

# **Information on implementation of the UN General Assembly Resolution 74/235 on “Women in development” in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

**(for the preparation of the Secretary-General Report on the progress made in  
implementation of the resolution)**

May 2022

This report presents progress made in implementation of measures taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) with regard to the issues outlined below, highlighting results achieved, lessons learned and opportunities for up-scaling and replication, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. **Gender-responsive strategies**, including social protection systems, especially in response to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic

Bosnia and Herzegovina has third Gender Action Plan in place (BiH GAP) for the period 2018-2022, as a framework state strategy for gender mainstreaming in public and private life. One of priority areas is Social Protection which defines objectives and measures to achieve social security for all citizens through the amendments to and harmonisation of the legal regulations in the area of social inclusion, and through the development and implementation of contemporary social policies and social protection programmes.

GAP BiH measures are integrated into policies of relevant ministries and other institutions, at all levels of government in BiH, through annual operational plans for the implementation of GAP BiH. The implementation of the GAP BiH has been ensured by the Steering Board consisted of the Directors of key gender institutional mechanism in BiH at state and entity levels: the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of BiH (AGE BiH/MHRR), Gender Centre of Republika Srpska (GC RS) and Gender Centre of Federation of BiH (GC FBiH), as well as by state end entity coordination boards of responsible institutions appointed by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Government of Republika Srpska and Government of Federation BiH.

However, BiH efforts to meet the commitments of national and international gender equality principles, have gained a different momentum in the last two years, marked by the aftermath of the global COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, in April 2020, the AGE BiH/MHRR prepared and distributed the Recommendations for the integration of the perspective of gender equality in the process of planning, adopting and implementing decisions, measures and plans in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The Recommendations were sent to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, entity and cantonal governments, civil protection headquarters, crisis-headquarters of the health ministries, institutes for public health and institutes for epidemiology. The set of recommendations refer to several priority areas of social life, such as: prevention and protection from gender-based violence, women's work engagement, the economy, and equal gender representation in the decision-making bodies. They explicitly state that different needs of women and men should be taken into account when planning and

implementing emergency support and assistance measures. It is recommended that special attention must be paid to difficult situation of multiple vulnerable categories of women, such as Roma women, women with disabilities, women over 65, single mothers, LGBTI persons and women living in the countryside or alone in the household.

The AGE BiH/MHRR, GC RS and GC FBiH have continuously drawn attention of the general public to the specific impact and consequences of the crisis on women and girls, and need for implementation of above mentioned recommendations.

**2. Investments in and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programmes for full and productive employment and decent work for all women, and addressing women's disproportionate job losses during the COVID-19 crisis**

Labor, employment and women's access to economic resources is one of the priority areas of BiH GAP. The main objective pursued by the measures envisaged is to eliminate gender discrimination in work, employment and the labor market, and to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in accessing economic resources, including poverty reduction through new macroeconomic and development strategies. Every year, the institutions of BiH, FBiH and RS adopt and implement the annual operational plans for implementation of GAP BiH. All ministries in the Governments are involved in the implementation by participating in the work of the Coordination boards for the implementation of the BiH GAP operational plans.

FBiH Government adopted the 2018 - 2020 Women Entrepreneurship Development Program, setting the strategic goals of "Promoting Entrepreneurship of Target Groups", the "Incentives for Women Entrepreneurship". This represents the operationalization of the Small Business Act's principle "Creating a conducive environment for entrepreneurship development". Within the framework of the regular budget, the FBiH Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Crafts allocates a grant for the development of women entrepreneurship in the amount of 434,500 EUR annually.

During 2019, the Government of the FBiH adopted the Action Plan for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises in the FBiH for the period 2019 - 2020, with one of the strategic goals being to encourage entrepreneurship of target groups (women and youth as priorities). The GC FBiH, in partnership with the Association of Women Entrepreneurs, launched a one-year project "Empowered Women for Strong Communities - Supporting the Creation of an Environment that Encourages Women's Entrepreneurship in the FBiH" worth approx. 25,000 EURO. The project was implemented in six municipalities, in partnership with local authorities. The project resulted in exemplary models for the development of women's entrepreneurship that can be applied in other municipalities of the FBiH, with special emphasis on the start-up support for women entrepreneurs affected by the COVID 19 pandemic.

