



Gender Policy to Fight HIV/AIDS

# **GENDER ISSUES AND HIV**

*Participatory Research Report*

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## *Participatory Research Report*

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# INTRODUCTION

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With the intention of facilitating the inclusion of gender dimension in the national response to HIV epidemic, and thus helping improve the efficiency and quality of the fight against HIV/AIDS in Serbia, since October 2009 Novi Sad Humanitarian Center (NSHC) has been implementing the project **“Gender Policy to Fight HIV/AIDS”**. The first step towards this aim was a participatory research, the intention of which was to enquire about the knowledge, attitudes, and existing practices of institutions and civil society organizations, in relation to gender issues and their impact on HIV vulnerability of target groups. On the basis of research results, trainings concerning gender issues and their impact on HIV vulnerability of target groups are going to be designed and implemented for the representatives of governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, and media houses.

There are activities being realized within the project “Strengthening HIV prevention and the protection of most vulnerable groups“ by NSHC as a sub-recipient and Youth of JAZAS as the primary recipient of the funds from round 8 of the Global fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

There is a growing influence of HIV epidemic on women because of the distinct gender, class, social, cultural, economic, and other inequalities. Gender is one of the major factors determining a person’s exposure to HIV infection, the possibility of receiving care, support, or treatment, as well as the possibility of coping with problems related to HIV. Therefore, the process of reducing gender inequality and empowering women represents an important part of the fight against HIV and AIDS.

# RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the research were representatives of the following institutions and non-governmental organizations which are implementing projects as a part of rounds 6 and 8 of the Global fund: Youth Information Centre, JAZAS-Association Against AIDS, PaO2, IAN, Više od pomoći (AID+), Q Club, Youth of JAZAS, Belgrade Special hospital for addiction illnesses, Požarevac Institute for public health, Serbian Institute for public health “Dr Milan Jovanović Batut“, Zrenjanin Health center, Stav +, Red Line - Resource Center for PLHIV - EHO (Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization), Novi Sad Humanitarian Center, Roma Women in the Decade, Psychiatry institute of the Vojvodina Clinical center, Prevent, Subotica County prison, Šabac correctional institution, Šabac Institute for public health, Duga Association, Inđija Health Center, Valjevo correctional institution, Stablo, Youth of JAZAS in Kragujevac, Valjevo Health Center, Iskra Loznica, Kraljevo Health Center “Studenica“, Timok Youth Center, Sunce, Niš correctional institution, Mental health clinic of the Niš Clinical Center, Putokaz, Children Help Center and Kruševac Juvenile correctional facility.

# RESEARCH LOCATION

The research was conducted in Serbia in four regional centers: Belgrade, Novi Sad, Kragujevac and Niš. Within the focus groups some of the participants were organizations and institutions from towns in the vicinity of those regional centers (These towns include: Pančevo, Požarevac, Šabac, Inđija, Subotica, Valjevo, Loznica, Kraljevo, Zrenjanin, Kruševac).

# METHODOLOGY

The research consisted of two parts: reviewing and analyzing the existing strategies and policies regarding gender issues in Serbia (desk research), and collecting data on gender issues and their impact on HIV vulnerability of target groups, as well as data on awareness and implementation of gender equality principles in the practice of various care providers (focus groups). There were 4 focus groups with 35 participants among them, out of which there were 21 women (60%) and 14 men, from 20 non-governmental organizations and 15 institutions (10 health institutions and 5 correctional institutions).

With the help of participatory techniques, qualitative data on the following fields were obtained:

- • **Familiarity with the concepts of gender, sex, and gender roles**
- • **Gender policy in organizations and institutions**
- • **Gender roles within the beneficiary groups**
- • **Gender issues and HIV epidemic**
- • **Ideas and recommendations for the inclusion of gender dimension in the national response to HIV epidemic**

Focus groups were conducted through participatory techniques, group and panel discussion, and field-effect analysis. The field-effect analysis technique was used in order to determine the differences in the rights and responsibilities of men in comparison to women, and vice versa. Panel discussion was applied so as to determine the knowledge of gender issues and to investigate the need for strengthening the capacities. Discussion technique was used throughout the entire duration of focus groups, in gathering data on all researched fields.

# RESEARCH RESULTS

## 1) LEGAL, STRATEGIC AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY

### *LEGAL FRAMEWORK*

#### **The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia<sup>1</sup>**

Gender equality in Serbia is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which promises to guarantee the equality of women and men and develop an equal opportunities policy (Article 15 of the Constitution).

The Constitution also prohibits all discrimination, direct or indirect, on any grounds, particularly on sex. Likewise, the Constitution allows for new affirmative measures to be introduced so as to achieve full equality of individuals or a group of individuals in a substantially unequal position compared to other citizens (Article 21).

<sup>1</sup> The text of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia is available at <http://www.predsednik.rs/mwc/epic/doc/ConstitutionofSerbia.pdf>

## Gender Equality Law<sup>2</sup>

Gender Equality Law belongs to the group of anti-discrimination laws and more precisely determines the right to gender equality and equal opportunities policy as guaranteed by the Constitution (Article 15). Gender Equality Law has been adopted by most countries in the region (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro), while in Serbia it was adopted by the National Assembly on 11th December 2009.

In addition to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, gender equality is determined by international documents, most importantly by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW (ratified by the Law published in the “Official Gazette of the SFRY” – International Treaties, No.11/81), which represents an integral part of our legal system and an international and legal basis of passing the Gender Equality Law.

Gender equality also exists within a number of legal and sublegal acts, such as Law on Labor, Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, Law on Pension and Disability, Criminal Code, Family Law, Law on Social Protection and Assurance of Social Security of Citizens, Declaration on Gender Equality of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Resolution on Gender Equality of the AP of Vojvodina, Decision on Election of Deputies to Assembly of the AP Vojvodina, the National Strategy for Improving the Position of Women and Enhancing Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction Strategy, and similar.

