ in the region met 15 per cent target of expenditure on gender transformative results and challenges remain in securing funding for gender equality programming among other countries. UNICEF will continue its efforts to increase resources through partnerships and place even greater emphasis on joint programming and promotion of pooled finance to incentivize partnerships. Efforts to increase the UNICEF Global Gender Thematic Fund will continue, while integrating budgets for gender expertise, partners and activities into resource mobilization and utilization efforts across sectors. UNICEF in Europe and Central Asia region will also continue to strengthen capacity for gender budgeting, advocacy for allocation of 15% gender expenditure across all funding/grants and ensure gender tagging/use of GEM and consistency in gender expenditure reporting.

■ Output 5. Strengthen communication, advocacy and innovation

The vastly changed communications landscape offers opportunities for brand positioning and visibility, but also for public advocacy and social media mobilization to make structural shifts in achieving gender equality. Social and behaviour change communication can play a catalytic role in transforming existing power structures that reinforce gender inequalities, challenging gender discriminatory social practices, and endorsing more equitable gender norms and relationships. In the design stage of communications/C4D interventions, a gender analysis should be consistently conducted, assessing the roles of, and relations between, girls and boys and women and men, and identifying how gender and other crucial variables, such as age, disability and ethnicity influence experiences, needs, capacities, specific vulnerabilities, access to and control over resources, barriers and priorities. All UNICEF communication materials and tools, from both external and internal communications to behaviour change and community engagement messages, must portray girls and boys and women and men equitably, and avoid stereotypical portrayals of girls and boys, women and men.¹¹⁵

UNICEF will also continue to increase knowledge sharing, communications and visibility on gender equality both for internal and external audiences and partners by using different communication channels with a mix of C4D/T4D/social media approaches. Some COs have partnered with UNICEF goodwill ambassadors and celebrities to advocate for social change on preventing GBV and child marriage. Social media must be harnessed to promote public engagement on gender equality and value of girl child related issues. Several countries are adopting innovative approaches to advance gender equality using influencers, Youtubers, religious leaders, startup companies, youth, etc. In addition, several public events have generated wide visibility on gender issues including the International Day of the Girl and the 16 Days of Activism against GBV, to call for equal rights between girls and boys, women and men that have been seldom discussed on public platforms. UNICEF will also work directly with media outlets and platforms in their business practice, to ensure that positive gender roles are promoted through their media outlets, and especially in marketing and advertising. Depicting positive gender roles, taking care to include female perspectives and avoiding harmful stereotypes around women's and girls' roles in society, media and marketing and advertising, UNICEF can play a proactive role in challenging harmful social norms and discrimination. Training partners on production of gender responsive media and materials that lean towards gender transformation and do not reinforce negative gender roles and relationships can therefore play a critical role in changing social norms and behaviors.

UNICEF in ECA region will continue to foster and use innovation- new technologies, products, and financing models- to achieve transformative shifts in gender inequality. UNICEF focuses on advancing girls' education and learning particularly in STEM fields including digital skills and overcoming gender stereotypes through girl-centered approaches. For example, under the Skills for Girls initiative, UNICEF and partners are showing promising initiatives and programmes reaching the most vulnerable girls with skills, education and alternative pathways for learning and connecting with local job markets. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNICEF-supported IT Girls Initiative connects adolescent girls and young women with information and communication technology companies through mentoring programmes in schools. In Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF in partnership with Clé de Peau Beauté, is equipping girls for the 21st century workforce by providing relevant STEM education, skills and vocational training through skills training centers where girls learn computer skills, coding and entrepreneurship curricula. Furthermore, under the partnership with Chloé, UNICEF in Tajikistan has rolled out innovation labs which help adolescents acquire 21st century skills, digital skills, social entrepreneurship skills and access to jobs, including most marginalized such as NEET girls and those with disability. UNICEF Serbia is also linking girls to job opportunities by working with the private sector on internship placements and