As part of the activities of developing and implementing programs of measures and activities to eliminate discrimination based on gender in the field of labor, employment and access to economic resources, the Federal Employment Institute (FEI), in cooperation with cantonal employment services, implements employment and self-employment programs and policy measures every year. For "Employment co-financing program 2020 / Measure for Employment of women 2020", funds in the amount of around 3 million EURO have been insured and made

available to applicants. Self-employment co-financing program “Start up 2020 / Entrepreneurship measure for women 2020” is another example, with the funds in the amount of 1,2 million EURO secured and made available to applicants.

Development of women's entrepreneurship in the RS has been recognized as very important for economic and social prosperity, and it has been supported especially by the current Law on Development of Small and Medium Enterprises. "Development of women's entrepreneurship through the adoption of support programs, training, better access to finance and association of women entrepreneurs" is one of the policy principles. Systematic support for the development and promotion of women's entrepreneurship is provided by the Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises of the RS for the period 2021 – 2027, as well as the previous Strategy.

In July 2019, the Government of the RS adopted the Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship of the RS for the period 2019 - 2023. The activities planned by the Strategy are expected to result in the growth to 30% percent of women entrepreneurs in the total number of SMEs by 2023, as well as the growth of the number of employees of women entrepreneurs by 10% in 2023, compared to 2019.

GC RS and the Ministry of Economy and Entrepreneurship of the RS have concluded an Agreement on Support for the Implementation of Programs of Measures to achieve Gender Equality in the Economy: "Support to self-employed women in Republika Srpska" (from the UN WOMEN donor funds). Based on the Agreement, a one-time financial support for women entrepreneurs in the amount of 250 EURO was provided, and 40 women entrepreneurs were covered through a public call.

The Rulebook on conditions and manner of obtaining financial incentives for capital investments in agricultural production in Republika Srpska contain the criteria that allow additional 5 points if holder of household is woman. Decree on entry in the register of agricultural holdings allows holder not to own the property but to be a holder with consent of household members. One of concrete results of this measure is increased proportion of women holding agricultural holdings, for more than 10% in last several years. The measures for improvement of position of women in rural areas were initially temporary, but they became sustainable as regular measures within the scope of work of relevant institutions in Republika Srpska. This includes needs, priorities and contributions of women, alignment of all regulations with gender equality standards, with particular emphasis on laws governing property issues, property ownership and access to economic resources.

Governments' investments in and implementation of gender-responsive policies and programmes in BiH are not sufficient. Therefore, AGE BIH/MHRR and entity gender centres have proactive approach to donor community to increase funding for gender-responsive policies and programmes. There is FIGAP program in place from 2010. It is Financial Mechanism for implementation of Gender Action Plan in BiH, supported by several donors. Currently FIGAP II program is under implementation, supported by Sweden (Sida - Sweden's government agency for development cooperation). Part of the FIGAP II programme funds was allocated to institutional and non-institutional partners to implement measures for economic empowerment of women.

The pandemic as an emergency has further deepened the prevailing gender inequalities and the issue of feminization of poverty in BiH. According to the data gathered in the UN Women BiH “Rapid Gender Assessment (RGA) of COVID-19 in Bosnia and Herzegovina” women felt more the economic impacts as they are often not employed, or are employed part-time or in the informal sector.

Aware of the huge risk of the extraordinary measures concerning COVID-19 having a specific impact on women, the AGE BiH/MHRR has taken several measures to mitigate the impact. The measures range from systemic recommendations for gender mainstreaming of the government measures during pandemic, to the direct support to safe-houses for victims of gender based violence (GBV) and economic empowerment of women. In March 2020 the AGE BiH/MHRR contacted the Women's Network and the safe houses and collected information on emerging challenges caused by the pandemic. Based on this, in 2020, the AGE BiH/MHRR allocated grants in the amount of approx. 80,000 Euro to eight (8) safe houses, as an emergency assistance to ensure functioning of the safe houses during COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, in 2021, the AGE BiH/MHRR issued the second Grant Program for non-governmental organizations in the total amount of approx. 60,000 EURO. One part of the grant is used to support projects related to women's economic empowerment (including economic empowerment of the Roma women and legal assistance to the migrant women) through the development and strengthening of women's entrepreneurship (to start their own businesses, obtain knowledge and skills for the preparation, promotion and placement of their products) especially in responding to the consequences of the pandemic, and strengthening women's economic security.

