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Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina



The Status and Activities of Municipal Gender Equality Commissions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Overview and
Recommendations

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Fra Andela Zvizdovića 1
71 000 Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina
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Executive Summary

As affirmed at the Ministerial Council in Moscow 1991, the establishment of effective national machineries that strengthen equality between men and women is a key commitment for the participating States of the OSCE. Field operations of the Organization are to play a supportive role in this regard, and as applicable promote adherence to the standards of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in host countries.

This background report of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina reviews the efficiency of the existing instruments of the domestic local gender equality machinery. In particular, it offers an overview of key standards and good practices to the Municipalities in light of their responsibilities for gender equality. Provision of advice at this juncture would also serve the implementation of the national Gender Action Plan, for which the Municipalities carry important yet elusive function. In sum, the report assesses the role of the Municipal Gender Equality Commissions and the extent to which their operations can become strengthened.

Among other recommendations, the Mission invites the entity Gender Centres to increase their support to the municipal Gender Equality Commissions by renewing the instructions for their establishment and increase the availability of training opportunities. Municipalities as well as the Gender Equality Commissions are advised to adopt local gender action plans, which take into account the Concluding Comments of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to Bosnia and Herzegovina. For these and all other activities, it is moreover recommended that authorities capitalize on the expertise accrued by civil society and ensure that qualified NGO representatives get directly involved in the work of the Gender Equality Commissions.

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1. Introduction

Equality between men and women is a standard protected by virtually every binding instrument on human rights and should be a policy priority for the participating States of the OSCE. The two International Covenants and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms protect the equal enjoyment of rights as a fundamental principle for the realization of all human rights.¹ Equal rights for women and men are also among the leading themes of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.² In 1983, the participating States of the OSCE reiterated their commitment towards this goal and agreed “... to take all actions necessary to promote equally effective participation of men and women in political, economic, social and cultural life.”³ Subsequently, in 2004, the Organisation invited Field Operations to assist in the implementation of the OSCE region-wide Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, including “... in building up local capacities and expertise on gender issues ...”⁴

As regards Bosnia and Herzegovina, an institutional framework tasked to enhance these standards domestically has been established. The creation of Gender Centres in both Entities in 2000 and 2001 became the first major steps in this direction. In 2003 the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality at the State level consolidated these measures. This Law established a central Gender Equality Agency the following year as an umbrella institution for mainstreaming gender equality initiatives in

1 *International Covenant for Economic Social and Cultural Rights*, article 3 and *International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights*, article 3. These treaties make special reference to the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which established equality as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. *See also European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms*, article 5 and Protocol 12, and the instruments’ respective preambles.

2 Helsinki Final Act, article 1 (VII).

3 Madrid 1983, principle 16, available at: http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1980/11/4223_en.pdf

4 OSCE ACTION PLAN FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY, 7 December 2004, Chapter V, paragraph d. Available at: http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/2004/12/3917_en.pdf

public and private affairs across the country.⁵ Furthermore, both Entity Gender Centres have issued instructions that call for municipalities to become directly involved in the enhancement of gender equality. In this respect, municipal Gender Equality Commissions should be established with the major mandate to facilitate the enforcement of applicable law and gender equality standards among the local authorities.

Next, the State Gender Equality Agency, in co-operation with the Entity Gender Centres and civil society organizations produced the Gender Action Plan.⁶ Adopted in 2006, the Plan identifies a broad range of priorities in the field of equality between men and women to be implemented within five years. In particular, the Plan says that it is necessary to harmonize municipal laws and regulations, to strengthen political support for gender equality, and to increase the co-operation with civil society as well as other municipal institutions and agencies responsible for matters affecting gender equality. The gender mechanisms at the state and entity levels carry most of the responsibilities for the Gender Action Plan, but many specific action points address issues that would fall within the realm of Gender Equality Commissions.

