

EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION

GENDER AND LABOR MARKETS IN TRANSITION COUNTRIES

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The message from the workshop was clear: Transition has had an adverse impact on women. The challenge is for partnerships - internal and external – to generate development interventions that can successfully transform the negative impact of the transition into opportunities to improve the lives of the majority of men, women, and children. It is also clear that there are sub-regional differences and some participants reiterated the need for such workshops at a sub-regional level.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

1.1 In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, countries within Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECA) began the transition from centrally planned economic systems to free market systems. Such a shift resulted in overhauling of government ministries, privatization of state owned agencies, reform of banking and financial systems, opening of markets for trade, and in general, modernization of economies and infrastructures to enable these countries to integrate into the global environment. This transition was not merely an economic and financial one, it had significant social implications. Prior to the transition, each of the sub-regions— the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Central Asia, and Eastern and Central Europe—held similarly high levels of social indicators. However, once transition began, most of the countries experienced high levels of poverty, at least at an initial stage. Each of the sub-regions, and countries within those regions, went through slightly different experiences in transition. Each had to deal with cultural and societal issues endemic and specific to their regions, in addition to the overall effects of the overhaul of their countries brought on by the transition. General problems such as increased unemployment, reduction in government expenditures on social services, and deteriorating health and education conditions had a direct impact on almost all countries, though some were more successful at handling the transition than others. Additionally, within this process, benefits were distributed unequally-between regions, within countries, between rural and urban areas, and between men and women. It is this last issue, the unequal and differential impact of the transition on men and women, especially in regard to the labor market and employment, that brought together participants from over 25 countries¹ and major bi- and multi-lateral donors² to meet in Warsaw, Poland in January 2001.

¹ See Annex II for full list of participants.

1.2 Through consultation with the various stakeholders, including key donors and regional representatives, “gender and labor markets” was selected as the theme for the Warsaw workshop. The individual topics discussed³—donor strategies, labor markets, both formal and informal, and entrepreneurship—were chosen within this overall theme. The central topic of labor markets (and within it, employment issues) was housed within the context of transition, and the specific impacts/effects that transition was having on labor market issues and employment for women. Informal labor and entrepreneurship were seen as issues within the labor market that were specifically relevant to women and were integrated into the program. Women’s predominance in the informal sector, the “costs” women must bear working in this sector, as well as the barriers faced and opportunities available in entrepreneurship gave these themes their urgency. Additionally, both donors and client representatives discussed donor strategies in order to understand what was working, what wasn’t and what needed to be done. Finally, there were several short capacity building sessions on family and health issues, engendered budgets and gender evaluations to stimulate discussion and enhance learning through sharing of information and new approaches.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

1.3 Setting the tone of the workshop and highlighting the various issues of importance on the topic of gender and labor, Honorable Member of Parliament and Former Prime Minister of Poland, Ms. Hanna Suchocka inaugurated the workshop. In her keynote address, the issue of women in the labor market over the last decade was discussed. She was of the view that transition had negatively affected the participation of both men and women in the labor market, resulting in increased unemployment, but, women overall were hit harder. Women tend to stay unemployed longer: an example that was cited was that the share of long term unemployment in Poland for women was 49.4 percent, while only 41.6 percent for men. Additionally, excessive legal regulations surrounding employment often caused negative impacts on the process of employment promotion. Examples of this were the strength of trade unions and their demands being deterrents to employers in hiring them, as well as the high costs of social security and health insurance that are necessary in formal contracts. Positive aspects of the transition were identified, such as women being afforded the opportunity to start their own businesses. However, they were constrained by the lack of capital and access to credit, the “traditional” roles women play, and lack of information and knowledge on how to start a business-- all

“Admittedly, the World Bank has no right to put any stress on national governments, but its authority is relatively high. It can use this authority to promote good things, without abusing that authority.”

--Warsaw workshop participant, January, 2001.

² The workshop was funded by the Swiss Development Foundation (SDC) and co-sponsored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the World Bank (both the ECA region and the Operations Evaluation Department).

³ See Annex I for the workshop Agenda.

hindrances to women's participation in entrepreneurial activities.

1.4 Additionally, the emerging role of women since transition was discussed. Women should be seen as part of the family unit and gender issues must be addressed from this viewpoint and "holistically", rather than from a standpoint of individual rights. For example in Poland, there is still debate on the various approaches to address issues related to gender equality. The same is true of other post-communist countries. A large part of society felt that the still ongoing political transformation was an appropriate time for women to transition themselves to full-time homemakers after communism had "forced" them into the work place and weakened the family. However, this was not the right solution to the problem. Although it is important to preserve and support the family unit in order to maintain social cohesion, equity and allocation of responsibilities and resources of members must be ensured within this unit.

1.5 In conclusion, she stated that the World Bank and other donors could assist in improving the situation. The best way of ensuring that Bank assistance is relevant for the client is to allow for the participation of both men and women in the process of designing and implementing the assistance. This participation will permit the people of the country to determine how gender issues should be understood and addressed. Another important area where the Bank can help is in supporting national agencies and specialists to undertake analytical research on strategic issues of topical interest. For example – what are the gender implications of Polish accession to the European Union? How have other countries enabled the women and men to be competitive in the European Union? In addition, it was felt that donor agencies should strengthen state agencies in their capacity to collect sex-disaggregated data and monitoring indicators that will inform policy decisions and development interventions in these countries.

