



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of North Macedonia

Head of Delegation

Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025

Country Level Implementation Plan – CLIP for the Republic of North Macedonia

The EU Gender Action Plan III: An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action (GAP III)¹ adopted on 25 November 2020, reflects the objectives of the EU Gender Equality Strategy² and provides a policy framework to mainstream gender equality in all external policies and actions. It also provides a roadmap for stakeholder coordination in strategic thematic areas, institutions leadership and transparency of results.

The Country-Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) for North Macedonia, prepared by the EU Delegation in coordination with EU Member States' embassies, creates both political and programmatic commitments on gender equality. It provides a common approach for all EU actors at country level, focusing on selected strategic priorities through close consultations with Member States, national and international actors, including civil society organisations³. In particular, this document builds upon the objectives of the IPA III Programming Framework 2021-2027 and the Strategic Response prepared by the national authorities. It takes into account various gender-based analysis and impact assessments from national and international sources, and outcomes from the consultations between the EU Delegation and different stakeholders.

The overall purpose of the Country-Level Implementation Plan is to ensure support for North Macedonia for the effective implementation of national and international legal frameworks on gender equality and women's rights, mainstreaming gender equality into EU integration and IPA pre-accession assistance, and strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality in line with EU standards. It is based on two approaches: (i) increased gender participation through EU interventions, supporting women, women's associations and other related stakeholders; and (ii) gender mainstreaming in policy making and budgeting. In this context, the EU and its Member States will support the country in all GAP III six key areas of engagement⁴, focusing on ensuring

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/gender-equality-and-empowering-women-and-girls_en#header-5139

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en#achievements-in-gender-equality

³ https://reactor.org.mk/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/07/Input-GAP-III-CLIP-NM_08.07.21.pdf

⁴ GAP III key areas of engagement: (1) Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; (2) Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; (3) Strengthening economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls and women; (4)

freedom from all forms of gender-based violence, increasing dialogue and providing financial assistance to strengthen women's rights and equal participation. The support includes the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, implementing the women, peace and security agenda and addressing the green transition and the digital transformation.

1. Context for EU action gender equality and women's empowerment in the country

The Republic of North Macedonia has clearly committed to achieving gender equality and women empowerment by becoming a signatory of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Istanbul Convention, and by implementing EU related reforms in line with the National Programme for Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA).

The country has made considerable progress regarding the development of **normative frameworks** on gender equality and women empowerment by further legal alignment with the Istanbul Convention, developing a new policy framework and operating plans for the integration of gender perspectives into sector dialogue, policy revisions and ongoing reforms for aligning with the EU Gender Equality acquis. The draft **National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2026** and the draft **Law for gender equality**, supported by civil society expertise, provide a comprehensive strategic framework: establishing an effective system for gender mainstreaming, providing cross-sectoral perspectives to achieve universal social, economic and political rights and build a culture of non-violence and non-discrimination in relation to sex, gender and gender identities. However, both of the documents have been in the adoption phase for more than a year. It is expected that with these novelties, an adequate budget and monitoring of gender equality will be developed with the structured and meaningful involvement of civil society and other stakeholders.

Despite these efforts in advancing the gender equality agenda in the country, gender gaps and stereotypes remain evident in all spheres of socio-economic and political life. Moreover, the anti-gender movement is on the rise in the country⁵ especially after the piloting of a comprehensive sexuality education in schools and increasing online hate speech and sexual harassment towards gender rights defenders⁶. Further significant efforts are needed to adopt and fully implement gender equality legislation, policies and standards through policy dialogue, technical expertise and guidance, the development and sharing of good practice, and strategic partnerships and all-inclusive cooperation.

