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| EUROPEAN COMMISSION  DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT | EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE |
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| The Director-General | Secretary General |

**Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025**

**Country Level Implementation Plan – CLIP Republic of Serbia**

1. **Context for EU action gender equality and women’s empowerment in Serbia**

Serbia has made significant strides in developing a comprehensive legal and policy framework for gender equality, especially in the last year. The most important development is the adoption of a long-awaited Law on Gender Equality, which was prepared through a participatory inclusive process and came into force at the end of May 2021. Amendments to improve the Law on Discrimination, including several that pertain to gender equality, were passed on the same day. Only a month earlier the new Strategy for Prevention and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2021-2025 was adopted. The newest advances build on Serbia’s commitments to international instruments and previous legislative changes, such as the Law on Domestic Violence of 2017. The Budget System Law of 2015 has made Gender Responsive Budgeting mandatory, and its progressive implementation accompanies the process to mainstream the gender perspective throughout the public sector.

Despite these normative advances, evidence shows the persistence of wide gender gaps, while there has also been some, albeit slow, concrete improvement. Some of the greatest changes can be seen in women’s representation and participation in political decision-making, mainly due to quotas, although these results are only at the parliamentary level. The 2018 EU Gender Equality Index shows that Serbia lags behind the EU-28 average in all domains of gender equality, except in the domain of political and executive, and that there is still a serious gap in the domains of labour conditions and wages level.

Gender-based violence in all different forms remains a serious concern, as has been highlighted by a series of high-profile cases over the past year. Support services for victims of violence, including victims of trafficking in human beings, are limited and mainly provided by civil society.

Sexual and reproductive health is not yet part of the education system. Access to Sexual and reproductive health is a concern particularly for women with disabilities, and there is still no Action Plan in this area.

When it comes to economic and social rights for Roma, in the education sector occupational segregation is widespread in secondary education, and the drop-out of Roma girls is especially worrying.

Labour market indicators are worse for women, including the persistent wage gap, translating to gaps in access to pensions. Time-use data shows that women spend twice as long as men on household and unpaid care work, and the burden is highest for married women with a child under seven, due partially to limited access to early childhood care.

Improved representation of women in political decision making at ministerial and parliamentary (local and national) level has not translated in advances in local decision-making, where women represent only 12% among the presidents of municipalities/mayors. Advances to integrate women into the Peace and Security Agenda have been made through implementation of two National Action Plans, but women remain grossly underrepresented in institutions dealing with this issue and almost invisible in the peace process, and a new Action Plan is pending. Mainstreaming gender into environmental and climate change has also advanced but remains uneven and unsystematic. Inequalities in all of the GAP III intervention areas are deepened and compounded for those facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as women and girls living with disability, those of Roma origin as well as other minority ethnic groups, older women, those living in rural areas, and who identify as LGBTI.

The COVID-19 pandemic, including measures introduced to curb its spread, has had a negative impact on gender equality, especially when it comes to increased risk of gender-based violence and the burden of unpaid care work, while also limiting access to services. The compounded economic impacts of the crisis are felt especially by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty.

The Institutional framework for gender equality has been strengthened with provisions of the new Law on Gender Equality, especially the legal entity of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the new law on Ministries establishing the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in October 2020. However, capacities for coordination and implementation are insufficient, especially at the local level. Women’s organizations in Serbia are important agents of change in local communities and their gender equality expertise has been engaged not only in provision of services but also increasingly in development of policies, however the process could be further improved.

There are vast challenges in transposing Serbia’s ambitions normative framework into practice. Deeply ingrained gender norms and stereotypes which permeate all levels of society are one of the most prominent bottlenecks. They impact institutional awareness, knowledge and capacities to implement mandates, coupled with limited human and financial resources - especially at the local level and in rural areas. The EC in its 2020 report on Serbia and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report have raised concerns regarding the prevalence of patriarchal attitudes, a growing anti-gender discourse and increased number of cases of hate-speech and attacks including against women. Additional efforts are needed for Serbia to comply with international recommendations and conventions, such as CEDAW and GREVIO, as well as the EU Gender Equality Acquis.

Serbia has been a Candidate country since 2012, and the negotiating framework for accession was adopted in June 2013. This framework has recently been improved with Serbia’s acceptance of EU’s new methodology for monitoring negotiations based on clusters, of which human and fundamental rights form the essential first step. The accession process has the potential to further gender equality reforms and programming across the GAP III intervention areas.