EMERGING MESSAGES AND ISSUES

1.6 In line with the various presentations, keynote speech and the ensuing discussions, several major themes emerged as critical for the region and for women: *transition* and its social and economic impacts; *labor issues*, including increased unemployment for women and the hardships faced in the informal sector; *entrepreneurship* and barriers women face in starting their own businesses; *family* and the shifting roles of men and women; decreasing standards in, and access to, *education* and *health*; along with several other issues such as the effect of *EU accession* on women, and the lack of effective mechanisms to enforce anti-discrimination/equal rights laws and legislation. These themes all had direct lessons and implications for women's employment, access to and interaction in the labor market.

The Gender Implications of Transition

1.7 Transition across the region is altering economic and political structures as well as social ones—these three are intricately linked and have a profound impact on women. Participants noted that although the countries within the ECA region all underwent broadly similar transitions, there were important differences amongst sub-regions and

within individual countries. For instance, they pointed out that Central Asia has been much less successful in terms of economic performance than has Eastern Europe, and especially Poland.

1.8 The negative effects resulting from poor economic performance have had direct consequences on the social and living standards of populations. Poverty sharply increased especially in the Caucasus, Russia, and in some countries in Central Asia and southern Europe. According to the World Bank estimates, the share of population living in absolute poverty (2 US\$ a day poverty line) amounts to 68 per cent in Tajikistan, 55 percent in Moldova and close to 20 percent in Russia⁴. Poverty is also a problem for successful reformers in central Europe, such as Hungary and Poland where pockets of poverty are especially seen in rural areas and in small towns. These changes come to a region that previously enjoyed high levels of education, employment and social assistance.

1.9 When economic restructuring and revised budgets were initiated under transition, serious cutbacks occurred in social expenditures, especially in health and education. This manifested itself through the elimination of jobs in the sectors under reform, as well as decreased access to, and use of, these services. In the health sector, for women, who in many of the countries constitute a large number of health care workers, especially nurses, many jobs were lost. Additionally, new user fees and/or side (informal) payments imposed on services caused many women hardship in obtaining access.

1.10 The retreat of the state as the primary employer and provider of welfare services and benefits has posed particular challenges for women, following the sharp reduction in public facilities and reductions in employment. One consequence of the cut back in social expenditure for women was a reduction or loss of state subsidies for children's day care, reductions in maternity leave benefits in many countries, and reductions in state-supported reproductive health care services⁵. The losses were incurred without any replacement safety net put into place in some countries. Such changes had a direct impact on women's ability to participate in the labor market as many had to stay at home to take care of their children. Additionally, discrimination sprang up in hiring practices. Without protection from the state, employers would not hire women who were visibly pregnant, in some cases would make them take pregnancy tests, or many times, would only offer non-contractual employment without any benefits or security. This problem is intensified by weak legal and regulatory enforcement mechanisms, which do not protect women under the equality or anti-discrimination laws.

1.11 Participants noted that the process of state divestitures and privatization had also resulted in the loss of jobs for many. Even if state owned enterprises (SOEs) were not privatized, many times, downscaling and re-organization similarly caused job loss. Women were generally more affected than men by job losses due to the structure of their employment by sector, and by concentration of women's jobs in clerical positions in

⁴ World Bank. 2000. Making Transition Work for Everyone: Poverty and Inequality in Europe and Central Asia. Washington DC: The World Bank.

⁵ It should be noted however, that in some countries (eg Albania), reproductive health care services were almost non existent except for abortions.

industrial enterprises, which were the first to be cut. However, discrimination, based on a male breadwinner approach, was also an important factor behind large losses of women's jobs. Additionally, due to credit constraints, and societal and sometimes legal constraints facing women's access to land, the majority of the assets from the privatization process fell into the hands of men. This phenomenon was illustrated in Bulgaria by the Bulgaria Gender Research Foundation. Through a 1998-99 sociological research survey, it was confirmed that women in the country were disproportionately affected by the transition process. Though privatization opened new job opportunities related to entrepreneurship and the development of the private sector, women benefited less than men from these developments (see below).

1.12 One final major result of the transition process was reformation of the pension system in many of the countries in the region. When transition began, many of the pension systems collapsed, causing the need for reformation and replacement. Due to re-prioritization of public expenditures, many governments had smaller allocations for pension provisions, prompting the need to charge arrears on pensions, leaving the system unsustainable. This unsustainability of the public pillar schemes in many ECA countries directly affects women pensioners - both through very low rates, but also through the emergence of the pension arrears. Also, with the reformation of pension systems, a debate about the provision of different retirement ages for women and for men was sparked off. In many countries in the region, women have an earlier retirement age than men—usually five years, based on their longer life expectancy and as a form of “protection” for women. Additionally, compared to many other countries outside of the region, the retirement age for both men and women is young—usually in the mid fifties. However, due to pressure to amend the situation, many countries are now raising the retirement ages for women to bring them closer, or in some cases equal, to that for men, and in some countries are raising them for both men and women, in the hope of trying to make the public schemes more sustainable.

Labor and Employment

1.13 Labor and employment was the main topic of the workshop. Several issues directly affect women's employment and their participation in the labor market. Prior to transition, employment was viewed as both a right and as a duty for women and men, however, once the shift began, so did perceptions about women's work. Some began to view women's primary role as only that of caretaker in the home, rather than caretaker and worker outside the home. This view, coupled with a preference for male labor, caused deterioration in women's employment levels.

