



BENDING THE BOW

Targeting Women's Human Rights
and Opportunities

OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
NETWORK WOMEN'S PROGRAM

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MISSION

The Network Women's Program of the Open Society Institute promotes the advancement of women's human rights, gender equality, and empowerment as an integral part of the process of democratization. The Program encourages, supports, and initiates gender-inclusive projects in the countries of the Soros foundations network.

The Women's Program seeks to raise public awareness of gender issues, influence policymakers to develop gender-sensitive policies, and eradicate violations of women's rights. It works to create effective and sustainable women's movements, promoting exchange and cooperation among women's organizations locally, nationally, and internationally.

Open society cannot exist without measurable and accountable responsibility for gender equity and diversity. Neither can it exist without the full participation of women in the solving of political, economic, and social problems.



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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

WITHOUT WOMEN, DEMOCRACY FAILS

This publication reflects on the first four years of the Network Women's Program (NWP) of the Open Society Institute. We hope that it explains not only what has become possible because of funding, but also offers insight into the way a unique network operates. This publication is by no means comprehensive. However, it does provide in-depth coverage of areas where our network had the most success as well as country essays, based on consultants' reports and Women's Program strategies, that give a brief, general overview of work on the ground.¹

Over four years, the Soros foundations network has become one of the most consistent, flexible, and responsive funders of women's movements in Central and Eastern Europe, the countries of the former Soviet Union, and Mongolia. NWP is proud to have helped put the perspectives of the region's women on the map of the international women's movement and to foster their participation in arenas in which global agendas are formulated.

Looking back to when NWP began, it is difficult to imagine that only two foundations had explicit programs to support women's issues: Poland's Stefan Batory Foundation and the Open Society Foundation for Albania. In addition, the Fund for an Open Society–Yugoslavia supported women's issues in all its programs. Yet, the Soros foundations network overall was not an ally of emerging postsocialist women's movements. Clearly, there was a missing component in its open society mission.

Two Bosnian girls play in the 16th century Alifakovac Turkish cemetery overlooking Sarajevo, 1994.

The Network Women's Program's beginning was a journey into unknown territory. In September 1997, NWP convened its First Forum to create a common vision. Over 140 participants—representatives of 28 Soros foundations, women's studies scholars, regional and international leaders of women's NGOs, international donors, and United Nations representatives—helped define the Program's priorities.

There was no recipe for creating a successful program or network, or fulfilling our mission within an institutional framework based on the autonomy of the Soros foundations. The independent status of the foundations was both a challenge and a potential asset. We realized that the Soros foundations could become a unique resource for the development of women's movements in the region. In order to succeed, we had to avoid "top-down" solutions—to negotiate within a structure and mandate that encouraged change, but did not impose it.

Initially, NWP had only a narrow consultative status with no financial incentives to offer. With the December 1997 decision of the OSI leadership to expand the Program's mandate, NWP acquired funds for "matching" the Soros foundations' commitments to women's programs. By 2000, all Soros foundations (with the exception of Hungary) had strategies for women's empowerment in place and had worked with NWP. Though the number of grants made in each of the 26 countries was relatively small, the Soros network as a whole became the biggest funder for women's movements in the region. Between 1997 and 2000, NWP and the women's programs of the Soros foundations infused over \$9 million into the region for women's issues.

Several factors have supported the rapid and successful development of NWP. These include the commitment of OSI leadership, intensive work with Soros foundations and regional directors, strong collaborations with other network programs, and the personal commitment of an extraordinary team of

foundation Women's Program coordinators who serve as NWP liaisons.

Over time, the network of Women's Program coordinators (WPCs) began to act as a major program design, implementation, and evaluation body. The WPC community represents an essential element in the methodology of NWP operations. This network of committed women and men redefined the traditional role of the foundations' program coordinators, becoming proactive advocates for women's agendas. Their commitment and vision enable NWP to fulfill its mission.

Appreciating four years of work, we must be realistic about the sustainability of women's movements. Overall, these movements and institutions still need ongoing commitment from donors. At the same time, many major donors are pulling back, due to "fatigue" and changing global priorities.

OSI itself is going global, which means there are new challenges. Yet change also creates new opportunities. Contributing to global agendas, the networks in OSI's traditional region will link to global women's networks. For the global women's community, ongoing network-building and international linkage have been especially underfunded. NWP's experience suggests that supporting women's networks pays off, and we will work on bringing this message to the international arena.

The mission of building gender-inclusive democracies is far from being fulfilled. We are still at the beginning of the road to creating truly inclusive open societies. As part of the funding community, we must continue to advocate for increasing resources for women's empowerment. As a part of the global women's movement, we must ensure that women's voices are a vital part of global politics. Simply put, if women are excluded from democracy, democracy fails.

— Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck
Director, Network Women's Program

i. In 2000-2001, NWP undertook a comprehensive Documentation and Evaluation Project. An innovative participatory methodology, designed and implemented by Strategic Philanthropy, Inc., permitted in-depth analysis of each foundation's work. All quotations not directly cited come from the Documentation and Evaluation Project country reports..





WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the number of women in the government and the work force has declined dramatically during the past decade. The message behind the decline is often an old one: a woman's place is in the home taking care of children.

In response, however, many women are sending out the message that their place is wherever they want it to be. They are organizing to secure political, social, and economic equality in the region's emerging democracies. They are using international human rights principles and laws to advance their rights and opportunities, and they are forcing more and more countries to recognize that women's human rights must be part of the discourse of democracy.

The Network Women's Program is working to strengthen the capacity of women's human rights activists and to connect them to the international women's movement.

PHOTOS: "Women's Pre-election Campaign" to promote women's political participation, Belgrade, September 2000. Banner, upper far left, reads, "Your Vote, the Vote of Difference." Apron, near left, says, "Recipe for Democracy."



The Women's Program is committed to empowering women leaders who will advocate for gender equality in the political process, in the labor force, and throughout society.

THE SILENCING OF WOMEN'S VOICES

In 1994–95, women from around the world mobilized to participate in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Beijing marked the beginning of the struggle of the newly independent women's groups emerging in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to make their voices heard within the global women's movement.

At previous UN conferences on women at Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and Nairobi in 1985, women from the region participated as representatives of official, government-sanctioned organizations. These women were a major presence, articulating alternatives and negotiating language that would shape international development priorities for the future.

At Beijing, the new women's groups faced numerous problems. First they had to find resources to get to the conference when state aid was not available. Then they had to learn how to influence the process of preparing and approving a final document so that it would reflect the negative consequences of transition on women's lives. The frustration they experienced in Beijing manifested itself in the landmark "Statement from the Non-Region," which was delivered by Polish women's rights advocate Wanda Novicka to the UN General Assembly.

Linked by the experience of communism and its collapse as well as efforts to establish democracy within new market economies, women from the region believed

they had vital perspectives to contribute on the issue of women's rights and gender equality. And they recognized that their missing voices at Beijing reflected an even greater challenge at the national and regional level: to find a way to play a leadership role in the task of building new societies along democratic lines. Women in Russia, already marginalized during the perestroika years that preceded the Soviet Union's break-up, were among the first to confront this challenge. "Democracy without women is no democracy," the slogan adopted by the First Independent Women's Forum in 1991, became a rallying cry for the Russian women's movement.

In countries throughout the region, many women are finding themselves once again relegated to hearth and home—and especially to motherhood. This reversion to traditional women's work suits the needs of economies that no longer have paying jobs for over half of their working-age populations. It is bolstered by reformers' efforts to portray women's equality under communism as a "forced emancipation" requiring their full participation in the labor force along with exclusive responsibility for household maintenance and family caregiving. In the 1990s, many women, agreeing with this perception, looked forward to escaping from what were often thankless, low-paying jobs and retiring to the domestic world.

DEMOCRACY WITH A MALE FACE

The development of democracy with a male face also reflects the dramatic decline in women's political participation following the collapse of communism. Across the region, the number of women in national parliaments tumbled when quotas for women were lifted in the first free elections. In the early 1980s, in Russia, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, roughly 33

percent of deputies to the Supreme Soviet were women. In 1991, the number had fallen to less than 6 percent.¹ In Belarus, only 3 percent of deputies elected in 1990 were women. The decrease was even greater in local bodies, especially in rural areas.²

Succeeding elections saw little change. In some countries, women's representation worsened. In Albania, for example, women's share of parliamentary seats fell from 36 percent before 1989 to 20 percent in 1991 and 7 percent in 1997. In other countries it improved, although only slightly. In Ukraine, women deputies represented a mere 4.2 percent in 1994 and only 5.6 percent in 1998. Women in Hungary saw their share of parliamentary seats fall to 7 percent in 1990 and rise to only 8.5 percent in the 1998 election.³ Women activists have advocated for quota systems in Georgia, Latvia, Poland, and other countries, but so far parliaments have rejected these proposals. The few women elected to parliamentary seats seldom advocate on behalf of women.

The situation is even worse with regard to high-level government positions: in only four countries did women make up more than 10 percent of government ministers in 1996, while in nine, including the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Romania, there were no women ministers at all. Some countries, notably Estonia, have taken steps to improve this situation, but prejudice against women's leadership still prevails. Upon announcing another all-male cabinet in 2000, Milos Zeman, prime minister of the Czech Republic, said: "When I compared possible female and male candidates, the males appeared in all cases as better experts."⁴ In countries where women did occupy ministerial positions, they were usually those of health, culture, or social welfare, where they command few, if any, resources. Placing women in such positions also reinforces gender stereotypes.

In short, as a recent report by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, *Women 2000*, makes clear, women are not participating at the leadership level in emerging democracies and women's rights are not part of the agenda. Women's absence from the policymaking process diminishes efforts to reform economic, social, and legal systems. Enduring gender biases have contributed to the failure to revise outdated employment laws, modify health care fees to ensure equal access for women, and adopt enforcement laws on gender-based violence.

Sonja Licht, president of the Fund for an Open Society—Serbia, believes that emerging democracies will not be open and stable until women with a gender equality agenda occupy senior policymaking positions. Recent geopolitical events in the Balkans and Central Asia only underscore Licht's contention that "a crucial part of global security is, by definition, human security." The human security framework requires the kinds of policy and budget shifts that are very often advocated by women.

In the short-term, the situation calls for strong women leaders, backed by a core of local advocacy groups and experts, who can propose gender-informed legislation, monitor violations of women's human rights, mobilize public opinion, and demand redress in legal and political realms. The rapidly expanding NGO sector is the one place where women are active on an equal basis with men. To the extent that governments in the region have made any progress toward implementing gender equality, the *Women 2000* report concludes, it is the result of the work of individual women and women's NGOs.

Women's rights advocates face tremendous challenges. Constitutions in almost every country include the principle of gender equality and forbid discrimination on the basis of sex, yet few define

discrimination and too little case law exists to provide a working definition. Monitoring and implementation structures are also lacking.

EMPOWERING WOMEN: HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERSHIP TRAINING

One of the most significant achievements of the global women's movement over the past decade has been to convince the countries of the world that women's rights are human rights. This recognition has made it imperative that women's concerns be part of any national development agenda. Yet women's experience has shown that gender equality and women's human rights must be demanded and fought for at every level.

The Women's Program has made it a priority to create programs that enable women to use the human rights framework for effective advocacy. With Women, Law and Development International (WLDI) and Human Rights Watch, the Program established the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women, engaging NGO leaders from 22 countries (plus Kosovo) in an 18-month program for emerging women's movements. The program followed the framework of the manual *Women's Human Rights Step by Step: A Practical Guide to Using International Human Rights Law and Mechanisms to Defend Women's Human Rights*, published by WLDI and Human Rights Watch in 1997. In a series of three week-long training sessions, participants mastered the concepts and skills needed to implement effective human rights projects, then worked in teams to identify goals and strategies for executing projects.

With technical assistance visits from WLDI, office equipment, Internet access, and e-mail linkages with other participants made available through OSI's Internet

Program, the teams initiated a range of projects—from drafting antiviolenence legislation to demanding equal access to health care to confronting labor market discrimination. They conducted surveys and research, documented human rights violations, and launched public awareness campaigns. They introduced thousands of people in different countries to the concepts of women's human rights and gender equality as well as the mechanisms needed to implement them.

Participants in the program had the invaluable experience of working with and learning from internationally acknowledged experts in women's human rights. A consultant to the Women's Program in Azerbaijan noted that as a result of participation in the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women, "a significant number of women advocates have emerged in Azerbaijan. Women who participated in these programs have not only increased their legal literacy, faced challenges, and acquired new advocacy knowledge and skills, but also gained feelings of self-confidence and mutual support that reinforce them morally in troublesome living situations." Participants from many countries created national NGOs devoted to women's human rights; all had the opportunity to participate as equal partners in international networks advocating for women's human rights.

Nicoleta Bitu, a Romani rights activist, introduced program participants to the problem of increasing violence and discrimination against Roma as well as the role of Romani women in their own communities and the larger society. She organized women from Romani communities in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Macedonia to participate in an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) meeting in June 1999. In September, Bitu presented the first report on the situation of Romani women in Europe to the

Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsy Issues of the Council of Europe.

Armed with new knowledge and self-confidence, women's human rights fellows are introducing human rights concepts to women in their countries and advocating on the international level. The leadership training helped Yevgeniya Kozyreva to produce alternative "shadow reports" on women's status in Kazakhstan. She presented them at the June 2000 United Nations Beijing +5 meeting and at hearings during her country's review by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in January 2001. The Committee monitors compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, one of the key conventions on women's human rights. "It has given me the possibility to see the world as a whole," said Kozyreva of the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women. "And to see our local problems as a part of the universal."

In January 2002, Fellow Elena Mashkova, director of the NGO Femina in Naberezhnye Chelny, in the Russian Republic of Tatarstan, also came to the United Nations to monitor the Russian government's report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Several years' work on Russian women's human rights informed Mashkova's analysis. Adapting the materials to local contexts, Mashkova and her team conducted human rights training for women in Tatarstan and then for women in the Privolzhsky Federal District. Mashkova and Kozyreva are part of a major effort to empower women in the region with knowledge of their human rights.

WOMEN'S DETERIORATING ECONOMIC STATUS

While teams addressed the entire range of human rights issues, the majority focused on the critical problem of women's deteriorating economic status and the lack of accountability on the part of either the state or the private sector. Eight teams (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, Russia, and Yugoslavia) addressed the problems of widespread labor market discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. Three teams (Albania, Kazakhstan, and Russia) addressed the inadequacy of state-provided social benefits, including pensions. The second area on which teams (Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) concentrated was that of violence against women and the lack of government accountability for ending it.

"Poverty and violence are two dominant phenomena in our society; they are deeply and indisputably connected," the Yugoslavia team concluded. For this reason, the team's initial strategy of raising awareness about domestic violence shifted during the war and bombing campaign of 1999 to focus on women's economic security. Perceiving that the country's economic, political, and social crisis would intensify in coming years and that violence against women would increase, they advocated for the broader empowerment of women. "We believe that one important condition for a violence-free life for women," they said, "is the realization of their economic and social rights, and especially their economic independence."⁵

A major problem contributing to women's deteriorating economic status is the failure of existing legal measures on gender equality to prevent discrimination against women in employment. In post-communist countries, women seeking employment are

constantly asked questions about marital status, family obligations, and their plans for children. Employment advertisements are gender-specific. Qualifications for men pertain to education and experience, while those for women often involve age and appearance. Some employment discrimination reflects existing protectionist legislation, but most represents a new effort to avoid the costs of maternity leave or other family-related health benefits.

All of these attitudes and practices characterize the labor market in Lithuania, where women constitute 54 percent of the labor force. Women over 40 years old find it almost impossible to secure jobs since physical attractiveness is usually preferred over skills. Young women offered jobs are often forced to sign declarations stating that they will not get pregnant during the time of their employment.

Such discrimination continues despite passage by the Lithuanian Parliament of the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men in December 1998, the first of its kind in the region. The legislation mandated the appointment of an ombudsperson to investigate cases of discrimination in both the public and private sector. The first appointee is Ausrine Burneikiene, a close ally of the Women's Program.

So far, Lithuania is the only Central and Eastern European country that has an ombudsperson specifically dealing with gender issues.⁶ The introduction of this office and its practical work provides a positive example for the region and hope for improvement in the status and protection of women's rights in Lithuania.

Lithuanian participants in the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women program worked with a labor law specialist to determine that the country's labor law lacked sufficient enforcement mechanisms, especially in light of a legal culture that

viewed men as wage earners and women as homemakers. A newspaper article about the team's findings caused an uproar and prompted a national debate. Labor issues comprise a significant portion of the complaints received by Ombudsperson Burneikiene.

There has been some progress in monitoring violations of women's rights, especially in countries seeking membership in the European Union. In the Czech Republic, for example, an amendment to the Civil Procedure Code shifts the burden of proof in gender discrimination cases from the employee to the employer. The same is true in Hungary, where laws now allow people to bring suits against an employer and require the employer to prove absence of discrimination. However, in practice, judges seldom uphold these new requirements.

In other countries, the state not only fails to enforce employment laws but also makes it difficult for individuals to do so. In countries of the former Soviet Union, for example, plaintiffs cannot bring charges against an employer but must lodge a criminal complaint against an individual civil servant, which in effect excuses state agencies from being held responsible. This highlights the extent to which gender discrimination still permeates all institutions of society. At a time when laws and their interpretation are taking on greater importance in the lives of individuals, it also shows how critical it is that women participate fully in the process of restructuring the laws.

THE DISPARITY BETWEEN RIGHTS AND PRACTICES

The vast majority of women, including many who are NGO leaders in their countries, are unaware of equal

rights laws and how to use them to address the great disparity between legal rights and existing practices. In Uzbekistan, for example, the “average woman” has a secondary education and five to six children. She is economically dependent on her parents, her husband, or the relatives of her husband, and must focus on housework and child rearing. The human rights training team found that women in Uzbekistan seldom understood even the “basic principles of democracy.” Custom dictates, they pointed out, that “an Uzbek woman should be submissive and an obedient slave for her husband, his relatives, and the keeper of the family fire.”

Participants from Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries commented that the training projects were their first exposure to the issue of women’s human rights in their countries. Most teams from Central Asia devised projects to increase public awareness of women’s human rights. Facing significant personal risk, the Turkmenistan team, for example, created a center to provide information to women about their legal and other rights.

A measure of the program’s success in empowering women leaders was apparent in the personal comments of many participants, who had always assumed that only lawyers could use national and international laws to advocate for women’s human rights. The experience of implementing a human rights strategy helped them realize that they too can master the knowledge and tools to work on behalf of women’s human rights.

Sharing experiences with other women was inspiring. “When we are in our own countries, we think it is hopeless,” said Nato Shavlakadze of the Peoni Women’s Club in Georgia. “But because there were examples from other countries and we spoke with people from these countries, we were empowered.”

NEXT STEPS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY

At the completion of the human rights training program, the Women’s Program supported its partners, WLDI and Human Rights Watch, in publishing a collection of case studies, *Becoming an Advocate Step by Step: Women’s Experiences in Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States*. The case studies describe the challenges and triumphs of women becoming human rights advocates, working to bring about legal and institutional changes in ways that promote and protect women’s basic human rights in countries throughout the region. The Women’s Program supported translations of the practical guide, *Women’s Human Rights Step by Step*, in cooperation with Soros foundations in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Mongolia, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine.

“We trained women and opened their eyes to the fact that their destiny is in their hands,” said Rosetta Aitmatova of the Women’s Support Center in Kyrgyzstan. “They have to fight for their rights instead of sitting and waiting for the government to help them.”

In 2000, Beijing +5, the UN General Assembly’s five-year review of progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action, provided an historic opportunity for women in the region to insert themselves into the UN review process that endeavors to hold governments accountable for past, present, and future commitments to women. The review process also offered a strategic opportunity to raise awareness about women’s human rights and gender equality within every country in the region.

