

The MONEE Project
REGIONAL MONITORING REPORT

No. **6**

WOMEN IN TRANSITION

a Summary



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The UNICEF International Child Development Centre (ICDC) in Florence, Italy, is an international knowledge base focusing on the rights of children. It was established in 1988 to strengthen the capacity of UNICEF and its cooperating institutions to promote a new global ethic for children and to respond to their evolving needs. A primary objective of the Centre is to encourage the effective implementation of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in both developing and industrialized countries.

The Centre disseminates the results of its activities through seminars, training workshops and publications targeted at executive decision-makers, programme managers, researchers and other practitioners in child-related fields, both inside and outside UNICEF. The Government of Italy provides core funding for the Centre. Additional funds for specific projects are received from other governments, international institutions and private organizations. The Centre benefits from the counsel of an International Advisory Committee, chaired by UNICEF's Executive Director.

The Regional Monitoring Report (MONEE) produced by the Centre, is a unique source of information on the social side of the transition taking place in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Each year's Report contains an update on the social and economic trends affecting children and families in the region, in-depth analysis of a particular theme and a detailed Statistical Annex. TransMONEE, a menu-driven database that includes more than 130 indicators on social and economic trends, can be viewed and downloaded from the UNICEF ICDC website: www.unicef-icdc.org.

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This publication is a summary of the sixth Regional Monitoring Report produced by the project “Central and Eastern Europe in Transition: Public Policy and Social Conditions”, known as the MONEE Project. This project has formed part of the Economic and Social Policy Research Programme at UNICEF ICDC since 1992. The sixth Regional Monitoring Report continues the pattern of the fifth, covering 27 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The sixth Regional Monitoring Report provides:

- an update on general economic and social trends affecting families and children in the region;
- an investigation of the impact of the transition on the rights and well-being of women and girls, with five thematic chapters on work, family life, health, safety from violence, and participation in decision making;
- a wealth of data, figures and tables, including a detailed Statistical Annex.

The full Report is available in English and Russian editions.

Previous Regional Monitoring Reports:

1. *Public Policy and Social Conditions, 1993*
2. *Crisis in Mortality, Health and Nutrition, 1994*
3. *Poverty, Children and Policy: Responses for a Brighter Future, 1995*
4. *Children at Risk in Central and Eastern Europe: Perils and Promises, 1997* (Summary available.)
5. *Education for All?, 1998*

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1 THE TRANSITION, CHILDREN AND WOMEN

UNICEF regularly monitors the impact on children and families of the historic changes under way in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union since the collapse of communism. This year's Regional Monitoring Report focuses on the rights and well-being of the 150 million women and 50 million girls who make up half the population of the 27 countries in the region – recognizing that the status of women is a sensitive indicator of human development and child welfare. Women's equality must not then be set apart from the transition, but must become an integral part of it.

The first chapter updates the major economic and social trends in the region, thereby providing a full context for the investigation of the circumstances of women. Moreover, it examines the links between gender equality and development and reviews commitments made by the transition countries under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Five thematic chapters follow that show how the various dimensions of the economic, social and political transformation are imbued with gender issues: work, family life, health, safety from violence, and participation in decision making.

Gender equality and human development

Although economic transformation is a primary purpose of the transition, it is widely recognized that there is more to the measure of a nation's well-being than economic output. Figure 1 on page 2 shows this fuller portrait of national well-being in the transition region by presenting the country rankings according to the UNDP Human Development Index. (The HDI, which was introduced in 1990, is a combined measure of economic output, health and education attainment.) According to the most recent available data, the ranking of the transition countries ranges from Slovenia in 37th place to Tajikistan in 118th place in an international field of 174 nations. Analysis in the Report shows that, relative to countries outside the region, the transition countries fare better according to this composite measure than they do in straight GDP terms. The diagram highlights this by showing the HDI rankings (the black columns) and the international rankings according to GDP (the black dots).

Moreover, as Figure 1 also shows, when a gender-related development index is applied, the transition countries systematically move ahead in the rankings by 10-15 places. (The rankings according to the GDI, a refined human development measure which considers gender disparities in earned

Transition countries rank better internationally when human capability or gender sensitive indicators are looked at

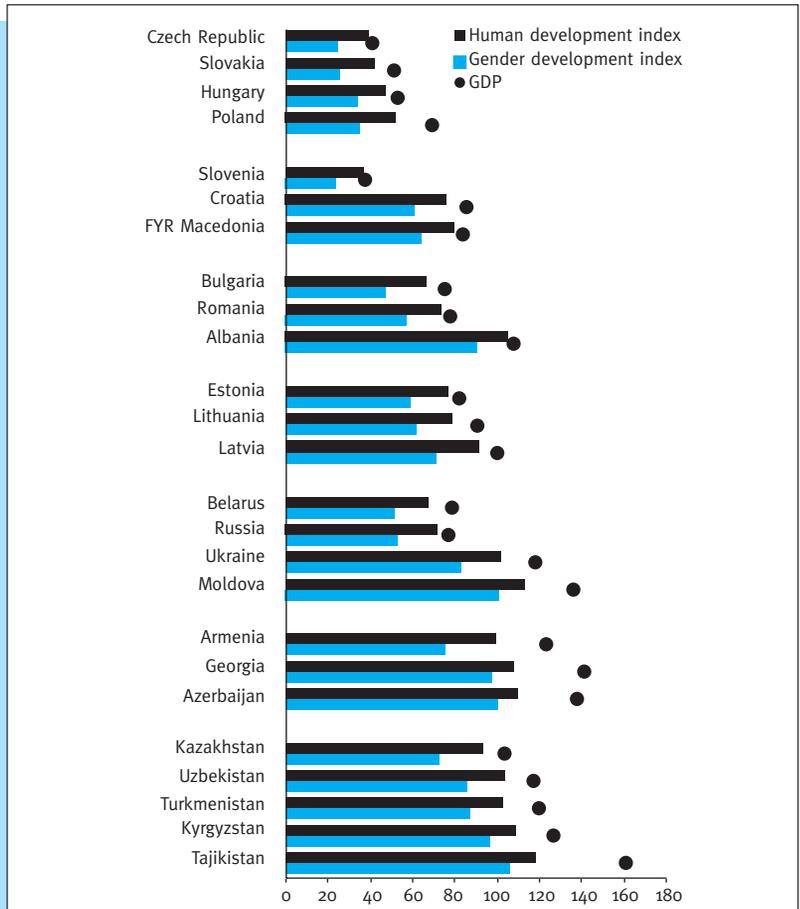


Figure 1 – Development ranking of transition countries, 1995
Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 1.1.

income, life expectancy and education, are denoted by blue columns in the diagram.) According to this measure, Hungary and Poland, for example, overtake their HDI-neighbour Argentina and come close to Uruguay, while Slovenia and the Czech Republic approach Italy and Ireland. This means that the relative advantage of the transition region in social development includes women and girls in its embrace and also translates into a relative advantage in terms of gender equality. UNICEF rankings based on child and maternal health confirm this comparative edge.

Widespread and relatively equitable access to basic education, health care and employment is a positive inheritance from the communist past. This inheritance has been eroded, but not entirely spent during the difficult period of the transition. For example, a 1995 international survey of learning achievement among 13-year-old girls and boys in 41 industrialized countries showed that students from the Czech Republic ranked second in science and sixth in maths. Also, the available data do not reveal any systematic gender gap in basic education, even in countries of the transition region

with weaker development scores. Furthermore, all of the transition countries have signed and ratified both the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child – a noteworthy declaration of intent.

