



EU support for women's political participation and leadership under the EU's Gender Action Plan

A case study on Bosnia and Herzegovina



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Women's political participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

While Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has adopted various legislative initiatives to advance women's representation, women still only hold a minority of elective seats. As a major regional player, the EU has significant leverage to advance women's political participation and leadership in the country. This paper assesses the extent to which the EU and EU member states have supported women's political participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on their commitments in the previous EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) II. The paper concludes with lessons learnt and recommendations for strengthening the implementation of the new EU Gender Action Plan's provisions on women's political participation and leadership.

More than 25 years have passed since the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), but the legacy of the conflict, and the Dayton Peace Agreement which ended it, still shape political life in the country. Bosnia's separation into two entities, *the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* and the *Republika Srpska*, and the complicated government system set up by the peace agreement have enabled ethno-political leaders to capture the state, neglect much needed political reforms, and disregard the rights of minorities, women, and youth. The agreement also entrenched women's exclusion from major political processes. By institutionalising power-sharing between the country's three main constituent groups (Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs), it formally discriminates against citizens who are not affiliated with one of those three entities or do not have the right combination of ethnic origin and place of residence required to compete for the Presidency or the House of the Peoples.

BiH is a signatory to numerous binding international documents guaranteeing the equality of men and women, and its legal framework generally ensures

the involvement of women in decision-making. In 2009, amendments to the Law on Gender Equality introduced a minimum threshold of 40 percent for the underrepresented sex in all government bodies. In addition, the 2013 Election Law of BiH requires at least 40 percent of candidates on political parties' electoral lists to be women, and at least one woman candidate has to be included amongst the first two candidates. The Central Electoral Commission can reject lists that do not fit these requirements, but there are no sanctions in place for non-compliance.

In practice, however, the implementation of these laws remains a significant challenge. A key obstacle is the semi-open candidate list system, which allows voters to change candidates' position on party lists. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has recommended replacing this system with a so-called zipper system and introducing reserved seats for women in different legislative bodies, but this recommendation has not been implemented to date. "Women rarely accede to leadership positions in political parties and tend to receive

1 Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity (MEASURE-BIH), "Difference in Development Priorities of Male Versus Female Politicians and Voters: Evidence From Bosnia And Herzegovina," USAID, 2017, available. [here](#)

2 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), "Concluding Observations on the Sixth

far less support during their campaigns, including less financial support, media time, trainings, and mentoring.” All of these factors perpetuate men’s overrepresentation in political decision-making processes.

Despite an initial increase in women’s representation after the introduction of the quota for candidate lists in 2013, the overall situation for women in politics has failed to improve. As of 2021, only 16.7 percent of representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH are women—in contrast to 30 percent in 1998. The picture in the country’s two subnational legislatures is only marginally better. Women currently make up 26.5 percent of representatives in the Parliament of

the Federation of BiH, which is the highest percentage to date. At the same time, their representation in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska has declined from 25.5 percent in 2006 to 18.1 percent today. In the cantonal assemblies, women currently make up 32.2 percent of elected officials. Women’s underrepresentation is especially evident at the municipal level. During the last local election, held in November 2020, only 29 out of 425 candidates for the mayoral positions were women, resulting in only 5 women being elected. In the executive, 4 out of the 16 members of the cabinet are women, covering the portfolios of finance, education, culture and sports, and the environment and tourism.

Sex of elected candidates in the 2018 general elections

	Women	% of women	Men	% of men
Presidency of BiH	0	0	3	100
Parliamentary Assembly of BiH	7	16.7	35	83.3
Parliament of Federation of BiH	26	26.5	72	73.5
National assembly of RS	15	18.1	68	81.9
Cantonal assemblies	93	32.2	196	67.8

Source: Central Electoral Commission of BiH

Periodic Report of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” adopted at the 1732nd and 1733rd meetings, CEDAW/C/BiH/CO/6, 2019, available [here](#).

3 √= Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), “Young Women Politicians Make Strides Towards Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” March 5, 2021.

<https://www.wfd.org/2021/03/05/young-women-politicians-make-strides-towards-equality-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>.

4 Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, “TB 03 Women and Men in Bosnia and Herzegovina,” Sarajevo: 2020, available [here](#).

5 Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, “Federal Ministries,” available [here](#).

