



# Gender Equality Programme

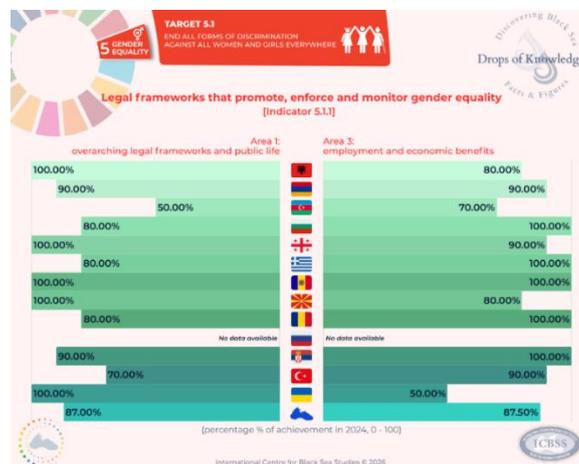
BRIEF #1 | MARCH 2026

## Gender Equality in decision-making and employment in the wider Black Sea region.

### State of Play

As of 2026, gender norms still impede gender equality and parity, while significant challenges remain across the 13 Member States<sup>1</sup> of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), despite recent progress.

At policy level, the adoption of national legal frameworks suggests significant improvement. According to the **UNSDG Indicator 5.1.1**<sup>2</sup> that measures whether legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality, in 2024 the BSEC countries' **average was at 87.08%** in the areas concerning overarching legal frameworks and public life, and employment and economic benefit (See Graph 1).

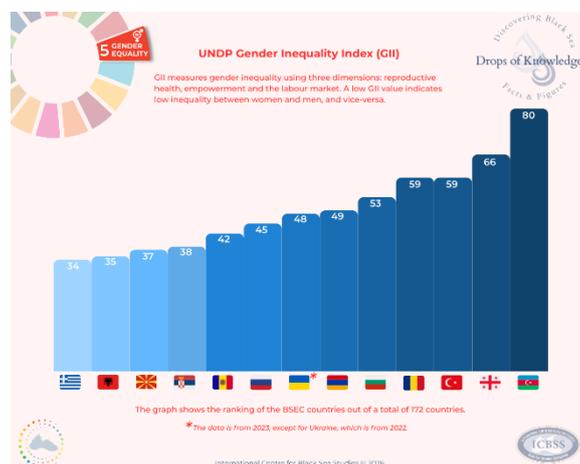


Graph 1: UNSDG 5.1.1. Adoption of National legal frameworks to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality across the 13 BSEC Member States, in Areas 1 and 3.

<sup>1</sup> BSEC Member States: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Republic of Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine

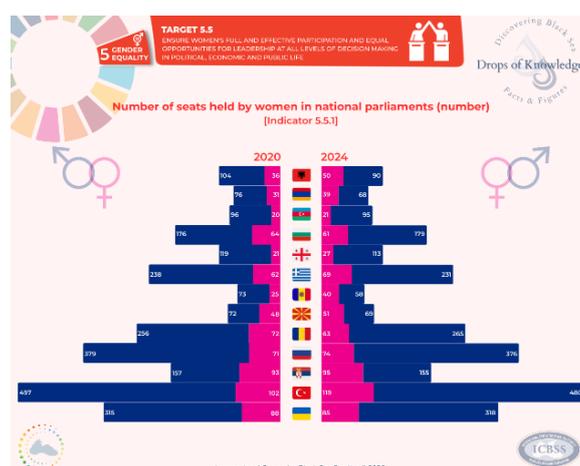
<sup>2</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database>

Despite countries' high performance however, recent data indicate that gender parity<sup>3</sup> has not been achieved in practice. According to the **UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII)**<sup>4</sup> that measures gender inequalities in three key dimensions (reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market), in 2023, Azerbaijan ranked 80th in 172 countries, the lowest among the BSEC13; while Greece (34), Albania (35), and the Republic of Moldova (37) ranked the highest (see Graph 2).



Graph 2: UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) across the 13 BSEC Member States.

