
INPUT TO THE CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE GAP III COUNTRY-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN IN NORTH MACEDONIA

After a long consultation process and independent evaluation on EU's external support to gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, in November 2020, EU published the new Gender Action Plan III – An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action¹ accompanied by Objectives and Indicators². We welcome the adoption of GAP III and we think the content is very ambitious, in particular in relation to:

- The aim to tackle the root causes of inequality and discrimination through three guiding principles: The transformative approach, the intersectional approach and rights-based approach;
- The expansion of the thematic areas of engagement to further include climate change, trade, green transition and digitalization and inclusion of WPS agenda;
- The introduction of the Country-level Implementation Plan (CLIP), based on a sound Gender Country Profile and Sectoral Gender Analyses, which will lay the foundation for a context-specific response.

There are some key elements to be considered for successful implementation including:

- Stronger partnership with women's rights organisations – it is crucial, for the new GAP III to be impactful, in that a clear strategic partnership at country level with women's organisations and feminist movements is honed by the EU Delegations and that the Country-level Implementation Plans, which will set priorities for the EU action, are informed by their analysis of the needs of women and girls.
- Ensuring funding for GAP III and specifically for women's organisations in partner countries – we welcome the new objective to increase funding to women's rights organisations and movements and to contribute to gender equality (Objective 1.4), but we call on the EU to establish a baseline and a clear target by the first quarter of 2021 (currently missing from the plan).
- Programming for gender equality based on gender mainstreaming and analysis – the adoption of GAP III comes at an opportune time as it coincides with the beginning of programming of the new external funding instruments. This is a golden opportunity for the EU to make sure that the policy priorities identified in GAP III are included in the programming exercise of NDICI and IPA III, among others, from the very start. Additionally, the priorities in the CLIP should be taken into consideration and be consolidated in the Strategic Response from the country.

CURRENT SITUATION AND CONTEXT

Significant progress has been made in North Macedonia with regards to advancing gender equality notably with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and adoption of the National

¹ Document available here: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf

² Document available here: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/swd_2020_284_en_final.pdf

Action Plan for its implementation.³ However, the Covid-19 crisis has undermined much achieved progress, placing women's needs last on the agenda. Many of the measures that the government undertook to deal with the crisis emerging with the Covid pandemics have not taken into account the women's needs and position they are in.^{4,5} A specific measure, that was considered gender sensitive, was the one releasing from work one parent of children up to 10 years old, while school and kindergartens were closed. In reality, the measure was mostly used by women and disproportionately affected their position as evident through the reported violations of workers right.⁶ The measure was also discriminatory, obligatory for the public sector and optional (just a recommendation) for the private sector. This additionally made life harder for women workers, especially in factories such as the textile industry.⁷

The adopted measures by the government referred to several aspects, and aimed at mitigating the health, social and economic crisis. However, victims of domestic violence, i.e. women and children who are under increased risk of domestic violence was completely left out of the government measures and recommendations. Apart from the notification of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy⁸ addressed to the victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence, which listed numbers for reporting violence, no urgent measures were imposed or proposed for this particularly vulnerable category of citizens.

The Covid-19 pandemic also aggravated existing challenges for women and gender equality, namely, increased the burden on women with unpaid domestic work and the risk of domestic violence, decreased income and posed difficulties to cover the basic living costs for marginalized groups of women. Specifically, the pandemic has exposed the inequalities of the social support system for women involved in sex work. Research shows that sex workers are adversely affected by the pandemic.⁹ Due to the quarantine and other Covid-19 measures they were prevented from earning money, and at the same time they were excluded from the state socio-economic support by the Government available to other marginalized women.¹⁰ The same report shows that the pandemic affected specifically Roma women working in the grey economy and earning for living on a daily basis. In some segregated Roma areas, the population does not have access to clean water that disproportionately affected the possibility for prevention for Covid-19 amongst Roma.

The most challenging effect of the pandemic on local government institutions, that were only partially functional, was a reduced financial capacity, limited availability of public information and the essential local services most relevant to women (education, social care, reproductive health care, public transportation, etc.). Online consultations practiced as one-way

³ National Network against Violence. (2020) Report on the progress of North Macedonia on the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Istanbul Convention. [MK] Available at: <http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NAP-finalen.pdf>

⁴ Reactor (2020) Gender aspect of the social and economic effects of the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Available at: <https://reactor.org.mk/en/publication-all/gender-aspect-of-the-social-and-economic-effects-of-the-crisis-caused-by-the-coronavirus-pandemic-covid19/>

⁵ OSCE. (2020) Gender and diversity analysis of the Covid-SARS-19 impact. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/0/3/480401.pdf>

