

**FOCUS ON**  
**GENDER**  
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

**Issue 04**  
**Women's Political  
Participation and Leadership  
in Bosnia and Herzegovina**



The presence of women in governance, decision-making, and public life is still an area with a wide gender gap, despite the bulk of work done on the political empowerment of women and amendments to the legislation whose aim was to encourage women to take up political and decision-making positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women's participation rights are frequently undermined by cultural expectations and social norms, exclusion from male-dominated decision-making platforms, lack of financial resources, restricted access to information and knowledge, discrimination and widespread violence. For these reasons, this issue of Focus on Gender concentrates on women's political participation and leadership in Bosnia and Herzegovina and provides a brief

overview of the relevance of women's political participation and a situational analysis in terms of the legal and policy framework, electoral system and barriers to the full and effective political participation of women. Furthermore, this issue provides a brief gender analysis of the 2020 Local Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina and summarizes some of the good practices of UN Women in terms of efforts to support inclusive electoral processes, provide parliamentary support and facilitate social norms change. Finally, recommendations for the government, political parties and the media are presented with the objective of ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership in decision-making.

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Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, met with women politicians during her visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2019.

# RELEVANCE OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women and men have equal civil and political rights. These are the rights to: participate in public affairs directly or indirectly through freely chosen representatives; vote and be elected in elections; and have equal access to public services. They are stated in numerous international frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, Article 25), and CEDAW Convention (Articles 7 and 8). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action prioritized inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels as a critical area of concern. The Beijing Declaration also established the internationally agreed goal of gender balance in all governmental bodies and public institutions. The importance of women's participation in public life and decision-making is recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG 5, target 5.5 is to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership in decision-making, including in national parliaments and local governments.

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the presence of women in governance, decision-making, and public life is still an area with a wide gender gap. This is despite the bulk of work done on the political empowerment of women and amendments to the legislation whose aim was to encourage women to take up political and decision-making positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unfortunately, the effects of patriarchal upbringing affect the roles in which women and men are placed from the start, which usually reflects the notion that men are more fit for leadership roles and that women are more suitable for roles in private life.

Until this day, women remain excluded from major political processes, which has been the trend since the signing of the Dayton agreement that also characterizes the current process of European integration. The process of signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the European Union (EU) in 2015 did not include women in the decision-making processes<sup>1</sup>, which demonstrates the lack of political will to respect gender equality as

<sup>1</sup> Sixth Bosnia and Herzegovina Periodic Report on Implementing the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women 2013-2016, 2017. Pg. 49.

an inseparable part of the EU integration process and all crucial reform processes that are a part of it. Women are represented in diplomacy with 23 percent of female ambassadors, 17 percent of female general consuls, and 40 percent of permanent female mission leaders.<sup>2</sup> Women make up 34 percent of negotiating delegations for the conclusion of international documents on police cooperation, readmission, protection of classified information, protection and rescue.<sup>3</sup> The representation of marginalized women is an even bigger challenge, as their presence in governance, decision-making and public life remains very limited, due to the double discrimination they are exposed to.

The barriers to women's political leadership are many and persist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These include **structural barriers** as political parties resist including women as leaders and winnable candidates; the electoral system makes it tough for women and men to compete on equal footing and women tend to have fewer financial resources to run election campaigns. Furthermore, **harmful norms and violence** against women in politics remains one of the most serious challenges to women's political rights today, including harmful gender-based stereotypes in the media that continue implying that women are less legitimate and capable leaders than men. Finally, **lack of political will** remains a significant challenge in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the leaders continue to tolerate the fact that decision-making in public life is dominated by men, slowing down any significant change in this regard. Challenges to women's political participation are most notable within political parties. Even though the electoral party lists must contain at least one candidate of the less represented sex among the first two candidates, two candidates of the less represented sex among the top five candidates, and so forth, political parties' internal policies are not harmonized with the Law on Gender Equality. Additionally, although women are active within their own political parties, they are not equally represented in their parties'

main decision-making bodies.<sup>4</sup> Leadership of political parties rarely includes or involves women, and there is not a single political party in the country with a female president. Because women are excluded from decision-making processes within the parties, they have limited opportunities to improve their political skills, and gain access to financing which would enable them to run their own campaigns. Women's associations within the parties have no influence and their work revolves around the issues considered to be "female". Only around 10 percent of women are electoral lists leaders, they are usually positioned second, while men continue to dominate compensatory lists.

Moreover, the complexity of the political and electoral system further complicates women's involvement in decision-making, as traditionally men are well versed in the political strategies of BiH while women are only marginally present in these processes. It is still expected for men to have more political power, which seriously undermines the participation and representation of women in the political processes and perpetuates stereotypes about their involvement in public life.

## LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made significant efforts to harmonize its legislative framework with international standards and commitments. The Law on Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted in 2003<sup>6</sup> and amended in 2009<sup>7</sup> with improved definitions and implementation provisions. A consolidated text was published in 2010.<sup>8</sup> The Law on Gender Equality specifically addresses equal representation and public life; it mandates that equal representation of men and women exists when one sex is represented with at least 40 percent in the public sector bodies at all levels of authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina (state, entity, cantonal and municipal levels). This provision applies to legislative, executive, and judicial

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Pg. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Pg. 52.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Official Gazette of BiH, No. 16/03.

<sup>7</sup> Official Gazette of BiH, No. 102/09.