Despite these measures, some trends pertaining to gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be of great concern.⁷ Women are substantially underrepresented in key executive positions and political bodies at all levels of government. As few parliamentary and municipal assemblies even reach 14 per cent of women representation, one would question to what extent the programmes of political parties have managed to take the view of women into due consideration.⁸ A similar imbalanced gender pattern is prevalent in the sphere of social and economic rights. Single women heads-of-households, elderly women, internally displaced women, women returnees, women with disabilities and Roma women are overrepresented among people living below the general poverty line.⁹

Further, in its review of the country's compliance with its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2006, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women gave special attention to the effectiveness of the institutional arrangements in the country. Among other things, the Committee appreciated the creation of mechanisms in the execu-

5 *Law on Gender Equality* (OG 56/03). Available at: <http://www.arsbih.gov.ba/?PID=3&RID=39>

6 BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA GENDER ACTION Plan of 2006 (not yet published in the Official Gazette). Available at: <http://www.arsbih.gov.ba/?PID=3&RID=39>

7 For instance, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was explicitly concerned about gender roles in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In areas of educational choices, the situation in the labour market and participation in public life, they have raised concern about the: "... stereotypes regarding the role and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society at large..." CONCLUDING COMMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN: BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (CEDAW/C/BIH/CO/03) 2 June 2006, paragraph 23. Available at: <http://www.arsbih.gov.ba/?PID=3&RID=77>.

8 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2007/2008. FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE: HUMAN SOLIDARITY IN A CHANGING WORLD, UNDP 2007, pp. 227 and onwards.

9 *Id.*

tive and legislative branches at all levels, including notably within the Municipalities. However, making a note of concern as regards understaffing and inadequate resources to the ‘machinery for the advancement of women’, the Committee recommended Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue to build the capacity of all levels of government. Namely, it stated, there is a ‘collective responsibility’ among all government agencies to implement the Convention.¹⁰

However, the Gender Action Plan does not specify how these recommendations are supposed to translate into concrete actions at local levels. Rather, operationalisation of the Plan lies with the municipalities and their Gender Equality Commissions. Against that background, and on the basis of its human rights monitoring role under Annex 6 of the Dayton Peace Agreement, this report of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina shares key findings emanating from the monitoring of gender equality matters and the institutions established at local levels to protect human rights. They are made public at a time when the newly elected Municipal Assemblies and Councils are new nominating members for Gender Equality Commissions, and decisive steps are being designed for the full implementation of the domestic Gender Action Plan. The report sets out some recommendations to the state and entity institutions, the municipalities, and the gender equality commissions. These are designed to assist the implementation of the Gender Action Plan at local levels and strengthen the overall institutional capacity to address gender equality concerns where they appear. A chart demonstrating differences in practice and progress among municipalities monitored in this respect is annexed to this report.

10 See *supra* note 7, paragraph 20.

2. Achieving Gender Equality Commitments at Local Level

a) *Human Rights Framework and the Municipalities' Responsibility*

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (“CEDAW”), to which Bosnia and Herzegovina became a member in 1993, is enumerated in the list of international human rights conventions appended to the Constitution. Its standards are hence an integral part of the domestic legal order. In relation to the term ‘gender’, there is an explicit recognition in the convention that modifications of social and cultural patterns of men and women might be necessary for:

[T]he elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.¹¹

CEDAW also sets forth obligations for affirmative action aimed at achieving de facto equality in all areas and at all levels of government, be it through legislation, judicial protection or arrangements necessary for a country’s public institutions.

Any organ of the State may cause a breach of CEDAW and other binding treaties on gender equality.¹² This universal protection responsibility of human rights is replicated in the BiH Constitution, which orders that international obligations, such as CEDAW standards on gender equality, shall be upheld by the Entities and their institutions. Entity Constitutions and their respective laws on the organisation of units of local self-government elaborate that concept further and establish that municipalities are organs of the Entities, and thereby the State.¹³ In other words, not only the central government, but also the municipalities have a responsibility to eliminate discrimination and curb prejudices against women, making that an essential component of their functions.

11 *Id.* Art 5 (l).