⁶ Petkovska, Natasha. (2020) Overview of the government measures for prevention of and protection against the corona virus and their impact on labour rights. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights: Skopje. Available at: https://mhc.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/overview_en.pdf

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Available here [MK]: http://mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-zrtvite-na-semejno-nasilstvo-covid19.nsp

⁹ Network against discrimination. (2021) Human Rights of Marginalized Groups of People during Covid-19. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2Shcngi>

¹⁰ Ibid.

communication by local authorities were ineffective, preventing several groups of women from participating due to limited digital literacy. Forty two per cent of the women in rural areas have responded that during the rise of the pandemic they faced challenges in securing food and hygienic materials and none of the five state economic relief packages addressed the needs of the rural women, because most of them are part of the informal economy.¹¹ 84% of rural women also have had a negative impact on their economic income due to the Covid-19 and more than 56% did not receive all the information they needed. Restricted movement, increased care for elderly people, but also care for the children and helping them with online learning were some of the main challenges that rural women are facing.¹²

Thanks to civil society advocacy efforts, gender equality became a priority in the 2020-2024 Operational Program of the Government.¹³ A new draft Law on Gender Equality¹⁴ is underway, that should improve, inter alia, the effectiveness of the gender mechanisms on both national and local level. Numerous deficiencies have been identified in the implementation of the existing Law on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, which should be addressed in the new Law on Gender Equality that will be replacing it. A new **Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2026** is also underway, which will also support the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality. A Shadow report¹⁵ on the preceding Strategy for Gender Equality 2013-2020, published by Reactor – Research in Action provides a set of recommendations to be considered for the new Strategy:

- The financial, human and technical capacities of all stakeholders responsible for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Gender equality need to be further strengthened.
- Adequate monitoring methodology for following the progress of the implementation must be developed.
- More active inclusion of the civil society sector is crucial.
- Allocation of sufficient state funding for the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy and other Gender Equality Policies which should not only rely on funding from international donors is essential.

Significant progress is evident with respect to the newly developed legislation for accomplishing women's rights and gender equality with active contribution of relevant civil society organizations. However, there is a continuation of the practice of developing and implementing key legal and policy documents as part of development assistance projects, in which civil society organisations from the subject area are involved to substitute for the lack of analytical data and expertise. Despite these changes the anti-gender movement is on the rise in

¹¹ Statement by Rural Coalition Executive Director on consultations held 22.06.2021; Available at: https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73970_nmrgaassessmentmacedonian.pdf

¹² Rural Coalition. (2020) Analysis of economic empowerment of women in rural areas. Available at [MK]: <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/%D0%98%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%98-%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B2-%D1%84%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB.pdf>

¹³ Government of North Macedonia (2021). 2020 – 2024 Operational program of the government of the Republic of North Macedonia. Available at: https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programme_for_work_of_the_government_for_2020-2024.pdf

¹⁴ Council of Europe, Opinion by the Venice Commission (2021). [Draft Law on Gender Equality](#).

¹⁵ Reactor. (2020) Shadow report in the implementation of the Gender equality strategy 2018/2019. Available at: <https://reactor.org.mk/en/publication-all/shadow-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-gender-equality-strategy-2018-2019/>

the country¹⁶ especially after the introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in schools and the protests sexual harassment by Women CSOs (WCSOs) at the beginning of this year¹⁷.

The implementation of the GAP III through the Country level Implementation Plan should support efforts on the ground, placing gender equality and women's rights back on the agenda through a coordinated approach and meaningful involvement of WCSOs and other stakeholders.

THEMATIC AREA- ENSURING FREEDOM FROM ALL FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Overview

The implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Istanbul Convention is very slow. Several Ministries have not implemented their commitments, even though all Ministries were tasked to develop Operational Plans for the implementation of activities from the NAP on the Istanbul Convention. In 2020, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health were the only ones who partially had fulfilled this obligation.¹⁸ In spite of the obligation of the institutions in charge of implementing the NAP to involve the civil society in the implementation of the activities as prescribed with the NAP, this has not been the case in practice, leading to conclusions that there is a lack of transparency.¹⁹

The process of harmonising the provisions of the Istanbul Convention with the national legislation is also at times lacking transparency. Representatives of civil society were not invited to participate in the relevant working group regarding the Criminal Code for example, and the only suggested mode of participation by the Ministry of Justice was the opportunity for a late input once the draft law is published on the Electronic National Regulations Register (ENER). After reactions by the civic sector some of the CSOs were invited in the specific working groups but still the process lacks a strategic and methodological approach for involving CSOs representatives in a more meaningful way.

