

GENDER EQUALITY IN FOREIGN POLICY IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Available data concerning North Macedonia's Foreign Policy paints a picture where **gender inequality persists**, particularly when it comes to the representation and involvement of women. The statistics reveal a **significant gender gap that extends across various facets of foreign affairs, including leadership positions, defence missions abroad, parliamentary committees, and roles within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**. Despite some positive developments linked to North Macedonia's accession to NATO and its pursuit of EU membership; North Macedonia is already an EU candidate from 2005 until present, the participation of women in foreign policy remains notably limited. This disparity is compounded by the **absence of a robust framework for gender mainstreaming within the nation's foreign policy agenda**. Institutional mechanisms aimed at supporting gender equality and the advancement of women within the realm of North Macedonia's Foreign Policy are conspicuously lacking.



Key factors in women's motivation to pursue a career in foreign policy:

- **Awareness on gender issues and social engagement:** Women working in foreign policy have a deep awareness of gender inequalities within their families and societies, recognizing the disparities, discrimination, and challenges faced by women in various aspects of life, including in the professional sphere. This awareness acts as a motivating factor, compelling them to strive for change from within the system.
- **Mentorship and family support:** Encouragement from mentors or family members plays a pivotal role in shaping the career choices. These mentors, often senior diplomats themselves, or influential figures in national policy or international relations, provide guidance, advice, and a sense of possibility. Family support, especially from parents who recognize their daughters' potential and encourage them to break barriers, is a common thread. Mentorship and familial backing instil confidence and determination, making the pursuit of both politics and diplomacy a feasible and desirable option.
- **Personal ambition and aspiration:** Beyond external factors, personal ambition and aspiration play a crucial role in women's pursuit of a career in diplomacy, as well as a genuine passion for international affairs, diplomacy, and the complexities of global politics.

Cultural and organizational challenges for women in diplomacy:

- The complex set of challenges foreign service pose for diplomats' families. The nomadic nature of diplomatic careers, requiring frequent relocations and international postings, often places *significant strains on family life*.
- Diplomatic assignments are often influenced by *traditional gender roles and stereotypes*, resulting in women diplomats being relegated to certain types of roles, such as those related to social or cultural affairs while being underrepresented in high-stakes, negotiation, policymaking positions.
- Gender plays a decisive role in geographic placement as well, and not all ambassadorships are of equal weight. *Women generally tend to cluster in ambassadorships of lesser status* while remaining underrepresented in the ambassador positions of power and clout.
- Balancing domestic responsibilities with professional aspirations emerge as a recurrent and poignant theme. The expectation that women primarily bear *the burden of domestic responsibilities can create a formidable barrier to career advancement*. On the other hand, men who opt to support their partners' careers by taking on more significant domestic responsibilities can encounter challenges to their self-perceived masculinity.





Importance of creating and implementing policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and diversity within the foreign service:

- Awareness that unconscious bias, even if not overtly expressed, could still exert a subtle yet profound influence on decision-making processes - necessity of measures to mitigate these biases and ensure that opportunities and promotions are based on merit rather than unconscious prejudices.
- The concept of Feminist Foreign Policy in North Macedonia is still viewed as a noble idea, aiming to ensure that diverse population is adequately represented in various categories of activities.
- Family-friendly frameworks within diplomatic institutions - creating work environments that are accommodating to family needs, without regard to gender, can be crucial in enabling diplomats to fulfil the demanding responsibilities of their roles.
- Potential policy initiatives to further empower women in diplomacy: range from positive discrimination or affirmative action measures, introducing quotas for nomination to key positions, and participation in key negotiations, to creating opportunities for women to participate more actively in foreign policy discussions.
- Increasing institutional memory within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - more effective use of individuals who possess the expertise to enhance existing capacities and initiatives, without regard to their political or party affiliations.

The imperative of gender mainstreaming in foreign policy: pressing need to introduce gender perspectives into all foreign policy decisions and actions, not merely acknowledging the presence of women in diplomatic roles but integrating gender perspectives and considerations into the very fabric of policymaking, decision-making, and implementation processes. **Gender mainstreaming is not a superficial nod to political correctness, but a profound paradigm shift in how foreign policy is conceptualized and operationalized.**

To promote gender mainstreaming approaches that could eventually lead to the institutionalization of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) in the future, the Government of North Macedonia must make gender an integral part of foreign affairs institutional structures, processes, and programmes.

Long-term recommendations

- High-level political commitment
- Ensuring institutional memory
- Facilitating inclusive dialogue among MoFA employees, current and past
- Strengthening gender legislation
- Affirmative actions, quota and parental leave provisions
- Awareness and education on FFP
- Lead by example, demonstrating commitment to gender equality in international affairs
- Prioritize policy coherence, coordination, and Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs)
- Gender-sensitive recruitment
- Mandatory, ongoing gender training for all employees, including diplomats
- Gender-sensitive performance evaluation

Short-term recommendations

- Networking opportunities
- Mentorship and peer support
- Public recognition of individuals who have made significant contributions to FFP
- Encourage innovation and creative solutions to address gender-related challenges
- Ensure parity in international representation, negotiations, and trade missions
- Utilize ongoing chairpersonship roles to promote gender equality
- Ensure diversity in events and panels
- Amend and adjust the NAP for Implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy, to include activities related to women in foreign policy and indicators to measure the success of foreseen activities
- Build specific, technical expertise for FFP in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Create specialized Equal Opportunities Coordinator positions held by gender experts
- Provide technical capacity development to the Parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunities and Foreign Affairs Commission
- Combat gender-based attacks on women in public discourse, including politicians, ministers, and ambassadors
- Develop knowledge base for gender mainstreaming in foreign policy
- Invest in collecting gender-disaggregated data and conducting related research in challenging areas of foreign policy to inform evidence-based policymaking