

My name is Aizhan, and I'm speaking on behalf of youth from the UNECE region—especially from Central Asia—where young people continue to face gender inequality every day. Young women and gender-diverse youth are doing care work, raising their voices, surviving violence, building communities—and yet, our experiences are often left out of policies and planning.

This roundtable is about evidence-based and transformative solutions. But too often, what's missing is the actual evidence of what young people go through. Without data that shows what young people are actually going through, it's hard to create policies that really respond to our needs. Rural girls, young informal workers, youth with disabilities, and gender-diverse people are simply not visible in national statistics. If our lives aren't counted, then our needs aren't met. We're calling for real investment in gender data that is disaggregated by age, location, income, and identity—data that reflects our lived realities and not just what's easiest to measure.

Another huge issue is care. Care work falls a lot on the shoulders of women—and this includes young women and girls. From a young age, we are traditionally expected to care for siblings, grandparents, and people with disabilities—usually without support or recognition. This unpaid labor holds us back from finishing school, joining the workforce, or simply having time for ourselves.

It's time to stop treating care as something private and invisible. Care is work, and it's essential. We need governments to treat care as public infrastructure, with investments in free or affordable childcare, eldercare, and services that support families. And we need social protection systems that value and support those who provide care—including young people.

We also need to talk about violence. Gender-based violence continues to be part of daily life for many young people, especially young women. From harassment in public spaces to domestic violence and early or forced marriage, many of us grow up with violence as something we're expected to tolerate or survive in silence. And when we try to seek help, services are often out of reach, unsafe, or not designed with young people in mind.

Health is another area where youth continue to be left behind. In many parts of our region, especially in more conservative settings, young people struggle to access basic sexual and reproductive health services. If you're unmarried, or simply too young in the eyes of the system, you can be denied care. And even when services exist, they're often not youth-friendly, not confidential, and not safe for gender-diverse youth. On top of that, mental health support is still out of reach for many.

We need health systems that are built on rights, not judgment. That means access to accurate information, comprehensive education, and services that are accessible to all—regardless of age, marital status, or identity. Young people know what we need. We just need to be listened to and trusted.

The truth is, youth are already doing the work. We are organizing in our communities, running peer education programs, setting up support groups, and collecting our own data. But we are doing this with little to no funding, and often without a seat at the table when decisions are being made.

So here is our ask: stop talking about youth as the future—we are here now. Involve us in the design and implementation of policies, fund our initiatives, and stop inviting us only when it's symbolic. We don't want to be included as a checkbox. We want to shape solutions that reflect our realities.