

# PREVENTING AND COMBATTING SEXISM AT LOCAL LEVEL IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

A guide for women and men in local politics



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities  
of the Council of Europe





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# Acknowledgements

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This Guide is a response to the Congress commitment to fight and prevent sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level.

The guide was drafted by gender equality experts Gabrielle Bardall Ph.D. and Adnan Kadribašić. Additional inputs were provided by the Agency for Gender Equality within Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gender Centre of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Gender Centre of Republika Srpska, as well as by the Association of Municipalities and Cities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Association of Municipalities and Cities in Republika Srpska. The overall co-ordination was ensured by the Co-operation Activities Unit in the Secretariat of the Council of Europe Congress.

The guide is part of a series of country-specific guides on preventing and combatting sexism in local politics that aim to equip elected and appointed local representatives and candidates with the knowledge and skills necessary for recognising and addressing sexist behaviour, and for revising and putting in place mechanisms to prevent and combat sexism.



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## Foreword

**E**qual participation for women and men in politics and at all levels of decision-making has been widely acknowledged as essential for more prosperous and stable societies but is far from being reached globally or in Europe. Gender equality is a priority of the Council of Europe, with the vast legal and policy *acquis*. The pioneering work in the field of gender equality has resulted in a set of standards which aim to bring member states closer to equality between women and men. Moreover, gender equality remains at the heart of human rights and sustainable development policies, with the United Nations 2030 Agenda acknowledging it for building stronger institutions as two of the 17 goals.

A sphere where equal participation must be actively pursued is local government. It is often an entry point for women into politics, allowing them to contribute to policy-making and administrative decisions in areas which are most of concern for their daily lives and where visible impact can be achieved. However, many obstacles hinder the active involvement of women in local politics. Sexist discourse, attitudes and violence against female candidates and local elected representatives is an important barrier to the participation of women and the advancement of their political careers. Yet, women's involvement is not only a democratic and human rights necessity, but also a pragmatic one: no society can do without half of its potential and knowledge.

In light of the evidence that sexism is a hindering factor in achieving equality between women and men, the Council of Europe has made preventing and combatting gender stereotypes and sexism the first strategic objective in its current Gender Equality Strategy. Likewise, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has placed a particular focus on ensuring gender equality in pursuing its political priorities. It has taken concrete steps in working towards balanced representation of women and men, including through its *Recommendation on Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level*<sup>2</sup> that encourages local and regional authorities to take appropriate measures in their institutions and administrations.

Local/regional authorities are responsible for upholding human rights, preventing various forms of discrimination and ensuring gender equality within their territories and institutions. Preventing and combatting sexism requires a concerted effort by local and regional elected representatives and public administration, supported by law enforcement institutions and civil society organisations. Effective policies, structures and mechanisms, including complaint mechanisms need to be put in place to promote equality at the local level.

In the spirit of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the right of all citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority, the guide aims to equip local decision-makers and candidates in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the knowledge needed to recognise and address sexism in their institutions, thereby enhancing women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels.



**Mathieu Mori**  
Secretary General  
Congress of Local and Regional Authorities  
of the Council of Europe

# Introduction

*Women who seek and hold local elected office are pioneers in advancing human rights in an area still heavily dominated by men. Among the many barriers they face, sexism plays a major role in limiting their ability to fully and freely exercise their civic duties.*

This guide provides practical advice to both local authorities and associations of local and regional authorities, and possible targets of sexist violence (including sexist speech and sexual harassment) and gender-based discrimination such as female candidates and local office holders. It offers guidance on how to recognise, prevent and combat sexism through practical measures before, during and after elections. The guide includes examples of good practices on awareness raising, codes of conduct and regulations to be adopted by municipalities *inter alia*, as well as some examples of sanctions against perpetrators and remedies for those targeted by sexist behaviour. It also provides a general overview of the concrete measures intended to address the underlying causes of sexism by enhancing gender equality in local government.



The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism in 2019.<sup>3</sup> The recommendation provided the first international definition of sexism.

**Sexism** is defined by the Council of Europe as “any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice, or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline”.<sup>4</sup> Prevalent in all sectors and all societies, sexism is rooted in historically unequal power relations between men and women which lead to discrimination and prevent the full advancement of women in society.<sup>5</sup>

Sexist attacks targeting representatives of local and regional authorities and civil servants and sexist behaviour within and among these authorities are major barriers to elected women’s effective participation in local government (note: this guide does not address sexist policy or behaviours that local bodies may enact towards their citizens). Local government is a particularly important area where this problem should be addressed because of the impact local decision-makers have on the daily lives of citizens in key areas such as housing, security, transport, and the economy.

Local government is often an arena for policy innovation and problem-solving, where policymakers identify and pilot test solutions before they are introduced at a national scale. Local politics is also often a gateway for women to enter politics. Barriers such as sexism against female candidates and local office holders can deter women from entering or advancing in their political careers. Women's equal participation and representation at this level of public decision-making is vital to ensure that the needs and issues of the entire population are adequately addressed as well as to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>6</sup>

This practical Guide aimed at combatting sexism and promoting gender equality in local government has five concrete objectives:



**To advance political and human rights and achieve SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls);**



**To enable local authorities and associations of local and regional authorities to address a key problem, create tolerant and supportive workspaces and advance gender equality in society;**



**To empower local elected women to be effective in their roles by eliminating a major obstacle;**



**To contribute to creating a secure and empowering environment for aspiring women to compete for local elected office; and**



**To advance popular perceptions of legitimacy, representativity and effectiveness of local government**

# Women in Local Government: Laws, Policy and Current Statistics



**W**omen's political empowerment is one of the most important challenges for achieving gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The country has undertaken to meet this challenge by committing to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 on Gender equality, and in particular Target 5.5 on ensuring equal opportunities for representation at all levels of decision-making in political and public life. To meet this target and goal, Bosnia and Herzegovina must assess challenges in different sub-areas of women's political participation, such as sexism in local government, and tackle them through targeted efforts.

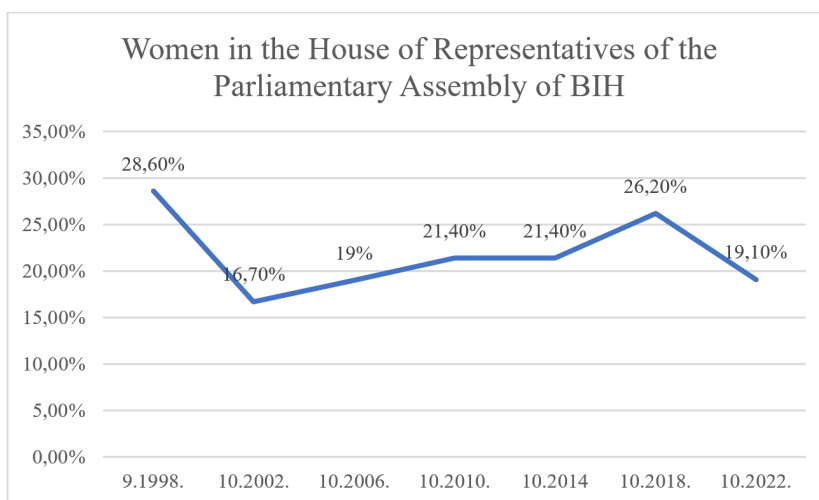
In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranked 86th (in 2022 ranked 73rd) out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index, which measures the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment).<sup>7</sup> According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in October 2023 Bosnia and Herzegovina also ranked 121st out of 188+ countries for the proportion of women in national parliament, with women constituting 19.1% of members in the House of Representatives (elections 10 2022) and 13.3% in the (House of Peoples) (composition on 02 2023) of the bicameral Parliament.<sup>8</sup>

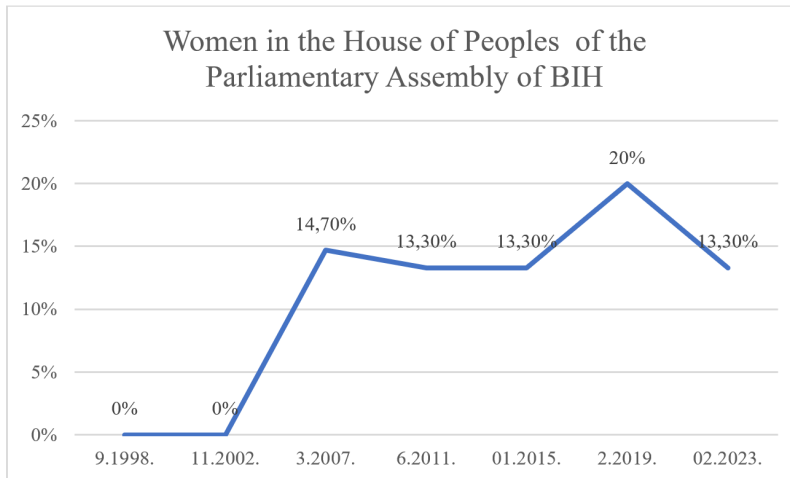
## Women’s participation in political life: legal and policy provisions

Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted several legal provisions for the equal participation of women and men in decision-making and leadership, which are aligned with international human rights treaties. Most notably, the Law on Gender Equality in BiH is based on international commitments and not only stipulates that equal representation exists when men and women are equally present in all areas of public and private life but also defines the obligation to promote and ensure equal representation of women and men in all government bodies and bodies under the supervision of public authorities, including political parties. In particular, it establishes that equal representation exists when one gender is represented by at least 40% of total members in public bodies at all levels of authority. In case this percentage is not met, the Law stipulates the obligation to adopt special ‘affirmative action’ measures.

It should be noted that there is no obstacle for such obligation to be directly applied when making decisions related to leadership positions. However, as a rule, this has not happened.