### **3. Transition of women from informal employment to formal employment, including access to decent work, improved wages, social protection and quality childcare**

GAP BiH foresees the activities in advancing the measures for balance between professional and private life, including the protection of motherhood and fatherhood, enhancement of provisions on paid maternity/paternity leave, and special measures that help employees to strike a balance between professional and family obligations. In that regard, initiatives and activities of BiH gender institutional mechanisms were directed to amendments of the relevant legislation.

BiH is committed to introduce a harmonized minimum level of maternity leave benefits and protection throughout the country, including harmonization of definitions of leave for mothers, fathers and parents. As an instrument for achieving this goal, the Framework Guidelines for the Protection of Maternal Human Rights and the Development of Parenthood in BiH were developed by the AGE BiH/MHRR. This document presents the current situation in this area, emphasizing all the limitations, but also the possibilities for development of new or improving existing policies for protection of mothers through legal acts at all levels in BiH (in cooperation with relevant bodies and in accordance with constitutional competencies in BiH).

One of the key measures to promote the transition from informal to formal employment is the legal regulation and policies that cover all forms of employment, as exemplified by the Labor Law of the RS, which specifically regulates the employment relationship with domestic support staff, as

well as the minimum salary for this work in the amount of at least 50% of the employee's salary. This type of work arrangement prescribes the obligation to conclude a contract, which regulates all the rights and obligations of the contracting parties. For women employed on a fixed-term contract, as well as for women working in household chores, given that they have concluded an appropriate employment contract, the Labor Law guarantees and enables social insurance and access to social services under the same conditions as the permanent employees.

The Law on Child Protection of the RS established the right to maternity allowance as a new right, the right to pro-natal benefit for a third-born and fourth-born child, for which the amount was increased, becoming legally obligatory. The aim of these provisions is to establish as soon as possible the approximate equalization of the position of unemployed mothers with children in relation to employed mothers. Additionally, it is important to mention the amendments to the Law on Child Protection of the RS, which referred to the categories of unemployed persons, foster parents or caregivers who care for children or other persons with disabilities, and are not able to establish employment and thus provide themselves and their families with the means to meet basic living needs. In that way, the position of families caring for children with disabilities has improved. Therefore, support for the biological family has been improved, and the introduction of a new right for children with disabilities also represents the prevention of the placement of children with disabilities in social protection institutions. As a result, the financial situation of children with disabilities has improved, and children remain in their families.

Main objective of the FBiH Employment Strategy (2018 - 2021) was to increase formal employment in private sector and to provide opportunities for decent jobs for all women and men, especially if they belong to disadvantaged groups.

In response to problem of uneven maternity benefits, House of Representatives of the FBiH Parliament adopted in 2019 a Proposal of the Law on Support to Families with Children in the FBiH thus marking a significant leap towards equalizing rights exercised by unemployed new mothers. The new law, which is in line with international standards, harmonizes conditions for exercising of right - compensation for unemployed mothers. This is regulated as "Financial Assistance for Unemployed New Mothers" in amount of 30% of average salary in the FBiH over 12 months, taking into account current financial capacities of cantons and FBiH.

The Recommendations for Integrating the Gender Equality Perspective into the Process of Planning, Making and Implementing Decisions, Measures and Plans in the Fight against the COVID-19 Pandemic, issued by the AGE BIH after the outbreak of the 2020 pandemic, drew employers' attention to unpaid domestic work performed by women. It was recommended to the employers to adjust working hours and adequately valorize the additional engagement and the crucial role that women have in the fight against the pandemic. Executive authorities at all levels were recommended that the adoption of measures to mitigate the economic effects of the crisis, support and economic incentives be based on gender analysis, i.e. that it is necessary to analyze how the final effects of the measures will affect the position of women affected by the current crisis.