However, as the Report details, more in-depth examination discloses gaps behind the broad strokes of achievement under communism. International reviews of the available national reports on the compliance of transition countries with the above Conventions confirm this by pointing to the serious structural shortcomings in equality left by communism (especially the gap between de jure and de facto equality) that must now be dealt with during the transition. Unfortunately, the situation since 1989 has not been very encouraging. Thus, the HDI rankings of many countries fell between 1990 and 1995, sometimes steeply, with Russia tumbling from 37th to 66th place.

Economic recovery and the new realities

Certainly, significant declines in economic output after 1989 have been responsible for a good part of the fall in HDI rankings. In the first half of the 1990s, GDP dropped, with few exceptions, by 15-25 percent in Central Europe, 35-45 percent in Southeastern Europe and over 50 percent in FR Yugoslavia, the Baltic States, the western CIS, and the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. (These are the seven sub-regions used in the Regional Monitoring Reports.) Governments have also suffered a large decline in revenues, with little increase in their ability to raise taxes. Most economies have started to rebound, but only in the Central European sub-region have economies become not only more efficient, but also bigger: according to 1998 estimates, Poland and Slovenia have surpassed their pre-transition levels of output.

Despite private-sector growth (reaching an estimated 50-70 percent of measured economic activity in the majority of countries in 1998), the Report finds that persistent structural problems cloud economic recovery. Under these conditions, the informal economy is taking root, and prospects for secure earnings remain dim in many countries.

Employment has declined in almost all transition countries during the 1990s. Overall, the number of jobs lost in the region has been estimated at 26 million – 13 percent of the initial level – more than half of which were held by women. Significant unemployment is a relatively new phenomenon after decades of central planning and policies of full employment. Currently, 10 million people are registered as unemployed, about six million of whom are women.

There has also been a sharp drop in real wages and a substantial increase in wage disparity. The analysis illustrates that, even when GDP is recovering, employment levels and real wages tend to lag behind. This creates pressure for households to maintain two incomes (and high female participation in the labour market) at a time when there are fewer jobs and less

job security. In many CIS countries wages are frequently not being paid out or are being paid only after long delays. The Report finds that women are over-represented in those sectors which are particularly susceptible to these problems.

Nonetheless, it is reasonable to expect that in modernizing markets, especially those with emerging knowledge-based and service sectors, there are expanding economic opportunities for women who possess the appropriate education and skills. Moreover, the growth of self-employment and small- and medium-sized enterprises, which are strategically important for improved productivity and reductions in unemployment, offers many new opportunities to women. Yet, how women are faring in these new jobs and new forms of employment has not been adequately researched.

Poverty, health and education

In most cases, the fall of transition countries in the HDI rankings also reflects a deterioration in social indicators. Because of its shrinking role and its declining revenues, the state has relinquished much of its tight control over social issues, and a new infrastructure – a partnership of personal, civil and public resources – has yet to develop sufficiently.

Widening disparities call into question how equitably the fruits of economic growth will be shared. A study using a poverty threshold of US\$4 per day concluded that, in 1993-94, about 120 million people – almost 30 percent of the 414 million in the region – were living in poverty, compared to 13.6 million in 1988-89. The Report finds evidence that those who had little before transition now have less and that families with children have lost more, and those with more children have lost the most. In Russia, for example, an estimated 37 percent of families with two children, 50 percent of families with three children, and 72 percent of families with four or more children were living below the official poverty line in 1997. Moreover, due to ethnic conflicts, there are hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons in parts of the region; these people, the majority of whom are girls and women, are particularly vulnerable to deprivation and abuse.

The unexpected deterioration in adult life expectancy that accompanied the onset of transition and that was revealed in earlier Reports has been reversed in some countries, but, in 1997, life expectancy had worsened or had not improved in about one-third of the countries for which data were available. Though rises in infant mortality have been relatively contained during the transition, there is still a substantial disparity in infant and young-child mortality rates. Given that most child deaths are preventable, the situation could be improved greatly. Analysis shows that thousands of children and adolescents are dying in the region each year because of the excessive number of accidents.

Moreover, a wide range of indicators on areas such as nutrition, child

neglect and youth suicide suggest that child welfare has been seriously compromised during the transition. Although the Report finds no evidence of a particular disadvantage for girls, these indicators show that adult women, along with their children, must face unhealthy lifestyles and considerable economic and psychosocial stress.

Education indicators offer a mixed picture. Enrolment in basic education has suffered relatively minor erosions, and enrolment in tertiary education has increased in many countries. However, the analysis reiterates the findings of earlier Reports of the general pressure on education systems and education resources that has been undermining the quality of education and shifting more financial burdens onto parents. There has been a pronounced drop in upper secondary enrolments, especially in Russia and some other CIS countries; however, this has most affected vocational and technical schools, which were previously dominated by boys. Meanwhile the higher share of girls in general secondary schools has been maintained even as enrolment has increased in many countries. As Figure 2 shows, in countries where women had a high share of enrolment in tertiary education, the share has grown since 1989; where the share was lower, it has tended to decline. The Report points to the importance for girls and women of maintaining a “knowledge” edge as the transition countries develop economies based more on brains than on brawn.

*The Report
finds some gender
polarization
at the tertiary level*

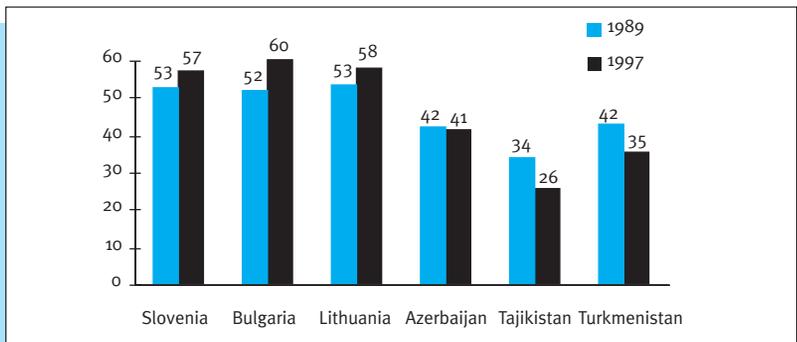


Figure 2 – Share of women among tertiary education students, 1989 and 1997 (percent)
Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 1.17.

2 WOMEN AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Economic power is the foundation of women’s equality and the muscle which helps women exercise their human rights. The second chapter in the Report looks at trends in female labour force participation, unemployment and involvement in the new private sector. Women’s paid work is important also for the welfare of children and in terms of women’s role in the household economy.

Changing participation in the labour force

At the outset of transition, women in the transition region had high rates of participation in the labour force compared to women in the rest of the world. In the Baltic States or in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine the gender gap in labour force participation was just a few percentage points, comparable to Sweden, the leader among market economies in this area. Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Azerbaijan posted somewhat bigger gender gaps, which nonetheless compared favourably to those in Western countries like the US or France. Moreover, in contrast to the case in Western economies, women in the transition countries usually had full-time jobs throughout their working lives. The planned economy required a large workforce, and the state encouraged women's participation through family-related supports and benefits. However, women had to put in long hours of work at home as well – a “double burden” averaging close to 70 hours per week in Central and Eastern Europe, about 15 hours per week more than the working burden of women in Western Europe.