mentorship. In Armenia, UNICEF and UNDP have joined forces to run an impact Accelerator #5, a programme to connect young women and girls to Armenia's IT/Tech ecosystem and helping them develop startups, new jobs, learn new skills and access new financing sources. Similarly, UNICEF Kazakhstan jointly with the Science and Technology Park of the Al Farabi Kazakh National University has launched an educational project specifically for girls through development of UniSat nanosatellites that covers the stages of creating any spacecraft- engineering, design, programming, assembling, testing and launch skills. Building on a wealth of experience, capability and techniques accumulated from these existing programmes, UNICEF in ECA region will further strengthen development and private sector partnerships, increase regional evidence base and promote sharing of promising practices.

■ Output 6. Ensure organizational accountability and leadership

While responsibility to implement the GAP sits with all staff, senior leadership support and commitment to gender integration is key to achieving and sustaining organizational cultures upholding gender mainstreaming and gender equality at all levels of the organization. According to the 2019 UNICEF ECARO Annual Gender Results Report, one-third of COs stated lack of accountability to achieve gender results in their country management plans (meaning that leadership, and roles and responsibilities for each sector were not articulated), and one-third of COs reported lack of full management oversight to support implementation of gender results. Furthermore, in the 2020 UNICEF Regional Gender Capacity Assessment Survey completed by all COs, 62 per cent stated insufficient support from supervisor to address gender in their work and 63 per cent responded not including gender-related activities in their Performance Evaluation Reviews (PERs).

UNICEF will continue to support leadership of senior managers to lead the application of the GAP and accountability mechanisms. This entails making institutional adjustments in several areas, including: strengthening gender results monitoring systems, and the capacity of country-level staff to use them; instituting clearer requirements for gender integration in programme design, execution and monitoring; emphasizing UNICEF's gender equality commitments in public speaking; and defining a more deliberate accountability process for implementation that incorporates clear regional and country-level responsibility for gender results. Importantly, it will also mean securing required resources (both human and financial) to achieve gender equality targets reflected in current and future GAP and UNICEF SPs. Country offices need to ensure Country Programme Management Plan (CPMP) and Annual Management Plan (AMP) clearly define accountabilities to achieve gender results across sectors, which is particularly important for COs with no gender specialist. All UNICEF programme staff should be supported to deliver gender results, aware of their responsibilities for gender equality and be held accountable for them through including gender related outputs/activities and personal learning/capacity development plans in all staff member's (where relevant) performance review/appraisal processes. Human Resources (HR) should ensure gender results accountability is also noted in staff's Terms of References (ToRs) and job descriptions.

■ Output 7. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for gender equitable results

Progress in gender mainstreaming in the country programme is expected to be monitored and evaluated alongside progress in other areas. A gender informed CPD is to include measurable targets and goals in terms of gender equality – whether this means increasing gender responsive projects or adding gender-specific indicators. However, a global annual quality review (GEROS) analysis is showing that UNICEF evaluations have not effectively incorporated gender considerations into all stages of the evaluation process.¹¹⁶ UNICEF in ECA region will continue building capacity of staff and partners to collect and analyze accurate sex and age disaggregated data, monitor, document and report on gender transformative programming. Results-based management (RBM) remains an organizational priority. Going forward, UNICEF in ECA region will: 1) develop capacity of staff and implementing partners on gender mainstreaming programming and RBM; and 2) deliver targeted support to COs that face challenges in meeting gender equality programming and RBM. Evaluations will continue to integrate gender equality and human rights perspectives across all evaluations, be systematic and impartial, providing reliable evidence-based information on progress towards results on gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment. UNICEF in ECA region will use evaluations and meta-analysis of CPE findings on "what works" to improve the quality of programmes, enhance accountability, inform decision making and contribute to learning. Innovative community-based feedback mechanisms also need to be in place to capture ideas and recommendations about programme effectiveness from girls, boys, all other genders and parents and communities directly.