4. **Prohibiting all forms of discrimination against women**, including in the world of work, including against women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as migrant women and women with disabilities

In order to implement the recommendations contained in the Concluding Observations on the Sixth CEDAW Report of BiH, the AGE BiH/MHRR launched an informative public campaign to raise awareness of BiH public on rights under the Convention, the Optional Protocol and legislation prohibiting all kinds of discrimination against women, as well as the measures BiH has to take to implement the recommendations. The public campaign has recognized women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination such as migrant, women in rural areas, women with disabilities, LBT women, etc. The implementation of the public campaign included the drafting and publishing of infographics, developing and posting videos on TV services, and internet portals, as well as social networks (1,793,479 impressions and 6,651clicks).

AGE BiH/MHRR participates in the project "Disability and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence – Building Capacity Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence" implemented by the two NGOs. The duration of the project is October 2020 - September 2022. The main aim of the project is to reduce sexual and gender-based violence against women with disabilities in BiH.

In October 2020 the AGE BiH/ MHRR and the Women's Network of BiH signed a Cooperation Agreement for joint action and exchange of information related to the protection and promotion of gender equality, especially the rights of victims of gender-based violence. The agreement is advocating for a systemic solution and improving the institutional framework for preventing, protecting and combating gender-based violence. The first result of this cooperation is the implementation of a pilot study on the position of vulnerable categories of women in BiH during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The issue of violence against migrant women that mostly take place outside of the reception centers for migrants, was recognized as a huge problem in BiH. Preparation of the Protocol to be signed by the BiH MHRR and BiH Ministry of Security is under way, in order to enable accommodation of women migrants, who are victims of violence. Also, in November 2021, the AGE BiH/MHRR held meeting with non-governmental organizations and international organizations working with women on the move - migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to exchange information on activities and to map the problems that need to be acted upon together. The BiH Migration and Asylum Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2025) recognizes the needs and interests of vulnerable categories, especially women and minors, as well as persons without parental care.

At the beginning of 2021, the AGE BiH/MHRR financially supported the project "Towards improving the position of victims of trafficking in the legal and institutional system" in the amount of 10,000 EUR. The project contributes to ensuring that migrant women and girls victims of sexual and gender-based violence have access to information on rights and opportunities for protection from violence, as well as the right to access specialized legal aid services. By providing free legal aid services, advocacy and mediation to judicial and service institutions, and developing "easy to

read and easy to use” material, the project contributes to ensuring access to justice and better information for migrant women about their rights, and contributing to the overall effort to early identify and prevent violence against migrant women in the reception centers.

5. **Promoting and protecting women’s labour and human rights in the workplace** through targeted measures, including universal minimum wage, social protection and equal pay for work of equal value, reducing occupational segregation and gender pay gaps and ensuring collective bargaining and recruitment, retention and promotion of women

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a strong legal framework when it comes to labor policies, which are regulated under the entity and Brčko District legislation. All labor laws are aligned with gender equality standards and prohibit discrimination on a variety of grounds, including gender based discrimination. Labor laws include provisions on use of both maternity and paternity leave, which can act as an additional protection from using pregnancy and family planning by employers as a reason to limit the employment of women in any way. Gender based discrimination is prohibited by the BiH Law on Gender Equality and the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination by guaranteeing equal opportunities and treatment for men and women in all spheres of society. However, despite the adequate legal framework, the status of women in the labor market in BiH is still inadequate, which is reflected in the high unemployment rate, large reliance on women in the care economy, and overly present patriarchal social norms.

The gender pay gap exists despite the law provisions that prohibit it, and regardless of the level of person’s qualification, education, and age. According to the 2015 World Bank Survey, hourly pay in BiH is around 9 percent higher in favor of men. The AGE BiH/MHRR conducted a desk review of relevant documentation related to gender pay gap in BiH, as well as an analysis of the existing preconditions for continuous statistical monitoring of the gender pay gap in the private and public sectors in BiH. The AGE BIH/MHRR currently is collecting data by statistical institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina to calculate gender pay gap. The aim is to establish regular collection and monitoring of this data from the official statistical system in BiH.

