

IN BRIEF



FINAL EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR GENDER EQUALITY FOR THE PERIOD FROM 2016 TO 2020

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Photo: UN Women

INTRODUCTION

The National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2016-2020 (hereinafter: the Strategy) was the umbrella policy of promoting gender equality in Serbia during this five-year period. The strategy envisages three general goals:

1. Changed gender patterns and improved culture of gender equality;
2. Increased equality of women and men through the implementation of equal opportunities policies and measures;
3. Systematic introduction of gender perspective in the adoption, implementation and monitoring of public policies.

The implementation of the Strategy was operationalized by the National Action Plan (NAP) only for the period 2016-2018 for which an independent evaluation was conducted and recommendations were made for the development of the NAP for the second strategic cycle 2019-2020. Although the Coordination Body for Gender Equality (CBGE), as the holder of the Strategy, drafted (with the support of UN Women with the financial support of the European Union)

the NAP for the second half of the strategic cycle, it was never adopted and the Strategy was implemented without an operational plan.

This report presents the final evaluation of the Strategy, which was supported by UN Women for the needs of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and with the financial support of the European Union, within the project “Key Steps to Gender Equality”.

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the *Law on Planning System, the Regulation on Methodology of Public Policy Management, Analysis of the Effects of Public Policies and Regulations and the Content of Individual Public Policy Documents and the Handbook for Analysis of the Effects of Public Policies and Regulations of the Government of the Republic of Serbia Public Policy Secretariat*.

The aim of the evaluation is to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the results of the Strategy, draw lessons and present recommendations for the next strategic cycle.



APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY OF EVALUATION

The final evaluation was conducted by a combined method:

- The evaluation results of the first NAP 2016-2018 were used, which were based on data collected from a large number of representatives of various stakeholders, including state authorities, partner institutions and organizations, international partners, independent experts, activists - a total of over 100 stakeholders who reported on their participation in the implementation and provided opinion on the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, lessons learned and proposed recommendations for the second cycle of implementation of the Strategy;
- annual report of CBGE, as the holder of the Strategy, on the work for 2019;
- Data collected on activities carried out in connection with the implementation of the Strategy during the period 2019-2020, through written structured questionnaires distributed to all institutions defined in the Strategy as competent institutions in the implementation of the

Strategy for the period 2019-2020; from the report, analyses that institutions and organizations have identified as sources of information on implementation activities. Questionnaires were sent to the address of 42 institutions. Responses to the request for information were provided by 22 institutions.

Given that for the period 2019-2020 the NAP has not been adopted, the entire methodology, and even the questionnaire based on which the information was collected, are defined starting from the objectives, proposed measures and activities and indicators for measuring results as defined in the main text of the Strategy.

The evaluation was conducted based on the methodology proposed in the *Handbook for Analysis of the Effects of Public Policies and Regulations*, which establishes the evaluation process in five OECD-DAC criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. The evaluation was guided by a set of evaluation questions, which together with the performance indicators and sources of verification are presented in Annex 4 of the final report.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

Finding 1: *The strategy is fully relevant to the priorities in the field of gender equality - the first strategic goal is focused on changes in cultural patterns that are the basis of gender inequalities, the second strategic goal is focused on structural inequalities manifested in different areas of participation and law, and the third goal is aimed at degeneration of policies, institutions, mechanisms and processes of coordination and cooperation, thus creating systemic conditions for the promotion of gender equality.*

Finding 2: *The strategy responds to the needs of various social groups, including women from marginalized and multiple discriminated groups. The strategy envisages formulating measures for women from vulnerable groups within various specific goals, and two specific goals are specifically aimed at improving the position of women from vulnerable groups - goal 2.5 is dedicated to rural women and goal 2.6 to different groups of women exposed to marginalization or multiple discrimination.*

Finding 3: *The strategy is based on a basic situation analysis and SWOT analysis. In the preparation of the basics of the Strategy, an analysis was conducted based on various surveys, official statistics, and studies and thus created an empirical basis for reviewing the situation and defining priorities. However, what the Strategy lacks is a theory of change that starts from the state observed in the analysis and shows the logic of the intervention that should lead to the desired goals.*

Finding 4: *The goals and measures defined by the Strategy are in line with key international conventions, such as CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as with the EU accession processes and sustainable development goals covered by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.*

Finding 5: *The goals and measures defined by the Strategy are still relevant for the current state of gender equality, and some have in the meantime gained more importance due to the initiated processes that need further support, such as the degeneration of mechanisms and policies.*