1.14 As pointed out in the keynote address, two of the most pressing issues for women are increased unemployment, both overall and in relation to men, and the prolonged periods of unemployment that they suffer. According to UNECE between 1985-1997 the female labor force and employment shrank more than the male in all countries for which there are comparative data-- Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Poland. The largest fall took place in Hungary where women's employment declined by 40 percent while male employment by 30 percent. In

the Czech Republic the female labor force declined by five percent while for men it increased by three percent.

1.15 There are several reasons explaining women's losses on the labor market. Female jobs cuts in industry were related to the restructuring of light industries, such as textiles, which lost state support in the early phase of transition (as opposed to male-dominated heavy industry), and due to the shedding of clerical positions in industrial enterprises. Women were also affected by large cuts in the feminized public sector service jobs, losing jobs in transport and communication. This was not balanced by any meaningful increase in women's employment in expanding market-related services, such as banking, insurance and business services. The deterioration of women's position on the labor market is explained by the pattern of structural changes but also by labor market policies. Women were encouraged to leave the labor market through early retirement policies (the Czech Republic and Poland) and more attractive parental leave schemes (Belarus and Ukraine). Their withdrawal from the labor force was seen in many countries as a remedy for massive male unemployment and cuts in childcare provided by the state.

1.16 Additionally, sex and age discrimination in hiring practices are serious problems in all transition countries. It was repeatedly reported that women over age 35-40 have serious difficulties finding jobs as there is no short supply of younger persons to do the same jobs. There is also a sort of "social benefits" discrimination as discussed above. Since state supported social services have been severely cut back, employers are less likely to hire women. Additionally, the issue of a lack of effective enforcement measures also contributes to women's higher and longer levels of unemployment.

1.17 *Informal Labor.* It was proposed that under the phenomenon of transition and economic globalization, rights are changing and the relationship between the monetized and non-monetized sector is being restructured. For many women, this restructuring is not necessarily generating employment, but is rather shifting their work into the informal and casual sectors. For example, in the 1990s, those working from home constituted one fourth of the total employment in Poland, one fifth in Armenia and one tenth in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia.⁶ In the ECA region, there is a large phenomenon of "suitcase trade" since transition. This consists of women from certain countries traveling to neighboring countries where cheaper consumer goods are available, purchasing such goods, packing them in suitcases and bringing them back to their home markets. In Turkey in 1996 it was estimated that suitcase trade revenues were around USD \$8.84 billion dollars.⁷ Since 1997, countries involved in suitcase trading have begun to impose import duties and sales taxes. This has hindered women's ability to engage in the activity and has harmed their revenues.

1.18 In addition to trading across borders, there are several types of informal work—subcontract workers and own account workers at home, and market vendors, among others. These all have high costs associated with them. Such costs include, very long work hours; harsh competition—there is always someone willing to sell or perform

⁶ Taken from presentation of Simel Esim, ICRW.

⁷ Ibid.

cheaper; lack of insurance; and lack of security; maintenance costs, gas, electricity being transferred to the household. Additionally there are several “informal rents” that must be paid: money to get a good spot for your stall, money paid to overlook not having the proper papers, and money to get things such as a phone line.

1.19 Women state the major reasons for moving into home-based work and informal work in general as being unable to find work in the formal sector and facing mobility constraints due to care obligations in the home. Suggestions of ways to address the constraints faced in the informal market were offered. On 20th June, 1996, delegates to the Annual Conference of the International Labor Organization (ILO) voted to adopt a Convention, supplemented by a Recommendation, on Home Work. The Convention is intended for setting an international standard. In each case, it has to be translated into national law and practice and governments can 'agree' or 'sign up' to the Convention through the process known as ratification. It asks for national policies on home work, increases in female employment, protection against discrimination, social security protection and training. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of collecting data to make home workers more visible to governments and donors. This is an important vehicle for protecting rights of informal laborers. If ratified and enforced by governments it will afford informal workers several rights they have not had previously. Once a government has ratified the Convention, it has to ensure that national laws, policies and practices conform to the Convention, which then has the force of an international treaty. In each country, it is important to find out which part of our government has responsibility for this and what action has been taken. Depending on the situation in each country, it is then possible to lobby, together with other organizations such as trade unions and women's organizations, for ratification if possible, or otherwise for appropriate action to be taken in line with the Convention and Recommendation. Also, it can be used to educate women on their rights and what resources are available to them.⁸ Other suggestions were creating trade unions for informal workers, building solidarity and exchanging knowledge and becoming involved with the international lobbying network.

1.20 *Entrepreneurship.* Entrepreneurship and informal labor are many times intricately linked. For example, though on a small scale, a woman who weaves baskets and sells them in a market place is an entrepreneur. For this type of activity the woman may face the constraints listed above, however, for a much larger type of entrepreneurial activity—such as starting a restaurant—there are greater difficulties that women encounter. Several barriers hinder women’s entrepreneurial activities: a lack of confidence in oneself and in the ability to start one's own business; societal and cultural biases against women as business owners; lack of access to networks such as chamber of commerce and “old boy” networks; a lack of access to credit due to inability to meet collateral requirements and because of discrimination in lending practices; and finally because of a lack of knowledge of how to start a business and the skills needed to run it. The State also imposes burdens that hinder women’s opportunities such as the imposition of user fees and taxes that they are unable to pay, many times; lengthy application procedures;

⁸ For more information on the ILO Convention on HomeWork and how to organize around it you can visit the website of the International Network of Homebased Workers <http://www.homenetww.org.uk/>

and the time taken away from home and productive activities by the need to travel in attending to these procedures. All of these things limit women's participation in entrepreneurial activities.