Advancing equal participation and leadership; (5) Implementing the women, peace and security agenda; (6) Addressing challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation

⁵ Kvinna till Kvinna (2019). The Fierce and the Furious. Available at: <https://kvinnaatillkvinna.org/publications/the-fierce-and-the-furious/>

⁶ See more on Gender Equality Platform. Available at: <http://rodovaplatforma.mk/>

Institutional mechanisms to implement gender equality policy need an improved organisational set up, technical capacity, proper financial and human resources for planning, managing and promotion of gender equality. Strengthening this mechanism and transforming it in a Secretariat for gender equality with an adequate budgeting for the effective implementation and monitoring of (cross) sectoral strategies and plans should be a priority for the country. Current gaps and the lack of reliable recent gender-disaggregated data across various sectors make significant constraints in developing evidence-based policies and measures, and requires improved capacities and coordination of the relevant institutions. The country's first Gender Equality index published in 2019 was based on data set from 2015, and is still not updated.

Proper **gender strategic planning and budgeting tools** are still lacking, which limits the opportunities for effective gender mainstreaming in policy making and the integration of gender perspectives into sector dialogue and in public finance management process.

The **representation of women in decision making** has increased due to including gender quotas the election regulations⁷ of having a minimum of 40% women in the Parliament, that was met in 2020⁸. However, the participation of women in the executive bodies is only 11%, where only 4 out of 16 members of the Government are women. In the last local elections 2021, out of 301 candidates for mayors only 25 were women, and only 2 women out of 80 Local Government Units Mayors were elected for the period 2021-2025.

Violence against women is considered a fairly widespread phenomenon in the country. The most recent comprehensive survey led by OSCE has shown alarming results related to violence against women, where only 2% on national level is reported. In 2019, the number of newly registered cases of domestic violence increased, reaching 1.554 victims, of whom 1.134 were woman, 247 men and 173 children. These figures have increased in 2020, where as a result of COVID19, women have been more exposed to rights violation and domestic violence. 14% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15 by a partner or non-partner, and 44% of women confirmed experiencing a psychological violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. The country has not yet established quality services necessary for the protection of victims of gender-based violence to meet the Istanbul Convention standards, including access for women with disabilities. Police still need to strengthen their capacity to assess the violence risk and take adequate measures. The new Law on prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence adopted in 2021 was important progress, being the first law to address all forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence. It regulates the reintegration of victims of violence. There is a need to accelerate legal harmonisation ⁹(e.g. criminal code), the adoption of

⁷ Gender quota first introduced in 2001 (30% of candidates on electoral lists to be from the less represented gender); amended in 2006 with a provision stipulating every third person on the list must be of the less represented sex; and in 2015 raising the bar to 40%

⁸ https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-KvinnatillKvinna-Foundation-report-WRWB_2020.pdf

⁹ Policy brief: What is next – following the adoption of the Law on the protection and prevention from violence against women and domestic violence, 2020 http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Policy-brief-Reintegration-of-women-victims-of-violence_WEB.pdf

related bylaws, and operating procedures for the proper implementation of the Law, in accordance with the Istanbul Convention¹⁰.

The **COVID – 19 pandemic** had its effects particularly at the local level, with women being disproportionately affected. The negative effects showed that institutions need to ensure that relief and recovery plans include a gender and intersectional perspective and attend to the needs of the most fragile segments of the population, including women in precarious employment situations, women subject to multiple discriminations such as Roma women, women in rural areas, migrant, asylum seeking and refugee women as recommended by the 2018 CEDAW Report. Institutions should also address the consequences of the pandemic on women's economic and social well-being, different forms of gender-based violence and recommend the swift adoption of specific legislation to the national authorities.

The pandemic crisis has further undermined much achieved progress, placing women's needs last on the agenda. Even though the country has put in force a measure where one of the parents could stay at home during the pandemic and take care of the kids, in most cases women were the ones staying at home.¹¹ The Time use survey shows that women spend three times more time on household activities compared to men, and have less free time¹². Furthermore, the measure were obligatory for the public sector and optional (just a recommendation) for the private sector that additionally made life harder for women workers and their work rights, especially in factories such as the textile industry. The measures adopted by the government covered several aspects, and aimed at mitigating the health, social and economic crisis. However, the victims of domestic violence, i.e. women and children who were/are under increased risk of domestic violence were not included in the pandemic measures.

