Advancing the Gender Equality Agenda in the Western Balkans and Turkey

12-13 December 2016
Budva, Montenegro

Meeting report
ADVANCING THE GENDER EQUALITY AGENDA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

MEETING REPORT
ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is a summary of the discussions that took place during the conference on Advancing the Gender Equality Agenda in the Western Balkans and Turkey, held in Montenegro on 12 and 13 December 2016. It presents highlights of the views expressed by participants over two days of plenary sessions and smaller group discussions. The report also includes recommendations made by participants during the meeting which can serve as a starting point for follow-up actions.

On behalf of the organizers, UNDP thanks everyone who has contributed to this report by taking notes, drafting content, and providing valuable feedback and insights.
A conference of key actors from national governments, parliaments, civil society, international organisations and donor agencies has agreed on the need to intensify cooperation in the Western Balkans and Turkey region to increase women’s presence and influence in decision-making and end all forms of violence against women.

Representatives from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey met in Budva, Montenegro, on 12 and 13 December 2016 to identify challenges to the empowerment of women and achieving gender equality in the region.

The conference was organised in partnership between UNDP, UN Women, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the EU Delegation in Montenegro, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro, in cooperation with civil society networks “I Sign”, the Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues and Women’s Safe House in Montenegro. It sought to stimulate joint action and peer support to ensure that national standards on gender equality are aligned with targets outlined in the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and those of the European Union (EU).

The conference concluded with an agreement among the participants to strengthen cooperation within and among countries, including through a regional platform for gender equality. The platform would work to promote EU best practices in achieving gender equality and support the institutions, organisations, and legal instruments responsible of enforcing the gender equality acquis. In addition, the platform would help develop gender equality
targets as outlined in the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy, the SDGs, and the Istanbul Convention\(^2\), and help provide access to resources and know-how to all partners involved.

In interactive discussions over two days, national representatives, regional actors and external experts examined gender equality issues at national and regional levels and discussed possible key areas for future cooperation. During the first day, the participants focused on the continuing challenges in tackling women’s political under-representation in parliaments, governments and local councils and initiatives to address them with the legal instruments and mechanisms at their disposal. During the second day, parliamentarians, practitioners and civil society representatives focused on the identification of actions and structures needed for the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating the pervasive scourge of violence against women.

\(^1\)The Government of Turkey was an observer at the meeting and represented by an official from the Ministry of EU Affairs. Representatives of three civil society organisations in Turkey participated in the meeting. The UN Kosovo Team also sent two local staff members to participate. References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

\(^2\)The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) is an international human rights instrument drawn up by the Council of Europe, which sets and calls for the implementation of legally binding standards to prevent violence against women and domestic violence. The convention was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 7 April 2011 and opened for signature to member states of the Council of Europe and non-member states on 11 May 2011 in Istanbul.

The conference agenda and background documents are available here:

MAIN GOALS

1. Commit to joint efforts to promote gender equality
   - Support ongoing cooperation between national stakeholders to deliver more effectively on UN, EU and national gender equality and women’s empowerment obligations
   - Create synergies between national and regional levels to strengthen democratic values, social justice, the rule of law, and the protection of women’s rights
   - Strengthen support for gender equality priorities to advance the SDGs
   - Identify possible sources of financing for region-wide initiatives

2. Strengthen political commitment for gender mainstreaming in policies
   - Enhance the role of women in decision-making (parliament, government, local governance, the judiciary)
   - Promote dialogue between men and women for gender-sensitive policy making
   - Identify common goals for Western Balkans countries and Turkey and joint actions for the promotion of gender equality

3. Better understand the current status of domestic violence prevention and victim protection
   - Review strategic initiatives and mechanisms dedicated to achieving the goals of the Istanbul Convention
   - Identify action points to address gaps in service provision for survivors and ensure effective progress on combatting violence against women
The discussions during the two-day conference were framed around women’s political participation and violence against women. Increasing the presence of women in parliaments, governments and the judiciary remains a priority in the region. Even though Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have higher levels of participation of women in parliament at 34 percent and 33 percent respectively, the regional average for women parliamentarians stands at 24.5 percent.

At the same time, violence against women continues at alarmingly high rates in the region. According to UNFPA, one in four women face physical or sexual violence from a current or former intimate partner, despite changes in legislation and international commitments that call for immediate action.