The new Law on prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence entered into force in early May 2021. The process of adoption of bylaws as prescribed by the new Law is delayed (one specific example is the preparation of a Rehabilitation Programme for the survivors of violence). Online harassment, as a specific form of gender-based violence is on the rise too, and there is a gap in the state's response to it, especially after "Public Room" and other related cases were revealed.²⁰

¹⁶ Kvinna till Kvinna (2019). The Fierce and the Furious. Available at: <https://kvinnaillkvinna.org/publications/the-fierce-and-the-furious/>

¹⁷ See more on Gender Equality Platform. Available at: <http://rodovaplatforma.mk/>

¹⁸ National Network against Violence. (2020) Report on the progress of North Macedonia on the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Istanbul Convention. [MK] Available at: <http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NAP-finalen.pdf>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Gender Equality Platform. (2021). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3hEWoRI>

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FROM GAP III

- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are better protected from all forms of gender-based violence in the public and private spheres, in the workplace and online through legislation and effective enforcement
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, who experience gender-based violence have increased access to essential services
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, trafficked for all forms of exploitation have improved access to adequate and quality services for socio-economic integration and psycho-social support
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are better protected from sexual and gender-based violence in fragile and humanitarian crisis situations
- **Objective:** Women's organisations, social movements and other civil society organisations are influential in ending gender-based violence
- **Objective:** Quality, disaggregated and globally comparable data on different forms of GBV and harmful practices are increasingly collected and used to inform laws, policies and programmes

SPECIFIC ACTIONS EU SHOULD SUPPORT INCLUDING TARGETED ACTIONS

- Enable a favourable environment for women CSOs' continuous work on GBV prevention and protection, also through budget allocations/sufficient funding especially targeting local grassroots WCSOs and CSOs working on advancing gender equality
- Support initiatives to ensure Roma women, LGBTQI, elderly women, women with disabilities, women in rural areas, single mothers, migrant women, sex workers, women who use drugs, women living with HIV etc., have undisturbed access to specialized services of assistance and support, adjusted to their specific needs, and provided without any form of discrimination
- Support initiatives for harmonisation of laws with IC through inclusive process and meaningful participation of WCSOs
- Support robust informative campaigns, especially in local communities, in order to introduce local population (with focus on women) about Istanbul Convention and legal framework in North Macedonia in order to be created enabling environment for implementation of the Convention and laws on local level
- Protection of Women activists and women who work on gender equality in light of the recent anti-gender movement in the country
- Quality and comparable data collection on GBV

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE

- 1) Call for full implementation of the Istanbul Convention and ending impunity for violence against women on national and local level
- 2) Call for meaningful participation of Women CSOs in all processes concerning GBV
- 3) Call for harmonisation of all laws with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention
- 4) Call for a „due diligence” by institutions as a key principal of the Istanbul Convention

Overview

Situational analyses²¹ in 2019 showed that reproductive health indicators for North Macedonia are relatively unfavourable in comparison to other countries in Europe. For instance, the perinatal mortality rate is twice as high as the EU average. Infant mortality rate is 9.2‰ which is almost three times higher than the European average rate. The disaggregation of this indicator according to the social and demographic characteristics of women shows further disparities, with higher values being expressed among women with lower education levels, women from certain ethnicities (specifically Roma), as well as women under 20 and over 40 years of age. Furthermore, the results have indicated that in North Macedonia, cervical cancer is the third most common cancer and fifth leading cause of cancer deaths among women aged 15 to 44. Unfortunately, the estimated coverage of cervical cancer screening programs remains low, at 28%. The rate of unmet needs for contraception among women at the age 20-24 is 36.5%, and only 52.7% of women who are married or in a relationship have expressed the need to use any contraception. Moreover, the modern contraceptive prevalence rate is very low (12.7%), while North Macedonia is one of the countries with the lowest prevalence rate in South-Eastern Europe and Europe in general.²²

HERA's field research has identified multiple types of barriers and large inequalities related to the accessibility of reproductive health care services. This situation mostly affects women with low socio-economic status. The most significant barriers include: Uneven geographic distribution of the services, illegal charging for the provision of reproductive health care services by primary gynaecologists, transportation costs to the nearest practice, lack of motivation by gynaecologists to provide family planning services and evidence-based information about the benefits of contraception for girls and women, as well as gender stereotypes. Another alarming fact is that, in general, a relatively small number of people with physical disabilities are using sexual and reproductive health services. According to the Global Gender Gap Report²³ in the field of "Health and survival", North Macedonia is placed 89 out of 153 countries. This is because women in the country do not have adequate access to gynaecological services, especially Roma women, women from rural areas, women with disabilities.

