

Zooming in

Briefing note on the outcomes of the
“Women, Energy, and Climate Resilience in the Caucasus & Central Asia” event

Women must come out of the shadows in the Caucasus and Central Asia

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Background

As governments in the Central Asia and Caucasus regions strive to meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement, protecting women from vulnerabilities they face in climate adaptation efforts and making the case for them in the energy sector emerges as both a **necessity and an opportunity**. [Kazakhstan](#), for example, aims for carbon neutrality by 2060, and [Georgia](#) seeks to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 35% by 2030. In order to fulfil this ambition, concrete climate adaptation measures and skills policies that will include women must be implemented. However, the situation of women in this region remains complex. So how to ensure their participation given the challenging conditions? Are there any successful models or examples? And how to make sure that the transition to renewable energy harnesses the full potential of women’s participation in these countries? What are the recommendations in this sense? These are the key points of this briefing.

Challenges come with opportunities

Women in Central Asia and the South Caucasus region are facing complex challenges when it comes to combating climate risks and employment in the energy sector.

Regarding women’s advancement in the energy sector, the current situation in Central Asia and the South Caucasus is mirroring the global trend. Here, women have traditionally been underrepresented in the energy sector. In Kazakhstan, for example, [data](#) shows that between 2016 and 2019, women accounted for an average of 25% of employees in the energy sector. Moreover, according to the latest statistics, the proportion of women in management positions and technical professions is only 16 and 19%, respectively. In Armenia, women are also less likely to be employed in technical fields, which are traditionally viewed as “masculine”. The [National Statistical Committee](#) has reported that 50% of women are not employed and are not seeking employment in Armenia, while many remain engaged in unpaid household work, which further limits their presence in the formal labor market. In Uzbekistan, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) used employment figures of the state-owned energy company Uzbekenergo (as the energy sector is predominantly state-owned), that showed just 17% of Uzbekenergo’s workforce was made up of women during 2014–2017, and no woman was found in top management. There has been no update of data since then. The ADB study attributes the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the energy sector, among other things, to inadequate educational and professional qualifications, a lack of knowledge about employment

options, limited training opportunities and stereotypes. In addition, in career decisions, women tend to be less motivated by the prospects of success than men due to the societal pressure to obtain qualifications that have a positive effect on family life. On top of the above-mentioned challenges, and specifically, when it comes to climate change, women in this part of the world also face disproportionate risks and vulnerabilities. This comes as a consequence of several [factors](#), such as:

- a) reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods (such as agriculture and pastoralism, where climate change impacts like droughts, floods, and soil degradation lead to increasing economic hardship for women and their families);
- b) limited access to resources and decision-making;
- c) heightened risks during climate disasters (mainly due to lack of mobility, and limited access to information and early warning systems).

Even though several complex challenges, as described above, can hinder progress, energy transition and management of climate risks also present opportunities for women. For example, studies, such as the OSCE's report on "[Advancing a Just Energy Transition in Central Asia](#)," project significant job creation potential in the renewable energy sector. Specifically, the model analysis of this study shows that if renewable energy capacity additions continue at the current pace, which means no additional policy or financial incentive, 17,345 jobs are likely to be created by 2050. However, if the governments will meet the current renewable energy commitments under the Paris Agreement, this will result in the creation of more than 51,090 jobs by 2050. And ultimately, as the model shows, an increase in ambition to achieve 75% renewable generation capacity by 2050 will result in the creation of more than 91,000 jobs. By **harnessing women's participation and leadership, Caucasus and Central Asia can enhance their workforce** and ensure that the transition to renewable energy is inclusive.

International support is there. But will this be enough?

In the last couple of years, thanks to the programmes accompanied by the support of international organisations and donors, progress has been seen on this topic in the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is safe to say that there is a growing movement to strengthen women's participation in the energy transition. Promising initiatives like '[50 Women in Tech](#)' and mentorship programs curated by [USAID](#) and [OSCE](#) aim to connect women with educational resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. These efforts resulted so far in fostering a supportive community for female professionals in the energy sector and offering women space and a safe platform for interaction, support and sharing of expertise. However, very often such strategies lack cohesion and governmental support. International actors are providing the finances, experiences and infrastructure to make progress in this direction. Nevertheless, if the government is not supporting such initiatives at the policy level as well, it is fairly difficult to ensure that such initiatives will reach as many women as possible.

