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Interns from Armenia and Kosovo Share Newly Gained Perspectives on Regulation, Career Path Development, and Gender Balance in the Energy Sector

January 2025 – The energy sector is widely regarded as one of the least gender diverse industries as women are consistently underrepresented, particularly in technical and managerial roles. Focusing on gender equity in the energy sector is vital, as studies have found that while women make up 47% of the global workforce,¹ only 22-25% of professionals working in the global energy sector are women.² Unlocking women's workforce potential in energy-related fields will fuel economic growth, thereby advancing countries' prosperity and national security. With funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) is introducing young women to careers in the energy sector through its Women in Energy Internship Program, which began in 2023 and is part of a larger Advancing Women Leaders in Energy (AWLE) initiative. Ranging from six months to a year in length, these paid internships are designed for young women in Europe and Eurasia who have recently completed university degrees in technical fields.

NARUC connected with two interns placed at the Energy Regulatory Office of Kosovo (ERO) – Edona Ahmeti and Gresa Salihi – as well as Angela Hakobyan, an intern from the Public Services Regulatory Commission (PSRC) of Armenia – to learn about their experiences during the internship program. The following interview showcases their enthusiasm around the role of energy in shaping sustainable development, the new perspectives they have gained on energy regulation, key skills that will aid their professional development, and their thoughts on how gender balance can unlock the full potential of the energy sectors in Armenia and Kosovo.

Q&A

Can you tell us about yourself and your educational background? Why did you choose to participate in the USAID and NARUC AWLE Women in Energy Internship Program?

Edona – I hold a degree in electrical engineering but have always had a passion for the energy sector, specifically in renewable energy and regulation. I chose to participate in the USAID and NARUC AWLE Women in Energy Internship Program to expand my knowledge in energy regulation and to gain hands-on experience in a field that is crucial to Kosovo's development and transition toward sustainable energy solutions.

Gresa – I am currently studying electronics at the University of Pristina Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering and am nearing the completion of my studies while working on my thesis. My interest in energy began during my university education, where I became fascinated by the role of energy in shaping sustainable development. I chose to participate in the USAID and NARUC AWLE Women in Energy Internship Program because it is a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience in this field, particularly for women who are underrepresented in energy leadership roles.

Angela – I graduated from the National Polytechnic University of Armenia with a bachelor's degree in engineering and am currently studying for a master's degree in electrical engineering, during which I developed a strong interest in sustainable energy and regulatory frameworks. My decision to participate in the USAID and NARUC AWLE Women in Energy Internship Program was driven by my passion for energy regulation and my desire to be part of a global movement that emphasizes gender diversity in the energy sector. The program provided a unique opportunity to gain hands-on

¹ "The gender gap in employment: What's holding women back?" International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women#global-gap>

² "Increasing women's participation in the energy sector – addressing the challenges." EEGResearch. October 2020. <https://www.energyeconomicgrowth.org/blog/increasing-womens-participation-energy-sector-addressing-challenges>

experience, work alongside industry professionals, and contribute to meaningful projects aligned with my long-term career goals. Additionally, I was inspired by the program's commitment to empowering women in the energy industry, and I wanted to be a part of that inspiring community.

How has the internship helped to expand your knowledge of energy regulation?

Edona – Working at the ERO has provided me with practical insight into the complexities of energy regulation. I have been able to learn about the regulatory frameworks governing energy markets, the importance of consumer protection, and how policy decisions directly impact energy pricing and infrastructure development.

Gresa – Working at the ERO enabled me to gain practical insights into how energy markets operate and how regulatory frameworks ensure fairness, efficiency, and sustainability. This experience allowed me to engage with real-world regulatory challenges, such as pricing mechanisms, market monitoring, and the integration of renewable energy sources. It also enhanced my understanding of the role that regulatory bodies play in shaping energy policy and ensuring a stable energy supply, all of which are crucial for promoting a sustainable energy future.

Angela – While working at the PSRC, I gained firsthand experience with regulatory processes and the complexities of balancing energy policies to ensure reliability and efficiency while protecting consumer interests. I learned how regulations are developed and implemented, and I was able to observe the impact of these decisions on both the industry and the public.

