



Deteriorating situation for women in Western Balkans and Turkey

1.6.2021



On 11 May, the Delegations for Turkey and the Western Balkans held a joint meeting about the latest developments in the region concerning different perspectives of gender inequalities. The meeting was led by the Chair of the AFET Working group for the Western Balkans, Tonino Picula.

Regional experts from Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Turkey were invited to present and discuss with Members the latest developments in the region regarding gender inequalities in the field of work and access to health services as well as gender-based violence.

Inequality in the work field

The first part focused on equality in the workplace and access to qualified jobs for women. Senior Policy Advisor at A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights Belgrade, Milica Marinković, presented the latest data on women's labour rights violations in Serbia's trade sector, expressing concerns over the lack of judicial protection against gender-based discrimination. Workers lack the knowledge of the relevant procedures to deal with discrimination issue, which leads to discrimination cases not being addressed properly.

Co-author of National Strategy for Gender Equality in Montenegro 2021-2025 at OSCE, Slavica Striković, highlighted the case of Montenegrin journalist Duška Pejović, who had been subjected to threats and hate speech, following an interview with newly elected Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazović. The attacks on and cases of hate speech towards female journalists have been condemned by the EU and various civil society organisations, but have not received any reaction from national institutions.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the economic position of women is difficult to measure due to a lack of national data. However, the significant difference between men and women is nevertheless evident. Assistant Professor at the University of Sarajevo School of Economics and Business, Dr Munira Šestić, wrapped up the discussion by showing that ethnicity and gender are the main discrimination factors and obstacles for entrepreneurs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, impeding on economic incentives and motivation for women to start their own businesses.

Unrecognised cases of violence

The second part discussed the balance between freedom of expression, right to privacy and the freedom from violence. Skopje-based private attorney-at-law, Marta Gusar, shared her experience regarding the case known as “Javna Soba” (“Public Room”). This online network is a platform where men can share personal information and compromising material of women. It has only recently received attention from the state authorities who decided to shut it down a few months ago. However, Gusar argued that the reaction from the competent institutions has been insufficient as they have failed to recognise these events as cases of violence.

Forensic Medicine Specialist at the Institute of Forensic Medicine Kosovo, Dr Bergita Curri, stressed the importance of spreading awareness and knowledge in schools. She argued that Kosovo may have criminalised domestic violence and marital rape, but that issues such as late institutional response, low punishments, social stigma, low trust in institutions, patriarchal values, underreported cases, neglect from officials, and skewed public perception of violence remain issues which need to be tackled.

Pandemic measures negatively impact women’s access to health services

The last part of the meeting focused on the access to safe health services in the context of pandemic restrictions. The Executive Director of Albania Center of Population and Development (ACPD), Bruna Hylviu, showed how the lockdown measures have had a negative impact on access to safe social and reproductive health services and rights for women. These restrictions have had a particularly negative impact on the most vulnerable and marginalised groups. Together with various civil society organisations, the ACPD have been actively working on spreading awareness, creating equal opportunities, offering online consultation and training for healthcare providers.

Co-Program Director at Greenpeace Mediterranean, Deniz Bayram, argued that the lack of pandemic-tailored measures has become an excuse for authorities to evade the rules and to arbitrarily deny women who experience gender-based violence support and access to economic measures. The authorities do not consider the Istanbul Convention a legal tool to protect women, but rather as an attack on Turkish values, culture and tradition. She explained that the withdrawal from Turkey from the Convention will have an impact especially on women from different minority groups.

MEPs expressed concerns

MEPs Tanja Fajon, Isabel Santos and Romeo Franz expressed their concerns over the deteriorating situation in the region regarding women’s rights and cases of multiple discrimination. They enquired further on gender-based violence, the number of abortion-related deaths in Albania and how relevant organisations in the region are reaching out and trying to improve the situation.

More information:

[D-RS website](#)

[D-ME website](#)

[DSEE website](#)

[D-MK website](#)

[D-AL website](#)

[D-TR website](#)