12 See for instance *Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts* (A/56/10) 2001, Article 4: “The conduct of any State organ shall be considered an act of that State under international law, whether the organ exercises legislative, executive, judicial or any other functions, whatever position it holds in the organization of the State, and whatever its character as an organ of the central Government or of a territorial unit of the State.” Available at: http://untreaty.un.org/ilc/texts/9_6.htm

13 *Constitution of Republika Srpska* (RS OG 6/92, 8/92, 15/92, 19/92, 21/92, 28/94, 8/96, 13/96, 15/96, 16/96 and 21/96), article 5, and. *Constitution of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (FBiH OG 1/04 and 13/97), chapter II, article 1. The *RS Law on Territorial Organization and Local Self-Governing* implies in Articles 20 and 26 that municipalities have duties for the exercise of citizens’ rights. As for the Federation, the *Law on bases of Local Self-Government* states more explicitly that municipalities shall create the ‘conditions’ for human rights.

With the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality in 2003, the concept of gender equality and measures of affirmative action were introduced in a single domestic legal act. In an introductory note of clarification, Article 4 of the Law defines the concept of gender as: "... the socially established role of women and men in public and private life as distinct from the expression bestowed by biological attributes."¹⁴

Further, this law determines that gender equality shall prevail everywhere in the country, including within the Entities and the Municipalities and affirms the role of the local levels of government in this respect. In Article 21, the Law requests any public authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina to:

[U]ndertake all appropriate and necessary steps to enforce the provisions set forth in this Law including [...] the adoption of planned measures designed to achieve gender equality in all fields and at all levels of governance (...)¹⁵

In the spirit of this provision, the entity Gender Centres have recommended that the general mandate of municipal Gender Equality Commissions should be monitoring, reporting and co-ordination on gender issues at the local level.

b) *Members of Gender Equality Commissions*

As the annex demonstrates, many municipalities have yet to establish such a Commission, but among those that have done so, the vast majority acts as a body within the municipal assemblies or councils.¹⁶ Others are set up in the Mayor's office as a support function and are therefore part of the executive branch of the municipality. Regarding appointment procedures, they are similar to those of other permanent municipal commissions, such as the commissions on budget, regulations, or capital investment, to which members are chosen by their respective political parties. Hence, a primary aim is to satisfy representation of political parties and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina is only aware of a few appointments that have been preceded by an adequate review of the potential candidate's background and his or her professional experience in the field of gender equality.¹⁷

Unsurprisingly, the monitoring has shown that many Commission members possess poor knowledge about the basics of gender equality. They might for instance be unfamiliar with the Law on Gender Equality and how it relates to local governance and

14 See *supra* note 5, chapter III, art. 4. This article also defines other key notions such as 'gender-based violence', and 'sexual harassment'.

15 See *supra* note 5, chapter XV, art. 21.

16 The regulatory body of a Municipality is called 'Assembly' in Republika Srpska and 'Council' in the Federation.

17 See the annex to the present report.

the work of the Commissions. Misconceptions about the basic concepts and the rudiments of applicable law are widespread problems. Furthermore, and partially due to the widespread perception that gender equality is only in the interest of women, only a few of the Commissions' members are men.

If a municipality sought to improve the appointment process, it would find scarce support in the Gender Action Plan. Perhaps Chapter II on 'Co-operation and Capacity Strengthening,' which concerns the harmonization of regulations with the Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, lays some foundation for review of these instruments. Addressing the government authorities and gender commissions at all levels, the Plan goes on to call for the establishment of "... procedures for successful implementation and execution of the [Law on Gender Equality], in accordance with the recommendations of the UN CEDAW Committee."¹⁸

Such a lack of constructive guidance seems unfortunate. It is highly questionable if members who do not have basic professional expertise, lack the relevant educational background, are not sensitized on gender and equal opportunity issues, and do not show interest in actively promoting gender equality, would be able to arrange the modalities for the work of a municipality towards gender equality.¹⁹

As a preliminary measure, one could, for instance, consider formulating a compulsory declaration for the Commissioners by which any appointed member acknowledges his or her commitment to the relevant laws and to gender equality. Although not formally binding, such a standardized written declaration signed in connection to appointment would set a tone for the work ahead and serve as a tool for accountability to the citizens of the municipality. As for judges in Bosnia and Herzegovina, who are morally bound by the High Judicial and Procedural Council's code of ethics on impartiality and independence for judges, the citizens would know that gender officials carry out their functions under a corresponding loyalty to equality standards. It would also increase a sense of impartiality vis-à-vis the political agenda of the municipality in which the Commissioners serve. Another possibility would be to issue generic terms of reference for the Commission members, which could serve as an important tool for the appointment process and as a step towards institutionalizing these positions at the local level and ensure quality of work and services.

