

**Regional Highlights from  
Gender Assessments in CEE/CIS conducted in 2009-10**

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## 1. Background

Since 1994, UNICEF has committed itself to gender mainstreaming, as central to achieving greater gender equality and as a critically important element of the Human Rights based Approach to Programming. In 2006, a UNICEF Programme Directive (*CF/PD/PRO/2006-05*) mandated the assessment and review of gender mainstreaming at least once per cycle in UNICEF-supported Country Programmes. UNICEF has developed guidance for Country Offices to undertake a flexible approach to gender mainstreaming assessment and review process (*Programme Policy and Procedure Manual, Chapter 6, Section 17.*)

In this context, and linked with more recent efforts by UNICEF to strengthen gender mainstreaming, the CEE/CIS Regional Office supported 20 of its 22 offices to conduct significant review in 2009-2010 of gender mainstreaming within the context of their support to country programmes of cooperation. Sixteen (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan) finalised assessments in 2009. The finalisation of two others (Serbia, Turkmenistan) were ongoing at the time of writing, while another two are set to begin in early 2010 (Georgia, Tajikistan).

In addition to the gender assessments conducted at country level, the CEE/CIS Regional Office commissioned a '*Stocktaking*' paper of key gender issues in the region and on-going initiatives by other agencies and partners in 2009.<sup>1</sup> The stocktaking documented that significant resources of partner organizations are allocated to address women's participation in politics and decision-making, the development of institutional structures, policies and legislation on gender equality, trafficking and domestic violence. The stocktaking suggested strengthened UNICEF involvement in the areas of gender-based violence, greater programme focus on boys and men and addressing masculinity, particularly in adolescence, and more focus on social policy reform for gender equality. Based on UNICEF mandate and

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<sup>1</sup> The review documented priorities in gender-related activities of 12 organizations active in the CEE/CIS region, as well as the EU.

experience, the stocktaking posited that UNICEF would have comparative advantages in the above areas.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Methodology

Terms of reference for each of the assessments were drafted by the Country Offices, in consultation with the Regional Office, which provided quality assurance and oversight of the contracting process. In addition, TORs were assessed against evaluation standards and gender criteria through the Regional Office's technical facility for Monitoring and Evaluation, comprising third party review by external experts.

Independent expert consultants were engaged by Country Offices to conduct the assessments. The experts were identified with the assistance of the Regional Office through the pre-qualified roster of gender consultants, and were selected competitively based on experience and performance in conducting gender assessments, knowledge of the regional and country context and language skills.

The prevailing organisational Guidance on Gender Assessments (see *Programme Policy and Procedure Manual, Chapter 6, Section 17*) provided flexibility to Country Offices in defining the scope the assessments and the participation of staff. As a result, the extent of direct involvement by Country Office staff and management differed. Each gender assessments included the following components:<sup>3</sup>

- an overview of key gender issues in the country which illustrated the context for gender mainstreaming in UNICEF programmes,
- a desk review of relevant programme and management documents at the Country Office, adapted from guidance in the PPP manual,
- interviews with country office staff and management, based on guidance in the PPP manual,

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<sup>2</sup> Complementing the gender assessments and the stocktaking paper, training in Gender Mainstreaming was conducted in 2009 for CEE/CIS RO staff.

<sup>3</sup> One exception is BiH, where a Situation Analysis on the Status of Gender Equality in BiH was conducted, which did not focus on an assessment of programme documentation.

- interviews with representatives of selected partners from Government, NGOs, UN agencies and other international organisations cooperating with UNICEF in the country,<sup>4</sup>
- presentation, discussion and feedback sessions with the country office on the main results
- a draft report, including observations, assessments and recommendations and incorporating the comments of the Country Office.
- In some cases, the assessment exercise was combined with gender training for the Country Offices.

Draft reports were shared with the Regional Office for expert review and quality assurance prior to their finalization by the Country Offices.

### **3. Key External Challenges for Gender Mainstreaming in Country Programmes**

The prevalence and durability of gender stereotypes in everyday social interaction was in evidence in all of the assessments. Stereotyping was reflected in national policies and was mainly to the disadvantage of women and girls. The observation is at odds with the official equality discourse pre-1990s and the appearance of an advanced state of gender equality legislation in the region. Instead, the assessments by UNICEF highlight significant inequality—including high rates of gender-based violence and relatively low economic power and participation in politics by women—despite a relatively high level of women’s education and participation in the workforce.

The assessments by UNICEF highlight a process of reversion to traditional gender relations in some countries since the early 1990s. The assessments identify potentially contributing factors, including the growth of insecurity resulting from economic reforms, crises, political instability and armed conflict, and the growing influence of religion in defining gender roles.