<sup>8</sup> Official Gazette of BiH, No. 32/10.

branches, political parties, legal persons with public powers and others that work under the auspices of the state, entities, cantons, cities, and municipalities. It also applies to appointments to delegations and international organizations or bodies.

Up to now, the most important legal harmonization with the respective provision was done in 2013 when the Election Law of BiH was amended to include the definition of equal gender representation that exists only when one of the genders is represented with a minimum of 40 percent of the total number of candidates on each candidates' list.<sup>9</sup> But even though the legal framework is set up to include women in the decision-making processes, in practice women remain underrepresented both in decision-making positions and in the main bodies of political parties as they make up around 20 percent in all legislative and executive bodies.<sup>10</sup>

Further amendments to the Election Law of BiH, introducing equal gender representation on candidate lists (50 percent of both genders) were drafted in 2016, but were not adopted.<sup>11</sup> Similar efforts were made to amend the Law on the Council of Ministers of BiH and introduce the 40 percent gender quota. The law was not adopted by the Parliament even though it was passed in the first reading.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding gender policy, the two guiding documents in this area are the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" (UNSCR 1325). The current Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period of 2018-2022<sup>13</sup> is based on the national legal framework for gender equality and the binding and recommended international documents, including among others the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and

Platform for Action. The goal of the GAP is to guide ministries and other institutions in mainstreaming gender equality principles in their work in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality. As part of the first out of the three strategic goals of the current GAP, "Developing, implementing and monitoring programs for the advancement of gender equality in government institutions, in accordance with priority areas", legislative and executive governments at all levels are in charge of implementing measures to achieve equal gender representation in policy development and decision-making by integrating international and national gender equality standards; collecting gender disaggregated data and conducting gender analyses on women's and men's participation in public life and decision making; developing and implementing necessary measures to advance equal representation; providing training to strengthen the capacities of political parties in order to increase women's political participation; strengthening the role and responsibility of the media to raise awareness of the importance of equal gender representation, and regular monitoring and reporting in this regard. Furthermore, the third Action Plan for the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in BiH was adopted in 2018 for the period 2018-2022<sup>14</sup> with the aim of a consistent, high quality, and effective implementation of the UNSCR 1325 in BiH, and it was developed in consultation with the non-governmental organizations. The strategic objectives of the Action Plan for the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 (2018-2022) are as follows: (1) Increased participation of women in the military, police and peacekeeping missions, including participation in decision-making places, (2) Increased human security through the prism of gender equality, and (3) Improved conditions and access to the implementation of the Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Official Gazette of BiH, No. 18/13.

<sup>10</sup> Sixth Bosnia and Herzegovina Periodic Report on Implementing the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women 2013-2016, 2017. Pg. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Pg. 23-24.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Official Gazette of BiH, No. 89/18.

<sup>14</sup> Official Gazette of BiH, No. 89/18.

<sup>15</sup> AP BiH UNSCR 1325 2018-2022. Official Gazette of BiH, No. 89/18.

## OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Major challenges to achieving gender equality in political participation and decision-making in BiH pertain to traditional gender roles i.e., cultural factors which include beliefs about appropriate gender roles in relation to political participation and decision-making, resulting in the popular opinion that men are more fit for leadership roles while women are more suitable for roles in private life. A hostile political environment preventing women from taking more active roles is another challenge as women in politics in BiH experience discrimination, having to overcome various obstacles in accessing decision-making positions, and highly prevalent gender-based violence in political processes.

Multi-layered exclusion of women from major decision-making processes is manifested through gender-blind party regulations, unequal access to and allocation of party resources, a party culture that perpetuates

gender-based stereotypes and double standards, as well as the lack of political will to harmonize the legislation and ensure more women in the executive government branch. Additionally, a lack of economic independence and care services restricts women when it comes to making their own decisions about their active roles in politics and decision-making.

Finally, the biased and sensationalistic portrayal of women and girls in the media further reinforces the existing traditional gender roles and stereotypes as media outlets in BiH rarely place women in the center of news reports about political processes.

Jointly with UNDP, UN Women has published a "Baseline Study on Obstacles to Political Participation of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina" in 2020, to offer new evidence to re-examine and re-visit this important topic, provide fresh insights for policy makers, and serve as an advocacy tool for champions of gender equality agenda.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> The Baseline Study was developed as part of the "Women in Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina" Project, implemented by UNDP and UN Women. Full text is available here: <http://bit.ly/38ZMUxc>

Public discussion under "Women in Elections in BiH" Project, "Election Law and electoral system of Bosnia and Herzegovina – interventions towards equal representation of women and men", Sarajevo, January 2020.



# ELECTIONS IN BiH

Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina are primarily regulated at the state level, namely by the 1995 Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Dayton Agreement, the 2001 Election Law, the 2012 Law on Financing of Political Parties, and Central Election Commission (CEC) regulations. Certain issues related to political parties and the establishment of entity institutions are regulated by entity-level constitutions and laws.<sup>17</sup>

The Central Election Commission is a permanent body responsible for conducting elections, and all seven CEC members are appointed by the BiH Parliamentary Assembly House of Representatives for a seven-year term. Election terms are four years for both local and general elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the two election cycles alternate every two years following the CEC announcement of the call for elections. In general elections, the electorate votes at the state level for the Presidency and the House of Representatives of the BiH Parliamentary Assembly; at the entity level for the House of Representatives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) Parliament, the Republika Srpska (RS) president and two vice-presidents, and the RS National Assembly. In FBiH, votes are also cast for 10 cantonal assemblies. In local elections, the electorate votes at the municipal/city level

