



REPORT

Preparatory Meeting Gender Equality Forum within the Berlin Process 2024
Bar, Montenegro, June 11-13, 2024

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1. Introduction and Overview

The meeting commenced with an introductory speech by Ms. Olivera Dimic, who welcomed the participants and outlined the meeting's focus on three main themes: women's participation in the regional labor market, inclusion in decision-making processes for EU accession, and the role of reconciliation as a precondition for EU integration. Ms. Dimic emphasized the importance of recognizing and promoting women's contributions to these processes, highlighting the benefits of gender equality for sustainable development, democratic leadership, and lasting peace.

Following Ms. Dimic's remarks, Ms. Deborah Leuthold elaborated on the project, highlighting the participation of high-ranking officials from various networks such as MFA, PARL, EUIO, IPA, and the establishment of a Regional Gender Platform. She underscored the critical role of **regional cooperation for EU integration**, bolstered by strategic frameworks like the Economic and Investment Plan, Green Agenda, Connectivity Agenda, Common Regional Market, Digital Agenda, South-East Europe Strategy 2030, and Berlin Process Summit Declarations.

Additionally, Ms. Leuthold provided a concise overview of the Berlin Process initiated in 2014 by Angela Merkel to enhance regional cooperation among the Western Balkans Six (WB6). This initiative aims to advance EU integration by addressing unresolved bilateral and internal issues, promoting reconciliation within and between societies, fostering economic cooperation regionally, and laying the groundwork for sustainable economic growth.

Ms. Marigona Hoti provided an overview of the German **Feminist Foreign and Development Policy**, focusing on gender equality as crucial for global justice, prosperity, and social cohesion. The policy's vision and aim are to achieve equal social, political, and economic participation for all, regardless of various identities and characteristics, by dismantling discriminatory structures.

Details of the forthcoming Forum on Gender Equality, scheduled for September 19, 2024, were shared, with emphasis on the theme of feminist development policy to accelerate EU integration of the Western Balkans

2. Why Gender-Sensitivity within the Berlin Process Matters

Kvinna till Kvinna presented an overview of their work with 150 partner organizations across 20 countries, focusing on gender-based violence prevention and women's participation in economic and political decision-making. Their efforts aim to leverage

the EU accession process to strengthen women's rights and gender equality in the Western Balkans, supporting civil society organizations in advocacy and networking. Key recommendations from Kvinna till Kvinna included increasing senior leadership support for gender equality, providing regular training on gender mainstreaming, and ensuring that gender equality recommendations in EC country reports are clear, practical, and action oriented. They emphasized the importance of addressing gender-based violence within the judiciary section and ensuring access to quality justice. The organization underscored the Berlin Process's role in promoting sustainable development and gender equality. For the 2024 Berlin Summit Gender Side Event, Kvinna till Kvinna, in cooperation with BMZ and GIZ, will deliver a gender assessment of the Berlin Process and coordinate the inclusion of civil society organizations.

3. Working Groups

Participants engaged in working groups, dividing into three teams to evaluate and prepare potential recommendations on the following themes:

1. Economic Empowerment - Participation in Regional Labor Market:

- **Implement Incentive Programs for Employers:** Provide tax incentives and subsidies to companies meeting gender diversity targets, recognize businesses with exemplary practices, and offer financial incentives for family-friendly policies.
- **Support for CSOs:** Establish grant programs for CSOs focused on women's economic empowerment and encourage partnerships between CSOs, governments, and the private sector.
- **Promote Social Entrepreneurship:** Develop programs to support entrepreneurship, which is particularly targeting disadvantaged groups, as well as foster entrepreneurship among women and in rural areas, improve youth employment initiatives, and invest in infrastructure to enhance access to opportunities.
- **Facilitate Cross-Border Employment:** Develop regional mobility programs, extend agreements to recognize professional qualifications, and create online job portals for cross-border employment opportunities.
- **Harmonize Qualification Framework:** Establish regional standards and certification bodies, align vocational training with the harmonized framework.
- **Recognize and Regulate Unpaid Work.**
- **Prevent and Address Workplace Gender-Based Violence:** Enforce laws against harassment, provide training programs on prevention, and address violence.
- **Enhance Educational Opportunities for Women.**

