



Advocacy Card

Addressing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Slovakia's Development Cooperation

**International Gender Policy Network
November 2008**



Project Development Cooperation and Gender funded by the Presidency Fund

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment have come to be understood as crucial prerequisites to development, and have been included among the ambitious UN Millennium Development Goals, which were signed by 189 governments in 2000. These commitments have been declared to reduce the gender gap and empower women in the developing world. However, civil society organizations across Europe have emphasized that governments are failing to deliver on their promises. According to the Concord report of 2008, the situation is more critical in new EU Member States where the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment is "a secondary element for the moment" (Romania) or "non-existent in the development aid agenda" (Latvia).¹

The International Gender Policy Network (IGPN) has examined gender equality and women's empowerment in the development cooperation of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia as part of the project Development Cooperation and Gender. Within the framework of this advocacy activity, IGPN has prepared twenty two Advocacy Cards for individual countries and one Regional Advocacy Card. The documents demonstrate that gender equality and women's empowerment are not integrated into all phases of the development processes in this region, and a more intense and determined approach is needed from the development actors. The aim of this advocacy work is to call for action by reminding the national as well as European representatives of their formally anchored commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Advocacy Card for Slovakia focuses on its role as an emerging donor country. This document provides a review of Slovakia's key political and legal commitments, and examines the gender aspect of bilateral development cooperation. On the basis of these reviews, recommendations are made to the national government, and to the European institutions.

COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- ❖ Slovakia's commitment to gender equality is reflected in a **number of politically and legally binding documents** of the EU and EC (Treaty of Amsterdam, Maastricht Treaty, Charter for Fundamental Rights of the EU, CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals).
- ❖ In terms of the EU development cooperation policy implemented by the institutions as well as by the Member States, the crucial policy framework for promoting gender equality is the **European Consensus on Development**, agreed upon in 2005 by the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and the representatives of the member states, where gender equality is defined as a cross-cutting issue.² Furthermore, the **2007 Commission Communication on "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation"** is the first step towards a coordinated European approach to promoting gender equality and empowering women through development cooperation.³
- ❖ Related to the 2007 Commission Communication is the document "Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States", also known as the **Council Conclusion**. One of the conclusions is the following: "The

¹ No Time to Waste: European governments behind schedule on aid quantity and quality, *Concorde*, 2008, p. 15, <http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/extranetdocumentsENG/NavigationSecondaire/WorkingGroups/Aidwatch/Aidwatch2008/Light-Full-report.pdf>

² "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm

³ Ibid.

Council recognizes the Commission's and the Member States' specific responsibility to support developing country partners in eliminating discrimination and gender inequality by increasing visibility and accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation and to promote and engage in an enhanced political dialogue at all levels, including the highest political level, which incorporates gender equality explicitly as a central theme."⁴

- ❖ In line with these documents, the EU (and thus the Member States) has supported a **twin-track approach: gender mainstreaming** (mainstreaming gender issues into all aspects of development policy) and **specific measures** aimed at socioeconomic and political empowerment of women.

GENDER IN SLOVAKIA'S ODA

The Slovak ODA (Official Development Assistance) derives from the principles and objectives as specified in Slovak legislation (chiefly article no. 617/2007) and the Millennium Development Goals. In this context, the current strategy (2009-2013) refers briefly to supporting gender equality and enhancing women's status. However, the support to gender equality is not explicitly specified in the sectoral priorities of the bilateral aid. Likewise, there is no reference to gender equality in the Mid-term Strategy for trilateral and multilateral aid.

The development aid sector in Slovakia is a fledgling field with a limited number of specialists, not to mention at the MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) level which approaches the plans to expand this field in Slovakia as rather a matter of diplomacy and foreign affairs and not one of humanitarian principles. Likewise, the formation of the agency SAMRS (a new structure existing since January 2007) is in the process of developing its internal capacities. The Slovak NGOs (non-governmental development organizations) have been, in particular, pressing for higher professionalization of its staff not only as administrators of the approved grants, but chiefly as experts in the field of development assistance and cooperation. Enhancing understanding of gender equality and mainstreaming its principles into development assistance at SAMRS (Slovak Agency for International Development Assistance) and MFA requires further lobbying. However, funds and a willingness to be involved in this effort are limited at the NGO level.

There is no specific allocation of funds to gender-related projects. There has not been any assessment of development aid carried out from a gender perspective. In general, the awareness of gender equality is relatively low – on the part of the MFA as well as the NGOs. Between 2004 – 2006 (based on the scanning of the projects financed by Slovak Aid in the given period), there were in total 4 projects explicitly dealing with enhancing gender equality (2 in Afghanistan and 2 in Serbia). It is not possible to assess whether any other approved projects mainstreamed the commitment to supporting gender equality in developing their proposals. Nonetheless, given the low awareness on gender issues, it is likely that the gender approach was ignored in methodologies.

⁴ Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting with the Council on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation, Council of the European Union, 15 May 2007, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st09/st09561.en07.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT:

General Recommendations:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To comply with the Consensus on Development and the Commission Communication and place gender equality and women's empowerment at the center of Slovakia's ODA
- To comply with the Council Conclusions and make gender equality a core aspect in the development policy's programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and to provide special support for women that enables their economic and political empowerment

Concrete Recommendation:

- To improve the institutional framework for implementation of gender into the ODA
- To improve the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the gender aspect in ODA projects
- To improve the transparency of Slovakia's ODA by making all data, reports and documents available, and by developing the mechanism of grant allocation
- To establish a database of projects supported by the ODA program and make data on ODA projects publicly available (names of organizations, financial data, monitoring)
- To promote understanding of gender mainstreaming in development assistance and cooperation at MFA and SlovakAid
- Upon building adequate technical capacities of SlovakAid staff, carry out gender impact assessment of assistance provided by Slovakia
- To initiate closer cooperation between Slovak NGOs and women's rights organizations, in terms of policy and strategy formulation and encouraging Slovak women's organizations to find a new niche in the field of development cooperation
- To increase gender expertise among the Slovakian development constituency
- To ensure an increase in awareness among the Slovakian population about development problems, including gender issues
- To strengthen the humanitarian principle in the provision of Slovak ODA

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To press for EU Member States' development cooperation policy to include a gender equality perspective consistent with EU-level policy and commitments
- To provide information to new EU members on older EU donor states' experiences and good practices in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in development
- In relation to gender mainstreaming, the EU should be leading by example. European CSOs say that the EU is failing to deliver on its promises. Implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy is still hindered by a number of factors (mainly, the inadequate allocation of human and financial resources, the evaporation of policy commitments at the level of program implementation, limited gender competence among staff members, and the absence of political will) and is undermined by other EU policy initiatives, most importantly by the neo-liberal economic policy approach.⁵

⁵ Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, p. 7,

<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CSOs

- To lobby the national government to significantly strengthen the efforts towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment
- To build alliances among Slovak NGOs and women's organizations in order to strengthen the impact of advocacy and lobbying activities in the area of development cooperation
- To provide shadow reports to the government reports on gender equality commitments
- To monitor whether gender concerns are reflected on in Slovakia's ODA (in the Country Strategy Papers, in the project cycle, calls for proposals, and other official documents of the MFA)
- To help to increase gender expertise among the Slovakian development constituency
- To advocate for the inclusion of projects that specifically target gender issues, apart from having it as a cross-cutting issue

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