Significant progress has been made towards the access to sexual and reproductive health and rights with the announced comprehensive sexuality education to be piloted in schools. Women also have access to medical abortion, although this is a novelty in the country and it remains to be monitored at what level of availability and professionalism such abortion will indeed be possible. There is no information available regarding the development of a new Strategy for sexual and reproductive health after the previous one expired in 2020.²⁴

²¹ HERA. (2019) Reproductive Healthcare in the Republic of Macedonia, Situational analyses with a focus on human resources. https://hera.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Analiza_en_web.pdf

²² Ibid.

²³ World Economic Forum. (2020) Global Gender Gap Report 2020. WEF: Geneva. Available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

²⁴ Ministry of Health, UNFPA, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. National Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Republic of North Macedonia. Available at: <https://mk.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Nacionalna%20strategija%20SRZ%20FINAL%283%29.pdf>

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FROM GAP III

- **Objective:** Enabled legal, political and societal environment allowing women and girls to access quality SRHR care and services and protecting their sexual and reproductive rights
- **Objective:** Improved access for every individual to sexual and reproductive health care and services, including family planning services, information, and education on sexual and reproductive rights

SPECIFIC ACTIONS EU SHOULD SUPPORT INCLUDING TARGETED ACTIONS

- Support action to ensure women from minority and multiple-marginalized categories in particular Roma women, LGBTQI women with disabilities, survivors of GBV, women in rural areas, single mothers, underage girls, sex workers, women who use drugs, women living with HIV etc.) can access sexual and reproductive health rights and services that includes legal changes and introduction of new programs in the Ministry of health and adjusting and regular update of the positive list of affordable medicine
- Support initiatives for awareness raising and understanding the positive impact of comprehensive sexuality education, as well as rising the capacities of the schools for implementation of comprehensive sexuality education

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE

- 1) Call for full implementation of the national conceptual framework for primary education related to comprehensive sexuality and gender sensitive education
- 2) Call for immediate and effective withdrawal of school textbooks that promote gender stereotypes and harmful sexual behaviour, as well as introduction of non-stereotypical representation of women and marginalized groups in school textbooks
- 3) Call for full implementation of the Law on termination of pregnancy with focus on providing medication abortion and increased access to legal abortion for women in rural areas and women from minority and vulnerable categories
- 4) Call for continuity in the state's response through timely preparation of National Strategy for sexual and reproductive health and rights in transparent and inclusive process
- 5) Call for an update of the legal framework related to provision of medication, and all outdated public policy related to SRHR with meaningful consultation of the CSOs

THEMATIC AREA - PROMOTING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS AND EMPOWERING GIRLS AND WOMEN

Overview

Almost 70% of men in the country are employed in the formal economy compared to 48,4% of women.²⁵ Before the Covid-19 crisis women spent 72% of their time on unpaid work in the

²⁵ Reactor (2020) Gender aspect of the social and economic effects of the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Available at: <https://reactor.org.mk/en/publication-all/gender-aspect-of-the-social-and-economic-effects-of-the-crisis-caused-by-the-coronavirus-pandemic-covid19/>

household. The pandemic has severely affected the informal and precarious workers, of which a majority are women, who faced illegal dismissals, non-renewal of contracts or work during curfew hours. One such example is women employed in the textile and garment industry.

The latest European Commission report on North Macedonia²⁶ states that “many Roma continue to live in poverty, and face unemployment and substandard living conditions. Their access to education, housing, health and employment and justice remains a concern. Roma children are especially at risk, as poverty and discrimination act as further barriers to receiving education” (p.35). The EC report notes the progress in reducing the unemployment rate in the country in general, but that the struggle with utilization of the employment measures targeting Roma people remains the same. The gender gap is visible, since 6,5% of those who used the employment measures in 2019 are Roma and only 2,02% of them are Roma women. At the same time, 4,5% of unemployed persons registered at the national level in 2019 were Roma women and in the City of Skopje this figure was 8%. A huge number of Roma women are not eligible to use the measures as 95% of the Roma women who are registered as unemployed lack any education or have primary education only. This situation deteriorated during the Covid-19 pandemic, in which Roma women remain disenfranchised and even further away from the realization of basic human rights. During the pandemic, 77% of the surveyed women responded to be without or with primary education only and lack access to any sources of income.²⁷ Seventy-four per cent of the given answers were about the lack of financial resources due to the end of their informal or freelance work.²⁸