The Gender Equality Law determines the creation of equal opportunities to practice rights and obligations, taking special measures in order to prevent and eliminate discrimination based on gender, and the procedure of legal protection of persons exposed to discrimination (Article 1).

According to this Law, public administration organs<sup>3</sup> lead an active equal opportunities policy in all fields of social life, while the equal opportunities policy means achieving equality of the sexes in all phases of planning, passing and carrying out decisions in connection to the position of women and men (Article 3).

This Law defines special measures for the implementation of the equal opportunities policy, the prevention and elimination of discrimination based on gender, as well as the protection procedure of persons exposed to discrimination in the field of labor, employment, education, culture, family, and political life.

The most important part of the Gender Equality Law is the **field of labor and employment**, thus it includes the fields which are not covered by the Law on Labor. The innovation within the field of labor and employment brought by this Law is in regard to the obligation of the employer of 500 or more employees to compose a plan of measures for elimination and alleviation of unequal gender representation (Article 13). Likewise, this Law binds the public administration organs to

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<sup>2</sup> The text of the Law is available at [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/lat/akta/akta\\_detalji.asp?Id=922&t=P](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/lat/akta/akta_detalji.asp?Id=922&t=P)

<sup>3</sup> Public administration organs include state organs, autonomous province organs, local government organs, organisations entrusted with public authority, as well as a legal entity established or financed in its entirety, or predominantly, by the Republic, an autonomous province or a local government (Article 2 of the Gender Equality Law)

aim to provide the 30% of the less represented gender, both through employment policy and on management positions, or administrative and supervisory committees (Article 14).

In this field, it is forbidden to give priority to a person on the basis of gender in cases of employment or advertising employment and to hinder promotion or professional training due to pregnancy or parenthood. Equal earnings for the same work are guaranteed, as well as the protection from sexual harassment, which is to be provided by the employer. Furthermore, the employer is obliged to offer professional training to the 30% less represented gender, and 30% of the less represented gender is to be included in collective negotiations as well. This also incites the employment of the less represented gender during the implementation of the active employment policy measures (Article 15-22).

In the **field of social care** it is issued that special means shall be set aside from the budget in order to advance the position of single and unemployed parents (Article 23).

In the **field of health care** it is forbidden to discriminate on the basis of gender, and the protection of women is provided for by establishing health care institutions on primary, secondary and tertiary level, in accordance with the law which determines health care. Women health care includes separately: prevention and early discovery of illness, health care in connection to family planning, during pregnancy, delivery and postnatal period; health care in cases of illness and injuries, in accordance with the law which determines health care (Article 24). A vital aspect of this field are the working hours of social and health care institutions for women and children, which are obliged to adjust their work organization and working hours schedule to the needs of their beneficiaries (Article 25). In the field of family relations, it is guaranteed that partners are equal no matter if they are married or in a non-marital cohabitation. Partners have equal rights to plan the number of children, to have access to information, education, and means which enable them to practice those rights. Special anti-discrimination measures are regulated in relation to domestic violence, and the public administration organs are obliged to work on increasing public awareness of the need to put an end to domestic violence (Article 26-29).

In addition to prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender in the field of education, the Law also precisely states the possible fields of discrimination (Article 30) and issues the possibility of taking special measures of faster advancement and a more complete inclusion into the education process and professional training for students or groups of students who leave school early, due to their culture, tradition, and social and economic conditions (Article 33). A new item in this field is a legal solution which issues that school curriculums should incorporate subject matters related to gender equality, as well as to provide information and special education in the field of sexual education and reproductive health within the curriculum.

In the field of political and public life, in addition to equal opportunities of political and other activities, the innovation in this Law is related to the obligations of political parties, unions, and professional associations. Namely, every four years they need to adopt an action plan and special measures for inducing and promoting equal representation of women and men (Article 35).

This field also binds the republic, provincial and local authority bodies, as well as publicly authorized institutions and organizations, state-owned companies and business associations to sort all the statistic data they collect, file, and process, according to gender (Article 40).

This Law determines the right of associations whose goals are related to promotion of gender equality to monitor the practice of gender equality, to point out discrimination, as well as to write and publish reports on their findings (Article 42).

Based on regulations on the court protection within the Law, injured parties have the right to start a legal procedure in order to protect their rights, while the monitoring of this application is performed by the authorized ministry, which is the body of the autonomous province in charge of gender equality. These bodies are the ones who fine the institutions violating this law through discrimination.

### **Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against<sup>4</sup>**

The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 19th 1979, and it took effect on December 3rd 1981, as a global and legally binding international contract. SFRY ratified this convention by the Law on Ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted by the SFRY Assembly on October 1st 1981 (“Official Gazette of the SFRY” – International Treaties, No.11/81).

By now, the Convention has been ratified by 185 countries, which is over 90% of the United Nations’ members.

Within the system of United Nations, equality of women and men was proclaimed as one of the primary principles of this organization in a great number of documents prior to the passing of this Convention. Thus, one of the central aims of *The Charter of the United Nations* is reaffirmation of faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* confirms the anti-discrimination principle and proclaims that all people were born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that all rights and liberties belong to every person, with no exception, including the sex difference. The signatory countries of *The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights*, as well as *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* have the obligation to provide the equality of women and men in respect to all economic, social, cultural, citizen, and political rights.

Nevertheless, in spite of the existence of all these instruments, women discrimination was still widespread. Therefore, a need arose for the adoption of a special international document in order to eliminate women discrimination and achieve the equality of women and men. The Convention represents the result of work and effort of the United Nations Commission on Status of Women (CSW), a United Nations organ established under the pressure of women groups in 1946, with the aim of pointing out the fields where women’s rights were most distinctly violated in regard to men’s. The particularity of this Convention is that besides the meaning of equality, it issues the manner in which equality can be achieved.