The **unemployment** rate among women has increased more compared to men due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Structural deficiencies in the labour market persist, impeding potential growth, especially for women. The gender gap widened again slightly in 2020, in annual comparison, to 22.7 pps, as male labour market participation dropped by less during the pandemic than female participation¹³. According to the Women and Men publication (2020) of the Statistical Office, women make up only 37.7 of the employed also due to COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The salary gap in private sector amounts to 12% fewer earnings for women compared to man. In addition, women who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs, are likely to be vulnerable to the impacts of COVID19. There is only a small number of registered individual women-farmers with regulated employment status in the country and a small number of women-

¹⁰ Shadow Report on the Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in Northern Macedonia, available online: <https://mhc.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/draft-shadow-report-grevio-final-mk.pdf>

¹¹The impact of Covid-19 on women and men in North Macedonia, UN Women 2020, available online https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73970_northmacedoniarapidgenderassessment.pdf

¹² Time-use survey 2009, State Statistical Office; Time-use survey 2014/15, State Statistical Office

¹³ The European Commission in the Progress Report of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2021, available online: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/north-macedonia-report-2021_en

farmers beneficiaries of financial support programmes in agriculture and rural development.¹⁴ The adoption of important legislation is pending, such as: the Law on Labour Relations and the Law on Protection from and Prevention of Harassment at the Work Place which still need to be aligned with the EU *acquis* and regulations on gender equality. The Strategy for the development of women's entrepreneurship 2019-2023 for the economic empowerment of women still lacks proper budgeting and accompanying economic measures.

Lack of ownership of assets by women is a factor for economic discrimination. Although the laws in North Macedonia are gender-neutral when it comes to owning and managing land, traditionally, the property acquired in a marriage is usually registered in the husbands' name and leaving the estate to the male heirs is still prevalent. Due to these male-normative customs, the gender disaggregated data for May 2016 of owners of property shows a serious disbalance where 72% of total owners are male and 28% are female¹⁵.

The legal framework in gender equality lacks a specific focus on science, technology, engineering, mathematics (**STEM**). Many of the key strategies that could promote women's inclusion and participation in STEM, for example the strategy for education, do not take into account the different needs and interests of men and women. Women face more obstacles related to prejudices and social norms and expectations when choosing their area of study or career path than men. Although by law secondary **education** is compulsory, 31% of girls aged 14 to 15 do not continue schooling beyond the primary level, with the largest disparity between the richest and the poorest youth.

Civil society research shows that the pandemic has made apparent the necessity and urgency for comprehensive **digitalization** but it also revealed that a 'digital gap' exists among diverse groups of the population, covering access to digital devices, internet and different levels of digital literacy.¹⁶

Women living in rural and remote areas, Roma women, but also LGBTQI+ persons, face limited access to primary **health services**, and to sexual and reproductive health care rights and services. Despite the piloting of a comprehensive sexuality education in few schools, the access to proper information and education on health, sexual and reproductive rights remains restricted, further exacerbated by COVID-19. Due to this, the Global Gender Gap Report¹⁷ in the field of "Health and survival", placed North Macedonia 89th out of 153 countries. There is no information available

¹⁴ Analysis- Economic empowerment of women in rural areas - a challenge, opportunity or unattainable goal?, Rural Coalition 2020, available online <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%B2-2-%D1%84%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB.pdf>

¹⁵ Cadastre 2019, Percent of women ownershipholders in 2019, available online: https://www.katastar.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/rodova_ednakvost/izvestai/Tabela_so_broj_i_procent_na_zapisani_prava_po_pol_i_po_katastarsko_oddelenie_2_019.pdf

¹⁶ Digital Agenda Observatory - Current Status Report and Roadmap for Advancing the Digital Agenda in Northern Macedonia (2021) https://metamorphosis.org.mk/izdanija_arhiva/opservatorija-za-digitalnata-agenda-izveshtaj-za-tekovnata-sostojba-i-patokaz-za-unapreduvanje-na-digitalnata-agenda-vo-severna-makedonija-2021/

¹⁷ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

on the development of a new Strategy for sexual and reproductive health after the previous one expired in 2020.

