



# FROM BUDGETING TO IMPACT: GOOD MUNICIPAL PRACTICES FROM GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICYMAKING AND BUDGETING

## MUNICIPALITY OF BITOLA

# BREAKING BARRIERS: A PATH TOWARDS EQUALITY

**B**eti Bulakovska (49), Lidija Veljanovska (42), and Simona Jovevska (35) share a common struggle – navigating a world that often overlooks their needs due to their disabilities. For Simona, the absence of physical access is not just an inconvenience, it is a daily reminder of exclusion. “Without physical access, you will be left behind, at the bottom of the stairs in front of the building” Simona shares, echoing the sentiments of many in similar situations.

In the Municipality of Bitola, 1400 citizens with disabilities face physical access challenges that prevent them from accessing the Municipality’s buildings, cultural and educational institutions, kindergartens, schools, workplaces, and homes.

Barriers to full social and economic inclusion include the need for accessible physical environments and transportation options. Therefore, to ensure equality for all citizens, adjusting national and local budgets through gender-responsive budgeting could help to overcome some of these challenges while also reducing structural inequalities between different social groups.

Recognizing the seriousness of the issue, the Municipality of Bitola made a major step forward in 2021, allocating a significant portion of its budget – 11 million MKD – towards dismantling barriers and



fostering inclusivity. This initiative, named “Building Bridges,” aimed to reshape the municipal landscape by providing physical access to institutions, houses, and streets around the Municipality, ensuring that citizens like Beti, Lidija, and Simona could move around their city with dignity and ease, and that access is not a privilege, but a right. In aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Bitola affirmed its commitment to ensuring that disability would never serve as a barrier to development or human rights. The Municipality’s efforts address various needs. From subsidies for home adaptations to accessible schools and cultural institutions, adjustment of the student dormitory, free parking for citizens with disabilities, each measure prioritizes equality. In 2024, the Municipality continued its allocation of funds for infrastructure adjustments, earmarking an additional 510 thousand MKD for this purpose.

For Beti, Lidija, and Simona, these measures are not just policies – they are lifelines, restoring self-confidence and enabling moments like Simona’s marriage ceremony within municipality premises. By prioritizing inclusivity, Bitola does not just build infrastructure, it cultivates a culture of empowerment, where every citizen has a voice in shaping their future. However, the journey towards full inclusion continues. In Bitola, with every budgeted measure the path towards equality is not a distant ideal – it is a tangible reality, forged through collaboration, compassion, and a commitment to building a better community for all.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Municipality of Bitola



# FROM A DAY-CARE CENTRE TO A KINDERGARTEN: SUPPORTING WORKING MOTHERS IN NOVACI

Marija Simovska Trajchevska is a devoted mother of two boys from the Municipality of Novaci. As her maternity leave for her younger son comes to an end, she faces the discouraging reality of having to return to work soon. With no one available to look after her son during the day, she grapples with the challenges of balancing her maternal duties with professional responsibilities. For Marija and countless other mothers in her community, the lack of adequate childcare infrastructure not only impacts their ability to work but also weighs heavily on their minds as they try to provide for their families while raising their children.

“I am convinced that mothers are unemployed not because of a lack of opportunities, but rather a lack of someone to care for their young children” – says Marija.

In the last ten years, the Municipality of Novaci has had a day-care facility for children, which previously used to provide care services for only two and a half hours every day. The residents, especially women, have been asking that the Municipality open a real kindergarten that will offer the necessary daily pedagogical care for the children. Women who live in rural areas, such as Municipality of Novaci, where agriculture is the primary source of income, frequently work eight hours or more every day. Despite their tireless efforts, the lack of childcare services significantly limits their access to employment opportunities.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Municipality of Novaci



Recognizing the pressing needs of mothers like Marija and the larger community, the Municipality transformed the “Bambi” day-care centre into a fully equipped kindergarten. The kindergarten’s aim is to provide an eight-hour day-care stay (including food, a pedagogical programme, and other services) for 50 children aged two to six years. To make this a reality, 5.2 million MKD were allocated from the municipal budget. On one hand, the opening of the kindergarten “Bambi” in 2020, after a few years of reconstruction, increased the self-confidence and self-esteem of mothers when the first group of children was enrolled. On the other hand, this initiative will result in improved children’s development, equipping them for the upcoming school years, contributing to better family dynamics and overall, benefitting the entire Municipality of Novaci. “I am glad that the Municipality took into consideration the priorities that we had been speaking for many years and made the

right decision – to allocate funds for the opening of a kindergarten. This was a huge relief for me because my maternity leave was about to end, and I would have to return to work. This meant one less concern for me, and I believe it will mean the same for other mothers in similar situations” – Marija stated.

