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ЕВРОПЕЙСКО
ЖЕНСКО ЛОБИ
БЪЛГАРСКА ПЛАТФОРМА

WOMEN CHANGING EUROPE: STARTING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL



www.womenlobbybulgaria.org

About Us

The Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby (Bulgarian Platform – EWL) is founded in 2005 as a non-formal coalition. Among the Platform's primary goals is joining efforts of non-profit organizations throughout the country working for gender equality and combating all forms of violence against women. The organization advocates for the interests of all women regardless of their race, ethnic origin, health status, sexual orientation, age, religion, conviction, or any other differences. The Platform works as a watchdog in the field of equality, against gender-based stereotypes and sexism, which form the basis of inequality and are conducive to violence against women.

In 2016 the Bulgarian Platform was officially registered as a legal entity under the Bulgarian Non-Profit Legal Entities Act. As of July 2024, the Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby unites 13 non-profit organizations and individual members from all around the country. Since 2005, the Platform has been a fully-fledged member of the largest EU based coalition, the European Women's Lobby (EWL), which unites over 2000 organizations working for women's rights.

The Bulgarian Platform shares and works for a society in which women's contribution in all aspects of life is recognized, rewarded, and appreciated – in leadership, in caregiving, in production; all women have self-esteem and freedom of choice; all women and girls are free from violence and exploitation and no woman, or a girl is left behind by the institutions.

We strive for building a fair Europe, based on feminist principles of equality between women and men, respecting diversity, values of peace, dignity, and fairness. While striving to achieve our vision of Europe and of Bulgaria, we create an environment for engaging different generations and for carrying out key discussions about women rights, which we deem critical for the understanding of the world and its transforming.

The Bulgarian Platform – EWL conducts monitoring of the gender equality policies on national and European level, carries out and implements initiatives for changing the status quo and the patriarchal Bulgarian society, drafts and presents recommendations to the institutions on key specific areas.

During the years, the Platform has implemented various campaigns aimed at adopting legislation in defence and prevention of violence

against women, including online violence, advocating for adopting a Law on equal opportunities of women and men, Protection from discrimination law, etc.

About the European Women's Lobby

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) was founded in 1990. The European Women's Lobby unites the women movement in Europe and has as its ultimate goal to influence the broad public and the EU institutions to work in support of the women's rights and for achieving full-fledged equality between men and women. Following multiple enlargement waves within 30 years period, the EWL has been transformed in one of the largest networks of women's associations, representing over 2000 organizations in all EU member and candidate states, one country outside the EU, as well as 18 coalitions from within Europe.

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Gender equality, violence against women, patriarchal stereotypes, and sexism remain a challenge for women in the various aspects of their everyday life. Overcoming violence and inequality demands participation and commitment by institutions on national and on local level!

Studies show that a girl that is born today will have to wait until her 97th birthday, an age over the projected life expectancy, to be able to witness the achievement of gender equality in the world.

In the period June – November 2024, the Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby carried out a project which aimed to enhance women representation and participation in decision-making on local level.

The project, in its essence, targeted overcoming gender inequality, including online and offline violence via developing tools for intervention, support and empowerment, together with direct work with local branches of political parties, and local government institutions to instil change in attitudes towards women's role, raise awareness regarding European legislative initiatives and policies. In other words, it aims to support the implementation of gender-sensitive policies.

The project is built upon the commitment, the passion, and the dedication of the European Women's Lobby to change Europe by applying its feminist guidelines. Our view is that a Feminist Europe is possible only if women's organizations work at all levels – European, national, and local. The project focused mainly on policies, advocacy, and campaigns, aiming at achieving our feminist vision through advocacy for the gender inclusion at the local level and the involvement of more women in the decision-making process. In this regard, to secure a solid foundation for meaningful women's participation in local level decision-making, further coordinated efforts are required with the engagement of local government, local branches of political parties and local activists. Local level challenges demand that local political parties change their attitudes and their internal policies for selection and support of female leaders; as well as equipping active women with adequate

knowledge and skills to be able to withstand themselves, mobilise resources for campaigns and initiate changes at the local level, or run for office. The Bulgarian Platform endorsed the EWL Manifesto to lobby local, national and European politicians to support our demands.