6. **Recognizing, reducing and redistributing women’s and girls’ disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work** and representing and rewarding women’s paid care work, especially given the increases in the unequal burden on women and girls during the COVID-19 period

Having in mind the frequent violations of the principle of gender equality in the process of work and employment, contained in the practice where preference is given to one sex during employment, as well as violations of the rights of women, especially pregnant women, arising from labour legislation, in October 2019, the AGE BIH/MHRR developed and published the Recommendation to employers and competent authorities regarding gender equality in work and employment. The recommendation drew attention of employers in the private and public sectors, as well as the competent administrative bodies and the public of Bosnia and Herzegovina that disadvantaging workers based on their gender and gender specificity, such as pregnancy and

motherhood, is an expression of direct discrimination based on gender is legally prohibited and punishable.

During 2020, the AGE BiH/MHRR conducted a “Survey on the Impact of Gender Division of Family and Household Work on the Professional Life of Employed Women in BiH”. Survey was conducted on a sample of 500 women who are employed and living with partners for at least one year. The findings showed that in as many as 93.8% of relationships all or most of the routine household chores are performed exclusively by women, and in most relationships (80.8%) it is the woman who does all or most of the work related to child care. All these leave negative consequences on the private and professional life of women, more precisely, it leave them five times less time for rest, for personal and professional progress and training, participation in social activities or politics. The findings were presented to the public, and they will serve as an empirical basis for policy-making for addressing work-life balance in BiH.

Within the international campaign “Generation Equality 2021 - 2026” coordinated in BiH by the AGE BiH/MHRR and UN WOMEN, three action coalitions were established (Physical Autonomy, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Economic Justice and Rights, and Gender-Based Violence) and the Advisory Board of the Youth was formed. The Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights has been designed to respond to critical constraints women and girls face in the economy by advancing bold, game-changing actions in four interdependent areas by 2026 and, specifically, the care economy, decent work, productive resources, and inclusive economies and stimulus packages. Given the BiH context and the priorities, especially as the result of emerging crisis caused by the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 pandemic, the Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights in BiH is focused on care economy.

**7. Supporting women’s entrepreneurship**, expanding existing women-owned and -led micro, small and medium enterprises and facilitating opportunities for new women entrepreneurs

One of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the slowdown or temporary shutdown of economic activities. This has been the situation that additionally and specifically affected women. Namely, the economic crisis first impacted some of the industries largely led by women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs are more represented in small and medium-sized businesses that are extremely sensitive to these conditions. Also, among the first to be hit by the crisis were trades dominated by the female workforce, ranging from hotel workers, hospitality and tourist industries to hairdressers and shop assistants in boutiques or florists. In such a situation women are disproportionately more losing jobs and are therefore unable to meet their financial obligations.

The report "Women in the Labor Market in BiH 2020/2021" was prepared with the support of the European Union. The report has emphasised that all legal acts in the field of labor and employment adopted by the authorities in BiH are harmonized with the Law on Gender Equality of BiH.



As regards women's entrepreneurship, great efforts have been made in BiH to ensure progress in this area. Within the program entitled "Strengthening the competitiveness of economic entities run by women entrepreneurs in the Republika Srpska", professional and organizational capacities of women entrepreneurs and their promotion were strengthened and improved. Six general and one advanced training for women entrepreneurs were organized, as well as a conference and the Women's Entrepreneurship Fair. The promotion of women entrepreneurs and their networking were supported through the organization of the Fourth Conference and the Second Fair of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Republika Srpska.

The program of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the RS entitled: "Identification and promotion of products of rural women as an example of program budgeting" was also implemented. The aim of the program was to show the advantages of the program budgeting in relation to linear budgeting and identify possible limitations in the identification and promotion of rural women's products (as one of program activities). In order to promote, increase visibility, competitiveness and better sales of rural women's products, the "Catalog of agricultural products of women's associations and cooperatives" was prepared and printed. The Government of the Republika Srpska has adopted a new "Action Plan for Improving the Position of Rural Women in the Republika Srpska for the Period 2022-2024." The draft Program of Economic Empowerment of Women in Rural Areas of the Republika Srpska for the period 2021-2025 was also prepared.

