



# 10

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How our common future in Eastern Europe and Central Asia depends on a girl at this pivotal age

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Regional portraits and facts supplementing UNFPA's State of World Population 2016



# → Foreword

When a girl reaches age 10 in our region, her world is about to change.

As she embarks on her journey through adolescence and on to adulthood, the coming years will be crucial for determining in which direction her life will go.

She could flourish, gradually building her skills and enhancing her horizons, nurtured by an enabling and empowering environment in her family and community that encourages her to start making choices and shape her own future.

But her dreams may also be shattered as social and cultural norms and discriminatory laws and practices hold her back.

At age 10, a girl in our region is at a crossroads.

Which path she takes does not only matter for her own life. It matters for the lives of all of us.

Because we all win when a girl – a hundred girls, a generation of girls – can fulfill their potential. Human capital strengthens. Economies grow. Wealth rises.

It is in our hands to help make this happen.

This publication supplements the 2016 edition of UNFPA's State of World Population report, with a focus on Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

It tells the stories of eight 10-year-old girls from across this region. It gives a short overview of some of the key challenges and opportunities they and their peers are facing. And it puts these in the broader context of what investments are needed to reap the demographic dividend in this region.

At the dawn of the Agenda 2030 era, as we have embarked on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, our success will in many ways depend on whether we are able to unleash the potential of this generation of girls.

The dreams and aspirations of the girls featured in this year's State of World Population report, and this regional supplement, serve as a powerful call to action for governments, civil society and the international community, for teachers, health workers and parents, to create the conditions necessary for girls to thrive in this region.

*Alanna Armitage*  
Director  
UNFPA Regional Office for  
Eastern Europe and Central Asia



SCHOOL

EMPLOYMENT

ADULT MARRIAGE/  
HEALTHY CHILDREN

SECURITY  
OF PLACE

WORK-LIFE  
BALANCE

LIFELONG  
LEARNING

WEALTH/CHILD  
INVESTMENT

SECURE  
OLD-AGE

DEMOGRAPHIC  
DIVIDEND

## Education

“In order for my dreams to become true, there should be good education at schools and many books published in the world”

**Sesili, 10, is from Tbilisi, Georgia.**

She attends one of the best schools in the country. Sesili is a bright, responsible, joyful and friendly girl and a talented painter. She is interested in arts and literature. Sesili loves her life and as she says, she will do her best to keep it as beautiful as it is. The most important thing for her is to be sincere and never lie.

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Photo: UNFPA/Dina Oganova



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CHILD ILLNESS  
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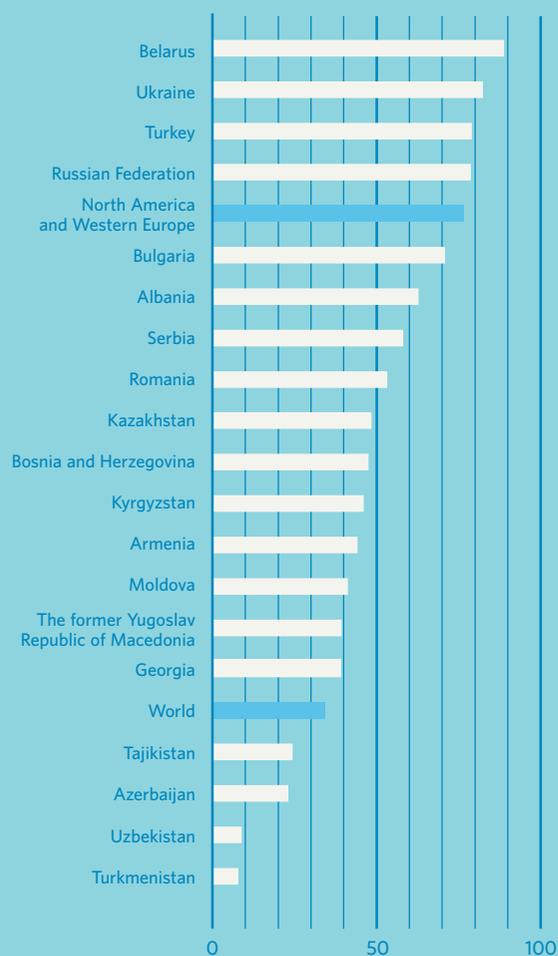
INSECURITY &  
DISPLACEMENT

INSECURE  
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# Investing in quality education contributes to building human capital.