The Women’s Program sponsored a small grants competition for NGOs to conduct campaigns to

implement the Beijing Platform for Action in their countries and raise public awareness nationally. NGOs from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Poland, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia used these grants to carry out media campaigns, launch public awareness events and performances, and reach out to new constituents. In some cases, they also worked across national and ethnic boundaries. During the refugee crisis in Macedonia, for example, the Women's Program coordinated a dialogue among a network of 30 women's groups representing several ethnic identities and promoted models of cross-ethnic cooperation through the media. Efforts at dialogue continue despite the tensions among the country's Macedonian and Albanian citizens.

With the support of the Women's Program, women activists attended each of the Beijing +5 preparatory meetings as well as the special session in New York. Participating Soros foundations held monthly NGO Beijing Prep roundtable meetings for national agenda-setting. In all, some 90 women sponsored through the Soros foundations network participated in the Beijing +5 meetings. At every meeting, women alerted their sisters from other regions to the experiences and concerns of women in their countries, making sure they would no longer belong to a nonregion in the eyes of the international women's movement.

The Women's Program has realized its goal of empowering a strong regional group of women's human rights advocates and helping them to integrate a regional perspective into the agenda of the international women's movement. Future work will focus on assisting this group, as well as other advocates, in taking on new challenges.

The Women's Program will support the development of regional and subregional women's initiatives designed to provide advocacy tools to as many people as possible in the campaign for women's equality and basic human rights. On the national level, the Women's Program and participating Soros foundations will continue to support a wide range of initiatives to increase women's civic participation—through voter education or participation in political activism and elections.

The Women's Program will continue to support advocates' efforts to hold governments accountable for their commitments to women's full human rights. Within the next decade, the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, and the Beijing Conference on Women will all have 10-year review processes, during which both advocates and opponents of gender equality and women's human rights will mobilize to advance their agendas.

An immediate priority is to help women's human rights activists take advantage of the gender equality requirements and monitoring mechanisms in European Union (EU) treaties and directives as well as the EU accession process, which provide a significant but challenging opportunity for women's rights advocates. In March 1998, the European Union formally launched the accession process, involving applicant countries in the Soros foundations network: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. As the 1998 Report of the Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men clearly states and European Social Affairs Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou, the director-general, stresses: "There is no accession without equal opportunities between women and men."⁷

The European Union has an important role to play in

promoting equal opportunities in these accession countries, where gender equality is still not considered an integral part of democracy. Compliance with EU principles on gender equality should be a major criterion for countries seeking membership. However, for advocates in these countries, the absence of enforcement mechanisms against gender discrimination is a crucial issue. “Almost all accession countries have commissions or departments on equal opportunities, but, with very few exceptions, they hardly understand the concept, not to mention the initiatives they may take or the competence they have to carry out activities in this respect.”⁸

The Women’s Program is committed to making sure that candidate countries promote equal opportunity principles. Even though equality between women and men is guaranteed in the constitutions of all these countries, discrimination persists in the application and implementation of equal rights. Operating regionally, the Women’s Program benefits from its unique position to advocate for and monitor the extent to which the EU accession process seriously

considers issues of gender equality and women’s rights. An immediate priority is to provide women’s human rights activists with tools to effectively utilize the EU’s gender equality requirements and monitoring mechanisms, as well as the accession process itself, to help secure equal opportunities and women’s rights. A joint initiative by the Women’s Program and the Soros Foundation–Romania, the Equal Opportunities For Women and Men in the European Accession Program will equip the EU candidate countries and their NGO communities with detailed reports reviewing the status of compliance to equal opportunity criteria.

With the support of the Women’s Program and working in partnership with regional advocacy networks, women’s human rights advocates from the postcommunist countries will be heard even more widely in the coming years. Women will raise awareness on gender equality and human rights standards and increase national, regional, and international pressure on all countries in transition to allow women to take their rightful places in the building of open, democratic societies.

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2. International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), *Women 2000: An Investigation into the Status of Women’s Rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States* (Vienna: IHF, 2000), 72.
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4. *New York Times*, 2/27/00.
5. Women, Law and Development International (WLDI), *Becoming an Advocate Step by Step: Women’s Experiences in Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States* (Washington, DC: WLDI, 2000).
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8. IHF, *Women 2000*, 17.



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*Kwiaty, uśmiechy, prezenty
a potem awantury, siniaki i ...*

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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women encompasses “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”¹ Violence against women can be seen as both a measure of women’s vulnerability and a critical social mechanism for maintaining women’s inequality.

Gender equality will never be realized as long as women live in fear of violence. For many countries, the transition to a market economy has exposed previously hidden gender-based violence, including domestic violence and rape, and fostered other kinds of gender violence, such as trafficking in women and forced prostitution. The alarming declines in the economic well-being of the region’s women contribute

PHOTOS: “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence” campaigns in Kazakhstan, Indonesia, and Poland in 2001. Upper left: Kazakh poster reads, “Stop!” Center and lower right: Polish campaign posters read, “Zero Tolerance for perpetrators who commit violence against women” and “Elizabeth R. Murdered by her husband, March 29, 2000.”



to the steady rise of violence against women in both the public and private spheres.

OUT FROM THE SHADOWS

One of the primary points of reference for the international women's movement, the Beijing Platform for Action charges governments to take active steps to eliminate violence against women, including raising public awareness of gender violence as a human rights issue, making women aware of their legal rights, sensitizing judicial and law enforcement personnel to gender violence, and providing shelter and services for survivors.

Governments in most countries in the region, however, have done little beyond acknowledging violence against women as an area of concern. Women are usually unaware of their rights under existing laws, which for the most part offer inadequate protection. Judicial and law enforcement officials, as well as medical and psychological professionals, operate within outdated frameworks that regard women as the cause of violence perpetrated against them. In addition, governments fail to adequately document gender-based violence and the response of the law enforcement system to its victims.

The antiviolence initiative of the Network Women's Program empowers women in the region to make all forms of violence against women, including trafficking, visible and recognized as a violation of women's human rights. In 1993, only a few countries, such as Poland, Russia, and Slovenia, had antiviolence services, mostly limited to hotlines and counseling. Today, women have organized in every country in the network to confront gender-based violence, providing safety and services to women who have experienced it and demanding government accountability for ending it.²

In Yugoslavia, for example, there are now more than 30 women's grassroots organizations dealing with domestic violence. Many of them have joined in a coalition to advocate for broader changes, including government accountability.³ Trafficking in women, which governments once denied, is now a concern of individual governments, as well as multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Violence against women is no longer ignored.

STOPPING TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN

The documentary film *Bought & Sold* opens in a Moscow living room, where a woman and a man are talking about a job opportunity abroad that she is considering. The man explains that the visa, the apartment, and transportation there and back will be paid so all she will have to buy is food. "Everything sounds good," she says. Then she adds: "But I have heard that a lot of girls go abroad and they never make it back."

Bought & Sold, produced by Gillian Caldwell and Steven Galster of Global Survival Network and supported by the Soros Documentary Fund, describes a two-year undercover investigation of trafficking in Russian women, as well as women from other former Soviet countries. Caldwell and Galster interviewed recruiters, pimps, health officers, counselors, trafficking experts, and Russian, Latvian, and Ukrainian women caught in the trafficking web. The women thought they were getting a chance for a new life abroad and instead found themselves working as indentured servants in the sex industry in countries such as Germany, China, Japan, Australia, and the United States.

The film broke the silence over this new phenomenon

by disclosing the elaborate methods used by international mafia networks to recruit and exploit thousands of young women from the region. In cooperation with Global Survival Network, the Women's Program helped to raise awareness of the issue among governments, NGOs, and the general public by screening and discussing the video at international conferences and organizing focused training sessions followed by a small grants program. It has been translated into several regional languages as well as English. The Women's Program also supported the publication and dissemination of *Crime & Servitude*, a report that accompanies the film as an educational and advocacy tool.

Trafficking in women is a new phenomenon in post-communist countries, which had no history of trafficking during Soviet times. By 1995, when Caldwell and Galster began work on their investigative film, trafficking had become a thriving practice in many of these countries, including Russia. Yet few people were aware that it was happening. Governments refused to acknowledge it as a problem, with many officials denying or trivializing its existence. Russia's interior minister said that Western feminists "help make a fuss about the issue" and "disseminate information that does not correspond to reality."⁴

The reality is that lack of work, gender and racial discrimination, desperate poverty, and the abandonment of state-funded safety nets force women to flee their countries to survive.

Typically women are deceived into thinking they are leaving for jobs as waitresses, dancers, or home companions. Many are young and especially vulnerable.

Once they discover that they have been deceived, women who have been trafficked have almost nowhere to turn. They have no knowledge of their rights in the foreign countries where they work. They owe large sums

to recruiting agencies and are unable to protect themselves against employers. Above all, they fear deportation, which would leave them destitute and prey to traffickers who go after them for unpaid debts. "My clients didn't earn any money," a counselor explained in *Bought & Sold*. Instead, 50 percent of their wages go to the recruiter or pimp, 50 percent to the bar owner. This is a modern form of slavery.

Organized crime networks dealing in trafficking operate in many countries and areas of Central and Eastern Europe, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, and Serbia as well as Russia.⁵ Advocates in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are now working on trafficking, demonstrating that the problem is spreading to Central Asia.

Governments are also complicit, as *Bought & Sold* demonstrates. Individuals in government provide protection, or "roofs." Masha, co-owner of a modeling agency trafficking in Russian women, said: "The best 'roof' is the government criminals. They take care of any problems from other 'roofs.'"

According to *Crime & Servitude*, many Russian mafia members are former employees of the Soviet security agency, the KGB. They combine their intimidation experience with high-level political and law-enforcement connections and ties to groups in Europe, the United States, and Israel.⁶ Thus, "traffickers in women from the countries of CIS . . . operate more and more openly, cynically and practically with impunity."⁷ Thus, curtailing the practice requires changes in national and international laws as well as transnational political cooperation. Above all, it demands "rethinking about the position of the trafficked person in the receiving country"⁸ : "A trafficked person must be treated not as a criminal but as a fully empowered human being."⁹

The Women's Program has encouraged educational campaigns in both sending and receiving countries about the perils and abuses involved in the trafficking of women. *Bought & Sold* has had an enormous impact. In 1997, CNN broadcast a special program using footage from the investigation. After seeing the film, the UN Human Rights Commission issued a finding on trafficking women for prostitution as a violation of Article 8 prohibiting slavery. The film's premiere at an international conference in Moscow in October 1997 resulted in front-page coverage in the Russian and international press. Following its showing in Ukraine in 1998, the Ukrainian Parliament outlawed the trade in human beings. The U.S. government uses it to sensitize INS and State Department officials as well as embassy and consulate personnel about the issue. In 2000, the U.S. Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protections Act.

Government action has come about as a result of constant pressure from women and women's NGOs. To support such efforts, in June 1998, the Women's Program and the Soros foundations joined with the Global Survival Network and the Global Fund for Women to sponsor a transnational training seminar in Budapest, "STOP Trafficking in Women." Addressing over 100 NGO representatives from 33 countries, Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, pledged to combat this global human rights crisis. The Women's Program provided funding to help NGOs in participating countries launch national antitrafficking campaigns.

As a result of the explosion in international attention to trafficking in women in the region, the Women's Program, having helped place the issue on the international agenda through strategic funding, has shifted to encouraging other donor agencies to continue funding this important work. A number of Soros

foundations in the region are supporting efforts in their countries.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Domestic violence, like trafficking, is hard to document in transition countries. The difficulty is not that it is new to the region, or denied by governments, but rather that it is so commonplace. In Kyrgyzstan, a survey of 1,000 women in Bishkek found that 89.2 percent had been abused—by husbands, partners, children, or relatives.¹⁰ In Ukraine, where according to available data nearly one woman in two was beaten in childhood, such violence is not seen as a problem, "because it is so widespread in both private and social environments that there is the impression that 'non-violent existence' is impossible."¹¹

Studies reporting a high prevalence of domestic violence in the countries of the region indicate that a woman's religious or ethnic group, age, social class, or level of education seems to matter little in terms of vulnerability to abuse.¹² Women's economic dependency appears to be the determining factor. In Albania, for example, 55.7 percent of housewives reported having been abused, compared to only 35.2 percent of women who worked outside the home.¹³ Often when women decide to leave home they become even more vulnerable. In Hungary, women who are most at risk are those who have declared their intention to file for divorce, and the highest percentage (57 percent) of abused women was among divorced women.¹⁴

In 1997 in Russia, according to Human Rights Watch, police had registered over 4 million men as potential abusers of family members, based on reports of prior abuse or threats. This remarkably high number may actually be an underestimate. Women face numerous obstacles in reporting domestic violence and

Domestic violence is hard to document. The difficulty is not that it is new to the region, or denied by governments, but rather that it is so commonplace.

rape, including indifference or hostility from authorities, the refusal of police to take statements or their failure to respond to emergency calls.¹⁵

Rape goes largely unreported across the region. The act of rape is surrounded by pejorative stereotypes: women ask for it, they provoke it by their dress or behavior, or they cry rape to take revenge on a man; normal men do not commit rape, and so on. In addition, reporting procedures, at the police station and again in the courts, are complicated and degrading. In most cases, if a woman reports being raped, she is regarded with suspicion and rarely believed; she lacks any form of police or court protection, leaving her vulnerable to retaliation—either from the offender or, in some cases, from members of her family, who feel she has brought them dishonor.

Another obstacle to women’s willingness to speak out about sexual violence is the reinstatement of the “traditional” male-dominated family throughout the region. Governments often collude with culture in this reinstatement. For example in 1997, the Polish government canceled a scheduled UNDP-assisted program to set up NGO-run crisis centers offering shelter, medical care, psychological help, and legal and economic assistance. The government declared flatly that “offering help to women and children outside their family home contributes to a break up of that family.”¹⁶

Traditional “family values” weigh heavily on women who have experienced domestic violence or rape in war

and conflict areas. After the conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo, women agonized over whether to report rapes, fearing that not only would they face personal and familial shame, but that their speaking out could be construed as a threat to the ethnic or nationalist agendas of victimized communities. Though rape has finally been recognized as a war crime, few individuals or governments have been held accountable.

CHALLENGING THE CULTURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

One of the most successful responses to violence is the creation of a broad support system: a network of hotlines, battered women’s shelters, crisis centers, and counseling and legal services. In November 1998, for example, the Women’s Program, working with participating Soros foundations, launched a Host-Visitor Exchange Program on gender-based violence that allowed experienced NGOs to share their knowledge, resources, and expertise with less experienced organizations.

Host countries for the six-month program included Bulgaria, Hungary, Mongolia, Russia, and Yugoslavia; visitors came from Albania, Armenia, Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. Visitors included domestic violence

activists, child support advocates, family planning specialists, human rights advocates, scholars, and journalists.

Host NGOs in Hungary and Russia conducted training programs on establishing volunteer hotlines, including counseling skills and media and public relations work. NGOs in Bulgaria, Mongolia, Russia, and Yugoslavia offered training in setting up shelters and developing support services for women who experience domestic violence, including legal and psychological counseling. In Mongolia, they shared skills in working with child victims of violence and with violent men. And in Russia, a psychological center for women offered an intensive psychological training program for people involved in counseling domestic violence survivors.

NGOs in a number of participating countries, including Croatia, Hungary, Poland, and Russia, have successfully set up networks of hotlines, shelters, and counseling centers. Networks are beginning to emerge in several Central Asian countries. Women in Uzbekistan are seeking ways to sustain women's shelters by linking them to micro-enterprise projects.

In many countries, those charged with the protection of women against gender-based violence, including judges, lawyers, police, and even medical personnel, share the gender stereotypes and assumptions of the general public and regard violence against women as a private matter. Police lack any special training and are often insensitive to the needs of women who have been beaten, raped, or abused.

Often, police are seen as part of the problem, taking advantage of victims rather than helping them. An NGO survey in Kazakhstan reported this incident: "I have a neighbor whose father drinks. When the girl called the district policeman for help, he came and asked her for a sexual service, in return for which he would detain her

father for a long time. How in this case should one appeal to a district policeman and to the police in general?"¹⁷

Such attitudes endure in countries and communities that condone violence against women as a part of daily life. In some places, the goal of the community is "to save the family." Women are told: "Go back to your husbands. Do you want to make your children orphans?"¹⁸ In many cases, society teaches women that they are at least partly responsible for provoking the violence against them. "Good wives" seldom get beaten. And when they do, it's excused as a sign of affection. As a Russian proverb puts it, "No beatings means there's no love."

The role of the community in condoning or combating gender-based violence has inspired a training program for practitioners and activists to shift responsibility for ending violence from the victim to the community. The Community Coordinated Response to Violence Against Women, developed in Duluth, Minnesota, focuses attention not on the behavior of the individual perpetrator or victim of gender-based violence, but on the way in which the police, courts, and human service providers respond to such cases and to the individuals involved. It conveys the message that the community as a whole will no longer tolerate domestic violence. This model, which is a winner of the Innovations in Government Award, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, has enabled literally hundreds of victims to free themselves from violent relationships in countries and communities worldwide.¹⁹

To bring this internationally recognized approach to countries of the region, the Women's Program and developers of the Community Coordinated Response designed a demonstration training seminar for teams

from 19 countries. Participants in the 1998 seminar helped to adapt the program in culturally and nationally appropriate ways.

Teams comprised women NGO activists, practitioners in the criminal and civil justice system (police officers, prosecutors, probation officers, judges), medical and human service providers, and community leaders. Participating countries included Albania, Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia.

At a follow-up seminar, 16 country teams presented their national strategy plans. Some teams, including those from Armenia and Tajikistan, focused on organizing the community toward meet dire needs, such as securing shelters for victims of violence. Others focused on changing the attitudes of police toward victims of gender-based violence. The Bulgarian team has worked with the regional police department to increase police sensitivity to and respect for women who have experienced gender violence. Some country teams worked for legislative or policy change: sensitizing women members of Parliament to domestic violence issues in Kyrgyzstan, lobbying the legislature for a new domestic violence law in Croatia, and working with the government on a conference and policy paper in Kazakhstan.

The Polish team pursued a multifaceted strategy, centered in Targowek, a district in Warsaw. They translated and used many of the Community Coordinated Response materials in all facets of their work. In addition to running a shelter and counseling service, the Women's Rights Center cooperated with police, prosecutors, and the district's social work agency. They held a forum on institutional cooperation that brought together police, prosecutors, judges, probation

officers, social work agencies, and NGOs. Ursula Nowakowska, director of the Women's Rights Center, noted, "As a result of the Budapest training and our own training based on the materials, the police and prosecutors' offices reevaluated their policy on domestic violence cases and implemented a new program. Police and prosecutors have started to play a more active role in tackling domestic violence cases. Now police officers have guidelines they should follow in case of domestic violence intervention."

"The main impact of our work, thus far," said Nowakowska, "was in convincing the police to intervene more seriously in domestic violence cases, to collect evidence and document cases more carefully." An evaluation of the project revealed "a big statistical difference concerning investigation of domestic violence incidents." According to Nowakowska, "there was a significant increase in the number of cases reported to the police and handled appropriately." The Polish team also initiated counseling work for perpetrators, an innovative approach for the region. Now courts are sending increasing numbers of men for treatment. In the legal arena, Polish antiviolence activists continue to press for the legal introduction and use of restraining orders but they can also see some progress in more sensitive and creative applications of existing laws to protect women and children.

ENGAGING THE MEDIA

After initial successes with the Community Coordinated Response, the Women's Program sought partnerships with other OSI programs to deepen its impact. The Women's Program and the Network Media Program provided support to extend gender-sensitive training sessions to educators and journalists in several

Before their matches, basketball and volleyball players walked around the court carrying a banner with the campaign message, “Show your strength but not on women.”

countries. In September 2000, with the Network Child Abuse Prevention Program, they convened a five-day training seminar on domestic violence and child abuse in Budapest. Teams from each country included one or more police officers, a prosecutor, activists working with abused women, and a journalist or media representative.

In addition to sessions for all participants on domestic violence and the community coordinated approach, the seminar featured a special training for police officers on how to work with abused children, and a parallel session for media representatives and women activists who work with abused women. Police learned how to improve their sensitivity in handling domestic violence calls along with practical models for conducting interviews with children in cases of child abuse and neglect, writing effective reports, and investigating charges of stalking and harassment. The activists learned how to facilitate educational sessions about domestic violence and child abuse as well as how to sensitize the media on these issues. The Women’s Program also reviewed and provided technical assistance to the Constitutional and Legal Policy Institute (COLPI) on a domestic violence curriculum they were developing for police training.