Over the past several years, there have been several domestic initiatives to advance women's participation in the country. The government has developed a national 2018-2022 Gender Action Plan which also integrates its National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. Institutionally, the development and the implementation of these measures as well as the Law on Gender Equality is overseen by the Agency for Gender Equality, the Gender Centre of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Gender Equality Centre of the Government of Republika Srpska. Within parliament, the Committee on Gender Equality of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH is the key institutional mechanism advancing gender equality reforms. In both 2016 and again in 2021, a group of parliamentarians proposed changes to the Election Law of BiH to increase the quota of women candidates on electoral lists to 50 percent and to introduce a minimum quota of 40 percent in the Council of Ministers. The changes are part of ongoing negotiations between political parties.

Women in BiH still face numerous barriers to equal political power, including widespread patriarchal attitudes, violence against women, as well as harmful gender stereotypes perpetuated by the media. For example, a 2017 survey of 1,985 BiH citizens conducted by USAID Measure-BiH found that half of male citizens and a little over 30 percent of women think men make better political leaders, with voters "who did not vote for female candidates expressing the strongest stereotypes." Like in many countries, male-dominated political parties also represent

a significant hurdle, with male party leaders often doing very little to advance women's political representation and actively blocking progressive female politicians. Resistance ranges from subtle discrimination to outright violence. A 2019 survey of Bosnian women politicians conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy found that 60 percent had experienced some form of violence, with numbers even higher amongst young women.

Despite these challenges, the Bosnian women's movement remains vibrant and active in several focus areas, such as combating gender-based violence, fighting gender-based discrimination, and promoting women's economic empowerment. Since 2009, for example, an active informal women's network of around 40 women's groups called the Women's Network BiH has advocated on behalf of women's rights, gender equality, anti-discrimination, reproductive rights, peace, and antimilitarism. Another informal network, "Women for Constitutional Changes," gathers 35 civil society organisations that advocate for constitutional reforms with an explicit focus on promoting women's engagement in private and public life.

6 "Izborna Komisija BiH Usvojila Inicijativu o Izmjenama Izbornog Zakona," Radio Slobodna Evropa, September 15, 2021, available [here](#).

7 Adnan Kadribašić, Barbara Chiarenza, Maida Čehajić-Čampara, Lejla Ramić-Mesihović, "Baseline Study on Barriers to Political Participation of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina," UN Women and UNDP, 2020, available [here](#).

8 Monitoring and Evaluation Support Activity (MEASURE-BiH), "Difference in Development Priorities of Male Versus Female Politicians and Voters: Evidence From Bosnia And Herzegovina," USAID, 2017, available [here](#).

9 Western Balkans Democracy Initiative, "Violence against Women in Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2019, available [here](#).

Assessing EU action on women's political participation and leadership

The EU is a major international actor in Bosnia and Herzegovina and exerts significant leverage through the EU integration process. The country's accession to the EU is dependent on a range of political reforms, which the EU supports via the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). IPA support is provided through different facilities, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Civil Society Facility, and the Gender Equality Facility. Some projects take the form of direct contracts with EU member states and international companies or organisations, others are implemented through open calls for proposals targeting local and international civil society organisations. Between 2016 and 2020, the EU's commitment to furthering gender equality through its external action was guided by the Gender Action Plan (GAP) II, which as of 2020 has been succeeded by GAP III (2020-2025). One of the four thematic priorities of GAP II was strengthening women's political participation.

Using these various instruments, the EU has supported a broad spectrum of gender equality issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its primary focus areas have been the rights of women belonging to minority or marginalised groups, gender-based violence, and women's economic empowerment. EU support for women's participation and leadership, one of the priority objectives identified in GAP II, has mostly consisted of strengthening the capacity of national and local bodies to enforce existing gender

equality laws. In contrast, the EU has only supported a handful of civil society projects focused on advocacy or capacity-building related to women's political representation. These projects tend to be much smaller scale. Projects related to institutional capacity generally receive between EUR 500,000 and EUR 880,000, whereas civil society projects on average only receive up to EUR 200,000. So far, the EU has not worked with political parties on advancing women's participation, even though parties have been identified as one of the key barriers to gender equality in Bosnian politics.

GAP II mandated that the EU Institutions and EU Member states allocate sufficient resources to deliver on the EU's comprehensive gender policy commitments and to report annually on its implementation. However, a regional study on funding trends for women's right conducted by Kvinna till Kvinna found that few EU members have committed substantial bilateral support when it comes to promoting women's political participation. By far, the most notable support has come from Sweden, while the other EU member states have contributed modestly, mostly to joint or pulled funds. The UK, through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, has also been an important actor supporting women's political empowerment in BiH.