The transformation of the Bambi Centre into a kindergarten will have a profound impact on Marija and many more mothers, as well as her friends, family, and neighbours. With this upgrade, they will all benefit from a reliable and accessible childcare option for their young ones. The Municipality is looking into ways to increase the number of children who can attend kindergarten. The first step towards that is for the employed parents from Novaci to enrol their children in “Bambi.” The next step is assessing the opportunities to include more children from the surrounding villages.



# “TOGETHER WE TAKE CARE” MOBILE SERVICE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

Many elderly citizens live in rural and remote areas of the Municipality of Kochani with limited access to the needed medical and social care services. Because of their homes' geographical and inaccessible location, most of them, particularly women, lack access to basic social and health care services. “I live alone with my wife in our village house. Our children have left the village, and we have no one to look after us, to help us”- stated a local living in the rural areas of the Municipality of Kochani.

Recognizing the circumstances that many citizens faced, the Municipality made the decision to form a mobile service team tasked with delivering social and healthcare services directly to the homes of rural residents. The team consists of four nurses and two social workers and is led by a municipality-appointed coordinator. It operates across three municipalities: Kochani, Chesinovo-Obleshevo, and Zrnovci. In addition to their providing primary services, the team actively identifies individuals and families in rural areas who require institutional support and shares this crucial data with the Municipality to facilitate future planning and intervention efforts.



During 2020 and 2021 the team also provided recommendations for citizens in isolation, hygienic measures that should be implemented, identifying and monitoring COVID-19 symptoms, informing the categories of citizens who are at risk of infection about the necessary measures for protection from the virus, and providing direct contact with the patients' family physicians. With this mobile service the Municipality set a new model for social and health care services for citizens who live in inaccessible and remote areas and face social, economic and health challenges.

In 2021, 50 thousand MKD from the Municipality's programme for social, children, and health services budget was set aside for the mobile service's operations, with the goal of expanding it in 2023. The Municipality's hospital is providing the necessary medical equipment. From its establishment until 2024, the team served 2067 patients (742 men and 1325 women), aided at least 1648 households, and identified around 350 households with specific health and social risks. Patients of the mobile service are pleased that institutions did not forget about them, even though they live outside of the city.

"This is one of the best things that has happened to us. We are thankful to the people who recognize that we have needs, that we require help, and that someone is willing to listen to us. It means a lot to us", said a mobile service's patient. Nowadays, the service has expanded to for the elderly in their homes, with a team of 16 female caregivers offering support services.

With this mobile service, the Municipality set a new model for social and health care services for citizens who live in inaccessible and remote rural areas and face social, economic and health risks. The work of the mobile service team was presented as a successful example in other countries in the region and is expected to be replicated in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Municipality of Kochani



## MUNICIPALITY OF CHASHKA

# NURTURING FUTURES: THE CHASHKA KINDERGARTEN INITIATIVE

Parents in the Municipality of Chashka faced the risk of not having access to adequate childcare services due to the limited capacity of the only kindergarten in the area. In 2018, the Municipality of Chashka used the infrastructure of a kindergarten from the Municipality of Veles to provide childcare services for its residents. After a few years, the kindergarten reached full capacity, unable to accommodate the residents' demand. "Although my two children are in the existing kindergarten group, it has already become a problem that other parents cannot enrol their children because there is no room for them"- said Ivana Stankovska a mother from Municipality of Chashka.





As the kindergarten reached its capacity quickly, it risked the prospects for affordable childcare for future generations of children. This situation posed significant challenges for families, particularly mothers, in need of childcare support during the day. Mothers argued that a childcare service provided to only a few dozen children fell short of being a viable option and appealed to the Municipality of Chashka for a lasting solution.