While the issue of **climate change/environment** and the gender perspective is evident in public discourse, it is not adequately reflected in the national gender policy framework. The Law on equal opportunities for women and men does not provide any reference to climate change or environment nor does it stipulate that these categories are basis for discrimination. The situation should improve with the Draft National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2026 where a special section on environmental protection and tackling climate change address the consequences of climate change from a gender perspective, especially in the agriculture sector. In this area the main concerns are the lack of a systematic approach to address climate change and gender, lack of gender desegregated data gender indicators for monitoring of strategic national documents, as well as weak administrative / institutional capacities. The gender component is missing in the organic Law on environmental protection, while in in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022 of the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Spatial Planning, the gender dimension is constantly present as a key performance indicator for the proposed activities¹⁸.

The second and third Biennial Update Report on Climate Change for North Macedonia contain concrete measures for gender aspects to be addressed, such as: integrating gender aspects, gender data and analysis in the national action plan, including gender perspective in the working programmes and capacity building of the institutions and promote gender climate champions. For some of the measures budget allocations are needed, whereas for others approximately 27.000EUR are forecasted¹⁹. Considering that the EU is implementing the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, which specifically encompasses a green deal, gender equality components may be embedded in its interventions.

In 2020, the second National Action Plan 2020-2025 for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was adopted, including a new operational plan to implement the Resolution for further integration of the gender perspective in the strategic documents and actions. There is a need for awareness raising and capacity building for implementing the UNSC Resolution 1325 at the local level as stated in Strategic Objective 5 of this plan.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

The overall objectives of the EU action for gender equality and women's empowerment in North Macedonia is to support the government in implementing national and international gender equality commitments and the EU Gender Equality standards. The EU will provide support for the following thematic areas and objectives of the new EU Gender Action Plan III for 2021-2025 (GAP III) through political dialogue and targeted actions.

GAP III Intervention Area	GAP III Specific Thematic Objectives

¹⁸ https://www.moepp.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Strateski_Plan_2020-2022_final.pdf

¹⁹ <https://klimatskipromeni.mk/data/rest/file/download/9d2deb47ef993e8856e2b6e00bab2727993f42e596519ba75156915277c8249a.pdf>

<p>A. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>2. Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are agents of change regarding discriminatory social norms, gender stereotypes, and gender-drivers of conflict.</p> <p>3. Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, who experience gender-based violence have increased access to essential services.</p> <p>4. The right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, free from discrimination, coercion and violence is promoted and better protected.</p> <p>5. 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.</p> <p>8. Quality, disaggregated and globally comparable data on different forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices are increasingly collected and used to inform laws, policies and programmes.</p>
<p>B. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights</p>	<p>1. Enabled legal, political and societal environment allowing women and girls, in all their diversity, to access quality sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) care and services and protecting their sexual and reproductive rights.</p> <p>2. 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.</p>
<p>C. Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>2. Improved policy, legal framework and access to care services enabling equal division of domestic and care work between women and men.</p> <p>3. Increased access for women in all their diversity to financial services and products, and productive resources.</p> <p>4. Women in all their diversity have improved access to entrepreneurship opportunities, including social entrepreneurship, alternative livelihoods and strengthened participation in the green and circular economy.</p> <p>9. Public health systems have sufficient and sustained financing to address the health needs of women and girls in all their diversity.</p>