Undoubtedly, the ‘quota’ obligation, which was first introduced in 1998 by the Provisional Election Commission as a result of women’s equality campaigns after the war,<sup>9</sup> has had a positive effect on the participation of women in legislative bodies. In fact, before the introduction of the quota, the participation of women in the State and entities’ parliaments was extremely low: in the 1996 General Elections, one woman was elected to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH (PSBiH) and the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska (NSRS) each, and two women were elected to the Parliament of the Federation of BiH (PFBiH). Right after the introduction of the quota for the General Elections in 1998, by contrast, there was a significant increase in the participation of women to over 30% in PSBiH, 14.95% in PFBiH and 22.9% in NSRS. It must be acknowledged, nonetheless, that the representation of women has oscillated between 7.1% and 26% only from 1998 onwards, according to electoral data. This suggests that, while the quota obligation has been successful in increasing representation, there are still factors other than the design of the quota that influence women’s participation in politics.<sup>10</sup>





(Source: authors' elaboration based on data from InterParliamentary Union)

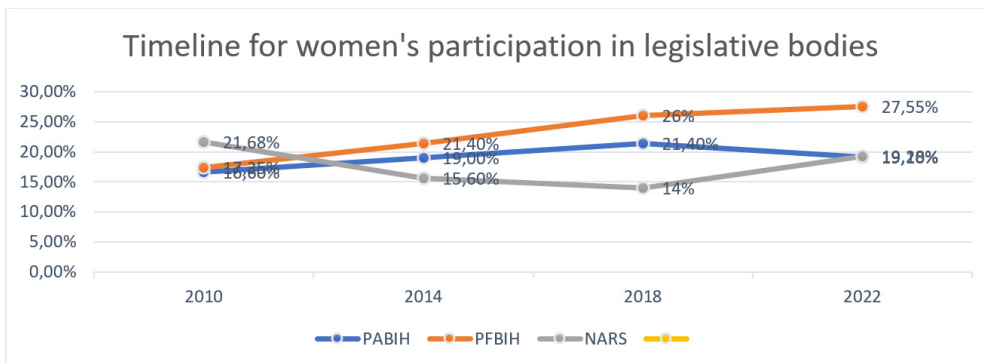
### Gender representation in political leadership roles

No women elected to the membership of the Collegium of the House of Representatives or the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH in the 2022-2024 term<sup>11</sup>. It is important to underline that the rules of procedure of both houses<sup>12</sup> regulate that the composition of the collegiums of both houses will strive to ensure the representation of both genders. The current composition of the Collegiums proves that this measure is considered declaratory and not binding. A woman was elected as the Speaker of the House of Representatives and one in the Collegium of the House of Peoples of the FBiH Parliament, while two women and three men were elected to the presidency of the RS National Assembly<sup>13</sup>. One woman is the vice-president of the National Assembly of RS and three women, and one man are members of the presidency of the Council of Peoples of the RS, and a woman is the chairperson of the Council of Peoples<sup>14</sup>.

The leadership of each committee in the PSBiH consists of three people, namely the chairperson and two deputy chairpersons. There are more women than men in the leadership of almost all committees of the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly. In a total of seven committees, three are presided by women, in four committees women are the minority (33%), in three committees they are the majority and in one committee there are no men in leadership position (Committee for Finance and Budget). In the NSRS, there are more women presidents and vice presidents of committees, and in both cases, they constitute over 45% of committee leadership. In PFBiH, women constitute 21% of the leadership of working bodies of the House of Representatives. There are committees where there are no women or men in the leadership.

The research by the Gender Centre of the FBiH (GC FBiH)<sup>15</sup> shows that the share of women as lead candidates on the lists of political entities has increased from 12.7% in 2016 to 18.6% in 2020 on the lists for local elections.

As a result,<sup>16</sup> the percentage of women elected to the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly was 21.4%, it was 26% to the House of Representatives of the FBiH Parliament, and 14% to the National Assembly of the RS.



In most of the parliamentary caucuses of the parties, women are a minority and are more or less represented in proportions that are comparable to the total participation of women in a legislative body. The exceptions are parties Naša stranka, Savez za bolju budućnost and Partija demokratskog progresa in the House of Representatives PSBiH and Naša stranka in PFBiH, where the participation of women is equal to or greater than that of men.

In terms of the executive branch, the documents governing the composition of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Government of the Federation BiH, and the Government of the RS, do not include the quota or other measures for the least represented gender. So far, no government has been formed in such a way that at least 40% of ministers of both genders were appointed, and women are still the least represented gender in all governments in BiH.

For the first time in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Chairperson Minister is also a woman. As of January 2023, out of nine ministries in the BiH Council of Ministers, only one is headed by women (11%). In the composition of the FBiH Government, out of 16 ministries, 4 female ministers are currently appointed (25%), same as for the Government of the RS, where 4 out of 16 ministries are headed by women (25%).

Women from marginalised groups continue to be underrepresented. According to “Baseline study on barriers to political participation of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina” not a single Roma woman was detected among members of municipal councils in the 10 analysed municipalities.<sup>17</sup>

### Women’s representation in local government

Elected Candidates in the 2020 Local Elections		
	Women %	Men %
<b>Total</b>	18.90%	81.10%
<b>Mayors</b>	4%	96%
<b>City/municipal council/ assemblies</b>	20.60%	79.40%

Source: Women and men in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo 2022.

According to data from the Central Election Commission of BiH, every fifth woman in BiH was elected to municipal/city councils and municipal/city assemblies – the same ratio that was recorded for the previous local elections.

### **The persistent challenges to gender equality**

While progress has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina to advance gender equality, significant challenges persist. Women’s representation in leadership roles has improved, but gender norms and stereotypes continue to fuel discrimination and violence against women in politics and the workforce. The prevalence of gender-based violence remains a concerning issue, worsened by underreporting and lack of trust in support systems.

## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA’S LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY**



### **International & Regional Commitments**

#### **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015–2030**

SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

#### **Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (BPfA) of the 4th World Conference for Women (1995)**

- Take measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making;
- Increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership;
- Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies;
- Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects;
- Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.



### Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1980) & CEDAW Optional Protocol

Eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promote women's and girls' equal rights.

### EU Integration Instruments: the Amsterdam Treaty (1999)

Recognise the importance of eliminating inequalities between women and men and commit to mainstreaming gender issues.

### Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force on 1 June 2015 and the 2019 Commission's Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership in the European Union

Bosnia and Herzegovina presented its application for membership in the European Union on 15 February 2016. Subsequently, on 20 September 2016, the Council of the European Union invited the Commission to submit its opinion on this application.<sup>18</sup>

The Commission's Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union included 14 priorities to be addressed by the country in its path towards accession, including one on gender equality, namely: "Strengthen the protection of the rights of all citizens, notably by ensuring the implementation of the legislation on non-discrimination and gender equality."

### Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (2011) – Ratified by BiH in 2013 (Istanbul Convention)

Prevent violence against women, including domestic violence, protecting victims, and prosecuting offenders, setting comprehensive and legally binding standards; address various forms of violence including physical, sexual, and psychological, and take measures to combat gender stereotypes and discrimination. Establish support services for victims, legal reforms, and public awareness campaigns.

EEAS Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025  
(Country-level implementation)

The EU reaffirms the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout EU external action at all levels and in all sectors.

Recommendation Rec (2001) 19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the participation of citizens in local public life  
(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 6 December 2001 at the 776th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

Appendix I

Basic principles of a local democratic participation policy

- Recognise the importance of a fair representation of women in local politics;
- Specific steps and measures to encourage categories of citizens who, for various reasons, have greater difficulty participating
- Collect, regularly, information on the participation of the various categories of citizens and ascertain whether certain ones such as women, young people, underprivileged social groups, and certain professional groups are under-represented in the elected bodies and/or play little or no part in electoral or direct forms of participation.

As regards women in particular:

- emphasise the importance of a fair representation of women in decision-making bodies and consider any arrangements which might make it easier to combine active political involvement with family and working life;
- consider, if legally possible, the introduction of compulsory or recommended quota systems for the minimum number of same-sex candidates who can appear on an electoral list and/or a quota of seats reserved for women on local councils, local executive bodies and the various committees and boards formed by local bodies.

### Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life

Promote the balanced participation of women and men in local politics and local public life;

As regards women in particular:

- emphasise the importance of a balanced participation of women and men in decision-making bodies and consider any arrangements which may facilitate reconciling active political involvement with family and working life;
- consider, if legally possible, the introduction of compulsory or recommended quota systems for the minimum number of same-sex candidates who can appear on an electoral list and/or a quota of seats reserved for women on local councils, local executive bodies and the various committees and boards formed by local bodies, taking into consideration Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;

### The Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on preventing and combating sexism

Recommends that the governments of member States: 1. Take measures to prevent and combat sexism and its manifestations in the public and private spheres, and encourage relevant stakeholders to implement appropriate legislation, policies

## National Law and Policy

### Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The enjoyment of rights and freedoms is guaranteed to all persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina without discrimination on any basis such as gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinions, national and social origin or association with a national minority, property, birth or second status.

### Law on the prohibition of discrimination (Official Gazette of BiH, Nos. 59/09 and 66/16)

This law establishes a framework for achieving equal rights and opportunities for all persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina and regulates the system of protection against discrimination. Per the Constitution and international standards relating to human rights and basic freedoms, this law establishes the responsibilities and obligations of legislative, judicial and executive authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as legal entities and individuals who exercise public powers, to enable, through their action, the protection, promotion and creation of conditions for equal treatment.

### The Law on Gender Equality in BiH – consolidated text (Official Gazette BiH, No. 32/10)

Defines the obligation to promote and ensure equal representation of women and men in all government bodies or bodies under the supervision of public authorities, including political parties. The law further stipulates that equal representation exists when men and women are equally present in all areas of public and private life. In addition, the Law stipulates that equal representation exists in the case when one of the genders is represented by at least 40% in these bodies, as well as it stipulates the obligation to adopt special measures (affirmative action measures) if representation is less than this percentage.

### Labour Laws

(“Official Gazette of FBiH”, Nos 26/16 and 89/18), (“Official Gazette of RS”, Nos 1/2016, 66/2018, 91/2021 – decision of CC and 119/2021) | (“Official Gazette” of BD, Nos. 34/2019, 2/2021, 6/2021 and 15/2022)

The labour laws in FBiH, RS and BD regulate the status of employees, the method and procedure of admission to employment, the conclusion of employment contracts between employees and employers, working hours, wages and benefits, vacations and absences, protection of rights from the employment relationship, conclusion and application of collective agreements, and settlement of disputes between employees. Labour legislation also defines prohibition of discrimination including sexual harassment sexual abuse, gender-based violence and systematic abuse of employees by the employer and other employees, i.e. mobbing.

BiH Election Law (Official Gazette of BiH, Nos 23/01, 7/02, 9/02, 20/02, 25/02, 4/04, 20/04, 25/05, 52/05, 65/05, 77/05, 11/06, 24/06, 32/07, 33/08, 37/08, 32/10, 18/13, 7/14, 31/16, 41/20, 38/22, 51/22 and 67/22)

Contains a quota for the less represented gender. Article 4.19 establishes a mandatory quota, stipulates the percentage of 40% and has a mandatory ranking rule. The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina has the authority to reject any list of candidates that is not drawn up per this rule.

Article 4.19 reads:

“Every candidate list shall include candidates of male and female gender. The minority gender candidates shall be distributed on the candidates list in the following manner: at least one (1) minority gender candidate amongst the first two (2) candidates, two (2) minority gender candidates amongst the first five (5) candidates, and three (3) minority gender candidates amongst the first eight (8) candidates, et seq. The number of minority gender candidates must be at least equal to the total number of candidates on the list divided by three (3) rounded down to the nearest integer.”