The same study has found that GAP II did not significantly influence European donors' funding decisions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. EU Member

10 Adnan Kadribašić, Barbara Chiarenza, Maida Čehajić-Čampara, Lejla Ramić-Mesihović, "Baseline Study on Barriers to Political Participation of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina," UN Women and UNDP, 2020, Available [here](#).

11 Nicole Farnsworth, Nerina Guri, Donjeta Morina, and Taya Kohnen. "Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans," Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2020, available [here](#).

12 *ibid*.

states were not significantly involved in the preparation of the GAP II indicators and in the planning of the EU's support for women's political empowerment. This lack of coordination seems to have been addressed in the preparation of the Country Level Implementation Plan under the GAP III.

by the Foundation of Local Democracy with a total budget of EUR 880,000 for 24 months, the project seeks to enhance public awareness of all forms of discrimination, strengthen the capacity of municipal officials, gender equality bodies, service providers, vulnerable groups, and improve the implementation of the Anti-Discrimination Law and the Gender Equality Law in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

EU assistance to BiH's Gender Equality Mechanisms

In 2018, the EU established a Gender Equality Facility to fund initiatives that strengthen Bosnian institutions' capacity to apply the EU gender acquis. To date, this support has been aimed at bolstering the role and functioning of existing gender equality structures in BiH to 1) implement the EU Gender Equality acquis across sectors and levels of government; 2) include a gender perspective in policy-making in targeted institutions, and 3) to improve the implementation of the BiH Gender Action Plan. Activities under this framework have been designed and implemented by UN Women, with a total budget of EUR 550,000.

A new project that is also aimed at strengthening the capacity of Bosnian institutional mechanisms, titled "*EU4HR: Support to implementation of Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Laws*," will start in August 2021, with a focus on improving protection for victims of all forms of discrimination. Implemented

EU support for women's rights activism

The EU has repeatedly acknowledged the important role that women's rights civil society organisations (WCSOs) play in furthering gender equality. In GAP II, it notes that the EU and member states should empower "girls' and women's organisations and human rights defenders" through "support [to] the participation of women's organisations as accountability agents in budgetary, legislative, and policy making processes at all levels." Furthermore, the 2018 Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security of the Council of the EU state that "direct, reliable, and predictable funding delivered through flexible grants or long-term financing can make a difference in creating the conditions for grassroots movements and civil society organisations."

However, the EU has published limited information on its actual expenditures and support for women's rights activism, although such information is

13 Interviews conducted with staff members of the EU Delegation and of the Swedish Embassy on 23rd and 24th August 2021.

14 European Commission, Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) 2014-2020, "Bosnia and Herzegovina: EU Gender Equality Facility", available [here](#).

15 *ibid*.

16 Information provided by EU Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

17 "Joint Staff Working Document - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020," European Commission, September 21, 2015, 36, available [here](#).

18 Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security," December 10, 2018, 50, available [here](#).

important for evaluating GAP II implementation and preparing IPA III and GAP III. An independent evaluation of the implementation of GAP II in the Western Balkans found that throughout the region, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union Delegations “did not take significant initiatives for developing partnerships with or support the capacity development of WCSOs as key stakeholders in furthering national capacities for gender equality” and the “insufficient financial support for WCSOs, particularly human resources, hinders WCSOs’ ability to participate in consultations and advocacy work related to gender equality as foreseen in GAP II.”

Most of the EU’s support for women’s rights activism in Bosnia and Herzegovina is channelled through the EIDHR. Since 2016, four EIDHR calls for project proposals have listed “supporting gender equality (women’s rights, women in decision-making, right to participate in peacebuilding and reconstruction processes, fight against violence and harmful practices, etc.)” as a type of action that may be funded. Yet until 2020, the EIDHR did not select a single project focused on promoting women’s political participation. In the most recent call for proposals, two such projects were selected (out of a total of eleven). They are now being implemented by local civil society organisations with a budget of around EUR 190,000 each.

The first of the two, titled *Women Human Rights Advocates* and implemented by Fondacija Cure, aims to build the capacity of women’s groups working on women’s human rights and democracy

issues. The second project, titled *Development of Training Program for Members of Municipal Gender Equality Commissions in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (2021-2023) and implemented by Citizen’s Association Neshto Vishe and Amica Educa, seeks to “strengthen the role and position of women in political, social and economic processes through supporting municipal councils and establishing effective mechanisms for gender equality in local communities in BiH.” As part of the project, members of municipal and city commissions for gender equality in 20 local communities will undergo training on gender equality in local governance.