Research shows that the index for total entrepreneurship activity of women in the country is quite lower compared to countries in the region. There is also a serious lack of data to understand the existing gender gaps.²⁹ The quarantine exacerbates already bad working conditions of informal workers in different sectors making them vulnerable to job losses and exposing them to the risk of extreme poverty. Women who are relying on agriculture as a main source of income spend significantly more hours in childcare and housework than women who are in paid jobs. Both, Roma women and rural women encounter a lot of job-related problems from lack of market for agricultural products till reduced mobility for petty trade. No plan for recognition of the unpaid work for women was developed in the county nor specific plan for social support of the informal workers, mostly rural and Roma women. Furthermore, the registered individual farmers do not have the right of paid parental leave. Paid parental leave for registered individual farmers is of great importance both from the aspect of human rights and respect for the principle of equal treatment of these persons, as well as from the economic-social aspect. The exclusion of registered individual farmers from the opportunity to use paid parental leave is discriminatory compared to other categories of employees and is contrary to the obligations set out in the international and national legal framework, including the EU legal framework, i.e., Directive 2010/41/EU. Very limited access to information prevents them from using the first and only measure focused on economic empowerment of rural women – the measure no. 115, which includes direct support of 3000 EUR for the registered individual women farmers. However, researcher is showing that 56% of women in rural areas still do not

²⁶ European Commission. (2020) Country Report North Macedonia. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

²⁷ HERA. (2020) Analysis of the socio-economic state of affairs related to reproductive health of Roma women during Covid-19. Available at: <https://hera.org.mk/analiza-na-socio-ekonomskata-sostojba-i-reproduktivnoto-zdravje-kaj-romkite-kovid-19/>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ We contribute. (2018). Policy Brief. Available at: <https://wecontribute.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Policy-brief-Juni-2018.pdf>

recognize this measure, adopted at the end of 2019.³⁰ When it comes to respect of human rights and access to justice for people in rural areas, 57.5% of the rural population believes that human rights, especially when it comes to gender equality, are insufficiently respected in rural areas and 82% do not have sufficient information on human rights and EU integration processes; 51% do not have any information about the legal framework for equal opportunities of men and women in the state.³¹ The latest research³² by the Rural Coalition shows the main reasons why women are not applying for any types of measures are: They don't have needed information; they don't have needed knowledge to apply for the funds; they are not evidenced or registered as individual farmers or holders of family agricultural holdings; they have no property on their name; they have many obligations related to the care of children and elderly people in the family; and they lack digital skills.

In the part of social inclusion, the new Strategy for gender equality is being prepared by the Ministry of social policy and labor, but women in rural areas in the most of the cases in the strategy are exclusively related to land decisions, land ownership, etc., and gender equality in rural areas should cover more than that. In terms of strategic goals and results, there is almost no part of how to increase the participation of women from rural areas in the decision-making process at the local level or how to promote their social inclusion or education when it comes to gender equality.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FROM GAP III

- **Objective:** Increased access for women in all their diversity to the formal economy and coverage by non-discriminatory social protection systems
- **Objective:** Improved policy, legal framework and access to care services enabling equal division of domestic and care work between women and men
- **Objective:** Increased access for women in all their diversity to financial services and products, and productive resources
- **Objective:** Women in all their diversity have improved access to entrepreneurship opportunities, including social entrepreneurship, and alternative livelihoods and strengthened participation in the green and circular economy
- **Objective:** Improved access for women in all their diversity to managerial and leadership roles in social and economic sectors and fora
- **Objective:** Reduction in gender disparities in enrolment, progression and retention at all levels of education and lifelong learning for women, men, girls and boys
- **Objective:** Improved regulatory framework for ensuring equal access to universal and public quality preventive, curative and rehabilitative physical and mental health care services for women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity, including in fragile and humanitarian crisis affected contexts
- **Objective:** Improved access to safe water and sanitation facilities
- **Objective:** Public health systems have sufficient and sustained financing to address the health needs of women and girls in all their diversity
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, have improved nutrition levels

³⁰ Rural Coalition. (2020) Research analysis - Degree of recognition of gender equality as a basic human right in rural areas. Available at: https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/analiza_na_istrazovanje_final1.pdf

³¹ Ibid.