<p>D. Promoting equal participation and leadership</p>	<p>2. Women and girls, in all their diversity, have improved access to justice to safeguard their civil and political rights.</p> <p>3. 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.</p> <p>4. Equitable social norms, attitudes and behaviours promoting equal participation and leadership fostered at community and individual levels – through civic education, media, education and culture at all levels.</p> <p>5. Improved systems for collecting quality, disaggregated and globally comparable data on women’s political participation and leadership.</p> <p>6. Improved system to track and make public financial allocations for gender equality.</p>
<p>E. Integrating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda</p>	<p>2. Gender mainstreaming.</p> <p>3. Leading by example.</p> <p>6. Relief and Recovery.</p>
<p>F. Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation</p>	
<p>Climate change and environment</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>3.Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, addressing climate change in their daily lives and preserving the natural environment are supported.</p> <p>4. Women and men in all their diversity, increasingly participate in and have improved access to jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities and alternative livelihoods in the green economy and the circular economy.</p>
<p>Digitalisation</p>	<p>1. 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.</p> <p>2. Women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity have equal access to affordable and secure broadband, technology and digital tools.</p> <p>3. Women, men, girls and boys are equally provided with and using equally public digital literacy.</p> <p>4. Women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity participate fully and equally in the digital economy.</p>

Currently, there are several EU funded ongoing and upcoming programmes which are linked to both the EU identified priority areas and those identified by EU Member States. The EU Delegation is closely coordinating with Member States in these areas at the policy dialogue level and potential new programmes. Building synergies and strengthening cooperation with EU Member States and other stakeholders in the country (UN agencies and other development actors) is also achieved through the relevant Sector Working Group where gender equality priorities are discussed and regular consultations are organised on existing and new programmes. Close coordination is already established with some Member States on programmes related to violence against women and girls, gender-based violence and in the area of employment and social inclusion.

Besides the above areas, Member States have listed specific areas of engagement that are of particular interest to them and where opportunities for cooperation between them and EU Delegation can be found. These are:

- **Policy dialogue and feminist diplomacy and participation in decision making at local and central level** - (supporting parliamentary women, women at local level municipal councils, working with youth and building capacity of Young Leaders (women and men) with focus to gender equality and promoting related rights).
- **Cooperation support for women civil society organisations and networks** - (strengthening capacity of local women civil society organisations and their networking including joint initiatives that reflect the multi-ethnic character of the society).
- **Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women** - (actions related to social inclusion, improved access to jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities in the green/circular economy. Also actions for improved access to childcare and elderly care services as a precondition for women economic empowerment).
- **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights** - (focused on raising awareness and access to services and ensuring a proper follow-up of the coalition of action resulting of the Generation equality Forum, focusing on Bodily Autonomy & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights).
- **Effective implementation of national and international legal frameworks on gender equality** (strengthening the implementation of the legal frameworks on gender equality, gender mainstreaming into the EU key reforms and strengthening the institutional mechanisms in line with EU standards).

Furthermore, the EU Delegation and Member States continue to work on including gender-disaggregated indicators for monitoring and specific activities targeting gender equality, and coordinating further dialogue on gender equality and regularly exchange information on specific actions in this field. The actions also envision the involvement of civil society with a focus on monitoring the institutions implementing gender equality commitments.

3. Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women's empowerment

The EU Delegation will continue with the working method established, which involves an assessment of the impact of every proposed action from a gender equality perspective, introducing gender sensitive indicators and where possible – additional measures to ensure gender equal benefit from EU funds. Particular focus will be given to introducing and monitoring gender markers and addressing the gender perspective more effectively as a cross-cutting component. Thus, all developed actions will envisage the collection of gender-disaggregated data and improved inter-sectoral cooperation in the field of statistics. This approach was also integrated into the performance assessment framework, which the country developed in 2019 with EU support.