The transition has changed the labour landscape in the region enormously and weakened job security for both women and men. In 10 of the 14 countries for which data are available female labour force activity has declined since 1989. However, as male participation in the labour force has generally decreased, too, overall there appears to be no “tectonic” shift in the gender balance. However, as the Report details, women have tended to lose somewhat more than men in almost every dimension of labour market activity.

Falling employment and growing unemployment

Of the estimated 26 million jobs lost during transition, data suggest that almost 14 million have been lost by women – many in countries which are leading in economic reform. In Hungary women have lost one-third of their jobs, while men have lost one-fourth. In Poland, women have lost 1.6 million jobs. In Russia, women lost seven million jobs from 1990 to 1995, while men lost one to two million. In some countries, evidence indicates that women have continued to lose jobs even though economies have begun to recover, while men have been able to seize new opportunities. Still, women account for 40-50 percent of the people with registered jobs across the region.

Figure 3 presents 1997 unemployment data for 10 countries, though it cannot show the human dimension of the problem for the legions of women and men who have lost their jobs and for whom unemployment is a new experience. Both individuals and social systems have been ill equipped to deal with this situation. Across the region, female unemployment currently ranges from 5 to 15 percent (reaching 7-33 percent among younger women). In most countries the share of the long-term unemployed (those who have been out of work longer than one year) has con-

tinued to rise, and many women without work (and often with many children) do not collect benefits either because they are not officially registered as unemployed, or because they have exhausted their entitlements.

Male and female unemployment rates are tending to stay close to each other, although women have lost relatively more jobs

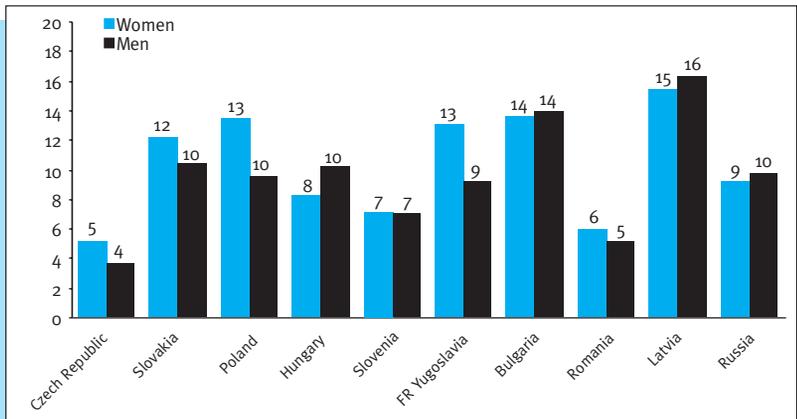


Figure 3 – Unemployment rates by gender from labour force surveys, 1997 (percent)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 2.7.

It would also seem that women's economic futures are more closely tied to the shrinking rather than to the growing sectors in transition economies. Data show that women are strongly represented in fields which are likely to remain largely in the public sector – health care, education, social services, and public administration. Although there are opportunities for private enterprise in some of these areas too, detailed studies indicate that women have been slower to take up private-sector jobs. In this regard, the analysis finds some evidence of gender bias in recruitment among private employers, possibly due to the perception that female employment involves higher non-wage costs because of the family responsibilities of women.

In most countries self-employment is more common among men than among women. Nonetheless, in those countries – mostly in the Southern part of the region – where private-sector agriculture has once again become an important part of the economy, women appear to be self-employed more often than men. However, such work often offers few prospects; many of these self-employed women are struggling to earn even a subsistence living, frequently by helping out on small farms or family plots. Overall, however, women are also less likely than men to be entrepreneurs, although in nine countries surveyed women own or have started one-quarter of the new businesses, a promising beginning.

The gender gap in wages

A gender gap in wages is evident everywhere in the world, and women were also earning less on average than men in the communist countries. Figure 4 illustrates the current earnings gap in 15 transition countries. Data show

that women earn less than men in every country, the wages of women ranging from 70 to 90 percent of men's wages. Though significant in size, this gender difference is nonetheless comparable to or smaller than the difference prevailing in Western countries. Interestingly and unexpectedly, the Report finds that the gender gap has remained relatively stable during the transition, despite the significant growth in overall wage inequality and the massive changes in the labour market. (The largest increase in the gap, five percentage points, has occurred in Bulgaria.)

The gender gap in wages is considerable; surprisingly, it has not increased during the transition

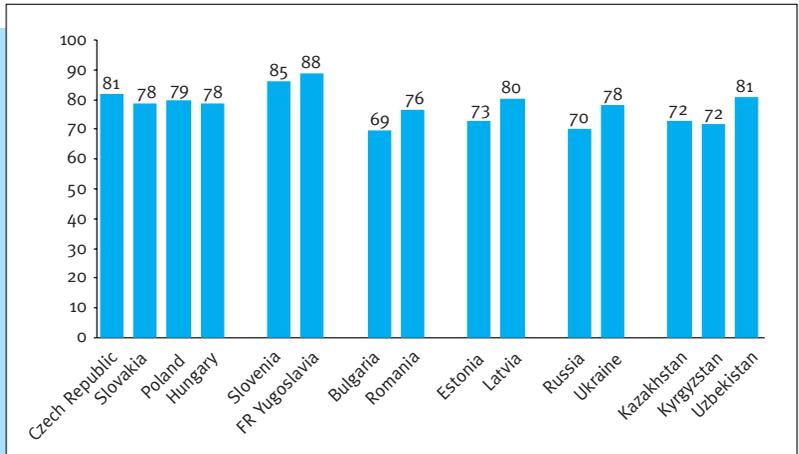


Figure 4 – Average monthly earnings for women as a share of male earnings, around 1997 (percent)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 2.13.

An in-depth analysis carried out for the Report attempted to account for the gender pay gap in the region. It found that the gender balance in education tends to reduce the pay gap, while the fact that women seem to be clustered in lower paying occupations tends to widen the gap. (The analysis also found an inverse relationship between women's presence in certain professions and occupational wage advantages.) However, even when these observable determinants are taken into consideration, there remains a substantial unexplained gap in pay – about three-quarters of the full gender difference – that warrants further investigation and calls for public discussion.

Women's equal pay and equal employment opportunity are also important for the well-being of children. Research in various countries has demonstrated that a rise in the share of women's earned income is beneficial for child welfare. In this regard, it is worth noting that the "net" pay gap (that part which the analysis could not attribute to differences in job or human-capital characteristics) appears to be significantly greater than the value of public child/family allowances in these countries.

3 WOMEN, FAMILIES AND POLICIES

The role of the family in women's lives and of women in family life is one of the fundamental aspects of women's equality. Responsibility for children is a major determinant of women's status in society, and the family is a key social institution through which gender roles and status are communicated and validated. This chapter looks at how the family dimension of women's lives has changed appreciably and often unexpectedly during the transition and how family-related policies have been adjusted.

The legacy of communism

Despite substantial regional and cultural diversity, communism imposed remarkably uniform family laws and policies across the region. These policies aimed at achieving the state's goal of high levels of female education and employment, while maintaining fertility levels which would assure a strong workforce in the future. Indeed, female labour force participation was high, while total fertility rates were close to or higher than those in Western countries, as shown in Figure 5. However, in contrast to women in Western industrialized countries, women in the planned economies married young and had their first children at a young age.