In Federation of BiH, through the Employment Service, targeted employment programs for women have been implemented, such as "Employment of women in 2021" in the amount of 1,250,000 EURO, "Entrepreneurship for women in 2021" in the amount of 1,000,000 EURO and "Fund for Women Entrepreneurs" has been established in the amount of 150,000.00 EURO. The goal is to more precisely plan support to women entrepreneurs (owners and directors of economic entities), given that women have a significant share in economic activities, but are often in an unequal position in terms of starting a business, employment and participation in management.

#### **8. Preventing and eliminating all forms of violence, sexual harassment and discrimination against women and girls**, including in the world of work, and addressing the increase in gender-based violence during the COVID-19 period

Based on the Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Harassment in the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, adopted by BiH Council of Ministers in 2019, 62 institutions at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina made the Decisions on zero tolerance for sexual harassment and appointed advisors for prevention, thus created preconditions for the prevention and suppression of this form of gender-based discrimination. During 2021, the AGE BiH/MHRR provided support to relevant institutions in order to meet the above conclusions of the BiH Council of Ministers. The Parliament of BiH also adopted a policy of zero tolerance for acts of sexual harassment and gender based harassment and appointed an advisor for prevention. The AGE BiH/MHRR and the Civil Service Agency of BiH organized basic and advanced training courses for on the prevention of sexual harassment and gender-based harassment for appointed advisors. The aim of the basic training was to become familiar with the relevant legislative

framework, Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Harassment, the procedure described in it and disciplinary procedures relevant for the civil service in the BiH level institutions.

The Law on Prohibition of Harassment at Work (Anti-Harassment Act) of Republika Srpska entered into force in 2021. The Law prohibits, among other things, sexual harassment, gender-based violence and mobbing.

The AGE BiH/MHRR developed a Project Concept, "Support to victims of gender-based and domestic violence in BiH during the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic". The project was based on the information collected from the NGOs and other institutional partners, and is in line with the Bosnia and Herzegovina Action plan on UNSCR 1325 (2018 – 2022), the Gender Action Plan in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2018 - 2022) and the Decision on emergency measures. The project was part of the Emergency and Support Measures and contained a proposal to the government and the international donors to allow re-allocation of the funds to support NGOs who are looking after the victims of violence against women and girls and domestic violence – notably the safe-houses. Also, the AGE BiH/MHRR coordinated with international organizations and donors the implementation of intervention assistance and planning of the long-term support to alleviate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of defining common priorities and coordinated action. Based on that, AGE BiH/MHRR distributed funds in August 2020, in amount of USD 100.000 for eight women nongovernmental organizations responsible for running of safe houses for the victims of gender based and domestic violence. The aim of the grants was to support those organizations to overcome barriers and problems caused by the pandemic of COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the AGE BiH/MHRR has been in contact with the Women's Network and has been collecting information from nongovernmental organizations on their activities and emerging challenges caused by it. A number of non-governmental organizations in BiH have established women online counselling, psycho-social support and other forms of online support for various vulnerable categories, including women victims of gender-based violence and LGBTI persons.

Five-year project "Strengthening the capacity of institutions to address gender-based violence in BiH", total value of 1,086,660.00 USD was successfully completed by the end of 2021. The main results of the project are, among other things, seven analyzes used to review the compliance of the legal and institutional framework of BiH with the standards of the Istanbul Convention. Activities to harmonize the legal and institutional framework with the Istanbul Convention in certain areas and jurisdictions were also supported, and a Committee for Monitoring the Implementation and Reporting on the Istanbul Convention and Femicide in Bosnia and Herzegovina was established. The process of evaluating the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by Council of Europe experts (GREVIO) has been successfully organized and implemented. Through the grant program, the project supported and strengthened the non-governmental sector which deals with the problem of violence against women and domestic violence. The multisector response to violence against women and domestic violence has also been strengthened. Trainings on the

treatment of perpetrators of violence were conducted and the first three Crisis Centers for Rape Victims in BiH were established with an investment of more than 110,000 EURO. During the COVID-19 pandemic, safe house services in BiH were additionally supported in the amount of 130,000 EURO, and a system for monitoring cases of violence against women and domestic violence in the BiH judiciary was established. The system for monitoring and working on cases of violence against women and domestic violence has been further improved through the procurement of IT equipment and training for professionals in the social welfare centers. AGE BiH/MHRR also worked to assist women and girls from the migrant population who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence by ensuring the access to information on rights and opportunities for protection from violence, as well as the right to access specialized legal aid services.