However, the issue of strengthened accountability is not within the exclusive realm of the Gender Equality Commissions and the municipalities alone. For it to transpire, the Entity Gender Centres must take their supervisory role seriously and facilitate the development of procedures that would advance the knowledge of gender standards among the Commission members and efficiency of the Gender Equality Commissions.

18 Gender Action Plan, chapter II, first action point.

19 According to the Law on Gender Equality, chapter XVII, article 28, paragraphs 1(6), and paragraph 2, a Commissioner would be imposed a fine if making "... public presentation of any person in an offensive, denigratory or demeaning manner with regard to gender."

c) *Appropriate Budget Allocations*

Most of the Gender Equality Commissions do not have their own budgets for the implementation of activities. Some Commissioners have raised this as a fundamental concern in contacts with the Mission, noting that without adequate resources to carry out their tasks, the Commissions risk to become a purely cosmetic body, producing no real impact in their municipalities. Nonetheless, only a few Commissions require funding for their activities and even less promote an overall gender sensitive budgeting process in the municipalities. Again, this reflects the lack of commitment and awareness of the importance of these issues among many members of the Commissions.

Indeed, such a critique about the resources of the Gender Equality Commissions seems to reflect a broader human rights concern in Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, reviewing Bosnia and Herzegovina's compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, has underlined that the lack of adequate financial and human resources impede the agencies and commissions of Bosnia and Herzegovina involved in human rights work from discharging their mandates.²⁰

Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that the lack of budgetary allocations is interlinked with the problems of showing results at the local level, which is indicative of limited know-how and weak gender programmes. Hence, increases in budget allocations should be complemented by the development of localised action plans in order to manifest a municipality's true commitment to gender equality.

d) *Municipal Gender Equality Plans*

Among the 21 municipalities figuring in the annex, some eleven lack a proper background document that sets out the core gender equality issues within the respective Municipality. The same number applies to activities underway to inform the public about their existence or mandate. Accordingly, many citizens are unaware of the fact that there is a body tasked to monitor and promote gender equality in their respective municipalities. For the same reason, the prospects for dialogue between the citizens and their Commissioners, and thereby the possibility to hold them accountable for their work is impaired.

Instead, as one of the starting points for newly established Gender Equality Commissions, members should be advised to study the Concluding Comments of the CEDAW Committee on Bosnia and Herzegovina. They offer an informed basis for formulating local priorities, not only as an inspiration tool but also as a means to identify immediate gender equality issues and their solutions. Besides, the Concluding Comments are fairly accessible in local language and the document is far more

20 Concluding observations of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/C.12/BIH/CO/1), 24 January 2006, paragraphs 34 and 38. Available at: <http://www.ars.bih.gov.ba/?PID=3&RID=77>

distinct and brief than the national Gender Action Plan. In fact, using the Committee's recommendations would foster a unified approach *en route* to the country's full compliance with the Convention. The Gender Action Plan is premised on this document and reiterates that in order to maintain and develop the human resources within the system, increased training and awareness about CEDAW is needed.

