

GENDER ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL INFORMATION  
SOCIETY POLICY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender analysis is a theoretical and methodological position which places gender relations as its subject of interest and discussion. The point of such an analysis is to identify gender issues, obtain information and raise awareness on the gender dimension of Information and Communication Technologies (hereinafter referred to as ICTs) in the context of the National Information Society Development Strategy, and in order to provide knowledge to be used in the production and evaluation of ICT policies and project activities. The reason for gender analysis of ICTs lies in the fact that gender identity represents a basic social identity and is a result of the overall social, economic, political, cultural, historical and civilization situations and processes. Hence, if ICT policies are not only a technical issue taking place within a societal vacuum, then the issue of gender relations as basic social dimension of such policies, should take central place in the their strategic efforts.

On 21 September, 2005, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the National Information Society Development Strategy <sup>1</sup> (hereinafter “the Strategy”). The Strategy represents the result of numerous efforts and processes in which various entities took place from the domestic political scene, the civil sector, international organizations, as well as from the political processes. Facing the challenges of its own development and the increasing transformation of global political, economic and social processes based on globalization principles and on contemporary information and communication technologies, the Republic of Macedonia has also its own authentic motives to build an information society: economic development i.e. economic growth, the need for investments in all sectors, improving the quality of life of people. These are the basic priorities in increasing country’s and society’s overall development. The achievement of these essential goals takes place in circumstances of increasing awareness and need for ICT use, as mean to reach development goals.

*ICT for development* is becoming a dominant framework for action internationally as well. Within the promotion of millennium goals United Nations have determined the guidelines for their action through program and coherent activities of their agencies such

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.kit.gov.mk/WBStorage/Files/NACIONALNA%20STRATEGIJA%20Makedonski.pdf>

as UNDP<sup>2</sup>, UNIFEM, the Information Society TASK FORCE<sup>3</sup>. The UNDP regional agenda *Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICTD) in Europe and the CIS*<sup>4</sup>, represented an important factor within the Stability Pact Information Society Agenda<sup>5</sup>.

The European Union also has its own version of *ICT for Development*. **Knowledge-Based Economy**<sup>6</sup> is the title of the main direction of the **knowledge-based society**, a synonym of the information society. The strategic goal the European Union has set itself is to become **the most dynamic and competitive economy in the world, based on knowledge, and capable of sustainable economic development with more and better jobs, for greater social cohesion and respect for the environment**. Political willingness, expressed through a series of information society documents supported by high-quality financial funds of the European Union, defined its position in the global relations.

By making efforts towards EU membership and commitments embraced with the regional initiatives' declarations and declarations originating from the *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*<sup>7</sup>, the Republic of Macedonia found itself in a seemingly favorable situation to formulate its orientation towards creation of an information society in its National Information Society Policy (hereinafter "the NISP") and in its Information Society Development Strategy, both based upon principles and guidelines fully meeting its priorities: development, economic growth and social cohesion.

However, the gender analysis, representing dominant analytical framework in the present study, reveals certain incompatibility in the formulation of NISP, the Strategy, as well as their short-term and long-term goals, with priority development goals.

The reasons for the existence of **incoherence between priority goals and NISP and Strategy formulation**, basically lie in the apparently complementary ICT policies of EU and UN/UNDP, being the guidelines in the developing of the Macedonian strategic

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sdn.undp.org/it4dev/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unicttaskforce.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://europeandcis.undp.org/uploads/ICTD%20Thematic%20statement.doc>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stabilitypact.org/e-see/default.asp>

<sup>6</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/information\\_society/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/information_society/index_en.htm)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html>

documents. The **mixture of discourses and vocabulary coming from various policies** represents the first barrier to the clear structure and formulation of the Strategy.

**The intertwinement between the Information Society concepts and the ICT-environment concept, defined as vehicle for achieving development goals.** The Strategy is not clear about whether ICT is medium producing original social, political and economic relations, i.e., information society, or ICT should be understood traditionally, as vehicle for certain social, political and economic actions. The difference is in the implications of these two concepts, when they are applied in determining the ICT status in development policies as well as in determining the point of view when defining development goals, strategies, measures, and monitoring and evaluation indicators.

**The inclusiveness concept of the information society is reversely set.** The idea that, *in order to define the e-citizen, e-services have to be **previously defined** – unified, standardized, user-friendly, accessible to all citizens regardless of their place of living and social status* - represents a business marketing strategy for increased consumption of e-services by citizens, meeting their e-consumption needs. According to this concept, the e-citizen - male or female - represents a function of several technical variables.