- The IPA 2021 EU for Prespa action is a comprehensive area-based development programme for the protection and sustainable development of Prespa lakes area. It will address gender equality by encompassing a number of gender-sensitive indicators in the area of nature protection and nature-based economic activities. The Action will actively pilot equal opportunities by ensuring the access to EU funding for women and girls. Special focus is put on engaging women in agricultural activities and support has been envisaged for cooperatives of women. The two planned call for proposals (i.e. direct financial support for sustainable eco-tourism and the grant scheme for youth and other civil society organisations) will have specific provisions (quotas) to ensure the participation of young people (under 45 years old) and women. The project has a G1 marker.
- The IPA 2020 project “EU Support for Rule of Law”, among other objectives, will improve the prevention of gender- based violence and gender-based discrimination. A research analysis on gender-based violence will include a legal review, mapping of prevention mechanisms and considering different analyses by civil society and academia, as well as the training of police and judiciary, cooperation between them and CSOs, the role of first responders, etc., with a view to improve the situation. Following this research review of training curricula, with the relevant training academies, and trainings on how to prevent and act with victims of gender-based violence will be conducted. A second research on gender-based discrimination will a focus on recommendations regarding concrete measures to increase the number of cases of gender-based discrimination that are brought before courts and competent institutions, including the newly-established Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The case law produced by the independent oversight bodies and the existing case law by courts will be assessed in this regard. Potentially conflicting competencies as a result of non-alignment of different pieces of legislation will also be addressed and recommendations for change or clarification elaborated. The research in this activity will examine preventive measures in different fields: labour market and business; income; education; social policy (e.g. childcare, parental leave); political representation; decision-making positions; and traditional gender-specific roles. A new Law on Gender Equality (draft recently reviewed by the Venice Commission) will be an important step forward and included in the analysis. The analysis

will also look into all relevant national policies to foster non-discrimination with a focus on Roma women, LGBTI persons and other related vulnerable groups and their access to justice in discrimination cases. The results of this research will serve to strengthen the capacities of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Ombudsman's Office, as well as the police and judiciary. This project has G1 marker.

- The EU Delegation has been supporting the Ministry of Justice through a number of finalised and ongoing projects, to improve access to justice for vulnerable citizens, including women, through legislative improvements, strengthening the capacities of the ministry of justice in charge of legal aid and through supporting civil society organisations providing preliminary legal assistance (in their involvement in the policy making and for the provision of legal aid to victims of gender-based violence and other vulnerable population).
- Under the IPA II Civil Society Facility, both on country and regional level, financial assistance was made available to civil society organisations and platforms in the country. The actions are contributing in important areas to gender equality, such as: supporting objectives from the national strategy, gender responsive policies and budgeting on central and local level, improving social and economic rights of women, women entrepreneurship, efficient mechanisms for equal opportunities and gender sensitization, monitoring of implementation of international agreements and relevant legislation, etc. The Call for Proposals that was launched under IPA II Civil Society Facility as well as the various grants schemes under the IPA sectorial portfolios included gender-mainstreaming component.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment

The EU pre-accession process is the key channel for political and policy dialogue in the country in order to influence progress on gender equality. A high-level political dialogue takes place at the SA sub-committee meetings on Justice and Home Affairs, and on Innovation, Information Society, and Social Policy. Before the SA sub-committee on Justice and Home Affairs, consultations with civil society organisations are organised, including on issues related to gender equality and gender-based violence.

The main policy discussion platform is the 11 Sector Working Groups established under IPA II framework. The Sector Working Groups is comprised of the national authorities, EU Member States, donors and civil society, are tasked with the identification of national priorities, monitoring and reporting on sector reforms. This implies also considering key crosscutting priorities, namely gender equality, equal opportunities, environment and climate change. The policy dialogue in the statistical field, updating the gender equality index and lack of gender disaggregation data are raised as an important topic.

Furthermore, in the framework of the support for public administration reform and public finance management, the EU Delegation pursues greater gender mainstreaming in public administration, promoting more gender sensitive policies and gender responsive budgeting.

The EU Delegation will continue facilitating dialogue on gender equality and women's rights in the period 2021-2025 through various formal and informal meetings and use the accession process as the key channel for continuous political and policy dialogue to promote and monitor progress on gender equality towards a full alignment with the EU gender equality and non-discrimination standards.