1.21 Several items were identified as being necessary to ease the constraints facing women. Firstly, there needs to be equal access to credit. This includes gender awareness training for lenders, decreased legal, regulatory and bureaucratic barriers, increased knowledge on the part of women of programs and resources, and allowance of alternative forms of collateral. Secondly, there needs to be increased training for women in business skills as well as in increased confidence. Also, there is a need for increased networks and more gender sensitive labor market policies.

Box 1: Unequal Gender Impacts of Transition

According to UNECE, between 1985-1997 the female labor force and employment shrank more than the male in all countries for which there are comparative data-- Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Poland. The largest fall took place in Hungary where women's employment declined by 40 percent while male employment by 30 percent. In the Czech Republic the female labor force declined by five percent while for men it increased by three percent.

From the presentation of Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny

Family

1.22 The approach to achieving gender equality was an issue that arose within the context of transition. Many countries have had shifting ideas concerning what families are and what they should be. Some participants felt that change had to be wrought maintaining the family as the social unit and not within a paradigm of individual rights. Many times however, this ideology conflicts with the necessity of having two incomes, especially with the decrease in family and maternity benefits. Women should be supported if they choose to stay at home and take care of the family rather than working outside of the home. However, all agreed that to ensure equity, the family should be seen as a partnership rather than as run by men.

1.23 Alongside this debate, there have been some major changes in the structure of family in the region. Marriage as an institution is undergoing considerable change. There has been quite a dramatic drop in marriage rates and an increase in the divorce rate as well as an increase in the average child bearing age and quite a significant drop in the birth rates. All of these facts add to a growing number of single-parent households and extended families.

1.24 There have been additional effects on the family since the transition. There has been a large increase in domestic violence in the region. It is thought that this has been spurred by increased alcohol consumption on the part of men due to feelings of

inadequacy—both as providers and as men. The inability to find jobs or the ability to only find jobs well below their qualifications has led many men to alcoholism and in some cases, to domestic violence. This trend has had a destructive impact on the family. A similarly disturbing trend has been an increase in the poverty of children. This has occurred due to an inability on the part of the parents, and especially on the part of the mother as chief caretaker, to provide the necessary healthcare, nutrition and education for her children. This is a direct result also of the breakdown of the social assistance that had previously been provided by the state under socialism.

Education and Health

1.25 Education and health are extremely important issues within the region. Although they may seem out of place in the context of gender and labor, there are links between the topics, especially education. On the last day of the workshop, capacity building sessions were held to discuss the issues at hand. At the beginning of the transition, the countries in ECA all held extremely high levels of educational attainment and health indicators while boasting virtually non-existent levels of gender disparity. However, in the years following, certain areas began to deteriorate

1.26 *Education.* In education, women had very high levels of attainment, and in many countries their educational accomplishments were higher than those of men. However, this has started to shift in certain areas—especially Central Asia—with women’s enrollment rates starting to decrease. It is thought that decreases in enrollment are being caused, in part, by increases in out of pocket expenses for education and by family poverty

1.27 Interestingly, at the same time that girls' participation at the lower levels is decreasing, the enrollment levels of women at the tertiary level in several countries, such as Poland, are surpassing that of males. Though this is positive in and of the fact that women are receiving high levels of education, there is a hidden downside to this trend. One of the major reasons that so many women are in colleges and universities is because they are unable to find jobs. Therefore, they continue to stay in school in order to occupy their time while simultaneously increasing their marketability. This strategy many times backfires however as women are then seen as “too qualified” for the jobs that are available to them once they graduate.

1.28 *Health.* Health is a major issue of concern in the region and has serious gender implications. There has been a deterioration in overall health care systems and in individual health status in general, but there has also been gender specific deterioration. Namely, levels of alcoholism and suicide have increased for men in the region, and there have been cutbacks and eliminations in some cases, of state supported reproductive and maternal health facilities for women. The trends in the behavior of men have been thought to be associated with the declining life expectancy of males that is prevailing across the region.

1.29 Additionally, many countries have seen a serious deterioration of the health care system and currently face the problems of lack of provision of services and lack of access

to those services that are available. In some countries, families are spending up to 80-90 percent on health care from their own pockets, whereas it was financed almost 100 percent by the state budgets earlier. This is another example of why governments need to restructure and re-prioritize their budgets. For successful development and growth, a country needs to have a healthy population and the state should assist in ensuring that this happens. Governments must also concentrate on realigning the health system to focus on the most significant health threats that the country specific population faces. In some countries, the network of hospitals that is currently in a very poor state needs to be upgraded and in some cases, possibly even downsized. In other countries, the problem may be a lack of supplies or of qualified health care administrators. Finally there is a need to focus on new health threats in the region, such as the increased mortality rate for men and the emergence of new communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Other Issues

1.30 Finally, participants raised a couple of miscellaneous issues that are extremely important for women in the region. First is the issue of *accession to the European Union*(EU). Many of the countries in the region are in the process of trying to accede to the EU and this has raised concern about women’s issues. Participants feel that the accession process must be handled in a gender sensitive way, ensuring that gender issues are considered at all stages of negotiation. Several countries have undergone the pre-accession process and it is felt that the process is in fact assisting women as the EU has certain minimum standards that new entrants must adhere to, among them equity and anti-discrimination provisions. Examples were given to show that in both Bulgaria and in Poland, equal opportunities and anti-discrimination legislation was developed and passed quickly due to EU requirements. However, concern was raised about a deterioration of standards. Certain participants felt that some of the countries applying for admission had much higher levels of social indicators than what is required by the EU, bringing the concern that standards within countries would fall as there was no motivation to keep them high if the EU’s requirements were lower.

