

**UNITED NATIONS**  
**INTER-AGENCY NETWORK ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY**

Fact Sheet prepared for WSIS Tunis 2005



**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (UNECE)**

**PROMOTING A REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON GENDER AND INFORMATION SOCIETY**

UNECE, a regional arm of the United Nations, has 55 member countries from North America, western Europe, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. It promotes a regional dialogue on gender and Information Society using its role in the WSIS regional process. UNECE addresses also selected gender aspects of ICT within its core programme of work. These activities are integrated into the UN ICT Task Force – Geneva node, which is facilitated by UNECE.

**Why a regional dialogue is important?**

Within the process of building a knowledge-based society, ICT has great potential to become a tool for ensuring gender equality in the UNECE region, where women are well educated and have high level of participation in the formal labour market.

Despite good practices, however, this potential remains untapped. National ICT strategies lack a gender perspective and barriers limit women's access to new communication and information technologies. These barriers include high access costs, lack of networks, time constraints due to family responsibilities and traditional views that technology is a "male" domain.

There are thus concerns that ICT could create new forms of gender inequalities. These concerns are especially serious in many ECE member countries with economy in transition, such as in south-Eastern Europe, central Asia and the Caucasus where women's situation has deteriorated during the 1990s. This was due to welfare losses and disproportional cuts in women's employment. In several countries there was

also a decline in education opportunities for girls, including at primary level. Also, there are large differences in sharing ICT benefits within countries according to women's income, family status (single mothers), living area (urban-rural) or age (older women). A dialogue on a "gender divide" within the digital divide is thus important for all countries in the ECE region.

**UNECE 2004 publication:  
'Access to Financing and ICT for Women  
Entrepreneurs in the ECE Region'**

The report looks at women's access to ICT within the context of progress and good practices in selected countries and sub-regions

**Issues to consider:**

- Raising awareness on gender aspects of ICT in the context of Knowledge-based Society
- Developing gender disaggregated ICT data and analysis,
- Training and equal access to low cost ICT infrastructure;
- Building partnership among stakeholders to change gender stereotypes and traditional social climate

**What UNECE is doing?**

- **Provides a regional platform for dialogue and supports the inclusion of gender into the WSIS process and national strategies.**

**WSIS Tunis, 2005- High Level Panel: "Women and the Information Society: Building a Gender Balanced Knowledge-Based Economy"**. The panel is organized by the five regional commissions, UNCTAD and UN-ICT Task Force. It will discuss how to bridge the gender digital divide based on experiences from each region.

**WSIS Geneva, 2003 - "From Bucharest to Tunis: Regional Cooperation on Gender and ICTs in Eastern Europe and CIS countries"**. The Round Table discussed the results of pilot projects, proposals for cooperation on: data improvement; research and analytical work.

**Sub-regional Ministerial Conference for CIS countries Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, September 2002**, The Final Declaration recognized the existence of a gender digital and called for action to ensure gender equality in building the Information Society in CIS countries.

**Pan-European Ministerial Conference, Bucharest, November 2002: "Building a gender sensitive Information Society"**. Recommendations from the Round Table were presented at the plenary session, which adopted proposed changes in the Final Declaration.

**Final Declaration  
Pan-European Regional Conference  
Bucharest, November 2002**

*"Governments and other stakeholders should provide the necessary conditions to ensure women's equal access to information and knowledge as well as ensuring their equal role as producers and decision makers in all aspects related to the shaping of IT policies and frameworks".*

- **Contributes to capacity building in ICT for women entrepreneurs.**

**Second UNECE Forum of Women Entrepreneurs, Geneva, 7-18 March 2003** discussed good practices in improving access to ICT for women run companies. Among winners of the UNECE Awards for Excellent Women Entrepreneur, one was

given to the best women run company in the ICT area.

**UNECE Portrait Gallery of Excellent Women Entrepreneurs** presents on-line profiles of 180 excellent women entrepreneurs, including many successful companies in ICT area

**UNECE Network of women's business associations** aims at building networks and exchange of experiences; it includes 25 organisations from 15 countries.

- **Develops methodologies and collects data on gender and ICT within its work programme on Gender Statistics.**

The work on gender statistics is carried out under the framework of Conference of European Statisticians. Data and others information are included into the existing UNECE/UNDP Gender Statistics website ([www.unece.org/stats/gender/web/database.htm](http://www.unece.org/stats/gender/web/database.htm))

**"Statistics on Women and Men and ICT: The ECE Region"** paper presented at the meeting on UNECE/UNCTAD/UNESCO/ITU/OECD/Eurostat Statistical Workshop: Monitoring the Information Society: Data, Measurement and Methods. Geneva, December 2003 ([www.unece.org/stats/documents/2004/10/gender/wp.31.e.pdf](http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2004/10/gender/wp.31.e.pdf))