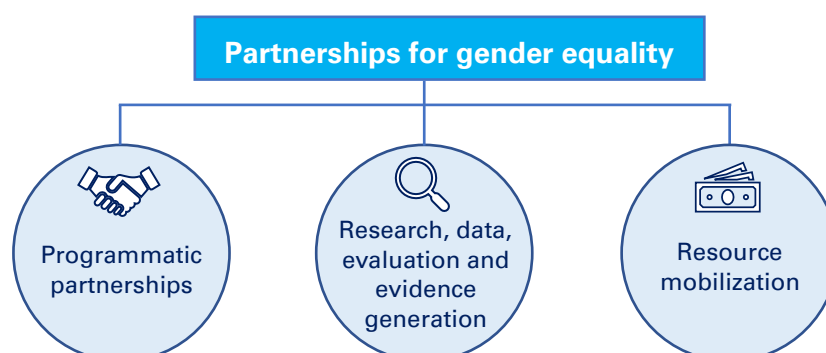
A common challenge across the region is that the results reported often provides only the number of people reached and does not include the information on behavioral/gender norms changed nor long-term impacts of such interventions. In 2019, only six COs reported that they see positive shift in discriminatory gender roles, norms and practices that can be attributed to UNICEF intervention. Measurements of success go beyond measuring the number of children reached and should include the impact of changes in girls' and women's individual agency (for example, changes in girls' self-esteem, aspirations and self-efficacy) and gender relations (for example, tracking community perception and beliefs around the acceptability of GBV), and interventions that transform structures (such as gender-transformative legislative systems and institutional change).¹¹⁷ Gender results, indicators and clear targets will need to be formulated to adequately capture and report on the work being undertaken by the COs, with clear accountabilities and adequate resources dedicated for transformative gender results. Regional office will support training on gender and evaluation especially to staff who sign off and prepare evaluations and TORs in each section.

■ Output 8. Foster inclusive, diverse and safe working environment for all

Achieving gender equality is important for workplaces not only because it is 'fair' and 'the right thing to do,' but because it is also linked to an organization's overall performance. UNICEF in ECA region will amplify leadership support and a strong willingness to drive the organization to becoming a more inclusive, safe, gender-sensitive and gender-equal workplace. To achieve this, it is required to: identify gender-related barriers related to recruitment, hiring, retention and advancement; removal of barriers to the full and equal participation of female staff; access to all occupations and sectors, including leadership roles, regardless of gender; elimination of discrimination on the basis of gender; and ensure application of family-friendly policies such as maternity and paternity benefits and flexible work arrangements, particularly in relation to family and caring responsibilities. Gender balance in UNICEF staffing mirrors UNICEF's commitment to gender equality. Most COs in ECA region have achieved gender parity among professional staff members in 2019. However, gender parity efforts are still needed, especially in higher grade levels and senior posts such as G-7, NO-4, P-5 and above. Each CO together with HR should review the gender parity in all job categories and levels of position to address parity discrepancies between job levels. Tackling sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment and abuse of authority in the workplace is a top priority for making working environment a safer place. All UNICEF staff are expected to adhere to the agency's core values and work in a way that respects and fosters the rights of the people they serve, and contributes to a work environment free from disrespect, discrimination, abuse of authority and harassment. UNICEF in ECA region will ensure to implement clear guidelines on reporting, protection and recourse mechanisms for staff and collaborators, and address any acts of sexual harassment, discrimination or abuse of authority.

3) Partnerships for gender equality

Partnerships are central to taking forward and sustaining UNICEF's efforts to gender equality. There are several types and approaches to partnerships that can strengthen and complement gender transformative programming, facilitate better coordination and avoid duplication of efforts, and generate and exchange evidence on best practices and data gaps. UNICEF in ECA region will probe and strengthen three types of partnerships to advance gender equality work as follows.