Consistently, women in Bulgarian political life lack representation and women's interest are marginalized in public discussions. With few exceptions, women have not been in leadership positions in political parties or institutions, whereas some conservative parties' representatives have even gone so far as to publicly share that women in their candidate lists are included just "to beautify the lists". Following the last parliamentary elections in 2024, women represent 20% of all elected members of parliament. Gender equality as a topic, not only is not a priority among the party manifestoes, but it also actually doesn't exist. Women are only mentioned within the issues of motherhood and marriage. Previous analysis of the political parties' platforms displays the same outcome, i.e. women form a part of the political agenda only with their reproductive functions or as part of the marriage institution. During the European parliament elections campaign in June 2024, the Bulgarian political parties did not discuss the issue of gender equality or women's rights, they even did not mention the first EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which was adopted within the period of the campaign. In other words, the Bulgarian political representatives do not discuss values or policies in support of women's rights, human rights, or any feminist principles. Bulgaria has been spiralling in a continuing political crisis for the last two years with early parliamentary elections every 4-5 months. With this in mind, it is even more important that the feminist organizations to actively push for their principles and advocate before political representatives and the broad public to include the feminist values for equality between women and men in their policies at all levels.

The project in this sense has provided adequate training, support, skills and urged for changes in local level policies and internal political parties' dynamics in the local branches for better women involvement via the following:

- Improving women's representation in local government and decision-making: strengthening women representation in decision-making at local level in such a way as to help women be more active,

more visible, and more empowered when they take part in various initiatives at the local level.

- Capacity building, training and providing tools to women at the local level to be able to actively advocate and withstand their positions, take part in political decisions and instil change in local policies; thus improving the setting in which women work and take part.
- Building strategies for local campaigns and initiatives that would guarantee better visibility of women and any policies and measures at local level, including gender equality component.
- Advocating for better gender disaggregated data at the local level.

The project team carried out needs assessment study to identify key areas of shared interest in five Bulgarian municipalities. The organizations, members of the Platform, collected data from municipalities in Plovdiv, Kazanlak, Smolyan, Gabrovo, and Veliko Tarnovo to map the most pressing areas of concern related to gender equality that require urgent decision-making. The team conducted initial meetings/reached out to the selected municipalities to discuss possibilities for resolving the identified issue/s.

The following critical issues have been identified in the respective municipalities:

Smolyan Municipality:

1. Lack of a crisis centre/shelter for victims of domestic/gender-based violence.
2. Low level of women's representation at all government levels.
3. Lack of a public council where gender equality issues could be deliberated.

Veliko Tarnovo Municipality:

1. Lack of adequate number of accessible public spaces for people with reduced mobility.
2. Inefficient public transport. Veliko Tarnovo municipality has designed transport information boards to alert citizens in a timely manner about

public transport timetables. These however have not been properly updated (Information is accurate as of before 2020).

Gabrovo Municipality:

1. Lack of a domestic violence working group or council at local level.
2. Need for raising awareness campaigns on human rights and equality between women and men.

Kazanlak Municipality:

1. Lack of a crisis centre/shelter within Kazanlak municipality

Plovdiv Municipality:

1. Lack of representation of women in local government and decision-making.



2. Lack of local gender equality policies.



Based on these outcomes, the team identified four cross sectoral areas of concern:

1. **Gender equality policies at local level:** lack of gender sensitivity and relevant understanding
2. **Domestic violence:** lack of crisis centre/shelter; lack of municipal level mechanisms
3. **Lack of women in the political decision-making process** at local level
4. **Human rights concerns:** accessibility to persons with reduced mobility; public transportation.

These areas formed the framework for capacity building trainings at local level. Further, local level events were organized for sharing experience, as well as a national conference with the participation of civil society organizations, and local government and public institutions' representatives from across the country.





The conference was held on 19 November 2024 in Gabrovo and allowed for substantial deliberation on the areas of concerns requiring urgent measures, namely the following:

- Local government and its role in the prevention of and protection from domestic violence and gender-based violence,
- Gender equality mainstreaming in local policies as a long-term strategy, and
- Funding possibilities and joint actions between municipalities and civil society on the issues.

The conference has confirmed that the outlined areas of concern within the five municipalities are among the key areas which require new policies, approaches, and cooperation in each Bulgarian municipality. The deliberations, facilitated by Mrs. Iliana Balabanova, European Women's Lobby President and chairperson of the Bulgarian Platform of the European Women's Lobby, Mrs. Diana Videva, Demetra Association and Mrs. Teodora Krumova, Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, allowed participants to look for active cooperation between civil society organizations and local governments, but also raised neglected issues as the lack of effective protection and prevention of

domestic violence, the need of proactive actions at every level and every institution to address any of the issues.

The project activities pilot efforts to introduce techniques for better women representation in decision-making at local and national level, as well as developing and implementing gender equality mainstreaming. The findings and the outcomes of the activities, as well as the local initiatives and ideas will be further enhanced in the future, and the Bulgarian Platform of the EWL will continue to put efforts to build upon this initiative. The project helped building a network of representatives of various institutions and civil society, as well as for a sustainable dialogue and joint activities in different municipalities.

