



Sarajevo, 21 September 2020

Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development Response of Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. What measures have been taken to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

The implementation of the third Gender Action Plan Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018 - 2022 (GAP BiH) has been ongoing. The GAP BiH contains strategic goals, programs and measures towards gender equality in all spheres of social life and labor. GAP BiH measures are integrated into policies of ministries 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 Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gender Centre of Republika Srpska (GC RS) and Gender Centre of Federation of BiH (GC FBiH) and coordination boards appointed by the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Government of Republika Srpska and Government of Federation BiH.

The implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) is also ongoing. The third AP for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 has been adopted for the period 2018-2022. The new AP follows the strategic goals of the previous AP and revises some midterm goals, expected results and planned activities. The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina manages the work of the Coordination Board for monitoring of the implementation of AP and extends a professional support to defense and security institutions in the implementation of Gender Equality Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina. To that end, a lot of trainings on gender equality were conducted, numerous laws and bylaws were harmonized and many affirmative measures introduced towards the advancement of the position and participation of women in police and armed forces and peacekeeping missions. At the G7 foreign ministers' meeting, the European Union chose Bosnia and Herzegovina for its partner, which is yet another acknowledgment of positive experiences in our country with regard to the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

GC RS and GC FBiH coordinated the sector strategies and action plans in Republika Srpska and Federation BiH, which pertain to: domestic violence, advancement of women in rural areas, introduction of gender responsive budgeting and response to natural disasters.

A special agreement was signed between the Council of Ministers of BiH, represented by the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, and the Kingdom of Sweden, represented by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), called FIGAP II Program (2018-2021) with the purpose of supporting the implementation of the GAP 2018-2022. The goal of the Program is to make public decisions (policies, budgets and service provision) improve socio-economic conditions and equal opportunities for women and men, girls and boys, in line with the Proposal of the Financial Mechanism for Implementation of the GAP BiH. The program is implemented by the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the GC FBiH and the GC RS.

2. What action and investments have been made for financing gender equality and the empowerments of women?

The implementation of GAP BiH was financed from budgetary funds as well as from Financial mechanism for the Implementation of the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FIGAP program). Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, GC RS and GC FBiH were in charge of coordination, implementation and administration of FIGAP program at all levels of authority.

The percentage of the national budget that is annually invested in the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is 0.05%. The funds are primarily dedicated for the work of the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina and includes grants to non-governmental organizations in the field of gender equality. Situation is similar at the entity level, and thus in Federation BiH is allocated about 0.05% of the total budget for the promotion of gender equality, while in Republika Srpska this percentage is approximately 0.04%.

3. What steps have been taken to bolster women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development?

In July, ahead of the deadline for submission of the candidate lists to the Central Election Commission, Agency sent an Open letter to all political parties registered for the 2020 Local Elections. In this Letter, titled: "Nominate and promote female candidates - it benefits everyone", we remind political parties about the importance of the equal participation of women and men in the forthcoming elections, and we urge them to nominate more women for mayors, and to place women/candidate at the top of the candidate list. The letter was sent on 24th of July, 2020 to political parties. It was also distributed to the media and published on the Agency's website.

During the session held on 30th of July 2020, The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CIK BiH), adopted the Statement on the commitment to gender equality. This Statement reflects the determination by CIK BiH to, within its competencies, respect relevant international conventions and provisions of the Law on Gender Equality of BiH, to advocate for gender equality and to strive to make a progress in the area of gender equality in all areas of public and political life. This Statement presents a plan of measures for the integration of gender perspective into the work of the Central Election Commission of BiH.

The Statement was drafted in close collaboration with the Agency for Gender Equality of BiH.

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina issued a Public Call for the allocation of grant funds for projects aimed at monitoring the election campaigns of political actors for the Local Elections 2020, through the lens of gender equality. The public call was made according to the Gender Action Plan of BiH - the priority area of "Public Life and Decision Making" and will be financed from the Financial instrument for implementation of Gender Action Plan (FIGAP). Based on this Public Call, grant will be given to two nongovernmental organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in December 2020, the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina will organize a regional on-line conference to discuss the findings of this monitoring.

In the last Recommendation issued by the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina it has been reiterated that the legal obligation of all institutions and public sector under the Gender Equality Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure participation of 40% of the less represented gender. The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina also send a similar letter to all political parties urging them to work and support higher participation of women in political life.

BiH has undertaken significant activities in this area towards prohibiting discrimination of women in employment and advancement of position of women in the public and private sector. With regard to harmonisation of Gender Equality Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the parts related to the area of labour and employment, Labour laws of Federation BiH and Republika Srpska contain the general prohibition of discrimination of persons seeking employment or employees per "open" list of grounds which include gender. They define direct and indirect discrimination, determine the grounds and types of discrimination in labour and employment, they prohibit discrimination on grounds of marital status, family obligations and pregnancy, among others, and provide for protection in cases of discrimination.

With the aim of being harmonised with the Gender Equality Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, these laws for the first time treat gender based sexual harassment, violence and mobbing and determine the legal protection for such cases. The previous laws contained the prohibition on an employer to refuse to employ a woman on account of her pregnancy, or terminate her labour contract during her pregnancy. New laws expand this prohibition in as much as explicitly prohibiting termination of employment during maternity leave, or the time a parent exercise the right to work half time under certain conditions, and the exercise of right to absence for the purposes of breastfeeding.

4. What macroeconomic, labor and social policies have been put in place that promote full and productive employment and decent work for women, in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment and economic rights and independence?

