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**REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA**  
**MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENT**  
**DEPUTY MINISTER**

**Promoting effective participation of women in decision-making processes in the economic and environmental spheres**

Strengthening the role of women in the society and their participation and representation in every aspect of our lives remains, a challenge even for countries that have been promoting democratic policies for centuries especially these last years after covid-19 pandemic, economic, energy crises and climate change effects.

The Government of Albania has made important progress in establishing relevant institutional and policy frameworks for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, in line with international, regional, and national gender equality standards and obligations. Recognizing that ensuring equality between women and men in all spheres, both de jure and de facto, is critical to the sustainable development of societies, facilitating progress towards gender equality is a key component of the European Union's (EU) accession agenda in the Western Balkans.

Gender equality and the empowerment of Albanian women, young women and girls are defined key objectives of the Government of Albania. To further advance towards their fulfillment in a systematic and sustainable way, by effectively mainstreaming gender into policies, laws and programs National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 is approved (by Decision of the Council of Ministers No.400, dated 30.06.202).

The difficulties and challenges encountered especially in the last two years have turned into lessons learned to live no one behind.

Prepared on this basis, for ten years period of time, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 reflects the direct link with the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda, Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 of the European Union, Convention on the Elimination etc

The need to increase the participation of women in decision-making remains a priority for all stakeholders and it is evident in the Sustainable Development Goals, goal 5.5.

Contributing to achievement of SDG targets 5.c and 5.4, Albania made outstanding progress in 2021 in mainstreaming the gender perspective into MTBP 2021– 2023. Eleven line ministries and two state institutions prioritized gender specific objectives, thus including gender key performance indicators and budget allocations in 38 budget programs in their MTBP 2021–2023 documents.

In addition, the Ministry of Finance and Economy issued its second annual Gender Sensitive Citizen's budget,<sup>18</sup> demonstrating continued commitment to include sexdisaggregated data and gender statistics in the budget and to inform citizens on next year's financial plans. Data collection disaggregated by sex has also improved in Albania.

### Opportunities for women entrepreneurs

The Government of Albania renewed the Social Enterprises Fund in the new Medium-Term Budget Planning (MTBP) 2021-2023, which ensures continuity and provides an opportunity for more women to benefit from the fund.

A budget rebalance in response to COVID-19 will increase agricultural subsidies. As part of the European Union accession journey, the EU financing window for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) is expected to increase funding on women's employment in sustainable development programmes, especially in the agriculture and rural development.

INSTAT's Women and Men 2021 publication included new gender indicators, while a network of gender statistics focal points was established under the leadership of INSTAT to improve the coordination of all stakeholders involved in the production and use of gender-related data.

The sphere of power scores 60.9 and ranks the Republic of Albania in 6th place compared to the rest of the countries that report on the Gender Equality Index. **This high result comes from the high representation of women in political and economic power.** On the other hand, the social power of women, i.e. representation in the bodies of scientific research, funding, environmental organizations, media and major sports organizational boards, **lags behind** progress in political power.

The representation of women in decision-making has increased at the legislative and executive level. Women represent **29.3** percent of the members of the Parliament or 41 women MPs out of 140 MPs that the Parliament has in total. During the 2013-2017 legislature, women constituted 23.5 percent of the MPs of the Parliament

Currently, **57** percent of the government consists of women ministers, a number that has increased from 42 percent representation in the government in 2013.

Fifteen-twenty years ago when I started working with civil society in rural development sector (forestry and agriculture) in all the meetings most of the times I was the only woman in the room. Representatives of line ministries, Mayors, councilors, chairpersons of associations, farmers participating were only men.

Due to all the efforts, commitment, engagement of governments, CSO, donors and partners the situation today is amazingly improved although still not in the level we would like to be.

## **The Minister of Tourism and Environment and two deputy ministers are women**

One of the lessons learned during my experience in development work was that, the best way to empower women a part from increasing their participation and representation is empowering them economically. Today in Albania we have more and more women organized in producer groups, or in small and medium enterprise like in agrotourism, non-timber forest products activities (forest fruits and medicinal plants) in production, processing and selling local organic products.