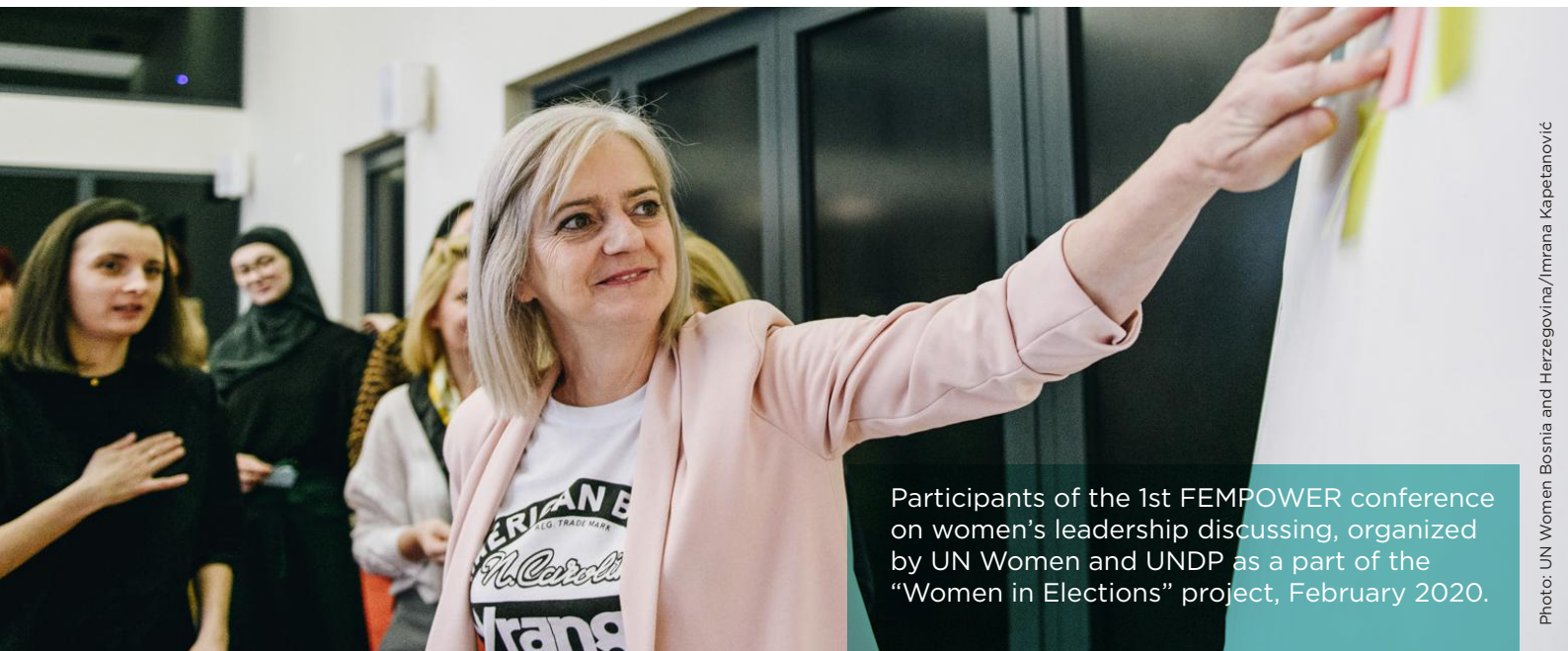
for municipal/city councils/assemblies and mayors.

The Election Law defines universal suffrage as the right of each citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina older than eighteen years of age to vote and to be elected. This right is subject to certain restrictions.<sup>18</sup> The election system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is categorized as a party-list proportional representation system, meaning that each political party or coalition presents a list of candidates for a multi-member electoral district, the voters vote for a party, and parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the votes. The lists are open, and the voters can influence the order of the candidates by marking individual preferences. Candidate lists must have at least 40 percent of candidates of each gender, with specific placement requirements, and if a list does not comply with the gender requirements, CEC can return it for correction or register the part of the list that follows the requirements.

Elections for members of the Presidency and for mayors are conducted based on the first-past-the-post system, and this is the simplest form of plurality/majority electoral system in which the winning candidate is the one who gains more votes than any other candidate, even if this is not an absolute majority of valid votes. Mayors are elected by single-member

<sup>17</sup> Entity legislation includes the Constitutions of FBiH (1994) and RS (1992); the Election Laws of RS (2002), of Brčko District (2008); the Laws on Political Associations of FBiH (1990), of RS (1996), of Brčko District (2012); the Laws on Financing of Political Parties of RS (2008), of Brčko District (2004).

<sup>18</sup> The right to vote is restricted for persons under indictment of the ICTY or those who are serving a sentence for serious violations of humanitarian law. Persons holding positions in the judiciary, police, armed forces, civil servants etc. cannot be candidates for any elected position. Read more: UNDP & UN Women (2020). Baseline Study on Barriers to Political Participation of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available here: <http://bit.ly/38ZMUxc>



Participants of the 1st FEMPOWER conference on women's leadership discussing, organized by UN Women and UNDP as a part of the "Women in Elections" project, February 2020.

districts and voters vote for candidates rather than political parties. A Serb member of the Presidency is elected from Republika Srpska, while Croat and Bosniak members of the Presidency are elected from the Federation of BiH.