## ENROLMENT IN TERTIARY EDUCATION, %



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Gross enrolment ratio, both sexes, retrieved 15 August 2016.

## → The situation

Most 10-year-old girls and boys are in school in this region, as they are entering secondary education where enrolment ratios are generally over 90%.<sup>1</sup> The outlook is good for higher education, too. Although enrolment ratios in tertiary education vary widely in the region (see graph), in most countries around 40% or more of high school students continue their education. Young women have a clear advantage in tertiary education: there are more female than male students in all but five of the region's 19 countries.



OR MORE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION IN MOST COUNTRIES

## → Leaving no-one behind

Young Roma face multiple barriers in accessing education, and gaps in educational attainment between Roma and non-Roma remain huge. More than 30% of young Roma were found to be without even primary education in some countries in the region, and nowhere did the share of young Roma with a university degree exceed 1%.<sup>2</sup> The price tag for Roma exclusion from education is high: the loss in productivity amounts to up to 3.7% of GDP in Bulgaria, for example, not counting fiscal losses in terms of lower tax incomes and higher social security expenditures.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup> With some exceptions in Southeastern Europe and Central Asia. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Roma Education in Comparative Perspective. Analysis of the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011. Roma Inclusion Working Papers, United Nations Development Programme, 2012.

## → Why is it important?

Investing in affordable quality education is key for ensuring that adolescents and young people can fulfil their potential. It also contributes to building a society's human capital. This is particularly important in countries preparing for the effects of low fertility and population ageing.



## → What needs to be done?

By further improving educational attainment levels and the quality of education, countries in the region can expect significant economic returns of up to 1.7% of annual per capita GDP growth.<sup>4</sup> Investments must go beyond formal schooling, as early childhood experiences greatly affect social outcomes. This includes policies allowing parents to balance work and family.



<sup>3</sup> Economic Costs of Roma Exclusion, The World Bank, April 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Investing in Young People in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Issue Brief 2, 2014.



SCHOOL

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DEMOGRAPHIC  
DIVIDEND



Photo: UNFPA/Aleksandar Milovanovski

“I do not have plans to get married young. I would like to finish my education first”

## Child marriage

**Gjulsefa, 10, lives with her brother and parents in Skopje, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.** Her father works as a municipality worker and her mother as a cleaner in Gjulsefa's school. The family lives in Shuto Orizari, a neighbourhood predominantly inhabited by Roma. Gjulsefa speaks her native Roma language at home, but loves the Macedonian language and wants to become a Macedonian teacher.

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INSECURITY &  
DISPLACEMENT

INSECURE  
OLD-AGE

MISSED  
DEMOGRAPHIC  
DIVIDEND



*Child marriage is rooted in, and perpetuates, a lack of value placed on girls.*

*A person who marries later is more likely to stay in school, work, and reinvest income into her or his family.*

### → The situation

Child marriage is common in parts of the region, in particular in the Balkans and Turkey, and appears to be on the increase in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Reliable data is hard to come by, as child marriage is generally illegal, often practiced informally, and therefore not officially registered.

### → Why is it important?

Child marriage is harmful to girls and limits their prospects in life. Getting married early generally means the girls have to leave school, in particular if they get pregnant. This severely restricts their ability to fulfil their potential. And what often begins as a forced arrangement, in many cases leads to exploitation and violence in the households they end up in. Early marriage also often means early child-bearing, with all the additional risks associated for the teenage mother and her baby.



### → Leaving no-one behind

Intersecting with social exclusion, tradition, poverty and geographic isolation, child marriage is more common among rural communities and among some minority groups, especially Roma. In Serbia, for example, 57% of Roma women were married before age 18 (compared to less than 7% in the overall population); 17% even before age 15<sup>1</sup>.

### → What needs to be done?

We need far greater engagement in challenging people's attitudes about child marriage and, more broadly, the status of women and girls. Without this grassroots engagement, including with faith leaders, little will change, and large numbers of girls will continue to see their futures cut off by child marriage.



<sup>1</sup> Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, UNICEF, 2014.