Being part of the PSRC team also allowed me to participate in discussions on emerging energy challenges and understand how international best practices can be adapted to local contexts. This experience has deepened my appreciation for the critical role that regulatory bodies play in shaping sustainable energy futures and has equipped me with a more comprehensive perspective on policy and regulation in the energy sector.

Can you tell us about some of your hands-on training and any valuable lessons you learned?

Edona – During my internship, I had the opportunity to work on various projects, including analyzing renewable energy policies and conducting audits. One key lesson I learned is the importance of stakeholder engagement in the regulatory process. Balancing the interests of consumers, energy producers, and government policies is critical for creating fair and sustainable energy solutions.

Gresa – I had the opportunity to engage in practical tasks related to energy market regulation. Some of my key experiences included getting involved in activities like monitoring energy markets, analyzing pricing mechanisms, and understanding the regulatory processes behind energy tariffs. I also learned about the integration of renewable energy sources and how this impacts regulatory decisions.

A valuable lesson I took away from this experience is the importance of a well-regulated energy market in promoting both fairness and sustainability. I also learned how crucial it is to be informed about evolving energy technologies and policies to ensure that regulations remain relevant and effective. This hands-on experience gave me a deeper appreciation of the technical and regulatory challenges within the energy sector, and it helped me build practical skills in problem-solving and decision-making.

Angela – During my internship in the Electric Energy Market Department at the PSRC, I worked extensively with market directives and conducted in-depth market analysis. One of my primary tasks was to review and assess existing market regulations to ensure compliance with international best practices. This involved analyzing market data to understand trends, identify inefficiencies, and propose improvements to enhance market operations.

I also contributed to drafting analytical reports on the performance of the electricity market, focusing on areas such as market competition and the integration of renewable energy sources. Through this work, I gained a practical understanding of how regulatory frameworks shape market behavior and

learned the importance of developing policies that balance market efficiency with long-term sustainability goals.

One valuable lesson from this experience was the importance of strategic regulatory oversight. Working with directives taught me how carefully designed regulations can foster a more competitive and transparent energy market while protecting consumers and promoting innovation. Additionally, I learned that successful market analysis requires collaboration across departments and a strong understanding of both technical and economic factors driving the energy sector.

What can you tell us about the skills that you are taking away from the internship?

Edona – I have improved my analytical skills, specifically in policy analysis, learned how to conduct regulatory audits, and gained experience in stakeholder communication. These skills will be instrumental in my future career as they are key to understanding and shaping energy regulation frameworks.

Gresa – I learned how to review and ensure compliance with energy regulations. This skill is crucial for maintaining transparency and consistency in the energy market and will help me contribute to regulatory processes in the future. I also developed the ability to analyze energy market data, including pricing trends and consumption patterns. This has strengthened my technical skills in interpreting and presenting data, which is vital for decision-making in the energy sector. Finally, I gained experience in communicating with various stakeholders, such as energy companies and government bodies. This skill has improved my ability to convey complex regulatory information in a clear and effective way, which is key to fostering collaboration in the energy industry.

Angela – During my internship at the PSRC, I developed several key skills that will greatly enhance my professional development. The first is regulatory analysis, as I gained a deeper understanding of how to analyze and interpret complex regulatory frameworks. This skill has strengthened my ability to assess the potential impacts of regulatory decisions on various stakeholders and to propose informed recommendations.

Second, by working on tariff analysis and other data-driven projects, I honed my ability to gather, interpret, and present data effectively. I learned how to distill complex information into clear and concise reports, which is essential for communicating technical insights to both technical and non-technical audiences. Lastly, I developed strong skills in engaging with diverse stakeholders, understanding their perspectives, and facilitating constructive discussions. This experience taught me the value of empathy and clear communication in building trust and finding balanced solutions in energy regulation.

How did the internship help you identify or clarify your future career path?

Edona – Yes, the internship has been instrumental in shaping my career aspirations in energy regulation and policymaking. The hands-on experience and exposure to critical energy issues have given me a strong foundation.

Gresa – This internship has definitely helped me better understand my desired career path. Through this experience and my work at ERO, I realized that I want my professional career to focus on the energy sector. Whether it is in distribution, transmission, or working with renewable energy sources, I now know that I am passionate about contributing to sustainable energy solutions and being part of the regulatory processes that shape the future of the energy industry.

