



Advocacy Card

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

International Gender Policy Network

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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. The situation in developing countries, nonetheless, remains critical: women are the poorest of the poor; they are largely excluded from decision-making processes; they often lack equal access to resources, land, credit, education, and health care. Civil society organizations (CSOs) across Europe have emphasized that governments are failing to deliver on their promises. According to the Concorde 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 Bulgaria focuses on its role as an emerging donor country. This document provides a review of Bulgaria'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

- ❖ Bulgaria'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

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

- ❖ 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.”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 BULGARIA’S ODA

As a newly emerging donor, Bulgaria is facing many problems in its ODA (Official Development Assistance) and in this context, the gender dimension of development aid is not an exception. As pointed out in the 2008 Concord report, there is a lack of capacity within the government and no general framework for development aid exists and consequently, these problems translate into poor coordination and reporting.⁵

In July 2007, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) issued the “Concept Paper on international development” which outlines the main principles, priority regions and sectors, and mechanisms for Bulgarian ODA. The protection of human rights (including the rights of the child and gender equality) is mentioned among the main areas which are to be addressed to achieve the objective of poverty eradication. Among the specific principles which will be guiding Bulgaria’s development cooperation is listed the principle of non-discrimination - equal treatment and equal opportunities regardless of sex, race, religious affiliation, age, disabilities, sexual orientation, etc. In addition, gender equality and women’s empowerment are included in the Concept Paper in the description of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

Commitments to the implementation of the MDGs and other international agreements (agreements of the UN, EC, ILO, etc.) are declared in the Concept Paper. However, in view of the structure of the development aid provided by the Bulgarian state until now, it is difficult to assess whether these agreements have been followed in practice. According to CSOs, documents currently under discussion should provide the mechanisms for control of the disbursement of the aid. These documents include the mid-term strategy for international development drafted by the MFA in June 2008, a regulatory framework for development aid, and a package of documents for funding. The mid-term strategy defines the main thematic directions for Bulgaria’s bilateral aid. There was also elaborated a draft version of an enactment (needed to be adopted by the Council of Ministers) that regulates the Bulgarian policy in international development cooperation, as well as a package of documents for the provision of funding for projects under the implementation of the mid-term strategy. The

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>

⁵ No Time to Waste: European governments behind schedule on aid quantity and quality, *Concorde*, 2008, p. 35 <http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/extranetdocumentsENG/NavigationSecondaire/WorkingGroups/Aidwatch/Aidwatch2008/Light-Full-report.pdf>

gender equality principle is reflected in the guidelines for applications for funding. These documents are indicative for the planned interventions; however, they need to be further discussed.

The future prospects to implement the gender equality principle in development cooperation policy and activities are likely to be positive as the governmental officials from the respective body unofficially expressed interest in discussing the issue.

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 Bulgaria'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 elaborate coherent, multiannual strategies for bilateral and multilateral development assistance
- To strengthen the capacity of the Bulgarian MFA in the area of development cooperation including the capacity in terms of gender concerns
- To improve the transparency of Bulgaria's ODA by making all data, reports and documents available, and by developing the mechanism of grant allocation
- To include the gender perspective in all funded projects, to develop mechanisms on monitoring and evaluation of the gender aspect in ODA projects
- To ensure close cooperation with NGOs, including women's rights organizations, in terms of policy and strategy formulation
- To ensure an increase in awareness among the Bulgarian population about development problems, including gender issues

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, and to distribute them through the development cooperation networks
- 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.⁶

⁶ 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

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