



**NGO Interactive Roundtables**  
**UNECE Beijing+15 meeting**  
*Friday 30 and Saturday 31 October*

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▪ **Summary:**

Kirsti Kolthoff (WILPF Sweden President), Susi Snyder (Secretary-General) and Ilse Wermink (annual intern WILPF International) attended the two-day NGO Roundtables. The NGO Conference was organised in preparation for the Beijing+15 Regional Review by the UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe). The WILPF representatives divided their input over the different working groups in order for WILPF's point of view to be heard. Before, between and after the working groups there were plenary information and discussion sessions on the economic vocabulary, gendered impact of the crisis, responsibility of the corporate sector and partnership success.

WILPF's Kirsti, Susi and Ilse focused mainly on raising issues surrounding military expenditure, women in armed conflict and funding for the new UN gender infrastructure. These inputs could be found in the final recommendations on the North American region, environment and climate change, the care economy and unpaid work, displaced and migrant women and trafficking, human rights, education and information, the new gender architecture and one UN entity on women.

▪ **Opening session:**

The senior gender advisor for UNECE, Patrice Robineau, addressed the audience on the expectations of the roundtables and the input UNECE Member States had already provided.

His introduction focused on the fact that although there is sufficient legislation on Violence against Women, there are continued deficiencies in implementation. Attention was given to the difference between Western and Eastern European States in addressing the gender pay gap. Mr. Robineau also raised the issue of the vulnerability of migrant women. Lastly, he mentioned the erosion of social protection schemes, for which partnerships can be built via ODA (Overseas Development Aid) to bring structural changes.

He gave the following main organisational advices for the NGO Roundtables:

- (1): Focus on NGO statements.

- (2): Highlight the most important recommendations and be concrete.
  - (3): Link regional and global developments.
  - (4): Combine a human rights approach with policy advice, as legal changes need to be implemented in all levels of society.
  - (5): Call for political will.
- **UNIFEM Global Policy Forum Teach-in:**

UNIFEM provided a teach-in, which opened with a short background of the economic crisis. It began in the USA, specifically with the collapse of the housing market due to the enormous build-up of unreliable credit. The crisis' spread throughout the globe has ensured its continued negative effects, especially on those who were already in dire financial straits. To simplify, there is a multiplier effect; If you can't get credit, you can't produce, you can't employ others and you have to cut your consumption. Consumption goes down, production is cut and a second round of decreased credit, production, employment and consumption results. Government income decreases which results in less spending on social priorities. Public sector jobs are cut. None of these developments are gender neutral, as the percentage of women working in public sector jobs is higher than the average percentage of employed women. This is what is called a pro-cyclical movement.

The government has a specific role in breaking the downward cycle, implementing counter-cyclical policies and making investments to ensure the development of their economies. This can be done via cash transfers to the more vulnerable members of the population, support employment opportunities, infrastructure, taxes and fiscal policy. Cash transfers to women are significantly stronger spend on their social grouping, as these transfers are mostly invested in the family and those related. Questions which should be asked: what are the right sectors to invest in to create employment? We have to ensure that investment in infrastructure does not only support roads, but also schools, universities and public transport. Most of the taxes come from value-added tax and this can be made more progressive.

The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) had the greatest decrease in the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) region with 6.7%, in comparison to 5% for the CEE (Central & Eastern European States) region. To translate these developments: 40% of the 480 million people living in the CEE/CIS region are poor and this number is expected to rise by about 5 million people for every 1% in decline of GDP. The ILO (International Labour Organisation) estimates that 58 million jobs have been lost in 2009 and an additional 10 million will be lost by the end of 2010. The economic crisis has had a dramatic effect on the countries in the CEE/CIS due to their dependence on trade, FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) and remittances.

The UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) found that countries and regions vary in their exposure to the crisis via remittance effects. Remittances to Eastern European and Central Asian countries are expected to make the biggest drop in both relative and absolute terms, reflecting the reversal of the rapid expansion which followed the European Union accession and the economic boom in the Russian Federation. In Moldova and Tajikistan, where remittances shares of GDP are the highest in the world (38 and 45 percent respectively), flows are projected to shrink by 10% in 2009. This will cause an increase in migration, which will bring more and more women into vulnerable situations.

Unemployment furthers the growth of informal work and the care economy, in which women carry the majority of the burden. Women are the shock absorbers of the economic and financial crisis. Females are overrepresented in the expanding survivalist sections of informal economies. The global crisis has also caused a household crisis which is mostly dealt with by women – increased reliance on informal loans, reduction of food, transport and communication expenses, child care costs and attempts to preserve spending on education. All these household level decisions increase the vulnerability of women, because they are less secure in income and reliant on survival strategies.

These developments are compounded by impacts of a failure in governmental revenue, which in its turn will affect social development gains and safety net programmes. Governments are expected to decrease their ODA (Overseas Development Aid) budgets, which will have a negative effect for ODA receiving countries. Job creation and specifically the provision of decent work are essential for long term development. Most of the external sources for the weakest countries come from the International Monitoring Fund (IMF). The IMF lends money under certain conditions in order to bring economic stability to countries but these conditions do not relate to social expenditure. For example, in the case of the IMF agreement with Romania there is an agreement to “streamline the social benefit system by consolidating some of the more than 200 benefits currently existing and by improving targeting of the remaining programmes”. What does this mean? How is this implemented and what are the effects? In the letter of intent between IMF and Serbia, IMF said that countercyclical loosening is not possible at the moment, due to the strong pro-cyclical policies between 2006 and 2008. But it was the IMF itself which had advised those policies only a few years before..