1) Programmatic partnerships

For the programmatic cooperation, partnerships with governments, municipalities, parliaments, civil society organizations (CSOs), the private sector, European Union (EU), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), United Nations agencies and national/international NGOs will continue to be critical in terms of leveraging policies and programmes and continued advocacy on gender issues such as sexual violence and GBV including in humanitarian settings, positive gender socialization and social norm change, child marriage and other harmful practices, higher education especially for marginalized children, support to marginalized girls and women (i.e. single mothers, refugees, girls with disabilities), maternal and newborn health, sexual health education for adolescents, ICT skills and STEM for girls, NEET, men and boys engagement and female entrepreneurship. For instance, the partnership with the EU has enabled UNICEF to expand collaboration with civil society partners to support the most vulnerable children and their families, while also offering management capacity support in areas such as financial planning and management, reporting and prevention of GBV. Furthermore, several COs have worked with partners from different stakeholder groups to empower girls through new joint innovative programmes such as UPSHIFT and Generation Unlimited (GenU) Youth Challenge, providing girls a platform for social innovation and entrepreneurial skills. On the other hand, some COs are working closely with partners by leading the United Nations Gender Thematic Group, making UNICEF a relevant and strong actor in this area.

UNICEF will continue to work with civil society actors as knowledge partners, implementers of programmes, and advocates for normative advancements and accountability. UNICEF will also strengthen its relationship with women's/girls' rights organizations and youth networks, that focus on engaging men and boys in gender equality programming, and pay special attention to those representing specific groups, such as disability and ethnic minority organizations that offer valuable knowledge and insights into gender relations, barriers and opportunities at local and regional levels. Building capacity of national counterparts and implementing partners on gender-equality principles and programming through training and resources will be prioritized. This should also include capacity building of service providers and frontline workers. There is also significant potential in ECA region for UNICEF to strengthen its collaboration with the business sector to co-create, innovate and develop products and services that ensure equal participation of girls and boys, that promote women and girls' access, and that address specific challenges related to children with disabilities. UNICEF will also work together with business to ensure that their practice contributes to promoting positive gender roles through family friendly policies, helping work life balance and family life, facilitating participation of women in the workforce, and contributing to a better distribution of domestic tasks. Business can also be an ally for UNICEF as champions promoting positive gender roles through awareness raising campaign, agenda setting in multi-stakeholder platforms, and advocating for better policies and regulation at government level.

2) Research, data, evaluation and evidence generation

UNICEF will continue working closely with governments, academic and research institutions, think tanks, the media, policy institutes, United Nations agencies, international/national NGOs and intergovernmental organizations in and out of the region focused on Europe and Central Asia to strengthen research, data, evaluation and evidence of what works, why and how to address the root causes of critical gender inequalities faced by girls, boys, women and men and all other genders.

3) Resource mobilization

Engagement with private sector companies will be expanded to harness various channels for promoting gender equality: leveraging resources for empowering girls and women and raising awareness and increasing opportunities for public engagement on gender issues to strengthen UNICEF's advocacy positions. Building on emerging opportunities and potential collaboration on innovative approaches to advance gender equality, dialogue will be further strengthened with governments, multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors (i.e., USAID, SIDA), international financial institutions (IFIs) (i.e., World Bank, International Monetary Fund), regional banks (i.e., Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), business, philanthropic foundations and national committees. This will aim to identify the areas for collaboration in a systematized way for sustainable investments to promote gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment in the region. This will generate further value by, aligning the efforts and leveraging partnership opportunities to address gender inequalities across the region and at country level. Knowledge building and sharing the good practices and the lessons learned from other regions and the ECA will further support the COs in their engagement with partners for leveraging results and mobilizing resources.