The diagram maps out the total birth rates and the teenage birth rates in the early 1990s for countries in the transition region and in Western Europe. It shows the considerable diversity in fertility, but the strikingly high fertility rates among teenagers in the transition region – up to several

High teenage fertility – a heritage from the past – is now increasingly associated with economic and social risk

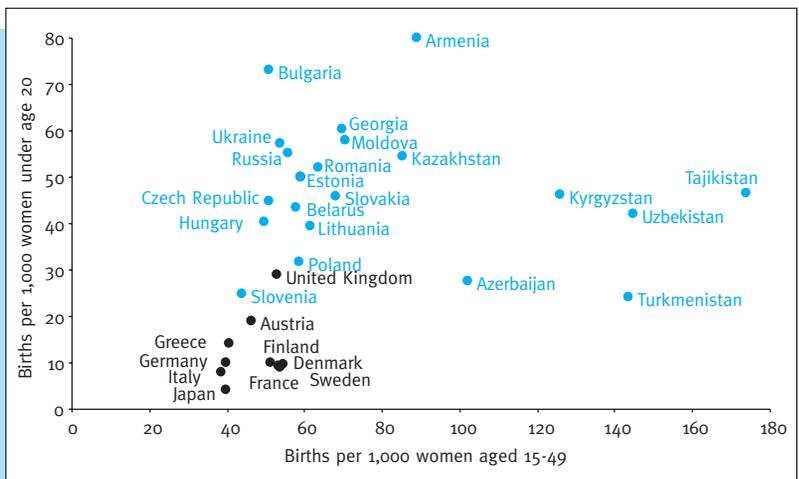


Figure 5 – Teenage and total birth rates, early 1990s (live births per 1,000 women in relevant age group)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 3.2.

times higher than the rates in Western Europe. In the region, however, teenage motherhood was less frequently associated with reduced educational and employment opportunities than in Western countries.

Changes in family formation

The Report describes a number of the most striking demographic changes which have accompanied the transition.

- **Birth rates** have plummeted across the region, and this trend has been continuing even in recent years. Infant and young child populations have been reduced by 10-50 percent over the transition period. This has had an immediate impact on societies, but also threatens to have substantial economic repercussions over the long term. In many countries, married couples are no longer having a second or third child, while the share of teenage births and births outside marriage has risen. In the Baltics, western CIS, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, teenage births rose immediately after the start of the transition, even against a backdrop of falling fertility rates. Since 1992, teenage birth rates have declined and in 1997 were lower – if only slightly in some sub-regions – than they had been in 1989. Still, the rates remain well above those in Western Europe.
- **Marriage rates** are down significantly in almost every country, though they are now stabilizing in some countries. Marriage rates have been halved in the Baltics and the Caucasus, two sub-regions with very different cultural traditions. Most likely this reflects delays in family formation due to economic circumstances, although the Report finds evidence that cohabitation is increasing in Central Europe and the Baltic States. Over the last few years, the average age at first marriage has started to climb, increasing in 9 of the 14 countries surveyed, but women are still marrying at a relatively younger age than are women in Western countries.
- **Divorce** initially increased in countries with already high divorce rates, confirming that regional differences in divorce rates have grown during the transition. The general divorce rate soared in the western CIS and the Baltic States, with as many divorces as marriages in Estonia over 1995-97. Where there have been rises in the number of family breakups, the reasons may include social stress, changes in lifestyles and social values, and streamlined divorce procedures. However, in countries with the lowest initial divorce rates – such as Uzbekistan or FYR Macedonia – the number of divorces fell as much as or more than the number of marriages. The number of divorces has dropped sharply in the Caucasus.
- **Household structure** is also being affected by demographic trends such as fewer marriages and more cohabitation (which, however, do not account for the rising share of births outside marriage) and, in several countries, more divorces or more premature adult mortality. In countries where data are available, there are signs that more and more children are not living

in dual-parent households, but in single-parent households or extended family households. Data show that the share of births to unmarried mothers ranges from less than 5 percent in Turkmenistan to more than 50 percent in Estonia, where it has doubled since 1989.

The weakened earning capacity of young men and women and the growing economic importance of kinship systems may be playing a significant role in these outcomes. Moreover, as the umbrella of family policies is removed, diverse social and cultural factors are becoming more important in the demographic responses in each country.

Income support to families

In the early years of reform, many countries boosted income supports for families in order to cushion the impact of the changes. However, as the transition has progressed, countries have been spending relatively less on family allowances. Support programmes have often shifted from universal coverage to targeted coverage and, in some cases, have been eliminated altogether. An investigation carried out for the Report shows that family allowances are usually received by the mother. However, this arrangement also means that women are the ones who most keenly feel the deterioration in the benefits.

At the same time, in many countries, divorce and single parenthood are becoming more common, and this is placing women and children at greater risk of financial difficulty and poverty. It appears that single-parenthood has grown even in countries where divorce rates and non-marital birth rates are relatively low. In Poland in 1995, almost 12 percent of children were living with single mothers (and 1 percent with single fathers). There is also evidence that couples with more children have a greater chance of divorce, thereby exposing a greater number of children to risk.

Single-parent families are hardly a new phenomenon in the region. However, in the past, as data from Poland, Hungary and Russia show, there was little difference in the poverty rate among children in single- and two-parent families (unlike in the United Kingdom or the United States). This was apparently due to the generous family allowances, guaranteed employment and readily available childcare. Because these are being eroded and because of the demographic trends noted above, a new group of disadvantaged children – those living in single-parent households – is likely to emerge in the region. The Report also looks at the issues of child support payments by non-custodial parents and personal income tax reform as part of the new policy framework around family income.

Changing childcare

For households with young children, adequate, accessible and affordable childcare is crucial to the effort to balance employment and family respon-

sibilities. The Report describes how the childcare environment has changed during the transition. The population of infants and young children is greatly reduced; public childcare facilities are less available; childcare fees have increased, and stay-at-home parenting is being promoted.

Maternity entitlements have remained relatively untouched and, along with parental leaves, have even been extended in some countries. However, the good intentions behind maternity and parental leave measures often go unfulfilled in the new labour markets. It is typically women who must adapt and take on more responsibilities in order to accommodate the new circumstances. Thus, there is evidence that employers may be unwilling and parents unable to take full advantage of the leaves. In the Czech Republic, 23 percent of legally available maternity leaves went unused in 1993, compared to 5 percent in 1989. In Poland, more than two-thirds of women with higher education returned to work early from parental leave. Male participation in parental leave remains negligible.

Figure 6 illustrates the changes between 1989 and 1997 in enrolment rates in nurseries and kindergartens, the backbone of the former childcare system. Enrolment rates in nurseries (children up to age 2) have fallen throughout the region during the transition – most clearly in the Baltic and western CIS countries, where enrolments were the highest pre-transition. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, nurseries have practically ceased to exist. Enrolment rates in kindergartens have been less affected, and there has been a partial recovery in rates in most Central and Eastern European countries, partly because of the much smaller child cohorts and partly because communities are taking more responsibility for providing care. The Report also looks at childcare costs and social assistance programmes and concludes that a range of childcare options needs to be developed to meet the diversity emerging in the work and family arrangements of women and men.

