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**Policy-making Process in the Local  
Level from Gender Perspectives Issues  
in FYROM (Republic of Macedonia)**

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## **Policy-making Process in the Local Level from Gender Perspectives Issues in FYROM (Republic of Macedonia)**

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### **Abstract**

In today's contemporary global society gender equality is becoming a basis of overall development of humankind; it is a cross-cutting issue which is related with governance, human rights, economic, social, political aspects of societal progress. In this context, one of the most important notions that is used in integration of gender perspective is mainstreaming, that means process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels, whose ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

This paper is primarily concentrated on situational analysis of the policy making process from the gender perspective in the local level in a transitional country, i.e. Republic of Macedonia. This study will encompass municipalities of Tetovo and Bitola, in order to identify gender-related priorities and citizen needs, and to find avenues for entry points in the local strategies, as well as developing mechanisms for tracking implementation of public policies from gender perspective.

This research focuses on the policy-making process in the municipalities, in general and from a gender perspective, and it can serve as theoretical and practical tool for identifying the entry points for further analytical, capacity building and advocacy work on gender mainstreaming on the local level in the Republic of Macedonia.

**Keywords:** gender equality, mainstreaming, policy making, local government, gender machinery, gender budgeting, gender analysis

## **Introduction: Defining the Concepts**

Gender refers to socially constructed and “assigned” roles and learned behaviors and expectations associated with females and males in a specific social environment. Talking about gender, is talking about gender inequality or gender-based unjust differentiation and discrimination. Developing framework and approaches for gender equality at the Balkans is still “work in progress” and in order to change the the manner in which society percieves gender and its role in society a holistic intervention is needed.

*Gender equality* implies that women and men are free to develop their personal competencies and to choose without limitations of any kind of stereotypes, prejudices and strict gender roles. It means that different behavior, aspirations and needs of women and men are respected, valued and equally supported. (ИВАНОВСКА, 2007: 69)

Gender equality is a fundamental condition for sustained economic development. Gender equality will not be achieved if decision makers lack symmetric - full information about the impact of their policies. This paper will provide information about main methodological tools for understanding the gender relations in the municipal level in the Republic of Macedonia.

One of the fundamental instruments to decrease the gap is the instrument of *gender responsive budgeting (GRB)*. Gender responsive budgeting reduces the space for arbitrariness in the budgeting in the budgeting process and increases the transparency of government. GRB is performed through the evaluation of the impact of the budget on central / local level on men and women. Practices of gender responsive budgeting determine whether the budget is discriminatory based on gender and other social dimensions.

*Gender analysis*- Gender analysis refers to the multitude of methods used to understand the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, their activities and the constraints they face when they relate to one another. Gender analysis provides information on recognition of gender and its links to race, entity, class, age, disability and / or other status, which is important in understanding the different patterns of involvement, behavior and activities that women and men have in economic, social and legal structures. Gender analysis is part of the process of creating, implementing and evaluating public policies in areas that are important for sustainability and community development. Gender analysis should analyze the various procedures in policy in order to provide knowledge and their proposed reorganization that will result in the inclusion of a gender perspective.

*Gender segregated data* - To implement gender-responsive budget requires statistics on gender. This kind of analysis is the only way to analyze the impact of various instruments for measuring living conditions of men and women. By analyzing users we can get information about people who use resources (costs, expenses, products) and institutions/organizations that directly offer these services, which is the target group of the product that pays - whether the data are sufficient clear if one takes as a basis the genus; what

specific data and information are needed to achieve more reliable assessment on the basis of gender.

*Gender analytical information* - Gender analytical information is qualitative information on gender differences and inequalities. This analysis is used to understand the culture, ie the forms and norms of behavior that men and women, boys and girls, practice and experience on the issue being examined. While the forms of gender differences and inequalities are revealed in the data classified by gender, this analysis is the process of research as to why there are differences, are worrisome as they can be placed as an object of analysis and gender-sensitive activism. In discussing the evaluation of the impact of gender analyze the impact of the proportion of the group of users in the group is indicated by a particular policy.