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Throughout the two days, a few common issues and challenges emerged. The next section is an overview of the issues discussed and possible interventions suggested by the participants. These can serve as a basis for more thorough discussion and follow-up actions.
WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Possible Common Challenges

Quotas

Gender quota legislation for national and local elections is unequally implemented

Propose policy amendments to strengthen the application of gender quotas in elections and influence the adoption of legally binding quotas for candidate lists such as the application of strong sanctions that address possible non-compliance

Women have limited access to leadership and decision-making positions within political parties

Advocate for a set of internal rules for political parties to promote women’s participation in decision-making within their ranks including the adoption of special measures accompanied by the allocation of financial resources

Create forums for women within and across political parties to serve as platforms for creating a favourable environment for women’s meaningful participation and gender-sensitive policy making (e.g. the Serbian Women’s Parliamentary Network)
The introduction of 30% to 40% gender quotas in national and local elections tends to be considered as an end in itself rather than a means towards more gender equality

Women parliamentarians still face gender stereotyping practices when it comes to appointments to committees such as security, defence and finance

Advocate for legal frameworks that would ensure steady progress towards parity on electoral lists

Conduct gender assessments regarding appointments to parliamentary committees and initiate negotiations for gender balance in all working bodies and for all executive positions in the parliaments

Women are under-represented in executive decision-making positions and economic decision-making bodies

Create an enabling environment to ensure progress towards parity in government and advocate for gender quotas for the managerial boards of private and public companies

Data Collection

The measurement and evaluation of gender equality indicators is too limited to enable the formulation of appropriate policy recommendations

Mainstream the collection of quantitative data and streamline monitoring strategies

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5,6 Different tools are available to support this type of intervention, including from EIGE, UN Women, and UNDP.
7 To be done in line with EIGE Gender Equality Index and the gender equality targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.
Legislation, policy-making and budgeting

Legislation and policies adopted to address gender inequalities are not fully implemented and sectorial policies remain gender blind

Mobilise resources jointly (both funding and human resources) to encourage public scrutiny and parliamentary oversight of the implementation of the laws and policies addressing gender inequalities

Introduce and formalise gender-responsive budgeting in all sectors to ensure the implementation of laws and policies addressing gender inequalities

Strengthen the capacities of gender equality parliamentary commissions to push forward legislative and policy changes

Resources

Gender programmes implemented by governments and international organizations, as well as women’s organizations and national gender equality mechanisms, are underfunded

Carry out capacity assessments and advocate with governments and donors to address the lack of funding and human resources

Strengthen women’s organisations and enable them to exert more influence in the area of political participation

Different tools are available to support this type of intervention, including from EIGE and UN Women.
### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

#### Legislation

The provisions of the Istanbul Convention are not fully integrated in national legislation and legal practices

Some countries lack legal definition or recognition of violence against women

Improve legal and policy national frameworks on violence against women to bring them in line with the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW and ensure their implementation

#### Data Collection

Lack of data persists, due to under-reporting to relevant institutions and lack of monitoring

Advocate for regular collection of data at the national level (data on victims, survivors and perpetrators disaggregated by age, sex, geographical location, type of violence as well as conviction rates and protection orders issued) to better inform policy-making

Align data collection procedures for national statistics with EU methodologies⁹

Develop a monitoring framework for tracking results of dealing with sexual and gender-based violence in the region

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⁹ For example, the methodology developed by Eurostat could be employed.
Multi-sectorial coordinated services for survivors of gender-based violence

Access to shelters and services is limited, especially for minorities and other groups facing discrimination (e.g. Roma populations, women sex workers)

- Construct new shelters and service centres outside urban centres
- Increase accessibility for people who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (people living with disabilities, HIV or addictions, ethnic and sexual minorities, refugees and migrants, sex workers, etc.)
- Make services available in Romani
- Support free legal aid provision for survivors

There are limited state and non-state services available for survivors of gender-based violence and there is a lack of data and technical and financial resources to improve service delivery

- Advocate for more active cooperation between government institutions and NGOs working on gender-based violence to ensure better prevention and protection services
Professionals providing services to survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence (police officers, psychologists, social workers, medical staff, judiciary officials, etc.) lack gender-sensitive knowledge and are not familiar with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention.

Train professionals on the provisions of the Istanbul Convention\(^\text{10}\).

**Harmful gender stereotypes, norms and beliefs**

Traditional beliefs and prejudice are still widespread.

Public educational institutions, media outlets, civil society organisations, citizen and community initiatives, and international organisations should continue to raise awareness, particularly on patriarchal patterns, victim-blaming and recognising the signs of violence and reporting violence.

\(^{10}\) Methodologies are available, including from EIGE, UN Women, and UNDP.
The two-day conference concluded with participants highlighting a number of recommendations for collaborative actions among parliamentarians, national gender equality mechanisms, CSOs, and international organisations that could be facilitated through a regional platform for gender equality.
Build on existing frameworks and cooperation models to promote strong national cross-party and multi-stakeholder cooperation and enhance regional efforts using the regional platform for gender equality as a vehicle for peer learning, capacity development, empowerment and mutual support:

- Define a strategic framework and common agenda that stakeholders in the region can agree and work on through regional dialogue and initiatives.
- Support regional cooperation between women parliamentarians’ networks.
- Integrate previous experiences of regional cooperation such as the Stability Pact Gender Task Force\textsuperscript{11}, the Podgorica Declaration\textsuperscript{12}, the Sarajevo Declaration\textsuperscript{13} and the Gender Equality Platform of Socialist and Social Democratic Parties of South Eastern Europe\textsuperscript{14}.
- Collect and share good practices from parliamentary caucuses on reaching out to political parties to champion gender equality and increase women’s political participation\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{11}The Stability Pact Gender Task Force (SPGTF) was established in the framework of Stability Pact for South East Europe in Sarajevo in 1999 as a political and expert support network among key regional stakeholders working on gender equality issues. The aim was to promote and enhance dialogue among parliaments, governments and CSOs in South East Europe.