Law on the Financing of Political Parties of BiH  
(Official Gazette of FBiH, No. 95/2013 and 41/2016)

Contains an affirmative measure stipulating that when allocating funds to parliamentary parties, an additional 10% of available funds will be allocated to parties in proportion to the number of parliamentary seats belonging to the least represented gender.

Law on Protection from Domestic Violence of the  
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette of  
FBiH, Nos. 20/2013 and 75/2021)

The law establishes protection against domestic violence, the concept of family and domestic violence, the type and purpose of protective measures for persons who have committed acts of domestic violence, the method and procedure of imposing protective measures, protection of the victim against domestic violence, the interconnection of all subjects which are in the function of protection against domestic violence and other issues of importance for protection against domestic violence.

**Law on Protection against Domestic Violence of Republika Srpska (Official Gazette of Republika Srpska, Nos. 102/2012, 108/2013, 82/2015 and 84/2019)**

The law regulates protection from violence in the family or family community, persons who in the sense of this law are considered family members, the establishment of the Council for Combatting Domestic Violence, measures to protect victims from domestic violence and other issues of importance for protection against domestic violence.

The main goal of this law is to protect victims of domestic violence by preventing and suppressing domestic violence, which violates basic human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and laws.

**Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023 – 2027**

The fourth Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina (GAP BiH) for the period 2023 - 2027 is a framework strategic document for the inclusion of the principle of gender equality in all areas of social life and provides guidelines for the development of operational plans of institutions at all levels of government in BiH.

**Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace and Security” in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Period 2018-2022**

The 1325 National Action Plan covers three key areas and includes increased participation of women in the military, police and peace missions, including participation in decision-making positions; increased level of human security through the gender equality prism; and improved conditions of and approach to the implementation of the Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

## Recognising sexism in local government

**S**exist behaviour<sup>19</sup> in local government can be direct or indirect, including written, verbal, physical, electronic or other forms of expression. Sexist behaviour and sexual harassment may be physical and/or psychological and can involve obvious and active actions, such as physical assault or openly discriminatory comments, or passive and subtle actions, such as persistent teasing or regularly 'forgetting' to include female councillors in meetings and decision-making processes. These actions may be single incidents or repeated behaviours over a period of time. Sexual harassment is defined by the person targeted by the behaviour, not the person engaging in that behaviour – claiming "it was a joke" or "I didn't mean to offend" do not excuse the behaviour. Sexist comments do not need to be targeted at an individual to be harmful. For example, a male council member who makes a derogatory statement about women's inferiority could be recognised as committing an act of harassment against female council members because it contributes to a hostile work environment for women in the council.

In the context of local government, the perpetrators of sexist speech and sexual harassment can include fellow council members, members of council staff and administrative staff, other elected officials and staff from other levels of government. It can also include constituents and community members. Perpetrators may include both men and women and may be known to the target or not. Social media can be a vector for encouraging sexism aimed at women in local government when users express derogatory comments, ridicule, etc. in these spaces.

Sexism against women in politics is common in Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to a series of recent studies, violence, particularly during elections, has emerged as a significant obstacle to women's political participation.<sup>20</sup> Sexism is present in discriminatory and derogatory language used against political women throughout the electoral cycle, often spread through online platforms. The unequal representation of women in leadership and the absence of gender-sensitive discourse in political parties and relevant state institutions reflect deep-rooted sexism in these spaces. Women who run as independents and women from underrepresented groups face especially steep challenges.

No specific information is collected on psychological, physical, sexual and economic violence against or harassment of women in political life. However, data on gender-based violence against women shows that 48% of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the age of 15 have experienced some form of abuse, including intimate partner violence, non-partner violence, stalking and sexual harassment, whereas the rate of partner violence is 35%.<sup>21</sup> Research conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina on violence against women in politics in BiH<sup>22</sup> also shows that 60.2% of 83 respondents experienced some form of violence while engaged in politics, while 45.8% of them experienced violence due to being women and, in most cases, they did so online. As many as 80% of the surveyed women politicians included in the research consider violence to be a common experience in politics.

Of the total number of respondents in the same research, 74.7% reported that social network users were the most common perpetrators of violence against women in politics, 66.3% said that violence was most often perpetrated by members of opposing parties or coalitions, 47% reported that perpetrators most frequently came from the ranks of the victims' own parties, 16.9% said that it came from media and the voters, and respondents mostly disagreed that the usual perpetrators were wider or closer family members (2.4%) or representatives of civil society organisations (1.2%).<sup>23</sup>

According to the Law on Gender Equality in BiH, Article 13, employers must take effective measures to prevent gender-based harassment, sexual harassment and discrimination in work and working relations. This provision was the basis for the creation of zero-tolerance employer policies and the creation of codes of ethics in local legislative bodies that defined such actions as unethical. An example of this is the Guide for taking effective measures to prevent gender-based harassment and sexual harassment at the workplace in institutions including the PSBiH Secretariat,<sup>24</sup> but also in other areas, for example in the judiciary<sup>25</sup> or at universities.<sup>26</sup>

The codes of ethics that apply to members of legislative bodies contain general provisions on respect for diversity and tolerance but do not contain specific provisions on the issue of sexual harassment. The Code of Ethics for the Representatives in the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>27</sup> adopted in June 2022 is the first document that contains clear standards related to discrimination, gender-based harassment, and sexual harassment. Failure to comply with this Code can result in disciplinary and financial sanctions.

Globally, women who are active in political life regularly face sexist bias, ridicule, humiliation and gender-based discrimination. According to UNDP research,

*“Rather than focusing on women’s professionalism and competence, their colleagues, the media and the general public often instead fixate on their personal attributes, superficialities such as clothing and hairstyles and their roles as mothers and wives.”<sup>28</sup>*

There are many reported examples of this at all levels of governance.

The Mediacentre has produced a specific report on sexism and hate speech targeting women in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 2022 General Elections.<sup>29</sup> The analysis revealed a large number of instances of such content as well as purposefully constructed harmful narratives about female candidates that could influence the outcome of the elections. According to the analysis, the most represented categories of harmful content were propaganda, smear campaigns against individuals and content referring to the candidates' morals. The influence of polarisation and politics on the media within the country is visible in the extensive presence of biased and propagandistic media content, along with smear campaigns. Moreover, the research reveals that gender stereotypes are also an effective tool for discrediting female candidates and mobilising the electorate.

These incidents underscore the urgent need to address and confront sexism and discrimination within political contexts. They emphasise the importance of fostering an inclusive and respectful environment that values the competence and contributions of all candidates, regardless of gender.



## Examples of sexist and harassing behaviour

Spreading malicious rumours, gossip or innuendo

Persistently criticising, demeaning or ridiculing a person

Undermining or deliberately impeding a person's work

Excluding or isolating someone

Physical threats or assault

Calling someone derogatory names

Teasing or joking about a person

Making aggressive or threatening gestures

Displaying offensive posters, cartoons, images or other visuals

Verbal threats or abuse

Playing pranks, vandalising or hiding personal belongings or work equipment

Unwelcome invitations or requests

Unwelcome physical contact

Publicly ridiculing or disciplining

Blocking applications for leaves, training or promotion

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### Sexism

Any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of: i. violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or ii. resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or iii. creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or iv. constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or v. maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.

### Affirmative actions

Special measures are introduced temporarily to achieve real gender equality and are not considered with discrimination, including norms, criteria or practices that can be objectively justified legitimate goal, and must be proportionate, appropriate and necessary.

### Discrimination on grounds of gender

exists if one person or a group of persons is put into a less favourable position based on gender.

### Direct gender-based discrimination

exists when a person or a group of one gender is treated or may be treated less favourably than another person or group in the same or similar situation.

### Indirect gender-based discrimination

exists when an apparently neutral legal norm, criterion or practice equal for everyone, puts or may put a person or a group of one gender into a less favourable position in comparison to a person or a group of another gender.

## Harassment

is any unwanted conduct based on gender that aims at or has the effect of violating the dignity of a person or a group and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or insulting environment.

## Sexual harassment

is any unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that aims at or has the effect of violating the dignity of a person or a group, especially when this behaviour creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

## Gender-based violence

is any conduct that causes, or may cause, physical, mental, sexual or economic damage or suffering, as well as any threat of such conduct which prevents a person or a group from enjoying their human rights and freedoms in public and private life. It can include domestic violence or violence in the wider community, committed or tolerated by authorities, and violence occurring in armed conflict.

## Victimisation

occurs when a person or a group is put into a disadvantageous position because they reject an instruction to act in a discriminatory manner, they report discrimination, they testify or participate in any other way in a procedure of protection from gender-based discrimination.

## Discrimination in language

Discrimination in language exists when only one grammatical gender is used as a generic term.

# Combating Sexism through Practical Measures



**S**olutions for ending sexism require engaging diverse groups of people, as well as leveraging processes and institutions. This section presents the main areas of action where practical measures can actively contribute to combatting sexism in local government. It begins by looking at how different stakeholders can take appropriate action. This includes discussions of how local government authorities can make better-informed decisions through data and research and how they can improve with civil society. This section also looks at the methods for enhancing the capacity of candidates and aspirants as well as how working with men (including young men) can strengthen outcomes. It discusses standards and transparency measures that help local governments enhance their responsiveness to issues of sexism and offers ideas on how networking and engaging new technology facilitates solutions.

The next section considers ways in which state processes and institutions can be adapted to improve their ability to respond to and prevent sexism and discrimination at the local level. The section begins with codes of conduct and ethical guidelines for local authorities and progressively examines possible institutional solutions from local to regional to national levels. It closes with an overview of possible sanctions and remedies, and a note on resource planning.

All interventions discussed here can be targeted at different phases of the electoral cycle (pre-, during and post-election) or can be overarching across the electoral cycle as a whole.

## Entry Points for a Multi-Stakeholder Strategy to Combat Sexism

Ending sexism in local government requires the involvement of many different actors working in multiple areas. This section presents how core actors (local government authorities) can improve the quality and impact of their actions in combatting sexism. It reviews how local government can work with other key groups, including civil society, to enhance responses. Other target groups, such as male counterparts in local bodies and female candidates and aspirants, can also be supported to better contribute to a constructive environment.