The Convention represents a legally binding document whose implementation is monitored by

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**4** Decree on proclamation of the Law on ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, “Official Gazette of the SFRY” – International Treaties, No.11/81, text also available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women through examining reports that countries are obliged to submit; the implementation of the Convention is examined through Concluding Comments on Convention implementation for each country and through General Recommendations on content and purpose from some members of the Convention to whom they are interpreted in the light of new challenges of the present times.<sup>5</sup>

For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “discrimination against women” shall mean *any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of gender which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.* (Article 1 of the Convention).

The member countries commit themselves to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake: to incorporate the principle of the equality of men and women into their national institutions or responding laws, as well as to provide for the practical implementation of that principle; to adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women; to establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination; to refrain from all procedures or practices which discriminate against women; to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women, as well as measures which will change or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs, or practices which constitute discrimination against women and to repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women (Article 2).

Among other things, the Convention prescribes measures of affirmative action in order to achieve *de facto* equality of women and men, to be valid until everyone is given equal opportunities and treatment (Article 4).

By the Convention, countries are obliged to take appropriate measures in regard to elimination of prejudice about inferiority or superiority of either sex or the traditional role of women and men, as well as measures which refer to the acknowledgment of joint responsibility of women and men for the nurture and development of children (Article 5).

It is necessary to carry out appropriate measures, including the legislative ones, in order to put an end to all forms of trafficking in women, as well as exploitation of women (Article 6).

Measures demanded from the countries include the ones which will ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women in political and public life, as well as education, health and employment, and there is a separate part of the Convention which refers to improving the position of women living in villages.

Countries which have ratified CEDAW are obliged to file reports on the implementation of the

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<sup>5</sup> Dubravka Šimonović, Short Guide on CEDAW - the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Implementation in Croatia, (ed.) Government Office for Gender Equality, Zagreb, 2004

Convention to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The reports will be considered through discussion with representatives of the government. In addition to the national reports, so-called *shadow reports* can be submitted as well by the non-governmental organizations stating their attitudes on the Convention implementation. Based on that, the Committee issues Concluding Comments regarding measures a country is obliged to take in order to efficiently implement the Convention and put an end to discrimination.

In the Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to our national report, which were published in June 2007, special recommendations for our country were about the process of adjusting our laws, policies, plans, and programs for the implementation of gender equality to the Convention, as well as the adoption of necessary laws and strategic documents which would regulate the field of gender equality and protection of women from discrimination. Moreover, the state is urged to carry out systematic gender-sensitization and training programs for government and other public officials, especially law enforcement, judicial and health personnel. Aside from taking measures to eliminate discrimination against women in education, employment, political, public, and social life, as well as eradicating violence against women and traffic in women, there are special recommendations in the field of health care. Namely, in Article 33 of the Concluding Comments, the Committee is concerned about the limited access to adequate health-care services for women, especially for women in rural areas and Roma women, including access to information and counseling on family planning. It is further worried about the use of abortion as a method of family planning. It is also concerned about the lack of up-to-date sex-disaggregated data and information on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women and girls.

In this field “the Committee recommends that the State party continue to take measures to improve women’s access to affordable health care throughout their life cycle and in all areas of the country. It calls on the State party to increase its efforts to improve the availability of sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, to mobilize resources for that purpose and to monitor the actual access to those services by women. It further recommends that information on family planning be widely available and reproductive health education targeted at girls and boys, with special attention to the prevention of early pregnancies and the control of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.”

The next national report is expected to contain information on the new efforts employed in advancing access to health services for women and girls.

The next report on the implementation of the Convention by the Republic of Serbia is due to be submitted in 2010.

## **The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination<sup>6</sup>**

Discrimination on the basis of gender is also prohibited by The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, adopted on March 26th 2009. This Law regulates the general prohibition of discrimination, the forms and cases of discrimination, as well as the methods of protection

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**6** The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination available at [http://www.minoritycentre.org/sites/default/files/The%20Law%20on%20the%20Prohibition%20of%20Discrimination%20ENG\\_0.pdf](http://www.minoritycentre.org/sites/default/files/The%20Law%20on%20the%20Prohibition%20of%20Discrimination%20ENG_0.pdf)

against discrimination. The terms “discrimination” and “discriminatory treatment” in this Law are used to designate any unwarranted discrimination or unequal treatment, that is to say, omission (exclusion, limitation or preferential treatment) in relation to individuals or groups, as well as members of their families or persons close to them, be it overt or covert, on the grounds of race, skin color, ancestors, citizenship, national affiliation or ethnic origin, language, religious or political beliefs, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, financial position, birth, genetic characteristics, health, disability, marital and family status, previous convictions, age, appearance, membership in political, trade union and other organizations and other real or presumed personal characteristics (Article 2).

This Law also defines the forms of discrimination, and they include direct and indirect discrimination, as well as violation of the principle of equal rights and obligations, calling to account, associating for the purpose of exercising discrimination, hate speech and disturbing and humiliating treatment (Articles 4-12).

Discrimination on grounds of gender represents a special case of discrimination<sup>7</sup>, and it is considered to occur in the case of conduct contrary to the principle of equal rights and freedoms of women and men in the political, economic, cultural, and other aspects of public, professional, private, and family life.

By this Law “it is forbidden to deny rights or to grant privileges, be it publicly or covertly, pertaining to gender or gender change. It is forbidden to practice physical violence, exploitation, express hatred, disparagement, blackmail and harassment pertaining to gender, as well as to publicly advocate, support and practice conduct in keeping with prejudices, customs and other social models of behavior based on the idea of gender inferiority or superiority; that is, the stereotyped roles of the genders.” (Article 20).