An emerging network of increasingly sophisticated antiviolence advocates in the region turned logically to the

next step—raising national awareness and challenging the culture of violence through media advocacy. After an initial pilot effort in 1999, the Women’s Program and the Network Media Program began to sponsor an annual grants competition for national public awareness campaigns, using all forms of media.

In 2000, the Program encouraged participants in the Community Coordinated Response program to take part in the international “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence” campaign conducted annually between November 25 (International Day Against Violence Against Women) and December 10 (International Human Rights Day). Initiated by the Center for Women’s Global Leadership in 1995, the campaign makes a crucial symbolic link by emphasizing that violence against women is a violation of human rights.

Participation of women’s NGOs in the region in the 16 Days campaign is helping to achieve one of the Women’s Program’s goals—to make women from the region visible once again in the international women’s movement as they are becoming more effective in their advocacy work. Croatia’s B.a.B.e. (Be Active. Be Emancipated.), one of the few women’s NGOs in the region to participate in the global campaign since its early days, is seeing the results of its persistent work. Sanja Sarnavka, a linguist who analyzes press clippings of B.a.B.e.’s antiviolence campaigns, sees a

“difference in how domestic violence issues were covered in Croatia five years ago. They are 200 percent better today.” Now mainstream media contact the organization in advance of the annual campaign to see which audiences and issues they are targeting. “If you take a look at media coverage from the 2001 campaign, you’ll see how serious the issue really is.”

In addition to the grants program, in May 2001, the Women’s Program added a workshop component to strengthen the skills and improve the quality of the media campaigns. Applicants with the best proposals for media campaign projects attended a workshop that included analysis of the effectiveness of the pilot projects/campaigns. The campaigns focused on changing attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate violence; motivating governments to develop and/or change policies, legislation, and practices to prevent violence against women and girls; and strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations to effectively advocate for and implement violence prevention programs.

Nebojsa Radic, one of the workshop trainers, said, “Participants were quick to embrace the basics of effective communication concepts. Advocacy campaign plans rewritten after the workshop had more clearly defined objectives and target audiences, leading to more effective campaigns.” The NGO League for Family from Montenegro is a good example of the workshop’s success. The campaign as originally planned would have consisted of a television show on violence against women. After the seminar, the NGO members rewrote their plan and organized a campaign focused on “macho” men. The campaign message, “Show your strength but not on women,” was delivered in places where men were most likely to receive it. For example, before their matches in Podgorica, players from the basketball and volleyball

teams walked around the court carrying a banner with the campaign message, while greeted by thousands of cheering men in the audience (see page 86 for photo).

In countries such as Slovakia, where national anti-violence awareness campaigns are new, advocates are making surprisingly swift progress. With their 16 Days campaign slogan—“Every fifth woman is battered”—the Slovakian NGO Fenestra garnered significant radio and TV coverage. Within a month after the launch of the campaign, Fenestra also received over 1,000 calls on its information support line. Laco Oravec of Fenestra said, “Our main success is that our society is slowly starting to understand and accept that domestic violence is a problem for many women in Slovakia.” Meetings with politicians in advance of the September 2002 national elections also seemed promising. Oravec and his colleagues at Fenestra “believe that for the first time in Slovak history, we will have a statement from a politician that he or she rejects violence.” Fenestra and the National Association of Women Judges are cooperating to fight for passage of a new law on domestic violence that has been introduced in the Parliament. Oravec thinks “that all the parties except the Christian party will support this initiative and it could really help battered women.”

The national media campaigns and the Community Coordinated Response program are starting to bring about institutional change. Like so many other governments in the region, the government of Georgia insisted that domestic violence “does not exist in Georgia.” After a comprehensive antiviolence media and action campaign involving 160 organizations that conducted 85 events throughout the country, the government seemed “to be ready to participate in our programs concerning domestic violence and to find a



"16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence" 2001 campaign billboard in Montenegro reads: "I do not want to put up with it! I do not want to be a victim!"

new approach to the problem,” reported Ketevan Tsurtsunia of WomenAid. As a first step, a lawyers’ association in Georgia organized free legal consultations in 13 regions and 11 districts of Tbilisi.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Such successes indicate that women’s NGOs in the region have a great deal of knowledge and experience to share. Starting in 2002, the Women’s Program will establish an antiviolenace coordinating committee comprised of media workshop participants from the most successful NGOs in Georgia, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia. The committee will analyze campaign materials and results, and create a web-based resource bank containing campaign-related materials and reports produced by grantees in 2001. The resource bank and a listserv will enable planning for a region-wide media campaign. NGOs that participated in the 16 Days campaign requested support for a region-wide campaign to capitalize on the momentum generated at the national level.

In 2001, the 16 Days grants competition was extended to all Soros network countries. The Women’s Program envisions future exchanges of experience that link the regions globally. Exchanges will focus on such challenging issues as working in multiethnic contexts, meeting resistance from traditional religious authorities, and including men as antiviolenace allies.

The Program’s exchange, training, and grants programs have had a cumulative impact in helping women’s NGOs working on gender-based violence to provide services and encourage governments to make this a priority in the region. NGO efforts have been critical in getting the issue of gender violence onto the public agenda, internationally and nationally, yet only governments have the resources to eliminate gender violence in their societies. Nevertheless, public awareness and pressure are integral to this effort. The Program’s priority for the future is to support advocacy efforts that continue to raise the public’s awareness and to pressure governments into taking responsibility for preventing and eradicating all forms of gender-based violence.

1. UN Declaration on Violence Against Women, 1993.
2. Ibid.
3. Women, Law and Development International (WLDI), *Becoming an Advocate Step by Step: Women’s Experiences in Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States* (Washington, DC: WLDI, 2000), 138.
4. International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), *Women 2000: An Investigation into the Status of Women’s Rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States* (Vienna: IHF, 2000), 339.
5. Ibid.
6. Global Survival Network (GSN), *Crime & Servitude: An Exposé of the Traffic in Women for Prostitution from the Newly Independent States* (Washington, DC: Global Survival Network, 1997), 33-35.
7. IHF, *Women 2000*, 79.
8. Global Survival Network (GSN), *Crime & Servitude*, 47.
9. Ibid., 48.
10. Cited in Kyrgyzstan country report. NWP Documentation and Evaluation Project, conducted by Strategic Philanthropy, Inc., 2001.
11. IHF, *Women 2000*, 485-486.
12. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Women in Transition* (Regional Monitoring Report #6, 1999), 83.
13. IHF, *Women 2000*, 35.
14. Ibid.
15. Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Violence against Women,” *World Report 2000* (New York: HRW, 2000).
16. IHF, *Women 2000*, 15.
17. Ibid., 229.
18. Martina Vandenberg, Human Rights Watch, OSI briefing, December 2000.
19. <http://www.duluth-model.org/>



GENDER EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT IN EDUCATION

Education is a human right and an indispensable element of economic and social progress. Under communism, women in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union pursued the many educational opportunities available to them, maintaining one of the world's highest levels of women's education, including fields considered nontraditional for women in other parts of the world. However, the end of the Soviet system, the pressure of market forces on the educational sector, and the emergence of diverse cultural values in regard to women's education have changed the landscape of education in the region. While some of the changes, such as the introduction of tuition fees, have made higher education less accessible to all, deeper analysis often reveals a variety of disadvantages accruing particularly to women and girls.

From its inception, the Women's Program has seen education from the perspective of human rights, active citizenship, and the development of civil society. The Program is founded upon the belief that open societies cannot develop fully without the contribution of women's critical thinking and perspectives. A network of gender and women's studies programs and scholars leads the effort to reform education from a gender perspective appropriate for the region. The Women's Program has strengthened this network through support for conferences, fellowships, and exchange programs. Small grants help start new women's studies programs, provide core library collections, and translate classic feminist texts. One of the Program's most successful programs, Empowering Education, trains teams of teachers and educators to integrate gender issues into primary and secondary school and university curricula. As one Empowering Education trainer stated, "We can't

PHOTOS: Upper far left, Bosnian refugee student and OSI Scholarship Program grantee discussing the return of students to their homes in the former Yugoslavia; lower far left, students at the Belgrade Center for Women's Studies; near left, Empowering Education trainer from Lviv, Ukraine, presenting "how to overcome the circle of discrimination."



change existing roles between women and men, girls and boys, or strengthen the role of women without changing society as a whole. To do this, we need to start in the schools.”

THE STATE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Since transition, the enrollment ratio of boys and girls has remained relatively equal in primary and secondary school. However, the number of all children in primary school is falling in many places, such as the former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.¹

The picture is more complicated at the secondary school level. In Central and Eastern Europe, for example, the enrollment rate of girls in secondary school has increased in some countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, but declined in others, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Romania, and Russia. In Central Asia, on the other hand, declining enrollment is common for both boys and girls, though for different reasons.²

The additional obstacles girls face include conflicts over religion, lack of safe transportation, and the fear of being kidnapped for purposes of sexual slavery and bride-stealing (in Central Asia and the Caucasus). In Uzbekistan, the government has expelled female students from universities for wearing religious dress, particularly veils.³ At the same time, the resurgence of patriarchal practices sometimes linked to religious interpretations inhibits girls’ access to education. In Albania, even in suburban areas around the capital, girls are often not allowed to leave the house unless accompanied by an adult male relative.⁴

Equally significant is the content and quality of education. The prevalence of stereotypical gender

attitudes in textbooks, classroom interactions, and curricula is widespread in countries throughout the region, at every educational level. In Romania, for example, a study of gender equality in education found that primary school textbooks portray women as school teachers, villagers, and fruit or flower sellers, while men are pictured as astronauts, policemen, doctors, actors, and masons. Women are also seen as housewives, while men devote themselves to working in the public arena. “Retraditionalization has accompanied the transition throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus,” said Cassandra Cavanaugh, formerly of Human Rights Watch. “In school, girls are educated to be submissive, quiet, good wives and daughters-in-law.”⁵

Widespread gender stereotypes at the primary level of education lead to further gender segregation at secondary and especially higher levels of education, which in turn leads to economic inequality for women in the work force. Even though women often outnumber men in institutions of higher education, women predominate in low-prestige fields that are poorly compensated. The market now values business and technical professions. At university, women go into education or law while men select engineering or computer sciences. The pattern of gender segregation is clear in Lithuania, where women have long outnumbered men in higher education. In 1998–99, women in vocational schools selected courses in crafts, household management, and the service sector, while men selected courses in engineering, transport, and communications. At the university level, women selected education professions, where they comprised 77.6 percent of all students, while men chose technical studies, comprising 68.7 percent of total students.⁶

The predominance of women with educational degrees is significant at a time when governments

throughout the region are cutting education budgets. In Russia, for example, government expenditures on education in 1997 fell to less than one-third of expenditures in 1990.⁷ As a result, teachers, who are overwhelmingly women, are badly paid and often wait months for their salaries. Many take second jobs. In Bulgaria, they work as insurance agents or salespersons and also take agricultural jobs to make ends meet.⁸ Teacher demoralization reduces the quality of education and results in a growing shortage of teachers in many countries. In rural areas of Moldova, where women comprise 85 percent of the teachers, women with university degrees would rather sell goods in the market than take teaching jobs.⁹ As the region's economies struggle to modernize, women without training in technical fields are at risk for being left out of transitioning economies.

ENGENDERING EDUCATION

Throughout the region, women are struggling to revitalize education so that it responds to their own needs as well as the needs of new societies. As many communist countries began to feel the influence of perestroika during the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, gender and women's studies programs began to emerge as centers of intellectual vitality and critical thinking. They offered a new kind of space where academics and activists, often working across ethnic and national boundaries, could come together to examine society, challenge existing power relations, and imagine creatively the future.

At the Women's Program Founding Forum in September 1997, the working group on education raised challenging questions for the Program's future work. How will women and girls gain access to educational

opportunities in the future? How will regional cultures become aware of injustices organized along gender lines, when "the woman question" is seen as a discredited relic of the communist past? How will activists and educators raise general social awareness about violations of women's rights and "women's damaged citizenship?" How will the new scholarship about women arising from the international women's movements of the last 30 years enter the region? How will the region contribute to the international development of women's and gender studies?

In 1997, the Women's Program started to explore how best to expand and link the work and talents of emerging women's studies programs. Despite their vigor, the programs were few in number, poorly funded, and at different stages of development. Programs in Central and Eastern Europe (Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Yugoslavia) were much further along than in most countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Both academics and activists understood that in order to build women's movements, they needed to develop a shared understanding of society and history based on women's experiences in their own countries.

In September 1998 in Belgrade, the Program held its Inaugural Conference on Gender/Women's Studies for Countries in Transition, bringing together 140 women from 30 countries. Co-organized by the Belgrade Women's Studies Center, the conference marked the first time practitioners in gender or women's studies from across the entire region came together to learn from each other, support each other, and strategize for the future of the field. One of the key questions was how to continue to develop high quality research and teaching in the region, while maintaining the connection with activist and democratic agendas.

Biljana Kasic, a founder and director of the Center for Women's Studies in Zagreb, Croatia, recalled that the conference provided "the opportunity to confront the diversity of women's studies centers, ideas, initiatives and their programs" and to initiate projects and future collaborations. The many different forms and locations of women's studies generated exciting debates, from how knowledge should be created to how regional scholars should position themselves conceptually in relation to "the West" and the "global South." If women's studies frameworks emerge from women's experiences, how would this region articulate its similarities and differences from global feminist paradigms?

In particular, "the conference breached the divide between academics and activists—a divide we find in every region, and one we must work constantly to reach across," said Dasa Duhacek, coordinator of the Belgrade Women's Studies Center. At the conclusion of the conference, participants formed the Women's/Gender Studies Association of Countries in Transition, devoted to the exchange of ideas, support, and resources across the countries of the region, with the Belgrade Women's Studies Center as Interim Secretariat.¹⁰

At the same time, the Women's Program pursued several strategies to help institutionalize existing programs, while encouraging the development of women's studies in countries where it had not yet existed. In August 1998, the Women's Program collaborated with the Gender and Culture Program of Central European University to produce the first Gender Studies Directory, a country by country compilation that was translated into local languages by several Soros foundations. An expanded edition appeared in June 1999, including listings of independent teaching and research centers; university-based programs; key

individual resource persons; documentation centers; and publications. There were additional listings for government organizations and professional associations in some countries.

Women's studies in the region often starts outside traditional academic institutions, reflecting both its potential marginality and a generative link between politics and scholarship. Some centers and programs focus on teaching while others prioritize research. A number of women's research institutes produce scholarship to inform public policy, while some independent women's studies and documentation centers see their mission tied directly to grassroots women's movements. Increasingly, new gender studies programs are able to affiliate immediately with universities.

To nurture and strengthen this diverse network, the Women's Program initiated a Women's Studies Fellowship Program in 1999. In collaboration with the Soros foundations, the Fellowship Program sponsored one-month study visits by 36 scholars—from Albania, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Moldova, Mongolia, Russia, Ukraine, Slovenia, and Yugoslavia—to established gender studies centers in nine cities, including Kharkov, Prague, Moscow, Bucharest, and Central European University in Budapest. After this exchange of ideas and information, several participating scholars made plans to collaborate on regional research projects, coordinate curricula and course syllabi, and organize teaching exchange programs. Soros foundations in Albania, Azerbaijan, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, and Tajikistan agreed to support pilot gender studies programs.

Support for emerging gender studies initiatives also came from collaborative funding with OSI's Human Rights Fund in Budapest and Central European

University's Gender and Culture Program. In 1998 and 1999, the three programs awarded small grants to help gender studies programs and centers set up offices, develop curricula, and hold symposia. The body of gender research and analysis continued to grow in countries throughout the region, work that was informed by international scholarship but specific to the national and regional experience. Feminist journals such as *Identities in Macedonia* also started to appear and multiply, as did opportunities for scholarly exchange. Overall, the Women's Program and Soros foundations have provided support to over 50 gender studies centers, programs, and initiatives in the region.

CREATING ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL THINKING ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

Recognizing the need to increase women's access to significant works in the field of gender studies, the Women's Program in 1998 initiated a four-year library and translation collaboration with two other OSI network programs, the Library Program and the Center for Publishing Development. Working with small selection committees of women's studies specialists from the region, the Women's Program created three comprehensive collections for libraries and gender studies programs or women's NGOs.

"It was an ingenious idea to put together those two most neglected categories: women and books," said selection committee member Slavica Stojanovic. A writer and translator herself, Stojanovic serves as a consultant to the Women's Program of the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia. "Women in the region used to read . . . [but] with the new system of values and the crisis, the instinct was endangered."

The first year targeted the needs of women's studies programs and centers, offering choices of three sets of up to 50 books—classic texts in women's studies, advanced work in gender studies, and practical books on women's issues. In 1999, the "women at risk" collection complemented the Program's work on violence against women and women's health. In 2000, the collection focused on ethnic/minority women and women in conflict situations. Over three years, the Library Core Collections program awarded approximately 150 collections to gender studies programs, libraries, and NGOs.

In collaboration with the Center for Publishing Development, the Women's Program also launched a four-year program to translate 20–25 books each year into local languages. Competitive translation grants went to publishers and women's groups able to demonstrate translation and marketing skills. Classics translated in 1998 included Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in Romania and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in Slovenia; and, among works uniting theory to practice, bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* in Albania.

To support culturally appropriate translation of books on "women at risk" in 1999, the Women's Program and the Gender and Culture Program held an intensive workshop that included regional experts in translation, one of the original editors of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, and translators who had received grants. In discussing some of the practicalities of translating Western classics for diverse regional audiences, the group generated new insights about the challenges of cross-cultural communication. Translations of such concepts as feminism, gender, and sexual violence, among others, generated heated debates.

Given the racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts in

many countries in which OSI operates, the translations list for 2000 highlighted works on ethnic/minority women and women in conflict and peace-building situations. Among those selected for translation were *The Veil and the Male Elite* by Fatima Mernissi in Azerbaijan; and *Gender and Nation* by Nira Yuval-Davis, published in Latvia.

The final year, 2001, reflected increasing world attention to globalization and the need articulated by Women's Program coordinators and grassroots NGOs for more information on women's economic empowerment. Titles included: *Who Pays for the Kids?: Gender and the Structures of Constraint* by Nancy Folbre and Tony Larsen; *Gender and Economics—A European Perspective* by Dijkstra Geske and Janneke Plantenga; and *Gender, Globalization and Democratization* by Rita Mae Kelly.

"Translation grants and library core collections projects play an extremely important role in the region," said Djurdja Knezevic, director of Zenska Infoteka, a women's information and publishing center in Croatia. "This is the only project that systematically supports translation and publishing of women's/feminist books."

The four-year program succeeded in encouraging publishers' interest in translation and publication in the region. Many of the titles have been commercially successful, reaching general readers. The next goal, as the Women's Program and colleagues see it, is to promote further translations of writings by women from the region into other regional languages, as well as into English.

PROMOTING REGIONAL SCHOLARSHIP ON WOMEN

To continue the momentum generated by the Belgrade conference and to help scholars build a regional body of

research, the Women's Program sponsored several events, conferences, and programs on women's studies. One of the main trends in the development of women's studies around the globe has been the effort to restore women's agency in history. The countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have been particularly engaged in analyzing their past, exploring the misuse of history to support changing political agendas.

The first regional women's history conference convened in October 1999 in Minsk, Belarus, with support from the Women's Program, the MacArthur Foundation, and several other funders. Scholars came together with a shared sense of urgency regarding the need to include women in the process of reanalyzing and reconstructing history in the region. One result is the publication of *Gendered Histories from Eastern Europe*, a collection of articles by 29 authors, edited by Elena Gapova, Almira Usmanova, and Andrea Peto.

