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## **New USAID & NARUC “Advancing Women Leaders in Energy” Project to Promote Gender Equity within Energy Regulatory Agencies in Europe and Eurasia**

**November 2020** – As part of a whole-of-Government effort to advance women’s economic empowerment globally, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) are launching a new two-year project, *Advancing Women Leaders in Energy*. This project will support promising mid-career professionals in energy regulatory agencies across Europe and Eurasia through tailored training and mentorship to advance their careers as leaders of the region’s energy sector. The project also aims to transform socio-cultural norms and policies within regulatory agencies to build a more inclusive workforce.

### **The Current Status of Gender Equity within the Energy Sector**

Gender equity in the workplace has a number of benefits, including expediting problem-solving through a diverse range of viewpoints, improving staff retention, and contributing to a more positive work environment where employees feel valued. In the context of energy regulation, integrating women into the energy sector as both employees and policymakers provides agency to women affected by energy decisions and encourages regulators to consider the gender-differentiated impacts of regulatory policy.<sup>i</sup> Further, studies show that gender equity can enhance organizational productivity and profitability. Allowing more women to fully participate in the workforce and earn equal pay is critical to any nation’s economic success.<sup>ii</sup>

“I believe that women’s inclusion in the energy sector is essential – not because of quotas to achieve equal representation of women and men, or because it is a matter of gender and justice, but because it is a necessary strategy for a country’s economic development. Their talent should be utilized!”

- *Ms. Ardiana Bokshi, Head of the Administration Unit at the Kosovo Energy Regulatory Office (ERO)*

Considering these advantages, there are very few women in top-tier positions within energy regulatory commissions. Women currently occupy less than one-fifth of senior leadership spots at energy companies around the world – for example, in 2019, women made up about 16 percent of utility C-suite spots (up from 12 percent in 2009).<sup>iii</sup> In Europe and Eurasia, women are often employed in sectors such as education, health care, social services, and cultural fields, and have a very low representation in the energy industry.<sup>iv</sup> On the whole, they are underrepresented in top management roles and must balance their careers with unpaid family obligations to an extent that is not required of men.<sup>v</sup>

The barriers to female leadership in the energy sector derive from both institutional policies and norms – e.g., the lack of gender-responsive policies and protections against discrimination, as well as stereotypes relegating women to certain roles and positions -- and the lack professional development opportunities for women to gain the skills necessary to advance into more technical and influential positions.

## Advancing Women Leaders in Energy

In this respect, some of the key interventions that energy commissions can make to promote gender equity are to both improve their employment practices and policies and focus on advancing the skills of their employees. Implementing these organizational changes will have a profound impact on the overall effectiveness of the commissions, which can in turn serve as examples for the regional energy sector.

The *Advancing Women Leaders in Energy* project will support this transformation by providing assistance to energy regulatory agencies through two different tracks focusing on Human Resources (HR) and mid-career professional development, respectively. For the HR track, NARUC will work with HR departments to change prevailing socio-cultural norms by assessing current hiring and promotion practices, implementing anti-discrimination policies, and providing gender awareness training. Through the successful completion of this track, energy regulatory agencies will gain improved HR practices that foster unbiased policies and procedures and support for female employees as they progress in their careers.

Through the mid-career track, NARUC will invite qualified employees to take part in a series of eight-month capacity-building professional development initiatives that will equip them with the skills needed to advance their careers, including public speaking, management and supervisory training, advocacy, and leadership. Additionally, the mid-career track will incorporate female commissioners and senior staff from both U.S. and EU regulatory commissions who will serve as mentors. Through the combination of mentorship and training, they will stay on track to achieve their career goals and emerge as leaders of the region's energy sector.

## Creating a New Generation of Future Female Leaders

The skills and connections built through this initiative will contribute to expanding the network of dedicated women who can in turn become role models within their own organizations. Participants can also become mentors themselves and help to train the next generation of female staff in energy regulatory agencies.

As the energy sector across Europe and Eurasia welcomes more voices to the table, new ideas, methods, and solutions will undoubtedly emerge. USAID and NARUC are proud to support the next generation of female leaders and will follow their progress as they reduce the gender and opportunity gaps within their commissions.

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<sup>i</sup> Practical Guide to Women in Energy Regulation, NARUC, 2018, <https://pubs.naruc.org/pub/CAA05EA6-CDCE-3F80-DBF6-56F3A3C31C8F>

<sup>ii</sup> "10 Benefits of Gender Equality in the Workplace (International Women's Day 2020)." Envato.com. <https://business.tutsplus.com/articles/gender-equality-international-womens-day--cms-34678>

<sup>iii</sup> "The Changing Face of Energy." S&P Global. <https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/featured/the-changing-face-of-energy>

<sup>iv</sup> "Toward Gender Equality in Europe and Eurasia: A Toolkit for Analysis." USAID. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/EE-Gender-Analysis-Toolkit-June-2012.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Idem.