

TITLE: Regional Network of Gender Institutional Mechanisms – a window of opportunity
COUNTRY: Bosnia and Herzegovina
IMPLEMENTING ENTITY: Agency for Gender Equality / Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees
DURATION: N/A



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Summary

Since 2005, a Regional Coordination Board on Gender Equality has been in place in the Western Balkans, consisting of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Turkey and Albania are expected to join shortly.

The Declaration on Collaboration of Gender Institutional Mechanisms of the Western Balkans (the Sarajevo Declaration) was signed in 2005 by representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. In November 2013, the Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya) also signed the Declaration.

Joint priorities were defined in July 2014 when a Joint Statement on Collaboration of Gender Institutional Mechanisms from the Western Balkan Countries was signed in Sarajevo.

Under the umbrella of the Regional Coordination Board, a regional network of women's NGOs was established as a Union of Associations, 'Balkan Region', which has assumed the role of Secretariat of the Regional Coordination Board. Joint strategic planning within the Regional Coordination Board has led to the draft Regional Action Plan for Gender Equality in Priority Areas.

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Impact of the Regional Network of Gender Institutional Mechanisms

Almost 15 years ago, Bosnia and Herzegovina initiated regional collaboration in the area of gender equality with the Declaration on Collaboration of Gender Institutional Mechanisms of the Western Balkans (the Sarajevo Declaration). The Declaration was signed in 2005 by representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, with other interested countries in the region also permitted to join.

According to the conclusions of the meeting of the Regional Coordination Board on Gender Equality in the Western Balkans (held on 16 March 2018 in Sarajevo), members of the Board (from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) emphasised the importance of continuing the effective regional cooperation on gender issues that had begun in 2005. They expressed their strong willingness to promote ongoing efforts, strengthen coordination and build on the regional cooperation already established under the Sarajevo Declaration.

Transferability to other contexts

Since the Declaration, Bosnia and Herzegovina has sought to lead the way on gender equality by initiating, organising and funding many meetings of the Regional Coordination Board and other regional events. The Regional Coordination Board meets twice a year, on average. In November 2013, the Mediterranean countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya) also signed the Sarajevo Declaration. The Declaration remains open to further signatories, with Turkey and Albania, for example, expressing interest in joining.

Learning and capacity-building potential

Regional cooperation has tremendous potential to strengthen the capacity of national gender equality policies, foster learning through common practice and leverage limited local resources. It helps to better contextualise and get a feel for the common needs of a region. The similar historical, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts of their member countries have also contributed to the success of established regional cooperation mechanisms.

The Regional Coordination Board creates a window of opportunity to develop joint regional projects and initiatives and create a common platform for action. Its added value is that regional cooperation provides not only institutional memory but also broader impact by creating a public knowledge base of institutional mechanisms.

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The Regional Coordination Board has continuity and is a respected presence whose influence stems from the representatives of governments, civil society representatives, NGOs and country experts gathered. Further support is needed to continue regional cooperation on gender issues and to be recognised as a credible regional structure invested with significant knowledge and resources.

Sustainability of the Regional Network

The establishment of the Regional Coordination Board led to the definition of joint priorities. In July 2014, the Joint Statement on Collaboration of Gender Institutional Mechanisms of the Western Balkans was signed, referring to the Sarajevo Declaration. The Joint Statement outlined the following priority areas:

1. UNSCR 1325 'Women, Peace and Security', including emerging security threats and challenges (regular cooperation on these issues improves stability and increases the prospect of sustainable reconciliation among countries in the region);
2. Economic empowerment of women;
3. Implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

At the same time, under the umbrella of the Regional Coordination Board, a regional network of women's NGOs was established as a Union of Associations – 'Balkan Region' - that advocates for greater institutional and NGO linkages on joint gender priorities. Over time, the 'Balkan Region' network has taken on the role of Secretariat to the Regional Coordination Board. This focused approach has led to joint strategic planning and creation of a draft Regional Action Plan for Gender Equality in Priority Areas. These joint initiatives provide continuity and increase the sustainability of action.

Despite significant changes in the structure and status of gender mechanisms, regional collaboration on gender issues remains vibrant and enthusiastic and has continued to gather interested and influential representatives of governments and parliaments in the region.

In summary, extensive work has gone into building regional cooperation.

National plans and strategies

The regional component is a regular element of national policy on gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina (notably the Gender Action Plan and Action Plan on Implementation of UNSCR 1325). The regional approach to gender issues provides an opportunity to develop better strategies and exchange resources, knowledge and skills to achieve stronger results within each country.