*Gender machinery* - The term gender machinery usually refers to formal government structures assigned to promote gender equality and/or improve the status and rights of women. Examining these structures in many countries around the world shows that in practice the machineries take a wide variety of forms, from formal ministries to temporary councils and committees. (McBride & Mazur, 2012: 4)

### **Institutionalizing Gender in FYROM (Republic of Macedonia)**

The legal framework for gender equality involves determining the applicable legislation in force in the country for gender equality. The paper explores the positive legislative framework regarding gender. Generally, accepted methodology in this sense involves analysis of the sources of law that are hierarchically defined and provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia as the highest legal act.

The main sources of law in the Republic of Macedonia are: Constitution, Laws and international agreements ratified in accordance with the Constitution. Constitution as the highest legal act determines the basic principles of the legal and political system of the Republic and thus sets the basic principles and gender equality which are further elaborated with the laws.

Constitution guarantees gender equality in its entirety and there is no any provision which limits certain rights and freedoms by gender or any other affiliation. In this sense, the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia fundamental value is that men and women are equal before the Law and Constitution.<sup>1</sup> In parallel, Constitution guarantees the right of the minors and mothers.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia has a mandate to protect the freedoms and rights of citizens and the prohibition of

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<sup>1</sup>Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 9. Citizens of the Republic of Macedonia are equal irrespective of the gender, race, color of the skin, national and ethnic background and wealth.

<sup>2</sup>Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 42. The Republic protects the mothers, children and minors. Minors and mothers have special rights while working.

discrimination on the grounds of gender.<sup>1</sup> Laws and Bylaws -Constitutional values on gender equality are further developed in the Laws and bylaws. The main act that regulates the gender equality is the Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men as basic law and other Laws that regulate sectors such as: family, labor relations, education social welfare etc. Law on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men regulates basic and specific measures for establishing equal opportunities for women and men, powers, duties and obligations of the parties responsible for providing equal opportunities, the procedure for determining unequal treatment of men and women, the rights and duties of attorney etc. The Article 2 of the Law stipulates that the purpose of the Law is to promote the establishment of the principle of equal opportunities for women and men in political, economic, social, educational and the other spheres of social life.

#### *Institutional Framework*

At the national level, Parliament is obliged to establish a Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men responsible directly to intervene to legislation related on gender equality, gender issues and ways for promotion of gender equality. In addition, the logistical focal point for promoting institutional reforms in the area of gender equality is the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy which has a Department for Equal Opportunities. The mandate of the Department is to work in advancing the status of women and the setting up of equal opportunities for women and men in the labor market, social protection and social security, coordination of activities, initiating and proposing the adoption, amendments to the legislation in the field and cooperation with all relevant institutions.

Apart from the Department at the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, every government institution in the central and local is required to assign coordinator on gender equality.

#### *Gender Machinery at the Local Level*

The role and responsibilities of municipalities in promotion of equal opportunities is stipulated by the Law on Equal Opportunity between Women and Men. Article 16 of the abovementioned law stipulates the responsibility of the municipalities to establish a committee and a coordinator for equal opportunities.

Also the bodies of local self-government when making development plans and other acts and decisions shall review the proposed measures and activities of the committee and the coordinator. The decentralization process in the country and strengthens the role of local government in promoting gender equality. In this sense, local government formally took an active role in implementing the strategic objectives of the National Plan of Action and Equal Opportunities. Like most municipalities in the Republic of Macedonia Bitola

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<sup>1</sup>Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Article 110, paragraph 1.

and Tetovo municipality have established a Committees on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. These committee aims to take care of improving the position of women and ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in Bitola through the process of creating and adopting policies and decisions, their implementation, monitoring and evaluation of results achieved. Local committees of equal opportunities between the women and men are obliged to submitted the annual reports to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Within its competence the Commission for Equal Opportunities of Bitola is responsible: to implement the law on equal opportunities, to care for the promotion of gender equality, to review laws, regulations and important documents, submit proposals and opinions to the Council, to monitor the work of other committees, to inform the Council, cooperate with the Coordinator, submit an annual report to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and to review other issues. For its work the committee at least annually submit a report to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