Women continue to have limited representation in **decision-making and leadership** positions across the 13 countries of the region. In 2024, women held 27.38% of **elected seats in national parliaments** (794 seats of total 3291) in the BSEC13, up to 8.65% from 2015, and only 3.58% from 2020 according to the UNSDG Indicators Database. (See Graph 3)

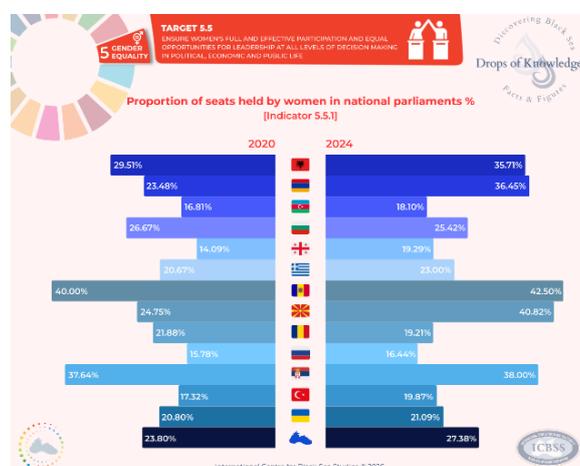


Graph 3: UNSDG 5.5.1. Number of seats held by women and men in national parliaments across the 13 BSEC Member States.

<sup>3</sup> Unlike gender equality, which addresses broad rights, parity is a statistic focusing on equal numerical representation of women and men in any given area such as leadership, education, or the workplace.

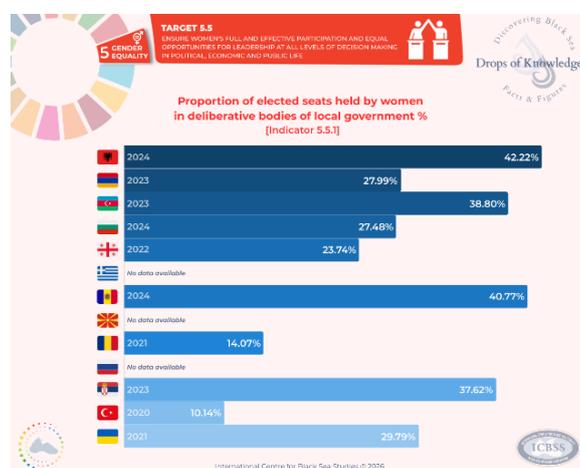
<sup>4</sup> <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>

The Republic of Moldova and the Republic of North Macedonia are at the highest positions with 40.82% and 42.50% respectively, whereas the Russian Federation has the lowest percentage at 16.44%. (See Graph 4)



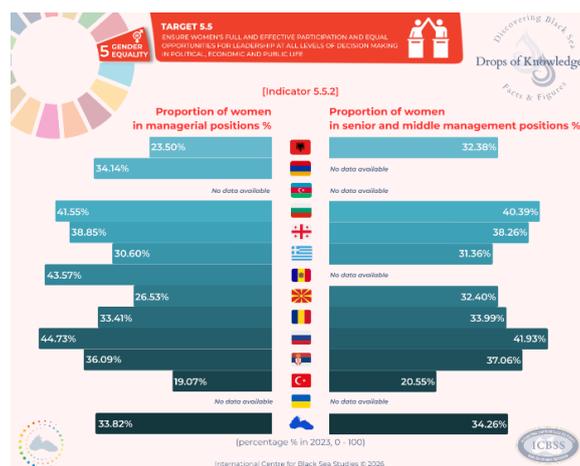
Graph 4. UNSDG 5.5.1. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments across the 13 BSEC Member States.