**Neither the NISP nor the Strategy recognize the gender category i.e. women, men.** The mystery of the gender category absence becomes larger starting from the fact that development, economic development in particular, implies investing in developing human capacity of a society which wants that development.

**The NISP and the Strategy do not anticipate human dimension and human implication of information society.** The very essence and outcome of ICT development policies are the people who - by gender identity and different quality of gender relations (equality, power, social services – motherhood, etc.) - have **different needs and expectations** from ICT and from the quality of relations within the information society.

**The NISP and the Strategy are gender-blind. ICT and information society have different impact and provide different benefits due to people's gender identity.** The reason to the different distribution of opportunities is in the different social roles of women and men. Women, for instance, cannot be placed as a separate target group in the same category with persons with disabilities. The gender category is not personal, but societal disability.

**Social cohesion as a strategic goal is missing. The NISP and the Strategy do not anticipate gender imbalance in the approach, accessibility and participation in the information society.** The NISP and the Strategy do not address the digital divide as they fail to explicitly consider gender relations, which actually are a consequence from the unequal approach, accessibility and participation to any resource, function, or status. The **gender digital divide** cannot be solved by fast, secure and cheap Internet, site accessibility and standardized services.

Taking into account these remarks, it may be stated that the NISP and the Strategy fail to treat the issue of gender relations, especially the status of women in the processes of building information society. This situation makes ambiguous the assessment of the impact of relevant documents over the information society. Namely, on one hand, the activities will undoubtedly have certain impact over gender relations – which may even be a positive one – yet, on the other hand, it is due to the absence of a systematically planned activity and policy that gender relations are likely to gain the character and forms of a new type of gender inequality – the so-called digital inequality.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

## **LEGISLATION AND PRIORITY AREAS TO ENABLE STRATEGY SUSTAINABILITY**

Integration of gender perspective i.e. assessment of the implications of each planned action over/of women and men, including legislation, policy making

and program developing in the context of building information society in the Republic of Macedonia, in each area and on each level.

Gender relations, experiences and needs of women and men represent an integral part in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programs in all political, economic and social spheres of the information society, so that women and man will have equal benefit.

Implementation of the parts of the international documents, EU documents and in the regional initiatives indicating gender-oriented goals, measures, guidelines, etc.

Greater representation of women in decision-making and management bodies in charge of issues related to the information society.

Raising awareness on the importance of gender-related topics and issues with politicians, experts and other entities playing a role in the creation of the information society.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure locating to make it easy for access by women;

Infrastructure in rural areas should be developed with accessible network technology;

Women should also be present during infrastructure installation planning and developing; and

Gender balanced, even simulative for women, staff policy in terms of ICT-networks management and maintenance.

## **E-BUSINESS**

ICT as a vehicle for economic empowerment of women;

Women entrepreneurship as one of the main benefits of knowledge-based economy;

Establishing centers to support e-business managed by women; and

Organizing women from IT-business to identify market conditions and trends contributing to the women cyber space.

### **E-GOVERNMENT**

Raising the awareness of the Government on the gender dimension of ICT policies and activities related with it;

Developing gender policies within the information society;

Gender-sensitive training for the administration; and

Relevant ministries, and in particular the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, to create separate ICT policy and strategy which shall reflect gender equality commitment.

### **E-EDUCATION**

Creating gender-inclusive e-teaching process;

Providing conditions for gender-integrative curricula and syllabi;

Special programs for increasing scientific and technical culture, especially with female students;

Developing methods for gender-sensitive ICT training to be carried out in schools or by specialized centers and nongovernmental organizations; and

Determining gender-sensitive indicators of e-teaching analysis and monitoring.

### **E-HEALTH**

Providing forms of gender-sensitive e-health services;

Creating special portals which will refer to the needs and interests of the female population;

E-strategy for so-called gender-based health;

Creating databases according gender criteria; and

Developing telemedicine.

## **E-CITIZENS**

Creation of a gender non-discriminating information society;

Developing strategies and proactive measures to prevent e-exclusion of men and women of different social and cultural status;

Developing general and sectorial strategies for e-gender inclusion;

Developing e-gender inclusion measures and projects; and

Embedding gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation indicators into the processes of creating information society.