For example, the Concluding Comments would suggest that Gender Equality Commissions should promote equal representation of women and men in political parties and in key executive positions. Collecting data on the number of women and men respectively who apply and are appointed to public office, who are clients of the social protection system, and who seek protection from law enforcement agencies, represents another key recommendation of the Concluding Comments.²¹ Similar, disaggregated data should be made available in relation to rates of secondary school attendance between girls and boys, their respective needs and use of cultural, leisure and sport facilities, as well as juvenile marriage and visits to health clinics. Incentives that promote associations popular among young women and girls, their access to information technology and - most notably - full and equal attendance at upper levels of education, are other actions which lay a foundation for promoting gender equality long-term.²²

Data collection would facilitate review of budget allocations in order to tackle the negative consequences of unequal fund distribution, particularly with regard to reproductive health care and day care services. The collection of data and identification of contact points for women or girls among local institutions and organizations would also render support to other ongoing human rights reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, many social welfare centres around Bosnia and Herzegovina are seeking to identify the most vulnerable groups in the society and ensure their equal access to social assistance. The municipal Gender Equality Commissions and civil society have an important supporting role to play in this respect.

e) *The Role of Civil Society*

There are some interesting and notable exemptions to those Commissions that struggle to work effectively. These examples mostly concern municipalities where cooperation with civil society has developed in the sphere of gender equality and where activities are being carried out in a coordinated fashion. Except for one out of the eight municipalities which have developed cooperation with NGOs in the attachment, all have developed specific activities pertaining to their mandate.

In the Municipality of Modriča, for instance, the Gender Equality Commission has implemented activities within the campaign "16 Days of Activism against Violence

21 *Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Bosnia and Herzegovina*, paragraphs 18 and 30.

22 See also Article 18 of the Law on Gender Equality, which obliges gender disaggregation of any data collected by public institutions and private corporations.

against Women”²³ The Municipality provided funding and together with the local non-governmental organisation (NGO) *Budućnost*, the Commission carried out a poster and leaflet campaign as well as roundtables highlighting violence against women and gender based discrimination. Members of this Commission also put forth a proposal concerning women and economy and an analysis of the Law on Gender Equality in light of priorities in the Municipality. As a result, the municipal assembly consults the Commission in issues affecting gender equality, and most projects are implemented in co-operation with the NGO *Budućnost*. In spring 2008, this co-operation prompted the Municipal Assembly to adopt a protocol on co-operation between institutions working on the protection of victims of domestic violence.

Likewise, the Gender Equality Commission of the Municipality of Tuzla carries out work together with civil society, in this case the NGO *Horizonti*. Their co-operation has covered areas such as women in media, gender sensitive budgeting, and the prevention of breast cancer. As regards public life, the Commission has made a written appeal to all political parties to ensure adequate participation of women within their structures. Further, it criticised billboards placed in Tuzla town that showed women in humiliating positions and has been straightforward in other areas as well.

Another example of fruitful co-operation between the Gender Equality Commissions and civil society can be found in Bratunac. *Forum Žena* in Bratunac has carried out activities aimed at educating members of the Gender Equality Commission and connecting the Commissioners with women active in political parties and women municipal councilors. Together they have advocated for change in a variety of areas which are all vital for the achievement of gender equality. There is a general acknowledgement that this co-operation has been instrumental in a series of measures undertaken in the Municipality in order to enhance gender equality. One example would be the 15 per cent increase of women in steering and supervisory boards of institutions founded under the auspices of the municipal authorities: the health care centre, a public utility company, the high school, the kindergarten, the library, the house of culture, and the sports centre. Many initiatives came as a result of this co-operation, such as earmarks within the 2007 municipal budget for victims of domestic violence, free legal assistance for citizens, free medical testing for non-contagious illnesses in the health care centre for individuals without health insurance, and public encouragement for women from local communities to get involved in public discussions about the municipal budget.

Similarly, the Gender Equality Commission of Maglaj and the NGO *Forum Syd* organized training sessions on international law and the Gender Equality Law for the Commissioners and made an analysis of participation of women in decision-making

23 “16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women” was launched by the United Nations as a means to mark 25 September, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, UNGA Resolution 54/134, (1999).

within municipal authorities in 2006. The Commission also produced information materials in order to promote gender equality and its work.

On the other hand, in locations where such cooperation has been developed, monitoring has also shown that it is crucial not to make progress entirely contingent upon the support of a partner NGO. Rather, cooperation between the Commission and civil society must be mindful of the fact that ultimately, the authorities bear the responsibility for the Law on Gender Equality and that such responsibility cannot be transferred to one or more NGOs. For instance, due to strong support of local NGO *Most*, the Commission in Višegrad had a well developed program over several years. Among other activities, it organized six radio shows on the local radio about gender equality and about the Law on Gender Equality. However, upon a new direction of the NGO, the Commission has ceased to be active.

3. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Promoting gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an important area for implementation of human rights commitments. There are visible instances of the bottom-up approach and evidence that the co-operation between public authorities and civil society have achieved successful results.

However, addressing the root causes of discrimination against women and changing the public's perception of gender roles require increased action among all levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To date, many Gender Equality Commissions struggle with multiple issues that undermine their work and credibility. At times, the need to satisfy political representation of political parties seems to take primacy at the expense of expertise or expressed commitment to the particular cause of equality. As a result, there is a lack of knowledge of and commitment to gender equality standards among many Commissioners and thereby to the core reasons for their appointment.

Ultimately, this permeates gender roles within the society, characterized in this report by referencing the discrepancy in the number of men and women living under the general poverty line and low representation of women in decision-making processes and in key leadership positions. Citizens are often unaware of the Gender Equality Commissions and to what extent they can deliver redress to instances of discrimination or other infringements of a woman's human rights. Exceptions exist, and this brief overview indicates that they tend to be where the Commissions have developed close ties with civil society. This fosters a working climate where awareness about key issues increases and measures to address the problems are developed promptly and effectively. Likewise, an increased gender balance within the Gender Equality Commissions would raise importance and credibility of the principles of gender equality among politicians and the general public.

In other words, the state and entity gender equality bodies need to design implementation strategies for the Gender Action Plan which caters to the need to develop municipal gender activity plans, if necessary by proposing amendments to this effect in the Law on Gender Equality. Furthermore, Entity Gender Centres and municipalities need to review the appointment process of the Commissioners, further their skills on gender standards, include civil society in the work of the Commissions, and develop the process of gender sensitive budgetary allocations. Better dissemination and review of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women are such specific measures that would reinvigorate the stalled debate and hopefully prompt the development of gender activity plans at the local level. Enhanced awareness of CEDAW and its background would definitely enable the Commissioners to grasp the precepts of their work and overcome hurdles seemingly created by the appointment process and political agendas. For these reasons, the OSCE Mission issues the following recommendations:

To the Entity Gender Centres:

- After a consultation with actors at all levels of the gender equality mechanism and other stakeholders, amend existing instructions for Gender Equality Commissions, in order to provide detailed guidelines regarding their mandate and responsibilities to protect and promote gender equality at local level;
- Consider the idea of developing, in co-operation with the municipalities:
 - ✓ terms of reference for Commission members, which provide guidelines regarding their specific tasks and responsibilities;
 - ✓ a standardized declaratory statement for Gender Equality Commissioners and other key actors underscoring the need for them to commit themselves to the gender equality standards of international and domestic law;
- Ensure active support for the reforms at the municipal level in the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and the Gender Action Plan;
- Appoint focal points for the municipal Gender Equality Commissions at the Entity Gender Centres;
- Ensure a systematic approach to training efforts for Commission members, and seek the support and resources among gender equality experts, municipalities, and NGOs;
- Ensure the distribution and use of standardized training manuals as well as practical toolkits for the Commission members;
- Work out measures to strengthen oversight and accountability, for example through the general requirement to issue semi-annual reports, which include progress and obstacles of the local gender equality mechanisms;
- Facilitate the exchange of information, in particular regarding lessons learned and best practices, among local Gender Equality Commissions, and ensure regular updates on ongoing field activities as well as updates on related concerns expressed by civil society.