This Country-Level Implementation Plan for Serbia has been developed on the basis of a detailed and updated gender analysis undertaken for Serbia in May and June 2021. The Serbia Gender Profile was developed through a combination of qualitative research methods, including a broad desk review, semi-structured interviews with key government institutions responsible for gender equality, and consultation with civil society organisations, as well as with Member States and international organisations active in Serbia. As with the Gender Profile, the CLIP has also been submitted for review and comments by Member States, IOs and CSOs.

In the Gender profile several opportunities and recommendations for EU’s support to gender equality in Serbia have been identified. This includes supporting the preparation of several key policy documents, such as the Gender Equality Strategy planned for 2021 as well as strengthening institutional capacities for coordination and mainstreaming. The actions foreseen in the CLIP can help provide renewed momentum to the gender equality agenda in Serbia, catalysing attention and resources on the selected thematic areas.

1. **Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives**

The overall objectives of EU action for gender equality and women’s empowerment in Serbia is **to support the government to comply with national and international gender equality commitments and the EU Gender Equality Acquis**.

In Serbia the EU will provide support to **five of the six thematic areas** of GAP III through political dialogue and targeted actions. The only area where direct support is not foreseen is D. Promoting equal participation and leadership given that this is an area where Serbia has advanced the most, and recognising synergies with work of partners in this area[[1]](#footnote-1). However, women’s leadership and participation will be monitored and supported through all EU funded interventions and newly developed policies relevant for EU accession. Below are the areas in which the EU will support gender equality and empowerment of women in Serbia, as well as the specific thematic objective to be pursued in each area:

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| **GAP III Intervention Area** | **Specific Thematic Objectives** |
| A. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence | 1: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 work place and online through legislation and effective enforcement |
| 3:Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, who experience gender-based violence have increased access to essential services |
| 7: Women’s organisations, social movements and other civil society organisations are influential in ending gender-based violence |
| B. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights | 1:Enabled legal, political and societal environment allowing women and girls to access quality sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) care and services and protecting their sexual and reproductive rights |
| C. Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women | 1: Increased access for women, in all their diversity, to decent work, including women’s transition to the formal economy and coverage by non-discriminatory and inclusive social protection systems |
| 2: Improved policy, legal framework and access to care services enabling equal division of domestic and care work between women and men |
| E. Integrating the women, peace and security agenda[[2]](#footnote-2) | 1: Participation |
| 2: Gender Mainstreaming |
| F. Climate change and environment and Digitalisation | 2: 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 |

The Gender Profile for Serbia includes a mapping of current activities on gender equality of EU Member States and other international partners in Serbia. The CLIP and proposed actions have been identified with a view to providing continuity of EU support, building on lessons learned, as well as ensuring synergies with activities of other gender stakeholders.

Civil society organisations have been consulted in the development of the Serbia Gender Profile on which the CLIP is based, as well as on the draft of the CLIP itself. CSOs will be engaged in implementation, in particular through the targeted actions described below, and will be engaged in the process to review the CLIP in 2023.

1. **Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment**

The main vehicle for EU’s support in Serbia is through the targeted action: *Support to Priority Actions for Gender Equality in Serbia II*, better known as the Gender Equality Facility (GEF) II, funded through IPA II. This action is implemented by UN Women in partnership with the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the Ministry of European Integration and builds on the lessons learned from its predecessor (GEF I). Overall, the project aims to create preconditions for the development, adoption and effective implementation of the key national strategic documents and for integration of gender equality considerations in different sectors.

The Gender Equality Facility II supports the National Gender Machinery, on national and local level, to further develop administrative structures and management systems that are needed for implementation and oversight of the new National Strategy for Gender Equality. It further supports the Ministry of European Integration and institutions involved in programming of EU funds to include gender perspective in planning, and programming of assistance. In order to influence development of gender sensitive policies and programmes and promote culture of equality and non-discrimination, the project also partners with women’s CSO to advance the position of women through support to local communities in fulfilling their commitments on gender equality.

The GEF II cuts across almost all the GAP III intervention areas, as it supports the government to strengthen administrative capacities in Serbia for integrating and implementing EU and national gender equality commitments in strategies, plans, budgets and EU funds management across the policy areas. The Action runs from March 2021 until February 2024, with funding of 2 million EUR.

Two more targeted actions are underway in Serbia as part of regional efforts, both focused on the response against gender-based violence (GAP III Area A.). The regional programme *“Implementing norms, changing minds”* has been implemented by UN Women with EU support since 2017, and has recently been extended until July 2023, with funding of 859,337 EUR for Serbia. The programme focuses on the most disadvantaged groups of women in Serbia and involves close strategic partnerships with women’s civil society organizations and networks. In the coming years the programme aims to: improve quality standards for shelters and provision of digital SOS and psychological support, with a special focus on women with disabilities; strengthen professional capacities for both free legal aid services and for development of individual safety plans; and support economic reintegration of Roma women survivors of violence.