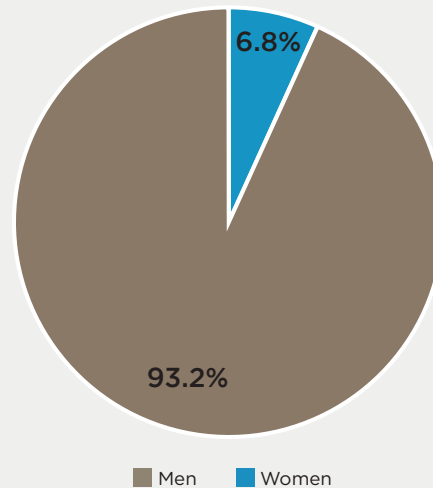
The number of political subjects vary from cycle to cycle. For example, in the 2018 General Elections, the state presidency was contested by 15 candidates, 37 candidates stood for the president of RS, lists of 22 parties and six coalitions appeared on the ballot for the BiH Parliamentary Assembly, 23 parties and five coalitions competed for the FBiH Parliament, and 21 parties, six coalitions and four independent candidates for the RS National Assembly.<sup>19</sup> A total number of candidates in the 2018 General Elections was 7,497.<sup>20</sup>

## 2020 LOCAL ELECTIONS

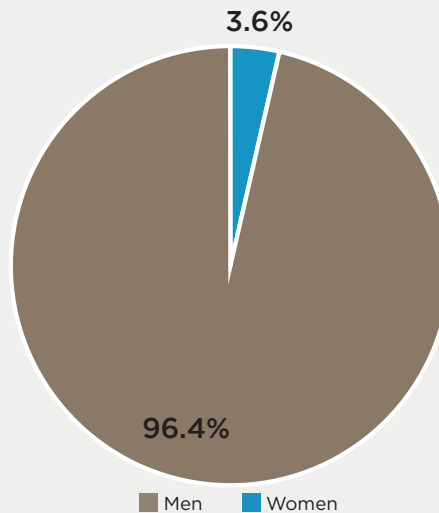
The 2020 Local Elections took place on 15 November in 142 cities and municipalities in BiH and on 20 December in Mostar. Elections for mayors and councils in Srebrenica and Dobojo were repeated on 21 February 2021, and elections for mayors of municipalities Travnik and Foča (FBiH) will be repeated on 21 April 2021. In November and December 2020, 119 municipal mayors were elected, 21 city mayors, 119 municipal councils and 20 city councils (including Brčko District Assembly). Out of 425 mayoral candidates, 29 were women, out of which 12 were candidates in RS, and 17 in FBiH.<sup>21</sup> Out of 140 elected mayors, five<sup>22</sup> are women – three women mayors were elected in RS, two in FBiH.

Women were elected mayors mostly in very small municipalities<sup>23</sup>, and elected women mayors will represent less than 1% of all registered voters in BiH (27,277 out of 3,196,511 registered voters). These municipalities are classified as rural and mostly underdeveloped, and four out of five have less than 7,000 registered voters. The approximate annual budget for the five municipalities is 13.5 million BAM,<sup>24</sup> out of which 50% would cover only one municipality and 50% would cover the remaining four municipalities. None of the 21 cities has elected a woman mayor.

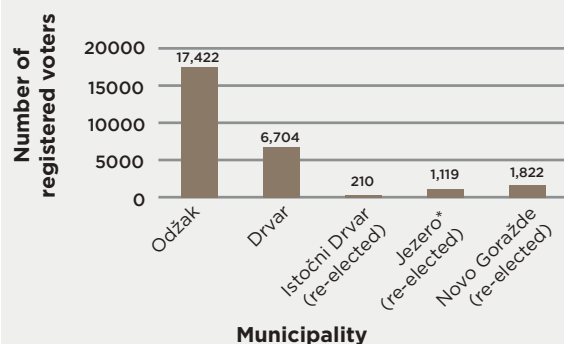
Candidates for mayor (2020)



Elected mayors (2020)



Municipalities with women elected mayors



<sup>19</sup> OSCE ODIHR (2019). Bosnia and Herzegovina, General Elections 7 October 2018 – ODIHR Election Observation Mission – Final report. Pg. 12. Available here: <https://bit.ly/3tCc8cN>

<sup>20</sup> CEC, Confirmed results of 2018 General Elections, available here: <https://bit.ly/2M6bP9X>

<sup>21</sup> Women were candidates in 23 municipalities and cities in BiH, meaning only a few municipalities and cities had more than one woman candidate for mayor, namely Modriča (2), Donji Vakuf (2), Novi Grad Sarajevo (3) and Istočno Sarajevo (3).

<sup>22</sup> 3 mayors are from SNSD, 1 from HDZ, 1 from Zavičajni socijaldemokrati.