To the municipal assemblies, councils, and the mayors:

- Establish a Gender Equality Commissions in municipalities if not done already;
- Amend the appointment procedure so as to ensure the commitment to and professional experience of gender equality standards among members of the Gender Equality Commissions;
- Ensure gender balance among the Commission members as well as representation of the civil society sector;
- Facilitate gender equality work and the development of activity plans by ensuring that proper and timely information sharing and consultations take place with the municipal Gender Equality Commissions prior to any action or decision is taken that might affect the situation or rights of women and men differently;
- Seriously consider and, as appropriate, adhere to the recommendations and concerns of the Gender Equality Commission;
- Allocate adequate financial and material resources for the activities of the Gender Equality Commission in municipal budgets and resource planning;

To the Gender Equality Commissions:

- Make an assessment of NGOs and other civil society actors in the field of gender equality active in the municipality and invite qualified representatives to get involved in the work of the Gender Equality Commission;
- Identify training needs among the Commissioners and key municipal officials;
- Actively seek information about activities and experiences, in particular lessons learned and best practices, of other Gender Equality Commissions;
- Ensure regular communication and coordination with the Entity Gender Centers; and
- Develop strategic gender activity plans in co-operation with the Entity Gender Centers, submit corresponding budget requests to the municipal assemblies or councils and provide annual activity reports in accordance with the respective Guidelines issued by the Entity Gender Centers.

Annex: Overview of selected Municipal Gender Equality Commissions monitored by the Human Rights Department as of July 2008

Municipality	Establishment (year)	Location/structure	Membership (number/expertise/financial compensation/appointment)	Activity (regular meetings, actions in the field of gender issues)	Contact with Gender center	Cooperation with NGOs
SARAJEVO CENTAR	Yes (2005)	Part of Municipal Council	7 members/politically affiliated/appointed by the assembly	Yes	Yes	Yes
SARAJEVO NOVI GRAD	Yes (2005)	Part of Municipal Council	7 members/politically affiliated/appointed by the assembly	Yes	Regular contact	Yes
BANJA LUKA	Yes (2006)	Part of Municipal Assembly	7 members/appointed by assembly/compensated per meeting	No (only one meeting)	No	No
BIJELJINA	Yes (2006)	Part of Municipal Assembly	politically affiliated/appointed by the assembly/president unpaid/others members compensated per meeting	Yes	No regular contact	vague
BRČKO	Yes (2004)		politically affiliated	No (BD government withdrew support)		
DOBOJ	Yes (2007)	Part of Municipal Assembly	municipal council members	Yes	Periodic contact	
FOČA	Yes (2006)	Part of Municipal Assembly	3 members	No	No	No
KONJIC	Yes (2006)	Part of Municipal Council	3 members (experts)/appointed by the assembly/paid	Yes	Yes	Yes
KOTOR VAROŠ	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
LIVNO	Yes (2004)	Part of Municipal Council	5 members (3 councillors/3 from civil society)/unpaid	No	No	No

Municipality	Establishment (year)	Location/structure	Membership (number/expertise/ financial compensation/ appointment)	Activity (regular meetings, actions in the field of gender issues)	Contact with Gender center	Cooperation with NGOs
MOSTAR	Yes (2007)	Part of Municipal Council	7 members (5 councilors, 2 NGOs)	Yes (ad hoc basis)	No	Yes
NEUM	Yes (2006)	Part of Municipal Council	appointed by the municipal assembly/no NGO member	No	No	No
PRIJEDOR	Yes (2001)	Part of Municipal Assembly	5 members/politically affiliated/ councilors/unpaid	No	No	Yes
SREBRENICA	Yes (2003)	Part of Municipal Assembly	5 members (3 councilors, no NGOs members)/politically affiliated/ appointed by assembly/paid per meeting	Yes	Periodic contact	Yes (training on gender issues)
STOLAC	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
TRAVNIK	Yes (2005)	Part of Municipal Council	5 members (councilors)/appointed by the municipal assembly/unpaid	Yes	Yes	Yes
TREBINJE	Yes (2006)	Part of Municipal Assembly	5 members/unpaid/appointed by assembly	No	No	No
TUZLA	Yes (2004)	Part of Municipal Council	politically affiliated/appointed by assembly	Yes	Regular contact	Yes
ZAVIDOVIĆI	Yes (2005)	Part of Municipal Council	5 members/paid per meeting	Yes	Periodic contact	Yes
ZENICA	Yes (2005)	Part of Municipal Council	5 members/unpaid/politically affiliated	No	Periodic contact	No
ZVORNIK	Yes (2004)	Mayor's cabinet	Municipal employees	No	No	No