



## **Advocacy Card**

# **Addressing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EC' Pre-accession Assistance to Albania**

**International Gender Policy Network**

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## INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has made commitments to promote gender equality and women's empowerment outside its borders. As stated in the "2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality Between Women and Men", "Gender equality is a goal in itself, a human right and contributes to reducing poverty. The EU is a key player in international development efforts and adheres to internationally recognised principles such as the Millennium Development Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). It has reaffirmed gender equality as one of the five key principles of the development policy in the European Consensus on development."<sup>1</sup> Although the EU's different levels of commitment provide third countries with opportunities to address gender inequalities on their domestic soil, challenges remain to bring these commitments into effect.

Civil society organizations point at the gap between policy and practice: an overview of the European Commission's annual work, legislative programmes and policy strategy documents reveals a limited integration of gender concerns.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) and mainly women's groups in policy discussion and formulation lacks a clear mechanism, despite the obligation of EU institutions to support a political dialogue with them.<sup>3</sup> As an active promoter of gender equality, the International Gender Policy Network (IGPN) intends to engage in a dialogue with the Commission's Delegations in the countries of Eastern Europe, South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in the matter of the upcoming revision of the country and regional strategy documents (Country Strategy Papers, Regional Strategy Papers, Multi-annual Indicative Planning Documents). The IGPN has taken the opportunity of the midterm-review and the annual review of the country/regional strategy documents to highlight the weaknesses of development cooperation and pre-accession assistance in terms of gender concerns, and to advocate for improvements.

Within the framework of this advocacy activity, the IGPN has prepared twenty two Advocacy Cards for individual countries linked with IGPN, and one common Regional Advocacy Card. The aim of this advocacy work is to remind the European and national representatives of their policy commitments. The Advocacy Card for EC pre-accession assistance to Albania firstly provides an overview of EU's commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. Secondly, the strategy document for Albania is examined in the context of the EU's commitments to gender equality. Next, an assessment of gender issues in EC's assistance to Albania is presented. Finally, recommendations are proposed to the actors involved in various degrees in the preparation of the strategy document: the EU officials, national government and civil society organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010, *European Community*, (COM 2006) 92 final, p. 9, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0092:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, p. 10  
<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

<sup>3</sup> For more information see Chapter 2 in Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007  
<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

## COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- ❖ A 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, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals).
- ❖ The promotion of gender equality outside the EU is outlined as the number 6 priority area of the **2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men** (Commissions' Communication). This priority is further detailed as follows: 6.1 Enforcement of EU legislation in acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries and 6.2 Promotion of gender equality in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), external and development policies. The key actions taken by the Commission will include monitoring and promoting gender mainstreaming and specific measures in the ENP, EU external relations and development policies, at policy dialogue and programming levels (Regional/Country Strategy Papers and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers); at implementation level, particular attention will be devoted to gender mainstreaming in the new aid modalities (budget support and sector programmes).
- ❖ In terms of the EU development cooperation policy, 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>
- ❖ 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 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."<sup>6</sup>
- ❖ In line with these documents, the EU 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.

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<sup>4</sup> "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, [http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> 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>

## **GENDER IN THE STRATEGY DOCUMENT FOR ALBANIA**

### **Preface to the Strategy Document**

The aim of the EU's overall assistance to Albania, an EU potential candidate country, is to support the country's progress towards reaching the Copenhagen accession criteria and to prepare the country for possible future EU membership. For candidate or potential candidate countries, EC's programmes and financial assistance are formulated in the Instruments for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).<sup>7</sup> The EC's strategic planning document under the IPA is the Multi-annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD). Another important document is the Accession Partnership (AP) with an annual report called Progress Report, which monitors and assesses achievements of the country during the year.

The strategic areas of the MIPD 2007–2009 are covered by five components: Transition Assistance and Institution Building, Cross-border Cooperation, Regional Development, Human Resources Development, and Rural Development. Gender equality is considered a horizontal issue in the strategy documents. Potential candidate countries receive assistance through components I and II of the IPA. The MIPD is issued for a three year rolling period and is reviewed on an annual basis.

### **Analysis of the Document from a Gender Perspective**

The MIPD 2007-2009 for Albania mentions gender equality as a cross-cutting issue: "Equal opportunities and non-discrimination will be respected as regards gender and minorities at the programming and implementation stages, particularly in relation to socio-economic support programmes." (MIPD, p. 8)

Moreover, gender issues are pointed out in component I - Transition Assistance and Institution. In reference to political challenges, among the main priorities on p. 14 is stated the following: "Support to the vulnerable groups (minorities - including Roma, women, children, handicapped) to overcome their vulnerable and economic fragile situation and to protect them against discrimination. Support to victims of trafficking." In this context, programmes to be implemented include "Institution and capacity building for bodies offering social services, including social inclusion of vulnerable groups and minorities, trafficked persons. Support to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities." (MIPD, p. 16)

Yet, even though gender equality is introduced as a cross-cutting issue in the document, there are many instances when gender questions could be further elaborated. Gender issues could be more elaborated in component I - Transition Assistance and Institution Building, particularly in reference to poverty reduction, the labour market, education, or concerning development of policies compatible with the European standards (p. 19–23).