## ***INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY***

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In the Republic of Serbia, after the changes in 2000, several significant steps have been undertaken towards establishing institutional mechanisms for gender equality. Mechanisms for gender equality represent institutional, governmental and/or parliamentary structures established in order to promote, advance, and ensure an equal participation of women and men in all spheres of public and political life.

At this moment, the mechanisms are established on the level of both executive and legislative

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**7** Other special cases of discrimination are: Discrimination in the course of proceedings conducted before public administration organs, Discrimination in the sphere of labor, Discrimination in the provision of public services and in the use of premises and spaces, The prohibition of religious discrimination, Discrimination in the sphere of education and professional training, Discrimination on the grounds of gender, Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, Discrimination of children, Discrimination on the grounds of age, Discrimination against national minorities, Discrimination on the grounds of political party or trade union membership, Discrimination of disabled persons and Discrimination on the grounds of health.

authority (on the level of the republic and province) and, in various forms, they also exist on the level of local authority.

The Republic of Serbia

- **Gender Equality Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia**

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- **Serbian Government's Council for Gender Equality**

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- **Gender Equality Directorate**

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- **Deputy Ombudsman for Gender Equality and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

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AP Vojvodina

- **Committee for Gender Equality of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina Assembly**

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- **Provincial Secretariat for Labor, Employment, and Gender Equality**

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- **Gender Equality Council**

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- **Provincial Institute for Gender Equality**

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- **Provincial Deputy Ombudsman for Gender Equality**

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### **Lokalne samouprave<sup>8</sup>**

In about 70 municipalities on the territory of Vojvodina there are different forms of mechanisms for gender equality.

## ***STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS***

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Over the last few years, the Republic of Serbia has adopted several important strategic documents in the field of gender equality on both national and provincial levels.

### **Millennium Development Goals<sup>9</sup>**

At the Millennium Summit held in New York City in September 2000, leaders of 189 UN member countries adopted The Millennium Declaration which states the fundamental values for the establishment of international relations in the 21st century: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility.

In May 2005, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Report on the Realization of Millennium Development Goals in Serbia. The report was prepared by the Working Group

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**8** <http://www.gendernet.rs/lokalni.asp>

**9** <http://www.prsp.sr.gov.rs/engleski/mcr/index.jsp>

of the Government of the Republic of Serbia for Monitoring the Realization of MDGs, with the support from UNDP.

Millennium Development Goals are as following: :

- **1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

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- **2. Achieve universal primary education**

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- **3. Promote gender equality and empower women**

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- **4. Reduce child mortality**

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- **5. Improve maternal health**

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- **6. Combat HIV/ AIDS, malaria, and other diseases**

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- **7. Ensure environmental sustainability**

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- **8. Develop a global partnership for development**

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The list of national Millennium Development Goals and the Progress Report on the Realization of Millennium Development Goals in Serbia are available on the website of the Poverty Reduction Strategy: <http://www.prsp.gov.rs/download/MDG%20Serbia%2006%20SRPSKI%5B1%5D.pdf>

### **National Strategy for Improving the Position of Women and Enhancing Gender Equality<sup>10</sup>**

On February 27 2009, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the National Strategy for Improving the Position of Women and Enhancing Gender Equality. Up to present days, this strategy represents the most comprehensive document which “defines a complete and coordinated state policy with the goal of elimination of discrimination against women., enhancement of women’s position and integration of gender equality principles in all operating areas of system institutions, as one of the elements of society modernization and democratization, with the aim of a faster, more uniform and efficient development of the society, in accordance with the equal opportunities policy as proclaimed in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia. (Article15).“<sup>11</sup>

The strategy applies to the period from 2009 to 2015 and its basic principles, and at the same time its priority goals, are:

- **1. increasing the participation of women in decision making processes and achieving gender equality,**

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- **2. improving the economic position of women,**

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- **3. achieving gender equality in education,**

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- **4. improving women’s health and promoting gender equality in health policy,**

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.minrzs.gov.rs/doc/rodna/nacrt\\_strat\\_zene\\_polovi.doc](http://www.minrzs.gov.rs/doc/rodna/nacrt_strat_zene_polovi.doc)

<sup>11</sup> *Nacionalna strategija za poboljšanje položaja žena i unapređivanje rodne ravnopravnosti*, str. 1

- 5. prevent and eliminate the violence against women and promote the victim's rights,
- 6. remove gender stereotypes from the media and promote gender equality.

For each of these areas the strategy gives a description of the current state, strategic and individual goals, and finally the activities that need to be implemented in order for these goals to be achieved. Furthermore, it names the advocates of the activities, who are specified in case of republic organs, though not in cases of provincial or local authority organs.

Following are the strategic and individual goals for each of the areas.

## **I Increasing the participation of women in decision making processes and achieving gender equality**

**Poseban cilj:** Achieving women's rights to equally participate in decision making

**Individual goals:**

- 1: Increasing participation of women in representative bodies on all levels,
- 2: Increasing participation of women in executive authorities, in managerial positions, in state administration, and public services,
- 3: Institutionalization of gender equality mechanisms and active participation in decision-making,
- 4: Creating prerequisites for participation of women from groups subjected to twofold or multiple discrimination in public and political life,
- 5: Strengthening the capacities of institutions through raising awareness and knowledge on gender equality in political and public life.