Now labor market challenges call for digital skills programs with a focus on women and the long-term unemployed. Special attention has to be given to support employment of persons with disabilities, including employer incentives and quotas for larger firms and organizations. Combined with targeted activation services these have the potential to increase formal employment and productivity. In agriculture, a coherent countrywide strategy is needed to invest in and enhance smallholder productivity, **with particular focus on women.**

This will support them to identify market niches and provide market incentives for the growth of small and medium-sized agro-enterprises (SMAEs) and export growth.

On the other hand, loss of environmental resources and biodiversity is putting sustainable growth and more equitable health and wellbeing at risk.

Climate change is becoming a critical threat and floods and heat waves are projected to become more frequent and extreme. Policy and implementation gaps impede the sustainable management of Albania vast natural wealth. Many strategies are still gender-blind and hinder access to and management of **assets such as land, forestry and pastures, technology and extension services.**

### **1. What do gender equality and climate change have in common?**

The negative effects of climate change have affected in many areas, mainly in agriculture, food security, biodiversity, ecosystems, water resources, human health, energy, transport and industry.

According to statistics in Albania, 41.4% of employed women are involved in the agriculture and forestry sector. This makes them more vulnerable to the effects of climate change as their livelihood is more dependent on natural resources that are threatened by climate change.

The negative impacts of climate change and gender inequality disproportionately affect women and girls, especially in vulnerable communities.

This does not occur because of inherent vulnerability, but results from gender inequalities in the political, social and economic spheres that intersect with other axes of social disadvantage, such as race, sexuality, gender identity and disability status. (For example, during and after climate change events, women and girls are more exposed to gender-based violence, and girls are less likely than boys to continue in education).

Although women and girls have a key role to play in working to achieve more effective and equitable climate outcomes, when it comes to employment, women in developing countries are

more likely to work in the informal sector, making their livelihoods more vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks.

Unequal access to natural resources, land and property rights, decision-making processes, and limited mobility puts women in rural areas in a position where they are disproportionately affected by climate change.

## 2. Women lose more from the climate crisis. How can we empower them?

At the national and international level, women continue to face challenges that prevent them from reaching leadership positions in the environmental field. Gender equality in environmental sector at the national level in Albania is rare, and on average one third of environmental sector workers are women.

Given more access to society for participation and decision-making, they are a loud voice as they play an important role in the family and community, as stewards of natural and household resources. This role positions them better to contribute to the strategies of living adapted to the change of the environmental reality.

We must take political action with gender equality in mind to overcome these systemic barriers. For example: **Land law reform can support women's rights to own, inherit and use land, for example, by advising couples' land registration to include both names.**

**Policies should support the career advancement of women in environmental institutions.** Investing in social services, especially childcare, can ease the burden of unpaid family work that women do, as can flexible work policies and paid parental leave.

Bringing more women's voices into our responses to climate change will help us all - as well as the planet itself, how can this be accomplished?

- By giving them access to vocational and professional education, the right to family planning and birth control, women have the ability to choose how many children they will have and when.

- By having these rights, women also earn more money, achieve career goals and face fewer health problems. Rural women see higher crop yields, providing better food and financial stability for their families.

- The right to be informed about the effects of climate change will increase the resistance of women and girls to climate disasters. Due to traditional gender roles, legal inequality and financial barriers, women face unique risks as climate change intensifies natural disasters but is reflected in rising food and water prices.

- By giving knowledge and legal rights to female farm owners at an early age to empower them, we will notice improvement in family health, reduction of social and financial problems. Above all, we should give women and girls more opportunities to be part of the policy-making process, not just implementers.

Nevertheless activities towards overcoming gender disparity and creating equal societies are still a necessity not only in Albania but for all governments around the globe in order to ensure

balanced and equal opportunities for man and women. These times it is essential to make progressive policies and undertake actions with a gender perspective.

According to all statistical parameters, the countries that have higher representation of women in the policymaking process, equity and inclusiveness are ranked as advanced democracies, stable, progressive and economically more developed, and in contrary in the poor countries where also the peace and security is debatable; the low representation of women in policy-making process is evident.

It is with substantial importance that the global leaders encourage women's participation in governance, amend policies that discriminate women's participation, and involve women's groups in policymaking processes. Sustainable development will be reached only if women are empowered as equal partners