### Improving informed decision-making

Evidence-based approaches help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation.<sup>30</sup> Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) and other documentation and research (surveys, data collection, etc.) are essential tools for local and regional councils to identify the nature of the issue in their institutions and set a baseline to measure improvement. Local government authorities can introduce these measures at multiple levels, generally for their institutions and more specifically around significant policies and procedures. Data collection should be consistent and ongoing for local authorities and should always be gender disaggregated. Some data such as reporting on sexism during campaigning and polling would be specific to electoral periods. All data, documentation and assessments should be conducted in a timely fashion to ensure that their results can meaningfully feed into decision-making processes. These findings may guide local authorities in improving internal processes and structures as well as be useful for reducing sexist practices among external actors, such as political parties. EIA is commonly used to assess new or proposed changes to policy. Evidence-based approaches have the added value of creating a written record of equality considerations taken into account and enhancing institutional transparency.



### Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The statistical offices in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been continuously working to improve gender statistics. Key indicators are presented in the publication “Women and Men in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The publication is published every second year and represents a collection of all available data segregated by gender. Most of the data comes from regular surveys by the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BHAS) and statistical entity institutes, while a part of the data is taken from other institutions and ministries.

The Gender Equality Index for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2022 presents the full index scores for two full domains (i.e. Knowledge and Power) and the partial index scores for the domains of Work and Health. With the development of this report, Bosnia and Herzegovina will for the first time be able to rely on a statistically legitimate, objective and up-to-date statistical tool for the comparison of the state of gender equality in the country with countries in the region and the EU. The development of the Gender Equality Index is the result of the combined efforts of the BHAS and the Agency for Gender Equality within the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AGE MHRR BiH), with the guidance of the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), support by UN Women and financing by the European Union.<sup>31</sup>

New regulations in BiH introduced the obligation of prior (ex-ante) and subsequent (ex-post) impact assessment<sup>32</sup>. Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is a systematic process of identifying and testing the expected effects of proposed regulations. The goal of this approach is to examine all available solutions to create a picture of their efficiency and effectiveness and enable the systematic selection of the best solution. These regulations also regulate the issue of assessing the impact of legal provisions on gender equality. This obligation is harmonised with the Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Gender Action Plan in BiH. A manual for incorporating the principles of gender equality into laws and policies has been developed to support gender impact assessment efforts.



### United Kingdom

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For over a decade, dozens of local authorities across the UK have used EIA to meet their responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).<sup>33</sup> This Act requires all public authorities to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation related to sex and gender as well as other protected characteristics. While each locality adopts its procedures, in general EIA in the UK involves a screening evaluation to decide whether and why further analysis is – or is not –

required. If further analysis is required, a full assessment questionnaire is completed, and the report is made public.

EIA questions may include gender analysis of the proposed policy, referral to relevant public data, consultation with community actors, data collection and evidence. The resulting recommendations are based on whether the proposed policy will meet the council's responsibilities concerning equality and human rights. Examples of EIA forms, guidance and reports can be viewed at:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equalities-hub/equality-framework-local-government>

[https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200041/equality\\_and\\_diversity/5885/our\\_approach\\_to\\_equality/6](https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/5885/our_approach_to_equality/6)

## **Setting targets and tracking progress through co-operation with civil society organisations**

Accurate data and documentation allow local authorities to set targets for improvement over time. Setting ambitious yet realistic targets for decreasing the prevalence of sexism and increasing gender equality within local elected bodies establishes a tangible roadmap for improvement. Targets should be based on solid data and developed collaboratively in consultation with multiple stakeholders, both state and non-state depending on the context. To ensure compliance, unmet targets can be set to automatic policy changes, for example, failure to meet a target could automatically trigger budget increases in spending for equality measures. Collaboration between local bodies and civil society organisations (CSOs) can be especially helpful in this. CSOs may contribute with testimony, research and documentation to track progress against targets. They may also enhance awareness about local authority targets and progress, which promotes confidence and perceived legitimacy by the population.



### Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The AGE MHRR BiH has signed a memorandum of exchange between the coordinating committee for monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan for the UN Resolution in Bosnia and Herzegovina and thirteen non-governmental organisations, which represents a platform for co-operation, co-ordination of activities and exchange of information between relevant governmental institutions and key non-governmental organisations dealing with issues of women, peace and security.<sup>34</sup>

The Sarajevo Open Center (SOC) works to improve human rights, especially the position and human rights of LGBTI persons and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, by interpreting, presenting and representing the authentic experiences of people who suffer human rights violations and unequal positions, and by advocating for legal, political, economic, social and cultural changes in all areas of life.<sup>35</sup>



### Republic of Moldova

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The Platform for Gender Equality developed an online platform enabling citizens to publicly report and notify authorities of instances of gender discrimination, sexism, and incitement to discrimination around the 2019 elections. The Platform (<https://gender.monitor.md/>) invited the public to report alleged cases of gender discrimination, sexist messaging, and violence against women. Besides statistical data that can be monitored via the reported cases on the Platform and in monitoring reports, select cases were brought for litigation by the Platform activists; each case was reported to the Equality Council and the litigation goes further to Court in some cases.

The Promo-LEX Association (Promo-LEX ([promolex.md](http://promolex.md))) monitored the public space and the media during 2017-2019, offering disaggregated data on different aspects of hate speech, including sexism for the first time. They recorded not only the number of cases but also categories of sources distributing the hate speech, public resonance, sex and average age of hate speech authors and victims, protected criteria and affected groups, politicians and media most often using these forms of expression. Their two reports (2018 and 2019) recorded nearly 600 cases and gained significant public attention, with millions of views and thousands of shares. The media played a key role in spreading hate speech, contributing to at least half of the cases in the public space.





## France

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In 2023, the French High Council for Equality (HCE) released an emergency plan to fight “an alarming level” of sexism in France.<sup>36</sup> The plan spans a broad range of areas, from youth education to political violence. Its recommendations include increasing resources for tackling GBV, enhancing sex education in schools, regulating online content, recommending mandatory anti-sexism training in the workplace, making public funding contingent on gender equality efforts, encouraging media organisations to improve women’s representation, addressing under-representation in school texts, banning gendered adverts for toys and raising societal awareness. A notable innovation of the action plan is the recommendation to introduce a public, independent authority to root out sexist behaviour in politics. If adopted, such a body would make MPs accused of GBV ineligible for government positions. Wide-ranging recommendations such as these can help set targets and benchmarks across multiple areas of government.

### Equipping candidates and aspirants to navigate local politics

Sexism is a deterrent for many women who are considering entering local politics. To overcome this, aspirants and candidates must understand the recourse available to them and trust that officials will protect them by sanctioning harmful behaviours both online and offline. This may include offering targeted information sessions, public service announcements and briefings during campaign periods. Strategic communications by official actors involved are also helpful, including statements of policy and intent by electoral bodies, police and security actors, local authorities and political parties.

Mentoring programmes facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experience, perspectives and skills within local government by providing an opportunity for elected women at all levels to learn from each other to progress in their careers. Similar to networking strategies, mentoring and sponsorship programmes pair emerging women leaders with both men and women with longer experience in their field. This strategy helps to combat sexism by equipping newly elected women with the tools and resources needed to exercise their duties free of harassment.



## Bosnia and Herzegovina

*AGE MHRR BiH supported, through the FIGAP II Programme (Financial Mechanism for the Implementation of the Gender Action Plan of BiH, financed by Swedish SIDA), the “Leadership Academy” Project<sup>37</sup> of the Faculty of Economics in Sarajevo. The Leadership Academy is an educational programme aimed at strengthening the leadership capacities of women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina and represents a very significant step in networking with women and encouraging their active political engagement. Education for female politicians, as part of the Leadership Academy, was realised in the form of two cycles of education in 2021. Training includes six modules that are focused on strengthening the leadership potential of women in politics within the transversal areas defined by the Gender Action Plan, which include: the media, improving the position of multiple marginalised groups of women, the balance of professional and private life and the role of men as allies in achieving gender equality.*

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Sarajevo Open Center, by starting the Equality Academy,<sup>38</sup> tried to create a new platform for political leadership and a space for the joint action of representatives, councillors, leaders of political parties and civil society organisations. The Equality Academy is a programme that was launched in 2015.

The Transparency International (TI) BiH Academy for Women’s Empowerment in Politics aims to build women’s capacity to effectively and actively participate in politics, enhancing the quality of their political participation and gender justice and promoting women’s equal right to political representation. The main objective of the project is to develop leadership skills among women, with a special emphasis on education about transparency, accountability and integrity, as key factors in fighting corruption. The Academy will combine lectures with interactive work through group discussions, small group activities and analysis of written material.<sup>39</sup>

A strategic approach to the success of female candidates in election campaigns is a toolkit created based on the findings and recommendations of the Baseline Study on Barriers to Women’s Political Participation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was conducted in 2019.

This Baseline Study found that one of the main reasons for the under-representation of women is the gender stereotypes of the electorate, as well as the low visibility and presence of female politicians in the public and media in the pre-election months. The advice contained in this brochure is based on the best international practices, but at the same time, it is adapted to the possibilities provided by the electoral system of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore, the brochure offers an insight into the opportunities that female candidates can use, which are related to

the electoral system. In addition, the brochure offers advice to female candidates on how to approach an electorate that has its prejudices and stereotypes concerning women in public and political life.<sup>40</sup>



## Portugal

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The “From Women to Women” programme in Portugal aimed to increase young women’s participation in politics. Older women active in politics provided twelve months of mentoring to 30 young women aged 16-30, who also took part in training activities on gender equality, democracy, political systems, and other topics, and visits to political institutions. Young women belonging to minority ethnic and cultural groups were particularly encouraged to apply.<sup>41</sup>

### Working with men to combat sexism and promote gender equality

Sexism is reinforced by gender stereotypes and also affects men and boys. Expectations towards men can lead to sexist behaviour. Constructive engagement with men (including young men) must be a part of any solution to combat sexism. Male counterparts in local government can learn to better understand what constitutes harmful sexist behaviours, avoid engaging in them and promote gender equality instead. Capacity-building activities can promote collaborative design and implementation of policies to sanction sexist behaviour and sexual harassment.

Practical measures to engage with men to cease contributing to cultures of sexism in local government include training, dialogue initiatives and mentoring programmes designed to raise awareness of personal bias and sexist behaviour and identify strategies to overcome them. These may be organised by specialised third-party actors (CSOs, etc.) or directly by the local bodies themselves. Similarly, local elected representatives (women and men) who want to contribute to improved policy responses may benefit from targeted training or comparative studies of responses in other regions or countries.

Beyond training and education, strategies to promote men’s engagement against sexism and for equality may include party pacts and personal commitments, incentive programmes, recognition and training in skills to intervene and respond in harmful situations. Mentoring programmes can also be used in different ways, for example by mentoring incoming male representatives on how to actively contribute to gender-equal and sexism-free local government. “Reverse mentoring” is another strategy whereby women active in local politics provide gender sensitivity training to regional or national level officials.