## **II Improving the economic position of women and achieving gender equality**

**Strategic goal:** Eliminating economic inequality between men and women and introducing equal opportunity policy and better resources utilization for female development

**Individual goals:**

- 1: Creating system prerequisites for equal opportunities policy in economics
- 2: Encouraging employment, women entrepreneurship, and self-employment
- 3: Diminishing economic inequalities caused by multiple discrimination
- 4: Strengthening the capacities of all stakeholders in economy and in

associations for eradication of gender discrimination, and better use of women resources

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### III Achieving gender equality in education

**Strategic goal:** Instituting gender equality and integrating gender perspective in education

**Individual goals:**

- 1: Equal access to education, equalization of the representation of both sexes on all levels of education and all educational profiles
  - 2: Strengthening the capacities of the educational system through inclusion of gender perspective into education
  - 3: Eliminating gender inequalities in education of groups subjected to multiple discrimination
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### IV Improving women's health and promoting gender equality in health policy

**Strategic goal:** Preserving and improving female health and achieving gender equality on health policy

**Individual goals:**

- 1: Protecting and improving women's health in general
  - 2: Providing women (especially women from groups subjected to multiple discrimination) with the availability of quality health care
  - 3: Improving reproductive health of women
  - 4: Strengthening the capacities of health care through introducing gender dimension into the system
  - 5: Increasing participation of women in health policy decision-making
  - 6: Increasing participation of women in sports activities, popularization of women sports organizations, and giving equal importance to women in sports
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### V Prevent and eliminate the violence against women and promote the victim's rights

**Strategic goal:** Preventing and fighting all forms of violence against women and securing comprehensive system for protecting women against

**Individual goals:**

- 1: Improving the normative framework of women's protection from violence
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- **2: Strengthening the systems' capacities of protecting women from violence**
- **3: Conducting research and improvement of documentation and statistics**
- **4: Raising awareness on violence against women as a social problem, and eradication of inappropriate media's portrayal of women who are victims of violence**

## **VI Remove gender stereotypes from the media and promote gender equality**

**Strategic goal:** Instituting gender equality in the media, removing gender stereotypes, and eliminating hate speech from the media (misogyny)

**Individual goals:**

- **1: Affirmation of gender sensitive media reporting**
- **2: Removing stereotypes based on gender and elimination of misogyny in the media, especially in cases of groups subjected to multiple discrimination**
- **3: Increasing participation of women in decision-making in the media**
- **4: Systematization of research, documentation, and statistics on gender equality in the media**

## **National Strategy for Improving the Position of Women and Enhancing Gender Equality and HIV/AIDS**

In the context of the Strategy, HIV/AIDS is mainly mentioned in the section related to the improvement of women's health. It is stated that women make up a third of the persons affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as that reproductive system diseases and sexually transmitted diseases represent 20% of women's diseases. Also, women infected by HIV are recognized as a group particularly exposed to violence.

Simultaneously, the Strategy proposes special activities regarding the prevention of high-risk sexual behavior and diminishment of the frequency of sexually transmitted infections, empowering youth to take responsibility of their sexuality and reproductive health, as well as the promotion of gender equality and sexual health based on mutual respect, equality and responsibility.

In order to achieve this, it is considered necessary: to campaign for the need of protection and the use of contraception, especially condoms, as a method of prevention of sexually transmitted infections; to stimulate the establishment and the use of services, based on Information Communication Technology, to obtain advice and information on health problems; to organize lectures on family planning and responsible attitude toward sexuality; to encourage youth to develop mutual relations on grounds of true partnership and mutual respect.

The Suggestion for the Strategy Implementation Action Plan is available at: [http://www.minrzs.gov.rs/doc/rodna/propisi/ostalo/predlog\\_akcionog\\_plana.pdf](http://www.minrzs.gov.rs/doc/rodna/propisi/ostalo/predlog_akcionog_plana.pdf).

## Other strategic documents

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### National Sustainable Development Strategy<sup>12</sup>

The National Sustainable Development Strategy defines sustainable development as a target-oriented, long-term, continuous, comprehensive and synergetic process affecting all aspects of life (economic, social, environmental and institutional) at all levels.

In the fourth section of the Strategy, which deals with socio-economic conditions and prospects created by sustainable development, among other measures, goals, and priorities, are the equal opportunities policy and gender equality.

In the process of considering the area of gender equality, a few main issues stand out: unequal representation of women in political life, inequality on the labor market, differences in education, illiteracy, segregation of professions. The emphasis is also on the especially unfavorable position and a twofold discrimination of women from marginalized social groups (Roma and refugee women, internally displaced persons and women with disabilities), as well as the exposure to higher poverty risks (particularly single mothers and mothers of very young children and children with special needs), housewives, old women, ill women, women with disabilities, women living in villages (especially old women and women without possessions), women refugees, women who are helping household members, Roma women, uneducated women, unemployed women, and women victims of violence.

Fundamental problems:

- **the presence of social and cultural barriers, accompanied by the traditional social structure which is not open to change the conventional power sharing between men and women;**
- **lack of political will of the government to finalize the process of adopting a set of laws on gender equality and the obligation to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women;**
- **lack of implementation of gender specific policies, i.e. lack of harmonization of the programs and indicators for monitoring in different programs and strategies which the gender aspect is missing.**

The strategic objectives of the Republic of Serbia in the area of gender equality include:

- **1) to establish an institutional framework for measures which will provide for the gender mainstreaming of all activities of public authorities and institutions;**
- **2) equal participation of women and men in government and decision-making on public policy;**

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/countr/serbia/nsds\\_serbia.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/countr/serbia/nsds_serbia.pdf)

- **3) improving the position of women on the labor market and at work while providing for equal opportunities with men;**

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- **4) social integration of women and men from marginalized social groups through education, the labor market and participation in decision-making on public policy;**

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- **5) increase employment rates and the self-employment of women in urban and rural areas;**

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- **6) prevention, suppression and protection from violence against women;**

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- **7) remove gender stereotypes in the public domain.**

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It is of high significance that the indicators of sustainable development which will be used in tracking the success of strategy implementation are sorted by gender.

### **National Youth Strategy<sup>13</sup>**

The Strategy was adopted on May 9th 2008. "The design of the National Youth Strategy in the Republic of Serbia is the first step towards a systematic solution to the problem of youth status and one of the priorities of the Government and the priority of the Ministry of Youth and Sport."