Enrolment rates in nurseries and kindergartens are down despite a 10-50 percent drop in the number of young children

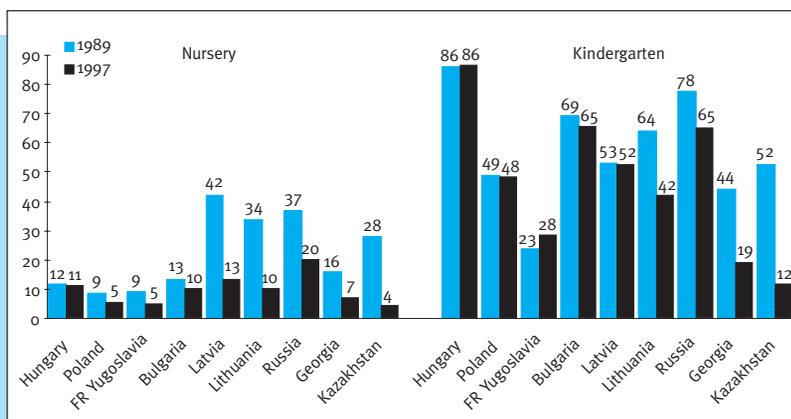


Figure 6 – Changes in nursery and kindergarten enrolment rates, 1989 and 1997 (percent of children aged 0-2 and 3-5/6)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 3.15.

4 WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women's health reflects and reinforces women's equality, and it is an essential factor in the welfare of children and families. This chapter looks at various aspects of women's health during the transition in keeping with the World Health Organization concept of good health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being".

Overall, women in the region began the transition with relatively good health status and adequate access to basic health services. However, the focus of women's health care (and hence the available data) was on maternal and infant health rather than on the health of women at all ages and stages of life. There were some particularly troubling traits in the general health picture of women, including considerable disparity in infant mortality rates across the region, high maternal death rates in many countries and extremely high abortion rates in almost all countries.

The bluntest measure of worsening health has been the deterioration in life expectancy. Of the 23 countries for which data are available, female life expectancy decreased in 16, and male life expectancy in 22. In many countries, the decline has been small and temporary; in others, the drop has been large and more difficult to reverse. In Russia, women lost 3.2 years of life expectancy, and men 6.3 years. Contributing factors include stress, poor nutrition, increased alcohol and substance abuse, and violence.

Women's reproductive health

Figure 7 presents a basic indicator of women's health across the region: changes in maternal mortality rates. Between 1989 and 1997, almost two-

Maternal mortality is still above the WHO target for Europe in most transition countries

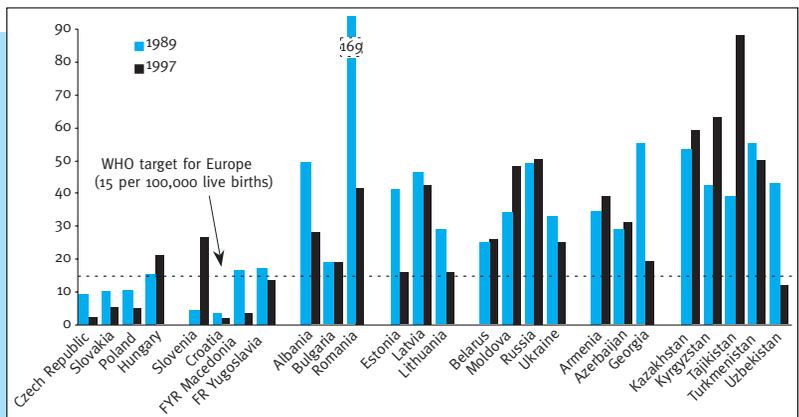


Figure 7 – Maternal mortality rates in 1989 and 1997 (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 4.1.

thirds of the transition countries reported declines in maternal death rates, while one-third reported increases. Central European countries were mostly successful in reducing maternal mortality. However, maternal mortality rates are above the WHO target for Europe in 17 transition countries. In 11 countries, the current rate is more than twice this WHO target.

The Report presents evidence on the deterioration in reproductive health, especially in the countries of the former Soviet Union. As access to good nutrition and perinatal care has weakened, birth-related complications of all types – including haemorrhage, eclampsia and especially anaemia – have increased in many countries. In Russia complications accompanied 23 percent of births in 1989, but an astounding 67 percent in 1996. The health status of newborns has similarly declined across the region, with the number of stillbirths, low birthweight babies, congenital anomalies, and problems in the perinatal period rising in most countries surveyed.

Figure 8 presents another conspicuous measure of women's health: the abortion rate. The absolute number of legal abortions has declined in every country during the transition, but abortion rates remain high and have actually risen in about one-quarter of the countries. The average rate in the region in 1996 was more than 100 abortions per 100 live births, compared with an average of 20 abortions per 100 live births in the European Union in 1994. The only countries where the rate is near the European Union average are Poland (where abortion laws became much more strict in 1993), Croatia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan. In Russia, there are two abortions for every live birth, that is, about 2.5 million abortions in 1997.

Abortions remain one of the leading causes of maternal mortality in the region, accounting for 20-25 percent of all maternal deaths. They also affect women's emotional health. High abortion rates result from a constellation of factors, including social acceptance of and wide access to medical abortions and, as evidence in the Report details, lack of access to family planning and modern contraceptive methods.

Abortion rates are still high, and the Report finds worrying patterns among young women

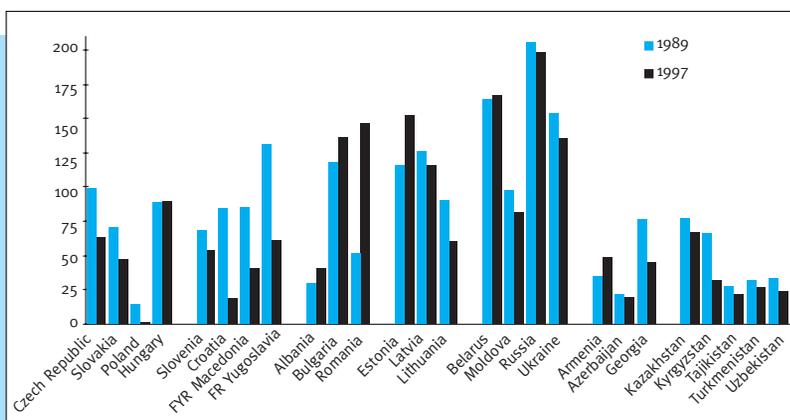


Figure 8 – Abortion rates in 1989 and 1997 (legal abortions per 100 live births)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 4.6.

Changing living conditions and lifestyles

The transition has brought many changes in the living conditions and lifestyles of women, and these social factors are important determinants of health. Evidence shows that populations have experienced micro-nutrient malnutrition linked to a drop in food consumption in some countries, a deterioration in the quality of the nutrients consumed, and the disruption of certain nutrition programmes such as the fortification of bread with iron and the supply of vitamin and mineral supplements to pregnant women and children. The Report also documents declining access to medical services, including the availability of and ability to pay for medical treatments and drugs.

The upheaval of the transition has created an environment – increased poverty and social stress, more migration, changing social values, and growing criminality – that provides fertile ground for risk-taking behaviours. The spread of “social diseases” is being compounded by the fact that there is often a lack of awareness, education, infrastructure, and programmes addressing the problems.

There are indications that smoking and alcohol consumption have risen sharply among adolescent girls during the transition as they catch up with their male and Western counterparts. For example, evidence shows that the percentage of adolescent Latvian girls who smoke has doubled, as has the share of 15-year-old Polish girls who report having been drunk at least twice.

The prevalence of drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases has also risen alarmingly. The rise in HIV infections is staggering: the number of recorded cases jumped from about 30,000 in 1994 to about 270,000 at the end of 1998. Much of the spread of HIV is associated with intravenous drug abuse, which also overlaps with prostitution.