In BiH, men have generally been less involved than women in activities related to addressing gender equality challenges. It is only through the support of entities such as the AGE MHRB BiH, the Gender Centre of the FBiH, the Gender Centre of the

RS (GCRS) and external stakeholders such as OSCE and UN agencies, that the focus started to shift towards including men more systematically in such activities. This has been the case, especially since 2014: the campaign “White Ribbon – Men Say No to Violence Against Women” and the “He4She campaign” are some examples of instances which have encouraged the greater participation of men in the fight for gender equality in the country.

## EXAMPLES

### WORKING WITH MEN TO COMBAT SEXISM AND PROMOTE EQUALITY



#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

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AGE MHRR BiH, supported by UNDP, organised the marking of International Men’s Day on November 18, 2022. The event focused on men’s role in achieving gender equality and how gender inequality as well as rigid and stereotypical gender norms negatively affect men. This event is in line with the Gender action plan of BiH which recognises the involvement of men as one of its key principles.<sup>42</sup>

In 2014, the publication *Overcoming Inequality: Men and Gender Equality in the OSCE Region* was issued. This document lists several potential strategies which could be used to engage and work with men in achieving gender equality.<sup>43</sup>

GC RS and the GC FBiH have implemented numerous activities as part of the campaign titled “White ribbon – Men say no to violence against women” which promotes the commitment of men to zero tolerance towards violence against women. This campaign included public officials, parliamentarians and the media.<sup>44</sup>



#### Balkans

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Young Men Initiative (YMI) is a regional platform of organisations, convened by CARE International Balkans. One of the landmark activities of the YMI is the “Be a Man” clubs. These clubs are established as clubs of high school students who are engaged creatively in the design and implementation of the “Be a Man” campaign and represent its most significant part. Be a Man clubs are not clubs that only include young men; these clubs include equally young men and women, to build healthy lifestyles for all of them.<sup>45</sup>



## Republic of Moldova

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The NGO Casa Marioarei created the initiative “Father School: Step by Step” aimed at preventing domestic violence by encouraging men to actively participate in childcare and sharing household responsibilities. Throughout the pandemic, the project utilised social media platforms, training guides, workshops, and a resource group of exemplary fathers to engage over 150 individuals, culminating in certificates for trainers who conducted sessions with parents. This effort represents a valuable step towards combatting domestic violence through education and community engagement.

Learn more at: <https://antiviolența.md/en/events/>

In 2020, UNFPA Moldova announced a pilot programme of eight “Fathers Clubs” to be established in Strasenii and Falesti, and the associated Father’s School Guide.<sup>46</sup> The clubs are intended to be a place where current and future fathers can find support and resources enabling them to participate actively in child-rearing and in activities traditionally regarded as female-dominated. Previously, in 2015, UNFPA launched the study “Men and gender equality in the Republic of Moldova” analysing shifts in behaviours and attitudes among men and women. The study provided national-level data to monitor changes resulting from gender equality policies and programmes, to guide subsequent development in this area.<sup>47</sup>



## Global – Barbershop Initiative (HeForShe)

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Barbershop events encourage men and boys to become actively engaged in promoting gender equality by better understanding how gender inequality limits the ability of individuals, businesses, and communities to reach their full human, economic and social potential. Barbershop events provide men with tools to address this inequality and become agents of change. The Barbershop Initiatives offer a range of tools in three areas: 1) Leadership sessions, 2) Workshops, and 3) Increasing engagement. These resources are targeted at audiences of men across a range of levels, starting with the highest levels of leadership. Toolkits and resources are available free online at <https://www.heforshe.org/en/barbershop>.



## Sweden

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The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) represents and advocates for local government in Sweden. All of Sweden’s municipalities and regions are members of SALAR. The Government of Sweden has had an agreement with SALAR since 2017 to strengthen the focus of gender equality work on men, boys and questions of masculinity.<sup>48</sup>



## Caribbean states

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Parliamentarians have identified the following good practices:

### *In legislative and oversight functions*

- Assessing legislation and budgets through an intersectional gender lens to consider the potential impacts on diverse groups;
- Advocating for laws and initiatives that will positively impact women and help build the political will to pass them;
- Consulting with women's groups to seek feedback on proposed legislative initiatives (not just those explicitly related to gender equality) and integrating the results into decision-making.
- *In meetings (including committees, plenary, and in the constituency)*
- Chairing meetings in a way that encourages equitable participation by all members (e.g. inviting those who have not spoken to contribute);
- Listening respectfully when each member of the group is speaking.
- *In the media and online*
- Leveraging social media as a tool to keep informed about the work of gender equality advocates and joining discussions on pertinent topics;
- Challenging gender stereotypes and bias when they emerge on online platforms or through interview questions.
- *In everyday life*
- Learning about key gender equality issues and sharing knowledge with others;
- Encouraging other men to become allies;
- Using gender-sensitive language (i.e. communication that demonstrates respect for women and does not make them invisible) and drawing attention to harmful uses of language in day-to-day conversations.

For more info: [About the Gender Equality Programme](#) > [ParlAmericas](#)

## Setting standards and introducing transparency measures

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe identified transparency and open government as priorities in preventing corruption and promoting public ethics.<sup>49</sup> The principles of open government are directly connected to the government's willingness to address sexism and promote gender equality. Specifically, open government increases the availability of information about governmental activities, supports civic participation, promotes government integrity and leverages new technologies for transparency and accountability. These actions contribute to closing gender gaps in information, access and participation and allow women and gender advocates to have a greater say in how government services are provided and to hold officials accountable.<sup>50</sup>

These are equally important measures for preventing and combatting sexism in local and regional bodies. Local and regional bodies should publish key documents and information, promote public consultation processes, and support the monitoring and implementation of transparency measures around issues related to sexism and sexual harassment within the institutions and surrounding women’s political participation. Standards of behaviour may be agreed upon and formally established to prevent harmful sexist incidents from occurring within the institutions. Training may be offered to promote widespread understanding and awareness of new standards of behaviour.

## EXAMPLES

### STANDARD SETTING



#### Global – The Open Government Partnership

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Seventy-six countries (including Bosnia and Herzegovina) and over one hundred local governments—representing more than two billion people—along with thousands of civil society organisations are members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). In April 2020, the OGP launched a new phase focused on local government, called “OGP Local”<sup>51</sup>. At all levels of government OGP recommends the following actions to promote gender equality and end sexism:

- Proactively invite and positively encourage women’s organisations, gender networks, and leaders to participate in government multi-stakeholder forums;
- Work with gender advocates to analyse government action plans to identify where people of different genders have disproportionate levels of access or potential benefit, and then use that analysis to mainstream gender considerations into specific OGP commitments; and
- Consider a new commitment that uses open government to address a specific gap in women’s and girl’s services or policy needs.

Many more examples of open government recommendations for promoting gender equality can be found at the official website of the Open Government Partnership.



#### Canada

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Canada explicitly integrates gender in its open government action plan. Canada uses its gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) assessment to assess its open government plan to examine how various intersecting identity factors might impact the effectiveness of Canada’s open government work. Based on this review and feedback from a multi-stakeholder process and feminist and inclusive peer review, the Government of Canada produced its 10 National Action Plan Commitments for 2018-2020 and multiple other resources<sup>52</sup>.

## Leveraging regional and national gender equality networks

Gender equality networks are powerful tools for women in local government to gain fresh ideas and perspectives both about overcoming shared problems (such as sexism) as well as improving policy solutions for their constituencies. Such networks provide fora for advice and career support, build confidence and help people gain different perspectives. There are many examples of networks for locally elected women worldwide, ranging from national associations that bring together women at specific levels of government (for example, national networks of women mayors) to networks spanning global regions or groupings (for example, the Forum of Women Mayors in South East Europe,<sup>53</sup> the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network,<sup>54</sup> the Federation of Canadian Municipalities<sup>55</sup> and the Network for Locally Elected Women of Africa – REFELA, in its French acronym).<sup>56</sup>

### EXAMPLES

#### GENDER EQUALITY NETWORKS



#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

The BiH Women's Network is an informal group of civil society organisations and individuals who advocate and deal with women's human rights and the promotion of gender equality, and which promotes anti-discrimination, freedom of decision, equality, non-violence and anti-militarism, and accepts feminist values of action - peace, solidarity, trust, togetherness, equality and diversity.<sup>57</sup>

The Women's Solidarity Network is a resource online platform that was created to increase access to information about the activities of women's organisations and feminist initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina and to increase synergy and solidarity in the fight for gender equality and women's empowerment. At the same time, the purpose of the platform is to increase access to information by the general public in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>58</sup>

The Roma Women's Network 'Uspjeh' is a non-governmental, non-profit, independent, voluntary, non-partisan association that brings together women's local non-governmental organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Women's Roma Network operates throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The general goal and direction of the Roma women's network is to improve the status of the Roma national minority with an emphasis on Roma women in Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>59</sup>

The Safe Network was created in 2001 (as an informal network), and it consisted of 32 non-governmental organisations and government institutions, which deal with the problem of violence in the entire area of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>60</sup>



## Integrating new technologies

Although social media and other new technologies can transmit and amplify harmful sexist messages, they are equally potent tools for educating and awareness-raising. Webinars, online rallies and Q&A sessions can offer women in local politics the opportunity to both share experiences on a peer-to-peer basis as well as to reach out to the public and raise awareness of the harmful effects of sexism against women in politics. Podcasting is another useful tool. Podcasts can be used to offer more in-depth information on challenges and opportunities. Podcasts can also be used to focus on more targeted audiences such as local women councillors/aspirants and male politicians.

### EXAMPLES

#### LEVERAGING NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO END SEXISM IN GOVERNMENT



#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Javnaraspava.ba”<sup>61</sup> is a web platform where you have the opportunity to directly participate in decision-making processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the opportunity to communicate with those who make those decisions. Through this page, anyone can learn more about the process of passing laws in BiH and the work of legislative bodies at the state and entity levels; get involved in the discussion of the proposed laws that are in the procedure and communicate with the elected parliamentarians. It creates a direct link to elected officials. Among many initiatives, this platform created direct links with female MPs who had several gender-specific proposals including legislation on violence against women.