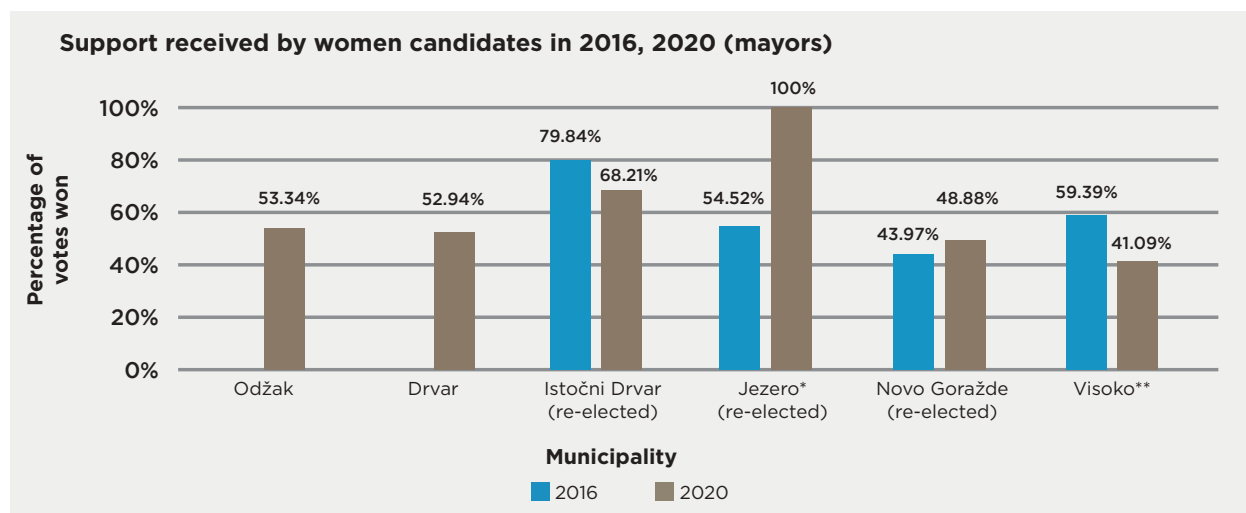
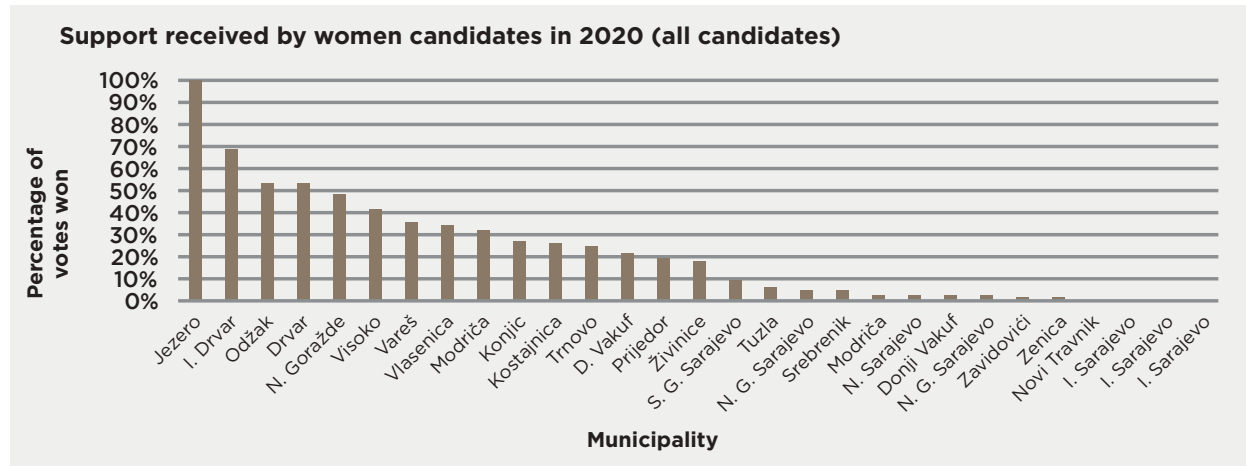
<sup>23</sup> Odžak (17,422 registered voters), Drvar (6,704 registered voters), Istočni Drvar (210 registered voters), Jezero (1,119 registered voters), and Novo Goražde (1,822 registered voters).

<sup>24</sup> Odžak (6,938,937 BAM), Drvar (3,154,300 BAM), Istočni Drvar (916,000 BAM), Jezero (835,500 BAM), Novo Goražde (1,745,486 BAM) – according to official websites of respective municipalities.



These findings are not surprising considering that 11 out of 29 women candidates for mayor won less than 5% of votes in their municipalities/cities; only four out of 29 women won more than 50% of votes. Out of five elected women mayors, three were reelected (Istočni Drvar, Jezero, Novo

Goražde). One woman mayor who won the elections in 2016 and ran again in 2020 lost the election (Visoko). Two are newly elected women mayors who have not run in the previous 2016 Local Elections (Odžak, Drvar). Out of the five elected women mayors, one did not have any opponents (Jezero).



When it comes to municipal/city councils/assemblies, in FBiH, women won 21.8% of mandates, i.e. 402 out of 1,845. Two municipalities (2.53%) elected less than 5% of women, namely municipalities Tešanj and Kalesija. Most of the municipalities (70.9%) elected between 11% and 30% of women, and only four municipalities (5%) elected more than 40% of women, namely municipalities Drvar, Dobretići, Kiseljak and Trnovo (FBiH).<sup>25</sup> In FBiH, 10 political parties and their coalitions were analyzed, namely “Naša stranka”, SNSD, HDZ, NIP, SDP, SDA, SBB, DF and SBiH. “Naša stranka” won 36 mandates in total, out of which 15 were won by women, i.e. 41.7%. “Platforma za progres” won 21 mandates, seven by women (33.3%). SNSD won 26 mandates, eight by women (30.8%). HDZ won 315 mandates, 94 by women (29.8%). “Narod

i pravda” (NIP) won 105 mandates, 31 by women (29.5%). SDP won 204 mandates, 42 by women (20.6%). SDA won 493 mandates, 98 by women (19.9%). SBB won 73 mandates, 14 by women (19.2%). DF won 58 mandates, nine by women (15.5%). SBiH won 46 mandates, four by women (8.7%).

