



Contribution to EC Macedonia 2019 Progress Report on Gender Equality

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Democracy, Parliament, Governance and Civil Society

- 1. Oversight role of the Parliament** to hold government accountable for protecting women's rights, overcome gender gap and mainstream is almost non – existing. Legal mechanism¹ for annual government reporting to Parliament is poorly used. Parliamentarian Committee for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (EOWM) had only 2 sessions/ public debates in 2018² and have no capacity to influence political debate regarding gender equality. The reports prepared by MLSP were made available only during public sessions for annual review by the EOWM Committee and were regularly adopted despite the lack of elaborated measurable evidence on the scope and level of achieved progress and effects of the measures, including the budget spending. The reporting session for 2017 was not organized by the end of November 2018.

Current revisions of the Rule book of the Parliament need to take into consideration mandatory public hearings organized by respective committees regarding implementation of all strategic documents for which the Parliament has legally prescribed authority for adoption and assess its progress.

- 2. Policy coordination, administrative capacities, and accountability lines within and among institutions towards advancement of women's rights and gender equality, including integration of gender perspective in policy and budget development³** need to be strengthened. National policy planning and implementation in the area of gender equality still highly rely on capacity building projects and resources of the international organizations, mainly performed by contracted experts. The newly

¹ Annual review by the Parliament of the progres in implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality prescribed by art. 9 of Law on equal Opportunities for Women and Men

² <http://www.sobranie.mk/sednici-na-rabotni-tela.nspx?structuredId=020DFFF7-9CF1-4C1E-8476-4944986FC6A8>

³ Government priorities for 2018 Official Gazette No. 96/28.07.2017; and 2019 Official Gazette No. 84/09.05.2018

adopted Action Plan for the period 2018-2020⁴ focuses on the activities whose implementation mainly depends on donations and projects of international organizations. Least inclusive and predictable are the the key reforms that are intended to set up the basis for transparent and inclusive proof-based planning and budgeting⁵.

Certain progress was made with revisions of the methodological bylaws⁶ for strategic and annual planning and reporting by ministries that impose obligation to: incorporate gender equality analysis of the context; functional analysis/needs assessment on the internal capacities development; and report on achievements in implementing government priorities, as well as those that derive from the areas of authority if the respective institution. However, there is no established internal mechanism, administrative capacities and expertise in the Government Secretariat to monitor and assess the level of implementing those obligations.

Current revisions of the general methodology for strategic planning for measuring overall level of implementation of Government priorities by all respective institutions should take into consideration inclusion of gender equality overall indicators, and gender impact assessment carried out at an early stage of the decision-making process, to allow for changes, and even major reorientation, of policies, when appropriate. GE should be mandatory clearly stated as priority and component of all SP and annual programs, properly budgeted, and duly reported quarterly and annually to the Secretariat by all respective subjects.

Administrative capacities of Government Secretariat to assess and evaluate submitted strategic, annual plans and reports regarding implementation and outcomes of the governmental priorities need to be strengthened, potentially through establishing gender equality department.

- 3. Continuous transfer of obligations for advancement of gender equality to the machinery on national and local level, despite its low efficiency and effectiveness remains.** Significant development aid allocated to increase the capacities of the gender equality machinery have proved ineffective, since evidence show that machinery is still not functional, lack capacities/resources and expertise to initiate appropriate measures for advancement of the status of women and support gender analysis and assesment of the results and impact of the institutional policies. In 2016, only 54% of the municipalities submitted reports for 2015, 12,9% developed plan with equal opportunity measures, while only 11,34% have small budget allocations for their implementation⁷. Newly appointed governmental advisory and consultative gender equality mechanism, the Inter-department Group for Equal Opportiunities for women and Men, despite the PM statement that the *Government will support*

⁴ <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/dokumenti.nsp>

⁵ Draft of the annual budget for 2018 and 2019 had not been available prior to its adoption by the government, SCOs members GE PLATFORM had not been invited to presentations organized by the Ministry of Finance on 12 and 13 November

⁶ https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/zakoni/metodologija_za_izmenuvanje_i_dopolnuvanje_na_metodologijata_za_strateshko_planiranje_i_podgotvnuvanje_na_gprvrm.pdf

⁷Data from responded requests for access to public information distributed by AZ to 81 municipalities in the framework of the monitoring of the implementation of the Law on Equal opportunities of Women and Men in 2016

