

WCOS Call for the Inclusion of a Gender Perspective in the Berlin Process

The Berlin process is a platform for high-level cooperation between official representatives of the Western Balkan Six (WB6), consisting of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, and their peers in Berlin Process host countries¹. It aims to improve and intensify regional integration as well as accelerate the entire region's closer alignment with the European Union (EU). Its main areas of focus are infrastructure development and connectivity, business, regional youth exchanges, reconciliation, and science. These areas were discussed through individual working papers during the digital preparatory workshop of the Berlin Process Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2022 on October 19-20. The workshop sought to bring civil society voices and expertise into the Berlin Process by preparing joint recommendations in these areas.

At least seven women's rights civil society organisations (WCOS) attended the preparatory workshop and provided several recommendations on how attention to gender equality could be integrated into the consolidated civil society recommendations. However, the resulting draft recommendations that were shared lacked sufficient attention to gender equality.

Gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU and should be at the core of the EU Accession process, including the Berlin process, particularly given the EU and its Member States' (MS) commitments to 1) ensuring attention to gender equality during political dialogues, and 2) gender mainstreaming, as outlined in the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III.² GAP III also calls for diverse women's engagement in decision-making related to the Green Agenda and the digital transformation, which are among focal areas of the Berlin Process this year. As per GAP III, the Berlin Process should consider how these developments may affect diverse women and men, utilising gender analysis to inform political and financial commitments in these areas.

Considering the EU's commitments, we lament that again this year, as in years prior, WCOS and attention to gender equality have been consistently side-lined from the Berlin Process. Drawing from our expertise as think tanks, service-providers, and engagers of diverse women across the WB region, we, the undersigned members of the EQUAPRO Coalition,³ **call for: 1) improved gender mainstreaming of the Berlin Process; and 2) improved and consistent engagement of WCOS in this process.**

More specifically, we ask that the five working papers produced during the preparatory workshop of the Berlin Process Civil Society and Think Tank Forum include the following recommendations and introduce them during the Conference on 1-2 November. We also ask that WB governments, the EU, and MSs consider these recommendations and reflect them in

¹ German Cooperation Deutsche Zusammenarbeit, "[The Berlin Process is coming back to Berlin](#)", The Western Balkans Summit, Berlin 2022.

² European Commission, "[Gender Action Plan – putting women and girls' rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world](#)", November 2020.

³ The Coalition for Furthering Gender Equality in the EU Accession Process (EQUAPRO) is an informal coalition of WCOS in the WB, which is advocating to improve attention to gender equality in the EU Accession process and to include more women and WCOS in EU Accession-related political dialogues, policy processes, and as beneficiaries of EU external financing. Considering that gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU, we seek to improve the accountability of governments and institutions in implementing commitments to gender equality and women's rights during the EU Accession process.

ongoing policy discussions related to the Berlin Process. The recommendations are organised by working group paper:

1) Climate Change, Protection of the Environment, and Environmentally Sustainable Development

- WB governments and the EU should collaborate with WCSOs to conduct gender analyses to better understand how climate change impacts diverse women and men, using such gender analyses to inform policymaking, as per GAP III.
- WB governments should engage diverse WCSOs in policymaking processes related to climate change and environmentally sustainable development, ensuring inclusion of their expertise and participation of diverse women in these processes, as per GAP III.
- WB governments should maintain and publicise regularly gender-disaggregated data related to climate change and government programs to address it, facilitating monitoring inclusive of gender analysis that can contribute to improve policies in the future to better reach diverse women and men.
- WB governments should conduct information campaigns related to climate change and environmental protection, ensuring reach of diverse women and men.

2) Energy Transition

- WB governments should increase engagement of diverse women and WCSOs, including women experts in the energy sector and think tanks specialising in gender analysis, in conducting gender analyses and providing evidence to inform decision-making related to Energy Transitions.

3) Information Disorder

- WB governments and the EU should address the threats and violence specifically affecting women human rights defenders as a result of misinformation and fake news. This includes by improving legislation and ensuring access to justice, considering the added challenges and inequalities that women in face.
- WB governments should ensure the participation of diverse women in decision-making related to and the design of digital public infrastructure.
- WB governments should ensure diverse women and men have equal access to information about digital public services. Further, they should monitor the use of digital services, regularly publishing gender-disaggregated data to enable gender analysis that can inform policies to better address any identified inequalities.