³² Rural Coalition. (2020) Report on real case studies of gender equality and equity in rural areas in Northeast and Polog region. Available at: <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/lzvestaj-RK-finalno.pdf>

SPECIFIC ACTIONS EU SHOULD SUPPORT INCLUDING TARGETED ACTIONS

- Support the development and implementation of employment strategies specifically targeting Roma women, women from rural areas, women with disabilities, single mother tailored made to meet their needs
- Support action that gives incentives for bigger engagement of men in the care economy
- Support increasing of public awareness against reproducing gender stereotypes related to gender roles both in the home and on the labour market
- Support development of socially-aware enterprises that offer flexible working conditions, family-friendly working environment, promote and nourish gender equality and diversity, and fully respect workers' rights
- Support initiatives for improved access for girls to menstrual hygiene and ending menstrual poverty in the country
- Support initiatives for economic empowerment of women in local communities, their visibility and registration in the system of the state, as well as increasing their role in decision-making processes in the family and in the community
- Support initiatives for social inclusion (social life, institutional care of the children, cultural events, traditional heritage) of women in local community
- Support initiatives for involvement of GRB tools in creation of national programmes and measures but especially introduction of this concept on local level to the municipalities

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE

- 1) Call for the alignment of national legislation with the EU Work-Life Balance Directive in particular in relation to maternity and paternity leave and the Directive on self-employment
- 2) Call for creation and implementation of transformative care policies i.e., public policies that allocate resources to recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care in the form of money, services and time (for e.g., provision of care services and care-related infrastructure, social protection benefits related to care, family-friendly working environment and arrangements, etc.)³³
- 3) Call for full implementation of measures on prevention and protection from discrimination in line with the Law on Protection Against Discrimination and recently adopted amendments, providing budget and effective oversight mechanisms
- 4) Call for creation and implementation of gender responsive and gender transformative policies and measures in each sector in the society
- 5) Call for cross sectoral coordination and communication of the institutions
- 6) Call for implementation of gender-based statistics as regular obligation of the institutions on national and local level including and municipalities

THEMATIC AREA- PROMOTING EQUAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Overview

³³ For more on care policies see: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf

Women remain underrepresented in decision-making with exception of the forums where quotas are introduced. The latest local citizenship survey³⁴ shows that approximately 78% of women surveyed have never been involved in any form of political decision-making processes. Most women, regardless of which social group they belong to, have difficulty connecting their daily problems with local government competencies and responsibilities due to a lack of information on key processes and the role of the local government. Also, only an approximate 15% of Municipal Council Heads in 81 municipalities are women (12 women, 69 men), while 30% of the elected councillors in the local self-government units are women (415 out of 1388, 973 being men).³⁵ The representation of women in public service is over 50%, including in middle management. Women are, however, less represented in top management positions.³⁶

In the absence of more comprehensive, publicly available analyses of the specific number of urban/rural communities and the gender structure, there are indicative data from the 2009 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy survey showing that out of the 68 municipalities that responded, only 13 women were elected presidents of the urban/rural local communities, compared to 55 men.³⁷ This leads us to conclude that limited progress has been made in the past decade. Also, this is confirmed with the data that consortium of 5 CSOs (Center for research and policy making, Rural Coalition, Journalists for human rights, ECHO Stip and Luludi) has gained through detailed analysis of 17 municipalities (urban and rural) where from 220 presidents of urban and rural communities only 3 are women.³⁸

Another research of the Rural Coalition says that not one from 350 women in rural areas from Polog and Northeast region has ever been to a meeting of the local community unit (*'mesna zaednica'*) or has ever visited the municipality. Also, women in rural areas do not recognize the Commissions of equal opportunities in the municipalities as a body or a tool that they could use in order to present their needs or issues they are facing in their everyday life in front of local authorities.³⁹

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FROM GAP III

- **Objective:** Enabling conditions created for equal participation of women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, in decision-making
- **Objective:** Women and girls, in all their diversity, have improved access to justice to safeguard their civil and political rights
- **Objective:** Women's organisations, other CSOs and women human rights defenders working for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and rights work more freely and are better protected by law

³⁴ M. Dokmanovikj et al., (2019) 'Women's Political Participation in North Macedonia', Study and Scientific Research Papers, WDF. <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Women-Political-Participation-2019-EN-for-web-.pdf>

³⁵ Kvinna till Kvinna (2020) Women's rights in the Western Balkans. Available at: https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-KvinnatillKvinna-Foundation-report-WRWB_2020.pdf

³⁶ European Commission. (2020) Country Report North Macedonia. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf

³⁷ Katerina Kolozova, Marija Savovska. (2020) Women's political North Macedonia participation: the study, pp.11-45. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/42869577/WOMENS_POLITICAL_NORTH_MACEDONIA_PARTICIPATION_THE_STUDY_pp_11_45

³⁸ Trajanovska Ljupka et al. (2021) Gender analysis of leadership positions and local government programmes for 2020/2021. Available at: <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Through-Gender-Lenses-Gender-analysis-2020-2021.pdf>

³⁹ Rural Coalition. (2020). Report on real position of women from rural areas in Northeast and Polog region. Available at: <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/lzvestaj-RK-finalno.pdf>