In RS, women won 17% of mandates, i.e. 214 out of 1,256. Seven municipalities (11.5%) elected less than 5% of women, namely municipalities Pelagićevo, Stanari, Ugljevik, Kneževo, Bratunac, Rudo, Milići. No women were elected in the Pelagićevo municipality. Most of the municipalities (63.9%) elected between 11% and 30% of women. Two municipalities (3.3%) elected more than 40% of women, namely municipalities Kupres (RS) and Istočni Stari Grad. Kupres (RS)

<sup>25</sup> Seven municipalities (8.8%) elected between 6% and 10% of women; 29 municipalities elected 11-20% of women; 27 municipalities elected 21-30% of women; 10 municipalities (12.6%) elected between 31% and 40% of women.

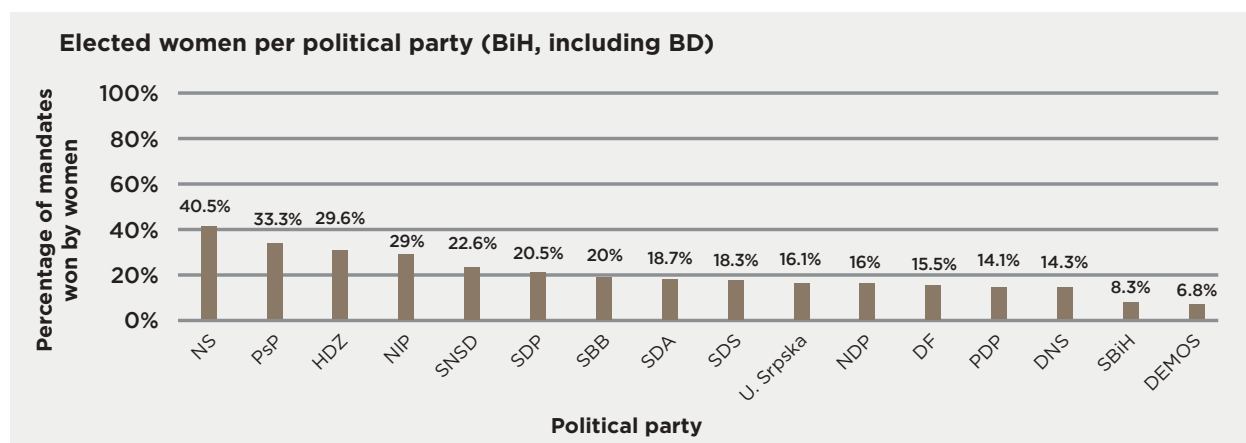
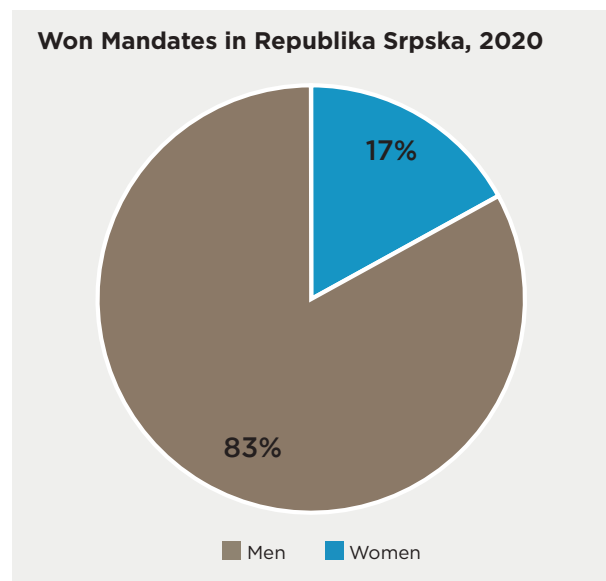
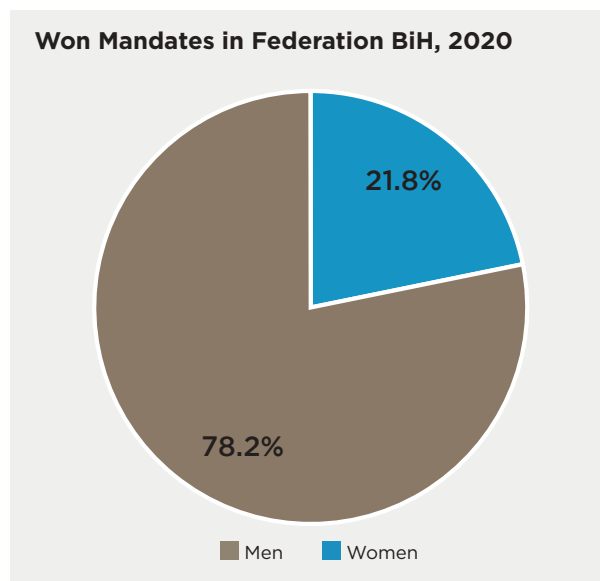
is the winner of the 2020 Local Elections when it comes to women's representation – the municipal council now consists of 63.6% of women, i.e. women hold seven out of 11 mandates.

In RS, eight political parties and their coalitions were analyzed, namely SNSD, SDS, "Ujedinjena Srpska", NDP, PDP, DNS, DEMOS and SDA. SNSD won 416 mandates in total, out of which 92 were won by women, i.e. 22.1%. SDS won 229 mandates, 42 by women (18.3%). Ujedinjena Srpska won 60 mandates, 10 by women (16.7%). NDP won 25 mandates, four by women (16%). PDP won 83 mandates, 12 by women (14.5%). DNS won 139 mandates, 20 by women (14.4%). DEMOS won 69 mandates, four by women (5.8%). SDA won 37 mandates, two by women (5.4%). In BD, women won 12.9% of mandates, i.e. four out of 31.