Annex 1: UNICEF ECARO Gender Action Plan

Outputs	Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Time Frame	Responsibility
1. Gender transformative programmes in line with GAP and ROMP are designed and implemented	1.1. Ensure all relevant programmatic data are disaggregated by sex and other critical variables and gender analysis is undertaken for the identification of key challenges and gaps in each context (programmes/projects/regional levels)	A standardized system for data Collection, analysis and reporting in place within each section with clear lines of accountability	Continuous	RO and CO Section Chiefs with support of PME section
	1.1. Establish gender sensitive and gender specific indicators for measuring the impact of sectoral policies, strategies and programmes, in cooperation with office-wide efforts	Key gender indicators/gender tagged SICs established at the design stage of projects/programmes and respective section's work plan	Continuous	RO and CO Section Chiefs, GFPs with Planning section, technical support from ECARO Gender unit
	1.2. Ensure the integration of results of gender programmatic review (GPR) into CPAP/CPD/PSNs/CPEs/ HAC	All the country programme documents have addressed gender issues and concerns with action plans and results matrix	Continuous	CO Senior Management, Section Chiefs, Planning section, Gender Specialist/GFPs with technical support from ECARO Gender/Planning unit
	1.3. Promote usage of the Regional Gender Toolkit and other tools to ensure gender mainstreaming in the full cycle of programmes	Regional Gender Toolkit is widely utilized by all sections	Continuous	RO and CO Section Chiefs, PME section promote and apply the Toolkit in their respective sections/networks, with technical support from ECARO Gender unit
	1.4. Enhance multi-sectoral collaborations for gender equality transformative results	A cross sectoral gender task force/mechanism is created in RO/COs with all sectors and led by senior management to drive priority results	Reviewed annually	RO and CO Management with CMT/RoMT
2. Gender capacities of UNICEF staff and implementing partners are strengthened	2.1. Identify capacity needs of staff and partners and organize practical trainings and clinics on gender mainstreaming and gender analysis including cross-sectional gender training such as Gender and Child-Protection/GBV, Undertaking Gender Analysis, etc.	Training session(s) and clinics organized for all COs and RO (including partners if necessary)	Continuous	ECARO Gender unit, Gender Specialists/GFPs with inputs from relevant sectors
	2.2. Institutionalize capacity building on gender among staff (including CO management/Gender Specialist/GFPs) and partners	All COs with management action has ensured gender capacity building plans and resources are incorporated in Human Resources Development Team (HRDT) plans	Reviewed annually	CO Management, Gender Specialists/GFPs, Section Chiefs and HR with all sectors and technical support of ECARO Gender unit

Outputs	Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Time Frame	Responsibility
	2.3. Appoint Gender Specialist/GFPs with clear terms of reference to provide coordination and technical support for gender analysis and gender integration in CO	All COs with a budget over \$20 million has hired a Gender Specialist (P3/4 or NOB/C), and if not, appointed one or more Gender Focal Points (GFPs)	Reviewed annually	CO Management and HR with all sectors and technical support of ECARO Gender unit
	2.4. Develop a roster of gender experts to be engaged on need basis	A list of gender experts is made available and shared	Reviewed annually	ECARO Gender unit (Applicable at country level for developing national level experts by Gender Specialists/GFPs)
3. Knowledge base on gender (and its intersections) is strengthened	3.1. Bring visibility to gender and sectoral products on the UNICEF ECARO Gender website and Intranet (online) to facilitate ease of reference, information searches and dissemination	The ECARO Gender website and Intranet covering updated gender issues are well maintained	Continuous update/learning	ECARO Gender unit with Planning section and inputs from RO/COs relevant sectors
	3.2. Share relevant information on good practices, innovative initiatives and new publications/tools on gender equality	Regional gender equality newsletter compiling up-to-date information is disseminated regularly Sectors to document updated evidence/ research/studies/progress on gender outcomes and ensure it is made available for cross sectoral learning and sharing	Quarterly Continuous	ECARO Gender Unit with inputs from relevant sectors/CO's RO and CO Section Chiefs
	3.3. Organize thematic dissemination and webinars on emerging gender and sectoral issues	Seminars/webinars on gender-related themes organized on needs-basis	Continuous	ECARO Gender unit with inputs/collaboration from relevant RO sectors/COs
4. Adequate financial resources for programmatic and institutional gender mainstreaming	4.1. Timely completion and periodic reviews of Gender Equality Markers (GEM) (at CO and ECARO level)	All offices have ensured the application of GEM/SIC Gender Tagging and monitors periodically	Continuous and reviewed annually	RO and CO: Section Chiefs/Advisers with support of Planning, Finance and ECARO Gender unit
	4.2. Ensure financial resources for gender mainstreaming to allocate adequate budgets for gender expertise and capacity building, as well as for the sustained implementation of gender equality programming (including research and analysis)	All COs ensure a minimum 15% allocation of all country programme and project budgets to advancing gender equality and/or empowering girls and women	Reviewed annually	RO/CO Management with Planning, Gender Specialists/GFPs, Section Chiefs and technical support of ECARO Gender unit
5. Communication, advocacy and innovation to transform gender inequality strengthened	5.1. Include gender analysis, gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment as integral elements in all communication/C4D plans, guidelines, strategies and action plans	A gender check and review process for all communication/C4D products including research, programme and partnership documents and media and training material commissioned by the office is institutionalized	Continuous	RO and CO: C4D/communication unit with Gender Specialist/GFPs with technical support from ECARO Gender unit

