



Equality and Gender Mainstreaming Across Border

A Project Funded by the European Union



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ROUND TABLE

“Equality in the Decision – Making Process and Provision of Services on the Local Level: Strategies for Changes”

Held in Skopje, 18 November 2015

At a round table organized by the Association for promotion of gender equality Akcija Združenska, in Impeksel 2 hotel in Skopje, on 18 November, 42 women activists, researchers and representatives of the local governments from Macedonia and Kosovo, debated about the key challenges for women and the possible directions and strategies for action in view of improving the position and status of women and equality on the local level.

The round table was organized in the framework of the project “**Equality and Gender Mainstreaming Across Border**”, supported by the EU under the IPA instrument for cross-border cooperation between Macedonia and Kosovo. The project is being implemented by Akcija Združenska, in partnership with the Kosovo Gender Studies Centre, the Community Development Institute - Tetovo and the Centre for Counseling and Support of Women Dora Dorës from Prizren.

The results and recommendations arising from the study “**The Status of Equality in Decision-Making and Promotion of Gender Equality in the Polog Region**” were presented at the round table, as well as the information from the study on the status of this issue in Kosovo.

In addition to the study recommendations, the following general conclusions and recommendations for action were presented at the round table aimed at increasing women’s autonomy and influence on the decision-making process on the local level and introducing LSG systematic policy and continuous practice for promotion of gender equality.

1. Women, especially the marginalized groups of women, are virtually excluded from the local decision-making processes.

A pro-active approach is needed from all local stakeholders in order to provide participation and influence of all women in each decision-making process and for all locally important issues.

It means greater public promotion of women’s right to decide for themselves and for the community, their encouragement or facilitation in using the existing mechanisms/processes for planning and decision-making regarding resource prioritization and distribution, which affects the conditions in which they live, as well as their position and status in the community.



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Furthermore, it is necessary to adapt and develop specific mechanisms and forms of active involvement of the women from the rural areas.

2. The strongly expressed patriarchal values and the traditional roles of women solely as mothers and housewives limit their participation in the social, political and economic life of the local community.

This calls for development of methodological research approaches that will take into consideration the gender norms, beliefs and stereotypes as a specific subject of exploration and will analyze the way in which they affect the situation in certain areas relevant for creation of policies of the institutions and the other stakeholders.

Furthermore, it is necessary to develop separate programmes and activities, especially by the civic associations for changing the traditional norms and beliefs for the roles of women and men, as one of the basic prerequisites for achieving gender equality.

3. The lack of basic services under direct municipal jurisdiction, such as water and electricity supply, public transportation, kindergartens, centres for persons with disabilities and elderly and frail persons, is only one portion of the challenges that overburden women's daily life, especially the women from the rural areas. The lack of these services prevents the change of the traditional role of the women and precludes the fulfillment of their economic, social, political and other interests.

The local authorities must begin to develop their own capacities for recognizing the problems related to inequality, be pro-active in identifying women's specific needs, identify the appropriate ways for delivering the services in a way that will provide access to the different categories of women and incorporate these services as a priority in the municipal programmes and budget.

4. The limited public funds available to the municipal authorities, especially the smaller ones, are indicated as one of the key challenges in the identification of the problems and in the process of planning and implementing activities for addressing inequality of men and women.

A multi-departmental and comprehensive approach is necessary in taking action and each stakeholder must take their portion of the responsibility for promoting women's rights and gender equality, having in mind their different specific roles, mandate and competencies. The local authorities have the greatest responsibility considering the legal obligations, authority and resources they are entrusted to manage.

Additionally, the following possibilities have been indicated: Developing projects for greater use of the funds and support provided by the central government, the EU and other donors for promoting the services relevant to the women in the local communities; projects for inter-municipal cooperation aimed at overcoming the lack of basic local services.

One of the possibilities for increased activity of the local authorities for promoting gender equality is the involvement of women's organizations in the process of programming the measures and activities for promotion and improvement of gender equality and their implementation by the civic



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associations with the financial support from the local budget. Such an approach would also be in function of sustaining the activities of the civic organizations that work in this area.

5. Local women's activism and organized action are virtually disappearing and they cannot respond to the increasingly greater challenges that stem from the discrimination of women and gender inequality due to the limited capacity and access to resources.

The following potential strategies have been indicated for overcoming this situation: Enhancing the cooperation and networking among different civic associations; Mutual support in developing the organizational capacities and implementing the activities; Developing creative approaches and/or returning to the previous practices of mobilizing and involving women; Developing advocacy strategies that would simultaneously provide influence on both women and institutions as means for an increased activity of the women's organizations. The cooperation with women on positions that may contribute to attaching greater attention to the issue of equality in the policies and practice of the local authorities has been indicated as very important.

In view of dealing with the common challenges in the area of women's rights and gender equality, the need for greater cross-border cooperation has been indicated, especially by strengthening the relations, exchanging experiences and practices and developing joint projects. The promotion and application of standards that derive from the relevant international documents have been underlined as an important aspect of the action.



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