In the whole territory of BiH, including Brčko District, "Naša stranka" and "Platforma za progres" have the highest percentage of elected women from their structures, "Naša

stranka" being the only political party in BiH to reach the 40% threshold. However, both parties have won small portions of mandates, 37 and 21 respectively, thus more attention was paid to the parties with 100 and more mandates. SDA won the highest number of mandates (535) in BiH but is ranked 5th among the parties that have won more than 100 mandates with 100 mandates won by women. SNSD won the second highest number of mandates (446) and is ranked 2nd with 101 mandates won by women. HDZ won the third highest number of mandates (318) and is ranked 1st among the parties with 94 mandates won by women.

In FBiH, 192 women who were positioned among the top five candidates on their party lists fell below the 10th position. In RS, that number was 251. To illustrate with an example – in Bijeljina only, 15 women fell from 2nd, 4th or 5th place on the list to 21st, 24th or 27th position. As a result, only three women were elected to the Bijeljina Assembly, out of 31 mandates.



<sup>26</sup> Nine municipalities (14.8%) elected between 6% and 10% of women; 27 municipalities elected 11-20% of women; 12 municipalities elected 21-30% of women; Four municipalities (6.6%) elected between 31% and 40% of women.



Photo: UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina/Acham Buba

# GOOD PRACTICES

## ■ INCLUSIVE ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Inclusive elections, where all those eligible can vote to choose their elected representatives, are central to democracy. Ensuring that women and men can and do participate without unfair barriers is a core component of delivering an inclusive election. When women participate in elections – as voters, candidates, electoral administrators, or party supporters – they can express their own needs and interests and decisions better reflect the electorate. Although not commonly acknowledged, electoral management bodies (EMB) have a key role in promoting women’s electoral and political participation. While there are different models, EMBs are tasked with the responsibility of conducting the election and managing all the stages in the lead-up to an election event, such as voter registration, candidate registration, polling preparations, and voter education and outreach.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, CEC is a permanent body responsible for the conduction of elections and UN Women and UNDP have been collaborating with CEC on ensuring strategies to mainstream gender equality within their organizational structure

but also on ensuring that women participate at all levels of decision-making, that data collected is disaggregated by sex and that the organization formalizes its commitment to gender equality through a gender policy.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Election Law requires that the “composition of an election commission shall in general reflect an equal representation of both genders”, which is interpreted as each gender comprising a minimum of 40 percent of the total number of the members of the CEC. The law further states that efforts will be made to ensure that the least represented gender in municipal election commissions and polling station committees reaches a minimum of 40 percent of the total number of members. A post-election analysis is made after every election that includes a gender equality perspective. The analysis includes statistics on the number of women candidates, elected candidates, and voter turnout. As a direct result of the collaboration with the CEC through the “Women in Elections in BiH” Project, CEC has signed a Statement on Commitment to Gender Equality to further express its determination to respect relevant international conventions and the BiH Law on Gender Equality, advocate for gender equality and strive for progress in this

area of public and political life, all within its competencies. The Statement was drafted by the BiH Agency for Gender Equality with the technical support of UN Women and UNDP and was officially adopted in July 2020.<sup>27</sup>

## ■ PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT

UN Women is committed to strengthening women's capacity and influence in parliaments by providing parliamentary support in a number of ways, including supporting women's parliamentary networks (e.g. parliamentary committees, parliamentary caucuses and regional networks), as well as support to gender-sensitive reforms of parliamentary culture and norms. As both lawmakers and overseers of legislation, members of parliaments are important stakeholders and among the key drivers of change for gender equality and women's empowerment. They are also key constituents for Sustainable Development Goals, Beijing reviews, and other efforts related to normative progress.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Committee on Gender Equality of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH (CGE HoR PABiH) is the key legislative gender institutional mechanism. CGE HoR PABiH considers issues related to exercising gender equality in BiH, in particular concerning the promotion of the status of women in BiH; encouraging activities in BiH institutions, entity parliaments and the Assembly of District Brčko regarding the implementation of the action platform of the Beijing Declaration in 12 critical spheres: considering draft laws and other regulations from the perspective of gender equality and preventing discrimination against women; considering proposed documents and reports of BiH institutions dealing with gender equality and the implementation of the action plan of the Beijing Declaration in general; considering and preparing the participation of the delegations of BiH at international meetings when deliberating on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration (UN, Regional Cooperation Council - RCC etc.). CGE HoR PABiH also considers other gender related issues.

As a direct result of the collaboration with CGE HoR PABiH through the "Women in Elections in BiH" Project, the capacities of CGE HoR PABiH are continuously being

strengthened through a series of expert consultations with members of parliaments; support to the organization of parliamentary thematic sessions; support to the visibility of CGE HoR PABiH's efforts and work on gender equality and women's empowerment in BiH, as well as knowledge generation. Related to the latter, three complementary knowledge products were developed in collaboration with CGE HoR PABiH and the BiH Agency for Gender Equality: (1) a Communication and Visibility Strategy of CGE HoR PABiH, complementary with the HeForShe global UN campaign, in order to increase the visibility of CGE's efforts and work on gender equality and women's empowerment in BiH; (2) Guidelines for Gender Responsible Parliaments to support the everyday work of the Committee in terms of conducting a quality, timely and all-encompassing analysis of legislation and monitoring; and (3) a Toolkit for Periodical Self-assessment of Parliamentary Bodies, including the CGE, in terms of progress in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment and alignment with international standards.