Outputs	Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Time Frame	Responsibility
	5.2. Evaluate effectiveness of communications/C4D interventions and activities in contributing to gender transformation	Changes in gender related attitudes and norms are measured (beyond programmatic changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours)	Continuous	RO and CO: C4D/sector staff with Planning, Evaluation, Gender Specialist/GFPs with technical support from ECARO Gender unit
	5.3. Increase intentional shifts in gender roles and expectations through innovative interventions	Private sector partnerships are strengthened for digital/innovative approaches for transformative gender results	Continuous	RO and CO: C4D, T4D and sector staff, Gender Specialist/GFPs, ICT with technical support from ECARO Gender unit
6. Organizational accountability and leadership to implement the GAP	6.1. Annual gender work plan is developed and used in COs	COs have an annual gender work plan that notes programmatic and institutional results, accountability, indicators and key areas for accelerated action	Reviewed annually	CO Management, Gender Specialists/GFPs, Planning and Section Chiefs/CMT with all sectors.
	6.2. Performance benchmarks on gender mainstreaming for individual/sectoral and organizational level developed and institutionalized	Performance benchmarks for Senior Management/ Section Chiefs/GFPs are clearly noted in their PERs and ToRs including level of accountability and performance on gender results	Reviewed annually	RO/CO Senior Management, Gender Specialists/GFPs, Section Chiefs and HR with all sectors
	6.3. Concrete action from senior management to support their staff, specifically their GFPs in gender mainstreaming	Senior management regularly makes official quality checks and communication with all staff on gender equality commitments and integration, and enhances learning/training opportunities where available for GFPs	Continuous	RO/CO Management with all sectors. Technical support from ECARO Gender unit if necessary
	6.4. Reviews and Quality check of TORs, contracts, programme documents, budgets, etc. from gender perspective is made mandatory prior to signing off	All TORs, contracts, programmes documents and budgets are cleared from a gender lens by approving authority	Continuous	RO/CO Management, PBR Committees, HR, Operation with all sectors. Technical support from ECARO Gender unit if necessary
7. Monitoring and evaluation systems for gender equitable results are strengthened	7.1. All sectors have established gender responsive indicators/outputs for each programmatic area in accordance with the office's planning cycle	Gender sensitive indicators/outputs identified/defined at all levels that relate to GAP	Continuous	RO/CO Sector staff with Planning section and technical support of GFPs/Gender Specialists/ECARO Gender unit
	7.2. Ensure that senior management meetings review progress in the implementation of gender equality results and its mainstreaming on a regular basis	Gender equality results reviews are included in the senior management meetings (CMT/DROPS/RMT) at least once every quarter; and in quarterly cross sectoral gender task force meetings	Continuous (review quarterly)	RO and CO senior management with all sectors
	7.3. Prepare regional annual progress report on the implementation of Gender Equality Results	Annual gender results are documented and disseminated	Annually	ECARO Gender unit with inputs from relevant sectors at RO/CO level/CO Gender Specialists/GFPs