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<sup>4</sup> Children or adolescents were in no case consulted explicitly. In a few cases, adolescents were consulted as NGO representatives engaged in peer-education activities.

The assessments by Country Offices in South-Eastern Europe specifically point to a connection between gender-based and ethnically-based discrimination and vulnerability, for example, in countries with a significant Roma population and other ethnic minorities. A number of assessments also identified challenges to girls' and women's rights posed by a high prevalence of human trafficking.

All of the assessments indicate that gender equality is not prioritized on national political agendas in region, although differences in the political environment matter. For example, those countries engaged in EU accession negotiations appear to pay greater attention to gender equality commitments compared to governments in Central Asia.

In general, there appears to be popular scepticism, of political decision makers, as well as the population at large, against the terminology and concepts of gender equality, since these are associated with a Communist legacy rather than with human rights and democracy. Moreover, gender equality appears to be associated with women, whereas the roles of boys and men and their potential needs do not appear to be widely recognized.

Weaknesses in quality and availability of sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data at country level have also been observed in a number of assessments.

#### **4. Key Issues for UNICEF CEE/CIS on Gender Mainstreaming**

While the assessments identified significant levels of awareness and attention to gender equality in important areas of UNICEF support, they also highlighted a need to systematically strengthen gender mainstreaming in all programme areas, enhancing staff capacity on gender issues and clarifying responsibilities for gender mainstreaming at country level.

The assessments highlight that Country Programmes in the CEE/CIS region have most experience in the promotion of gender equality and women's/girls' rights in the following programmatic areas:

- **Education**, particularly support of the promotion of Life-Skills-Based-Education, child-friendly schools programmes, and activities addressing the early drop-out of students, mainly of girls, from secondary and post-secondary education,
- **Early-Child Development**, particularly the role of fathers in parenting,
- **HIV/AIDS prevention** and programmes addressing the situation of most-at-risk adolescents (**MARA**), as well as especially vulnerable **adolescents (EVA)**
- programmes addressing **domestic violence**
- support to the promotion **baby-friendly hospitals**.

While the assessments noted UNICEF's experience in these areas, they also point out that support on gender mainstreaming was not always explicit or systematically documented in the programmes' objectives and targets, and that indicators were not always specific enough to measure changes in gender-related issues.

A number of gaps were identified in country programmes with respect to gender mainstreaming, including limited attention to the concluding observations of the CEDAW committee in areas of programme cooperation. Analyses of the situation of women and children were noted to not be fully gender-sensitive; for example, identifying sex-disaggregated data in only some areas but omitting substantive gender analysis.

The assessments indicated that attention to gender equality was not comprehensive in a number of programme areas, including:

- **child protection**, in particular **juvenile justice**
- **health & nutrition**
- **social policy**
- **violence in schools**

A number of assessments highlighted that gender equality in country programmes (similar to the broad view of CEE/CIS societies) may be perceived as an issue relevant to the situation of women and girls. As a result, there is a risk that UNICEF-supported activities, which are intended to benefit women and children directly, are interpreted wrongly as gender mainstreaming initiatives by Country Offices and without examining the impact of these activities on issues related to women's empowerment, perceptions of traditional roles and wider gender equality.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, the assessments noted limited attention to gender relations as a reflection of power relations in society, to the role of **boys and men** in gender equality, and to the gender-specific needs of boys (e.g. as clients of the juvenile justice system). The integration in a number of country programmes of support to the promotion of the active role of fathers in early child development was an exception.

While several assessments pointed to a growing awareness by UNICEF staff of the need to engage more with boys and men for gender equality, the assessments did not identify Country Offices with significant experience in this regard. A number of assessments point to limitations in office capacity that may impact on efforts to improve gender mainstreaming progress. In particular, the gender focal point system did not appear to meet its mandate, in part due to incompleteness in the assignment of focal point responsibilities (terms of reference were often unclear) and the limited authority of the focal points. At the time of the assessment, a majority of Country Office did not use explicit management or evaluation instruments specifically designed to assess gender mainstreaming. Most Country Offices had only formulated generic standards how to ensure gender sensitivity in communication material and publications, nor were gender sensitivity or competences routinely required of outside experts or in hiring processes.

The assessments highlighted a strong general commitment by UNICEF staff to the principle of gender equality and the promotion of girls' and women's rights by all staff. However, staff

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<sup>5</sup> A few assessments point out, for example, that activities in the area of health and nutrition may contribute to confining women to stereotypical gender role assignments, or that there may be an unaddressed tension between women's economic empowerment and the promotion of breastfeeding beyond the term of statutory parental leave.

articulated a need for gender sensitization and capacity development in general. The need for context specific capacity development for CEE/CIS countries was noted.