Towards women's inclusion in renewable energy: best case examples

Experts agree that among the countries in the region, Georgia and Kazakhstan are seen as the ones leading the way towards the inclusion of women in the energy sector. According to the Asian Development Bank's "[Women-in-Energy Program for Central and West Asia](#)", women have already taken the initiative to shape the future of energy in Central Asia by establishing formal energy cooperatives designed to run local-scale renewable energy

operations. For example, in Georgia, WECF (Women Engage for a Common Future) have developed gender-responsive energy cooperatives as an example of inclusive and successful business model. Local cooperatives offer technical and financial advice, as well as production and installation of climate technologies, such as solar water heaters and efficient cookstoves. A tailored financial mechanism has been put in place in coordination with the two Georgian banks, enabling poor rural women-led households to access these technologies through affordable loans. According to the [project](#), households with very low income have gained access to financing for sustainable climate technologies, which are paid back within 4 to 6 years. This shows that with the targeted policy and support systems in place, women can become part of sustainable practices in the energy field. In Tajikistan, [OSCE](#) supported rural women in accessing off-grid solar-powered devices and trained them how to use this technology for their homes.

When it comes to the increase of women's visibility in employment in the energy sector, in Kazakhstan, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the "[Women for Just Transition](#)" network was established in 2023 to bring women to the centre of decision-making, fostering their political, and economic participation, and access to clean energy. The network uses tools such as advocacy, collaboration with academia, and reaching for women across both private and public sectors with the ultimate goal of championing gender-specific targets within the clean energy industry.

Last but not least, individual success stories also matter. UNDP Kyrgyzstan showcases [examples](#) of women who have not only become part of the energy sector in the country but also advanced the career ladder to top management positions.

Recommendations for advancing women's agenda in this region

Enhance the cooperation at the regional level

More coordination at the regional level is needed. The challenges that women face in these countries are the same to a certain degree. However, there is rarely a consideration to bridge the existing programmes and initiatives with the neighbouring country or region. Therefore, it would be beneficial to cooperate more and harmonise actions among the countries. This could be successfully done through:

- *joint research and analysis* on the barriers that women are still facing;
- develop *joint action plans* that would prioritise women's participation in the energy transition. These could be frameworks that would set a direction for promoting gender equality and increasing women's representation in the energy sector with clear targets and timelines.
- establish a *regional knowledge hub* that could provide access to resources and best practices for promoting gender equality in the energy sector and incorporation of gender aspects in climate change policies.

Collect disaggregated data by gender, sex, and age

This is essential to better understand the climate change risks, as well as the potential of women in renewable energy employment. Specifically, sex-disaggregated data is crucial for identifying barriers that women face in accessing employment opportunities in energy and designing targeted policies and programmes that can advance gender equality in the energy sector. Furthermore, this is also vital for monitoring progress towards gender equality and the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly [SDG 7](#), which focuses on affordable and clean energy.

Harmonise data collection and reporting practices

Regarding harmonisation, this is an ongoing challenge for the countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. So far, these countries have [reported](#) climate data using different methods and reference periods, making it difficult to compile an accurate and consistent regional dataset. Therefore, more coordination among countries is needed to align their data collection and reporting practices.

Incorporate gender mainstreaming into policy-making processes

In February 2022, Central Asian governments started to discuss the integration of gender equality into climate change policies within the framework of the [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) led by the UN Women. Among others, the SCW recommended to:

- a) strengthen coordination and gender mainstreaming across sectors and all levels of government;
- b) “increase the gender responsiveness of investment in climate change by scaling up technology transfer, capacity-building and the mobilisation of financial resources from all relevant sources (including public, private, national and international resource allocation); and
- c) increase public and private financing to women’s civil society organisations, and women’s cooperatives and enterprises for climate change.

Organising discussions and setting up recommendations for governments certainly shows a positive evolution in the right direction. Nevertheless, this proves to be insufficient as there is a lack of political will and persisting gender stereotypes that slow down the process of reforms in this area.

Encourage the inclusion of business companies and private actors in the process

This can be realised through the development of mentorship and sponsorship programs to support women's career advancement in the energy sector. [Women in Green Hydrogen Network](#) is an example in this sense. They offer mentorship programmes for women who would like to follow a career in the green hydrogen industry, and there are already experts involved in the network from the Central Asia countries. This represents a good start. Amplification of such an initiative could encourage more women to follow this career path and positively impact their employment in the energy sector in this region.

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