Outputs	Indicators	Sub-Indicators	Time Frame	Responsibility
	7.4. Ensuring sex-disaggregated and gender inclusive methodology for data collection amongst all sections and among partners	Data is disaggregated by age, sex and other social variables in the programmes documents and results reporting	Continuous	RO/CO Sector staff with Planning section, Gender Specialist/GFPs and with technical support of ECARO Gender unit
	7.5. Ensure gender integration as a line of focus and enquiry into all phases of evaluation processes irrespective of the type of evaluation.	All ECAR led Evaluations and CPE's integrate gender equality as a key criteria and explicit line of enquiry and learning	Annually	ECARO Evaluation section
8. Inclusive, diverse and safe working environment for all	8.1. Adoption of the global GAP Staffing Guidance and Diversity Plans at the CO and RO level	All COs have signed off management and HR Action Plans on enhancing gender parity and implementation of gender policies at workplace	Reviewed annually	RO/CO Senior Management, Section Chiefs and HR with all sectors. Technical support from ECARO Gender unit
	8.2. Ensure that policies and training for the prevention of PSEA, harassment and abuse of authority, conflict resolution and protection against retaliation are in place and implemented to all staff	Senior management enforces a strict zero tolerance policy to sexual exploitation, abuse of authority and harassment, regularly following up on staff completion of mandatory training sessions and disseminating information about existing policies and confidential reporting mechanisms	Reviewed annually	RO/CO Senior Management and HR with all sectors.
	8.3. Support all staff to take advantage of family-friendly policies	Maternity and paternity leave and flexible work arrangements, gender-friendly facilities (i.e. breastfeeding places) are available and widely used	Reviewed annually	RO/CO Management and HR/operation
9. Partnerships and joint programming to promote gender equality in ECA region	9.1. Strengthen multi-stakeholder global, regional and local partnerships	Donor engagement, programmes and resources to implement gender responsive/transformational programmes have increased	Continuous	Senior Management with Planning, Gender Specialists/GFPs, Section Chiefs and technical support of ECARO Gender/Partnership units
	9.2. Promote learning exchanges and capacity building to increase expertise in COs around strategic partnership to advance gender equality	HQ/RO partnership experts have provided technical support and expertise by providing evidence-based good practices/approaches and lessons learned to advance gender equality partnerships	Continuous	Senior Management, Section Chiefs, Gender Specialist/GFPs, with technical support of HQ/ECARO Gender/Partnerships unit

Annex 2: Key Tools and Resources

| UNICEF Core Documents

- UNICEF, [UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018-2021](#), 2017
- UNICEF [Gender Action Plan 2014-2017](#)
- UNICEF [Gender Action Plan 2018-2021](#)
- UNICEF, [Working for an Equal Future: UNICEF Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Girls and Women](#), 2010
- UNICEF, [Gender Staffing Guidance](#), 2019
- UNICEF, [Family Friendly Policies: Handbook for Business](#), 2020
- UNICEF, [UNICEF Guidance on Gender Integration in Evaluation](#), 2019
- UNICEF ECARO, [Gender Intranet website](#), for UNICEF staff only

| Gender Toolkit

- UNICEF ECARO, [Gender Toolkit](#), 2019

| Gender Programmatic Review

- UNICEF, [Gender Programmatic Toolkit](#), 2018
- UNICEF, [GPR Management and Operations Guide](#), 2018

| Gender Integration into Country Programming

- UNICEF, [Thematic Piece of Situation Analysis Toolkit: Gender Equality](#), 2019
- UNICEF, [Gender Quality Assurance Checklist for Country Program Documents](#), 2018
- UNICEF, [Gender Quality Assurance Checklist for Program Strategy Notes](#), 2018
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February 2021