## ■ SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE

Social norms programming is a vital component and cross-cutting theme of all of UN Women's work. In support to women's political participation, UN Women strives to ensure that women are perceived as equally legitimate and effective political leaders as men. UN Women can incorporate social norms change in political participation programming, including community dialogues to increase civic understanding of gender equality and women's right to political participation; media campaigns that positively portray women's role in public life and/or communicate messages to prevent violence against women in politics/elections; media monitoring and capacity building on adequate coverage of the positive contributions to women's political participation and the challenges women face in participating and leveraging the HeForShe campaign to encourage more political leaders to publicly promote women's leadership. To further support women's political participation and leadership and build alliances around gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, only in 2020, 434 participants were engaged in 12 public discussions and events and 200 thousand people were organically reached on Facebook through online advocacy and outreach.

<sup>27</sup> The Statement is available here: <https://bit.ly/2Xb5goK>

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

## GOVERNMENT

Adopt the amendments to the Election Law of BiH to increase the quota of women candidates on the electoral lists of political parties to 50 percent and the amendments to the Law on the Council of Ministers to introduce a minimum quota of 40 percent for the representation of either sex on the Council.<sup>28</sup>

Consider replacing the open list system with a zipper system for the nomination of candidates of both sexes on the electoral lists of political parties, ensuring that the first of every pair of subsequent ranks on the electoral lists is for a woman candidate, and introducing reserved seats for women in the parliaments of all entities.<sup>29</sup>

Provide capacity-building programs for women candidates on campaigning and political leadership skills, in particular for women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as Roma women, and raise awareness among political leaders and the public of the fact that the full, equal, free and democratic participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life is a requirement for the full implementation of the human rights of women.<sup>30</sup>

Adopt and implement legislation prohibiting and criminalizing violence against women in politics or incorporate adequate provisions into existing laws on eliminating violence against women, consistent with international and regional human rights standards. That includes laws to prohibit sexism, harassment and other forms of gender-based violence against women in politics, public life and parliament. Laws must be comprehensive enough to cover new forms of violence, including online or ICT-facilitated violence against women.<sup>31</sup>

Ensure adequate financial support to gender institutional mechanisms and improve the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data, as required by the Law on Gender Equality, in order to assess the progress and impact of measures taken, and the achieved results.

<sup>28</sup> As per UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Concluding observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Bosnia and Herzegovina\*, adopted at the 1732nd and 1733rd meetings, 2019 CEDAW/C/BiH/CO/6, available at: <https://bit.ly/3eWopEU>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> As per Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics, adopted at the 1732nd and 1733rd meetings, 2018 A/73/301, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/73/301>

## POLITICAL PARTIES

Harmonize internal political parties' policies with the Law on Gender Equality and introduce mandatory 40% gender quota for decision-making bodies at all levels of political party structures.

Expand the pool of qualified and capable women to run for election, including through initiating programs that boost women's confidence and capacity to lead, enhancing their campaign strategies and techniques and promoting linkages with supportive CSOs.

Ensure women's visibility in election campaigns by providing financial resources, additional media exposure, and training and promoting women in campaign leadership positions (e.g. in campaign management, voter contact and communications).

Ensure women elected to a political institution are provided with leadership roles within the parliamentary group (e.g. group chairperson) and parliamentary committees (e.g. chairperson or group focal point).

Encourage and include men in all efforts to support gender equality and parity.

## MEDIA

Adopt voluntary codes of gender-sensitive coverage in everyday work, not only for political and electoral coverage, but in all areas of reporting.

Adopt gender sensitive indicators for a balanced presence of women and men in the media and adhere to a fair portrayal of women and men through the elimination of stereotypes and the promotion of multi-dimensional representation/portrayal.

Increase reporting on women political candidates and the obstacles they face in the electoral process.

Work to equalize the presence of women political representatives when discussing topics of importance in dialogue shows, as opposed to providing opportunities only to male candidates.

## CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION

Conduct electoral gender mapping to identify gaps and opportunities to promote women's participation in elections – as voters, as contestants and as electoral management staff.<sup>32</sup>

Monitor and report violence against women in elections and analyze candidate registration procedures to prevent the erection of barriers to women's participation.<sup>33</sup>

Integrate information about violence against women in politics and elections and respective mitigation measures into training programs for electoral administrators and ensure that early warning systems for election violence and electoral security assessment address gender-based forms of violence.<sup>34</sup>

## INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Encourage the government to respect its national and international commitments on promoting gender equality: the support of the international community is essential to enable Bosnia and Herzegovina to meet its commitments on gender equality. In that sense, respect for gender equality should be a criterion for eligibility for international cooperation programs negotiated with the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The international community should also support capacity building for women regarding political participation and be involved in the monitoring of gender indicators.

Support and complement the efforts of the government to prevent and combat violence against women in politics, including developing standards for data collection and supporting monitoring initiatives over the entire election cycle, in cooperation with independent mechanisms on violence against women and women's rights.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> As per UN Women and UNDP (2015). Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation, available at: <https://bit.ly/3s4COxo>

<sup>33</sup> As per Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics, adopted at the 1732nd and 1733rd meetings, 2018 A/73/301, available at: <https://undocs.org/A/73/301>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.