SCHOOL EMPLOYMENT ADULT MARRIAGE/HEALTHY CHILDREN SECURITY OF PLACE WORK-LIFE BALANCE LIFELONG LEARNING WEALTH/CHILD INVESTMENT SECURE OLD-AGE

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND



Photo: UNFPA/Tayfun Dalkılıç

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# Teenage pregnancy

“I want to be grown up, I don’t want to marry young. I want to have two children, a girl and a boy”

**Azize, 10, is from Şanlıurfa in southeastern Turkey.** She spends most of the year away from home because her parents work as migrant farm workers. Azize helps with taking care of her siblings, cleaning the tent they live in, and many other household duties. But whenever there is time she goes to the temporary school now set up in the tent camp. Her father and her mother, who was 15 when Azize was born, both want her to get a good education, whatever it takes. Azize wants to become a doctor one day.



CHILD MARRIAGE TEENAGE PREGNANCY REPEAT PREGNANCIES CHILD ILLNESS & DEATH MATERNAL MORBIDITY INFORMAL WORK INSECURITY & DISPLACEMENT INSECURE OLD-AGE

MISSED DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND



# Early child-bearing perpetuates poverty across generations.

## BIRTHS PER 1,000 WOMEN AGES 15-19



### → The situation

Although teenage pregnancy is on the decline in this region, many more girls still get pregnant and give birth when they are teenagers compared to their peers in Western Europe (see graph). In Azerbaijan and Georgia, the countries in the region most affected by adolescent pregnancy, the teenage fertility rate is about six times higher.

### → Why is it important?

Early child-bearing is associated with higher health risks for both the mother and the baby. Globally, pregnancy and childbirth complications are the second most common cause of death among 15 to 19-year-olds. Teenage pregnancy also often negatively affects the girls' prospects in life, as many drop out of school and have difficulties finding a job. In many cases, early child-bearing perpetuates poverty and social exclusion across generations.

### → Leaving no-one behind

Some population groups are disproportionately affected by teenage pregnancy. This includes married adolescents (see *Child Marriage*), adolescents from lower income groups or from rural areas, out-of-school youth, and linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities including Roma. In Serbia, for example, the teenage birth rate among Roma is 157, more than seven times the national rate of 22.



### → What needs to be done?

As quality school-based sexuality education rarely exists in the region, introducing such programmes in schools across the region, along with youth-friendly services, is one important way of empowering teenagers to make informed choices and avoid unintended pregnancies. And where teenage pregnancy is the result of child marriage, stronger measures to combat this harmful practice must be put in place (see *Child Marriage*).





Photo: UNFPA Kyrgyzstan

## Employment

“In the future I want to be a policewoman. Because the police keep order. And I like their uniform”

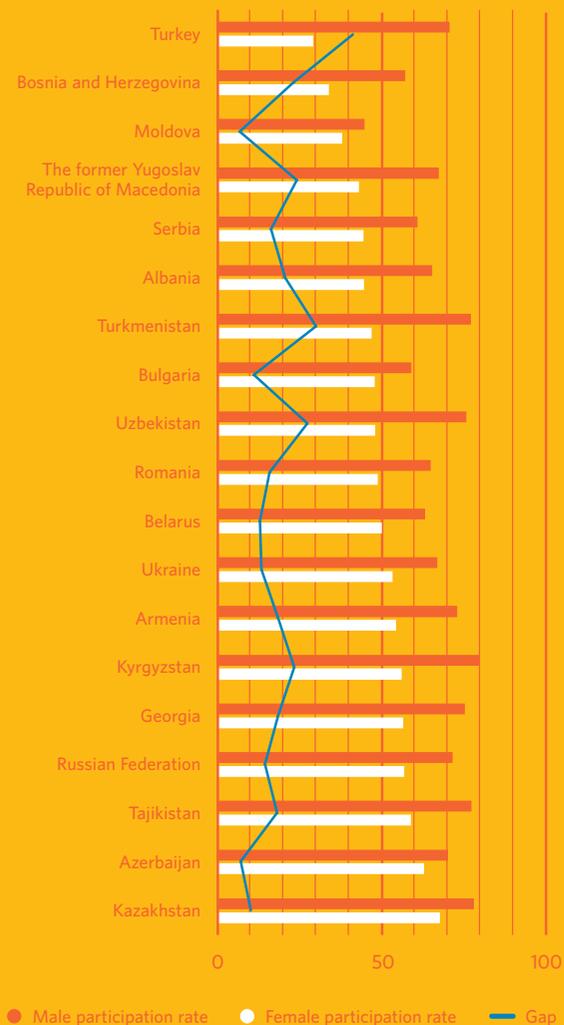
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**Akak, 10, is from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.** She lives with her father and older brother. Akak goes to school and also helps her father who has a stand at the bazaar. She visits the Centre for Child Protection every day to get food.