As another means of recovering the "unofficial" realities and experiences of women in the countries of the Soros foundations network, the Women's Program initiated work on women's oral history at the network and national levels. "Women's Memory: Oral Histories from Transition—Theory and Practice," the November 2000 workshop cosponsored with the CEU Gender and Culture Program, drew women from 18 countries in the region, plus Turkey. Workshop participant Elmira Shishkareva, Women's Program coordinator for the Soros Foundation—Kyrgyzstan and a historian herself, noted the absence of researchers from Central Asia and the Caucasus and volunteered to host another workshop.

Consequently, in July 2001, in collaboration with the Soros Foundation—Kyrgyzstan, the Women's Program sponsored a women's oral history workshop for 20 researchers (from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia,

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan). Led by an international team of scholars from Hungary, Russia, Turkey, the United States, and Uzbekistan, the workshop provided new concepts and opportunities to practice new skills (such as the ethics and the “art” of conducting in-depth interviews; oral history methodology; and gender analysis). Individual consultations helped participants refine their research plans. Multicountry working groups addressed the following topics: ethnic minorities; the impact of transition on women; political conflicts and violence against women; rural women; and women’s memory and history.

The program includes an ongoing mentorship component, linking researchers with workshop faculty. The Network Women’s Program and participating Soros foundations are supporting the research projects of many of the workshop participants. Participants received an extensive Women’s Oral History Reader in Russian. A second edited volume, including the new research of participants, will be distributed widely.

“People are very grateful to be listened to,” said Ketevan Kobaladze. “They feel abandoned by the government, their families, etc. This project makes them feel like their stories will be written somewhere and read.” Kobaladze is one member of a nine-person team working on “Women’s Oral Histories: Multiethnic Georgia in the Last Century,” supported by the Open Society Georgia Foundation and the Women’s Program. The project provides a gendered perspective in examining how ethnic minorities living in six regions of the country view each other and how that impacts ethnic conflicts, economic crises, and the country’s future stability.

EMPOWERING EDUCATION PROGRAM: GENDER-SENSITIVE TRAINING

While values and stereotypes about gender roles and relations are embedded most deeply in family and home life, they are reinforced in schools, at virtually every level. There is a pressing need for educational reform throughout the region and, in particular, the countries of the former Soviet Union. Although gender-sensitive and equitable educational models are badly needed in the regional educational systems, they are not always a priority for schools or a realistic option.

The Empowering Education initiative of the Women’s Program presents a participatory, alternative educational approach for schools, universities, NGOs, educators, and human rights activists who understand the importance of talking about human rights and providing nonthreatening gender-sensitive education for both boys and girls.

Halyna Phedoryshyn, director of School 13, the largest school in the Lviv region in Ukraine, stated, “Empowering Education covers a lot of issues relevant for youth, such as effective communication, which are important because earlier no one paid any attention to them, and now these issues are important for our contemporary society. It prepares them for adult life and gives them concrete tools to deal with important problems, such as domestic violence and gender stereotypes.”

In 1999, in cooperation with the International Renaissance Foundation in Ukraine, the Women’s Program initiated the Empowering Education program to train teams of teachers and educators to introduce gender issues in secondary schools and some universities across the countries of the former Soviet Union. The Empowering Education program currently operates in secondary

schools and in some universities in Ukraine and eight other countries of the former Soviet Union.

Leading this program is the Women's Information Consultative Center (WICC) in Ukraine, which conducted a successful pilot training program in three Ukrainian cities from 1996 to 1998. From 1999 to 2001, WICC trained teams in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Teams are teaching the innovative curriculum in high schools, some universities, pedagogical colleges, and for other target groups (such as rural families) in major cities and in the provinces. Although the main target group is secondary students, other groups also participate, and new groups are continually being researched and developed. For example, Empowering Education for kindergartners is currently in the works, due to demand from educators, administrators, and parents. In Tajikistan, Muslim leaders participate in trainings.

Constantly evolving curricula based on participant need include topics such as gender-based violence, conflict resolution, women's human rights, and UN instruments and mechanisms.

The training manual for the program, originally written in Ukrainian, has been published in Russian, Lithuanian, Georgian, Tajik, and English. It includes exercises covering such topics as gender issues and successful communication techniques, dialogues on diversity, and strategies to elicit student attitudes about gender and gender roles. In one warm-up exercise, participants tell stories about their own names, helping to draw out the cultural layers that surround individual identity in each country. Subsequent exercises, such as discussions, brainstorming, case studies, role play, and creative work (drawing, pantomime) focus on working

effectively with others. During each session, participants discuss the Empowering Education principles promoting active citizenship and their expectations.

In each country, the cooperation of the Ministry of Education is critical to the success of the program. In Tajikistan, for example, the Ministry of Education participated in the selection of schools in which to conduct trainings and issued letters of support to the school directors. In both Tajikistan and Georgia, local universities requested workshops for their education students. In Tajikistan, at the invitation of teachers from the Department of Journalism of Russian Tajik Slavonic University, trainers now conduct weekly seminars on the Empowering Education methodology.

Ukraine has served as a model for other countries, paving and helping to formalize Empowering Education. In April 2001, WICC received a license from the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine to provide postgraduate courses in gender issues and successful communication techniques. This is the first time an NGO has received such a license in Ukraine.

In the summer of 2001, the first Empowering Education Camp took place in Karpaty, Ukraine. In addition to participants from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, the camp included participants from Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, and Laos, who had not worked with Empowering Education before. They explored the innovative methodology hands-on in training sessions that were held in English for the first time.

Empowering Education's emphasis on multicultural learning had its first global test. "I found that many of the youth were very interested in me," recalled Aye Aye Khaing, of the Women's League of Burma. "They are so active and creative. I noticed that they all spoke Russian. They seemed to be able to cooperate and understand

each other even though Russia had occupied their countries. Seeing this made me realize that it is possible for us also to work out our situation. We can start doing this with all ages; the education process is for everyone.”

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

WICC’s experience in Ukraine represents precisely the kind of participation that NGOs in general, and women’s NGOs in particular, are seeking within the educational reform process now taking place in the region’s countries.

In support of such efforts, the Women’s Program worked with the Institute for Educational Policy (IEP) to make gender an integral part of the educational reform process. A seminar in December 1998 prompted joint work on the Gender Equity in Primary and Secondary Education project, which will produce a practical, change-oriented report to provide educational reformers

with the concepts and tools for promoting gender equity in education. As with many other fields, education reform must start with encouraging governments to collect and provide consistent gender-disaggregated data.

In the coming years, the Women’s Program is committed to strengthening efforts to integrate nonsexist curricula, textbooks, and pedagogy into education at all levels. The Program will encourage ministries of education and international donor agencies to ensure long-term support for gender studies and gender-sensitive education.

Institutionalization of innovative programs such as Empowering Education and socially engaged gender studies programs will help change the culture of education in the region. Education remains a focal point for the Program’s cross-cutting commitment to the empowerment of girls, who will help shape the future of women’s movements, democratization, and the development of open societies.

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4. International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), *Women 2000: An Investigation into the Status of Women’s Rights in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States* (Vienna: IHF, 2000), 10.
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ROMANI WOMEN: BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

The collapse of communism and the transition to a market economy has brought particular hardship to Romani communities. Roma, long targets of discrimination in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, suffer from high rates of unemployment and poverty as well as increasing hostility and violence from the majority population.

Romani women activists are struggling to find their place within the new Roma rights movement that seeks to end discrimination against the Roma while preserving Romani traditional culture and identity. They must negotiate a path between the changes of modern society and the practices of their

PHOTOS: Left, participants at the Leadership Training for Romani Women in Ohrid, Macedonia, October 2000, who built a "tower of power" for a leadership exercise; below, Romani students from DAJA, a Romani women's NGO supported by OSI-Macedonia.



“Non-Roma still see a Romani woman as a beggar in the street, holding a baby. They do not see a leader or an activist who deserves their respect.”

own communities. A crucial question remains: “Can they reconcile traditional beliefs about the role of women that are both a part of Romani identity and a source of inequality?”

The Network Women’s Program, in collaboration with other OSI network programs, seeks to help Romani women develop solutions to their problems and the problems of the larger Romani community. The Program’s Romani Women’s Initiative connects Romani women from different countries to map out the challenges they face and to resolve problems together, building a network of Romani women activists working at local, national, and international levels. The Women’s Program organizes leadership development opportunities for Romani women, respecting their role as mediators between the demands of modern culture and traditional Romani values, while asserting that Romani women’s rights are integral to a better future for all Romani people.

DEFINING THE ISSUES

The majority of the population continues to perceive the Roma in terms of poverty, unemployment, and low standards of living, rather than as a diverse people with shared linguistic, cultural, and ethnic roots. The upheavals accompanying transition have, if anything, intensified these perceptions. Yet the transition has also afforded Romani men and women the opportunity to

challenge their status as second class citizens. Within these changing societies, Roma are introducing a new language of ethnicity and cultural identity, of human and minority rights, of nondiscrimination and equality. They are engaging international human rights and multilateral organizations, especially within the European Union, including the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Commission on Human Rights.

Romani women are pivotal in this new mobilization. Women generally enter the Roma rights movement from the local level, working in the scores of NGOs that began to spring up following the collapse of communism. “For this reason Romani women activists are more aware, more open to new ways of dealing with problems,” said Azbija Memedova. A consultant on Romani women’s issues for the Women’s Program and director of the Roma Information Center in Skopje, one of OSI’s Roma Participation Program (RPP) centers, Memedova first became involved in the Macedonian women’s movement by working on violence against women and children. “Now we are trying to share this experience and knowledge with other Romani women,” she said.

Romani women activists, Memedova explained, must work on several levels—the family, the community, the wider society, and the international Roma rights movement. “If a woman manages to get out of the first, she faces the risk of expulsion from her community, yet she is not accepted as a full person in

the wider society. Non-Roma still see a Romani woman as a beggar in the street, holding a baby. They do not see a leader or an activist who deserves their respect. On the global level, the Romani woman has to fight with Romani male leaders, who no matter how educated and activist they may be, are still very connected to traditional roles.”

Education is a frequent focus of this tension. It sets in opposition those who fear educating their children will mean the loss of their Romani identity against those who see education as the best way to redefine Romani identity in ways that challenge, and ultimately change, persistent stereotypes that keep the Roma from achieving a better life. For women, the debate has a special urgency. In most communities, girls are not allowed to continue school after they reach puberty, often as early as 11 or 12 years old, at which time they are expected to marry and have families. “The parents become afraid to send them to school because they fear they will learn ‘bad things.’ Among other things, parents are concerned that there are evil boys who hang around the schoolyard,” wrote Sabina Xhemajli in the *Roma Rights Quarterly*, stimulating a vigorous debate about gender roles in the Romani community.¹

The high rate of illiteracy among the Roma, Xhemajli concluded, was one of the main causes of their historical economic and social marginality. For Romani women, education is an important way to challenge the double discrimination they suffer both inside and outside their communities. “The most important problem of Romani women all over the world is lack of education,” said Dilbera Kombarowsa, a Romani woman leader in Macedonia. Education enables them not only to find jobs but also to carry out their role as mediators between Roma and the institutions of the majority community, including the schools. Hristo Kyuchukov, a Romani

consultant to OSI on Romani educational issues, recalled how a women’s literacy project in Bulgaria quickly attracted husbands and other community members eager to learn.

The role of mediator is one that Romani women are increasingly assuming since the transition. Romani women are going outside the community to earn money, deal with the education of their children, and obtain health care for them. “The shift of responsibility from male to female in the Romani community is a common occurrence,” noted Bulgarian researcher Ivan Ivanov. “Many problems with the local authorities are resolved by a Romani man sending his wife to negotiate.”

Women are often at the forefront of efforts to challenge the discriminatory policy of placing Romani children in special schools for the mentally handicapped.² Katalin Stoika, who runs a Roma Participation Program center in Kalocsa, Hungary, has worked on this issue. In 1999, when Roma living in an abandoned army barracks had to be relocated, she discovered 25 children, ranging in age from 5 to 13, who had never been to school. After failing initially to get the local schools to enroll the children, she started a school for them in her own house. Letitia Mark, a board member of the Soros foundation in Romania, did the same thing in Timisoara. Soon the children were prepared to enter “regular” schools.

But schools are only one example. “In fact, women at the grassroots level ensure that their communities are opened to others, and they make the link between the two worlds: Gadge [non-Roma] and Roma,” said Women’s Program consultant Nicoleta Bitu. However, this is not easy. “These so-called ‘middle persons’ are the ones who confront the changes in modern society, but also have to fight the prejudices of their own society.”³ Bitu, a leader in the European Roma rights movement

and one of the first to articulate Romani women's issues, knows these challenges well.

GETTING TOGETHER—AND GETTING ORGANIZED

Concerned about the increasing acts of violence against Roma in Eastern European countries, the European Union sponsored the First Congress of Roma from the European Union in May 1994, in Seville, Spain. This historic conference was notable both for the presence of Romani women from Central and Eastern Europe as well as Western Europe, especially Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands—and for the striking absence of their participation and concerns in the final report.⁴

The absence of their perspective from the final report highlighted the lack of an organized Romani women's movement and the need for better research and knowledge about Romani women in different countries. In an effort to become better known, a group of women at the Congress in Seville issued the Manifesto of Romani Women. The Manifesto, unique in its reference to the situation of Romani women in both Eastern and Western Europe, primarily addressed external discrimination, particularly in education, and its impact on Romani women. But it also challenged internal discrimination, insisting that Romani women be allowed “to take full responsibility for the expression of cultural and traditional values as defined by Roma culture, even in contexts where these values are obstacles to such expression.”⁵

“One of the most serious problems plaguing us as Romani women is the lack of self-esteem,” the Manifesto stated, “and it is urgent to reinforce the consciousness of our worth and capacity to solve our own problems.”

The following year, the Council of Europe held a hearing on Roma/Gypsy Women in Strasbourg. The hearing was convened by the Council's Steering Committee for Equality Between Women and Men, reflecting a concern to address Romani women's issues within their gender equality programs rather than within the specific Romani programs. At the hearing, Romani women cautiously explained their problems in the context of discrimination against their communities rather than against them as women. For the first time, Romani women participated in a discussion on how to use international human rights mechanisms to improve their situation.⁶

LAUNCHING THE ROMANI WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

Romani women continued to work individually as activists at the local level and within the Roma rights movement. Then, in June 1998, the Soros foundations network convened the First International Conference of Romani Women in Budapest. Organized by the Roma Participation Program and attended by Women's Program staff, it brought together some of the key players in what would become the Romani Women's Initiative. The discussion aired a range of views on the role of Romani women at the intersection of traditional culture and the modern world.

The women who came to Budapest had different experiences and opinions about culture and identity depending on where they came from, but all were committed to improving the lives of Romani women and children. “We learned about differences from these meetings, since there is no research,” Memedova explained. “There were many Romani women who wanted to start something but did not know how,



Romani students from DAJA, a Romani women's NGO in Macedonia.

women in NGOs who were active in Romani women's issues, and women in Romani associations who did not see the need for women's rights."

The women agreed that it was important to retain many Romani traditions, such as those involving dress, family names, music, and holidays. Without these traditions, as one woman said, "we can't tell the

difference between Romani and non-Romani." But while some, mostly older women, did not see the need to change anything, many, especially the younger women, saw it differently. One thing they agreed on was the challenge of being a Romani woman activist.

Not only do Romani women activists confront traditional patriarchal views of women throughout

Central and Eastern Europe, they also face opposition from their families and communities, and even their activist colleagues, who oppose women taking on leadership roles. “When one stands against tradition, one is shunned from the family,” Sabina Xhemajli wrote. “And because for us the family and togetherness are very important, being shunned from one’s own family is the cruelest punishment.”⁷

Some at the Budapest conference thought the dilemma was worse for married women. One woman at the conference said that “married women, even educated women, can’t leave the house,” making it hard to become activists in Roma rights issues. But others thought it harder for single women, who, lacking the respect conferred by marriage and children, also faced hostility from other women, who often consider their activism a threat.⁸

The conference prompted a desire to establish a network of Romani women activists, bring more professional skills to their organizations and work, and begin to participate in international human rights work. Following the conference, the Roma Participation Program and the Women’s Program sponsored a joint six-month internship to coordinate efforts on all these fronts. Liliana Kovatcheva, from Bulgaria, took up the internship in the Budapest office in January 1999, and began to compile a database of Romani women associations and activists in Eastern Europe. In addition, the Women’s Program granted a fellowship to Nicoleta Bitu to participate in the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women program.

In April 1999, Bitu and Kovatcheva gave a presentation to OSI staff, designed to explore ways to support Romani women through the different programs of the network. George Soros challenged them to explain why Romani women’s issues were different than general

women’s issues. They highlighted the problem of children, especially girls, leaving school at rates generally higher than all other ethnic groups. They also cited the critical role Romani women play as mediators between the family and the larger institutions of society, especially with regard to education. They proposed a series of activities to raise awareness about Romani women’s issues both within the international women’s human rights movement and within the Roma rights movement.

In December 1999, OSI’s East East Program and the Open Society Foundation–Romania supported a conference organized by the Association of Romani Women in Romania on “Romani Women and Public Policies in Central and Eastern Europe.” Participants from Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Yugoslavia looked at the needs of Romani women and examined ways to use national and international rights mechanisms to promote Romani women’s rights. Among their priorities were increasing political participation, especially in decision-making bodies concerned with Romani policy, and improving Romani women’s leadership skills.

In October 2000, the Women’s Program, with support from the Open Society Institute–Macedonia and the Roma Participation Program, sponsored Eurozurally Romni, the first Romani Women’s Leadership Training Seminar in Ohrid, Macedonia, coordinated by Azbija Memedova and Nicoleta Bitu. The seminar was the first regional training organized by Romani women for Romani women and represented a significant new stage in the Romani women’s movement. Twenty-five women from Romani women’s organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Yugoslavia participated in the seminar. They honed skills to

Romani women play a critical role as mediators between the family and the larger institutions of society, especially with regard to education.

strengthen their work at the grassroots level in Romani communities, while creating a vision for expanding Romani women's activism.

The seminar focused on different levels of activism, from the need to become more politically involved, to ways to build women's solidarity, to how to start and manage an NGO. It included sessions on practical skills, including drafting project proposals, articulating their organization's mission, and developing fundraising strategies.

A major issue was women's leadership. "For me personally, being a leader is a big challenge, both inside and outside my community," said Senija Seferovic, of Croatia. "When I leave the community, people do not understand why I go, yet when I am among non-Roma, they do not understand why I am there."

At a roundtable during the Ohrid training, male activists in the Romani movement argued that women who failed to support men's leadership were failing to support the community. "All of the women, no matter what they thought about women's rights, stood behind Romani women in their discussions with the men," Memedova said. "This shows a new solidarity among women."

A small grants competition, cosponsored by the Roma Participation Program, enabled women who had participated in the training to carry out projects designed to address the immediate needs of Romani women and girls, primarily in health and education.

In response to the needs Romani women activists articulated at the workshop, the Women's Program and participating Soros foundations also offered specialized follow-up national seminars in Kosovo in December 2000 and in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia in 2001.

Outreach continued on the national level, linking Romani women activists and their allies. The first Slovak National Meeting of Romani Women Leaders in Banska Bystrica garnered significant attention in the Slovak media. With support from the Open Society Foundation—Bratislava and hosted by activist Andrea Buckova, the meeting followed three tracks: education, discrimination, and nongovernmental organizations.

Practical needs of the Romani, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities have been driving forces in the emerging activism by women in Kosovo. With the support of the Kosova Foundation for an Open Society, two participants in the Ohrid training started their own projects and helped bring together Romani women from all over Kosovo. After her visit to Pristina, Nicoleta Bitu noted the remarkable growth, strength, and commitment of Romani, Ashkali, and Egyptian women since the Ohrid meeting.

Two Romani women activists, Vera Kurtic, of Yugoslavia, and Nadire Selman, of Macedonia, will work with the Kosovar women as mentors. These mentorships are part of a larger collaborative project, Capacity-

Building of Romani Women’s Associations. In keeping with the goal to build and strengthen the women’s movement in transitional societies, the Women’s Program is working with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to support the creation of five new Romani women’s associations in the region. This includes the first Romani women’s association in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The joint project provides technical assistance to Romani women’s NGOs, helping them to become better advocates for Romani women’s rights at the European level.