One of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic is the slowdown or temporary shutdown of economic activities. This is the situation that additionally and specifically affects women. Namely, the economic crisis first impacts on 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.

Extensive economic recovery measures are ongoing. At the same time, certain indications have shown that fiscal measures put in place to alleviate the global economic crisis in 2008, have impacted women much more negatively. Such mistakes should not be repeated with mitigation plans to ease the consequences of the crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina recommended the adoption of economic support measures and economic incentives based on a previous gender-based analysis of the effects of the aforementioned measures, which means that before these measures are put in place, the necessary analysis should be conducted in order to determine the way in which these measures will further affect the precarious position of women caused by the existing crisis. Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina also recommend that the different needs of women and men are taken into consideration when planning and implementing emergency support and assistance measures. Appropriate attention should be paid to the difficult position of multiple vulnerable categories of women, such as Roma women, women with disabilities, women over 65, single mothers, LGBTI persons and women living in rural areas or in the single household.

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina issue the Recommendations to ensure that, in the future, measures to overcome and mitigate the effects of the pandemic include the different needs and interests of men and women. Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina *recommended* that relevant authorities - such as the civil-protection staffs, governments and other decision-making bodies even after this emergency - should have equal representation of women and men in their structures.

5. What response and recovery measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken to improve and expand social protection for women (e.g., health care coverage, unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, maternity benefits, pensions, income support such as cash transfers)?

One of the priority area in respond and recovery measures to COVID-19 pandemic has been the employment of women, especially in the areas of healthcare, care and social welfare services. Namely, over 75% of employees in the healthcare and care sector in Europe are women. According to the Agency for Statistics of BiH, in 2017, women accounted for 62% of medical doctors, and the percentage of women medical technicians is incomparably higher. Women are on the front line of protection and prevention and are at a higher risk of infection. At the same time, the medical profession, and especially the care sector, is underpaid and underappreciated. On the other hand, traditionally in our society, unpaid and "invisible" work at home are responsibilities that are disproportionately made by women and girls. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, women in Europe spent 13 hours a week longer than men completing unpaid domestic work. Today, in the situation of closing schools and kindergartens, and in the situation of online education and working from home, these house chores are increasing burdening women even more. Finally, women in employment today face additional challenges at work as well as in the private sphere because many communal services - from healthcare to public transport, food supply and kindergarten services, have been restricted or ceased to function normally.

For this reason, the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina recommended that employers, considering the unpaid work that women have to complete at home, adjust

working hours and adequately valorise the additional engagement and responsible role that women play in the current struggle against the pandemic.

Besides, Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina recommended the mandatory use of gender-sensitive language in the statements and public appearances of officials as one seemingly less significant but very important form of recognition of the key role of women in the struggle against the pandemic. One example is that both officials and the media in their speeches and press releases when talking about “healthcare workers, doctors, citizens...”, should express those nouns also in the feminine gender because those ‘nouns’ represent real women, who should be mentioned.

6. What actions have been taken to expand the availability and affordability of care services to address the increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the COVID- 19 pandemic (e. g., care subsidies, paid leave)?

In April 2020, the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the “Emergency and Support Measures for the most disadvantaged categories of the population at the time of COVID-19 Pandemic”. Appreciating the fact that when providing assistance to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina affected by the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, special attention should be paid to the most disadvantaged groups. The above mentioned *measures* target the residents of collective centres, people placed in institutions, persons with disabilities, children, Roma families as well as victims of gender based violence.

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina 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 is based on the information collected from the NGOs and other institutional partners, and is in line with both 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 recommended by the government. The project is part of the abovementioned “Emergency and Support Measures” and contains 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 Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina coordinated with international organisations 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.

In April 2020, the Gender Equality Agency of BiH adopted and distributed the Recommendations for the integration of the perspective of gender equality in the process of planning, making and implementing decisions, measures and plans in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina sent the Recommendations to the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, entity and cantonal governments, entity and cantonal civil protection headquarters, crisis-headquarters of the health ministries, institutes for public health, institutes for epidemiology. The set of recommendations 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.

7. What action has been taken to increase resources and support for women's and civil society organizations as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic?

In March 2020, immediately after the outbreak of the pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina contacted NGOs responsible for running of safe houses for the victims of gender based and domestic violence in order to seek their opinion on the priority government measures to combat the increase in domestic violence and to improve the delivery of services. Based on the information collected, the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina prepared the Project concept, as described above.

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina distributed funds in amount of USD 160.000 for eight women nongovernmental organizations in August 2020. The aim of the grants is to support those organizations to overcome barriers and problems caused by the pandemic of COVID-19.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina 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. Several non-governmental organisations in BiH, including members of the Women's Network, 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

8. What steps have been taken to improve gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts and response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina submitted recommendations based on the Analysis of the Collection and Recording of Data Disaggregated by Gender in the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina in September 2019. The recommendations, structured both as general and specific, were submitted to 24 Bosnia and Herzegovina institutions for further action.

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina requested report on implementation of the submitted recommendations in February 2020. It is evident from the submitted answers that most institutions have started implementing the recommendations, which include the establishment of electronic databases or the preparation of bylaws that would enable the classification of data by gender. Certain recommendations have been implemented, such as data on employees, promotions, participation in commissions or attendance at trainings, which are separated by gender. However, recommendations regarding data taken from the lower level institutions require adjustment and harmonization, and are more difficult to implement in a shorter period of time.

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. The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue to monitor the implementation of recommendations in the coming period.