- **Objective:** Equitable social norms, attitudes and behaviours promoting equal participation and leadership by women and men fostered at community and individual levels – through education, media, culture and sport
- **Objective:** Improved systems for collecting quality, disaggregated and globally comparable data on women’s political participation and leadership

SPECIFIC ACTIONS EU SHOULD SUPPORT INCLUDING TARGETED ACTIONS

- Support initiatives for meaningful participation of WCSOs in consultation processes
- Support initiatives for establishing gender quotas and other mechanisms to promote and support women’s equal participation in decision making positions (particularly on local level and in men’s dominated sectors)
- Support systematic and comparable gender data collection on political participation and leadership

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE

- 1) Call on urgent adoption of the new Gender Equality Law and its full implementation after its adoption
- 2) Call on continuous, meaningful and acknowledged participation of women’s organizations and other CSOs working on gender equality in policy making
- 3) Call for full implementation of measures on prevention and protection from discrimination in line with the Law on Protection Against Discrimination and recently adopted amendments, providing budget and effective oversight mechanisms
- 4) Call on changes of the Law on political parties to tackle the obstacles for unequal access women have for political participation

THEMATIC AREA- INTEGRATING THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

Overview

North Macedonia adopted the second National Action Plan (NAP) 2020-2025 for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 in June 2020. Relevant institutions (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Health, Ministry for Education, and Ministry of Labour & Social Policy; the Crisis Management Center, Protection and rescue Directorate) are obliged to develop five-year Operational Plans and Annual Working Plans, giving the general framework for work of the institutions. However, so far only the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice have made their operational plans publicly available on their websites. In order to monitor the implementation, there is a Monitoring & Evaluation team established by the Ministry of Defence (as the leading Ministry for the implementation of the NAP) and the focus is to establish the necessary regulations, guidelines, procedures, code of conduct etc in the relevant institutions. The NAP is missing an intersectional approach and LGBTI women, Roma women, or women with disabilities are not specifically mentioned. The financial allocations available for implementation of the UNSCR 1325 NAP need to be looked into, as well as the overall implementation of the Plan.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FROM GAP III AND WPS AGENDA

- **Objective:** Participation
- **Objective:** Gender mainstreaming
- **Objective:** Leading by example
- **Objective:** Prevention
- **Objective:** Protection

SPECIFIC ACTIONS EU SHOULD SUPPORT INCLUDING TARGETED ACTIONS

- Support initiatives to increase knowledge of officials and citizens on UNSCR 1325 and its implementation in the context of North Macedonia

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE

- 1) Ensure comprehensive education/capacity development and awareness raising on the WPS Agenda including on NAPs on UNSCR 1325, among duty-bearers, relevant stakeholders, and general public
- 2) Ensure link between security issues and gender policies including appropriate gender mainstreaming for consistent implementation of the WPS/NAP
- 3) Ensure meaningful inclusion of women and Women CSOs in monitoring the NAP, as well as in other consultations and processes as relevant
- 4) Ensure that all actions towards implementation of the WPS/NAP taken by the State/relevant actors are gender transformative.
- 5) Ensure intersectionality of all policies and processes concerning the WPS Agenda/NAP

THEMATIC AREA- ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES AND HARNESSING THE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY THE GREEN TRANSITION AND THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Overview

North Macedonia remains high on the list of countries with air pollution and no substantial steps have been taken by the government to strategically deal with the issue. Agricultural production in rural areas is an important factor for improving the situation and it directly affects women from rural areas. Environmental issues are high on the local agenda for women when they receive greater influence. In 2020, women activists supported by Women CSOs⁴⁰ initiated 10 petitioning actions in eight rural communities. This activism has also strengthened interaction between local women's organisations, women in the communities and the local government, including with the neighbouring units and other service providers. The negotiations and advocacy efforts resulted into modest, but concrete response of local authorities in addressing some of the priorities e.g., waste collection, leisure spaces and playgrounds, repairs of the streets, improved school spaces, bus stops, pedestrian crossings, and similar activities that were previously not planned with the municipal programs and budgets. These examples illustrate the importance of local ownership and action, with support from the international community and not least the EU.

⁴⁰ Akcija Zdruzenska is supporting six grassroots women CSOs in mobilizing and participation in decision-making at the local level.

The experience about decision-making and budget management in climate change-related situations varies by gender. In the latest national report on climate change, women report higher rate of joint decision-making than men (31% vs. 23%), while men report higher rate of making decision themselves, compared to women (55% vs. 36%). Around 18% of men and 21% of women reported that the decision to act was made by the 'Other' party.⁴¹ The same report estimates that by 2035 there will be more than 9.895 green jobs. At least 27% of the maximum number of jobs in 2035 may be related to women. If the percentage of green jobs broken down by gender can be further calculated, it will significantly improve efficiency in implementing the national Climate Change Action Plan. However, these calculations require more detailed and more gender-disaggregated data, which is not currently collected in the country.