CHALLENGES AND CHANGES

Romani women activists analyzed the intersection of racism and sexism in Romani women’s lives as part of their preparation for the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in South Africa in September 2001. During the European Roma Rights Center’s training session before the World Conference, the working group on gender, supported by the Women’s Program, identified three Romani women’s issues to highlight at the NGO Forum: involuntary sterilization, unemployment, and violence against women.

As participant Andrea Buckova recalled, Romani leaders only allowed them to discuss one issue—involuntary sterilization—at the Forum. Seen as an effort to reduce the Romani population and thus as a racist attack, sterilization was presented as a violation of Roma rights and not necessarily women’s human rights. In addition, “male leaders said that violence against women was not a big problem.” In contrast, participant Vera

Kurtic’s research among Romani women in settlements in Nis, Yugoslavia, demonstrated that 95 percent of the women had experienced some form of family violence. Buckova believes there is still “a big taboo based on tradition and the myth of the Romani family.”

Nevertheless, young Romani women are particularly eager to tackle taboo topics and are taking the lead in doing so. In Macedonia in 2001, 13 young Romani women formed a network and convinced the Open Society Institute–Macedonia to fund a project to address the problem of the “rigid tradition and the cult of virginity,” according to Women’s Program coordinator Marija Savovska. Seeking to open up discussion about premarital sexuality and the right to choose one’s partner, the young women will conduct research in 10 cities with Romani women and men between the ages of 18 and 25, as well as with their parents. The results will be published and used to generate public debate and education. Rumyan Russinov, director of the Roma Participation Program, hails this project as an example of the emergence of a more strategic approach in the Roma rights movement. He sees the Romani women’s networks as key to the larger Romani movement and the issue of early marriage as a priority.

Romani women activists of all ages are inspired by the changes taking place. “After two years I see more young women, and also older women, exchanging information and opinions and arguing out differences across the generations,” said Azbija Memedova. “At our first meeting, in Budapest 1998, the younger women sort of deferred to the older ones. Now there is a better balance. Younger women say, ‘I respect you but I expect you to respect my opinions.’ ”

Although the best student in her class growing up, Ildiko Lakatos, a young Romani woman medical student in Budapest, “always felt like I was considered just a

gypsy.” This resonated with several seasoned Romani women activists at a December 2001 meeting. “Welcome to the club of those who had to work harder than the others,” said one activist from the Czech Republic. Lakatos sees improvement at the university level, where “my fellow students can handle the fact that I am different.”

Another positive trend is more inclusion of Romani women activists in national networks of women activists, for example, within the Kosovo Women’s Network. As Slavica Stojanovic, a Women’s Program consultant for the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia, said, “We have no special funds for Romani women. Support for their work is integrated throughout the women’s program.”

Active participation of Romani women in all program areas has long been a goal of the Women’s

Program. In addition to Nicoleta Bitu’s women’s human rights fellowship, the Program’s information program area supports the development of a website for Romani women activists and training and mentoring for effective use of information and communication technology by Romani women’s NGOs. Developed in collaboration with the Information Program, Roma Participation Program, and the Roma Media Program, this project aims to build strategic and “virtual” connections within Romani civil society. The Women’s Program will continue to support Romani women’s leadership, as Romani women activists articulate their own priorities and challenge the international Roma rights and women’s rights movements to integrate their perspectives when creating advocacy agendas.

1. Sabina Xhemajli, “Everything We Don’t Want to Hear!” *Roma Rights Quarterly*, no. 1, 2000 (European Roma Rights Center).
2. Ivan Ivanov, “Response (6) to Sabina Xhemajli, ‘Everything We Don’t Want to Hear!’” *Roma Rights Quarterly*, no. 1, 2000. This pattern was condemned by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination as “de facto racial segregation” (ERRC 2000). A class action suit in the Czech Republic, dismissed by the Constitutional Court, has been brought to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.
3. Nicoleta Bitu, “Double Discrimination: Romany Women in Europe,” paper prepared for presentation to the OSCE-ODIHR Gender Seminar, Vienna, June 14-15, 1999.
4. Nicoleta Bitu, “The Situation of Roma/Gypsy Women in Europe,” paper prepared for presentation to the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, September 17, 1999.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Xhemajli, “Everything We Don’t Want to Hear!”
8. Nicoleta Bitu, “Response (7) to Sabina Xhemajli, ‘Everything We Don’t Want to Hear!’” *Roma Rights Quarterly*, no. 1, 2000.



PUU
MABA
7

STERY



COUNTRY REPORTS

ALBANIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

BULGARIA

CROATIA

CZECH REPUBLIC

ESTONIA

GEORGIA

HAITI

KAZAKHSTAN

KOSOVO

KYRGYZSTAN

LITHUANIA

MACEDONIA

MOLDOVA

MONGOLIA

MONTENEGRO

POLAND

ROMANIA

RUSSIA

SLOVAKIA

TAJIKISTAN

UKRAINE

UZBEKISTAN


YUGOSLAVIA

Estonian photographer
Anu Tonnov poses next to
tree graffiti that reads,
"tree belly button."

ALBANIA



*“Now I feel a part of the women’s movement.
I have grown as a person and see things differently.”*



The legacy of a particularly oppressive and isolated communist regime is an obstacle hindering Albania's development. The country still faces many new problems, which appeared during the transition period and were aggravated by the collapse of pyramid schemes, social unrest, and the Kosovar refugee crisis. Violations of women's human rights, such as trafficking and domestic violence, continue throughout the country. Enrollment of girls in school and the safety of girls, especially in rural or mountain areas, have decreased considerably. Privatization and factory closings have left many women unemployed. Many men have abandoned their wives and families in search of work in the neighboring countries of Greece and Italy. Within Albania, migration from rural areas to Tirana has created widespread poverty.

The Women's Program of the Open Society Foundation for Albania is one of the oldest in the Soros foundations network. Since 1994, the Foundation has grown from supporting only one project for women in Tirana to a number of innovative initiatives covering a wide geographical area. The Program works closely with women's NGOs, sometimes advocating on their behalf to other donors.

The Women's Program has also played an important role in integrating gender issues and increasing gender sensitivity in other programs in the Foundation. For example, its collaboration with the Youth Program resulted in an internship project that provided gender sensitivity training to key public administration employees.

Over the years, the Women's Program has remained flexible to change, ready to address emerging areas of need, such as women in conflict, empowering Romani women, and stopping domestic violence and trafficking in women. In 1999, the Women's Program was one of the first to respond to the crisis in Kosovo, working with women in Kosovar refugee camps around the country through Tirana Counseling Line's project Open Camps and a project documenting violence against Kosovar women.

The Women's Program was the first donor in the country to fund projects that address gender issues and women's rights. The Women's Center, one of the most

effective projects of the Women's Program, has helped develop the women's movement in Albania by providing documentation and information on gender issues and the women's movement, including the 121 active women's NGOs in the country. "The most significant thing I've gotten from participating in projects," an employee of the Center said, "is that now I feel a part of the women's movement. I have grown as a person and see things differently today."

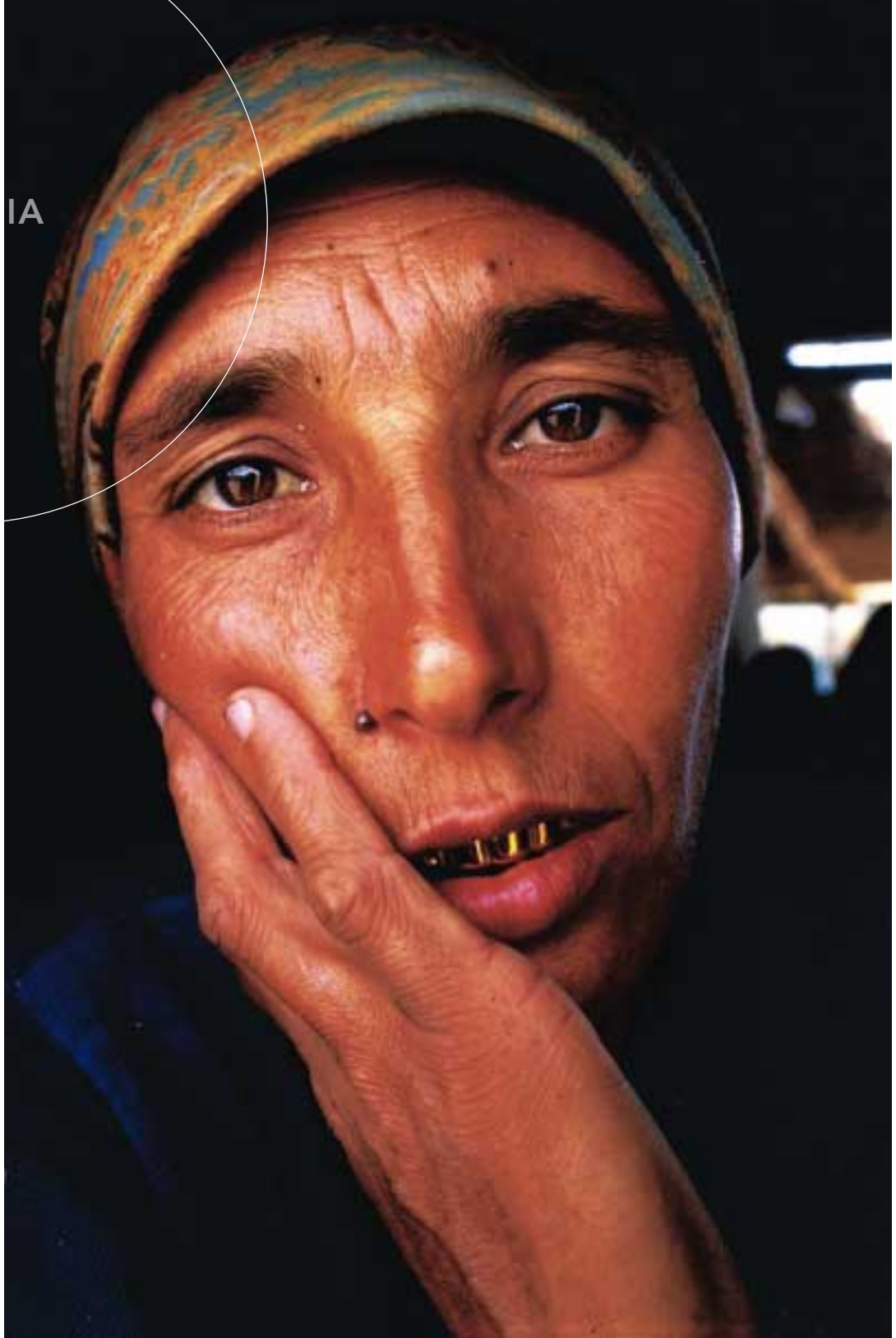
In March 2001, the Albania women's movement celebrated its 10th anniversary with the opening of the first Gender Studies Center in the country, at the University of Tirana.

The Women's Program established the first counseling line for women in Albania, in collaboration with other major donors in the country, such as the Netherlands Organization for International Development (NOVIB). This successful initiative has created other branches in Shkodra and Pogradec and is in the process of piloting the same institution in Berat (the "capital of trafficking," with the highest rate of forced prostitution and trafficking in the country). To encourage networking and cooperation among women's NGOs, including rural NGOs, the Women's Program helped to form the Network Against Violence.

Criminal networks are responsible for trafficking hundreds of women and girls for prostitution from and through Albania. Because of its geographical location, Albania is a country of origin, transit, and destination in the trafficking industry. The Women's Program has helped to start a reintegration project for trafficked women, in cooperation with the Albanian government, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and other important actors. In cooperation with the Albanian Foundation for Civil Society, the project provides gender-sensitive training to representatives from NGOs from 11 cities.

The dramatic performances of the Women's Street Theater helped to make a village community, including Macedonian minorities, more aware of gender issues. Both men and women were drawn in to the village's main square, to hear "such strange things," causing them to reflect on and rethink gender stereotyping, issues, and roles, while enjoying themselves.

ARMENIA



Society still emphasizes the private domain of family and homemaking as women's sole area of responsibility.

While Armenian society remains patriarchal, the country has a long history of granting equal rights for women, such as the legal right to divorce, own property, and receive an education. There is also a long tradition of women's activism and organization. Many women's organizations took on a humanitarian mission after the devastating earthquake of 1988 and during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the early 1990s, assisting refugees.

With independence and the transition to a market economy, the status of women has declined politically, economically, and socially. There is a general lack of awareness and acknowledgement of gender inequities in Armenian society. Society still emphasizes the private domain of family and homemaking as women's sole area of responsibility. Participation of women in politics and decision-making positions is insignificant, and women account for the majority of unemployed.

The Women's Program of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation–Armenia works to promote gender-sensitive education and women's rights and conduct women's leadership training. The Program helps to raise public awareness of such issues as the country's alarming maternal/infant mortality rates and unwanted pregnancies, increase access to health care facilities, and integrate gender-sensitive education into high schools and universities.

Society now faces many new problems, such as trafficking in women, and many long-ignored ones, such as domestic abuse and rape. There is widespread silence about these issues. Even most victims do not consider such violence against women a human rights violation.

Another significant issue is labor migration. It is common for husbands to leave their wives and children in search of work in other countries. These men often start new families in destination countries, leaving what are called "straw widows" back home. As part of the network-wide Mass Media and Gender Policy project, the Armenian team, comprised of journalists and a public policy analyst, are working on a documentary film about this critical issue.

The Armenian participants in the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women focused on the issue of gender discrimination in the labor market. Their project provided recommendations on labor laws aimed at eliminating gender-based discrimination in labor and created a center to actively work on these issues. The center collected information, analyzed and compared current labor laws in Armenia and other countries, and conducted a sociological survey of women in Yerevan; held roundtables and workshops with women's NGOs in Yerevan and Gyumry; worked with the mass media, the Ministry of Justice, social scientists, and other policymakers to raise awareness based on findings; and conducted advocacy training for women's NGO leaders.

Another initiative, which helped to raise awareness and provide recommendations for policy by women's NGOs, was Women of Armenia 2000: Beijing Platform for Action Review. This initiative promoted the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Armenia by disseminating information and holding roundtables around the country.

AZERBAIJAN



“Now we can do something for ourselves.”



Until 1917, the women's movement in Azerbaijan was embodied mainly in the struggle for women's liberation from Sharia laws prescribing women's secondary role in the family and restricting their educational and civic participation. During the Soviet era, the government conducted a literacy campaign for women and a campaign against wearing the veil. A memorial to the first Azerbaijani woman throwing off the chador (veil) still stands in the center of Baku, the capital. But, as in other former Soviet countries, the ideal of women's equality as practiced under communism in many ways disrupted Azerbaijan's growing indigenous women's movement.

The crisis accompanying the transition period from communism has resulted in many new problems affecting women, which are still challenging the country's development, such as the deterioration of living standards and health care, high unemployment, unequal access to decision-making, and violence against women. The 1992–1994 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also negatively affected the development of the country, resulting in a number of vulnerable groups: refugees, displaced persons, disabled women, widows, and women who have experienced sexual, physical, and psychological violence.

Several projects supported by the Women's Program of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation–Azerbaijan have helped women overcome new economic barriers. One project assisted women refugees in launching their own businesses by reviving the ancient art of carpet weaving. This idea emerged during a visit to a refugee camp by several young women from an NGO. "We saw women who were forced to support their families on their own because their husbands were killed in the war," one of the visiting women said. "Their children were hungry, but they could not find work. Many of these women knew how to make carpets so we decided to organize production and help them sell the carpets." The project generated income and established a sense of sisterhood between the young women organizers and the refugee women.

The Caspian town of Sumgayit was home to one of the largest chemical industries in the Soviet Union. Factory closings have left thousands unemployed. A project supported by the Program provided young women with free courses on business and leadership skills, foreign languages, and computer literacy to make them more competitive in the changing labor market. More than 20 women have found jobs. Such projects are empowering. As one woman said, "Now we know that we can do something for ourselves and for our families."

To strengthen and help consolidate the development of the women's movement, the Women's Program works to promote more effective and sustainable cooperation among many disparate groups. The Women's Program brought together diverse women to take part in the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women. The Azerbaijan team concentrated on poverty reduction strategies for women-headed households, a particularly vulnerable group that is growing due to such factors as male labor migration and the consequences of armed conflict.

A significant number of women who participated in the program emerged as advocates and leaders, and started many new women's NGOs and initiatives. The participants not only increased their legal literacy and acquired new advocacy skills, but also gained self-confidence and a mutual support network. "Now, we can work as independent advocates and engage in women's problem solving," one participant said.

BOSNIA
AND
HERZEGOVINA



Women who work in the growing informal economy are underpaid and lack benefits.



The war in the 1990s had an enormous and lasting effect on the women of the country. Tens of thousands of women and girls endured sexual violence. The number of women-headed households and women in poverty, most of them refugees or displaced persons, increased dramatically. High unemployment in the formal economy resulted in the growth of the informal economy, in which workers—the majority of whom are women—are underpaid and lack benefits. Despite a prevailing culture of nationalism and xenophobia, many women resisted nationalistic impulses and made strong contributions to building a civil society. Some of the most successful NGOs are women’s NGOs, which, against all odds, were able to maintain cross-national and cross-cultural contacts during the war.

The Women’s Program of the Open Society Fund–Bosnia and Herzegovina has contributed to fighting discriminatory attitudes and behaviors and promoted a culture of nonviolence and peace building in women’s activism. During and immediately after the war, in addition to grant-giving activities, the Program worked to ensure nondiscriminatory gender politics in humanitarian aid. It has taken an active role in the women’s movement through participation in roundtables, discussions, seminars, meetings, conferences, campaigns, women’s human rights bodies, and initiatives. The Women’s Program functions not only as a grantmaker, but also as a technical assistance provider, an expert in gender issues, and, in some ways, a policymaker.

The problem of minority women is great in Bosnia and Herzegovina due to ethnic conflict and existing stereotypes and prejudices. Because of the double discrimination of ethnicity and gender, Romani women are especially vulnerable. The Women’s Program has supported the establishment of the country’s first Romani women’s NGO in Bolja Buducnost, Tuzla, to

promote women’s empowerment and address specific needs. The 1999 project Women Activists in War and Conflicts, in cooperation with the East East Program, produced the first common declaration against violence in Kosovo. Women from all sides of the conflict signed the declaration.

Violence against women is on the rise due to women’s increasing poverty and disenfranchisement, making them dependent on employers, traffickers, and abusive partners. The Women’s Program funds public campaigns to combat violence against women, hotlines, and shelters for women victims of violence. In cooperation with the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Women’s Program helped establish the first SOS hotline in Sarajevo. A women’s shelter in Modrica provides temporary protection to abused women and children who have nowhere else to turn. The shelter helps to empower survivors to begin new lives and escape the cycle of violence in abusive relationships.

Trafficking in women is a widespread problem. The Women’s Program, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), has supported education and public campaigns on trafficking and the establishment of emergency shelters for trafficked women. In 2001, it helped to provide training sessions for professionals who encounter trafficked women.

BULGARIA



A regional conference brought together more than 150 women leaders from 15 countries to develop a common strategy for mobilizing citizen participation.



The Open Society Foundation–Sofia Women’s Program works to help alleviate some of the most serious issues affecting women around the country: unemployment, reproductive rights, health care, and domestic violence.

The Women’s Program has applied an effective mechanism for multisectoral coordination, networking, and regular exchange of information in the country and in the region. In 1998, the Women’s Program initiated the first meeting of NGOs that focus on gender issues in Bulgaria. More than 70 different NGOs, business and professional associations, and think tanks participated, and they formed working groups on important issues. The meeting served as an important tool for partnership and networking, exchanging ideas, advocacy, and lobbying. Subsequent meetings have drawn more organizations, as well as members of Parliament, senior government officials, and staff from the United Nations Development Program and the World Health Organization.