Political support for women’s representation and leadership

esides the standard EU Delegation, the EU is represented in BiH through the EU Special Representative, who is mandated to ensure “continued progress in the Stabilisation and Association Process, with the aim of a stable, viable, peaceful and multi-ethnic and united BiH.” In addition, the EU is the most significant contributor to The Office of the High Representative (OHR) and appoints the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The OHR is an ad hoc international institution responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement. It holds significant political power in Bosnia, including the power to adopt binding decisions when local parties do not act and the power to remove from office public officials who violate the peace agreement.

19 Farnsworth, Guri, Morina, and Kohnen, “Where’s the Money for Women’s Rights?” Available [here](#).

20 Nicole Farnsworth and Iliriana Banjska, “Mind the GAP: An Independent Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II In Western Balkan Countries,” Kosovo’s Women Network, 2018, 6, available [here](#).

21 Amica Educa “Public Call to Municipalities and City Administrations in B&H to Apply for Participation in the Training Programme for Members of the Gender Equality Commissions,” <https://www.amicaeduca.com/novost.php?id=31>.

22 European Union External Action Service (EEAS), “EU Special Representatives,” May 31, 2021, available [here](#).

23 Office of the High Representative, “General Information,” available [here](#). Accessed 03 October 2021.

However, when it comes to advancing women's political participation, these offices have rarely used their political leverage. Instead, the EU has repeatedly side-lined gender equality concerns in its negotiations with its Bosnian counterparts. As noted in a recent UN Women report, "the process of signing the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union (EU) in 2015 did not include women in the decision-making processes, which demonstrates the lack of political will to respect gender equality as an inseparable part of the EU integration process and all crucial reform processes that are a part of it." In 2019, the EU published an Opinion and a comprehensive analytical report on BiH's application for EU membership which focused almost exclusively on problems of ethnic discrimination, whereas discrimination based on gender is almost absent from the Opinion.

One exception is a joint project launched by the EUSR, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation in December 2017. The project, which is titled "Include Women in Change Processes/*Uključimo žene u procese promjena*," aims to strengthen women's rights and equal participation in decision-making. The pilot phase of the project consisted of four thematic roundtables organised between December 2017 and May 2018 that gathered around 100 women participants of different backgrounds. These discussions resulted in a report and recommendations targeting a wide variety of actors in BiH as well as the establishment

of a Women Advisory Board (WAB). The WAB is composed of ten prominent women leaders from civil society, politicians, entrepreneurs, and legal experts who are tasked with advising the EU on how to best integrate gender equality and women's political participation in the EU accession process. This Advisory Board held its first session in May 2019 and has been consulted since then, especially for the preparation of the Country-Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) under GAP III.

EU member state support for women's political participation in BiH

Amongst the EU countries present in BiH, Sweden—through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)—has been the most significant supporter of women's political participation. Other than the project "Include Women in Change Processes" mentioned above, SIDA funds local women's civil society organisations through Kvinna till Kvinna, as well as a regional project focused on building the capacity of CSOs that are advocating for gendering the EU accession process in the Western Balkans, including in BiH. In addition, SIDA also supported the "Women in Elections in BiH" project implemented by UNDP in partnership with UN Women and national institutions between 2017 and 2020. The project, which had a total budget of USD 1.89 million, included networking and capacity-building targeting women leaders, support for the adoption of local gender action plans, public debates on women's leadership, and media engagement,

24 UN Women, "Women's Political Participation and Leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina," Focus on Gender: Bosnia and Herzegovina, no.4 (2021), available [here](#).

25 Lejla Gačanica, Raba Gjoshi, and Sofija Vrbaški, "Women's Rights in Western Balkans," Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, November 2020, available [here](#).

26 "Women's Advisory Board Holds Its First Session in Sarajevo." 2019. Europa.ba. May 30, 2019, available [here](#).

27 *ibid*.

amongst other activities. The project's results and impact are currently being assessed.

Lastly, SIDA, together with the Swiss and Austrian governments, has also supported the implementation of the BiH Gender Action Plan through the Fund for Implementation of Gender Action Plan FIGAP I (2009-2014) and FIGAP II (2018-2021). Other than the relevant state institutions, the programme involved local CSOs as implementing partners, who conducted various awareness-raising activities aimed at improving women's representation in political decision-making. Following an external mid-term review of the first FIGAP I programme, which assessed these activities as very successful in advancing the Gender Action Plan's implementation, similar activities have been foreseen under FIGAP II. The evaluation pointed to an increase in the number of women ministers in the Government of Republika Srpska as a result of the promotional activities implemented through the FIGAP I programme.