The second action “Integrated Response to Violence against Women and Girls in Serbia“ is supported by the government of Sweden and is implemented jointly by the UN Country Team in Serbia (in particular UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP) and the government of Serbia led by the CBGE with funding of aprox 1.5 million USD. As with the previous two actions this one also builds on lessons learned in previous phases of the project, having entered into its third phase at the end of 2020. Components of this action include: ensuring violence is effectively sanctioned; that women and children who are victims of gender-based violence are protected and receive adequate support, including trough capacity building for responsible professionals; promoting positive discipline and ending child marriage; and informing citizens, especially youth, on causes, consequences and need to prevent violence, including through ethical media reporting.

The Regional IPA through the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme is also supporting a targeted action on *Women for Peace and Security: Towards Good Neighbourly Relations between Serbia and Kosovo* implemented through the Association of Women Sandglass. The action, which contributes to Area E of the GAP III, began in March 2020 and will run until 2023. Firstly, the Action aims to engage women’s organisations from Mitrovica region in Kosovo and Rasina region in Serbia to strengthen their cooperation and involvement in peace-building efforts. Secondly the Action aims to mainstream gender into the peace process by increasing available knowledge, providing evidence-based recommendations for implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325, and strengthening awareness of local public officials, as well as the general public on the issue. Funding for this action is 242,740 EUR.

EIDHR and Civil Society Facility national programmes will continue to support civil society organizations, in particular women’s organizations and organizations working on gender equality and gender empowerment.

1. **Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment**

In Serbia the Accession process is the key channel for political and policy dialogue to influence progress on gender equality in line with the EU Gender Equality Acquis. The new methodology adopted by the EU and accepted by Serbia in 2020 has placed the negotiation process into clusters. In includes a stronger focus on progress in fundamental areas of functioning of democratic institutions, especially public administration reform, which will determine the overall pace of negotiations.

Dialogue in the context of Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental rights is of particular importance. The revised Action plan of 2020 includes promotion of the strategic and legislative framework on gender equality, with commitments to strengthen coordination and institutional capacities. The Action Plan for Negotiation Chapter 22 – Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments from 2019 related to the improvements of the legislative framework under Chapter 23, and the related administrative capacities for implementation of gender equality and antidiscrimination standards in the planning, implementing and monitoring of EU funds. Also of relevance is monitoring of implementation of the Action Plan for Negotiation Chapter 19: Social Policy and Employment from June 2020, which envisages activities related the development and implementation of gender equality standards, antidiscrimination and equal opportunities policies, in particular related to women’s’ participation on the labour market, protection and safety at workplace, and access to health and pension schemes. Future negotiations on Chapter 27 provide an opportunity to mainstream gender in this area.

During 2021 the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue organized several thematic events on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Additionally, the established platforms for cooperation and communication with the civil society, mainly National Convention on the European Union and SECO mechanism, can be used for meaningful dialogue on gender equality through the EU integration process.

**5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities**

In order to support outreach and communication during the period 2021-2025, the EU in Serbia will take a two-fold approach.

Firstly, Serbian institutions and civil society will continued to be supported by the EU and Member States to participate meaningfully and engage in global events on gender equality and women’s empowerment. A recent example is the support which was provided by the government of France to CSOs, the CBGE, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and Commissioner for Equality in preparation of the Generation Equality Forum held at the end of June 2021.

Secondly, the EU will engage in outreach and communication around key international days, such as the International Women’s Day on 8 March, the 16 Days of Activism starting every 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) and the International Girls in ICT Day fourth Thursday in April, to raise visibility of its actions and of gender equality issues in Serbia. In these efforts the EU will seek to complement partners’ activities including support for national processes and synergies with outreach of international organisations.

**6. Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation**

Support for GAP III Implementation in Serbia is primarily through the Gender Equality Facility (GEF) II, which supports the government of Serbia to consistently comply with national and international gender equality commitments and EU Gender Equality Acquis. Financing for this action is 2 million Euro over 36 Months from 2021 – 2023.

*Date:20 July 2021*

*e-signed*

*Head of Delegation*

*Sem FABRIZI*

1. Swiss cooperation and UNDP are active in supporting the Women’s Parliamentary Network as well as a network of local women mayors/ municipal presidents. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As per objectives of EU Action Plan on WPS. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)