Also in 1998, in collaboration with the East East Program, the Women’s Program organized the regional conference “Women in the 21st Century – Transcending Boundaries of Sustainable Development in Southeast Europe.” This conference brought together over 150 women leaders from 15 countries in the region to develop a common strategy for mobilizing citizen participation. It also resulted in the creation of a network of women politicians, entrepreneurs, journalists, and NGO leaders, called SEELIDA (Southeastern Europe Leadership Initiative Dialogue for Action). The network holds biannual forums in different capitals on how to contribute to peace building and development in the region.

A unique project on the regional level established a network of women police officers in the Balkans. The women police officers meet to discuss common problems with members of NGOs concerned about

equal opportunity, crime and drug prevention, and social integration of high-risk groups in the Balkans. They define strategies for education of women police officers and effective cooperation with NGOs for prevention of crime, drug addiction, prostitution, and domestic violence.

The Women’s Program has helped grassroots NGOs create sustainable services for women, especially for Romani and Turkish minority women and long-term unemployed women. Some examples are health care projects in the Dobrich, Silistra, and Vidin regions. Realizing that they needed more information, knowledge, and experience to work effectively with the minority beneficiaries, staff of funded NGOs turned to trusted intermediaries belonging to the same ethnic group. Participants increased their self-confidence and knowledge about health care issues while helping other women and their families. They said that now “we possess a new, higher position in our communities as persons who are better qualified.”

Romani and Turkish women beneficiaries believe that the programs gave them the tools to challenge their status as socially excluded minorities, making them feel more in control of their lives. One participant established a women’s club within a Romani organization in Dobrich. Another was appointed a specialist on ethnic problems in the local government. In Silistra and Vidin, several Romani girls were inspired to continue their educations, enrolling in university courses.

CROATIA



Women's NGOs have flourished, providing humanitarian assistance, working on peace building, and encouraging women to participate in the political process.

In the last decade, Croatia has faced the challenge not only of building democratic institutions while becoming an independent state, but also of dealing with the destruction and residual effects of war—factors that have helped to enhance and renew patriarchal values. The growing influence of the Catholic Church and a decade of authoritarian politics by the Croatian Democratic Union (CDU) are also detrimental to the status of women, and economic crises and the process of privatization have led to a significant increase in unemployed women.

Women's NGOs have flourished in Croatia in the postwar period, providing humanitarian assistance, working on peace building, encouraging women's participation in the political process, and advocating for the rights of women and refugees. In addition, some women's NGOs have made major inroads on raising public awareness about violence against women.

The Women's Program of the Open Society Institute–Croatia has responded to the ongoing needs of women in the areas of education, media, and civil society. It focuses specifically on women's political participation, the need for new legislation, domestic violence, gender-sensitive education, women's health, and the growth of women's organizations in rural areas.

In the area of women's human rights, the Women's Program has worked on solving the problems of women refugees and displaced persons. There are many political and security-related obstacles involved, such as the lack of cooperation by local authorities, strong ethnic tensions, and questionable provisions on the legal status of refugees and displaced persons. The Women's Program has contributed to solving several legal issues through support for legal representation and the publication and dissemination of information on the rights of women refugees and displaced persons.

The project "Women for Changes" targeted the needs of rural women by providing a safe place for bringing together women of different ethnicities living in communities burdened by high ethnic tensions. The project offered job skills, computer training, organizational, and community development workshops, courses on communication skills and leadership, psychological help, and information on reproductive

health and rights for local women in Vojnic and Karlovac. One outcome of the work in Vojnic was the establishment of a local women's group.

Another project supported by the Program and initiated by an NGO in Split provided psychological assistance to women recovering from breast cancer and offered professional medical assistance and individual, group, and family therapy to more than 1,300 women with breast cancer. Public education and establishment of a volunteer program widened the scope of activities, covering close to 3,000 women of different ages and backgrounds through preventive examination and education.

The Women's Program has also funded several women's NGOs that work with victims of domestic violence. For the last 10 years, the Autonomous Women's House in Zagreb has provided a safe place, psychological assistance, and counseling for more than 1,000 abused women and children. The Women's House, the only shelter in Croatia not religiously affiliated, empowers women through a secular, feminist approach. In response to inadequate legal measures to protect women and children from abusive partners, four women's NGOs in 1998 began the project Stop Violence against Women. The project included action-oriented research and a television public service campaign.


In the area of reproductive rights and health, the Women's Program has used campaigns and other public actions to increase awareness of the problems associated with attempts to ban abortion, stimulating action among key actors in society on several occasions.

Since the early 1990s, the Zagreb-based NGO Zenska Infoteka has been documenting the history of the women's movement in the region. In late 2000, the Women's Program supported Zenska Infoteka to start a network-wide program to help establish and develop women's information centers. The NGO compiles and publishes databases and directories, and provides policy information and training activities to strengthen the communications skills of women. The target audience has widened in recent years to include NGO activists, students, journalists, and university and high school teachers.

CZECH REPUBLIC



The Women's Program is one of the few sources of funding for gender issues, especially in the field of education.



After more than a decade of social change, Czech women are still far from attaining equal status with men, and they are consistently underrepresented in all decision-making positions. Pressure on the government to conform to European Union standards on women's equality has translated recently into some positive changes in existing legislation. Nonetheless, these changes have yet to result in significant changes in women's daily lives. Most Czechs do not consider the status of women a topic of great importance (regardless of some rhetoric from the government), and programs for women's empowerment are not a focal point for donor organizations and policymakers.

The Open Society Fund–Prague Women's Program is one of the few sources of funding for gender issues in the Czech Republic, especially in the field of education. Although grants are relatively small, they are crucial for many women's NGOs, especially groups outside Prague.

Responding to the need in the educational system for debate on gender issues as well as to help students learn critical thinking, the Program made a small but effective grant to introduce more participatory, interactive methods of teaching into the curriculum. An educator created and implemented a gender issues program in Brno for students of social sciences, secondary school teachers, journalists, and librarians. The courses helped to break gender stereotypes, created new ways of thinking, and also spawned other projects.

OSF–Prague places emphasis on “bridge-building” activities between NGOs and other stakeholders. It established an informal group on gender issues at the Czech Donors Forum to draw more funding for women. A grantee organization conducted a pilot project of focused discussion groups at schools to prevent

trafficking in women, with the aim of introducing this type of activity into the national school curriculum. The same NGO was also consulted on a draft act on prostitution. With cofunding from other sources, another grantee is conducting a media campaign against domestic violence to start public debate on this issue.

An initiative on healthy parenting aims to bring about positive changes in maternity care and childbirth. It established the first birthing house in the country, a model institution providing comprehensive obstetric care in line with EU and WHO requirements. Other activities include training and conferences, comparative research, media cooperation, translation and publication of educational documents, and initiatives to improve legal transparency and norms related to gender.

ESTONIA



The Women's Program brings problematic issues to light and supports cutting edge organizations and projects.



Values are changing fast in Estonia. There is lively debate on a number of social issues, including equal participation of women in the labor market and in decision-making, equal educational opportunities, and the growing problem of domestic violence. However, stemming from the Soviet legacy of assumed equality between men and women, many Estonians often deny the existence of these problems. With Estonia's efforts to join the European Union, however, Estonians are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of equal rights, and opportunities for gender-inclusive policy are growing.

The need to study and document social attitudes and behavior in the midst of change, and to provoke thought and debate on otherwise invisible issues, is extremely important. Despite resistance from both prominent public figures and Estonian society as a whole, many important initiatives of the Open Estonia Foundation Women's Program have helped to bring the situation of women into public discourse.

Some of the Women's Program's greatest achievements are in bringing to light problematic issues, and in supporting cutting edge organizations and projects, including research, books, films, and training materials. Many of the books produced by the Women's Program most likely would not otherwise have been published commercially, due to limited interest on the part of publishers. Likewise, mainstream Estonian documentaries rarely focus on gender or controversial social issues. The Women's Program has funded important documentary films, which have proven to be powerful explorations of some of the problems and attitudes of a society in transition.

The Big Sister, a 1999 film that explored media stereotypes on women in politics, has been used in training politicians and journalists. *The Beauty of the Fatherland: The Lives of Two Women*, another film supported by the Women's Program through the Mass Media and Gender Policy program, explored gender roles and values

in Estonian society by profiling two highly visible, yet controversial women. It was screened at an Estonian film festival at the end of 2001, drawing a large turnout. Both documentaries have received wide media coverage and stimulated discussions about gender images and stereotypes.

The area of women's studies has developed slowly in Estonia, due to unreceptive attitudes in society. The Women's Program works with the women's centers in two universities, as well as with the Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Center. The Tallinn Pedagogical University's Women's Studies program, an example of effective cooperation between Estonian and more developed Nordic women's studies programs, has gradually influenced discussions about the role of women in society.

Several well-targeted seminars in media, literature, and philosophy have succeeded in increasing understanding of feminism and the women's movement. An electronic discussion list has created a forum for the community of feminist researchers and students to engage in intense and sometimes passionate discussions on gender issues, some of which have reached mainstream media. Every year it is becoming more common for students to do feminist research or include the gender aspect in their theses.

GEORGIA



“What we are doing for women, we are doing for all of humankind.”



Regardless of the many changes in Georgia in the transition period, the majority of the population still lives in poverty. This is true in both rural areas, where survival depends on such basic needs as favorable weather for crops, and in urban areas, where whole industries have disappeared as a consequence of political change and economic collapse. Years of armed ethnic conflicts in Georgia and neighboring Chechnya have created a large population of refugees. Of the numerous problems women face, the most acute are economic problems, lack of women's rights, and the threat of violence in an increasingly aggressive environment.

Before the establishment of the Soviet Union, Georgia had a strong tradition of charitable organizations. Today, women's NGOs are gradually returning to make important contributions to improving the status of women. The Open Society Georgia Foundation Women's Program has been one of the few accessible sources of funding for women's NGOs and social activism. The Program has helped to create a strong network of women's NGOs by establishing a mailing list and hosting meetings for information sharing and collaboration, advancing their slogan: "What we are doing for women, we are doing for all of humankind."

Openness, networking, confidence, and collaboration constitute the core of the Women's Program approach, enhancing the reputation of the Program in the women's NGO community. The Women's Program, in collaboration with IREX, helped to establish a website called Gender Awareness Information Network-Georgia. The creation of an information center has led to increased professional development of women's rights activists, serving as a tool for networking women's NGOs and coordinating activities. It provides a space for publishing documents and case studies in Georgian, Russian, and English.

Georgia is a multiethnic state composed of Armenians, Ossetians, Kurds, Jews, Abkhaz, and other minorities. Instability, resurgent nationalism, and bloody ethnic conflicts and civil wars have characterized the transition period. The Women and Peace program is a

main priority for the Women's Program. One innovative peace-building project is Women's Oral Histories: Multiethnic Georgia in the Last Decade. Participants have conducted fieldwork in mostly rural areas, collecting and preserving the voices of women from many different minority groups. The result will be an illustrated book and a television production. The Women's Program has also helped to create important regional databases for defending women's human rights, including case documentation of rights violations of disabled women and women in conflict zones.

A series of articles in newspapers and journals raised the visibility of peace initiatives by women in conflict zones such as Abkhazia, Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory disputed by Armenia and Azerbaijan, as a step toward opening dialogue, overcoming ethnic conflict, and fostering mutual understanding.

The Georgian team of the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women chose to address the complex and growing issue of trafficking in women, marking the first time activists addressed this problem in the country. The trafficking phenomenon highlights several issues at once—migration, prostitution, and the conservative social mores that preclude open discussion of the problem.

Project participants made the problem of trafficking more visible, conducting a series of meetings and trainings for different actors in society, creating informational brochures warning women of risks, and developing recommendations for policy reforms, including the passage of appropriate legislation.

HAITI



The foundation supports four feminist organizations that play a major role in promoting issues of gender, women's rights, and human rights.



In many ways, the situation of women in Haiti reflects its turbulent past and the social and cultural dichotomy that marks the country to this day. Violence and arbitrary rule have dominated Haiti's political history, and the legacy of slavery has affected women most severely. As in colonial times, the upper and middle classes have used mostly women as domestic servants, depriving them of all rights, creating a system of quasi-slave work in each household with a set of accompanying abuses, sexual and otherwise, inflicted on domestic workers.

At the same time, women of all socioeconomic levels play an important role in the Haitian economy, in children's education, and in society as a whole, but perhaps more so in the most destitute sector of the population where female-headed, single-parent households are the norm.

Contrary to many countries of the Caribbean and Latin American region, a high number of educated women in Haiti can be found in high-ranking jobs in banks, international institutions, government, NGOs, and other private sector professions. In the rural communities, women work the land and assume a leadership role in Voodoo (a widely practiced religion) as priestesses with the same rights and privileges as priests. Heralded as the backbone of the economy, Haitian women make up a large percentage of the people who travel throughout the region to buy and sell goods and commodities. Yet, Haitian women do not enjoy equal status with men.

Since the end of the Duvalier regime and military rule, several women's associations have emerged to courageously make gender issues more visible.

The Fondation Connaissance et Liberte supports four feminist organizations (Enfofanm, Kay Fanm, Fanm Yo La, and SOFA) that play a major role in promoting issues of gender, women's rights, and human rights.

The foundation's support includes help in establishing computer connectivity and conducting training to facilitate communication, develop networking capacity, and familiarize the groups with resources on the Internet to more effectively coordinate projects.

The four organizations will continue to bring medical, psychological, and legal assistance to women victims of rape and abuse, and to lobby the Haitian Parliament about laws on abortion, women servants, divorce, and adultery. They will also continue to promote grassroots activism, organizing marches, sit-ins, and other forms of protest in defense of women's rights.

KAZAKHSTAN



“Our center has helped many people. Women now know their rights. We don’t just advise women, we try to create jobs.”



A number of progressive reforms have taken place in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, yet policymakers seldom consider the ways these reforms affect men and women differently. The inaccurate perception of the majority of the population is that men and women are treated equally and that gender issues do not require any special attention.

In 2001, the Women's Program of the Soros Foundation–Kazakhstan, in cooperation with the Open Society Institute–Russia, developed and coordinated a new network program on Mass Media and Gender Policy, which captured the interest of 12 other Soros foundations. This program aims to raise gender awareness in society by creating an international and national community of knowledgeable journalists committed to gender-sensitive media.

One of the most widespread problems in Kazakhstan is violence against women. Only NGOs and international agencies worked on the issue until 1998 when President Nazarbaev proclaimed the eradication of violence against women as a state priority. The government introduced special departments to deal with the problem. Yet, despite this acknowledgement by the state, violence against women remains a pressing problem.

In 1999, the Women's Program began to support training on starting hotlines and crisis centers, leading to the opening of two crisis centers, Podrugi (Girlfriends) in Almaty and the Women's Support Center in Rudnyi. The Women's Program helped to form a growing network of crisis centers and shelters connected via electronic communication.

Crisis centers and shelters play an important role in the towns in which they operate, providing an essential resource for women who escape violent situations.

Leninogorsk, an industrial town in eastern Kazakhstan, is experiencing problems typical to transition, which have profoundly affected the most vulnerable groups of women, such as low-income, unemployed, homeless women, single mothers, and women running large households. The Nezabudka Crisis

Center runs a hotline, provides psychological and legal counseling, offers educational programs for women and girls, and supplies literature on gender issues to the public. During the first month of operation, there were 200 calls and more than 50 visits. The staff has established effective cooperation with the local and federal government and the police department. "For Leninogorsk, the crisis center is an outlet," Alla Platonova, the Center's director, said. "With the privatization of mines and factories, many people lost their jobs. Our center has helped many people. Women now know their rights. We don't just advise women, we try to create jobs."

In addition to a crisis center, the Consulting Center for Women in the town of Uralsk now houses a sewing workshop, an ecological group for children, and a small kindergarten for low-income families. The NGO also conducts outreach activities, visiting women in factories, farms, schools, and universities to distribute information about their center.

Another crisis center provides help to women in Zhezkazgan, a mining town in central Kazakhstan, suffering from the painful cycle of unemployment, poverty, and violence. "Before the hotline, there was nobody to listen," Alma Userova, the center's director, said. "We didn't even suspect many of these issues—lesbian women, for instance—existed. The town is small and people here know each other. Our hotline keeps secrets."

KOSOVO



The Women's Program is working to make women's voices heard and encouraging women to play an active role in the process of democratic reconstruction in Kosovo.



The vestiges of war—unemployment, poverty, and the loss of family members—are pressing problems for the population in general, but they have had a particularly direct effect on women. Women and girls have less access to economic resources and fewer opportunities. They have little or no involvement in decision-making structures.

Violence against women is a prevalent reality in society and the absence of a legislative framework and women's lack of awareness about their existing rights puts them at a disadvantage. Women also have less access to education. The parallel schooling system, the destruction of a great number of school buildings in the war, and poverty have all led to a decline in the number of women at all levels of education.

From its early stages, the Kosova Foundation for Open Society has provided assistance to women's projects and initiatives. The Women's Program seeks to increase women's involvement in rebuilding democratic institutions; promote equal rights and opportunities for women and girls; oppose violence against women; include women and girls in the educational system; and enhance regional cooperation among women's NGOs. In addition, the Program provides technical assistance to women's groups and NGOs in writing project proposals and organizing computer training and roundtable discussions related to women's rights.

The Program has established an important partnership with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) for a long-term project focusing on illiterate girls and women. The project will include seminars and workshops in cooperation with HESP (Higher Education Support Program) and UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo) on gender mainstreaming. With support from the Women's Program, the Department of Education will incorporate a new gender studies program at a university in Kosovo.

The Women's Program is working to make women's voices heard and encouraging women to play an active role in the process of democratic reconstruction in Kosovo.

The Program provided support to emerging Kosovar women leaders to attend the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women. "I was shocked to learn

about advanced human rights conventions," a participant from Kosovo said, "to hear about places where there is no war. I cried several times while listening to people talking about rights. I am grateful for having the opportunity to attend this training and come back to Kosovo to advocate for women's rights."

Many funded projects demonstrate a great sense of collaboration among local women's groups and international organizations. The Women's Program provided a space for different women's groups to come together to work on an issue and document women's human rights abuses. Groups such as Elena, the Center for the Protection of Women and Children, and others have worked as advocates, disseminating reports to a large number of international human rights organizations.

A participant in a roundtable held shortly before the war described the benefits of such meetings: "Overnight, my life changed. I was a homemaker without a job and without any hope for a better future. And, there was the fear of war coming. Participating in discussions with women from different backgrounds allowed me to share my own experiences and learn from others how to overcome fear and stress."

Motrat Qiriazhi is a group of rural women's NGOs addressing the obstacles rural and refugee women and girls face—such as access to education and the traumatic effects of war. A campaign they conducted brought together different women's groups, communities, and educational institutions to work on the problem of girls dropping out of the educational system. The campaign resulted in an increase in the number of girls returning to school. The number of girls enrolled in higher education in one region increased from only 12 girls in 1995 to 500 in 1998.

The Sfinga Center, a women's research and publishing center, works to develop women's studies and promote the achievements of women academics in Kosovo. Its annual feminist academic journal of literature and art by Albanian, German, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Greek, Albanian, Turkish, Slovenian, Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian women has become an important resource for students of the humanities.

KYRGYZSTAN



“The trainings helped women believe in themselves. For the first time it occurred to them that they could participate in elections on an equal basis with men.”



Most Kyrgyz women have experienced a sharp decrease in their standard of living, and they struggle with high rates of unemployment, domestic violence, and the deterioration of the health care system, especially reproductive health care. Kyrgyzstan also has a high rate of trafficking in women.

The Soros Foundation–Kyrgyzstan Women’s Program is one of the few funders providing much-needed support for programs and projects on gender issues in the country. The Program’s strategic goals include raising public awareness on domestic violence and developing institutional mechanisms to prevent it, fostering cooperation between interethnic women’s NGOs in the region, creating a more positive image of women in the mass media, and developing educational programs and research. The Women’s Program will work with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) on the Mass Media and Gender Policy project, and it will collaborate with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the prevention of trafficking in women.

In the area of education, the Women’s Program successfully piloted the network-wide Empowering Education program in five schools during one year, expanding the program to rural areas and obtaining certification by the Ministry of Education. The Women’s Program also coordinates the subregional network Women’s Oral History program, which seeks to preserve and present the complex picture of women’s “unofficial” realities and experiences in the region.