Equality, and therefore, gender equality, is listed as one of the main principles of the Strategy (alongside with the respect for human rights, responsibility, availability, solidarity, etc).

Chapter 3.4, "Life chances of all groups of young people and risks of social exclusion and inequality" states that "many life outcomes, and among them pathway of the education, choice of profession and employment possibilities, are defined by gender", where it is stressed that especially vulnerable are certain groups of young girls, namely women (Roma women, young single mothers etc). They also name gender as a factor of exposure to the risk of poverty, HIV infection, violence, sexual abuse, and discrimination due to different sexual orientation.

The Strategy shows an attempt to use data sorted according to gender in order to put accent on the specific characteristic of the young in relation to gender; though it is not consistently done.

#### **Specific goal**

To increase the participation of young women in high-level decision-making

#### **Mere:**

- **Decreasing gender stereotypes in the educational system;**

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- **Removing gender stereotypes in the media and promote gender equality;**

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- **Supporting affirmative measures and creating social conditions for equal chances for promotion to the top levels of decision-making.**

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.ngoserbia.com/res/National\\_Youth\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.ngoserbia.com/res/National_Youth_Strategy.pdf)

Other goals and measures do not include gender dimension consistently.

In the discussion on goals and measures concerning HIV/AIDS, gender dimension is not clearly evident.<sup>14</sup>

## **Social Welfare Development Strategy**

Social Welfare Development Strategy was adopted in 2005. The overall goal of the social welfare system reform is development of integrated social welfare in which social stakeholders use the existing and develop new resources in the most efficient way, through accessible, high quality and diversified services in order to preserve and improve the quality of life of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups, and to empower them for leading a productive life in society, as well as to prevent dependence on social services.

Even though the international documents which influenced the reforms include The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, gender dimension is not consistently considered in the text.

## **Strategy for protection from domestic violence and other forms of gender based violence in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for the period from 2008 to 2012<sup>15</sup>**

The goal of the Strategy is to respond to the obstacles to efficient elimination of domestic violence and violence against women, as well as to define a coordinated effort of appropriate institutions and organizations to prevent and solve cases of domestic violence and violence against women and recognize the most successful mechanisms for effective fight against this form of human rights' violation, within the jurisdiction of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

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### **14 Specific goal**

#### **4.10.5. To prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS**

##### **Measures**

4.10.5.1. Promoting and providing active youth participation in spreading the national reaction to HIV/AIDS;

4.10.5.2. Establishing programs for the intensification of monitoring and protection of young people from STI (sexually transmitted infection) and HIV/AIDS;

4.10.5.3. Establishing and supporting peer and youth groups and citizens' associations so that they contribute to local and national responses to HIV/AIDS;

4.10.5.4. Mobilizing parents, media, citizens' associations and institutions of the local community to influence public opinion and policy toward STI, HIV/AIDS;

4.10.5.5. Extending the approaches to health services adjusted to the needs of young people, including testing and counseling, care and support services in the areas of STI and HIV/AIDS.

4.10.5.6. Giving bigger support to young people who live with HIV/AIDS and eliminating all types of discrimination

**15** <http://www.psrzrp.vojvodina.gov.rs/pages/DokumentiRavnopravnostiPolova.php>

## 2) FOCUS GROUPS' RESULTS

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### FAMILIARITY WITH THE CONCEPTS OF GENDER, SEX, AND GENDER ROLES

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Most of the focus groups' participants (herein after: participants) were not familiar to the meaning of the concepts of gender and sex<sup>16</sup>, nor did they have the opportunity to learn about this topic earlier. By the concept of "sex" they usually meant: choice, a genetic determinant, natural human determination, and the way by which people divide into two sexes, male and female. It was also said that sex is a physical characteristic and a personal feeling, as well as that sex is connected to sexual identity. The participants found it more difficult to explain the concept meaning of "gender", and some of the responses were that gender is an internal, individual feeling, collective feeling, belonging to a group, a personal choice, but that it is also a political term which applies to sex roles and expectations from them.

During the discussion on different roles of women and men, the participants quickly recognized, from everyday life, the examples of gender roles. Furthermore, it was said that that which is given as a gender role (for a women, e.g. taking care of children, working in the house, and similar) is not at the same time an obligation, but the society condemns individuals unless they accept and fulfill their role.

” „My son doesn't like playing football, and the teacher always said: 'A boy is no good if he doesn't play football!', and I felt bad. So what if he doesn't play football, he plays chess.“

” „A woman is predetermined to wash, clean, cook, iron, and a man ...“

The participants agreed that our society is patriarchal and that there are clearly fixed roles for both men and women. Most of them feel that in that division, women carry a heavier burden.

” „A woman is expected to manage everything. To be successful in every field, as a mother, as a wife, housewife, cook, whatever... at work, to accomplish everything without expecting any help. To work hard, to accomplish everything by herself so that people consider her successful.“

” „I think that we, women, ourselves, are thought to behave like that, and we do. No one can make me do it... it's simple, it's our upbringing, a consequence of our upbringing.“

They also recognized some typically male roles which put men in an unfavorable position: fighting in the war, working in the mine, providing for the family. Some of the participants considered

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**16** Sex refers to biological differences between men and women while *gender* is a social category and it refers to the social and psychological level of those differences.

that, aside from the existing gender roles, there is an equality because that kind of division is fair - for men to do, for example, hard physical work, and for women to take care of the household.