\textsuperscript{12}The Podgorica Declaration against violence against women and domestic violence was adopted at the International Conference “General and specialised services of assistance to women who experienced violence - guarantees of availability and quality of service”, held on 24-25 November 2015 in Podgorica. The conference was dedicated to the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and was organised by the Gender Equality Committee of the Parliament of Montenegro and the NGO Women’s Safe House with financial support of the EU, TACSO - People2People component and UN Women.

\textsuperscript{13}The Declaration on Cooperation Between Gender Mainstreaming Institutional Mechanisms in the West Balkans and Mediterranean countries was adopted in November 2013, in Sarajevo. The main goal of the declaration is regional cooperation on issues of gender equality, to be achieved through exchange of knowledge and good practices and by initiating bilateral and multilateral gender equity and equality agreements and projects. A Letter of Intent on Cooperation between Gender Mechanisms in the Region to Cooperate on Gender Equality Issues was also signed in Sarajevo in 2014.

\textsuperscript{14}The Gender Equality Platform of Socialist and Social Democratic Parties of South Eastern Europe was launched during the PES Congress in Budapest (11-13 June 2015) following meetings in Zagreb and Skopje of representatives from social democratic parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Montenegro.

\textsuperscript{15}Collections of good practices from EIGE, UN Women and UNDP already exist.
Organise discussions about the gender equality agenda in the region in the context of EU accession and the application of EU Resolutions and the EU Strategic Plan with support from EIGE and DG NEAR.

Identify ways to advance the Sustainable Development Goals in the countries, ensuring that gender equality is not limited to Goal 5. Gender equality is essential to achieving all 17 goals, with at least 24 explicit targets across 11 SDGs. There is a need for a vigorous exercise in making the connections and improving research and data generation to bring about synergies and multipliers among a range of goals to ensure integrated development interventions that advance gender equality.

Adopt a more comprehensive approach when discussing gender equality, examining linkages between gender equality and issues such as security, economic growth and sustainable development and establish connections with relevant committees and MEPs in the European Parliament.
Advocate for gender-responsive budgeting and for an increase in the budgets and capacities of institutions mandated to work for gender equality to strengthen their impact, including through development cooperation and EU accession allocations:

- Conduct capacity and needs assessments to support advocacy efforts.
- Lobby ministries of finance for the allocation of stable and sufficient budgets for gender equality.
- Support capacities of mandated gender equality institutions to mainstream gender in all policy areas.
- Increase the collaboration of gender equality mechanisms with members of civil society organisations and members of political parties at national and local levels.
- Advocate for linking financing to strategies and legislation while ensuring that there are targeted gender equality activities and that sufficient funds are being provided to gender equality mechanisms.
- Appoint special designated advisors to focus on the enforcement and monitoring of gender equality measures.

Support civil society organizations to continue grassroots work and adapt to emerging challenges:

- At a time when civic space is shrinking in most countries, civil society organisations need to define strategic interventions and be supported in their advocacy for an enabling environment to move the gender equality agenda forward.
- Diversify the range of actions to support gender equality by adapting and responding to emerging challenges in some countries.
- Create a civil society platform for organisations working on gender equality in the Western Balkans and Turkey region based on the model of the national platform in Serbia.
- Intensify joint advocacy efforts with UN agencies, EIGE, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and EU delegations.
A follow-up workshop will be organised to explore opportunities for cooperation and the modus operandi of the regional platform for gender equality, addressing how it can work and what priority issues can be addressed jointly.

The workshop aims to involve national representatives from participating countries: one representative each of governmental gender mechanisms, parliamentary gender mechanisms, and CSOs, and representatives of UNDP, UN Women, EIGE, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the CEE Network for Gender Issues and other regional civil society networks, and the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission (TAIEX).

All participants will be mandated by their institutions to suggest, contribute to and adopt recommendations to set up the regional platform for gender equality.

The Department for Gender Equality in the Government of Montenegro with support from TAIEX and UNDP Montenegro will host the two-day workshop in Podgorica. The first day will be dedicated to discussions on the proposed mandate, scope, and composition of the platform, while the second day will focus on agreeing on a work-plan on specific priority areas of work.