In addition to Swedish support, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), which is a UK public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world, also supports women's political participation in BiH. Since 2019, the Foundation's programme in BiH has focused on encouraging women to become politically active and facilitating links between political parties and independent CSOs working on women's rights to promote more gender-responsive policies. An earlier WFD

programme implemented between 2014 and 2016 focused on increasing the profile of women in political discourse and engaged the media and other stakeholders in raising awareness of women's contributions to political life. It included more than 300 women candidates from six of the main political parties. The latest WFD project was the campaign "I vote for women," supported by the Netherlands, the UK, and the Swiss government; it was implemented in partnership with the local organisation Nahla ahead of the 2020 local elections. The campaign aimed to showcase positive narratives about women leaders to motivate voters to elect more women in the legislative bodies of BiH, using social media, TV programmes, newspapers, and magazines.

28 UNDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Women in Elections in BiH," available [here](#).

29 Interview with staff member of the Swedish Embassy in BiH, held on 24th August 2021.

30 Austrian Development Agency, "Project FIGAP - Fund for the Implementation of the Gender Action Plan in BiH," available [here](#).

31 Anamaria Golemac Powell, Alma Kadic, and Vida Koren Holm, "Mid-Term Review of the Programme 'Financing the Implementation of the Gender Action Plan' (FIGAP Programme) in Bosnia and Herzegovina," 2021, available [here](#).

32 Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), "Bosnia and Herzegovina," available [here](#).

33 *ibid*.

34 Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), "Ja glasam za zenu," available [here](#).

Lessons learnt

Over the past five years, most EU support for women's political participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has focused on strengthening the capacities of national institutions to implement gender equality laws. However, the low numbers of women in politics suggests that existing efforts have not produced significant results. EU support has not been embedded in a broader theory of change that systematically targets the key barriers to women's political participation, such as patriarchal political parties and gender-based stereotypes that are still reinforced by the media. The new GAP III implementation plan appears to have taken this into account only to a limited extent. While one of the two objectives related to women's equal participation and leadership is to foster *equitable social norms, attitudes, and behaviours promoting equal participation and leadership at community and individual levels, a stronger focus on political parties and gender stereotypes is lacking.*

Moreover, despite the EU's commitment to support civil society actors as important agents for gender equality change in politics, the EU's support to date has mostly been top-down, focused on national implementation processes and high-level institutional mechanisms. The support for and the involvement of local women's rights organisations has been limited. The fact that the EU has provided direct awards to UN agencies and other multilateral organisations without open calls for proposals have exposed CSOs to unfair competition and contributes to the monopolisation of already limited funding.

This is particularly damaging for local women's activists, especially in a context where local women's organizations have the capacity to perform similar tasks and to manage large funds. It is unclear whether the EU plans to provide any core support to local organisations in the forthcoming period, or if these organisations will have to continue relying on project-based funding. The EU should follow the lead of other donors in the region that have worked more closely with local women's rights groups and ensure that actions implemented under GAP III strengthen these local actors. In the words of Kvinna till Kvinna, "grassroot organisations are more effective and better suited to reach women [because they are] grounded in their communities [and] will not leave when the project concludes."

Despite its stated purpose, GAP II did not facilitate effective coordination amongst the EU actors when it comes to advancing women's political empowerment. The preparation of the GAP II country implementation plan lacked the involvement of key stakeholders, especially of EU member states and of local CSOs, resulting in its poor use in practice; the EU member states, have not necessarily used the GAP II when developing their funding decision. The lack of coordination that characterised the preparation of GAP II seems to have been addressed under GAP III. In preparation of the Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) for GAP III, the EU Delegation in BiH organised a consultation process with national bodies, civil society, and EU member states. It is important that

35 Farnsworth, Guri, Morina, and Kohnen, "Where's the Money for Women's Rights?" Available [here](#).

36 Powell, Kadic, and Holm, "Mid-Term Review of the Programme (FIGAP)." Available [here](#).

37 Farnsworth, Guri, Morina, and Kohnen. "Where's the Money for Women's Rights? Funding Trends in the Western Balkans," Available [here](#).

such stakeholder involvement continues throughout the implementation period, particularly in order to track what results are achieved.