*its work by all means*⁸ is coordinated and administrated by MLSA⁹, who have no capacities neither authority over other line ministries/state institutions. The advisory body have no influence on the governmental planning and decision making due to lack of regular information feed on the overall policy developments, low commitment and participation of the governmental representatives. No single draft of policy document beyond those specifically gender equality related ones, or budget were reviewed by this body, despite the annual workplan and requests of the CSO representatives, while no single document with policy advice and recommendations was submitted for attention and review by the Government.¹⁰ Most recent assessment findings of the local policy and budget planning indicate that machinery has been virtually excluded from municipal planning and decision making, as well as serious marginalization and low level of attention and resources devoted to gender equality and women's priorities¹¹.

Strengthen the gender equality machinery through legally established appointment criteria in line with the level of professional expertise and mandate for compulsory involvement and input in planning and decision-making, implementing and evaluation of the legislation and policies of government institutions at all levels.

- 4. Accountability of local administration to address gender inequality through creating enabling conditions for remains weak, despite capacity building efforts.** Most recent assessment findings conducted among of the local policy and budget planning shows no difference in transparency, inclusiveness and commitment to gender equality between previous newly elected local governments. In one of Skopje based municipalities, not one planning document was publicly available during planning cycle for 2018, while program and budget documents were made publicly available two months after adoption. Some of the municipalities who were famous of its transparency refuse to publish drafts of the programs and budgets prior to their adoption by the municipal Council. Analysis also reveals serious marginalization and low level of attention and resources devoted to gender equality and women's priorities, as well as women's complete exclusion from municipal planning and decision making remained, while implemented activities rely mainly on external initiatives of CSOs and UN Women or other UN agencies projects¹². In addition there is an **absence of culture of active citizenship among women, especially on a local level** which derives from their marginalization as a social and political actor, and results in almost non-existent women's civic influence on decision making. This results not only in maintaining the existing democratic deficit of local administration and non-functional mechanisms for citizen participation at the level at which that democracy should be practiced, but also limited public demand for equality by those who are most affected by the underperformance in addressing equality - women's community. The data on women's civic participation in the local planning and decision making indicate that women are virtually excluded from these processes, especially with regard to public finances, where we face a situation of total ignorance

⁸ <https://vlada.mk/node/13578>

⁹ <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/inter-resorska-grupa-za-ednakvi-moznosti-na-zenite-i-mazite.nsp>

¹⁰ Akcija Združenska represents the Gender Equality Platform by Government appointment decision No. 44-4277/2, 15.08.2017

¹¹ Akcija Združenska *Gender in municipal programs and budgets – Summary monitoring report*, 2018 [Третманот на родот во општинските програми и буџети-Сумаренизвештај од следење во општините Струмица, Кавадарци, Радовиш, Центар и Карпош](#)

¹² Ibid

and passiveness. Survey among about 900 women from 11 municipalities targeted with street campaigning activities implemented in 2016 and 2017 by Akcija Združenska, identified only 1 woman who was familiar with the amount of the municipal budget, while majority were never involved in any consultation process, had no information, neither were interested on the purpose and size of the municipal budget spending. For the purpose of developing outreach strategies for increased involvement of women in local participatory processes¹³, 20 focus groups in 10 municipalities involving total of 252 women were conducted by AZ and Strategic Development Consulting in 2017. The analysis of the factors that influence their non- participation indicates several key challenges that women are facing. Most women, regardless of which social group they belong to, have difficulty in linking their everyday problems with the LSG competences and obligations, due to lack of information on the key processes and the role of LSG. A particular concern is the indifference, even rejection to tackle public finances, taking up the position that they do not have the right to interfere with the budget planning and decisions. There is a high level of criticism and distrust towards the CSOs and the LSGs, apathy and disinterest for any kind of civic action that could improve their position. This situation is partly due to the unsuccessful attempts and/or previous bad experiences with CSOs or LSGs. Most marginalized groups display even a level of anger, while only few build up some resistance. The most vulnerable women are too poor and deprived and focused solely on dealing with their everyday survival to be able to think about activism. Moreover, rural women, in the absence of public transportation, are physically limited to accessing information and getting involved. A large portion of women are very articulate in voicing their everyday problems, yet they do not perceive themselves as stakeholders in the process of solving them. Personal interest prevails in women and they rarely perceive their own problems as the problems of a wider community of women, which is probably due to the decreasing level of social interaction, especially in urban environments. A slight portion of women, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural environment, exhibit an interest for greater social engagement. In urban areas, these are mostly more mature women who have already been socially engaged and have prior experience in raising issues in the community, but have withdrawn for various reasons. In rural areas, these are women who are aware of the wider community and get activated when they face an exceptionally burning issue in their community. This interest of both categories of women is not sufficient for self-organization and is preconditioned by an external factor (“Somebody should organize us”).