- 9. Providing equitable and universal access to affordable and quality health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health**, for women and girls in order to achieve the realization of the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, particularly in contexts of HIV/AIDS and COVID-19

The Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, MHRR BiH continuously points out the obligations to implement the Law on Gender Equality in BiH. It is necessary that different levels of government in BiH ensure, in all areas of life and work and thus in the areas of health care, adequate systemic support, especially for those persons or groups of persons who may be or are already in some form of multiple discrimination. Girls and women often belong to these groups, and it is necessary to point out the importance of improving their position in BiH society.

The Mental Health Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a result of the continuous commitment of the Entity Ministries of Health to carry on with the reform of the mental health sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Project supports the implementation of the strategies of mental health in both BiH Entities (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina-FBiH and the Republika Srpska-RS) and the Brcko District of BiH-BD BiH. The Project has had a role of a facilitator of planned interventions, encouraging responsibility, ownership of the activities and results as well as the visibility of the partners - local institutions and organizations. It has been recognized as a key catalyst for change in the reform of mental health care in the country. The overall strategic leadership of the Project has been entrusted to the Steering Committee consisting of representatives of the key Project partners (the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation - SDC and representatives of the Swiss Cantons of Bern, Fribourg, Jura and Geneva as donors, and representatives of the institutions in BiH as the main institutional actors).

Through the Mental Health Project in BiH, programs aimed at protecting mental health were implemented as part of the mental health reform. All programs include gender perspective. In this field, there has been progress in understanding the importance of respecting in practice all issues related to gender equality within the health care system. Sexual and reproductive health programs are fully linked to the goals important for ensuring gender equality, respecting the specifics and needs of men and women, but are also linked to the implementation of global development goals in this area (family planning, counselling, contraception, etc.).

The Strategic Plan for Health System Reform in FBiH is in line with gender equality principles. However, it was noticed that some cantonal regulations in the field of health are not harmonized with the regulations at the level of Federation BiH, ie that in some cases they regulate the same issues in a different way. Women's health issues are incorporated in the FBiH Strategy for Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights which contains priority areas such as: prenatal, maternity and postpartum care; family planning including infertility services; abortions; preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; malignant diseases of the reproductive organs; promoting sexual health and rights; promotion of reproductive rights; continuous education; the role of the non-governmental sector.

The Ministry of Health of FBiH, in cooperation with the Federal Institute of Public Health, other institutions and the non-governmental organizations, is conducting regular promotional activities to mark the International HIV / AIDS Day.

Several NGOs were funded by the FIGAP II to implement projects in the area of health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health. The project "Improvement of sexual and reproductive health services for women in crisis public health situations - COVID 19 in the FBiH" was implemented by NGO/Association XY. It identified key barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services during the COVID 19 pandemic in the cantons of the Federation of BiH. This was preceded by a survey on access to sexual and reproductive health services, which covered the public and private health sectors in the FBiH. The project "Strengthening the capacity of safe houses in mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic" was implemented by three NGOs in BiH. Meetings of safe house teams were organized to exchange experiences and challenges during the pandemic, and steps were defined to develop a plan for the protection of users and staff in the event of an emergency such as psychological support for victims of violence, support to groups for users of specialized services. This project has strengthened the capacities of safe house employees, which will contribute to mitigating the consequences of the pandemic and reduce the risk of professional burnout. Also, at least 57 users of safe houses were empowered through psychological help and support groups through the principle of help/self-help.

**10. Promoting and protecting women's and girls' right to education and ensuring their safe and equal access to and participation in education** throughout the life cycle and at all levels, given the prolonged suspension of educational activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and redressing the attrition of women and girl students

The Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH - Sector for Education informed the competent education authorities in BiH about the "Key Recommendations for Continuing Education in the Context of COVID-19", which were submitted to the Ministry by UNICEF. One of the eight key recommendations relates to the protection of the most vulnerable and marginalized children, saying that countries should provide additional support to schools in poor areas and disadvantaged children, and schools should implement additional measures to further protect socially disadvantaged children, including fieldwork with those at risk of dropping out of school. This especially relates to the risk of girls and young women dropping out of school during a pandemic, due to still traditional division of family responsibilities, where women are intended to run a household and raise children.

