

Concept Note

Side Event at the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69)

Date: Tuesday, 11 March 2025

Time: 11:00 – 13:00 EST

Venue: Room 1875, 18th floor, UN Women Headquarters, The News Building, 220 E 42nd St, New York, NY 10017

Empowering Change: Unlocking Transformative Gender Impact in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe

Organizer: Republic of Moldova

Co-organizers: Albania (tbc), Denmark, North Macedonia, Ukraine, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), and UN Women ECARO

Background

The high-level event is jointly organized by the EU accession countries, EU Member States and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), and UN Women.

In the context of rising challenges to gender equality and backsliding, this event will examine how gender mainstreaming and GEWE policies within the EU enlargement process could support transformative change in the region.

The event will review the contribution of the EU enlargement process to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) across all 12 critical areas of concern, assessing progress and successes. It will also explore opportunities for fostering commitments to achieve greater impact, particularly by building stronger coalitions between EU institutions, the international gender equality community, and candidate countries. The focus will be on increasing funding for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) within the EU accession process, strengthening women's participation and addressing gender backsliding to boost the adoption and implementation of GEWE policies, human rights and anti-discrimination laws in line with the EU Acquis and the OSCE commitments.

The conditions for joining the EU are set out in the Treaty on the European Union and the Copenhagen criteria. Currently, seven countries in the region are in the EU accession process (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine).

Candidate countries need to demonstrate stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition; and the ability to adopt and implement the obligations of EU membership effectively. Gender equality is a fundamental aspect of EU enlargement and is embedded in the accession criteria. This includes the adoption and transposition of the EU acquis (including gender equality directives) and the capacity to implement it effectively.

Gender equality directives primarily cover employment and labour rights, self-employment and social security schemes. They also include recently adopted directives on work-life balance, pay transparency and combating violence against women. Beyond the legal framework, [the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020 – 2025](#) provides a comprehensive policy approach, grounded in a dual strategy that combines gender mainstreaming with targeted action, while intersectionality serves as a guiding principle for implementation. Gender mainstreaming is also defined in Directive 2006/54/EC (Article 29) as an integral part of EU and Member States' policy processes. Additionally, the [EU Care Strategy](#) and the [ratification of the Istanbul Convention](#) (and Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence) further reinforce commitments to gender equality and combating gender-based violence.

At the same time, there is a robust policy framework for EU external cooperation to enhance gender equality, outlined in [Gender Action Plan III \(2021–2025, extended until 2027\)](#). This plan follows the dual approach of gender mainstreaming (G1) and targeted actions for gender equality (G2), setting an ambitious target for 85% of EU actions to contribute to gender equality and at least 5% of EU actions to be gender equality targeted action. These commitments are also embedded in the regulations governing specific EU assistance facilities¹ for the accession countries.

Many candidate countries are also having to deal with a range of deliberate and aggressive behaviours, discourses, practices and structures that seek to destabilize and undermine the foundation of the human rights framework, stop the implementation of gender equality laws and erode gender equality gains, mechanisms and institutions.

The event will focus on the following key themes:

- **Gender mainstreaming:** Exploring the procedures and resources in place to leverage EU accession and maximize its impact on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA), while showcasing good practices between the EU and UN and effective strategies in achieving gender equality.
- **Women's movement and countering gender backsliding:** Underlining the importance of transnational, regional and national networks, the participation of women's CSOs and strengthening their role within the EU enlargement process. These are pivotal for effectively countering gender backsliding and addressing the challenges posed by anti-gender equality narratives and disinformation, leveraging the enlargement process to build stronger, broader coalitions for gender equality.
- **Celebrate progress and identify opportunities:** Acknowledge the achievements of the EU and candidate countries in promoting gender equality while exploring ways to further strengthen these efforts and their impact.

¹ Regulation (EU) 2024/792 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Ukraine Facility; Regulation Proposal of the European Parliament and of the Council on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Republic of Moldova; Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans

Gender mainstreaming: The EU commission will emphasize the EU's external and internal policies and a robust framework for gender mainstreaming and the enlargement process gender equality benchmarks. UN Women will present its Gender Equality Facility (GEF) framework showcasing strategies for policy interventions and gender mainstreaming in EU assistance. Country examples will demonstrate the importance of the process in strengthening gender equality mechanisms and embedding gender mainstreaming practices within broader policy agendas.

Women's movement and countering gender backsliding: The EU integration process offers a critical opportunity to counter gender backsliding by creating broader coalitions, increasing funding for women's organizations and ensuring their active engagement in policy processes and decision-making. Contributions by ODIHR, Kvinna till Kvinna, and youth representatives will emphasize specific activities that have addressed gender backsliding and have successfully leveraged the enlargement process to strengthen women's movements.

Celebrate progress and identify opportunities: The EU, through its Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and accession countries, will present the successes of EU-funded programmes and their impact on the lives of women and girls across the region. These achievements span all 12 critical areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDfA), demonstrating the tangible progress made towards substantive gender equality.

Event Objectives:

- Increase the visibility and framing of EU integration as a powerful process for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA).
- Provide a forum for exchange between EU Member States, accession countries, women's groups, civil society organizations and international organizations to discuss success factors, lessons learned and opportunities for advancing gender equality.
- Present emerging challenges and good practices in preventing, addressing and reversing gender backsliding.

Anticipated Outcomes: The event aims to share insights, showcase best practices, and outline a trajectory for stronger cooperation between EU member states, accession countries, women's CSOs, and international partners, while supporting countries in the EU integration process.

Side Event Agenda

Time	Agenda item
11:00 – 11:15	Registration of participants
11:10 – 11:40	Welcome and opening remarks <i>Collaborative: Why did we join forces to be here today?</i> <i>Relevant: What is the regional and global importance of gender mainstreaming of EU accession process?</i> <i>Strategic: Why is preventing, addressing and reversing gender backsliding integral to gender transformative reforms and peace?</i> - Marta Kos, EU Commission, Commissioner for Enlargement - Doina Gherman, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Republic of Moldova (TBC) - Belen Sanz Luque, UN Women Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia (tbc) - Tea Jaliashvili, First Deputy Director Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights - Lise Tamm, Director General the Agency for Gender Equality of Sweden
11:40 – 12:10	Panel discussion tackling the following framework questions 1. <i>Are gender mainstreaming and multistakeholder dialogue on gender equality underutilized tools for transformative change?</i> 2. <i>What successes in this area serve as pointers for future work?</i> 3. <i>What challenges demand new and innovative solutions?</i> Panel discussion participants: 1. Minister Fatmir Limani, Ministry of Social Policy, Demographics and Youth, North Macedonia (tbc) 2. Ambassador Suela Janina, Permanent Representative of Albania to the United Nations 3. Felicia Bechtoldt, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection Moldova, 4. Kateryna Levchenko, Commissioner for Gender Equality Ukraine, 5. Petra Totterman Andorrf, Secretary General, Kvinna Till Kvina, 6. Chloe Laurens-Dinsdale, Team Leader for Human Rights and Civil Society, DG ENEST, European Commission Moderators: Sanja Nikolin, CHANGE Project Officer, ODIHR and Florence Raes, Director of UN Women Brussels Liason Office (tbc)
12:10 – 12:50	Friendly Face-Off with the Side Event Participants Side event participants, both in person and online, weave their views and experiences into the discussion to complement, challenge or support the main points made by the panel members. <i>The goal of the faceoff is to maximize opportunities for exchange and collaborative efforts. If time allows short videos from EU supported programs will be shown.</i>
12:50 – 13:00	Wrap Up and Main Takeaways