# When more women work, economies grow.

## LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION, MALE & FEMALE, %



Source: The World Bank. Data for 2014.

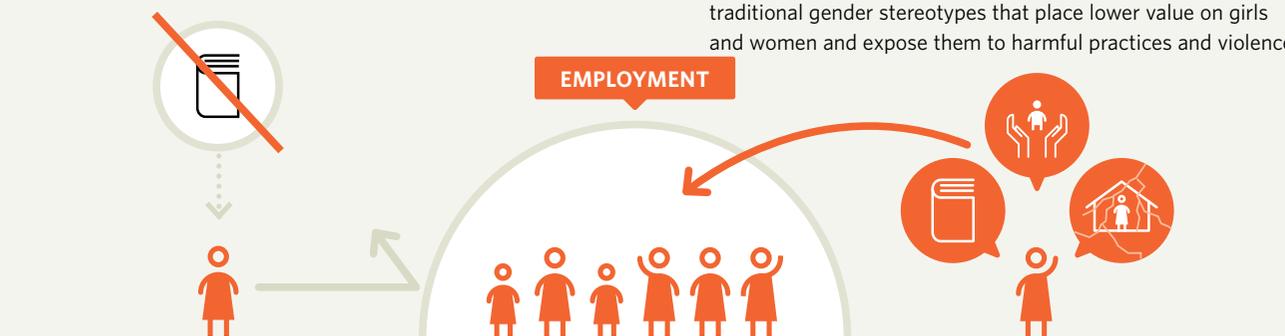
### → The situation

Although girls often do better in school than boys in this region (see *Education*), there is a clear reverse gender gap when it comes to employment. Far fewer women than men are in formal employment in all countries of the region (see *graph*). The gap is largest in Turkey, where only 30% of women are in the workforce. In contrast, women's labour force participation is relatively high - in several cases above the OECD average of 51% - in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and parts of Central Asia, a legacy of the Soviet Union's efforts to include women in the workforce.



### → Leaving no-one behind

Women with low levels of education are more likely to be excluded from the labour market. In Turkey, for example, large-scale migration to the cities meant that many unskilled women formerly working in agriculture are now unable to take up jobs, as the type of work they can get does not pay enough to afford help with childcare and housework.<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Female labor force participation in Turkey: Trends, Determinants and Policy Framework, The World Bank, Turkey State Planning Organisation, 2009.

### → Why is it important?

When more women work, economies grow. Studies show that an increase in female labour force participation results in faster economic growth. And as populations age, increasing the share of women in the workforce helps mitigate the impact of a shrinking labour force. But the effects of traditional gender norms, lack of family-friendly work environments, and traditional gender roles keep many women confined to childcare and housework (see *Work-life balance*).



### → What needs to be done?

Investing in the education and employment opportunities of girls and young women, and making affordable childcare available, are key factors for increasing women's labour force participation. Paid parental leave also is crucial, but should not be too long because it can otherwise keep women out of the labour market. This needs to go hand in hand with dismantling traditional gender stereotypes that place lower value on girls and women and expose them to harmful practices and violence.



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DEMOGRAPHIC  
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Photo: UNFPA Moldova

## Work-life balance

“I would like to have a career”

**Tina, 10, is from Chisinau, Moldova.**

Both of her parents work: her mother as an accountant at a research institute and her father as an engineer. Tina spends a lot of time with her 22-year-old aunt and one day wants to become a dressmaker and open her own shop. She would like to have two children when she is grown up.