Strengthening local administration capacities in evidence based programming and budgeting, allocation of resources for implementation of the legal and policy commitment for gender equality.

Establishing clear policy frameworks for provision of public funding to local CSO, with included criteria for supporting women’s groups, focused on continuous and thorough process of women’s community empowerment, mobilization and their active involvement in programming and budgeting processes of LSG.

5. Women CSO involvement

There is positive trend of self-organization of women’s and gender equality focused CSO into platforms and networks as mechanisms for more effective monitoring, assessment and input in policy development processes, however the opportunities that arise from the recently established

¹³ Commissioned by UN Women in the framework of the regional project “ Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in SEE and the Republic of Moldova”

institutional practice of increased involvement in the policy planning are limited for several reasons. The gender equality expertise for substantial contribution to EU related reform processes remains within several Skopje based organizations. Still, despite limited financial, human and other resources, and extremely intensive dynamics of developing various sectors' policies, they have been either ignored, or put in a position to act as a substitute for the lack of political will, understanding and capacities of the institutions in mainstreaming gender into policy planning. Development aid specifically committed to gender equality distributed international organizations limits the access to funding of autonomous initiatives of these organizations to effectively contribute to the accession process with their expertise. They are put in a position to either follow the imposed agenda and priorities to maintain its work, or to work with scarce resources and limited impact.

GE is coming after "high" priorities related to EU accession and the issue is not seen as integral part of the priority agenda. This situation put additional burden and efforts for women's and gender equality focused CSO to establish dialogue with national institutions and provide input. This was especially visible in regards to visits of high level EU officials, developing Plan 18 and the screening process, where these organizations were completely ignored. The Plan 18, announced at the press conference organized October 10th 2018 by the Vice Minister Osmani as the most inclusive process, was made publicly available after its adoption by the Government. Consultations on its first draft presented by the Mr. Osmani in June was opened for input only upon reaction of the women rights and gender equality focused organizations' and serious concerns expressed in the written submission¹⁴ on the lack of transparency and almost complete absence of gender equality related measures. In response to submitted written concerns about the gender blindness and provided recommendations in regards to the presence of gender perspective and specific proposals for integrating gender related measures in respective areas of the Plan, oral consultation session of Vice PM and SEP organized with contributors and representatives of the line ministries¹⁵. Organized with extremely short notice, the meeting revealed lack of readiness for substantial changes among relevant ministries representatives and tendency to transfer the "women" issues to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Another draft of the Plan was not available until the last version of this Plan was presented during press conference with information on its adoption by the Government, and CSOs haven't had a chance to discuss or assess the extent to which submitted recommendations were taken into consideration. The overall remark of this very important document is that it is still gender-blind and doesn't take in consideration how the proposed reforms will influence women or will advance the gender equality in our country.

Systematic involvement and consultations with women's groups to be ensured in high political dialogue of the government with EU for the purpose of ensuring the presence of gender equality in agenda setting, ensuring transparency of the screening process and establishing regular consultations of the most relevant negotiation working groups with CSO thematic gender equality networks/platforms at the early stage of policy development or programming.

Provision of multi year institutional public funding to maintain the independence and oversight role of the NGOs that will enable implementation of effective advocacy strategies in front of the key national and local institutions

¹⁴ Prepared by AZ in cooperation with Coalition Margins, and supported by the Gender Equality Platform

¹⁵ Akcija Združenska representative elaborated the proposal during the working meeting organized by the Secretariat for European Affairs on 22 June, 2018

Partnership of the government with international organizations should be reconsidered and assessed in terms of efficiency and effectiveness to impact the changes in reality of women, as well as ownership, and sustainability of the capacities of the national institutions and locally based women's rights and gender equality organizations.

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