Angela – Yes, the internship at the PSRC has been instrumental in shaping my career path. Before the program, I had a general interest in energy regulation, but this experience clarified my passion for working at the intersection of policy and technical analysis. Seeing how regulatory decisions directly impact energy systems and society made me realize the importance of contributing to sustainable and fair energy policies. The internship also highlighted the variety of career opportunities within energy

regulation, from policy analysis to stakeholder engagement. I discovered that I am particularly interested in roles where I can use both my analytical and communication skills to influence positive change in the sector. This clarity has motivated me to pursue further opportunities in regulatory affairs and policy development, with the goal of making energy systems more efficient, equitable, and environmentally responsible.

What is one piece of advice you would give to other women who are currently participating or may participate in the AWLE internship in the future?

Edona – My advice would be to fully immerse yourself in every learning opportunity. Don't be afraid to ask questions and seek mentorship. The energy sector is evolving rapidly, and the knowledge you gain here will help you become a key player in driving change, especially considering current global challenges. With energy crises, the gap between energy demand and supply, and the pressing issue of climate change, the energy industry is a highly recommended field for women who want the opportunity to make a real impact on the world's future.

Gresa – I would encourage all women to participate in the AWLE internship because it has been a significant step in the beginning of my professional career, especially since this is my first internship and a crucial transition after finishing university. For women who are already part of the program, I'd advise them to fully embrace the learning opportunities and network with other professionals in the field. This experience will not only enhance their skills but also empower them to make meaningful contributions to the energy sector.

Angela – One piece of advice I would give to other women participating in the internship program is to fully embrace every learning opportunity and not be afraid to ask questions or seek mentorship. The energy sector can seem complex and intimidating, but the internship provides a supportive environment where curiosity is valued and encouraged. Engaging actively, whether by contributing to discussions or volunteering for challenging projects, will help you grow both professionally and personally.

Additionally, I would encourage women to build connections with fellow interns and professionals in the field. Networking can open doors to future opportunities and provide a strong support system with peers who share similar challenges and aspirations. Remember that your voice and perspective are important, and your contributions have the potential to shape the future of energy regulation in meaningful ways.

Can you please share one reason you think having gender balance will improve the quality of the energy sector in Kosovo and Armenia?

Edona – Having gender balance in the energy sector is vital because it brings diverse perspectives to decision-making processes. Women are often underrepresented, yet their insights and approaches can lead to more innovative, inclusive, and sustainable energy solutions for all. While Kosovo's institutions strive for 30% participation of women, in key positions, many women still lack the opportunity to work in this field. Increasing the gender balance will help unlock the full potential of the energy sector by fostering a more equitable and effective workforce.

Gresa – When both women and men contribute to decision-making processes, it results in a wider range of ideas and solutions, which is crucial for addressing the complex challenges in the energy sector. Gender balance can foster creativity and adaptability, ultimately leading to more effective policies and practices that promote sustainable energy development and ensure that the needs of all communities are met.

Angela – Achieving gender balance in the energy sector in Armenia is crucial because diverse perspectives lead to more innovative and effective solutions. The energy industry is facing complex challenges, from transitioning to renewable sources to ensuring energy security and affordability. Having more women in decision-making roles and technical positions brings varied approaches to

problem-solving, as women often offer unique insights and experiences that can enhance strategic planning and policy formulation.

Moreover, research has shown that gender-diverse teams are more likely to consider a wider range of societal impacts and prioritize sustainability, which is essential for developing inclusive energy policies. In Armenia's context, where the energy landscape is rapidly evolving, the contributions of women can drive more balanced and equitable progress. By fostering an environment where both men and women work collaboratively, the energy sector can better reflect and address the needs of the entire population, ultimately leading to a more resilient and forward-thinking industry.

Continuing Professional Advancements

Following the completion of her internship, Angela Hakobyan accepted a full-time position within the Tariff Policy Division at the PSRC. Additionally, with USAID support, NARUC has extended both Edona and Gresa's internships with the ERO for another six months and will continue to provide women with opportunities to work in the energy sector by setting up additional internships with other regulatory authorities in 2025.

This story is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of NARUC and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.