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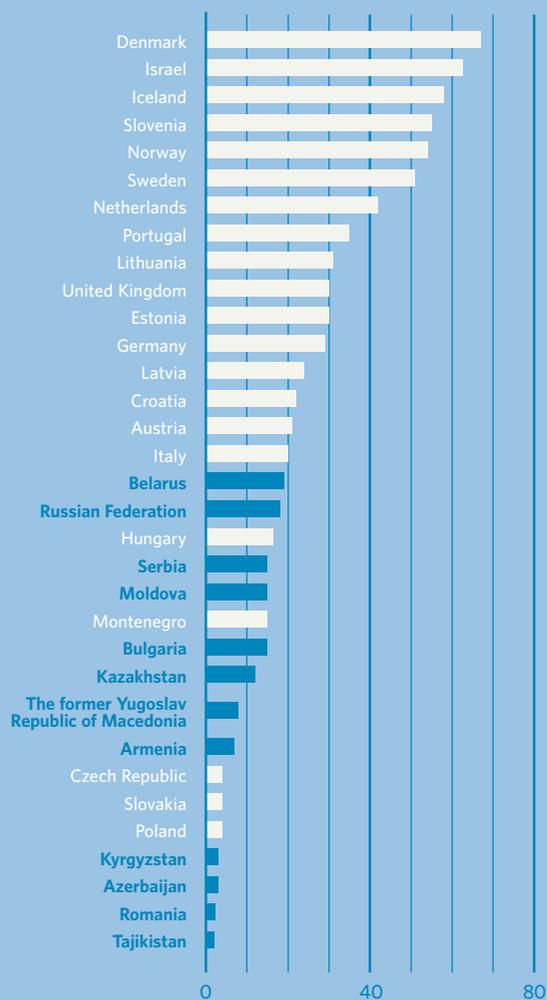
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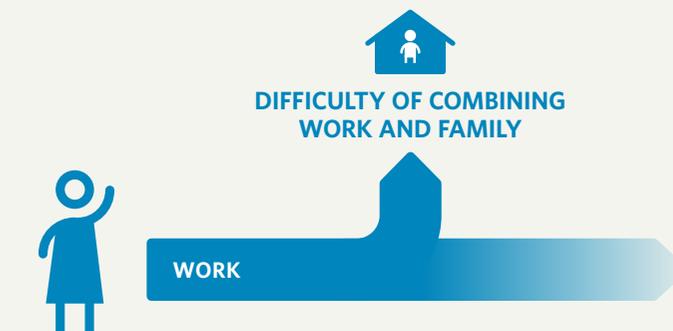
# Child care

## ENROLMENT OF UNDER 3-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN IN CHILD CARE, 2012



### → The situation

Although girls and young women in this region are generally well educated (see *Education*), many of them either never enter the labour market or drop out soon (see *Employment*). This is often due to the difficulty of combining work and family, as social norms put pressure on women to stay at home, childcare services are rare and expensive, and parental leave arrangements are insufficient.



### → Leaving no-one behind

Many families, in particular poorer ones, do not have access to childcare services, as many facilities in the region have closed since the 1990s and others have introduced or increased their fees. As a result, enrolment rates are very low (see *chart*). Parental leave arrangements also disadvantage poorer families: although both parents can take leave in most countries, fathers' leave is generally only partially paid or not paid at all.



### → Why is it important?

The high level of education among girls and women presents a huge potential for the region's social and economic development. But this potential is largely squandered if policies are not in place to allow women (and men) to balance child-rearing and pursuing their careers. Enacting such policies also helps address concerns over population ageing and shrinking, as it makes it easier for couples to actually have the number of children they desire. Currently, many couples in the region have fewer children than they wished.

## Women are highly educated in the region but this potential risks being squandered.

### → What needs to be done?

Work-life policies should ensure that parental leave can be shared, and is taken up, by both parents, and that people have access to affordable quality childcare. This must be part of broader efforts to dismantle traditional gender roles and labour division between men and women.



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Photo: UNFPA/Denys Panchenko

## Security of place

“The war needs to stop”

**Olya, 10, is from Donetsk, Ukraine.**

She was forced to leave, together with her parents, when the regular shelling of the city began in 2014. For a while, the family did not have anywhere to stay and moved from one place to another. Eventually, local NGOs helped Olya’s father to find a job, and the family was able to get an apartment to live in. Olya goes to school and her favorite subject is history.



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# Refugees and internally displaced people

## REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE AS A RESULT OF CONFLICT OR VIOLENCE IN EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA



Source: IDMC, UNHCR, end-2015.  
Only countries with over 1,000 refugees or IDPs.

### → The situation

Millions of people in the region are affected by humanitarian emergencies sparked by conflict and natural disasters. Fighting in eastern Ukraine has displaced large numbers of people, and many more have fled to Turkey and other parts of the region from Syria and other countries devastated by war. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis.

### → Why is it important?

Placing the safety and health of girls and women at the centre of humanitarian responses is important because their specific needs and vulnerabilities are often overlooked. The benefits are immediate, but they also carry over well into the future, as countries rebuild and people reclaim their lives and dignity.