Consideration of the following is required: can infrastructure programmes be gender-equitable? How can social protection systems reduce the burden of care? There must be a shift away from informal safety nets. Long-term needs are employment growth, automatic stabilizers and universal coverage of social security. The care economy must be recognized and governments must put policies in place to ensure the recognition occurs.

On the international level the following things are of high importance: food security, rights of migrant workers, ODA commitments, IMF policies, debt workout mechanisms, protectionist agricultural policies and strategies for revenue. There must be linkage with international policy engagement via the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CEDAW reports, national budget processes, ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Reviews and the 2010 September MDG summit. A UNIFEM publication which examined the national budget process and potential for NGO intervention found that a greater representation in international forums leads to a greater emphasis on policy focus and a greater potential for policy influence

Joint Initiatives within the UN System:

Initiative	Leading agency
1. Additional financing for the most vulnerable	UNDP and World Bank
2. Food security	FAO, IFAD, WFP

3. Trade	UNCTAD and WTO
4. Green Economy Initiative	UNEP
5. Global jobs pact	ILO
6. Social protection floor	ILO and WHO
7. Humanitarian, security and social stability	WFG
8. Technology and innovation	ITU, UNIDO and WIPO
9. Monitoring and analysis	DSG of UN, UN-DESA and IMF.

The speaker provided the following explanation of specific words:

- Pro-cyclical: moving in the direction of a recession.
- Counter-cyclical: countering the economic downturn by governmental investments / policies.
- Fiscal policy: how the government raises and spends money.
- Fiscal space: room in a government's budget allowing it to provide resources for a desired purpose without jeopardizing the sustainability of its financial position or the stability of the economy.
- Monetary policy: how the government changes and fixes exchange rates.
- External shock: unexpected adverse change to an economic variable that takes place outside a particular economy, e.g. an increase in the price of oil due to a war.
- Jobless growth: Economy growth without job creation, caused by movement of money in the financial sector.
- Automatic stabilizers: Contributions to unemployment insurance which ensure that when an individual finds themselves unexpectedly in need of money, they don't have to search for funds. Example: health care.
- Remittances: A remittance is a transfer of money by a foreign worker to his or her home country.
- Concretionary policies: are monetary policies that seek to reduce the size of the money supply. They are fiscal policies (such as lower spending or higher taxes) that reduce economic growth. In most nations monetary policies are controlled by either a central bank or a finance ministry.
- **Responsibility of the Corporate Sector:**

The following key facts were described to highlight the current situation for women in Europe:

- Of the 27 cabinet members that make up the current European Commission, 9 are women; only 33.4%.
- Of the 785 Parliament seats, only 33.3% are held by women.
- 58.5% of women are employed – compare to 72.5% of men.
- Only 8 out of the top 500 European companies are headed by women.
- Women are the minority on company boards in Europe, in a range from an average of 43% women in Norway to 0.8% in Portugal.
- Women in top positions were three times harder hit (i.e. losing jobs, missing out on promotions, cuts in their salaries) than their male colleagues by the economic crisis.

The speaker focused on mainstreaming gender in the talent management of corporate organisations. Women in corporations tend to have less access to challenging jobs and less supportive work environments.

Recommendations:

- Increase job opportunities and capitalize on employee skills and abilities;
  - Provide career planning, mentors, and improve opportunities for employee achievement;
  - Hold managers accountable for employee development;
  - Provide honest feedback;
  - Listen to employees and build equity, transparency, and consistency;
  - Adjust work practices work environment and culture.
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- **Partnership success**

According to Kinga Lohmann, the success of a partnership is based on the framework, the culture and the differences in the partnership. She represents a partnership organisation, **CARAT**, bringing Eastern and Western European organisations together in order to build a European movement. The most important aspect of a functional partnership is common ground between the partners. Capacity needs to be built on economic issues.

**European Women's Lobby**, represented by Brigitte Triems, has around 2,500 member organisations. Their main goal is to work together with all member organisations to ensure gender perspectives in European policies. EWL works in four areas: joint campaigns, joint lobbying efforts, facilitating networking between NGOs and facilitating regional cooperation between governments and NGOs.

Marina Tabukashvili, representing **NGOs in the CIS region**, said that building democracy is a key part of the work of the women's organisations. She expressed a feeling of abandonment in their work. There is a lack of political will to implement international obligations and a clear lack of understanding of the added value of true gender equality for economically strengthening these relatively new countries. Rural women are the most vulnerable in the CIS regions and most in need of good representation but can often only be reached through mediators.

June Zeitlin represented three coalitions: **NGO CSW, CEDAW Coalition** and the **GEAR Campaign**. She conveyed the energy and positive feeling which is felt in the US by their new President and Secretary of State. The US is the only country in the western world that has not ratified CEDAW and she requested the participants of the Conference to support their CEDAW Coalition to push for US ratification. There will be an effort to put the Beijing+15 Review under CSW into a greater historic understanding and to link it back to the Women's Conference in Mexico City 30 years ago. You can find the new NGO CSW address, still partly under construction, at [www.ngocsw.org](http://www.ngocsw.org). She spoke of GEAR as a truly global campaign.

Conchita Poncini introduced the **CONGO CSW** (Conference of NGOs Committee on the Status of Women). It was established for engagement with the Women's Conference in Mexico City 30 years ago. She spoke about the interdependence of civil, political, economic

and social rights. CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) is now held in both Geneva and New York and increases the need to focus on the role of the NGO CSW in linkage to the Treaty Bodies such as CEDAW.