” *„There are equally great expectations from both sexes – men are also expected to be parents, husbands, brothers, sons, successful and businesslike and more, so there are no differences in expectation“*

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Deo učesnika fokus grupa je socijalne razlike između muškaraca i žena povezao sa, a delimično i objasnio, biološkim razlikama između polova. Na ovaj način je podela u društvu na „muško“ i „žensko“ prihvaćena kao prirodna i nepromenljiva, urođena i biološki predodređena:

” *„...Perhaps there is no need to overly insist on some roles, or even use the term of imposed roles. I think that they are largely determined by nature (...) A lot of gender roles are actually connected to sex, they originate from it..“*

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A common trait for all participants is that they had expected that the research on gender issues was related to women’s rights and their fight for equality, and most of them held a negative attitude towards that (in form of open protest on account of feminists, even discussion on whether women are already equal, or that they do not need equality, and similar).

## **GENDER POLICY IN ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS**

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Most organizations and institutions do not have special documents defining gender policy, or the participants were not sure if such a document exists. Nevertheless, some non-governmental organizations have ethical codexes which mention gender equality.

In all cases, records of beneficiaries are organized so as to note the sex, and gender as well, in some institutions and organizations (they introduced a category of transgender persons), which is solely connected to projects financed by the Global fund, as part of a uniform database. The concept of transgender was unclear to most participants, and a large number of them regarded it to be identical to transsexuality and sexual orientation<sup>17</sup>:

” *„We have a database where there is also sexual orientation.“*

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” *„Yes, male, female, transsexual.“*

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” *„We have it by gender... so there is trans, too, though no one has circled that one yet... the beneficiaries fill in the forms themselves and we only explain to them that they can state if they are transsexual... I precisely know that some transsexuals hadn’t circled that.“*

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**17** Transgender is a term which describes persons not belonging to either of the two gender categories (male and female), and it applies to an entire spectar of gender-conditioned behavior, dress code, and type of identification. Transgender does not imply a determined sexual orientation – those persons can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or asexual. *Transsexuality* is a narrower medical term which describes persons who want a sex change in order to harmonize their inner gender identity with their body.

When asked about their view on gender division in their own institutions and organizations, participants answered merely if there are women employed among their staff and what positions they are on. A general impression is that this topic is not considered extremely important in everyday work, and that a possible influence of gender issues is not considered within this context. However, some participants noted that women are not equally represented, but that that was a matter of personal choice, as well as that women should not perform certain jobs which are difficult or not safe (e.g. in a prison clinic). Only in organizations which do fieldwork with, for example sex workers or injecting drug users, there are teams with both men and women.

” „Some specific characteristic of women were noticed, in comparison to men, and there is a different approach. Although there are no written documents, when a patient’s review is being composed, we usually write down some kind of a comparison. The practice has shown that there are certain things we need to pay attention to.“

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## **GENDER ROLES WITHIN BENEFICIARY GROUPS**

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Focus group participants analyzed the beneficiary groups they work with and tried to give a review of gender roles within those groups, as well as to discover the impact of that division on HIV vulnerability.

### **1. Most-at-risk adolescents (MARA)**

These are children and youth from age 10 to 18, without appropriate parental protection. In this group, as in the general population, there are clear gender divisions and expectations from boys and girls. Boys prove themselves by taking alcohol, cannabis, and exposing themselves to various risks. They have the role of “the head of the family”, they get money by washing windshields, begging, stealing, dealing drugs, procuring women, while the girls take care of the food. Boys are usually organized in groups, they gather money, and are economically better off than girls.

Girls are subordinate in this division. They obtain money by begging or selling sex. They do not have the right to own anything, but are forced to work for boys, and are extremely exposed to physical abuse. They too take psychoactive substances, but less than boys.

” “A fast life, a lot of roaming the streets, use of psychoactive substances, alcohol, wandering around discotheques, using guns... “

A general indifference to this group makes them extremely marginalized and vulnerable in the society. These adolescents have a hindered access to health institutions, to medical treatments... The institutions do not have enough resources to attend to these adolescents, and foster families are equally unprepared and supported in their attempts to accept and take care of these children.

### **2. Injecting drug users (IDU)**

Among the population of injecting drug users, women and men are equally represented. Nevertheless, there are certain gender based differences within this group.

Men come into contact with psychoactive substances earlier, often in adolescence, as a way of male boasting, and they become addicted to heroin earlier. In order to obtain drugs, they often resort to criminal behavior, theft, violence... Their problem is noticed sooner because of the crimes they commit to obtain money. As addicts, they more often apply to institutions for help and treatment, and they relapse more often. In case of the work of methadone centers, one focus group participant said that there is a significantly larger number of men using methadone treatments than women. One of the stated reasons was that methadone program includes the people who have tried, unsuccessfully, to cure themselves several times, while women do not apply themselves to treatment so often in the first place.

The problem of male addiction is less condemned by the society, and besides that, men have more support from their family – parents or wife – to sign up for treatment. The family sometimes even ignore the existence of the problem, as long as the man brings the money into the house and fulfills his basic social roles, and the drug problem is considered merely a vice.

On the other hand, women often hide their drug problem and are afraid of being judged by the society. They apply for help and treatment less often than men, although when they do apply, they are more cooperative in the treatment and have fewer relapses. Furthermore, in comparison to men, they much more often use so-called soft drugs, thus it is easier to get clean and quit them. But once they become addicted to heroin, they are cruel to themselves and soon overdose fatally. They also engage in crime, prostitution, in order to obtain money for drugs. The society is more judgmental to female than male drug-addiction, especially during the process of re-socialization, when women addicts find it far more difficult to find a job. These women stay stigmatized and condemned forever. Women addicts also face fear, shame, high-risk pregnancy; it is very hard for them. They are more frequently rejected by their family and left to deal with the problem on their own.