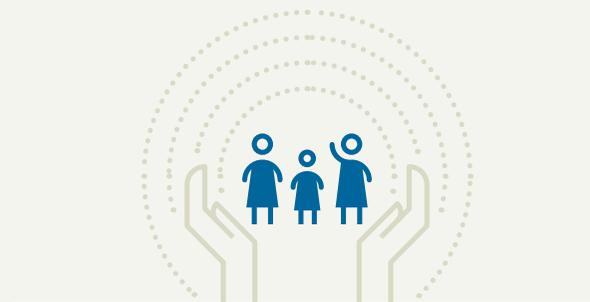


### → Leaving no-one behind

Crisis situations take a disproportionate toll on women and adolescent girls. They are at heightened risk of unintended pregnancy, maternal death and illness, sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation, as well sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

### → What needs to be done?

There needs to be a stronger focus, right from the onset of an emergency, on the specific needs of women and girls. But doing this only when disaster strikes is too late — countries also need to step up their emergency preparedness well in advance.



## Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis.



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Photo: UNFPA/Besfort Kryeziu

“I don’t have the conditions to go to school”

## Wealth/child investment

**Kejsi, 10, lives in a village in southern Albania.** Kejsi used to live in barracks under a bridge with her mother, who collects cans to earn a living. She now lives with her grandmother, but the family still does not have enough money to send her to school. Kejsi wishes her 15-year-old sister, who is married abroad, could come back and live with her. She wants to become a hairdresser when she is older.

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# Investing in the health and education of girls and young women is key for breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

IN PARTS OF THE REGION MANY PEOPLE LIVE WITH LESS THAN

USD 3.10 PER DAY



## → The situation

Although Kejsi's situation is not typical for the region, poverty and social exclusion is a reality for many people, in particular in parts of Central Asia and the South Caucasus where significant segments of the population live on less than USD 3.10 per day.<sup>1</sup> There are also pockets of poverty in other parts of the region, including among some minority groups.

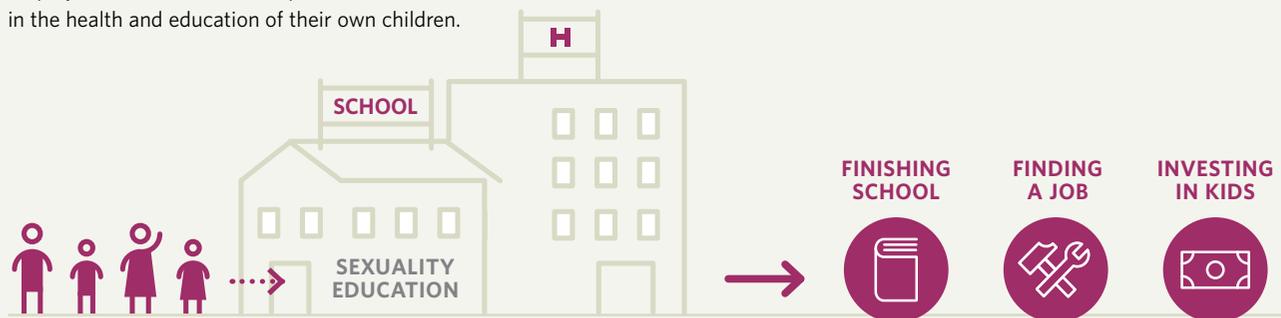


## → Why is it important?

Poverty and social exclusion limit the opportunities of young people, especially girls and young women, to fulfil their potential. They often get caught in a vicious cycle involving early marriage and pregnancy, early school drop-out and lack of job opportunities, which in turn further contribute to poverty and exclusion, passed on from generation to generation.

## → Leaving no-one behind

Making sure all girls and young women, including the most vulnerable, have the knowledge and means to protect themselves from unintended pregnancy is one of the key factors for breaking this cycle. It empowers them to decide when to have children, and how many. This increases their chances of getting a good education and finding employment, which in turn helps them invest in the health and education of their own children.



## → What needs to be done?

Investing in the health and education, including sexuality education, of girls and young women is key for breaking the cycle of poverty and exclusion, and for empowering the current generation of young people to invest in their own children.

<sup>1</sup> The World Bank, Poverty and Equity Database.



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Photo: UNFPA/Hayk Melkonyan

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## Gender-biased sex selection

“I was so happy I was going to have a child. Who cared at all if it was a boy or a girl?”

*Ani’s mother*

**Ani, 10, is from Yerevan, Armenia.**

Her father passed away several years ago. She and her little brother are being raised by her mother, Anahit, who runs a small café and crafts shop. Ani has lots of ideas for her professional future, from being an artist to becoming a programmer, but says she does not know yet which of the many options she will want to pursue when she is grown up.