The International Day of Girls and Women in Information and Communication Technologies is celebrated every year in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Due to existing societal norms about traditional women's roles, it is still difficult for most women to stand out in areas of professional engagement that are traditionally considered more suitable for men. Therefore, women most often choose certain areas of study and employment that are stereotypically "acceptable" to women. Gender institutional mechanisms in BiH and all responsible BiH governments' institutions will continue working on reducing gender stereotypes regarding boys' and girls' educational and job choices and decisions.

**11. Integrating a gender perspective into climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes** and providing adequate resources to ensure the full and equal participation of women in all levels of decision-making and implementation in these areas

Climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction from gender perspective is an integral part of gender equality policies and strategies in BiH. Environmental issues are integrated in BIH GAP within the areas: Labor, employment and access to economic resources. The measures envisaged relate to research and promotional activities related to the integration of gender issues in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development. Environmental issues are also addressed as an emerging security threat from gender perspective in the BiH Action plan for implementation of UNSCR 1325 "Women, peace and security".

At the same time, finalization of a comprehensive Environmental strategy for BiH with strong gender component integrated, is under way. The process of drafting this strategy is example of an inclusive approach to policy making, which includes a consultative process with a large number of institutional and non-institutional actors, even in the challenging COVID-19 conditions. This is also a positive example of the introduction of gender equality standards at all stages of strategy development.

On the occasion on marking 8th of March - International Women's Day, AGE BiH/MHRR, in cooperation with the Commission for Gender Equality of the House of Representatives of the BIH Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Mission to BiH and UN Women, organized a conference entitled "Gender Equality in the Context of Environmental Protection and Climate Change". This was also a priority theme at this year's 66th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, at which BiH presented its statement on this topic.

**12. Improving and systematizing the collection, analysis and dissemination of high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable disaggregated data**, with a focus on women's employment, informal employment, access to decent work and social protection, entrepreneurship, and unpaid care and domestic work through time-use surveys and satellite accounts to assess the contribution of such work to national income

The GEA BiH/MHRR has issued recommendations based on the Analysis of the Collection and Recording of Gender Disaggregated Data in the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The

recommendations, structured both as general and specific, were submitted to BiH institutions for further action (in accordance with obligations under the BiH Gender Equality Law).

The GEA BiH/MHRR requested report on implementation of the submitted recommendations. The institutions in their responses pointed out that, wherever possible, they would implement the recommendations and continue to work on improving and disseminating gender-disaggregated data including the establishment of electronic databases or the preparation of relevant bylaws that would enable accurate gender statistics. The GEA BiH/MHRR will continue to monitor the implementation of recommendations in the coming period.

The BiH Agency for Statistics (BHAS) and the GEA BiH/MHRR, with the technical support of the EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality), are currently working on the first gender equality index for Bosnia and Herzegovina according to the EU Gender Equality Index methodology. The EU GEI methodology contains six domains of data collection in EU countries: Knowledge, Time, Power, Work, Health and Money, which together give a unique number - an index for each country, but it is possible to compare countries by individual domains. The Gender Equality Index is also introduced for Western Balkan countries, including BiH. However, due to insufficient statistical data, the BiH Index will be partial, as it will be able to calculate the index for two full domains: Knowledge and Power and for two sub-domains: participation in the domain of Work and access in the Health domain. Although incomplete, the BiH Gender Equality Index will be of great benefit, because it will facilitate, at least in certain domains, the measuring of progress in achieving gender equality in BiH as well as comparison of BiH with other Western Balkans and the EU countries.

Within the IPA II project Gender Equality Facility (GEF), consultations were held with the relevant institutions in order to improve the practice of collecting and diversifying gender statistics. A special set of workshops were conducted for statistical institutions in order to improve statistical bulletins "Women and Men" which have been, over the years, regularly produced for the state (BiH) level and entity (RS and FBiH) levels.