

# Why economic literacy from a gender perspective in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia?

## THE NEED:

KARAT Coalition's fifteen years experience, together with that of its members, clearly shows that women in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEE-CA) do not feel confident talking about economy and participating in economic debates. Yet, truly comprehensive and democratic decision making must include women's voices in order to make economic and social policies more responsive to women's needs.

Women need to recognize and claim their right to critically approach economics and contribute to the decision making processes that so strongly influence their situation. They need to build their competencies in economic concepts as well as the links between economic policies and their livelihoods, in order to criticize and influence economic and social policies from a gender perspective. In short, they need to enhance their economic literacy to increase their economic and political power.

This need is exacerbated in the context of the current global and European crises and the visibly growing trend of polarization of European societies which in many ways affects women differently and more drastically than men. This is particularly true in the CEE-CA region where women are still paying the costs of economic and political transformation processes (after 1989). The economic and social situation of large numbers was negatively affected by the states' tendency to withdraw from their responsibilities in the area of employment and social policies (e.g. many women dropped out of the labour market; others found themselves in very weak economic positions i.e. low-paid and/or precarious jobs, also in the informal sector or with forced self-employment, or suffering from discrimination based on ethnicity, age and level of education). Given the lack of the gender-responsive policies, their prospects for improvements remain bleak.

## THE SOLUTION:

KARAT's Economic Literacy program will increase women's knowledge on economics and social policies and trends affecting the region. We are convinced that this is a powerful and effective way to respond to women's needs formulated above.

KARAT's Economic Literacy Program would include the following main components: 1. updating and expanding KARAT's training program, including its manual (e.g. about links between austerity measures and corporate tax policy; recent social policy reforms; international financial policies; international standards on economic and social rights and states' obligations in these areas); 2. regional training for women's organizations, 3. exploring the possibilities of web-based feminist economic literacy training in our region to overcome problems of geographical distance and lack of funding amongst our member organizations; 4. regional networking with other stakeholders (e.g. Trade Unions) on economy and social issues; 6. facilitating the participation of KARAT's members in international debates related to economic and social issues.

The program will be coordinated by KARAT Coalition's Secretariat and a regional working group of KARAT members (to ensure common ownership, monitoring and evaluation).

## WHY:

Gendered economic literacy is critical for empowering women in the CEE-CA region to influence the states' policies towards economic and social justice. While more than twenty years have passed since 1989, the neoliberal and gender-insensitive approach to economy and social policies still remains largely uncontested in much of the region despite its negative impact on the lives of disadvantaged groups of people. Among these groups a large percentage are women. Nonetheless, gender-aware criticism and evidence remain underdeveloped. Building capacity of women's organisations in this area will help to fill the gap in civil society's lack of knowledge and appropriate tools for dealing with the social consequences of the neo-liberal economy.

## WHY NOW:

The economic crises in recent times exacerbate the challenges for women due to states' austerity measures in social spheres which seriously affect women (e.g. pension system, care economy, health care, education). The urgent need to respond to the gendered consequences of the economic and financial crises and the social consequences of the so-called solutions currently implemented is added to the unfinished transformation of the last twenty years.

## WHY KARAT:

KARAT Coalition, a regional network of women's organizations has fifteen years experience in research, advocacy, lobbying, grassroots activism and capacity building on the gender aspects of economic and social justice, particularly related to disadvantaged groups of women in the labour market. KARAT Coalition was running an Economic Literacy program in the region a few years ago, which had to be discontinued for financial reasons despite its success. Building on its experience and increased analytical and activist capacity as well as its expanded international outreach, KARAT is properly prepared and eager to revive its economic literacy program.

## ABOUT KARAT COALITION:

KARAT Coalition is an international network of 61 organisations working for gender equality. With members in 26 countries, our territory is the Region of Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

While this region is not homogenous, women's organisations in these countries have a lot in common and a lot to gain from working together. Why? Not everyone benefitted from the successes of transformation, and the group that advanced the least was women, in particular vulnerable groups. There is still a lack of visibility and underrepresentation of women in public and political life, and women's rights are often not recognized as an integral part of democracy. This is particularly troublesome considering that we are witnessing a return to conservative value systems in many countries in the region.

It's important for us to work together with women's organizations in other countries in order to put forward our common perspective, to push for the advancement of women's situation and to be effective on a European and wider international level.

KARAT Coalition is a gateway and a megaphone for voices of member organisations to be heard and listened to on a European level and beyond. Through KARAT, the work of our members is internationally recognized. We build bridges between our members and international partners and provide a unique opportunity for solidarity and mutual support in the CEE-CA region and beyond.

Our countries' young civil societies are often unable to guarantee an effective system of democratic checks and balances to ensure positive change toward economic and social justice. Our countries are still facing instabilities and in these critical times of global economic crises, women's rights are often in a fragile situation. Now is the time for women to reclaim their power and reassert their rights. And we need your help in order to make this happen!

## THE ASK:

To respond to the pressing needs of women and women's organizations described above, **we are looking for financial support to revive our program on Economic Literacy** from a gender perspective in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

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