### **Long Way Ahead for Gender Machinery in Local Level in Republic of Macedonia**

Even though legal framework in the Republic of Macedonia (article 5) promotes gender equality *de jure*, it is evident that these principles are not transcended in social context in different spheres of public and private real life as economic, cultural, political, social dimension. Empirical analyses show that the quality of gender relations, i.e. the status of the women is determined by the quality social conditions and balanced intergender relations. This can be exemplified most vividly in the decision-making process in the local level. The percentage of elected women mayors in the local government is extremely low (See **Table 1**) and far from European standards, fact underlined by variety of international instances.

**Table 1.** *Women Mayors according to Election Cycles*

	<b>1996</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Number of women Mayors (from 84 municipalities)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3 2 %</b>	<b>3 4 %</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3 4 %</b>

Source: *Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of RM (2014)*

Comparatively in countries such as Sweden and Latvia go as high as 30 % and 39 % respectively. (EC, 2009: 26)

This study is based on qualitative analysis at two municipalities, Tetovo (Polog Region) and Bitola (Pelagonia Region). Interviews were carried out with decision-makers (members of the Council, of Committees for Equal Opportunities and Coordinators for Equal Opportunities).

The data analysis brings into the light the following general conclusions: Committees on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men have knowledge of the concept of a theoretical level, but lack greater commitment to getting

deeper practical knowledge on gender-responsive budget committee members, the coordinator and administration. Gender analysis is utopian concept without gender segregated data. There is no database of gender analysis at the institutional level; women's non-governmental organizations have collected data based on gender analysis in the field of employment in the public sector at the local level, but at the institutional level there are no data updated on gender base.

Both Committees on Equal Opportunities for Women (Tetovo and Bitola) are actively involved in the implementation of activities supported by various local and international institutions for capacity building in the field of equality and non-discrimination as a solid base for the implementation of gender responsive budgets. Women population supporting projects. They are very active in field of education and trainings, development of women entrepreneurship, support of women-centred NGO, support for single mothers, organizing public debates on gender sensitive issues such as family voting and women trafficking etc.

Although within its powers the Committees have a wide range of activities ranging from humanitarian activities to support children with disabilities, combating drug addiction, cultural and artistic activities, activities aimed at promoting equality in schools by introducing gender sensitive education in the curriculum, removing gender stereotypes and biases in textbooks it can be concluded that they are not serving at full capacity due to lack of political will and precise legal framework that would determine in detail the procedure and sanctions for those entities that do not adhere to the implementation of gender budgeting.

NGO are extremely important in the realization of a number of activities aimed at building the capacity of all relevant actors in this field. Even though Municipal Councils of Tetovo and Bitola have strategic plans in the area of gender equality, these plans are not linked with municipality budgets.

## **Recommendations**

Mandate the Committees and the Coordinators for equal opportunities between women and men to monitor and assess the process of provision of gender segregated data in the annual bases. Political will of the municipalities ought to be demonstrated by providing specific targets in term of gender equality and indentifying specific actors for implementing the targets. Full implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities that bind organs and institutions of local government to consider measures proposed by the Equal Opportunities Committees and the coordinator when making development plans and other acts and decisions.