EFFECTIVENESS	<p>Finding 6: <i>The strategy initiated significant processes and achieved significant initial results in certain areas. Despite the absence of the NAP for the period 2019-2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic, many processes of promoting gender equality have continued, precisely because they were relatively effectively initiated in the previous phase. However, the records indicate uneven effectiveness in the implementation of the Strategy in various target areas, with greater effectiveness in the degeneration of policies, institutions, decision-making processes, budgeting, prevention and suppression of violence against women, and lower effectiveness in areas of economic empowerment of women, improving the position of women from vulnerable groups, gender sensitive education</i></p>
	<p>Finding 7: <i>Areas in which the Strategy has been implemented more effectively indicate that important success factors are combinations of different types of intervention, broad mobilization of different stakeholders, high commitment of stakeholders involved in task implementation, solid normative framework, institutionalization and standardization of practices, coherence and consistency of intervention, recognition of the area as a national priority and integration into the reform processes related to EU accession.</i></p>
	<p>Finding 8: <i>Factors that inhibited the effectiveness of the Strategy are partly related to the weaknesses of the first NAP (2016-2018), such as inconsistencies in the operationalization of certain objectives, insufficiently clearly defined individual measures, fragmented and small-scale interventions, and partly related to the absence of the NAP in the second phase of the implementation of the Strategy, because the intervention plan, resource coordination and monitoring mechanisms were missing. Overall, the factors that have diminished the effectiveness of the Strategy are insufficiently strong gender equality mechanisms which should have carried the implementation at different levels, inconsistent institutional mechanisms with even conflicting mandates or conflicts of interest due to which reforms have been blocked, as well as insufficient financial and other resources.</i></p>
EFFICIENCY	<p>Finding 9: <i>The strategy is not supported by a single financial mechanism, nor a mechanism for monitoring invested resources, which makes it difficult to determine whether sufficient funds have been allocated to achieve results, especially when the last two years of implementation were not guided by an operational plan that clearly defines measures, activities and invested funds.</i></p>
	<p>Finding 10: <i>Due to the lack of a single funding mechanism and a robust monitoring mechanism, it was not possible to assess whether the funds were spent in the most efficient way or could have been used better.</i></p>
	<p>Finding 11: <i>The mechanisms for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Strategy were better than in the case of the previous five-year strategy, but still far from optimal.</i></p>
SUSTAINABILITY	<p>Finding 12: <i>It is more likely that the results and initiated changes will be sustainable in areas in which the results are integrated into systemic solutions - laws, regulations, regular procedures - when there is a high awareness and commitment of stakeholders to support changes, and when changes are an integral part of priority reform processes, especially those related to EU accession.</i></p>
	<p>Finding 13: <i>The institutional structure for maintaining results exists, but is insufficiently strong, primarily due to the scarce human and technical resources available to the key national mechanism for gender equality (CBGE), and most often weak and dysfunctional local mechanisms. It remains to be seen whether the new Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue will contribute to strengthening the institutional structure for gender equality.</i></p>
	<p>Finding 14: <i>Gender-responsive budgeting is a systemic process introduced by the implementation of the Strategy, which should enable the systematic allocation of funds for the improvement of gender equality. However, during the strategic cycle, it has not yet reached the maturity that would enable to provide budget funds regularly, systematically and according to the implementation plan in line with the strategic priorities.</i></p>
	<p>Finding 15: <i>The implementation of the Strategy mobilized various stakeholders: state institutions, experts, international partners, but the potential of women's and feminist CSOs remained underutilized, and the partnership between CBGE and these organizations was not established through a permanent formal mechanism.</i></p>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation-based recommendations are grouped into two blocks: recommendations related to the strategic planning and implementation process and recommendations related to the thematic areas of gender equality.

Recommendations related to the process:

1. It is crucial that the new Gender Equality Strategy is adopted in 2021 so that the initiated processes are not interrupted and a vacuum created in gender equality policies.
2. The process of developing a new Strategy should be more participatory than the process of drafting this strategy, but should not be delayed into an inefficient process because of participation. Women's and feminist organizations, especially organizations representing the interests of women from multiple marginalized groups, should be consulted and their solutions respected in the strategy development process, as this is the only way for the Strategy to adequately respond to the needs of different groups of women.
3. The strategy development process should clearly set out the strategic priorities and corpus of goals that this umbrella strategy should achieve while relieving the strategy of sectoral issues that can be well integrated into other sectoral policies, such as health, safety, social protection of women, etc.
4. The strategy should be operationalized by an action plan with consistent measures in relation to the set goals, clear roles and precisely defined financial resources and sources of those funds.
5. The strategy should have a solid implementation monitoring mechanism that will rely on stronger coordination mechanisms, precise but realistic indicators and standardized and regular reporting procedures, which include financial reporting.

Recommendations for thematic areas are presented in 11 thematic sets of recommendations:

1. Establish and standardize competencies in the field of gender equality for all employees in state administration, institutions and public services
2. Establish stricter control of textbooks in order to eliminate gender stereotypes and nurture a critical attitude towards gender inequality in the literature and similar content
3. Include goals and measures that will enable the elimination of gender segregation in education at the level of secondary school and higher education
4. Develop gender studies at all levels of education and make study programmes gender sensitive
5. Conduct campaigns for raising the awareness and better monitor cultural changes
6. Continue work on improving the safety of women, eliminating violence and discrimination and access to justice
7. Develop a comprehensive programme for economic empowerment of women
8. Continue to improve women's participation in political life, pay more attention to women's participation in decision-making in other areas of government (economy, sports, science and research, culture and art)
9. Maintain a strong focus on introducing a gender perspective into public policies and use more effective tools to improve the process
10. Further improve regional cooperation
11. Put in focus new areas, such as gender equality in the context of climate change, environmental protection, disaster and crisis risk management, etc.