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**Only by fostering a culture that places equal value on men and women will we see parents fully embracing all their children, no matter their sex.**

### SEX RATIO AT BIRTH IN SELECTED COUNTRIES/TERRITORIES

Country/Territory	Sex ratio at birth	Year
Azerbaijan	114	2016
Vietnam	113.8	2012
China	113.5	2015
Armenia	112	2015
Albania	110.9	2008-12
Montenegro	110.2	2005-12
India	110.1	2010-12
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Northwest)	110.1	2005-13
Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)	109.6	2008-12
Georgia	109	2015
South Korea	105.3	2013

Sex ratio at birth = male births per 100 female births. Based on birth registration data (estimates in China, India and Vietnam).

Source: Adapted and updated from: Preventing Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Issue Brief 4, 2015.

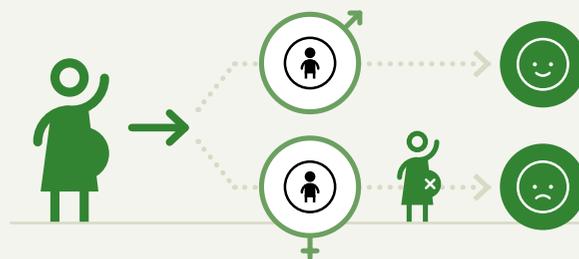
### → The situation

When Ani was born ten years ago, she – being a girl – was part of a minority. For every 100 girls born in Armenia at the time, there were 115 boys. Heavily skewed sex ratios like this are not uncommon in the region. They exist in the South Caucasus and in the Balkans where patriarchal societies place little value on girls and, as family sizes are shrinking, parents engineer the composition of their offspring to make sure at least one of their children is a boy. In fact, some countries in the region are among those with the world's highest sex-ratio-at-birth imbalances (see graph).



### → Leaving no-one behind

At the individual level, women in countries where sex selection is practised face intense pressure from family members and the wider community to give birth to a boy. They may face violence, especially psychological violence, if they fail to deliver a son. And they may be forced to undergo abortions – sometimes repeated ones – if they get pregnant with an unwanted girl.



### → Why is it important?

Sex ratio imbalances are not simply a demographic anomaly. They have tangible negative consequences. In Armenia alone, close to 100,000 girls will be “missing” by 2060 if current trends continue. This means many men will not find a partner; many may go abroad to establish a family. Neither scenario bodes well for countries already struggling with mass out-migration and population decline. Experts also expect a rise in crimes such as human trafficking, gender-based violence and forced marriage.



### → What needs to be done?

Decisive steps need to be taken to combat engrained gender inequalities and discrimination. This includes school education programmes, awareness-raising campaigns and empowering women at work and in public life. It also includes strengthening women's financial independence by reforming inheritance laws and pension and other social security schemes. Financial incentives for families with girls to counterweigh their perceived economic burden can also be effective. Only by fostering a culture that places equal value on men and women will we see parents fully embracing all their children, no matter their sex.



# 10 ESSENTIAL ACTIONS FOR THE 10-YEAR-OLD GIRL

## LAWS

- 1 Stipulate legal equality for girls, backed by consistent legal practice.
- 2 Ban all harmful practices against girls, and make 18 the minimum marriage age.

## SERVICE

- 3 Provide safe, high-quality education that fully upholds gender equality in curricula, teaching standards and extracurricular activities.
- 4 In working towards universal health care, institute a 10-year-old mental and physical health check-up for all girls.
- 5 Provide age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education when puberty begins.

## POLICY

- 6 Institute a rigorous and systematic focus on inclusion, acting on all factors rendering girls vulnerable to being left behind.

## INVESTMENTS

- 7 Track and close investment gaps in young adolescent girls.
- 8 Mobilize new funds for mental health, protection and reducing unpaid work that constrains options for girls.

## DATA

- 9 Use the 2030 Agenda data revolution to better track progress for girls, including on sexual and reproductive health.

## NORMS

- 10 Engage girls, boys and all the people around them in challenging and changing gender discriminatory norms.



Delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled

### United Nations Population Fund

Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia  
Istanbul, Turkey

[eeca.unfpa.org](http://eeca.unfpa.org)  
[eecaro.office@unfpa.org](mailto:eecaro.office@unfpa.org)