Lastly, on the issue of monitoring, GAP II introduced a mandatory reporting mechanism that asked EU actors, including member states, to report annually on its implementation. However, some stakeholders perceived the process as complicated and ineffective in practice. Furthermore, although specific indicators were set, very few had baselines or targets, making it difficult for the EU to measure progress and to ensure accountability for the delivery of results. An independent report on the GAP II implementation process published in 2017 found that minimal data existed for tracking progress on EU support to WCSOs, which needs to be addressed in the implementation of GAP III.

38 Interview with a staff member of the EU Delegation in BiH conducted on 23.08.2021; Nicole Farnsworth and Valmira Rashiti, "Policy Brief: Following through on EU Commitments to Gender Equality, Lessons Learned from GAP II to Inform GAP III," available [here](#).

39 Farnsworth and Banjsk, "Mind The Gap."

Conclusions and recommendations

Stronger political support

The **EU integration process remains a powerful tool in BiH** and gives the EU significant political weight to push for reforms in the country. So far, however, the EU has not used its political leverage to press for women's political inclusion, despite its high-level commitments to gender equality. Going forward, the EU should put its Gender Facility Document into practice, which notes that "gender equality needs to be pursued as a core element of governance, shifting from 'equality of rights to the equality of results.'" This means that the EU needs to push the BiH government to respect its national and international commitments to gender equality through the OHR and through the EU Integration process. It has several tools available to do so:

Firstly, the EU should assess Bosnia's **progress towards meeting its gender equality objectives** in the annual EU reports that assess the country's overall reform progress. This can be done by integrating (and upgrading) the reporting framework set out in the GAP III implementation plan and by engaging civil society in a systematic manner in the monitoring of government action.

Secondly, the EU should **condition its support to the Bosnian government** (through IPA III and other international programmes) on the government's respect for gender equality and progress in achieving the previously agreed upon equality objectives.

Thirdly, the EU should reprioritise its funding to

more effectively address the root causes and key barriers to women's political engagement, such as societal stereotypes and archaic political party attitudes. This cannot be done if EU support is predominantly directed at building the capacity of national gender equality institutions (as was the case under the GAP II) or at leadership training (as currently planned under the GAP III CLIP). Instead, the EU's support needs to explicitly focus on supporting women's political representation by working more closely with political parties, media, and local civil society organisations.

Lastly, the EU can provide political support for enhancing women's political participation by encouraging more women politicians to be involved in the **EU accession process**, by creating opportunities for **inclusive dialogue with women's rights groups**, and by ensuring their involvement in the planning, implementation and monitoring of EU support and policy actions.

More support for gender equality activism

There is a strong local women's rights movement in BiH and GAP II recognises **CSOs as important agents for change**, especially when it comes to addressing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes. However, the EU has so far only provided limited support to women's rights organisations and women's political activism.

If the EU is serious about strengthening women's

40 European Commission, IPA 2014-2020, "BiH, EU Gender Equality Facility" Available

41 UN Women, "Women's Political Participation and Leadership."

political representation in BiH and addressing the objectives set out in GAP III, it needs to ensure that the support provided through its different financial instruments and the new IPA III does not only go to national gender equality institutions (typically via multilateral organisations), but also to **local civil society actors and to women's activism**. To recognise the diversity in Bosnian civil society, the EU should combine different modalities of support, including core/operational grants to organisations with a proven track record of efficiency and accountability, project grants targeting specific objectives, and sub-grants for smaller CSOs with less developed capacities for EU project implementation.

for measuring progress, and a clearly stated monitoring process and means of verification. This process should also monitor and report on the direct support provided to women's rights organisations as key instigators of change.

More effective coordination and evaluation

The EU Delegation built on the weakness of GAP II and launched a more inclusive consultative process to prepare the GAP III Country Level Implementation Plan. This practice needs to be continued in the future. Consistent dialogue with EU member states will ensure that their respective gender equality actions support the priorities set out in the GAP framework and in other EU policies. This type of consultation may also help increase EU member states' support for women's political leadership in BiH. At the moment, Sweden is the only EU country dedicating significant resources to this purpose. Finally, strengthening donor coordination and joint strategising will also help avoid duplication of efforts, which has occurred to some extent in the past.

Lastly, a good system for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of GAP III is crucial for facilitating timely adjustments and delivering meaningful results. Therefore, the EU should use its experience with GAP II and set up a more comprehensive monitoring framework. The new framework should be developed in close cooperation with the relevant actors, should have baselines and targets



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