1.31 The other issues that were raised time and again were the lack of sex -disaggregated data and monitoring systems in the region and similarly, the lack of benchmarks to compare and track data. Without these two items it is impossible to understand what is happening in the region or to know what the trends are in order to avert any negative effects/impacts.

“We should no longer talk about women’s problems but about gender problems. We cannot solve women’s problems if we just focus on them, because there is an entire area of problems, a symmetrical area of problems, on the men’s side.”
--Workshop participant

Possibilities for Addressing these Issues

1.32 In response to the above issues, both participants and donor organizations pulled together to try to find solutions for addressing the problems raised. Though there was consensus that there are no easy solutions or quick fixes, several suggestions were put

forth. First and foremost, there should be a restoration of economic growth in the region in order to generate sustainable employment opportunities. This is a Herculean task that depends on many actors in addition to exogenous factors, but nonetheless, it is the core solution to the problem of unemployment. Secondly, states need to ensure that legal and social frameworks are put in place so that men and women have equal access to economic benefits and that women will no longer face discrimination in the labor market. Additionally, budgets for health and education expenditures need to be restored or stabilized. This is absolutely essential, especially for women as caretakers, in ensuring access to employment opportunities and in maintaining high levels of social capital. Finally governments need to mainstream gender into their programs and policies. One way of ensuring this is through “engendering” their budgets. Engendered budgets are a tool to assist in gender mainstreaming, to ensure government accountability and financial transparency. There are several governments that have successfully employed this technique that can be used as examples.⁹

1.33 For both governments and donors alike, there is an immediate need to have data—employment data, as well as health and education data—collected in a sex-disaggregated manner. This will firstly allow for a baseline to be established and subsequently offer the capacity to monitor situations in order to recognize any differential outcomes and take action. Additionally, donors can assist in strengthening the capacities of governments and their institutional and legal frameworks. This will aid in ensuring that the proper frameworks are in existence to protect women. Finally, it was suggested that there be greater coordination and partnerships amongst donors, NGOs and governments. Through shared knowledge and comparative advantage, the issues can be tackled more effectively.

Donor Assistance in the Region

1.34 In addition to having recommendations about what can be done to address the above issues, it is important to recognize what activities have already been underway. Each donor present at the workshop was afforded the opportunity to discuss what its strategy was in tackling the gender and labor issues present in the region and what action it had undertaken. As the donors started working in the region at different times, and had different focuses and interests, there were individual distinctions,, although the overarching goal of improving women’s situation was constant. All have been, or are just starting to tackle the issues that have been discussed.

1.35 *UNECE*. UNECE is devoted to the economic situation of the region and Europe as a whole. It is therefore well established at monitoring macroeconomic trends in the region and recently it has become more involved in gender issues. It has been involved in various gender workshops in the region, offering a forum for exchange and dissemination of information, focused on supporting women’s entrepreneurship. UNECE’s main strength is in collecting and analyzing economic data. It has ensured that its flagship publication is gender sensitive and provides sex -disaggregated data, and it has also started a website to monitor the gender situation in the region.

⁹ Such as Australia, South Africa, Philippines, Tanzania and Mexico.

1.36 *UNIFEM.* UNIFEM began work in the region in 1998 and has a small budget compared to the other donors present. As an agency whose mandate is concerned with increasing and improving the development of women worldwide, its whole program in the region has necessarily dealt with addressing many of the issues raised above. Focus has been given on engendering macroeconomic frameworks and building capacity to manage transition and the effects of globalization. Additionally, its assistance has been focused on governance and leadership, particularly in facilitating partnerships and in supporting efforts to engender government legislation, policies and programs. Finally, UNIFEM has been working at ensuring the security of human rights for women in the region and at assisting women in post-conflict situations.

1.37 *The World Bank.* The Bank is presently in the process of devising its overall gender strategy as well as initiating a gender strategy for the ECA region. The Bank's gender strategy is embedded within its mandate of poverty reduction and the strategy is developed with the overarching goal of how to assist women in order to reduce poverty. There are four basic objectives underlying the development of the Bank's gender strategy: reducing gender disparities in order to alleviate poverty; increasing women's participation in decision making at a country specific level; undertaking gender analyses in all countries; and integrating of gender issues across the board in all aspects of work and sectors. In order to achieve the above, it was proposed that the Bank formulate an operational policy for its own staff; that gender be made a criteria that is used in such critical things as quality assessments and Bank clearances; that training is provided to Bank staff and government officials interested in gender; that gender assessments be conducted in every country in which the Bank works; that there be a provision of better tools and technical support to the Bank's operational units in the area of gender; that a systematic monitoring, feedback and evaluation system be developed, including for gender; that the Bank clarifies its internal organizational accountabilities; and finally, that sufficient resources are allocated to ensure that it happens. The Bank's region-specific work on gender is fairly recent and therefore the strategy for ECA is only now coming into focus. It will however be mired into the overall strategy, while being tailored to fit the specificities of the region and the various sub-regions. The regional staff are cognizant of all the issues discussed and the strategy will directly address ways of dealing with them.