The Committees and the coordinator should take a proactive approach and actively participate in decision-making throughout the budget cycle, giving points for participation and influence. Creation of conditions, including any additional regulations for the implementation of Article 29-30 of the Local



Government Act which states that every citizen has an individual and collective right to submit proposals for the operation of the municipal authorities and the Mayor has a responsibility to create conditions for the same. To ensure that women fully benefit from this process. To establish a mechanism for regular consultations/hearings between Equal Opportunities Committees and NGOs representing women, through which the views of the NGOs will be heard in the policy making process. Build the capacities of variety of actors in the following: The committees and coordinators for equal opportunities in terms of: budgetary processes, gender mainstreaming in society, gender-responsive budgeting. In addition, these actors should develop the skills that are not exclusively related to gender sensitive budgeting but important for the work of the Committee (skills in the field of project management, communication, organization and leadership skills coordinators , teamwork, conflict resolution, and advocacy skills for coordinators and committee members). Provision of trainings for municipality Councilors and Mayors in the field of gender equality in the beginning of their mandate. Training of the municipality administration on avenues for integrating gender dimension in the policy making process. A number of materials should be made available in local languages to raise awareness of public officials, but also the general population, both in terms of gender issues as a whole and specifically on gender responsive budgeting. The materials should also be included obligations and conditions that a country has in terms of international and EU standards. The demand for effective, accountable, transparent and participatory public administration should come from the citizens themselves. In order to increase awareness about their rights to participate in decision-making should be organized media campaigns about the importance of active citizenship and the channels through which citizens, men and women can participate.

Given the importance of political will on high, encouraging the highest decision-making structures and especially mayors to sharpen the sense of the concepts of gender equality, and significant support for the Commission.. The municipalities should develop a solid database that will contain information on the population divided into as many dimensions (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.), which will be available to citizens (in accordance with the Law on Free Access to Information). To analyze the representation of women and men in the various organs of the municipal administration and budgetary decision-making, as well as analysis of costs associated with salaries and other expenses for employees.

- Develop a system to get a real understanding of the needs and problems faced by women and men of every community; This can be achieved through regular surveys and needs assessment should be linked to strategic planning and action in the community, and can be made available to the public through annual reports. Needs assessment should serve as the basis for all activities of the Commission and coordinator and is an engine of overall policy making in municipalities. Establishment of a working group that will include President of the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Chairman of the Budget and Finance

Committee, coordinator of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and selected NGOs and academic representatives who will have the task to develop the principles that will apply gender responsive budgeting, the dynamics of their received (including the development of capacity) and provide their full impact and sustainability.

Enhance coordination between the Commission for Equal Opportunities and other committees and municipal sectors that directly or indirectly can contribute to promoting gender equality. This should be linked to raising awareness among staff and counselors about the importance of gender equality for all, as well as the specific role of the Commission for Equal Opportunities. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs should establish coordination and regular exchange of information in order to identify common challenges and approaches to gender responsive budgeting at national and local level. In order to provide mutual knowledge, should establish a forum or mechanism for sharing experiences and good practices between the Equal Opportunities Commissions of all units of local government. To ensure the inclusion of women and other groups that are underrepresented in activities run by the municipality or governmental organizations in the field of participatory local governance (eg, "Forum Community", supported by the Swedish Development Agency). The Commission should work with NGOs actively involved in the field of human rights of women and to seek their input when making decisions within their jurisdictions.

In the process of strengthening the system of planning that is based on evidence the decision-makers need to ensure that gender issues are fully integrated.

This implies inclusion of gender sensitivity as criteria for funding of projects in the field of culture, local economic development and social protection. Establishing mechanisms for integrating a gender perspective in all phases of the budget process, for example: Budgeting - Coordinator of the Commission for equal opportunities to be actively involved in working with other heads of organizational units in the preparation of annual plans to ensure monitoring of the principles of gender equality. To provide support for this, we can develop methodological tools such as checklists (this may be subject to specific training for committee/coordinator). Before approving the budget - let Equal Opportunities Commission to review the budget and make suggestions for amendments and annexes taking into account the gender perspective. In this period, the Commission may also organize public hearings with citizens and NGOs seek to offer their contribution. Evaluation - prepare gender sensitive tools for monitoring and evaluation system budget.

Gender equality prospect encompasses holistic approaches which incorporates political will, capacity building and awernases raising of different societal groups about the issues related to gender.

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