**Humanity in Action BiH**, with the support of the German Marshall Fund and the United Kingdom Government, organised a two-day podcast workshop as part of the project “Women and power - strengthening the visibility and perception of women in public space”, which was held in Sarajevo on October 29 and 30 in 2021 for 12 participants who come from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project aims to enable new generations of female leaders who create media content and use multimedia platforms to affirm equality, with a special focus on women’s political participation, to gain additional knowledge and tools in creating audio and video podcasts – an increasingly popular format in domestic and regional public space.<sup>62</sup>



## Europe

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The Council of Europe’s online Human Rights Channel presents a range of helpful information on how to end sexism. Accessible in multiple languages, the resources available include information on understanding sexism, videos, statistics, examples and recommendations. It also includes an interactive quiz to test users’ knowledge and personal perceptions of sexism.<sup>63</sup>



## Global

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Many podcasting examples to promote women’s political participation and reduce sexism exist in other parts of the world, for example the Canadian “No Second Chances”<sup>64</sup> podcast follows the political journeys of 12 female ministers, and helps listeners understand how gender played a role in both low and high points of their careers. “The 23%: Conversations with Women in Government” is a podcast that talks to women leaders about what motivated them to run for office, lessons they’ve learned along the way and the policy battles they’re facing ahead.<sup>65</sup>

## Institutional channels for combatting sexism within local government

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the legal framework concerning gender equality is based on the Constitution, which upholds the principle of equality for all individuals before the law and public institutions. It explicitly prohibits discrimination based on various factors, including race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, political affiliation, wealth, or social background. The Law on Gender Equality in BiH – consolidated text (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 32/10) regulates, promotes, and protects gender equality, ensuring equal opportunities and equal treatment for all individuals regardless of gender, in both the public and private spheres of society, and it governs protection against gender-based discrimination. The Anti-Discrimination Law (Official Gazette of BiH, Nos. 59/09 and 66/16) establishes a framework for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all individuals in Bosnia and Herzegovina and regulates the system for protection against discrimination. This legal framework provides a basic framework for combatting sexism in local government.

## Codes of conduct and ethical guidelines

Local government codes of conduct establish consistent standards of behaviour for members of local councils in how they conduct themselves with their elected colleagues, with staff and with the public. Written codes of conduct help ensure that members of local government share a common basis for acceptable conduct. They enhance public confidence in institutions and elected officials.

Local council codes typically represent an additional set of rules to supplement existing regional or national legislation or policy. Some global jurisdictions (such as the Province of Ontario, Canada<sup>66</sup>) require local governments to establish codes of conduct for local elected officials and certain boards. They may also mandate these codes to include specific matters, including sexism and discrimination. Local government codes of conduct may also be introduced because the issues related to the responsible conduct of individual elected officials fall outside the mandates of existing offices responsible for government oversight. Alternately, they may be adopted as a first line of action in a broader hierarchy of government oversight.

Codes of conduct should include clauses to ensure women's and men's equal participation by specifying guiding principles and specific practices that constitute prohibited sexist and discriminatory behaviour. These should include non-criminal sexual harassment, intimidation, bullying (including cyberbullying and social bullying), hate speech and disrespectful behaviours. Including these behaviours in codes of conduct is essential because they provide a basis to sanction perpetrators, and they boost public awareness and multiparty unity on the topic.

Codes of conduct may also contain rules following a finding of misconduct. Codes may include rules regarding enforcement, or they may reference other governing policies. In some cases, codes of conduct may be supplemented by by-laws that establish local-level accountability officer positions to handle complaints and enforcement. Complaints of violation of codes of conduct may be made by members of the public, staff as well and other members of the local council. Codes of conduct may accommodate both formal and informal complaints.

## EXAMPLES

### CODES OF CONDUCT AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES



#### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

In 2020, the Central Election Commission issued the publication "The Role of Social Media in Election Process – Guidelines for Election Actors."<sup>67</sup>

The Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina also adopted a Zero Tolerance Policy on Sexual Harassment<sup>68</sup> which includes commitments and definitions of unwanted behaviour based on sex/gender including commitments to prevent and investigate all incidents of sexual harassment.

The Code of Ethics of the Parliament of FBiH states that elected representatives are obliged to perform their duty without bias, prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. It enumerates forms of discrimination, including direct and indirect discrimination, harassment of any kind on a prohibited basis, sexual harassment, mobbing, segregation, and issuing orders for discrimination or incitement to discrimination and victimisation. In addition, the Code elaborates on what harassment and sexual harassment entail, including specific examples of non-ethical behaviour.<sup>69</sup>

The Code of Conduct of Elected Officials in the Novi Grad Sarajevo Municipality<sup>70</sup> defines several basic principles of standardised behaviour which citizens expect from elected representatives in the performance of their duties, which will maintain and strengthen citizens' trust in institutions, in the function of general interest. It specifically regulates the topic of sexual harassment and the prohibition of victimisation.



## Europe

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The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life<sup>71</sup> establishes a formal commitment by local and regional governments to use their powers and partnerships to achieve greater equality. To assist in the implementation of these commitments, each signatory authority undertakes to draw up an Equality Action Plan, which sets out its priorities, actions and resources and undertakes to engage with all of the institutions and organisations in its territory, to promote the achievement of real equality in practice. In 2023, four local communities in BiH have submitted signatures of the Charter, namely Gradiška, Mostar, Sarajevo and Srbac.



## Canada

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Provincial governments provide various resources to assist local governments in developing their codes of conduct. These include template documents and companion guides, reports on best practices across the province or between other provinces and links to other helpful material.

Model Code of Conduct: [https://www.gov.nl.ca/mpa/files/Municipal\\_Official\\_Code\\_of\\_Conduct\\_Template-2.docx](https://www.gov.nl.ca/mpa/files/Municipal_Official_Code_of_Conduct_Template-2.docx)

Local government ethics and inclusion resources: <https://bit.ly/2FrU3e1><https://fcm.ca/en/resources/wilg/women-in-local-government-resource-library>



## Georgia

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In 2017 the Government of Georgia approved the General Rules of Ethics and Conduct in a Public Institution, according to which a public servant shall avoid committing any form of discrimination, as well as refrain from using hate speech in public and/or making discriminatory comments. Moreover, the rules provide for the prohibition of sexual harassment and ensuring equality, through the creation of equal opportunities and refraining from stereotypes.<sup>72</sup> One of the platforms where a person can report a violation of ethical norms is the online portal Mkhileba.gov.ge run by the Bureau of Civil Service of Georgia. Several Georgian municipalities,

such as Baghdati and Vani, have adopted codes of conduct for civil servants which echo the abovementioned rules, incorporating equality and non-discrimination and the prohibition of sexual harassment.<sup>73</sup>



## Serbia

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The Republic Electoral Commission has adopted a Code of Conduct for Political Entities during election campaigns. The code includes provisions promoting gender equality and prohibiting sexist language and behaviour. It encourages political parties and candidates to respect the principles of gender equality and to avoid discrimination or offensive language based on gender during electoral campaigns.<sup>74</sup>

## Accountability Officers and Ethics Standards Boards

Enforcement of codes of conduct may be overseen by accountability officers or ethics standards boards. These officials must ensure that all parts of codes of conduct are equally protected, which may require supplemental training regarding gender provisions in cases where these are newly introduced.

Globally, there are various types of accountability officer roles that may enforce gender provisions at the local level. These are usually established under local by-laws and may include:<sup>75</sup>

- *a municipal Ombudsperson*. The municipal Ombudsperson's function is to investigate, in an independent manner, decisions and recommendations made and acts of the administration of a municipality, local boards and certain municipal corporations. The municipal Ombudsperson is a separate office from the central or regional Ombudsperson, who may also have a role concerning local government;
- *a closed meeting investigator*. A local government (municipality or other) may appoint an independent investigator to investigate complaints about closed meetings (i.e. meetings where the public is not invited to attend). Should the local government not appoint an investigator, the Ombudsperson at the next jurisdiction level would be expected to serve in that role;
- *an Integrity Commissioner*. Integrity Commissioners report to local councils. Their role is to independently apply the code of conduct and associated procedures, rules and policies governing ethical behaviour of local government members. They may issue periodic watchdog reports or investigate specific complaints. If a Commissioner's inquiry into an ethics complaint finds a violation of the code of conduct, the local council may impose a penalty at their discretion.

In contrast to creating an individual role to oversee ethics, many countries establish Local Government Standards Panels or Boards to administer justice and resolve complaints relatively quickly and to provide the local government sector with

guidance and benchmarks about acceptable standards of behaviour.<sup>76</sup> Under this model, local councils choose to elect an independent standards board periodically (annual or other) that is representative of political representation as well as local diversity (sex, race, religion, etc.). Standards Boards have the authority to make binding decisions to resolve allegations of minor misconduct and to deal with complaints about council members having allegedly committed a breach of one or more of the provisions of their code of conduct. To be effective, they must establish clear procedures for filing complaints, both for internal and external actors. Standards boards may have the authority to apply sanctions and temporarily or permanently suspend council members who are found guilty of non-criminal sexual harassment and other prohibited behaviours. Appeals to local standards boards may be made to higher authorities, such as the Ombudsperson.

## EXAMPLES

### ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICERS AND ETHICS BOARDS



#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

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The AGE MHRR BiH, GC FBiH and GC RS monitor and examine violations of the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality of BiH committed by an act, action or inaction of a body or legal entity and undertake activities to eliminate them. This includes the possibility to seek protection in cases of sexual and gender-based harassment as a form of discrimination. The uniform rules for receiving and processing requests for examination of violations of the Law on Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina regulate the procedure for receiving and processing requests for examination of violations.<sup>77</sup>

**Commissions for gender equality** have been established in almost all local self-government units in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Commissions/boards primarily deal with monitoring the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality in BiH and the Gender Action Plan of BiH at the local level, as well as the integration of international standards in the field of gender equality.<sup>78</sup>

**The Institution of the Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina** has a special role in the protection against sexual and gender-based harassment as a form of discrimination. The Anti-Discrimination Law (Official Gazette of BiH, no. 59/09 and 66/16) determines these competencies, as well as the basis for establishing a special department within the framework of the Institution, which exclusively considers cases of discrimination against legal or natural persons in any which area of life. The Institution issued Guidelines to inform the public on this procedure and to streamline its process.<sup>79</sup>



## Austria

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In 2011 an advisory board on anti-sexism to the Austrian Advertising Council was installed including qualified gender experts to counteract gender-discriminatory advertising and raise awareness of the advertising industry for a non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes.

Out of 278 complaints received in 2012, more than half dealt with “gender discriminatory advertising” (53.41%). The anti-sexism Advisory Board reviewed these complaints and provided its opinion to the Council. In 13 cases (7.39%), the Council called for immediately stopping the campaign. Similar models can be applied for local government.



## Canada

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The Integrity Commissioner for the city of Vaughn, Ontario filed a Code of Conduct Complaint Investigation Report to the city council following receipt of a complaint with allegations of sexual assault, harassment and reprisal by a deputy mayor and a councillor in 2017. Referencing the provisions of the municipal code of conduct that protect against sexual harassment, the report documented the investigation and recommended sanctions (reprimand and suspension of remuneration for 90 days), corrective actions (apology to the complainant and the city) and the suspension or removal of some procedural powers. Ultimately, the deputy mayor and councillor resigned.<sup>80</sup>

## Role of associations of local and regional authorities to respond

Associations of local and regional authorities give voice to the needs of local government at a national or regional level and promote local needs. These associations can play important roles in responding to sexism and harassment in local government in several ways. They can collect appropriate data, monitor progress, raise awareness, advocate for improvements, educate local councils and municipal employees about solutions at the council level and set standards for their members. Associations of local and regional authorities may require capacity-building support directly to achieve some of these goals.



