

# Women's participation in political processes



According to the 2013 Census, women represent around 51% of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, they are underrepresented across society, including in politics. Increasing women's participation in politics would be beneficial for society as a whole, not only for women. Women's participation in politics and elections, be it as candidates, voters, or party supporters, is a democratic principle that ensures that their needs are well addressed.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has an impressive legal, policy and institutional gender architecture. However, there are great challenges to the state's pronounced commitment to gender equality and it raises questions of how much the legal framework positively impacts on women's day-to-

day lives. Cognizant of the negative impact gender inequalities have on economic growth and development, the state is committed in bridging the disconnect between *de jure* policies and *de facto* practices.

There is a palpable disconnect between women's participation

in political processes and representation in formal political structures. Despite the electoral list having a 40% gender quota, stark disparities remain in gender representation in legislative bodies at all levels of government.

The gender gap in political participation and representation remains a tenacious global challenge. The Law on Gender Equality defines equal representation as when one sex is represented with at least 40% of members in bodies at all levels in BiH. Similarly, Article 4.19 of the BiH Election Law makes it mandatory for political parties to include 40% women in open electoral lists. Political parties are indeed meeting this requirement, however, this

has not translated into greater representation of women in legislative bodies.

In order to promote gender equality in BiH through the meaningful and visible political participation of women and inclusion of gender equality in the work of political parties, the OSCE Mission to BiH co-operates directly with political parties to promote the empowerment of women politicians. Capitalizing on such established partnerships with political parties, the Mission works with parliamentary gender equality committees at state and entity levels with the aim of placing gender equality issues high on the parliamentary agenda.

In 2016, the Mission worked with the eight largest political parties in BiH to conduct the *Audit of Political Parties* led by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The project identified several issues pertaining to the poor advancement of women in political life, one of them being the lack of systematic education on principles of gender equality and its relevance to political life and party activism. In 2018, the Mission developed the curriculum of a gender equality module to be included in the educational programme of the four largest political parties' political academies.

In line with the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality and the Ministerial Council decision on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, in 2014 the Mission supported the BiH Agency for Gender Equality to develop the Pledge

for Political Party's Allegiance to Gender Equality. In doing so, the Mission established direct contact and worked with eight political parties that signed the pledge, ensuring their continuous commitment to the principles of gender equality. In co-operation with ODIHR, the Mission supported a Gender Audit of the eight largest political parties. Subsequently the Mission supported the development of parties' strategies for the promotion of gender equality within their structures through the identification of policy and programme areas that require additional efforts in order to achieve gender parity.

The Mission supports BiH parliamentary gender equality committees as central drivers of the legislative implementation of gender equality principles. Furthermore, the Mission contributes to increasing awareness on *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security*, its implementation and the importance of women's participation in political and public life.

Institutional mechanisms for the implementation of gender equality laws and gender policies are encoded in the Law on Gender Equality (GEL). The Law prescribed the establishment of the Gender Equality Agency at the State level and gender centres at Entity level in FBiH and RS and called for establishment of implementation bodies at all levels of government.

The executive institutional mechanisms include the BiH Parliamentary Assembly Gender Equality Committee of the House of Representatives (HoR); the FBiH Parliament Gender Equality Committees of the HoR and HoP; the Republika Srpska National Assembly Committee for Equal Opportunities; the BD-BiH Assembly Committee for Gender Equality; cantonal assembly committees for gender equality; and municipal council/assembly commissions for gender equality.

BiH has adopted several policies to ensure gender equality in various spheres of life, including in the Gender Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2018-2022, and Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" in Bosnia and Herzegovina for period 2018-2022.

The recommendations ODIHR has made on women's participation in elections in the Western Balkans include calls for greater participation in electoral and other decision-making bodies, equitable media coverage during campaigns, parity in electoral candidacy, and addressing issues such as group or family voting.

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