## **5. Recommendations for Gender Mainstreaming in UNICEF CEE/CIS**

The assessments recommended that UNICEF Country Offices should ensure a more systematic approach to gender mainstreaming in all programme sectors, while at the same time deepen gender mainstreaming in sectors where it is currently most visible (i.e. Education, ECD and MARA).

The assessments recommended strengthening national data systems on gender equality that feed into national policy decisions and UNICEF's knowledge base to improve programme support decision making on gender mainstreaming. As a matter of principle, UNICEF-supported analyses on the situation of women and children should identify context-specific gender issues.

The assessments also recommend that UNICEF document its programme experience on gender mainstreaming to effectively demonstrate on-going commitment to gender mainstreaming and make lessons learned and good practices widely available in the organisation.

All of the assessments recommend that the terms of reference for Gender Focal Points to be clarified and the profile of the role strengthened, for example by greater involvement in the advisory bodies of the country office and more participation in programme planning decisions. Other examples include facilitating greater exchange of experience between gender focal points in the CEE/CIS region.

All assessments recommend specific and tailored capacity development on gender mainstreaming in all programme areas, highlighting specifically a need for training, guidance,

tools and instruments that are adaptable to the context of CEE/CIS countries, including specific sub-regional conditions such as EU accession. Some assessments also recommend general gender equality sensitization and basic capacity development on gender mainstreaming concepts, approaches and instruments.

The assessments recommend that the prevalent but misguided interpretation which equates gender mainstreaming activities with activities directed specifically to benefit women, and thereby reinforce traditional gender roles, needs to be addressed.

Several assessments recommend that specific resources be made available for gender mainstreaming, including resources to enable Country Offices to increase their knowledge base on gender equality issues as well as for specific activities/ programmes for girls' and women's empowerment. Moreover, assessments recommend that gender sensitivity and UNICEF's commitment to gender mainstreaming should be more explicitly highlighted in partnerships at the national level. Some reports recommend that UNICEF should directly collaborate with the respective national institutions responsible for promoting gender equality and the status of women. Others recommend that Country Offices should involve relevant NGOs or academic partners at national level more directly, and that gender expertise be a criterion in the collaboration with national experts. Some assessments recommend increased engagement of Country Offices in UN Gender Theme Groups.

The need for increased support through the Regional Office is highlighted: ensuring the exchange of experience of Country Offices (mainly, but not only of GFPs), developing region-specific capacity building and programmatic guidance and shared standards for gender mainstreaming in management and programmes, introducing and sustaining substantive input, for example with respect to the engagement with boys and men for gender equality, providing information resources and tools such as good practice examples, as well as ad-hoc expertise and assistance are the main areas where RO assistance is considered helpful.

## **6. Ongoing follow-up to gender assessments in CEE/CIS**

Country Offices are currently engaged in follow-up activities to the assessments, with Regional Office support for selected priority areas, and in line with the Global Strategic Priority Action Plan for Organisational Transformation on Gender Equality 2010-2012.

Several Country Offices have taken broad measures to strengthen gender mainstreaming through the development of a country-level gender strategy (1 office), revised annual management plans specifying gender mainstreaming priorities and “gender checks” in authorization and approval processes (1 office), or a CO gender action plan (1 office). Several others are considering similar measures.

A number of Country Offices are revising the TORs for GFPs (5 offices) combined with a broadening of their roles as clearing house for gender mainstreaming in the country programme (2 offices). Several Country Offices are developing guidance and standard formulations to be used in TORs for partners and consultants (2 offices).

A few Country Offices are revising AWP to include or expand gender-sensitive activities, or to make the existing gender mainstreaming practice and expertise more visible (2 offices). Several countries have begun to collect and disseminate information material, tools and instruments to staff through an e-library (2 offices).

Several Country Offices are planning to conduct in-house capacity development exercises in-house (3 offices), while others are considering supporting staff to increase their gender competence through outside trainings (2 offices).

Some Country Offices have engaged in a process of expanding and strengthening partnerships and collaboration to promote gender equality, in particular through UN Gender Theme Groups (3 offices).

In support of the above, the Regional Office has committed itself to focus in particular on four priority areas in 2010-2012:

- Capacity building, including on-call support to Country Offices and the dissemination of reference material, operational guidance, tools and instruments
- Programming, including specific support for programme areas, through sessions at Regional Network Meetings; the documentation of case studies about the benefits of a gender perspective for more effective and sustainable results in interventions; and the development of a concept note on “Engaging with boys and men in working for gender equality and addressing masculinity in CEE/CIS”
- Communication, including fostering the development of joint approaches on gender in communications
- Leadership, including commitment to gender mainstreaming, by senior management through the Regional Management Team.