The EU Delegation and the EU Member States keep close contact and consult with the civil society on their support programmes and strategies as well as key policy updates and impact analysis. A gender coordination mechanism such as the EU informal group will be established (mid-2022) to coordinate dialogue and actions with civil society organisations and platforms, with a focus on those implementing EU funded projects, but also to draw attention and support for greater gender equality and empowerment in the course of CLIP implementation. This set up may include donor community, international organisations and national institutions in consulting and contributing to the updating and monitoring of the CLIP. Such structural gender dialogue and coordination with civil society and other stakeholders should support "bottom-up" implementation, institutional cooperation and be based on inclusive consultations.

The implementation and assessment of EU programmes and projects will also contribute to advancing gender equality in the country. Different ongoing EU funded projects will be used to extend the gender dialogue by engaging with civil society, private actors and local authorities.

5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities

Gender Equality is incorporated in EU assistance, communication and visibility actions, where appropriate, in particular when defining the target audience and specific needs of each gender. Furthermore, gender equality related messages will be integrated, where relevant, in public diplomacy work, in particular as regard public administration reform and public finance management.

Several events related to strategic communication on gender equality as well as high-level dialogue events are foreseen in the forthcoming period, including on the basis of a Team Europe approach. Planned outreach and communication activities include:

- Since 2019, the EU Delegation and UNDP office in the country jointly mark the international days related to human rights, including the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November). This includes a joint 'Orange the World' campaign about the rights of women and young girls. Cooperation and will continue throughout 2022-2025.

- The EU Delegation will use all possible occasions to promote gender equality, such as: marking the International Women's Day or dedicating a month of gender balance in decision-making.
- Local level outreach, dialogue and joint events with civil society organisations working on gender equality, human rights defenders and youth.
- Making available to the public relevant research, studies and publications on gender equality, supported by the EU and other donors, such as the gender sector analysis.

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

In 2021, while programming the **IPA III assistance** for the country, a special focus was put on including gender mainstreaming in all sectors of the IPA programming period 2021-2023. Moreover, a direct priority was given in the **2022 IPA Action Programme** “EU for Quality Employments and Equal Opportunities”, where the specific objective is supporting reforms to promote equal opportunities and access to quality employment and social protection for men and women. The AAP 2022 includes activities for the advancement of gender equality and closing the gender gap, by addressing the barriers on women’s greater participation in the society at local and national level. A **Call for Proposals (EU for Gender Equality)** is programmed for civil society organisations to local gender policy and practices for empowering women (employment, social protection, education, health, justice and decision making at local level). In particular, it will support inactive women from ethnic minorities and will invest in preventive, counselling and other type of services for victims of gender based and domestic violence, women Roma, LGBTI victims of violence, etc.

Under **IPA III Civil Society Facility 2021-2023**, support for civil society organisations is programmed for actions for gender equality and related areas in different communities. Gender equality and women rights are one of the five priorities of the EIDHR programme for the country.

Services through the **EU TAIEX** instrument are already providing expert support to the institutions in drafting and harmonising legislation relevant for gender equality as well as for improved implementation and efficient operations and coordination mechanisms.

The UN Women **Gender Equality Facility (GEF) project** financed by the Sweden, aims at strengthening the implementation of national and international legal frameworks on gender equality and women’s rights, mainstreaming gender equality into EU integration and planning processes for pre-accession assistance, and strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality in line with EU standards. In the medium to longer-term, and in line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the Principles of the EU Gender Action Plan III (2021-2025), the project aims to secure implementation of the gender equality legislation, policies and standards

through policy dialogue, expertise and guidance, sharing of good practice, and strategic partnerships and cooperation. The main partners of the project are the Secretariat for European Affairs, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) structures, the Equal Opportunities Department at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and National Gender Machinery institutions. The UN Women are currently in process of preparation of a country profile on gender equality to be finalised in 2022.

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