The Women’s Program helps to coordinate the subregional Ferghana project (initiated by the Soros foundations in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan), which consists of joint projects of women’s NGOs from the Ferghana Valley. Women from the Ferghana Valley must grapple with issues such as high unemployment, domestic violence, and drug trafficking and addiction.

Kyrgyz participants in the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women focused on the issue of women’s political participation in presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections. A series of trainings increased women’s participation. In the village of Kyzyl-Jyldyz, six women who attended trainings won local council elections. “The trainings

helped women to believe in themselves,” a participant said, “and for the first time it occurred to many of them that they could participate in elections on an equal basis with men. Some women nominated themselves for local government elections and won.”

Two of the most critical problems for women are poverty and violence. The Women’s Program supports four crisis centers around the country. The members of the NGO Tendesh, located in the remote region of Naryn, set up one of these crisis centers after they took part in an internship at an established crisis center in St. Petersburg, Russia. In addition to a hotline, the center works on prevention of violence through the mass media, training sessions, and roundtable discussions.

The Women’s Program supports the establishment of crisis centers in other regions of the country as well. “Working in the crisis centers,” a staff member at the Crisis Center Sezim said, “we run across negative aspects of women’s lives: assaults, beatings, extreme poverty. Very often we are the only source of support for such women.”

In 2001, the Women’s Program helped to introduce a course on violence against women and children at the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It also lobbied for a bill to protect victims of domestic violence. In 2002, the Program plans to introduce a course on violence against women at the Center for Advanced Training for officers of the General Prosecutor’s Office and continue working for legislation protecting victims of domestic violence.

LITHUANIA



“We can’t change existing roles between women and men without changing society as a whole.”



In 1999, Lithuania was the first country in Central and Eastern Europe to pass an equal opportunities law that formally recognized the equal social, economic, and political rights of men and women. It was also the first to establish an Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. Although these instruments have created the legal preconditions for gender equality, Lithuanian women, particularly in rural areas, still have not achieved gender equality.

The Open Society Fund–Lithuania Women’s Program believes that women’s NGOs offer “the most direct path to achieving gender equality goals.” The Program helps NGOs and other institutions to create more favorable conditions for women to secure and assert their rights.

Women’s NGOs in Lithuania provide direct assistance to women by supporting and operating shelters. They also help raise public awareness on gender issues and engage in lobbying efforts for women-friendly legislation. Since independence, women in Lithuania have made great strides in the development of gender and women’s studies and research, establishing academic women’s studies centers that analyze domestic violence and trafficking in women.

The Empowering Education project has been active in Lithuania since 1999. When the program first began, the idea of promoting social partnerships in society based on respect for human rights and a participatory, learner-centered model was a new concept for the Lithuanian educational system. Lithuanian trainers now train others in methods of empowering high school girls and boys in five schools in Vilnius, Kaunas, and Silute. The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson helps the trainers working in the five schools. The demand for training in other schools is growing.

For the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women program, the Lithuanian team worked on pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment, and age discrimination of women in the labor market. With the transition to a market economy, competing equally in the labor market has become difficult for women. Although a system of guarantees exists, they are not always beneficial to women, and violations are hard to document. In cooperation with governmental institutions, women’s NGO networks, and trade unions, the Lithuanian team sought to raise public awareness about problems of discrimination through mass media and roundtable discussions.

The project led to the establishment of the Women’s Employment and Information Centers Network in Rural Areas and the Kaunas Mobile Consulting Center, working to help rural women find alternative means of earning a living. Women learned that they can create change as individuals, as well as a group. One woman said: “After our seminar in the village of Zeimiai, women started organizing meetings every Wednesday, inviting people from the local government to discuss how to improve the situation in the village, how to help the poorest. They conducted an assessment showing the need for a kindergarten and funeral home. They also organized elections. They changed themselves as well as others.”

MACEDONIA



The Women's Program has played an important role in developing the Macedonian women's movement, encouraging dialogue among women of different ethnicities.



The transition process has resulted in rapid growth in the number of women's NGOs, though women have very limited access to political decision-making at all levels. The women's NGO sector and individuals in Macedonia have done a considerable amount of work addressing the needs of women and raising awareness of gender issues. However, recent crises have further divided Albanian and Macedonian women and hampered the possibility for shaping a united women's agenda that would benefit and empower women of all ethnic groups.

The Foundation Open Society Institute–Macedonia Women's Program has played an important role in transforming the women's NGO sector and developing the Macedonian women's movement. To address the most painful issues dividing Macedonian society, the Women's Program has focused on encouraging cooperation and dialogue among women of different ethnicities. In 2001, the Program provided seed grants for community-based projects in ethnically mixed communities. The Program plans to initiate joint meetings with women's NGOs in these communities to identify potential partnerships.

In the spring of 1999, the Women's Program responded to the Kosovo crisis by making emergency funds available for refugee women. Through local NGOs, the Women's Program distributed aid packages for women refugees hosted by local families and organized sewing and English courses. The German Institute for International Cooperation joined FOSI–Macedonia in providing sewing machines. In addition, the Women's Program awarded several grants to women's organizations for projects targeting refugee women and children.

Another pressing problem is violence against women. The Women's Program has helped NGOs with media campaigns to raise public awareness, workshops, debate programs, crisis centers, and medical, psychological, and legal counseling. These activities have succeeded not only in raising public awareness, but also in opening the door for women to speak up about their experiences and begin the struggle to regain their lives.

In collaboration with the Healthy Options Project (HOPS), the Women's Program designed a pilot project for HIV/AIDS prevention among women involved in

prostitution, the most vulnerable and marginalized group of women in society. This was a pioneering step in addressing the needs of sex workers and their families.

Through a challenging door-to-door campaign, a team of social workers and grassroots activists contacted almost 60 women. HOPS distributed condoms and educational brochures and created an SOS line. In 2002, the Women's Program will continue working with HOPS on HIV/AIDS prevention and women involved in prostitution. With the NGO Open Gate, HOPS will also work on a Trafficking in Women Prevention Project.

The Research Center for Gender Studies established by the Women's Program was the first to introduce gender theory to the broader public; promote contemporary feminist thought among academics and NGO activists; and establish gender studies as an academic discipline. The Center has organized several symposiums, workshops, roundtables, a regional seminar for students and scholars, and several gender research projects.

The Center publishes a directory of women's NGOs in Macedonia. An Information and Documentation Unit provides information on the status of women in society. In September 2001, the Center began to publish *Identities*, a journal for politics, gender, and culture, in Macedonian and English to communicate regionally and gain international attention.

The Macedonian participants of the network-wide Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women program addressed the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. In collaboration with several women's NGOs, the team conducted a national campaign for raising public awareness and drafted amendments to the criminal and labor laws. Advocates, judges, union members, and women's NGO representatives attended a lively public debate on the amendments and produced policy recommendations. After the debate, participants formed the Breza advocacy group to lobby for legal changes.

MOLDOVA



The most important outcome is the women's renewed sense of self-confidence stemming from their ability to provide for their families.



In July 2000, after more than a decade of transition, Moldova returned to a communist-controlled government. The legacy of communism is still evident in a lack of information about nongovernmental approaches and a general political passivity. The role of NGOs is not widely understood—they are often regarded as temporary organizations of low importance. Many think that only governmental activities are valid.

Women have less access than men to essential financial resources, and women frequently face discrimination in hiring, promotion, and firing practices. Unemployed women on average remain out of work much longer than men. In the last decade, chronic unemployment, scarce wages, and legislative inadequacies have contributed to the emergence of the disturbing, new phenomenon of trafficking in women and an increase in domestic violence. To provide for their families, many Moldovan women are forced to accept employment in low-paid and exhausting jobs, endure harassment, and often illegally leave the country in the search for better paying jobs.

The Soros Foundation–Moldova Women’s Program has successfully run several projects focused on the development of practical skills. In 1999, the Handicraft Union of Moldova launched a substantial initiative for vulnerable women in the village of Vasieni. Astonished by newspaper articles about economic despair in this village (people selling their internal organs abroad for survival), the Union began a training program for 40 women in traditional handicraft skills, including crocheting, embroidery, and weaving, and basic business skills.

The trainees participate in exhibitions and other events in the village and elsewhere, receiving recognition and exposure. The most important outcome of the project is the women’s renewed sense of self-confidence stemming from their ability to provide for their families and feel useful.

The precarious economy has led to limited, expensive medical care and an ailing health care system, with detrimental consequences for women’s health. Moldova has a staggering number of newly registered cases of breast cancer annually. The Women’s Program funds a number of NGOs that conduct policy research; produce informational posters, fliers, and television public service announcements; and provide training for doctors.

The Women’s Program works to increase awareness on issues of gender equity and women’s empowerment; increase the effectiveness of coalition building, dialogue, and collaboration among women’s NGOs; monitor and decrease discriminatory attitudes against women in society; and establish a clear set of journalistic standards for gender equity in the mass media.

One great success was the creation of the Ten Plus club for women journalists. Several years ago, an international seminar challenged a Moldovan journalist to scrutinize gender sensitivity in the media. She discovered that apart from one or two references to women singers, an outsider would have deduced that Moldovan women simply did not exist. This revelation inspired 10 women journalists to work at making women’s voices present in the mainstream media by creating the Ten Plus club.

The membership list now includes activists, many from rural communities. The club promotes women’s empowerment in the mainstream press, works to increase the number of women in decision-making positions, and offers accolades for exceptional articles and radio and TV programs. In addition, the club publishes a vital 20-page bulletin—the only publication that brings gender issues into focus in the country.

MONGOLIA



The Mongolian women's movement in the last 10 years has become a diverse, strong, and integral part of civil society.



Although located in the heart of Asia, Mongolia's remote, landlocked geographical position and complex history make it difficult to place in regional categories used by governments, international organizations, and academics. In the face of urbanization, the nomadic traditions of the steppes continue, but Mongolia's recent transition to a market economy has meant drastic changes in socioeconomic and political life, leading to economic crisis and political instability.

Changes have had both positive and negative impacts on the situation of women. While there are more opportunities for women to participate in the democratic process, to exercise freedom of choice, and to own property, many women have slid into a state of poverty, unemployment, and poor nutrition and health.

The Mongolian women's movement in the last 10 years has become a diverse, strong, and integral part of civil society. It includes women's studies programs, information centers, antiviolence initiatives, and organizations for women lawyers. It succeeded in building alliances to promote women in positions of power. At the same time, the difference between the development of the women's movement in the capital city and in rural areas is a significant concern.

The Mongolian Foundation for Open Society Women's Program encourages and promotes the sustainability of new and existing women's and gender studies programs. It also works on preventing violence against women and increasing the visibility of Mongolian women's NGOs and their activities in the international arena.

In the remote western region of Bayan-Ulgii, which has a large population of ethnic minorities, the Women's Training Center has helped improve the economic situation of individual women and the sustainability of women's NGOs. The Center has expanded from an income-generating project to include much-needed civic and legal education.

The Mongolian participants' project of the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women is an example of a cross-sectoral collaboration to effect policy change. The team worked with the Foreign Investment Department of the Ministry of External Affairs. The Labor Department and Foreign Investment Department continue to consult team members on gender and labor policy issues.

The team conducted a survey on the labor rights issues of women employed in garment factories and created training models and training materials. The participants effectively lobbied Labor Monitoring Department officials of the Social Welfare and Labor Ministry on the need for monitoring labor rights issues in joint ventures. One important outcome was the adoption of a new Labor Code by the Parliament.

Projects on domestic violence raised public awareness, facilitated a more women-friendly response by law enforcement agencies, and encouraged coalition building of rural NGOs. Specific activities included training of trainers, counseling for abusive men, legal and psychological consultation for women, support groups, and the production and dissemination of educational materials. Grantees have also set up a working group to develop domestic violence education in the police academy.

MONTENEGRO



The most pressing issues for the Women's Program include violence against women, early marriage, education, and gender discrimination.



In its decade-long social crisis, Montenegro has witnessed an intensive revival of patriarchal values, which has endangered the realization of women's human rights. In the context of the war, sanctions, conflict in Kosovo, and NATO intervention, the issue of women's rights has been largely ignored. Women in Montenegro must face obstacles such as high unemployment, high illiteracy rates, and low participation in decision-making structures. Although the law guarantees women's equal status, it still has not addressed several vital issues, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and family planning. Among the most pressing issues for the Women's Program of the Open Society Institute–Montenegro are violence against women, early marriage, education (women's studies and research), and gender discrimination.

In the capital city of Podgorica, the SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence was the first organized group to fight violence against women in Montenegro. By working with the prison administration, the group was able to increase the number of visitations allowed for incarcerated mothers to see their children, from only twice a year to once a month. Through the organization's help, the women have been allowed other rights as well, such as being able to remove their uniforms for a couple of hours in the afternoons, to cook for themselves, and to reestablish relationships with family members.

Many women and children have found a safe place, for 24 hours to one year, at the Shelter for Women and Children Victims of Male Violence in Podgorica. The shelter offers medical and psychological help, workshops for children, and legal advice. Recognized as a necessity in the community, the shelter has attracted the interest of many other donors and institutions. It has established successful cooperation with law enforcement, medical institutions, schools, and kindergartens.

The SOS Hotline in the town of Niksic encompasses a wide range of activities and programs. The group was among the first to start working with local and refugee Romani children and women. It offers classes at the SOS House and evening classes for children to help them finish school while providing a safe space for women and children.


The Women's Program helped to establish an Information and Documentation Center that showed women's groups the importance of networking, cooperation, and access to relevant information. In addition, the Women's Program helped to develop women's studies and research at the university faculties in Niksic and Podgorica, introducing the issue of gender in educational reform and working to sensitize teachers and administrators.

Professional volleyball players from Montenegro, at the European Volleyball Cup Tournament in Podgorica, carry an antiviolence campaign banner that reads, "Show your strength but not on women."

POLAND



The Women's Program works to increase women's participation in political, social, and economic life.



There has been much development in Poland, but the social cost of transition continues to be very high. Poverty is growing, especially in rural areas. Profamily, antichoice policies have tried to restrict women's roles to the family. The government has resisted introducing institutional mechanisms for gender equality, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Parliament rejected equal opportunity legislation that would have protected women against discrimination in the labor market.

Women have little access to quality health care, and the great majority of Polish society is fervently antichoice. Domestic violence, which was not discussed under communism, is increasingly coming into public view, but most people in Poland still do not see it as a human rights violation.

Established more than eight years ago, the Stefan Batory Foundation Women's Program is one of the oldest women's programs in the Soros foundations network. The Women's Program provides financial support to NGOs and informal groups working toward fostering legal awareness among women, increasing women's participation in political, social, and economic life, promoting women's health issues, and preventing violence against women.

Numerous organizations point to the important role the Women's Program plays not only in providing funding but also in offering additional assistance and advice in needs assessment, strategic planning, and capacity development. Among other activities, the Program organizes meetings and other events for exchanging information, cooperation, and networking. One grantee said, "The Women's Program is a place where everybody can come for support and advice. Its value cannot be measured only in economic terms."

The Women's Program has demonstrated its ability to act quickly and decisively. During the devastating floods in southern Poland in 1997, for example, it was the first to provide support for on-site crisis intervention centers.

The Women's Program awards grants to organizations of rural women to run workshops for unemployed women and provide legal, psychological, and medical assistance. Many beneficiaries have found

jobs, become involved in income-generating activities, and established new organizations.

The Women's Self-Help Movement is a small, Warsaw-based association that assists women affected by violence and promotes women's leadership and self-help. One woman, once a victim of violence seeking legal counseling herself, is now running her own support group. Several other women are now employed. As a result of these successes, a benefactor donated space to the association to provide counseling to mothers with small children.

Through funding to the Family Planning Association in Wroclaw, a Women's Program grantee developed a comprehensive program of crisis intervention, a system of free legal, psychological, and pedagogical counseling to women and their children, and a diagnostic center for victims of sexual abuse, including facilities for disabled women (very rare in Poland). The local National Health Services now contracts services with the center due to the high quality of its medical care. In the first half of 2000, the center provided services to 2,000 girls and women and their children.

The Women's Program funded a group of teachers from a village in central Poland to run workshops for rural women. The topics included women's rights, family planning, educational and vocational development, economic activities, and violence against women. The project also provided health exams, including mammograms.

Thirty of the participating women farmers and homemakers established an association of rural women, also with funding from the Women's Program. The association monitors the situation of women in the community and encourages the local government to include women's issues on its agenda. They also organize cultural and social events, participate in NGO training, and attend meetings of women's groups in the Polish Parliament. A dynamic association of women now exists in a community where women have traditionally lacked self-confidence and opportunities and lived in isolation.

ROMANIA



“Our public events, radio talks, articles in newspapers, and training courses turned domestic violence from a taboo subject to a problem that needs to be addressed.”



In the ongoing struggle of transition, Romania faces both old problems, such as violence against women, and new ones, such as trafficking in women. Despite expressed commitments by officials in decision-making positions, governmental programs and policies in Romania have not truly begun to address gender issues and women's rights. The government has resisted taking the necessary steps to integrate gender awareness into Romanian society, and public discourse seldom touches upon the problem of gender discrimination.

Due to the pressure of women's organizations, however, gender is being taken into consideration in criminal law discussions. The law already addressed many issues, such as rape, although incompletely. Romanian law previously allowed rapists who married their victims to evade punishment, but this proviso has now been repealed. Other issues, such as domestic violence and trafficking in women, have not yet been addressed.

The Women's Program of the Open Society Foundation–Romania has brought valuable expertise and assistance to the women's movement. One of the strengths of the Women's Program is making taboo subjects, such as domestic violence, visible. As one NGO member said: "At the beginning it was very hard, especially because we were working with an unknown subject in domestic violence. People looked at us suspiciously. But interest in the subject increased due to our public events, radio talks, articles in newspapers, and training courses. This turned domestic violence from a taboo subject to a problem that needs to be addressed."

In September 1999, the Women's Program cofunded and organized a major event that caught the attention of the media: an outdoor gathering of over 100 participants to protest domestic violence. The meeting was to protest an article in the Romanian *Playboy*, entitled "How to Beat Your Woman Without Leaving any Marks." An impressive number of men supported this event, which represented the public emergence of the Romanian feminist movement. Not only did the event raise public awareness, but it also resulted in the creation of a shelter for battered women, financed by *Playboy* magazine itself.

In 2001, the Women's Program launched an antitrafficking project with the participation of Romanian government ministries, the International Center for Migration and Health in Geneva, OSCE, United Nations agencies, and the World Health Organization. The project will work on prevention and reintegration through research and analysis of the problem, effective legislation and law enforcement strategies, awareness campaigns, and training.

Women's economic empowerment is a component largely ignored by rural economic empowerment initiatives. The Women's Program and the Economic Development Center created a training and counseling program for rural communities. The Center, a member of the Soros Open Network, helps small and medium-sized businesses by providing information, training, and consultation. As a result of this initiative, the special needs of women are now taken into consideration when creating courses on income generation and community development.

The leadership of the OSF–Romania Women's Program at the regional level led to the development of the subregional network program Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the EU Accession Process. Renate Weber, president of OSF–Romania, believes that the program "is well-positioned, not only to promote the values of equal treatment of women and men within this region, but also to find appropriate means of convincing the European Commission, the European Parliament, and other relevant EU institutions to promote the same values on a more global scale."

RUSSIA



Women's human rights fellows and women's NGOs participated in hearings held by the State Duma to advocate for changes in the Labor Code.



The Open Society Institute–Russia Women’s Program is helping to make gender issues more visible and accessible. It has effectively worked to mainstream gender into crucial social institutions, and to change policy to empower women and promote strategic advocacy by women’s groups. It has covered a wide range of issues in collaboration with activists, NGOs, university departments, mass media, and the government. The Women’s Program also collaborates with almost every other foundation program.

Anita Soboleva, the director of the OSI–Russia Rule of Law program, said: “When the Women’s Program showed us concrete facts about discrimination against women, we started to take this issue more seriously. No doubt, it was a huge shift in our awareness. Now when we consider a problem, we try to look at it from the gender perspective as well.”