Figure 9 catalogues the dramatic resurgence of syphilis in many countries, indicating that many more people are not practicing safe sex and are

Sexually transmitted diseases are spreading rapidly in some countries

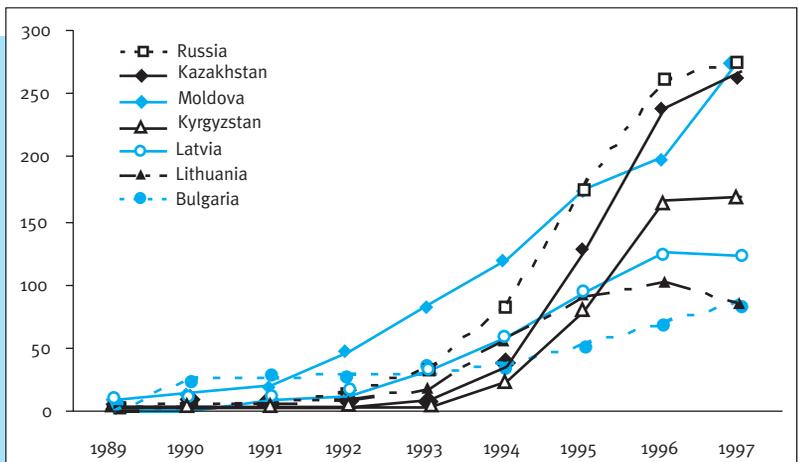


Figure 9 – Change in the number of newly registered cases of syphilis (per 100,000 persons)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 4.13.

also therefore at risk of being exposed to HIV. The data show an average incidence of two cases of syphilis per 100,000 people in the European Union, 11 in Central and Eastern Europe, and 221 in the former Soviet Union – the last more than 100 times the EU rate. The Report details how women, especially young women, are both biologically and socially vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. In Russia, for example, more than 1 girl in every 100 aged 18 became infected with syphilis in 1997.

Some dimensions of women's health, such as mental health, are still being treated largely as narrow medical problems, and there is little recognition of the social factors involved, including women's subordination in society. Accordingly, there is little emphasis on early intervention and prevention. This is especially troubling for women and girls, as they tend to report more emotional health problems, including stress and depression, than do men and boys. A study of 19 countries in the region found that depressive and post-traumatic stress disorders accounted for one-third of the disabilities from mental health problems for women, but for only 10 percent for men.

5 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is one of the broadest violations of human rights in the contemporary world and a substantial barrier to women's equality. This chapter offers evidence that violence against women is widespread in the region.

A portrait of violence against women

The chapter starts with an international review of the prevalence of violence against women around the world, detailing the forms it takes and the tolls it exacts. Girls are not only directly affected by this violence, but children also suffer when their mothers are exposed to it.

Under communism, violence against women was largely under-recognized and undocumented. Data and evidence have remained fragmentary during the transition, although there are reasons to believe that violence against women in its many forms has increased. The unsettling changes of the transition have been accompanied by a spreading sense of lawlessness and an alarming growth in crime, including homicides, in most parts of the region. The expanding culture of violence must surely have exposed women to even greater risks. Taken together, Figures 10, 11 and 12 graphically illustrate how pervasive and insidious violence against women is in the region.

Reported rapes and domestic violence

The rise in reported crime and homicide, the pinnacle of violent behaviour, strongly suggests that all kinds of violence have increased in these societies, including violence against women. A 1991 analysis concluded that Russian women are six times more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than are Russian men and several times more likely to be murdered by their partners than are Western European or North American women.

A surprising finding is that reported rapes have fallen (or increased less than homicides) in all transition countries for which information is available. The Report concludes that this trend reflects the reduced reporting of rape rather than a drop in actual cases. It is not uncommon for sexual assaults to go unreported, but this particular trend in the transition region is cause for alarm. There is also evidence that trust in the ability and capacity of police forces to solve cases is often low. The analysis presents evidence that women victims of violence do not receive adequate support from health professionals, police officers, prosecutors, judicial authorities, and social workers.

If the reporting of rape is down, it is even more likely that the criminal nature of domestic violence is not being recognized. Indeed, evidence shows that violence against women is sometimes not treated seriously by the criminal justice system, and domestic violence is often not even considered a crime. Analysis shows a high incidence of domestic violence – which presumes an intimate relationship between victim and offender and includes emotional abuse and neglect, as well as sexual and physical violence – in all countries for which information is available. Figure 10 illustrates the prevalence of this problem through a 1996 study of married and divorced women in Moscow. More than one woman in 10 said she had been sexually assaulted, and two-fifths of the divorced women had been beaten, struck, or shoved. It appears that alcohol is a prominent factor in domestic violence and that violence is a factor in divorce.

Tragically, physical and sexual abuse against children is also widespread

Divorced women are reporting more domestic violence

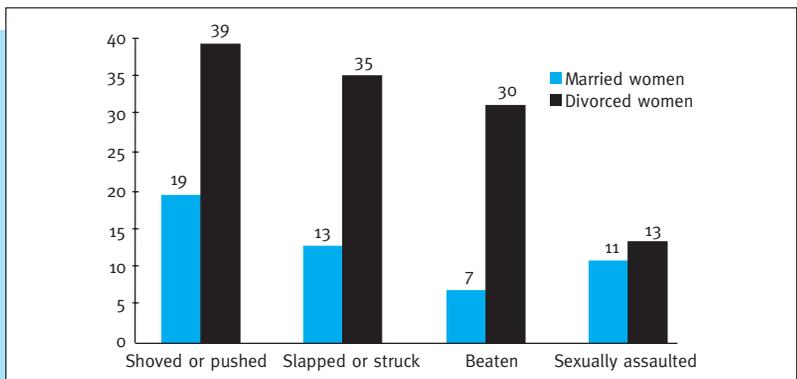


Figure 10 – Women reporting various forms of domestic violence in Moscow, by marital status, 1996 (percent)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 5.6.

in the transition region. Figure 11 reports the results of a 1995 survey of 1,500 adolescent girls and boys in Ukraine and shows that children in mainstream education institutions are exposed to high rates of violence, unwanted sexual contact and harassment. The situation for those adolescents who live in institutions run by the Ministry of the Interior is particularly worrying, with 50 percent of adolescents reporting unwanted sexual contact, and as many as 30 percent reporting having been raped. Data from Central Asia show that young women are particularly at risk from family violence and, in some cases, self-injury and suicide.

In some institutions every second adolescent has experienced unwanted sexual contact

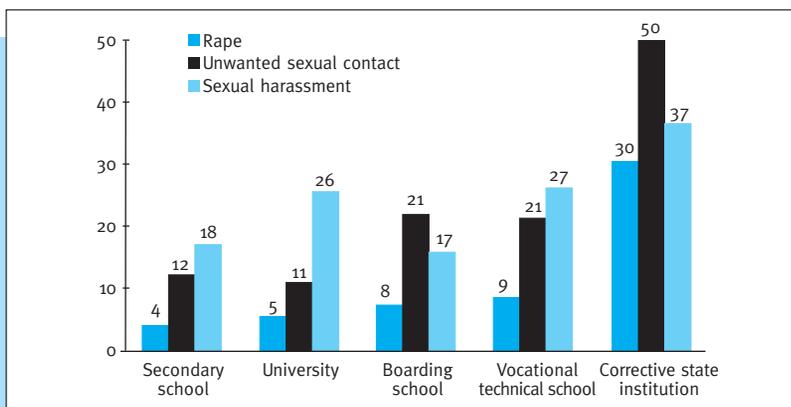


Figure 11 – Boys and girls reporting sexual abuse in Ukraine, by type of educational institution attended, 1995 (percent)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 5.7.

