

# Women's Political Network (WPN) Montenegro



In November 2017, the Women's Political Network (WPN) was established in Montenegro. As a result of a long-term process of the political empowerment of women, the WPN was financed by the Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro through IPA 2010 and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. The WPN is a coalition of women from 16 political parties, united in joint political action to improve the status of women in society, increase the numbers of women in decision-making and empower one another until equality is reached.

The WPN is not simply another network to promote women's political and economic rights and to combat violence against women. It has been established in the context of a political crisis, and while intolerance and nationalistic rhetoric had deepened divisions in an already fragile democracy. In the context where there were no all-party political meetings for longer than a year, women across parties gathered together, bringing to life a new political culture and ensuring dialogue in their country.

**Implementing entity:** UNDP / Ministry for Human and Minority Rights

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# Impact of the Women Political Network

The work of the WPN has resulted in several important advocacy actions:

- Montenegro ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). While it has amended the Criminal Code to include many of the Convention's provisions for addressing violence against women, rape was inadequately designed and sanctioned. The WPN, in partnership with civil society organisations, began advocacy actions that resulted in the Criminal Code being amended to include a definition of rape that complies fully with the Istanbul Convention, i.e. what is considered rape is extended to any sexual intercourse without consent, thus including marital rape.
- Two decade-long efforts to increase women's political participation have brought results. For example, efforts to introduce a 30% quota for women in the Electoral Law have seen women's numbers in the national parliament grow from 11% to 24%, and in local parliament from 8% to 26%. The WPN is committed to maintaining these increases and ensuring that quotas are not watered down. To this end, it conducted an assessment of the legal framework (Electoral law, Law on Political parties and Law on Financing of political parties), which led to the creation of an advocacy framework. That framework became the basis for subsequent advocacy efforts, titled 'Conclusion on the necessary amendments to Montenegrin legislation with the aim of improving the political participation of women in Montenegro'. Its recommendations included several key demands: (1) 40% of women on electoral lists; (2) positioning on lists: at least one in three candidates should be from the under-represented sex; (3) political parties should be obliged to have women's party wings; (4) women's party wings should receive 10% of party financial resources; (5) for each woman Member of Parliament (MP) and local councillor, the party should receive a financial contribution 30% higher than that given for men MPs and local councillors. This advocacy action was undertaken with the full support and participation of the EU and UNDP and was similarly supported by the two-thirds qualified majority needed to change the Electoral Law. This change will be discussed in parliament once the political crisis has ended and the opposition parties return.
- Only 9.6% of entrepreneurial companies are run by women and the WPN has started an initiative to develop affirmative policies to foster an environment that enables and accelerates women's entrepreneurial activity. While the long-term aim is to establish a guarantee (revolving) fund for women (regulated through a by-law), the WPN has already initiated the establishment of financial support mechanisms at local level. This advocacy

initiative was run with women local councillors, with six municipalities (Podgorica, Budva, Bar, Danilovgrad, Kolašin, Herceg Novi) allocating special funds (totalling EUR 120,000) for women entrepreneurship in their 2018 budgets for 2018. Three further municipalities are to similarly allocate funds in the forthcoming period.

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## **Transferability to other contexts**

Part of the success of the WPN stems from its strategy of including trainers (as knowledge carriers) and women with gender expertise in specific topics in the core team. The ideas pursued must be concrete subjects of common interest, in which women politicians, at a minimum, a) agree that the topic/initiative is a priority, and b) agree on the desired outcome. Strategies on how this outcome should be achieved are then discussed and agreed among the participants.

The WPN's way of working is fully transferable if certain preconditions are fulfilled. Firstly, commonly accepted leadership must be assigned to a trusted neutral organisation that is seen as competent and credible in this politically sensitive process. Secondly, trained gender-competent specialists should be included in the decision-making body. Finally, concrete problems should be identified, together with solutions.

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## **Learning and capacity-building potential**

Knowledge development and capacity-building is at the core of this process. Through the programme, the UNDP has worked to develop the capacity of women in political parties, through trained trainers, women's party wings (now common across almost all parties), cross-party networking and issue-based networking (i.e. thematic alliances centred on women's quotas, women's entrepreneurship, violence against women and within families, and women in the media).

The process of setting up the WPN has taken time. A certain amount of time was needed to test the network on different occasions, to gain 'maturity' and develop the appropriate argumentation, both politically and personally.

Training evaluations reveal high levels of satisfaction and responsiveness, with the WPN rated at 100%. Providing women with a forum for dialogue and idea exchange proved critical in placing women's issues on political agendas and creating women's alliances for the advancement of gender equality and women in politics.

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## Sustainability of the WPN

The WPN has been developed to be sustainable, basing itself on the very concept of long-term women's political alliances. WPN initiatives have been successful to date, laying the foundations to reach out and receive support to continue their work and achieve their aims. The WPN Strategic Plan covers four areas of gender equality: (1) women's political participation; (2) women's entrepreneurship and women's economic status/position in the labour market; (3) women in the media; and (4) combating violence against women.

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## National plans and strategies

The Plan of activities for achieving gender equality in Montenegro for the period 2017 - 2021, together with the subsequent Enforcement programme 2017-2018, was adopted by the government of Montenegro in March 2017. The Women's Political Network played an important role in these national plans by providing assistance and consultancy while promoting women's political rights and combating gender based violence. The Enforcement programme 2017-2018 is the third developing document for the implementation of gender equality policy in Montenegro.

Successful implementation of this strategic document requires the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and the Department for Gender Equality, to cooperate and collaborate with all ministries, state administration bodies, the parliament, public institutions, local self-government bodies, local government bodies and the civil sector.

The third Plan of activities for achieving gender equality has identified several focus areas: (1) improvement of human rights for women and gender equality; (2) gender-sensitive education and training; (3) gender equality in the economy; (4) gender-sensitive healthcare; (5) gender-based violence; (6) media, culture, and sport; (7) equality in decision-making in political and public life; and (8) institutional mechanisms for implementing gender equality policies.

In each area, a strategic goal is defined that specifies the activities, parties responsible, partners, timeframe, indicators, means of evaluation and the funds necessary to carry out these activities.

Given the importance of establishing effective mechanisms in Montenegro for the implementation and monitoring of human rights protection, work on the implementation of legal solutions is expected to be harmonised with international standards and effective practice, most notably those measures targeting the capacity-building of institutional mechanisms at local level.

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## Achievements and tangible outcomes

With just 24% of parliament being women, the targeted 30% of the under-represented sex in parliament has not been achieved. However, with the support of the Department for Gender Equality in the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the threshold has been increased to 40% in the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, taking over from the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, with its earlier goal of 40% women in decision-making. International treaties such as the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)/ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) recommend efforts to improve the political participation of women.

The WPN has built on these instruments, giving a platform to women's voices to demand accountability from political parties.

The WPN particularly promotes political dialogue as the only way to establish an accountable parliamentary system, advocating for citizen-centred policies that give equal consideration to the interests of both women and men.

The WPN has an important role to play in prompting political commitment and subsequent development of gender-sensitive policies that will provide substantive support in the EU integration process.

Tangible outcomes of the WPN's work are generating the political will to amend the Electoral Law to increase the numbers of women in political decision-making, seeing funds allocated for the development of women's entrepreneurship and having the Criminal Code amended to align the definition of rape with that of the Istanbul Convention.

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## Contacts/Further Information

### Contacts

## Proposal

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## Further information

[Women's Political Network \(WPN\), Montenegro](#)



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## Metadata

**TOOL:** Competence development, Gender equality measures in the IPA region