

**THE PAN-EUROPEAN REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
in preparation of the World Summit on Information Society**

Parallel Event

**BUILDING A GENDER SENSITIVE INFORMATION
SOCIETY**

Bucharest, 7th November 2002

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Gender Equality for CEE/CIS Women in the World Information Society**

Organized by the UNECE Advisory Services on Gender and Economy and the Romanian Government, in cooperation with ITU Working Group on Gender and ICT, UNIFEM and UNDP.

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Rapporteurs: Ms. Ewa Ruminska Zimny, UNECE Regional Adviser on Gender and Economy and Iolanda Mihalache, Devnet/UNIFEM, Romania.

Topics:

- Gender dimension of Digital Divide within the UNECE region: current situation, achievements and obstacles;
- Lessons learned and best practices in building a gender sensitive Information Society;
- Role of governments, private sector, civil society and international community;
- Follow-up activities and the regional contribution to the WSIS 2003 (Geneva) and 2005 (Tunis).

Objective: Mainstreaming gender into policy debate WSIS Geneva (2003) and Tunis (2005) through:

- Raising awareness on trends and issues related to gender and ICTs that are specific to the region;
- Establish platform for dialogue among stakeholders (governments, private sector, civil society and international organizations);
- Recommend follow up actions and activities.

Key point raised at roundtable:

Why is gender of key importance to the process of building an information society:

- **Equality concerns:** Gender equality in relation to international standards of human rights and conventions (CEDAW), UN core values reflected in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals, and other documents.
- **Efficiency concerns:** Equal participation of women and men as users, producers and decision makers in the ICT sector is good for economic growth and business. Women make up 50% of consumer markets, labor force, and bring new perspectives and ideas to develop new products, management styles, networking. Efficiency concerns are

especially important given the conditions in the ECE regions – women are well educated in terms of their level and profile (maths and science).

Concerns about a Gender Digital Divide:

- Women's situation in the economy drastically deteriorated during the 1990s due to a) disproportional cuts in employment and moving to lower end jobs in the labor markets; b) cuts in family benefits and social protection, and c) persistence of traditional views of women's role.
- This result in a) lower income wages, b) less time for learning new ICT related skills and c) lack of encouragement for women to benefit from ICT related opportunities.

Gender specific barriers:

- costs of access (in proportion to lower incomes) and technology choice;
- ICT related education (less time for training, less information on available opportunities, lack of encouragement from the ICT sector for women to apply for training);
- lack of equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups such as rural women, single mothers, and older women (over 40-45 years), poor women;
- insufficient support for networks;
- traditional views on women and ICTs which is considered a "male" sector;
- lack of data and information on women's position in the different aspects of ICT sector.

Opportunities to use ICTs as a tool for advancing gender equality:

- use of ICTs as a tool for advancing gender justice (awareness raising, discrimination, violence, etc.);
- best practices in using ICTs for entrepreneurship and business development as well as access to jobs and markets;
- ICT as a tool for networking at national, regional and global levels;
- ICT as a tool for e-learning;
- increasing women's political participations through e-governance.

Key recommendations:

1. To better reflect gender perspectives in the final outcome document from the Conference, the statement which calls on pages 1 states: **"Governments and other stakeholders should provide the necessary conditions to ensure women's equal access to information and knowledge"** should be extended to say **"as well as ensuring their equal role as producers and decision makers in all aspects related to the shaping of IT policies and frameworks."**
2. Properly assess the situation of women and men as users, producers and decision makers in the ICT sector in the ECE region towards providing inputs for WSIS (Geneva and Tunis). The reports could be prepared through cooperation between governments, NGOs, private sector, with the support of UNECE and other international organizations.
3. Governments should include gender into the debate and preparation of national ICT strategies and their full involvement in the development of e-governance.
4. Include at least 30% women in national delegations to WSIS.
5. Governments are encouraged to support gender mainstreaming in telecommunication institutions and policies, especially decisions over infrastructure development and related projects.