Furthermore, the proportion of elected seats held by **women in local government** varies significantly across the BSEC13. Albania and the Republic of Moldova rank higher at 42.22% and 40.77% respectively, whereas Romania and Türkiye are much lower, at 14.07% and 10.14% respectively. (See Graph 5)



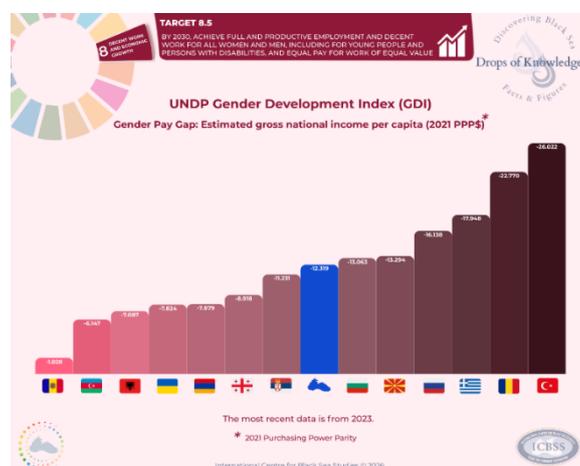
Graph 5: UNSDG 5.5.1. Proportion of elected seats held by women in local government, across the 13 BSEC Member States.

Indicators related to **employment and economic benefits** show even lower progress. The **UNSDG Indicator 5.5.2** that measures the **proportion of women in managerial, senior, or middle management positions**, notes limited improvement over the past decade across the BSEC region; from 31.5% in 2015 to only 34.5% in 2023. (See Graph 6)



Graph 6. UNSDG 5.5.2. Proportion of women in managerial, senior, or middle management positions across the 13 BSEC Member States.

Additionally, the **gender pay gap average** is at -12,319 (2021 PPP\$)<sup>5</sup> according to the estimated gross national income per capita for the **2023 UNDP Gender Development Index (GDI)**<sup>6</sup>. As of 2023, the smallest pay gap is observed in the Republic of Moldova, at -1,828 (2021 PPP\$); while the highest is in Romania at -22,770 (2021 PPP\$) and Türkiye at -26,022 (2021 PPP\$). Worth noting that the three BSEC EU Member States, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, rank above the BSEC average at the highest ranks. (See Graph 7)



Graph 7: UNSDG 8.5 Gender pay gap across the 13 BSEC Member States

## In conclusion

Measurements across various indicators reveal a significant disparity between governments' efforts adopting legal frameworks to support gender equality, and

<sup>5</sup> The 2021 PPP\$ are the main data used to convert different currencies into a common, comparable unit, while accounting for price differences across countries.

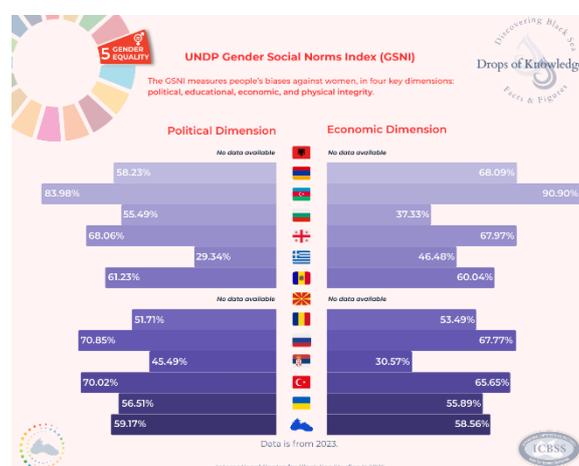
<sup>6</sup> <https://hdr.undp.org/gender-development-index#/indicies/GDI>

the actual situation. These findings highlight that **structural and legal reforms** are not enough to achieve gender equality. In fact, data emphasise the pressing need to address **cultural and societal barriers** across the BSEC region. Persistent social norms and stereotypes feed discriminatory behaviours and undermine efforts to human development.

The **2023 UNDP Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)**<sup>7</sup> measures **people's biases against women**, in four key dimensions: political, educational, economic, and physical integrity. In 2023, **85.76% of people**, namely **85 in 100 persons** across the 13 countries of the BSEC region, have **at least one bias against women** in these four categories<sup>8</sup>.

In relation to the **political and economic dimension** particularly, it is noted that **58 in 100 persons** (58.87%) across the BSEC countries believe that women having the same rights as men is not essential for democracy, men make better political leaders than women do, men should have more right to a job than women, and men make better business executives than women do.