### Bosnia and Herzegovina

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An informal network for gender equality at the local level was established in the framework of the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republika Srpska. The informal network was created as part of the Project “Strengthening the Role of the Associations of Municipalities and Cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina” in co-operation with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). It has a dedicated website/platform<sup>81</sup> which aims to share materials and promote good practices.

The Women’s Forum for Development<sup>82</sup> (WF4D) is an independent and self-sustainable platform (virtual and real) for female leaders in BiH, which should be a mechanism for providing mutual support for networking, learning and positive exchange of experiences and opinions between existing female leaders and women who want to become so in BiH. The goal of this platform is to enable female leaders and empower them to take effective and concrete measures for the positive transformation of their communities, from the local level to the entity, state, regional and higher levels. Female leaders, from all spheres of life and professions, with different experience, knowledge and skills, are considered essential actors of positive social transformation towards achieving the goals of sustainable development, greater gender equality and a better quality of life for the citizens of BiH.



### Australia

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Local Government Managers Australia, Queensland (LGMA Queensland, founded in 1957) supports local government advocacy, collaborative learning and professional development. The LGMA offers an in-depth Framework for Action to Promote Gender Balance in Senior Management in Local Government.<sup>83</sup> The Framework is an internal guidance document outlining the vision, strategic priorities and mechanisms to assist in integrating gender awareness through local government organisational cultures and management, as well as within the LGMA itself. It includes guidelines on implementation, monitoring, reporting and review.



## Responses through the National Office of the Ombudsperson

The Human Rights Ombudsman Institution is an independent institution that deals with the protection of the rights of natural and legal persons, per the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and international agreements that are included in the appendix to the Constitution. The Institution of the Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH considers cases related to violation of human rights committed by any body of Bosnia and Herzegovina, its Entities and Brčko District. Cases are formed based on individual complaints of legal or natural persons or ex officio.

Every natural and legal person who has a legitimate interest, regardless of citizenship, race, gender, religion and national affiliation, can apply to the Institution of the Ombudsman for Human Rights of Bosnia and Herzegovina. A complaint addressed to the Institution will not cause any criminal, disciplinary or any other sanctions for its applicant. Complaints are submitted in writing, by mail, fax, e-mail or by personal delivery. The appeal should include a brief description of the events, facts or decisions that led to the filing of the appeal. The complaint must be signed by the person making the complaint, or an authorised representative. It is preferable to attach photocopies of the relevant documentation with the appeal if it exists. The Institution may refuse to consider anonymous complaints that it believes to be malicious, unfounded, in which there is no complaint, which cause damage to third parties, or which are presented to the Institution outside of the 12 months after the occurrence of events, facts or decisions that the person complains about. If it finds a violation of rights, the Institution issues recommendations to the competent authorities to take measures to correct human rights violations or poor functioning of the administration. Also, the Institution advises citizens on how to use the most suitable legal means or refers them to the appropriate institutions.<sup>84</sup>

### EXAMPLES

#### ACTIONS TO STOP SEXISM AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT



#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

The AGE MHRR BiH has engaged in several efforts to stop sexism and sexual harassment in politics. In 2014, together with several stakeholders, it produced the Gender Equality Pledge for Political Parties<sup>85</sup> with eleven commitments to be undertaken by the political parties. A total of eight major political parties have signed the Pledge and have committed themselves to, among other interventions, “condemn sexist comments, hate speech or any other form discrimination by members of political parties” and “demonstrate commitment to the principle of non-discrimination.”

AGE MHRR BiH has additionally issued a Recommendation regarding gender stereotypes, and misogynistic and sexist speech<sup>86</sup> which was based on the Recommendation CM/Rec (2019) on Prevention and fight against sexism.

In addition to these efforts, the GC FBiH and the GC RS regularly work to promote non-biased communication free of sexism. Both have engaged with several actors to adopt measures to combat sexism and sexual harassment.



## Ukraine

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In 2019, before the onset of war in 2021, the Ombudsperson considered 385 appeals of citizens reporting over 420 cases of discrimination (including 44 cases of gender-based discrimination) and launched 61 legal proceedings. The Ombudsperson considered reports on cases of gender-based discrimination and documented multiple cases of public sexist insults towards women politicians from male politicians, violation of their human dignity, and mistrust of their professionalism.<sup>87</sup>



## Croatia

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Croatia has a dedicated Ombudsperson for Gender Equality who independently monitors the enforcement of the Gender Equality Law and other regulations on gender equality and reports to the Croatian Parliament at least once a year. First created in 2003, the Gender Equality Ombudsperson handles between 400-500 more cases each year, including several litigation cases.<sup>88</sup> One initiative of this office was working with the Croatian Radio and Television (HRT). The HRT training centre, in co-operation with the Office of the Gender Equality Ombudsperson, introduced training programmes for editors and journalists on the elimination of stereotypes and of content that presents men and women in a sexist, offensive or degrading manner in the media.

## Sanctions, Enforcement & Remedies

The constitutions of BiH, the RS and FBiH do not specifically regulate gender-based violence but place the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as one of the international documents which applies directly in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Sexual harassment is prohibited by the laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina and actions that constitute sexual harassment can be held criminally and civilly liable. Criminal liability is currently stipulated by the Law on Gender Equality in BiH and the Criminal Code of the RS, while civil liability is stipulated by the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination and several other laws, especially those regulating working relations.

The first law that defined sexual harassment was the Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina - revised text ("Official Gazette of BiH", No. 16/03). Definitions of harassment were covered by amendments in 2009 when it was clearly stated that sexual harassment is a form of discrimination based on gender. The law, in addition to judicial protection from Article 23, provides for criminal responsibility, namely a prison sentence of 6 months to 5 years (Article 23, paragraphs 1 and 2 and Article 29).

The criminal codes of RS and FBiH include several acts which represent violence against women and domestic violence. The Criminal Code of Republika Srpska ("Official Gazette of RS," No. 64/17) includes sexual harassment as a criminal offence whilst the Criminal Code in FBiH has not yet been amended to include this criminal act. Despite significant efforts, the Council of Europe Expert Group on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) committee still found that the criminal codes need to be amended to be harmonised with the Istanbul Convention.<sup>89</sup>

The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination in BiH also creates the framework for the realisation of equal rights and opportunities for all persons in the country and regulates the system of protection from discrimination, inter alia, based on gender. The process of amending this Law to align it with the relevant EU Directives has led to the Law protecting the citizens of BiH from discrimination in all areas of life. This includes labour and employment, social and health protection, judiciary and administration, housing, public information, education, sport, culture, science and the economy. Furthermore, this Law prohibits sexual and every other form of harassment, mobbing, segregation and incitement to discriminate.

Laws on protection from domestic violence were adopted in both the RS, FBiH and BD as special pieces of legislation focused solely and comprehensively on the protection of victims of this crime. The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in the RS was adopted in 2012, with the last amendments introduced in 2019. FBiH adopted the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in 2013. Finally, in 2018 the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in Brčko District of BiH was adopted. The relevant segments of this report will present these Laws in more detail.

## EXAMPLES

### TRANSPARENT PROCEDURES FOR ENFORCING CODES OF CONDUCT



#### Bosnia and Herzegovina

In October 2019, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the proposal of the AGE MHRR BiH, adopted a "Guide for taking effective measures to prevent harassment based on gender and sexual harassment at the workplace in the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>90</sup>". Based on this Guide, almost all ministries and institutions at the state level had to take effective measures to

prevent gender-based harassment and sexual harassment at the workplace in BiH institutions and have to adopt and publish a decision on a policy of zero tolerance for acts of sexual and gender-based harassment. Moreover, institutions have to appoint counsellors for the prevention of harassment based on gender and sexual harassment in the workplace. The Agency continuously provides training to all appointed counsellors.

In December 2022, following a proposal of the GC FBiH, the Government of FBiH passed a Decision on the policy of zero tolerance towards acts of sexual and gender-based harassment in federal administrative bodies, federal administrative organisations, services and other bodies founded by the Government of FBiH. In this way, the commitment to a policy of zero tolerance towards acts of sexual and/or gender-based harassment in all federal administrative bodies was highlighted. Employees in federal administrative bodies are obliged to maintain the highest level of professionalism and integrity in their work and refrain from actions that may represent this type of harassment, in connection with work or concerning third parties.

In 2021, the Sarajevo Cantonal Government adopted the Protocol<sup>91</sup> on handling sexual and gender-based harassment as a form of violence in administrative bodies, public enterprises, public institutions and legal entities founded by the Sarajevo Canton. The protocol defines an internal procedure for dealing with unwanted behaviour internally, including sexual and gender-based harassment. The obligation to appoint a counsellor whose obligation is to provide the victim with appropriate help and counselling is defined. The Protocol also contains guidelines on what to do if you believe you are exposed to sexual and gender-based harassment and also includes important contacts for formally reporting unwanted behaviour. The protocol has been submitted to all institutions and is available on the website of the Sarajevo Canton Government.



## Canada

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Transparent and accessible complaints procedures support the effective enforcement of codes of conduct. The City of Barrie set forward clear procedures for filing complaints about violations of codes of conduct and published them on their website, summarised as follows:

### *Informal Complaints*

Any individual who has identified or witnessed behaviour or activity by a member that appears to be in contravention of the Code may address their concerns in the following manner:

- Advise the member that their behaviour or activity contravenes the Code;
- Encourage the member to stop the prohibited behaviour or activity;
- If applicable, confirm to the member your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his or her response to the concern identified;

- Keep a written record of the incidents including dates, times, locations, other persons present, and any other relevant information, including steps taken to resolve the matter;
- If not satisfied with the response received through the informal process, an individual may proceed with a formal complaint through the Integrity Commissioner.

### *Formal Complaints*

Any individual who has identified or witnessed behaviour or activity by a member that appears to be in contravention of the Code may address their concerns through the formal complaint process:

- All formal complaints must be made using the City's Complaints Form / Affidavit.
- The complaint must include an explanation as to why the issue raised may be a contravention of the Code and any evidence in support of the allegation must be included with the Complaints Form/Affidavit; Complaints must include information on witnesses, as well as the specific details of the case and be filed with the Integrity Commissioner.

The Integrity Commissioner<sup>92</sup> will determine whether the matter is a complaint concerning non-compliance with the Code and/or a violation of other codes including a Criminal Matter or a violation of codes on Discrimination or Harassment.