The European Partnership document emphasizes the need to strengthen the state committee on equal opportunities and fully implement the gender equality act (p. 10). Moreover, the document draws attention to further efforts to prevent domestic violence (p. 8). The Progress Report 2007 gives greater attention to gender equality, highlighting the achievements and deficiencies in this area. As stated in the report, "Albania is progressively approximating its legislation on working conditions and equal opportunities to European standards as regards gender equality. However, the State Committee on Equal Opportunities remains weak and the Gender Equality Act remains largely unimplemented. Further action is needed to facilitate women inclusion in the labour market and their participation in the

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<sup>7</sup> In January 2007, IPA replaced a series of EU programmes and financial instruments for candidate countries or potential candidate countries, namely PHARE, PHARE CBC, ISPA, SAPARD, CARDS and the financial instrument for Turkey

decision-making process. Albania remains at an early stage in mainstreaming gender in employment as well as in other policies.” (p. 33)

## **DIALOGUE WITH THE EC DELEGATION<sup>8</sup>**

In August 2008, the IGPN made inquiries concerning the review of the MIPD; however, no concrete information was provided either by the Delegation or desk officers in Brussels. The DG enlargement stresses that gender equality is not only a cross-cutting issue in the programs for Albania, but there are also specific projects in the area of gender and women empowerment in Albania. For example, a call for proposals on "Women rights" was published only recently on the EuropeAid website.

According to officials, the DG Enlargement is currently preparing the programming round for the 2009 National Programme for Albania. During the programming phase different stakeholders including civil society organizations will be consulted. However, for the time being, there is no detailed schedule when this will take place but the EC Delegation will make sure that the consultation will take place in a transparent manner.

## **IGPN'S ASSESSMENT OF GENDER ISSUES IN THE EC'S ASSISTANCE**

In Albania, gender inequalities still persist as women face discrimination in all economic, political and social areas. Gender stereotypes and traditional mentalities preserve the structural inequalities between women and men and unequal power relations between them. Most of the projects aimed to tackle these inequalities have been initiated by civil society organizations, in particular women's organizations. They have been mainly supported by international donors and international organizations, and in general, they have addressed the issue of low participation of women in decision-making levels, domestic violence, trafficking of women and girls, etc. However, there is a noticeable lack of coordination of all efforts; there is a tendency to implement short-term projects which sometimes overlap and fail to bring sustainability.

Concerning the legal and institutional framework, a radical change in the recent Albanian context is the approval of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and Against Domestic Violence (NSGEDV), 2007-2010. In addition to that, an Action Plan has been developed. The approval of this strategy and Action Plan indicates a positive step towards meeting the international commitments and EU integration standards on gender mainstreaming in public policies and programs. The Gender Equality in Society Law (approved on 24. 7. 2008) "regulates fundamental issues of gender equality in public life, the protection and equal treatment of women and men with regards to equal chances and opportunities for the exercise of their rights, as well as their participation and contribution in the advancement of all social spheres". Nevertheless, more efficient collaboration is required by the state, particularly by the Directorate of Equal Chances of the Ministry of Labour, Social Issues and Equal Chances, the responsible authority regarding gender equality in Albania, in order to fully contribute to the eradication of gender inequalities and to women's empowerment.

As for the EC's role in Albania, projects financially supported through the EC's pre-accession assistance to Albania have largely focused on human rights in the frame of the democratization process. The main focus has been the strengthening of the NGO sector capacity in functioning as a 'watch dog' with regards to the implementation of the rule of law, democratization process, and good governance. Little space has been given to gender equality and women's empowerment, which are, along with the other themes, important components of the development and EU integration process. The main objective of pre-

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<sup>8</sup> Information in this section has been obtained through email communication of IGPN with the EC Delegation and desk officers in Brussels

accession assistance is the strengthening and capacity-building actions for human rights NGOs, their role in promoting human rights and democratic reform and monitoring the human rights respect and legislation implementation in Albania. Although the objectives seem to be overall inclusive for women's rights and gender equality, it can be stated that gender is not a priority area for the EC pre-assistance policies.

Many challenges exist in Albania in relation to gender concerns. Even though there is a good legal framework in place, the problem of compatibility with international standards, harmonization between existing laws, improvement of some segments of the legislation and better implementation/ enforcement of legislation still remain the biggest problem in Albania. Furthermore, gender-based violence is one of the most well known and up-to-date problems of the Albanian society, along with the low participation of women at decision-making levels, gender inequalities in the labour market, and minor attention to women's economic empowerment. In addition, the reintegration of women and children who were victims of trafficking and face discrimination due to stereotypes in the society has to be dealt with.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recommendations to the EU:**

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To support the development of comprehensive national policies followed by sufficient funding, based on clearly formulated indicators, effective monitoring and evaluation of the approximation and implementation of the policies and projects, in accordance to already set EU policy for gender equality and specifics of the national context
- To strengthen the EC's internal gender capacity (Gender Desks and Gender Focal Points)
- To follow the twin-track approach, and besides having gender equality as a cross-cutting issue, encourage specific projects on women in calls for proposals (to have a budget line for gender-related activities)
- To strengthen and build the capacity of women's NGOs to act as watch dogs for the implementation of gender policy
- To help ensure the financial sustainability of women's NGOs
- To increase the transparency of political dialogue with civil society in partner countries by setting the minimum standards for consultation of the local stakeholders which will be applied during the process of the development of internal policies and the national programming of IPA (6 weeks consultation, targeting NGOs with gender expertise based on established standards etc.)
- To consider appropriate alternatives to the existing implementation of the concept of gender mainstreaming which proves to be ineffective

### **Recommendations to the National Government:**

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To address gender concerns on the level of policy as well as practice
- To give special attention to funds allocation to women's organizations and their initiatives aimed at addressing women's issues
- To ensure gender expertise of the national administration

### **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 with other women's organizations in order to strengthen the impact of their advocacy and lobbying activities

- To engage in an active dialogue with the EC Delegation in Albania
- To provide shadow reports to the government reports on gender equality commitments
- To monitor gender issues in the EC's development cooperation
- To advocate for inclusion of projects that specifically target gender issues, apart from having it as a cross-cutting issue

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