Azerbaijan notes the highest percentage of people's bias against women in both dimensions, politics and the economy, at 87.4%. Greece scores the lowest at 29.34% in the political dimension, while Serbia has the lowest percentage, 30.57%, in the economic dimension.



Graph 8: UNDP Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) - Percentage of people with bias by dimension across the 13 BSEC Member States.

<sup>7</sup> <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>

<sup>8</sup> See ICBSS Drops of Knowledge for International Women's Day | Facts from the Black Sea region, 7 March 2025, <https://icbss.org/international-womens-day-black-sea-region-facts/>

## Other observations

- Aside from the UNSDGs and other UNDP relevant indexes, there are no regional indicators available to monitor the progress of gender equality across the BSEC region.
- Key regional policy-oriented documents make little to none references to gender equality in the BSEC region.
- BSEC's key document, the 2023 BSEC Economic Agenda 'Towards a sustainable future of the wider Black Sea area' refers only once to gender equality, in the General Guidelines<sup>9</sup>.
- There is no mention of gender equality in the two key frameworks, the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, and the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, both adopted in 2019<sup>10</sup>.
- The 2025 European Union's Strategic Approach to the Black Sea region<sup>11</sup> includes gender equality in the envisaged priorities, however, there is not a dedicated action plan available to promote, support, and monitor gender equality progress in the wider Black Sea region.

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## METADATA

1. The UNDP Gender Inequality Index measures gender inequalities in three key dimensions: a) reproductive health, b) empowerment, c) and labour market. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment is measured by the shares of parliamentary seats held and population with at least some secondary education by each gender; and labour market participation is measured by the labour force participation rates for women and men.
2. PPPs are the main data used to convert different currencies into a common, comparable unit, while accounting for price differences across countries. The release of the new purchasing power parities (PPPs) by the International Comparison Program (ICP) was done in May 2024. In

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<sup>9</sup> 2023 BSEC Economic Agenda <https://www.bsec-organization.org/UploadedDocuments/BsecAtAGlance/Attach%205%20to%20Annex%20VII%20-%20BSEC%20Economic%20Agenda%20FINALFINAL.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://black-sea-maritime-agenda.ec.europa.eu/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/joint-communication-european-parliament-and-council-european-unions-strategic-approach-black-sea\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/joint-communication-european-parliament-and-council-european-unions-strategic-approach-black-sea_en)

accordance, in June 2025, the World Bank updated the global poverty lines to \$3.00 per person per day, which replaces the previous \$2.15 poverty line based on 2017 PPPs.

3. The UNDP Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) quantifies biases against women, capturing people's attitudes on women's roles along four key dimensions: political, educational, economic and physical integrity. The political dimension uses two indicators: women having the same rights as men is essential for democracy, men make better political leaders than women do. The educational dimension uses one indicator: university is more important for men than for women. The economic dimension uses two indicators: men should have more right to a job than women, men make better business executives than women do. The physical integrity dimension uses two indicators: proxy for intimate partner violence, proxy for reproductive rights.

## RESOURCES

- **UNSDG Indicators Database** <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal/database>
- **UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII)** <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>
- **UNDP Gender Development Index (GDI)** <https://hdr.undp.org/gender-development-index#/indicies/GDI>
- **Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)** <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>

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**Gender Equality Programme:** The Gender Equality Programme (GEP) is launched by the ICBSS in March 2026, on the occasion of International Women's Day (8 March). The Programme uses data, information, and statistics to study, assess and monitor the current status and progress of gender equality across the 13 Member States of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Through this science-based approach, the Gender Equality Programme aims to raise awareness and contribute to policy advocacy and stakeholder mobilisation.

**About the ICBSS:** The International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS) was founded in 1998 as a non-profit organisation. It has since fulfilled a dual function. On the one hand, it is an independent research and training institution focusing on the wider Black

Sea region. On the other hand, it is a related body of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), and its think-tank. Thus, the ICBSS pursues applied, policy-oriented research, promotes knowledge on the Black Sea region both within and outside its boundaries, and offers policy advice with the aim of fostering multilateral cooperation among the BSEC member states as well as with their international partners.

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**Date of the report:** 6 March 2026

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