There are thousands of women’s organizations active in this large country. Since distances are long and travel costs high, the Women’s Program helps women’s organizations, many located in remote regions, build coalitions and gain access to new communications technologies. Projects connect women through websites and links to vital resources. A leading resource is the Open Women’s Line, an Internet portal containing a vast amount of information. Another prominent project is an Internet network of Russian libraries. In early 2000, the Program launched a unique publication of Russian-language resources, “Women on the Web,” now widely used as a reference tool in Russia and in many other countries.

The Women’s Program has supported numerous university gender studies courses and publications. In 1998, gender education grants helped to expand the gender studies community, providing women teachers with valuable peer support. In 1999, a grantee created an interdisciplinary resource center for teaching courses on gender studies, including a model gender studies course for professors from 20 regional universities. The Women’s Program has also worked to incorporate gender-sensitive education into federal educational standards and develop a system of teacher retraining.

Russia’s participation in the Human Rights Advanced Leadership Training for Women program brought together a multisectoral team from different geographical regions of Russia to choose and work together on a common issue: women’s labor rights. The team members overcame differences resulting from their varied backgrounds and experiences and disparate understandings of advocacy. Together with numerous women’s NGOs and associations, they participated in hearings held by the State Duma, establishing contacts and dialogue with Duma members to advocate for changes in the Labor Code.

To break gender stereotypes and strengthen popular images of women, the Women’s Program encourages creativity in culture and the arts. At the regional level, the Women’s Program, in cooperation with its counterpart at the Soros Foundation–Kazakhstan, is coordinating the network-wide program Mass Media and Gender Policy. Each of the 12 participating countries will produce a high-quality documentary film to make gender issues more visible.

To bring exposure to the works of Russian women artists from 1500–2000, the Women’s Program sponsored a ground-breaking women’s art exhibition in one of Russia’s leading art galleries, the Tretyakov gallery in Moscow. The exhibition drew wide interest from the mass media. About 10 radio stations and women’s magazines served as informational sponsors. An article in the January 25, 2002 *Moscow Times* described the exhibition as “an eclectic, democratic display of the talents of women from many walks of life—some anonymous, some named, all deserving of the recognition they have now acquired. This is a long overdue tribute to their relentless dedication.”

SLOVAKIA



Many of the issues tackled by women's groups are considered delicate, controversial, embarrassing, or even nonexistent.



One of the most important goals of the Open Society Foundation–Bratislava Women’s Program is to help build an active network of women’s NGOs to cooperate on projects vital for women’s empowerment.

The Women’s Program works to challenge existing prejudices and stereotypes, which are deeply rooted in society. Many of the issues tackled by grantees, such as violence, reproductive rights, or sexual orientation, are considered delicate, controversial, embarrassing, or even nonexistent. With state and local government reluctant to work with women’s NGOs, the Women’s Program plays an important role in filling the funding gap for projects addressing these often controversial and otherwise invisible issues. The Women’s Program also provides leadership opportunities for marginalized women to present their ideas in local and international forums.

One increasingly controversial issue is freedom of reproductive choice. The Women’s Program supports advocacy, public debate, and education to raise people’s awareness. In response to the Christian Democratic Party’s attempts in 2001 to restrict women’s reproductive rights, the Women’s Program, in cooperation with an alliance of NGOs, helped to establish the Initiative for Freedom of Choice. Women’s NGOs in Slovakia came together to lobby against proposed restrictions to women’s reproductive rights.

Violence against women is an often invisible and taboo issue. The civil association Pro Familia in northeastern Slovakia has helped break much of the silence surrounding gender-based violence. Its project, “Violence Against Women – A Women’s Human Rights Issue: Women Writing Laws,” led to positive changes in legislation and legal practice. Seminars and workshops for social workers, psychologists, lawyers, police officers, teachers, and journalists provided training to increase awareness.

The majority of projects have focused on assistance to socially and economically marginalized women and girls, including unemployed, uneducated, Romani, refugee, or rural women, disabled women or mothers of disabled children, lesbians, domestic violence victims, and women on maternity leave.

The Club of Disabled Children of Kosice works with mothers of disabled children. These women are disadvantaged both within their families and in society, often having to give up their jobs and free time to take care of their children. In many cases, they are left alone, sometimes with several children, dependent on state support. The club provides mothers of disabled children with a support network, peer counseling, and services for their children.


The project has succeeded in bringing disability issues to the attention of the public and bringing essential actors together to help propose solutions for positive change. In addition, it has created an information database for legislative changes and established successful cooperation with the mass media, which regularly covers stories about the club.

The Help Foundation in Bratislava teaches skills to unemployed women from marginalized groups, including Romani and disabled women, so that they can gain employment or start their own businesses. The Foundation created a counseling center in Bratislava, with a team of expert volunteer workers to advise clients on education, employment, and various social and legal issues.

TAJIKISTAN



The Ferghana Valley Forum of women’s NGOs—a kind of “folk diplomacy”—discussed and implemented numerous political and gender initiatives.



Tajikistan has suffered from a deep economic crisis worsened by civil war, which created a new population of widows. The increasing influence of more restrictive forms of Islamic law, the reemergence of polygamy (technically forbidden by law), and an increase in early marriages by young girls have led to further subjugation of women. With fewer opportunities for education and less access to decision-making structures, women find it difficult to effect change in Tajikistan.

The Women's Program of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation–Tajikistan has helped to shape public opinion through a number of funded projects. During the election campaign of 1999, these activities contributed to a presidential decree vowing to increase the role of women in the society. Consequently, the number of women in leadership positions rose, as did the number of women deputies in the Majlisi Oli (Parliament) and local majlisies.

In October 2000, the Women's Program, in cooperation with the Foundation's Legal Program, held a workshop to address the disturbing rise in cases of young women in rural areas resorting to self-immolation (the deliberate and willing sacrifice of oneself, as a desperate form of protest, often by fire). The workshop attracted representatives of the khukumats (local government bodies), governmental and nongovernmental women's organizations from the Khatlon oblast, and international organizations. Participants recommended preventative strategies and published a brochure on self-immolation of women and girls.

The Women's Program funded emergency work by a local women's NGO in remote villages to mobilize the community, raise awareness on the complex factors that lead to this form of protest, and provide psychological counseling to women in crisis. Within five months of operation, not one case of self-immolation was registered in this area (compared to seven in the previous two months).

Drug addiction/abuse among women and women's involvement in the drug trade are on the rise in Tajikistan. The Women's Program and OSI's Central Eurasia Project (CEP) have funded various research-based projects to help deal with this issue. One project is researching the court cases of women convicted of drug-related charges to determine reasons for the growth of drug crimes by women.

OSI–Tajikistan, in cooperation with CEP, published the brochure *Women, Crime, and Drugs* and held several events on the subject, including the showing of a documentary, *Light Glows in Darkness*, followed by a discussion. The film by A. Tsirulev is about the fate of a woman sentenced to 12 years for attempting to illegally transport drugs. This major initiative has the potential to positively affect U.S. foreign policy with regard to women in Central Asia.

The Women's Program is a leader at the subregional level. For example, the Ferghana Valley Forum of women's NGOs in Central Asia helped connect women from NGOs in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (countries through which the valley stretches). At the Forum, described as a kind of “folk diplomacy,” participants discussed numerous political and gender initiatives, which have been subsequently implemented. As part of the Mass Media and Gender Policy initiative, the Women's Program is working to create a core of gender-sensitive journalists at the local and national levels and, at the same time, heighten awareness around the issue of women in the drug trade.

UKRAINE



“Before this program,” a 70-year-old woman said, “my whole life I thought I was crazy because I had looked at women and men as equals.”



Ukrainian independence in 1991 provided the impetus for a women's movement and helped to put women's issues on the country's agenda. However, in spite of a growing number of women's NGOs, women's issues have not gained special significance in society, and the movement is mostly confined to urban areas. Among the public, there tends to be a general lack of information as well as negative attitudes regarding issues of feminism and women's rights.

The new women's movement has experienced both victories and failures in its struggle to ensure that women's rights are adequately protected by the country's laws. On a positive note, in November 2001, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted a Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence (initiated by a Women's Program board member).

At the same time, some members of the Parliament recognize that women's empowerment, if taken seriously, may change the gender power balance, especially with respect to political decision making. In a heated debate on a proposed gender equality bill, one Parliament member went so far as to proclaim, "Gender is a threat to national security." The bill was rejected.

The Woman's Program of the International Renaissance Foundation is one of the oldest women's programs in the network. The Program has succeeded in creating new jobs and credit unions for women, expanding gender-sensitive education at all levels, improving professionalism in women's NGOs, increasing gender awareness within the population, and allowing for research on key gender issues.

In cooperation with the Women's Information and Consultative Center, the Women's Program takes a leadership role in promoting the network program Empowering Education, which is operating in different locations around Ukraine as well as in eight other countries. One of the most significant achievements of this program in Ukraine was the official licensing of the Empowering Education training course by the Ministry of Education.

This multicultural program has been translated and adapted for use with such ethnic groups as the Roma and the Crimean Tatars, with part of the course focusing on the resettlement and integration issues of returnees

from Uzbekistan. In the Lviv oblast, the Empowering Education program, together with Heifer International, provided gender and family courses for families from mountainous villages in the Carpathians. The trainers, concerned with how the introduction of gender issues would be received, were surprised with the participants' enthusiastic response. "Before this program," a 70-year-old woman said, "my whole life I thought I was crazy because I had looked at women and men as equals."

Another important area is economic empowerment. The Women's Program has enabled the creation of new jobs for women, credit unions, business incubators, and green tourism. Economic training courses, in cooperation with Winrock International, have allowed many women to receive credit to start their own businesses. The Women's Program has also helped to form networks and to increase the skills and capacity of women's NGOs.


Various projects have pursued change on the policy level. The Kharkiv Women's Research Center, one of the most advanced gender studies centers in the region, began an information campaign to draw the government's attention to gender inequities in trade and bring about more gender-equitable trade policies. The Parliament recently adopted an economic regulatory law, initiated by a Women's Program grantee through the project "NGO and Government Cooperation as a Social Partnership."

To respond to the problems of sexually transmitted diseases, drug abuse, and the sex trade among young people, the Trans-Carpathian Association of Family Planning created an innovative theater group. Performances of *What a Beautiful Life Means* and *Adventure Seekers* inform secondary school and university students about these important issues and the consequences of poor life choices. The theater also does monthly traveling performances for rural youth in western Ukraine on issues of reproductive and sexual health.

UZBEKISTAN



The Women's Program encourages rural participation in the women's movement through quarterly meetings that draw leaders from around the country.



In recent years, Uzbekistan has been the focus of criticism by international human rights organizations for numerous human rights violations, and especially for neglecting the issue of gender-based violence. This issue is not unique to Uzbekistan, but the efforts of advocates have been hampered by the fact that until recently the government refused to admit the problem existed. Women's NGOs have mobilized their efforts to pressure the government to recognize the existence not only of violence against women, but also of a broad range of gender inequalities in society. These efforts, though far from achieving long-term changes in practice and attitudes, have brought some initial success.

For example, the government of Uzbekistan has taken some steps to guarantee gender equality. The year 1999 was officially declared the "Year of the Woman," prompting discussion on gender issues. The government has openly recognized the existence of gender-based violence and is considering launching a national program to publicly support crisis centers. However, attitudes toward women's rights and roles are deeply ingrained.

The Women's Program of the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation–Uzbekistan promotes cooperation among women's NGOs and encourages rural women's participation in the women's movement.

It organizes quarterly meetings of women's NGOs to provide women leaders with a forum to discuss important issues and share their activities. The meetings have also helped to build a bridge between the vibrant, nonhierarchical NGOs and the politically engaged, often exclusive governmental organizations.

The meetings have opened up taboo topics for discussion, such as domestic violence, unemployment, gender stereotypes, and Islamic fundamentalism, and set strategies for dealing with these issues. More than anything else, the meetings provide a unique opportunity for women from different parts of Uzbekistan, with different experiences and backgrounds, to meet each other and identify common goals.

The Ishonch (Faith) Crisis Centers are located in the Ferghana Valley, the most densely populated region of the country with half of Uzbekistan's largest cities. Women in the Ferghana Valley must grapple with issues of high unemployment, domestic violence, and drug trafficking and addiction. The Ishonch Crisis Centers provide free legal, psychological, and medical counseling, operate a hotline, and conduct outreach in remote districts to help educate women on women's rights, domestic violence, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Legal Education for Girls, a project for teenagers, is based on the interactive teaching methodology of Empowering Education, the network-wide program initiated in Ukraine. The participants valued the program's atmosphere of trust and partnership. The girls' self-esteem increased as they gained legal knowledge on human rights, women's rights, and gender equality as well as training skills. Boys in the pilot classes increased their awareness and interest in gender issues. One of the most unexpected and exciting results was that the teaching staff of pilot schools and colleges expressed a desire to become project volunteers. In addition, the project has received considerable encouragement from local state educational authorities and the local khokimiyat (mayor's office).

YUGOSLAVIA



The Women's Program has contributed to the emergence of women's political perspectives in Yugoslavia.



Contemporary feminists have raised “the woman question” in Yugoslavia since 1978, yet in the last 10 years, instability has defined the situation of women and the women’s movement in Yugoslavia. Women’s rights and gender issues have been trivialized in the aftermath of war and the destruction of institutions and public space. Now, however, society has begun to address the issue of women as a politically and socially relevant topic. The destructive phenomena of increasing violence, a devastated economy, and a ruined education system have had a negative effect on women’s image, roles, and opportunities in society.

In addition to its gender-mainstreaming approach to grantmaking throughout the foundation, the Women’s Program of the Fund for an Open Society–Serbia (formerly the Fund for an Open Society–Yugoslavia) has contributed to the emergence of women’s political perspectives in Yugoslavia. It has supported the development of Romani women’s leaders, initiated energetic and creative programs targeting disabled women and breast cancer survivors, and brought women’s studies to rural areas through a mobile educational outreach program.

From its very beginning, the Women’s Program has dealt with issues of marginalized women. In 1998, the Program supported the first Romani women’s groups, including the Bibija Center for Roma Women’s Rights in Belgrade and a group of disabled women.

The Bibija Center started promoting the rights of Romani women by holding workshops for women and girls in Romani settlements. The workshops, which focused on sexuality, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, and nutrition, also evolved into discussing gender consciousness and women’s human rights. In more than three years, the group has worked in 10 settlements, participating in large Romani development programs and cooperating with other Romani groups. The Center organized a door-to-door election campaign and workshops for Romani women voters. In 2001, they initiated the Romani women’s leadership seminar for

Romani women activists from Serbia and a roundtable on Romani women’s human rights.

Around the elections of 1999, the Women’s Program supported a multisectoral group of women politicians, NGO members, and women from trade unions in organizing a successful door-to-door campaign to influence rural and ethnic minority women. These organizers established strong contacts with the regional ministry for women’s issues in promoting women candidates for the presidential elections.

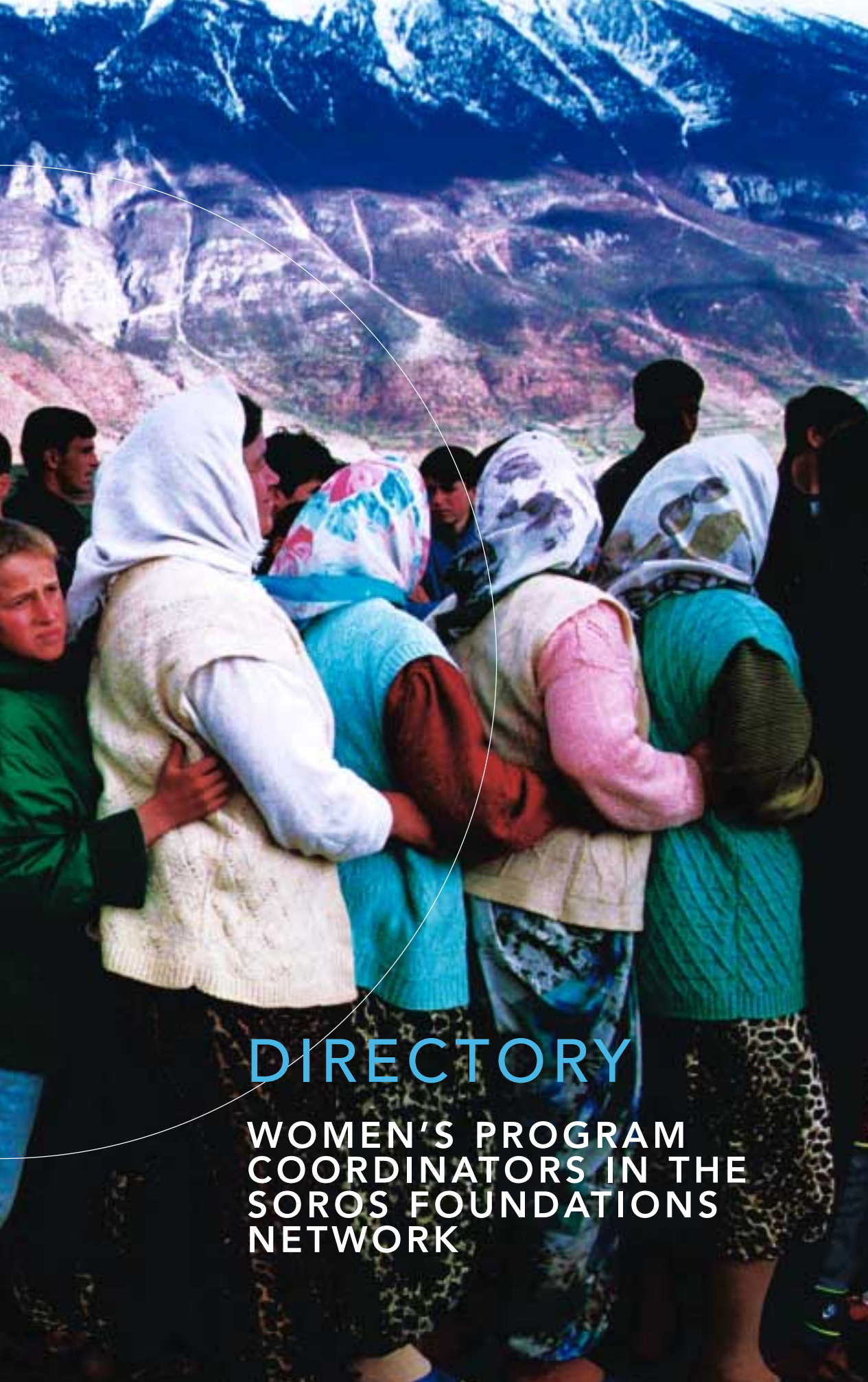
Two hotline activists and volunteers from the Autonomous Women’s Center and Incest Trauma Center created Out of the Circle, a support group for disabled women and children and mothers of disabled children. From an initial counseling service, the group expanded to include training and education on violence and discrimination against women, terminology on disabilities, and social and political advocacy.

Out of the Circle held workshops by and for hospitalized disabled women; lectures on “Architecture without Barriers” for architectural students; an exchange program for women with disabilities; and a disabled women’s conference with participants from Serbia and Montenegro. The 2000 conference focused on enabling women with disabilities to organize around women’s human rights, an agenda distinct from traditional organizations and programs. In 2001, the group trained trainers and planned to start branch groups in other cities.

Women experienced in psychosocial programs founded the Uzice Women’s Center in 1998 for refugees. Starting from basic activities and with help from feminist activists, the group has developed into a resource organization. The Center developed its own team to work on girls’ issues through educational, psychological, and creative workshops and the publication of a magazine for girls. The group also started a woman’s health program for girls with diabetes and a pioneer program on establishing self-help groups, counseling, and medical treatment for the women survivors of breast cancer.

A member of Women in Black holds a sign that reads, “I, as a woman, reject war.”





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An open society cannot exist without measurable and accountable responsibility for gender equity and diversity. Neither can it exist without the full participation of women in the solving of political, economic, and social problems.



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