Hearing mothers' demands, the Municipality of Chashka initiated the process of establishing their kindergarten "Bambi". For this to become a reality, already existing premises of the Municipality were renovated and refitted for the kindergarten to become operational in 2020 upon securing the needed permission from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Two unemployed women from the Municipality who obtained a licence for kindergarten teachers were hired to assist with the daily operations of the kindergarten. Initially, the facility cared for a diverse group of 2- to 6-year-olds but could accommodate only 20 children. Starting from 2023, the Municipality successfully doubled the childcare capacity, and now some 40 children can benefit from the kindergarten's services.

Kindergartens serve to empower women by easing caregiving responsibilities, enabling greater workforce participation, educational pursuits, and financial independence. They also foster social inclusion among children through opportunities for networking and interaction, promoting building positive relationships and social skills development.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Municipality of Chashka



## MUNICIPALITY OF AERODROM

# GAME ON! SPORTS 4 EVERYONE



In the heart of the Municipality of Aerodrom, the women's handball club Vardar—established in 1961—continues to inspire future generations of women athletes. With a legacy of success, Vardar's achievements serve as a beacon of hope for countless girls in Aerodrom who dream of stepping onto the field, proudly donning the team's jersey, and making their mark in sports. Yet, despite the triumphs, women's sports have historically been underfunded and overshadowed by their male counterparts. As Gordana Naceva Bosheva, athlete and president of Vardar, points out: "While men's teams like our basketball squad enjoy strong visibility and support, women's sports are still in need of an iconic symbol that represents their strength and potential."

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Municipality of Aerodrom

Listening to the voices of its residents and recognizing the untapped potential in women's youth sports, the Municipality of Aerodrom stepped in with decisive action. Between 2019 and 2021, the Municipality allocated 300 thousand denars to support women's basketball and handball clubs. This support, according to Naceva Bosheva, has been instrumental: "It is encouraging to see the Municipality prioritize the development of women's sports. For the first time in 2022, the Municipality even launched a public call to further support women's sports clubs—an unprecedented step." The investment didn't stop at financial support. A range of strategic measures was introduced, from providing girls with quality sports equipment and jerseys to covering membership fees for aspiring athletes from underprivileged backgrounds. These initiatives have transformed not just the sports scene, but the lives of young women in Aerodrom.



In 2019, the Municipality's efforts bore fruit with the creation of its first-ever women's basketball team. Today, the number of women's sports clubs continues to grow, mirroring the rising participation of girls eager to pursue their athletic dreams. The Municipality's commitment to mainstreaming gender equality in sports also shines through in its annual recognition of outstanding women athletes. In 2021, the Municipality honoured one such rising star, acknowledging her as a successful sportswoman and role model for future generations.

The ripple effects of these initiatives are clear, Aerodrom is not just supporting women's sports, it is changing lives and creating new pathways for young girls to excel. As the Municipality continues to break down barriers, the message is clear: The game is on—and this time, it's for everyone.



Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is a transformative approach to planning, developing and monitoring budgets that considers the distinct needs and experiences of women and men, and aims to promote gender equality through budget allocation and policy decisions. Over the past decade, UN Women's efforts have institutionalized GRB, embedding gender considerations in policymaking and budgeting at both regional and national levels. These initiatives have empowered vulnerable communities and improved accountability in public budget spending, while cultivating a pool of skilled GRB experts.

In the first phase of the project "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia," UN Women collaborated with 31 municipalities in North Macedonia to enhance the lives of women and men from various backgrounds. By mentoring and supporting local governments, civil society organizations and local women, the project has facilitated the design, implementation, and monitoring of gender-responsive budgets and policies. Coordinators for Equal Opportunities in municipalities play a key role in promoting gender equality and mainstreaming gender in local policymaking, with training and mentoring from UN Women.

This publication shares success stories that highlight the real impact of GRB in various communities. Five stories from municipalities supported by UN Women over the past four years highlight how GRB has addressed gender inequalities, improving resource distribution and service delivery for women, men, and vulnerable groups. These first-hand experiences offer valuable insights and inspiration for policymakers, practitioners, and advocates committed to advancing gender equality and empowering women through more inclusive budgeting and decision-making. The project will now extend its impact, continuing to work with these municipalities and expanding to include 10 more in its second phase.



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