STAKEHOLDER VOICES

1.38 From the discussions and the shared experiences of the stakeholders, many messages and lessons for the donors were derived. Participants offered examples of what the Bank has done well in regard to gender, what it has not done well, and specific recommendations on what it can do to improve its performance.

What the Bank Did Well

1.39 Several specific examples of projects and activities carried out well by the Bank were presented. The work done in Russia on the "Feminization of Poverty" was the most prominent example cited of good work on the part of the Bank. It is considered good

practice because it was inclusive, was disseminated widely and initiated action on the part of the government. In Slovakia, it was noted that the bank was supportive of various NGOs, including women's NGOs, through a Small Grants Program. A similar program was started in Poland although it came only in the late nineties. Also in Poland, a joint IFC-WB program to develop private entrepreneurs resulted in assistance to women, even though the design was gender-blind. The Bank's involvement in the health sector reform in Romania was also viewed positively for its consideration of women. Finally, it was noted that the Bank's Resident Mission (RM) in Hungary was especially considerate of gender in its operations, while the RM in Bulgaria reflected good practice through its consultations with NGOs.

What the Bank Could Have Done Better

1.40 There were several key items that were identified as weaknesses within the Bank's assistance program in the region in regard to its integration of gender. A major complaint was that the Bank's recognition of gender issues as well as the visibility of gender in its interventions came late in comparison with other donors in the region. Several of the bilateral donors and Asian Development Bank (ADB), UNECE and UNIFEM have been cognizant of the issues facing women's employment and access to labor since the transition. It was felt that the Bank was either slack in its attention to differential impacts of the transition, or that a blind eye was turned. Opportunities were missed to enhance quality-action should have been taken earlier.

1.41 Additionally, it was felt that a major deficiency of the Bank was/is its lack of both general and project level monitoring systems to measure the gender impact of the transition. The first criticism and the Bank's lack of involvement on gender issues could have been avoided had it decided to monitor the effects of the transition. Even at the early stages (though not as strongly) it was evident there were differential impacts on men and women. Finally, the issue of the Bank's poor dissemination of information was addressed. Even where the Bank had done some work on gender, or at least given consideration to it, it was unknown because of inadequate methods of dissemination.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1.42 From the general discussions and through a separate consultative session, specific recommendations were given on how the Bank could improve its performance integrating gender into its assistance in the region. Additionally, suggestions were given as to how to enhance its partnerships.

Specific Recommendations for Improved Gender Integration

1.43 Promote engendered Bank assistance and good governance models by including gender aware civil society agencies and stakeholders. Several methods were offered as possible ways to ensure this:

- Dialogues and discussions between Governments and the Bank should involve the input of stakeholders;
- Stakeholders should be consulted during design and implementation of Bank assistance;
- By establishing consultative groups for gender at regional and individual country levels;
- By conducting gender assessments in all countries; and
- Finally, by providing greater access to information on gender and ensuring greater dissemination of Bank work on gender.

1.44 *Provide technical support to governments and other stakeholders.* This support should be offered specifically to:

- Develop indicators to measure gender impact;
- Assist in collecting, analyzing and using sex-disaggregated data in policy formulation, through country specific methods in collecting statistics;
- Encourage the engendering of government budgets;
- Increase the capacity of governments to integrate gender considerations into development design and planning; and
- Establish standards for Governments to measure the gender sensitivity of their policies.

1.45 *Strengthen institutional arrangements in-country for gender.* This can be accomplished through:

- Supporting the establishment of state machineries for women in all countries in the region;
- Integrating into Bank policy a provision to include state machineries in the discussion of country assistance strategies and in other dialogues with Governments;
- Dissemination of findings and analysis; and
- Translating key reports to local languages.

1.46 *Enhance World Bank structures for gender.* Suggestions for implementation:

- Establishing a dedicated gender team for the region;
- Creating gender focal points in Bank country offices and giving them adequate budgets to operate;
- Integrating gender monitoring indicators into all Bank supported activities;
- Including gender as a criteria for measuring Bank performance in a country;
- Including gender specialists in all social sector projects; and
- Educating Bank staff and their partners on gender issues.

1.47 *Shift in focus of support.* Finally, it was suggested that the Bank needs to shift its focus when developing its assistance. Several means of doing this were given:

- Focus on increasing women’s participation in labor markets and private sector development interventions, shift focus from health and education;
- Undertake a research agenda consistent with country priorities and needs, especially needs of women in rural restructuring, gender issues in areas of accession to EU, and so on; and
- Selectivity—focus on issues where the Bank can have the greatest impact on gender disparity.

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

1.48 The three days spent in Warsaw provided many insights into the major issues affecting women in the region, as well as provided insight into how donors, and specifically the World Bank, can improve their assistance in the region in order to better address the issues identified. It was established that women have been negatively and differentially impacted upon by the transition process. This is epitomized through higher levels of unemployment, longer periods of unemployment, barriers to private entrepreneurial activities and decreased social assistance provisions from the state, among other fall-outs. Awareness of these issues was raised amongst donor institutions, while positive attempts at addressing these issues were identified, as were negative ones, and concrete recommendations were offered on how donors can improve the situation in the future.