In the weakened economy, women may be more vulnerable to sexual threats related to getting or keeping a job. Based on a large 1996 survey on victimization at work in 34 countries carried out by the UN Inter-regional Crime and Justice Research Institute, Figure 12 shows evidence that vio-

Violence in the workplace is not uncommon, and the subordinate position of women exposes them to greater risk

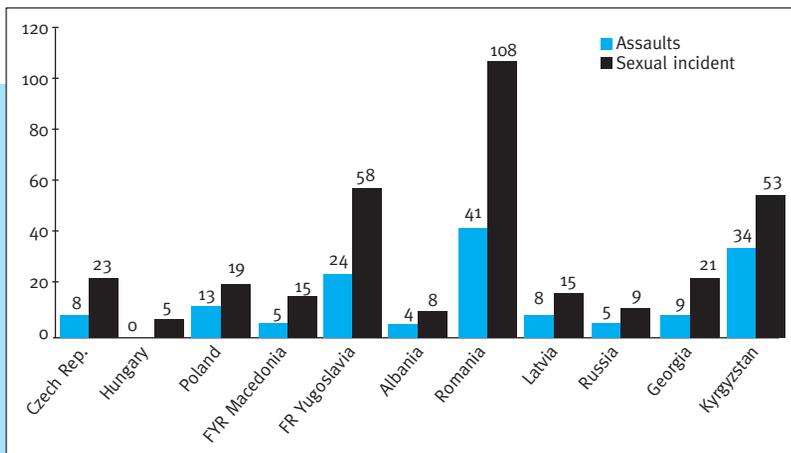


Figure 12 – Prevalence of assaults and sexual incidents involving women at work, 1996 (per 1,000 women)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 5.8.

lence against women also infects the workplace. The figure presents estimates of the prevalence of assaults (defined broadly) and sexual incidents involving female workers in 11 transition countries. Even if the rates cannot be readily compared between countries (since the same behaviour may be perceived and reported differently), these data confirm that a significant portion of women in the region are victims of sexual incidents at work.

New forms of violence against women have also appeared during the transition. The use of violence against women, rape and forced pregnancy as weapons of war in ethnic conflicts is horrific. Hundreds of thousands of women and children in the region have experienced the trauma of displacement, and women refugees are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. The Report also documents the emergence of trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation – a particularly disturbing aspect of a burgeoning sex industry which exposes women to higher risks of violence.

The transition countries now have a unique opportunity to incorporate a broad-based strategy to address violence against women as part of their widespread reforms. The Report explores opportunities to criminalize domestic violence, sensitize the criminal justice system, raise public awareness, and cultivate an environment of prevention in schools, workplaces, families, and communities.

6 WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Creating gender equality in society requires the equitable participation and representation of women at all levels and in all fields of decision making. This chapter examines women's power in political and economic decision making, drawing attention to the need to build women's participation from the grassroots up in the new civil societies of the region.

Women at the top in political and economic life

The voices of women have been heard only faintly during the transition, but there are significant building blocks in place to promote women's participation in the new democratic societies. One of the challenges is to shed the imposed and often illusory egalitarianism of communism without forsaking the ideal of gender equality and genuine representation and participation for women.

Figure 13 provides a dramatic snapshot of the progress of women as representatives in national parliaments over the last 50 years, including the abrupt impact of the transition. The share of women elected has dropped substantially across the full region – from the 30 percent or so imposed by quotas under communism to somewhere between 4 and 14 percent in most countries. Although it can be argued that, unlike the women promoted

under communism, women parliamentarians today are genuine political representatives of their communities, most transition countries have a long way to go to reach “a critical mass” in women’s political representation. The Report also looks at the finding that women are less likely than men to be represented in leadership positions in political parties and that women who run for office in the new multi-party elections have less chance of being elected than do their male colleagues.

The share of women in parliaments dropped sharply following the first democratic elections

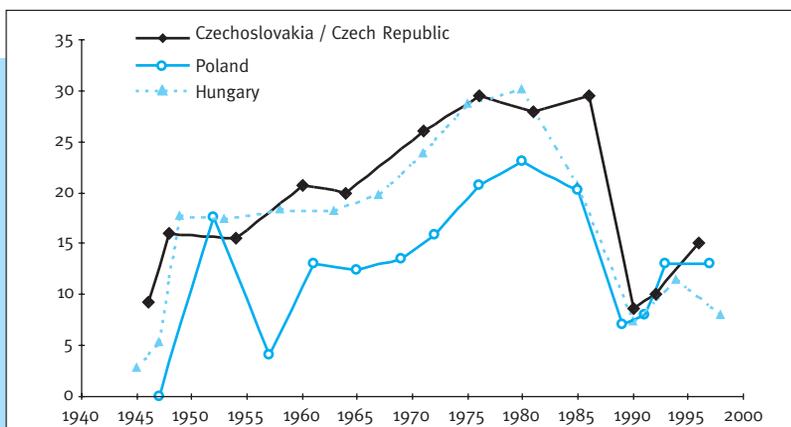


Figure 13 – Share of women in parliament, 1945-98 (percent)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 6.1.

Women are under-represented in senior government posts at the ministerial and sub-ministerial levels. Figure 14 presents the share of women, by sub-region, in senior government positions and adds, for comparison, the ratios in Nordic and non-Nordic OECD countries. It is clear from this picture that women have little chance of taking up a senior government position in most CIS countries, and available evidence suggests a similar situation in top economic decision-making positions.

Few women hold top decision-making posts – a pattern particularly pronounced in CIS countries

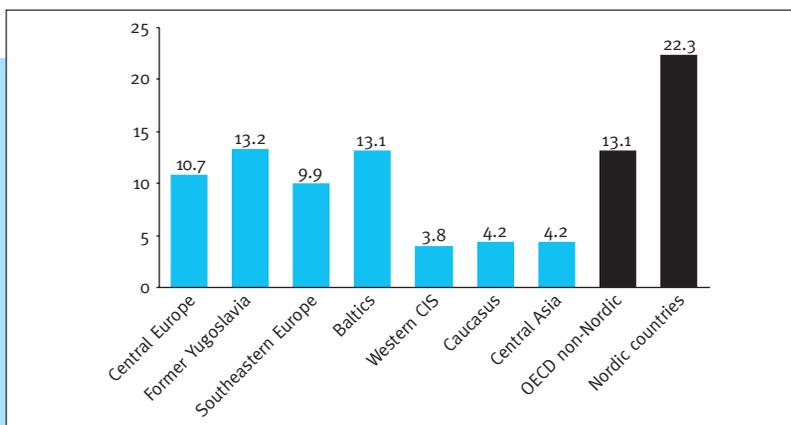


Figure 14 – Senior government positions occupied by women, 1996 (percent)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 6.4.

Women's representation among the directors of state enterprises was low under communism, and the "glass ceiling" which blocks women's upward mobility appears to have remained in place in the new private businesses. A sample of directors of large private organizations and companies in the Czech Republic found one woman for every 10 men (with women earning on average 63 percent of the salary of their male counterparts).