2. Women's Inclusion in Decision-Making for EU Accession

- **Increase Quotas for Women:** Increase gender quotas in executive positions and local governance.
- **Regulate Participation in Negotiation Structures:** Mandate inclusion of women in high-level negotiation teams for EU accession.
- **Double Voting System:** Implement a double voting system for laws affecting women.
- **Prevent Online Discrimination:** Develop laws to prevent online discrimination against women.
- **Harmonization with EU Acquis:** Align laws with EU gender equality standards.
- **Enhance Monitoring Bodies:** Increase responsibilities of monitoring bodies, require regular reporting.
- **Improve Gender Statistics:** Enhance data quality and develop specific gender indicators.
- **Raise Public Awareness:** Launch campaigns and engage media to promote women leaders.
- **Establish Regional Resource Center:** Create a center for gender-sensitive policy development.
- **Capacity Building:** Implement training programs on gender mainstreaming for leaders.
- **Encourage Women's Participation:** Promote educational programs, establish mentorship initiatives.
- **Cooperation with CSOs:** Foster partnerships with CSOs, seek EU financial support.
- **Review Existing Structures:** Conduct analyses of structures dealing with gender issues.
- **Develop Joint Project Proposals:** Encourage development of joint proposals.
- **Share Expertise and Best Practices:** Facilitate knowledge exchange forums and regional conferences.

3. Reconciliation as Precondition for EU Integration

- **Regional Implementation of Resolution 1325:** Facilitate knowledge sharing, joint trainings, and develop collaborative projects among Western Balkan, ensuring the inclusion of women in peacebuilding.
- **Empower Gender Machinery:** Enhance capacities of gender machineries at all levels.
- **Promote Joint Initiatives on Shared Issues:** Identify common topics for joint initiatives, develop projects that foster cooperation and trust.
- **Establish Regional Revolving Fund:** Create a fund for projects supporting women's economic empowerment and sustainable development.

- **Link Reconciliation Efforts to Broader Women's Inclusion Strategies:**
Develop programs connecting reconciliation with women's inclusion and economic prosperity, integrating principles of Agenda 2030.

On the second day of the meeting the agenda for the Gender Side Event within the Berlin Process was presented, highlighting the key topics represented in the three working groups.

Participants discussed forthcoming steps leading up to the side event, with feedback provided on working groups and event planning. Key points raised included: The discussion centered around enhancing women's participation and empowerment in various sectors across the region. A key point was the need to strengthen the regional network of women entrepreneurs and address financial challenges that hinder their progress. Improving data collection on women entrepreneurship, especially in rural areas, was highlighted as essential for informed decision-making. Regional cooperation and EU integration were seen as critical, with an emphasis on ensuring gender-balanced negotiation teams and supporting existing regional coordination mechanisms. Including men as agents of change was considered vital for promoting gender equality. Participants stressed the importance of local-level involvement, advocating for the inclusion of women not only from the business sector but also those in executive positions and academia. The promotion of female mayors and the fight against hate speech and cyberbullying were also discussed. Economic empowerment and decision-making at the local level were deemed crucial, alongside the need for accurate data to address the needs of women in rural areas. The Berlin Process was discussed in terms of its focus on gender-related topics and the importance of addressing sensitive issues for regional stability. The role of civil society organizations, media, and social enterprises was underscored, along with the need for financial sustainability beyond project-based approaches. The importance of addressing hate speech, gender-based violence, and improving statistical data was reiterated, with a call to include marginalized groups such as Roma women. Participants highlighted the need for mentorship and networking among women, the significance of political support from male-dominated parties, and the replication of successful practices. The Berlin Process was seen as an opportunity to amplify the region's voice on gender issues, considering current EU trends. The discussion concluded with the emphasis on the critical role of local governments and the need for comprehensive inclusion to achieve synergy and success.

4. Conclusion and Potential Recommendations

The session underscored the importance of regional cooperation to accelerate EU integration for the Western Balkans. The collaboration between various networks and

stakeholders aims to foster sustainable growth and gender equality. The following drafts can serve as a foundation for the recommendations arising from the Forum:

1. Strengthen regional networks and data collection: Enhance the support system for women entrepreneurs and improve data collection to inform decision-making.
2. Increase awareness on hate speech and cyberbullying against women leaders, enhance women's participation in local governance and leadership roles, address issues of hate speech.
3. Implement and monitor Resolution 1325 to ensure women's meaningful participation in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconciliation efforts, empower women as agents of change in promoting peace, reconciliation, and sustainable development in the Western Balkans region.

Next Steps: On 2nd of September, an online meeting will take place with all stakeholders to discuss and finalize the recommendations and make the final preparations for the upcoming Forum on Gender Equality within the Berlin Process.