1.49 Additionally, several important outcomes were derived from the workshop. At one level, the workshop afforded participants and donors networking opportunities at a regional level, which could be carried forward in the future. It allowed participants to be empowered in that they engaged in a discussion of gender issues at a regional level, and were given the opportunity to contribute to Bank outputs, specifically OED’s evaluation and the proposed gender strategy, and to other donor strategies. Some participants were of the opinion that previous regional workshops had been centered around Government documents on gender and, therefore, this workshop was particularly refreshing as it offered new information while being participatory and interactive. Overall, the participants gave the workshop a rating somewhere between satisfactory and highly satisfactory¹⁰. The Gender sessions (capacity building session on gender and family, engendered budgets, and gender and evaluation) got the highest average rating with 3.7, as did the response to the question whether the workshop afforded participants with an opportunity to engage in relevant issues.

1.50 The workshop was able to increase awareness among participants on donors mandates. Through three short capacity building sessions, the workshop brought to bear some focus on *Gender and Family*, *Engendering Budgets*, and *Gender and Evaluation*, which aimed to raise awareness and provide participants with a bird’s eye view on these matters. Additional literature was provided to them on ‘Engendering Budgets’ and ‘Evaluation Methodologies.’

¹⁰ A questionnaire was provided at the end of the workshop to participants to obtain their feedback on the workshop. A scale of 5 was used with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest possible response.

1.51 Another immediate output was that the workshop provided considerable feedback on the gender dimensions of Bank assistance in the ECA region. This information has fed directly into OED's 2001 gender evaluation, and has greatly strengthened the country-specific analysis of Poland and Kyrgyz in the evaluation. Additionally, the feedback has been considered in the preparation of the both the Bank's overall gender strategy as well as into the preparation of the ECA gender strategy.

1.52 A final and extremely important output of the workshop came in the form of a petition¹¹. Several weeks after the workshop, participants sent a petition, via email, to the Vice President of the ECA region of the Bank, reiterating the gender issues in the region and offering suggestions and recommendations on how to address these issues within the ECA department, and within the Bank as a whole. As an immediate result of this petition, the Vice President sent a notice to all ECA staff, requiring them to address gender issues in all of their work from that point forward.

¹¹ Please see Annex III for a copy of the petition.

ANNEX I: "GENDER & LABOR MARKETS IN TRANSITION COUNTRIES"
Warsaw, Poland: January 15-17th, 2001

DAY 1: JANUARY 15TH, 2001

Opening Session: 9:00 - 10:00

Chair: **Mr. Jacek Wojciechowicz**, External Affairs, WB Poland

- ◆ *Welcome Remarks* by:
Mr. Christopher Hall, World Bank Office, Warsaw
Ms. Danuta Hübner, Executive Secretary, UN/ECE
Ms. Zina Mounla, Program Manager, Europe & CIS Section, UNIFEM
- ◆ *Opening Remarks*, **Ms. Jan Piercy**, US Executive Director, World Bank
- ◆ *Keynote Address*: by **H.E. Hanna Suchocka**, Parliamentarian & Poland's Former Prime Minister
- ◆ *Workshop Agenda*: by **Mr. Ruben Lamdany**, Manager, Operations Evaluation Department, Country and Regional Evaluations, World Bank

Coffee Break 10:00 – 10:30

Session I: World Bank and Gender Strategies 10:30 - 1:00

Chair: **Mr. Hanspeter Wyss**, Swiss Development Corporation

- ◆ *OED's Gender Evaluation & Relevant Findings* by **Mr. Ruben Lamdany**
- ◆ *Bank's Gender Policy* by **Ms. Karen Mason**, Director, Gender and Development Board
- ◆ *Moving Towards a Gender Strategy in ECA* by **Ms. Annette Dixon**, Director, Human Development, Europe and Central Asia Region

Commentaries: **Ms. Elena Kochkina**, Director, Woman Network Program, OSI, Russia

Ms. Ewa Charkiewicz, Institute for Social Studies, the Hague; Karat Coalition for Regional Action, Poland

Lunch 1:00 – 2:30

Session II: Partners and Gender Strategies 2:30 – 5:00

Chair: , **Ms. Jan Piercy**, US Executive Director, World Bank (*Organized by UN-ECE, UNIFEM*)

- ◆ *Gender and Macro-Economic Trends: a Regional Overview Beijing+5* by **Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny**, Senior Advisor on Gender and Economy, UN/ECE
- ◆ *Beijing+5 on Economic Issues by Women's NGOs and National Machineries in the CEE* by **Ms. Zina Mounla**

Commentaries: **Ms. Bayan Donobayeva**, National Commission on Women and Family Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Ms. Susanna Yeghiazaryan, Deputy Head, Ministry of Finance and Economy, Armenia

Cocktails: 6:30 – 8:00 (hosted by Mr. Ruben Lamdany)

DAY 2: JANUARY 16, 2001

Session III: 9:00 – 12:00 Gender and Labor Markets

Chair: **Ms. Danuta Hübner**, Executive Secretary, UN/ECE (*Organized by the World Bank*)

- ◆ *Gender and Labor Markets*, **Ms. Annette Dixon**, Director, Human Development, ECA

Commentaries by: **Mr. Yashar Pasha**, State Statistical Committee, Chief of Department; Azerbaijan

Ms. Genoveva Tisheva, Executive Director, Bulgaria Gender Research Foundation, Bulgaria

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch

Session IV: 1:00 – 4:00 Gender: Entrepreneurship and Informal Labor Markets

Chair: **Ms. Annette Dixon**, (*Organized by UNIFEM and UN/ECE*)

- ◆ *Gender in Informal Labor Markets* by **Ms. Simel Esim**, International Center for Research on Women
- ◆ *Women's Entrepreneurship* by **Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny**
- ◆ *Women's Entrepreneurship Experiences in Poland:* by **Ms. Ewa Lisowska**, Warsaw School of Economics

2:00 – 4:00: Commentaries and open discussion

Commentaries by: **Ms. Malgorzata Kalinowska-Iszkowska**, Manager, Positive S.A.