However, the picture improves when the Report looks at the broader band of decision makers down the ladder, including occupations where decision making constitutes a major activity, about 3-7 percent of jobs. Women's share in these broader managerial positions ranges from 23 to 38 percent, which compares favourably with the situation in Western countries. Moreover, women in many transition countries appear to have positions which are equal to or stronger than those of men in the next rung down in the ILO classification system – the "professionals" class. For example, half of all professionals in Romania are women, two-thirds in Slovakia, and 70 percent in Lithuania.

Women at the grassroots of civil society

The Report explores the need for the participation of women to be built from the grassroots up in the new civil societies of the region through local politics, non-governmental organizations and small business.

As Figure 15 shows women have enjoyed significantly more success in local than in national level politics. In 9 of 11 countries for which data are available, the proportion of women elected to local governments is higher than that of women elected to national parliaments. In Latvia, the share of women in local councils is about 40 percent, more than double the share in the national parliament. This level of power is important at a time when, throughout the region, many responsibilities are being shifted to local governments.

The comparatively higher share of women in local councils may represent a building block for the future

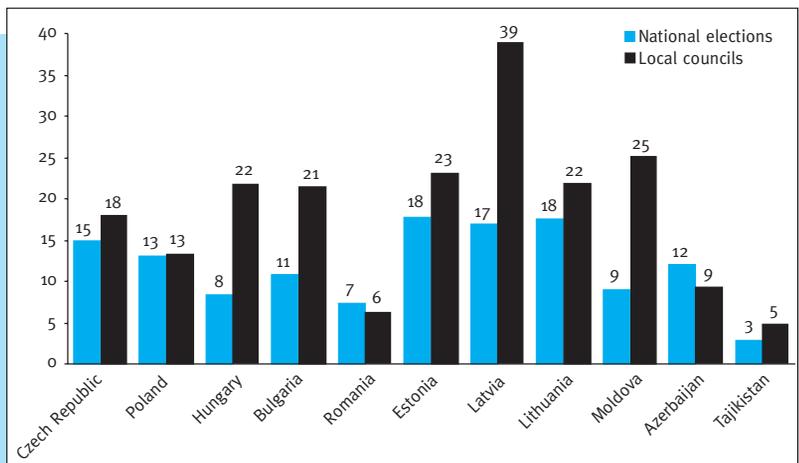


Figure 15 – Share of women elected to local councils and national parliaments (percent)

Source: RMR No. 6, Figure 6.6.

Civil organizations constitute an increasingly powerful “third” sector in democratic societies that balances and acts in partnership with the public and private sectors. In most transition countries, political liberalization has encouraged the formation of non-governmental organizations, social movements, grassroots groups, and media entities. The Report notes a certain “allergy to feminism” which lingers from the communist experience, but it emphasizes the importance of these civil vehicles in the effort to advance women’s equality. A survey in 10 transition countries found numerous active women’s organizations concerned with four common areas of concern: political issues and rights, the promotion of business and professional activities, social services such as health and education, and violence against women and domestic abuse.

The Report also stresses the particular importance of and historical opportunity for women’s participation as private entrepreneurs. This participation can break stereotypes, provide an entry point to local politics, bring fresh approaches to business, and contribute to reducing the current high levels of poverty in the region. Women are less likely than men to be entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, they represent about one-quarter of all entrepreneurs – a share consistent with that in many developed market economies. Women’s participation in the new private business sector has often been a result of plain economic necessity in the turbulent transition period. The Report investigates the importance of women’s social networks in the development of micro- and small-entrepreneurship and the barriers women face in financing and expanding their businesses, including family responsibilities, lack of training and lack of access to credit.

CONCLUSIONS

The transition countries have a great deal to gain from the full participation of women in the continuing evolution of market economies and democratic societies. Fortunately, women’s substantial assets in education and work experience represent a headstart on this path to progress. Moreover, the principles driving the transition – the expression of diversity, genuine political representation, economic development, and the expansion of choice – are the same values driving the movement for women’s equality.

However, there is a strong body of evidence suggesting that countries are failing to capitalize on this important resource by failing to integrate gender equality into the new foundations of the reborn societies. To accelerate genuine development, gender issues need to be better integrated into the political and public agenda. The analysis provided in the Report suggests the following key areas for action across the region.

- **Human capital:** The transition societies need to maintain or increase their investment in women and children in order to build upon their com-

parative edge in gender equity and child welfare. This means reforming education *and* promoting access, a critical determinant of gender equality and economic prosperity. It means adopting a more holistic approach to women's health, including a coherent strategy to promote healthy lifestyles and individual responsibility for health, while reinforcing the delivery of basic health care.

- **Raising children:** The primacy of the family is being reasserted during the transition, a good time to reset the balance among the roles of women, men and the community in the raising of children. A wider range of accessible childcare options is needed; family-friendly workplaces, particularly in the private sector, must be developed, and men must be encouraged and supported in taking a larger role in parenting. Ultimately, women and men should be able to make the best choices for themselves as individuals and families regarding the balance of work and children in their lives.
- **Violence against women:** The prevalence of violence in transition societies needs urgent attention. Violence, especially domestic violence, must be more strictly defined in criminal law and more vigorously pursued by justice systems. Victims of violence need to be treated more sensitively and supported in the legal, health and social systems. Avenues must be developed to allow women to leave abusive environments and to allow society to intervene in situations of risk with an eye to prevention. A culture of non-violence needs to be cultivated, beginning in school.
- **Women at work:** Women represent a remarkable repository of work experience and potential in the region. To lever that asset, further investigation is required, and solutions must be developed so as to close the gender gap in pay, shift the gender balance in occupations, remove barriers to upward mobility, and promote entrepreneurship. In particular, active consideration must be given to improving women's participation in the private sector, including initiatives such as gender-awareness, management training and pay and employment equity programmes.
- **Participation in decision making:** Pro-active measures should be taken to promote the participation of women in politics, business and civil society. There is a rich array of international "best practices" to choose from and adapt: education, awareness and training programmes; research and programme development geared to fostering gender equality; mentoring and leadership by example; voluntary targets promoting gender balance that are gradually implemented within political parties and non-governmental organizations, and publicity and discussion around gender equity in decision making.
- **Government leadership:** Government can play a critical role in fostering the equality of opportunity among citizens. Central policy units dedicated to advancing gender equality need to be established and adequately empowered. Governments can work domestically and internationally to implement UN conventions against discrimination and violence against

women and for the rights of the child. It is a responsibility of governments to demonstrate public leadership and to act in partnership with other sectors of society in the promotion of gender equality. In particular, governments can favour the development of gender-related data and research and the adoption of gender-based analysis in the development of public laws, programmes and policies.

- **Public discourse:** The many actors in the emerging democratic society represent a great opportunity to open a public discourse on gender equality in the region. Governments can help promote this issue on the public agenda through consultation with citizens and non-governmental organizations, as well as by undertaking public awareness and education campaigns. The development of civil society, especially non-governmental organizations and other fora, offers many opportunities for public dialogue. The media can show leadership in the presentation of women in ways which reflect the wide range of women's realities. A vigorous public dialogue keeps gender issues on the agenda and changes expectations around gender roles in society, extending opportunities for women, men and children.

July 1999

This year's Regional Monitoring Report (MONEE), published by UNICEF International Child Development Centre, focuses on the experiences of girls and women during the transition. It highlights the role of women in regional progress and the obstacles they face. The Report covers a broad range of issues, including women's participation in the emerging market economy and democratic governments, female access to health and education, trends in family formation, and violence against women and girls. The Report calls for the full implementation of existing human rights agreements and emphasizes the importance and benefits of integrating gender equality into the foundations of these new societies.