## **Ensuring adequate resources**

To offer effective remedies as well as to advance the other measures suggested in this guide, local governments should ensure the provision of adequate funding. Strong institutional responses to sexism within local government require dedicated funds and human resources. For example, staffing of accountability positions, training and awareness-raising, processes to develop and adopt codes of conduct and investigation and reporting cannot be adequately implemented unless sufficient and consistent resources are allocated to them.

According to the Law on Gender Equality of BiH, national and entity authorities as well as cantonal and local authorities must undertake all relevant and necessary measures to implement the provisions of this law and of the BiH Gender Action Plan (GAP), which includes the implementation of BiH GAP activities and measures through regular work programmes and the securing of associated budget funds (Article 24).

At present, budget allocation for gender-related institutional mechanisms in Bosnia and Herzegovina is low. According to official reports, the percentage of the national BiH budget that is annually invested in the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women is 0.05%. This share is intended for the work of the BiH Gender Equality Agency and includes grants to nongovernmental organisations in

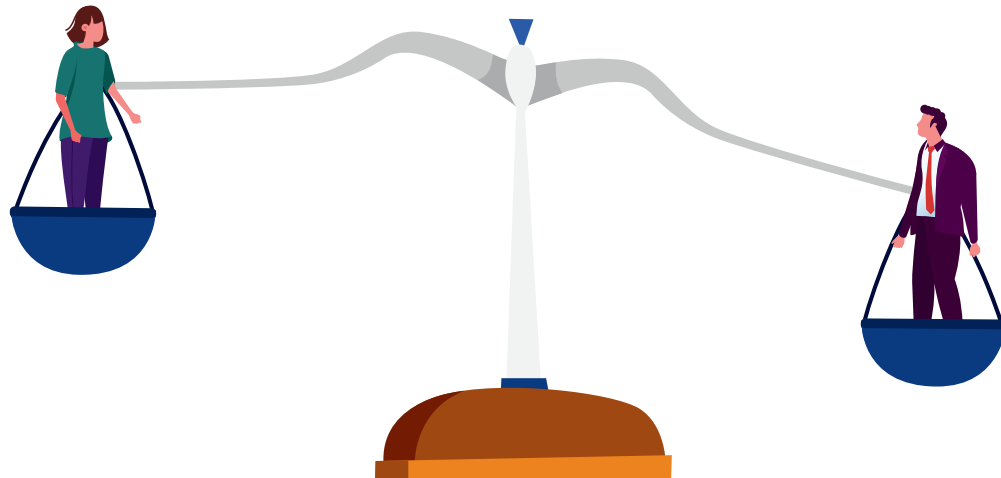
the field of gender equality. The situation is similar at the entity level, and thus in FBiH, it is estimated that about 0.05% of the total FBiH budget is allocated for the promotion of gender equality, while in RS this percentage is approximately 0.04%.

The governments in Bosnia and Herzegovina have begun efforts to introduce gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) into Bosnia and Herzegovina's legislative framework since 2009.

Since 2012, the Budget Management Information System (BMIS) was upgraded to include a specific GRB module and the mandatory requirement to include specific gender indicators in all line ministry programmes before their submission to the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Continued efforts have also resulted in GRB being completely embedded within the legislative framework. In 2020, the government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) issued a detailed declaration on the development of GRB, which was included in the FBiH Budget Framework Paper (2021–2023).

A major obstacle to gender-responsive budgeting remains the fact that budgets at all levels of government are still prepared and adopted in a line-item format, while budget requests also include programme formats. This prevents the calculation of the actual cost of gender equality initiatives, including a report on gender budgeting.

# Promoting gender equality in local-level government through concrete measures



The specific strategies for combatting sexism in local government that have been suggested above will only succeed if they are accompanied by efforts to address the root causes of sexism by promoting greater gender equality in local government. This final section provides a brief overview of some key measures for promoting gender equality in local government.

## Adopting Temporary Special Measures (TSM) for local government

Temporary Special Measures (TSM) are “aimed at accelerating the improvement of the position of women to achieve substantive equality with men, and to effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women, as well as to provide them with compensation for inequalities and harm suffered.”<sup>93</sup>

Gender quotas (the most well-known form of TSM) have been proven effective at increasing women’s representation in elected bodies, worldwide. Gender quotas can be either legislated or voluntary. There are two forms of legislated quotas: candidate quotas and reserved seats. As the name implies, candidate quotas guarantee a more equitable gender balance among candidates but do not ensure that the target will be met. Reserved seat quotas set aside a designated proportion of seats for the under-represented gender, thereby guaranteeing a minimum level of representation.

BiH Election Law contains a quota for the least represented gender. Article 4.19 establishes a mandatory quota, stipulates the percentage of 40% as the minimum representation for one gender and has a mandatory ranking rule. The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina has the authority to reject any list of candidates that is not drawn up per this rule. Article 4.19 reads:

*“Every candidate list shall include candidates of male and female gender. The minority gender candidates shall be distributed on the candidates list in the following manner: at least one (1) minority gender candidate amongst the first two (2) candidates, two (2) minority gender candidates amongst the first five (5) candidates, and three (3) minority gender candidates amongst the first eight (8) candidates, et seq. The number of minority gender candidates must be at least equal to the total number of candidates on the list divided by three (3), rounded down to the nearest integer.”*

This quota has had a positive effect on the participation of women in legislative bodies. Before the introduction of the quota, the participation of women in the State and entity parliaments was extremely low (below 5%). During the 1996 General Elections, one woman was elected to the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH (PSBiH) and the National Assembly of the RS (NSRS), and two women were elected to the Parliament of FBiH (PFBiH). After the introduction of the quota for the General Elections in 1998, there was a significant increase in the participation of women to over 30% in PSBiH, 14.95% in PFBiH and 22.9% in NSRS. However, looking at the data from 1998 onwards, the representation of women has remained between 7.1% and 26%, which means that factors other than the design of the quota have influenced women’s participation in politics. Several studies confirm this finding<sup>94</sup> because the interplay with other elements of the electoral system, such as the voting method (open lists), the size of the electoral unit and the number of political entities reduces the impact of the gender quota. In this sense, it cannot be expected that, within the current electoral system framework, the quota will result in more significant access for women in parliament in the future. For this reason, women’s voices will only be heard if action is taken to reduce the influence of other factors that shape the current state of women’s participation in elections.

In addition to the quota in the BiH Election Law, the Law on the Financing of Political Parties of BiH also contains an affirmative measure stipulating that when allocating funds to parliamentary parties, an additional 10% of available funds will be allocated to parties in proportion to the number of parliamentary seats belonging to the less represented gender. This provision is contained in the Laws on Budget Execution regulating the financing of political parties represented in entity and Brčko District parliaments.

## Other structural reforms and policies

In addition to legislative changes to electoral laws and systems, many initiatives can be taken at the local level to enhance gender equality and accordingly, combat sexism. These include measures taken directly by local governments, as well as measures by national or regional bodies to govern local authorities. Briefly, these include:



## **Introduce term limits**

Term limits for councillors promote turnover and open new spaces for women to compete. Term limit proposals can be implemented with significant lead time, to allow sitting members to achieve their policy goals.

## **Promote gender-equal workspaces for local councillors**

This may include instituting parental leave programmes, providing childcare or covering the costs of childcare for local councillors, allowing remote attendance of meetings enhancing the use of technology in workplace accommodation and reviewing meeting times (avoiding evening, weekend meetings and events) to allow members with family care duties to attend.

## **Adopt policies on gender equality in leadership roles**

Local councils may adopt policies to promote gender equality through council activities, including ensuring balance on any committees and equal representation in leadership roles.

## **Proactive recruitment**

Local authorities should publicly promote gender-balanced recruitment ahead of election periods, to encourage equal representation. This may include targeted awareness-raising and information sessions.

## **Gender focal point**

Identifying a gender focus point or diversity committee within local government can be a mechanism to advance monitoring and new initiatives.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was a significant effort to establish a network of gender focal points. However, their capacity and budget allocations are low, and their roles have not been systematically defined.

## **Training**

Regular training activities for local councillors, online and in-person, can help improve the ability to recognise and combat sexism as well as to become better equipped to develop responsive local policy that advances equality in the community as well as in the institution.

## **Use Gender-Inclusive Language in public documents and statements (both oral and written)**

The European Union defines gender-inclusive language as “a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, inclusive language or gender-fair language. The purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory

or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm. Using gender-fair and inclusive language also helps reduce gender stereotyping, promotes social change and contributes to achieving gender equality.<sup>95</sup>

On the initiative of MP Ismeta Dervoz (Parliamentary Assembly of BiH) launched in 2013, gender-sensitive language was included in the rules of procedure of the House of Representatives and the House of Peoples of the PSBiH, and the methodology for the drafting of regulations in the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following this initiative, the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH adopted uniform rules in both houses. Additionally, instructions on the use of gender-sensitive language for the PSBiH and its Secretariat were created, with examples and tables of functions, occupations and titles, as well as a manual for the use of gender-sensitive language in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>96</sup>

For further examples, refer to:

*Gender in Local Government: A Sourcebook for Trainers* (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2008)<sup>97</sup>

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# Conclusion

Ending sexism in local government requires a concerted effort on the part of local elected representatives in partnership with civil society, law enforcement and regional and national authorities. Starting with reliable data, clear targets and a shared understanding of the scope and nature of the problem, local authorities can adopt a range of strategies to address the existence of sexism and promote gender equality in local politics.

Local and regional authorities can demonstrate their commitment to ending sexism by developing adequate structures and policies to combat sexism and promote equality within their institutions. Allocating sufficient resources and staffing structures of accountability ensures that these commitments are applied and enforced. By dedicating themselves to transparent practices and creating gender-inclusive institutional cultures, local governments build public trust and can successfully fulfil their roles.



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**P**reventing and combatting sexism in local politics is essential for guaranteeing equal participation for women and men and ensuring that their perspectives are represented in local policies.

This guide presents concrete measures for combatting sexism at the local level and ensuring that women play an active and meaningful role in the decision-making process. It is intended for use by local authorities and their national associations, as well as possible targets of sexist violence and gender-based discrimination, such as female candidates and local office holders.

Combatting sexism in local government requires a concerted effort from all levels of governance in partnership with law enforcement bodies and civil society. Practical steps such as collecting reliable data, raising awareness, and building capacities can create a shared understanding of the scope and nature of the problem. Altogether, clear targets and commitment on the part of public authorities, accompanied by sufficient resources for ensuring accountability will lead to transparent structures, a gender-inclusive institutional culture and greater equality.

ENG

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees it brings together 612 elected officials, representing more than 130,000 local and regional authorities.

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