Ms Aniko Soltez, Director, SEED Foundation, Hungary

4:00 – 4:30 Coffee

Session V: 4:30 – 6:00 The Way Forward

What we heard: **Mr. Ruben Lamdany**, **Ms. Zina Mounla** for UNIFEM, and **Ms. Ewa Ruminska-Zimny** for UN-ECE

- The way forward
- ◆ Participant Feedback

DAY 3: JANUARY 17, 2001

9:00 – 12:00 Monitoring and Evaluating Improved Opportunities

- ◆ Engendered Budgets: Experience of other Countries (UNIFEM/UN-ECE)
- ◆ Gender and Family Issues (World Bank)

12:00 – 1:00 Lunch

1:00--2:30 Gender Evaluation: Issues of Methodology (OED)

ANNEX II: PARTICIPANT LIST
ECA GENDER WORKSHOP, WARSAW, POLAND
January 15-17, 2001

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ANNEX III: LETTER FROM PARTICIPANTS AND REPLY
(original email dated 2/2/2001)

Subject: letter to Mr. Johannes Linn from the participants of the workshop Gender & the Labor Markets in ECA

Letter from the participants of the workshop on Gender and the Labor Markets, Warsaw, January 15 - 17th., 2001

Dear Mr. Johannes Linn,

We are writing to bring your attention to gender inequalities in our region. The rise and feminization of poverty, the deterioration of access and quality of health care, the erosion of social protection, gender and age based discrimination in the labor market, informalization of female labor, the widespread corruption, and gender inequalities in the access to the benefits of transition warrant serious concern.

Therefore, we very much appreciate the initiative of the Bank to organize a workshop on Gender and Labor Markets, and to carry out a dialogue on gender issues with stakeholders in the ECA region. The participants of the dialogue included women's NGOs, senior government officials, women in business and academia, gender experts from the region, the staff of the Bank's headquarters, UN ECE and UNIFEM. The workshop was extremely useful and productive. We have pointed out what the Bank has done well, and what needs to be done better. We have also elaborated the list of 19 specific recommendations to the Bank and 7 suggestions to enhance Interagency Partnerships.

We would like you to provide personal leadership to mainstream gender in the programs and operations of the Department, and to legitimize gender equality as an important policy issue to your partners in governments.

We would also like you to give priority to:

1. ensure that all Country Assistance Strategies, as well as economic and sector work address gender issues,
2. create a mechanism for a systematic national dialogue between the Bank, government agencies, women's NGOs and other stakeholders,
3. create a Regional Gender Consultative Group that will include women's NGOs.
4. provide support for gender analysis of national and local budgets,

5. ensure gender training for Bank staff, including country missions, as well as your partners in government, and create a team of gender experts in the ECA headquarters.

For further specific recommendations, that we fully endorse, we would like to refer you to the OED Review of the Gender Impact of the Bank's Assistance, and to the Bank staff who took part in the meeting.

We hope this meeting breaks ground and opens way to sustained and constructive dialogue between the Bank and women of the ECA region.

Sincerely Yours,

Tamar Abramishwili, International Advisory Centre for the Education of Women, Georgia
Duska Andric-Ruzicic, Women's Association Medica Zenica, Bosnia & Herzegovina
Erin Barclay, director, Network of East-West Women, United States
Daniela Draghici, The Centre for Development and Population Activities, Romania
Patricia Droblyte, Vilnius University, Women Studies Centre, Lithuania
Ewa Charkiewicz, Tools for Transition, the Netherlands/Poland
Valeri Elizarov, Moscow University, Centre for Population Studies, Russia
Simel Esim, PHD, International centre for Research on Women, USA and Working Group on Women Home-based Workers, Turkey
Lara Griffith, advisor on gender issues, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Poland
Sayora Hodajeva, deputy mayor of Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Malgorzata Kalinowska-Iszkowska, Positive Inc., Poland
Alicja Kostecka, PSF Women Centre, Poland
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Malgorzata Tarasiewicz, Network of East-West Women, Poland
Genoveva Tisheva, Gender Research Foundation, Bulgaria

Reply from Mr. Johannes Linn, VP ECA Region
(Original email dated 2/2/2001)

Dear Ms. Charkiewicz,

Thank you very much for your e-mail and the letter from participants of the workshop on Gender and the Labor Markets in ECA. I have followed the workshop with great interest and am grateful to the organizers and participants for the efforts which you all made.

My colleagues and I in the World Bank's Europe and Central Asia Region intend to review our approach to gender issues and will certainly take your letter's recommendation into full consideration. I will keep you informed, of course, of the progress that we're making and consult as appropriate. Annette Dixon, who will take a lead on this, is currently in New Zealand attending to urgent family matters, but I expect she'll be back in mid-February and will then proceed with this important task.

With best personal wishes and again many thanks,

Sincerely yours,

Johannes Linn
Vice President
World Bank