Regarding digitalisation, the new report from State Statistical Office, states that from the total number of Internet users in 2019, 48.9% were women and 51.1% men.⁴² When Covid-19 crisis emerged, it was noted by WCSOs⁴³ working in the rural areas, that women, even those that had access to internet were not able to use it due to lack of digital skills and were not able to attend online workshops and meetings. In general, only 10.000 agricultural workers applied for the measures from the 170.000 registered due to lack of digital skills.⁴⁴ Over 64% of women and men in rural areas still prefer to get the services from institutions with physical presence in the institution and not online because of lack of trust in the e-documents and system of the state. However, they noticed that if they have support and learn how to use national portals for e-services (like uslugi.gov.mk) they are determined to start using digital services.⁴⁵

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES FROM GAP III

*Climate change and environment

- **Objective:** Increased participation of women and girls in all their diversity in decision-making processes on environment and climate change issues
- **Objective:** Strategies and agreements on climate mitigation, adaptation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity are more gender-responsive, at local, national, regional and international level
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, addressing climate change in their daily lives and preserving the natural environment are supported
- **Objective:** Women in all their diversity increasingly participate in and have improved access to jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities in the green economy and the circular economy

⁴¹ UNDP. Report by the Ministry of labour and social policy conducted with involvement of CSOs, Climate change and Gender. Available at:

<https://klimatskipromeni.mk/data/rest/file/download/889a234b125a5e9e04f38910e4af9cb45c2230d9doc190042556f8869f7e5c9f.pdf>

⁴² State Statistical Office. (2021) Women and Men in North Macedonia. Available at:

<https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2021/Gender%202021.WEB.pdf>

⁴³ Akcija Zdruzenska and OWMSVN work on strengthening women for participation in decision making processes on local level.

⁴⁴ Rural Coalition. (2021) Digital Transformation in the Rural Sector. Available at: <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Policy-brief-Digitalization-RC-1.pdf>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

*Digitalization

- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity participate equally in policy- and decision-making for the digital world, on local, national, regional and international levels, and are represented in these policies and decisions
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity have equal access to affordable and secure broadband, technology and digital tools
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys are equally provided with and using equally public digital literacy
- **Objective:** Women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity participate fully and equally in the digital economy.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS EU SHOULD SUPPORT INCLUDING TARGETED ACTIONS

- Support/fund collection and use of gender-disaggregated data on impact of environmental degradation including air pollution, use of chemicals, water scarcity on women and men and on different at-risk communities to be used in policy-making
- Support initiatives for good agricultural practices and reduction of usage of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers that contribute to reducing soil degradation
- Support initiatives for awareness raising for environment protection and climate change through fair access to agricultural production by using safe protective measures, fertilizers and technologies
- Conduct gender-sensitive environmental analysis of impact of infrastructure projects supported by the EU (including bridges, dams, roads)
- Support humanitarian aid for climate refugees i.e., forcefully displaced people due to climate change (most of whom are women and children)
- Support initiatives for improving digital literacy and access to digital tools and connection for people from vulnerable backgrounds (i.e., Roma, rural, socially disadvantaged, and people with disabilities)
- Combating gender-based discrimination in the ICT and STEM sectors

POLICY AND POLITICAL DIALOGUE

- 1) Nationwide awareness raising and education on environmental issues and how are they related to human rights and gender equality
- 2) Ensure accountability of institutions regarding environmental issues
- 3) Create opportunities for digital literacy of women and girls, also as an important approach for women's empowerment

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3. Biovita – Association of organic food producers, Kavadarci
4. Association for protection of workers' rights - Glasen Tekstilec, Shtip
5. National network to end violence against women and domestic violence – Voice against violence
6. Coalition sexual and health rights of marginalized communities Margins, Skopje
7. Roma Women and Youth Association LULUDI, Skopje
8. Journalists for Human Rights, Skopje
9. European Policy Institute - Skopje
10. Akcija Združenska – Association for advancement of gender equality – Skopje
11. HERA – Health Education and Research Association, Skopje
12. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Skopje
13. Center for Research and Policy Making, Skopje
14. Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), Skopje
15. Foundation for Management and Industrial Research
16. Macedonia 2025 –Branch office
17. Macedonian Center - International Theatre Institute
18. Association of Businesswomen, Skopje