4) Infrastructure Investments

- As per best practices in gender-responsive budgeting, WB states should ensure that the 1) prioritisation of investment projects, 2) their technical designs, 3) selection of contractors and implementation of work contracts, 4) monitoring of the use of investments, and 5) evaluation of these investments all attend to furthering gender equality and engage diverse women and men at each stage. They should ensure that such projects address the potentially different needs of diverse women and men.

5) EU Integration in a Changing Geopolitical Environment

- The war in Ukraine, its consequences for security and stability in Europe, and the EU's changing geopolitical priorities are impacting the WB region and its future. There is no

alternative to the European future of the WB. The EU and its MS need to better communicate the benefits of joining the EU with diverse women and men in the WB, countering damaging political narratives and misinformation.

- The EU should use mechanisms for monitoring (e.g., progress reports, political dialogues, and SAA committee meetings) and financing more effectively in holding WB governments accountable. When financing reforms related to EU Accession through the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) III, the EU should require that WB governments include objectives towards gender equality with accompanying indicators and budget allocations, so that the EU meets its GAP III commitments regarding the gender marker. The EU should refuse to approve actions until they have adequate gender mainstreaming. Moreover, as per GAP III, the EU should earmark additional funding for Actions that contribute specifically to furthering gender equality, particularly feminist development policies that have a gender-transformative approach.
- The EU should have a more strategic and comprehensive approach in building lasting partnerships with diverse WCSOs on gender equality, women's human rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights, including stronger involvement of diverse grassroots organisations in the EU's external actions and as part of EU Accession processes.
- EU MSs should attend more to gender equality in the WB and the importance of gender mainstreaming the EU Accession process. With its new Feminist Foreign Policy, Germany can serve as an example for other MSs. MSs also can be inspired the Swedish example in terms of funding for gender equality and WCSOs.

6) Overall and Additionally

- As per GAP III and Women, Peace and Security Agenda commitments, the EU and WB governments should ensure inclusion of WCSOs in high level political dialogues and decision-making. Formal mechanisms need to exist for consulting WCSOs at national, regional, and EU levels, ensuring inclusive and evidence-based policymaking and participatory democracies.
- Via transparent and fair criteria, WB governments should budget more for financing diverse WCSOs as think tanks, partners, and agents of change, supporting them in contributing knowledge and expertise to the aforementioned areas and processes.
- WB governments must take resolute actions against hate crimes and hate speech, ensuring responsible institutions have the capacities for timely prosecution, conducting efficient investigations and collecting gender-disaggregated data.
- WB governments need to implement commitments to improve LGBTQIA+ rights especially by introducing legislation for legal gender recognition and same sex partnerships.
- Related to furthering gender equality, WB governments, encouraged by the EU and EU MSs, need to prioritise: 1) improving gender mainstreaming in policymaking, 2) increasing women's political participation, 3) more effectively providing protection from gender-based violence, 4) taking measures against gender-based discrimination in labour, 5) harmonising legislation with the EU Work-Life Balance Directive and implementing it, and 6) ensuring access to paid maternity leave and social benefits for unpaid domestic workers and women in agriculture.
- The EU needs to take decisive actions in supporting human rights by scrutinising the implementation of policies and recommending specific actions, especially related to women's, LGBTQIA+, Roma, and disability rights.

We call up on the EU to lead by example when it comes to furthering gender equality. The country hosting the Berlin process, Germany, can play a particularly important role as an influential Member State with a Feminist Foreign Policy. We request Germany's support in ensuring that the EU Accession process upholds principles of gender equality and a "leave no one behind" approach, particularly as women and youth often are left behind and aside from decision-making "tables", such as the Berlin Process. We request your support in ensuring that women have a seat at the table and are engaged in these processes.

We remain ready to discuss these recommendations further.

Sincerely,

ASTRA – Anti-trafficking Action, Serbia to the signing organizations, Serbia
Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN), Albania
Autonomous Women's Centre, Serbia
Coalition Margins, North Macedonia
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banjaluka, BiH
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Skopje, North Macedonia
Kosovo Women's Network (190 diverse WCSOs, including Kosovar Centre for Gender Studies)
Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Sweden
Reactor – Research in Action, North Macedonia
Rights for All, BiH
Roma Center for Women and Children DAJE, Serbia
United Women Foundation from Banja Luka, BiH
Women's Rights Centre, Montenegro