

United Nations  Nations Unies

**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-fourth session
New York, 1-12 March 2010**

INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Regional Perspectives in Progress Achieved and Remaining Gaps and
Challenges in the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action**

Written Statement

Submitted by

**Ján Kubiš
Executive Secretary
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

Ms./Mr. Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2010 is indeed a special year – not only does it mark the **15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action** but we are also taking stock of the progress made during the **10 years** that have passed since **the Millennium Declaration**, with gender equality being – besides an objective in its own right – a key determinant for reaching effectively *all* the Millennium Development Goals.

Before entering into the specifics of the ECE region, let me underline that globally, the **economic and financial crisis puts at risk further progress** to be made towards gender equality and women’s empowerment whereas such progress is *essential* for economic growth and sustainable development. Therefore, it is all the more important to consider the crisis as an opportunity to mainstream gender into all measures taken for mitigating its impact and promoting economic recovery, including through stimulus packages and other counter-cyclical policies.

With this in mind, I would like to present the situation, challenges and policy recommendations highlighted at the ECE Beijing + 15 Review Meeting which was held on 2-3 November 2009 and gathered some 350 participants, with a strong presence of both member States and civil society representatives.

The meeting proceeded first with a systematic review of the 12 areas of concerns of the Beijing Platform for Action, and then focused on the topic of “women and the economy”, with two specific agenda items dedicated respectively to *gender-sensitive economic policies in the context of the economic and financial crisis*, and the *role of the corporate sector in promoting gender equality*.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The economic and social situation within the ECE region is extremely diverse as it covers the whole of Europe, Central Asia and North America. Nevertheless, both the national reports submitted by our member States and the discussions during our Regional Review Meeting revealed a number of common, fundamental trends and developments:

Most significantly, countries across the ECE region have made **substantial progress** since the last review **in criminalizing violence against women**, as well as in **providing assistance and protection to women and children victims of violence**. In particular, *domestic* violence has received considerable attention, with a few countries having introduced laws against domestic violence in their legislation for the very first time.

Another key priority emerging from the national reports of *all* countries is **improving the situation of women in the economy** by promoting women’s access to employment, in particular through reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, and by adopting specific measures combating women’s poverty.

In other areas of concern, progress has been much less uniform:

As an example, **national mechanisms for the advancement of women** were extended and strengthened in many countries; however, especially in the Eastern part of the ECE region, they continue to suffer from **lack of political and institutional support** and, often as a consequence, the **lack of financial and human resources**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Despite the numerous achievements in empowering women and improving gender equality during the past years, there remain two major challenges, which attracted particular attention at our meeting and led to corresponding recommendations in the chairperson's conclusions.

The *first* concerns the **insufficient design of policies for gender equality**, and I will just mention four examples:

- First, while undoubtedly the gender gap in labour force participation has significantly narrowed over the past decades, the same cannot be said for the **gap in wages** and the **decency of work**. Accordingly one of the four main sets of recommendations addresses the need for strengthening the situation of women at work.
- Second, **Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) initiatives continue to lack systematic application and are often undertaken on an ad-hoc basis only**, with limitations in time and scope. In this context, the chairperson's conclusions to the ECE-meeting reminded that GRB is nevertheless one of the main tools for implementing effective gender-sensitive policies.
- Third, **social protection for women**, including pensions and unemployment benefits, **continues to pose a challenge** given the economic crisis and the general trend towards a reduction in social expenditure. This challenge is particularly acute in Eastern Europe, due to weak social safety nets combined with insufficient health and social infrastructures. Hence the recommendations of the Meeting, calling for employment and social protection policies which take into account women's underemployment and the predominance of women in the informal sector, in precarious jobs, and in part-time and lower-paid work.
- Fourth, no significant improvement has been made in **the situation of migrant women and women belonging to minority groups**, who suffer multiple forms of discrimination. As a consequence, the recommendations put particular emphasis on the need to address such *specific* vulnerabilities of women.

The *second* major challenge – and this is true for *all* countries and *all* areas of concern - remains to be **the effective implementation and enforcement of already-existing legislation**, which is particularly insufficient for, but not limited to, legislation addressing violence against women.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no readily-available remedy for this implementation gap but the recommendations of the ECE-meeting highlighted two important ingredients for further progress:

First – the **collection of systematic and reliable sex-disaggregated data and statistics**. Indeed, an accurate quantification of gender gaps makes these gaps visible and raises awareness on the size of the problem. Only when gaps are known, could appropriate policies be formulated and progress towards more equality could be measured. Put differently, accurate and reliable statistics are the backbones of good policy.

The second ingredient is: policy measures to **encourage men to meet their family responsibilities**. Indeed, while gender division *at work* has evolved over the last decades, gender division *of domestic labour* has *not*, leading to a combined burden of paid *and* unpaid work for many women. This calls for work-family reconciliation policies that do not only aim at encouraging *women* to participate in the labour market but *also* focus on *men* and *their* possible role in domestic work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me finish with a general observation.

The challenges highlighted at the ECE Beijing + 15 Meeting and which I have just briefly presented now are of a structural nature: **most of them were already identified during the 2004 review**. While overall, progress has been made since then, this appears to be largely insufficient and the economic and financial crisis could even slow down the pace of progress. Furthermore, **new challenges** are arising in our region such as the extension of migration flows and the acceleration of population ageing. It is all the more important to regain momentum on all issues covered by the Beijing Platform for Action, with the joint involvement of governments, civil society, international organizations and the international community as a whole. The most powerful justification for such a new momentum is that, in any society, **promoting gender equality serves simultaneously the purposes of: social justice, economic efficiency and respect of fundamental human rights for all**.

Thank you very much.