” *“Very often, the family has a more flexible attitude towards men, they usually accept that it is only a vice, something that cannot be controlled, and not simply an illness that effects both men and women.”*

” *“It is a lot easier for a woman to enter a pharmacy and buy a syringe and a needle, they rarely ask what she needs it for. And when a boys enters, it is instantly clear which population he belongs to.”*

### **3. Men who have sex with men (MSM)**

Homosexual men fail to fulfill one of the fundamental gender roles dictated to women and men, and that is to be heterosexual. Due to their same-sex orientation, these persons are exposed to great condemnation by the society, and especially to violence, which is encouraged by the fact that violence against them as men, done by other men, is socially acceptable.

There is a large percentage of adolescents and young men who find it hard to accept their newly discovered identity as homosexuals and who most often hide that fact and become self-destructive. There is a high percentage of suicide within this population. The ones who

announce to the people in their surroundings that they are gay, often face rejection by the family, consequences of open discrimination, and they are forced to move to bigger cities, where they usually live with difficulties. They are at risk of mobbing, they suffer various psychological problems, and similar. On the other hand, there is a significant number of gay men who have never admitted that they are homosexual, but are married and have children. In that way, they formally fulfill the model gender roles, but are in secrecy often extremely promiscuous and exposed to a high risk of HIV infection, and so are their wives and children.

” „We had a case of HIV positive patient who knew that he was positive, he was married, had unprotected sexual relations with his wife. When she found it out, she sued him...”

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Gay men living with HIV are subjected to twofold discrimination and rejection by their group as well. That is why they often hide their HIV status in fear of being rejected and isolated.

” “There are homosexual men with a wife and family, which is good according to those gender relations... I personally know some of them, and they are in deep trouble, they have to juggle a lot... I would never walk in their shoes. That means that he has to go to his lover, and to his wife, and to take care of children, then there are situations connected to what we are talking about - when the wife knows it but she’s playing the fool, she simply pays no attention to that, she finds a lover, because that man provides her security and there is some kind of a compromise, again because of that prejudice.”

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” “There would be no discrimination if people were strong enough to say that there are as many of us as there are, we do not endanger you by being what we are. It’s a lot worse when men don’t tell their wives about having homosexual relations as well, and they have children, and there is a possibility of spreading sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.”

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#### 4. People living with HIV (PLHIV)

Although both women and men living with HIV fight stigma and discrimination, men find it more difficult to accept that and to face rejection, and in accordance with that, they are more afraid to reveal their HIV status. Nevertheless, the society condemns women more because “who knows what she did” if she became HIV positive. Due to enormous pressure exerted by the society, people living with HIV often isolate themselves, decide to stay at home, break off contacts.

Women living with HIV are expected not to bear children, due to the risk of infecting the child, while men with the same HIV status are expected to have descendants.

” “There are cases when the family pressures their son, we don’t have grandchildren, but we’ve heard that you could have a healthy child with someone...”

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Women living with HIV show a greater interest in psychological support, and they also need specific health services, certain specialists, and similar. They have a greater need for support.

These women still have the responsibility to take care of their family, their children. Women also attend to other ill members of the family, their husband, and similar.

” *“I think that women suffer greatly because they cannot negotiate, they cannot insist on protection, and they often have sexual relations with a partner even though they don’t want to, let alone the other things in the family when they don’t know and they can’t know, nor can they oppose, even when they know their husband is bisexual, they cannot stand up to him.”*

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” *“In connection to HIV, in families where both partners are infected, taking care of the children, of the family, the learnt social role, even the care of an ill member in the family, even though she is ill herself, maybe even more ill than him, she has to take care of him. A twofold, threefold, multiple burden placed upon women, plus their own illness, everything falls on their shoulders again.”*

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The society expects from both men and women living with HIV to take upon themselves not to spread HIV, and that pressure is greater for men, who have to use a condom and are more troubled by that than women are.

A special problem is recognized in the field of providing health care, where people living with HIV have only few people they can turn to, they can trust. Those are usually infectologists, and there are not many of them.

## 5. Roma people

Roma women endure twofold discrimination, as women and as Roma. In Roma population, women are in a subordinate position to men, and their main social value is viewed through their reproductive function and care of the children and household. According to tradition, Roma girls do not have the chance to go to school, and their parents marry them off at a very young age so that they are still virgins, which is highly important. They also become mothers very early and usually give birth to a lot of children. Their obligation is to take care of the household and the children, and they spend their entire lives in a subordinate position and without any choices.

Men, on the other hand, are the heads of the family, they decide on everything, including children’s education, they handle the money and other resources. Roma men are expected to be with a lot of girlfriends and their promiscuity is socially accepted. Every deviation from this role division meets condemnation within the Roma community: if girls are sent to school, if a girl does not marry young, if she is not a virgin when she gets married. Moreover, Roma women face a strong condemnation if due to any reason they cannot have children (it gets connected to promiscuity, it’s the woman’s fault).

In Roma communities, the responsibility for the prevention from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases is on a woman, and due to her lack of education and information, she cannot protect herself adequately. This is why voluntary abortion is the most frequent form of family planning, and sexually transmitted diseases are not considered a realistic threat. There are a lot of false beliefs and prejudice related to these issues.

” *“Men are dominant... When my father enrolled me in high school, our cousins used to tell him – why are you educating her, she is a girl, she’ll get married, who are you educating her for? ... A woman only has a role of a mother and a housewife.”*

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## 6. Commercial sex workers (CSW)

In this area, there are more women than men selling sexual services. Stigma and discrimination against this group is substantial. Women in this job are considered filthy, unintelligent, immoral, and bad, while the other side – the male clients - is not especially labeled, in accordance to the rooted gender roles of men which include promiscuity. In the context of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, it is considered that female sex workers spread diseases and it is their responsibility to prevent that. However, they are not often in a position to decide whether they are going to use a condom or not, because the decision is on the client. By doing this job, they are exposed to violence and numerous health risks. Most female sex workers have pimps they work for and who are in a superordinate position to them. Nevertheless, they stand up for them and protect them by introducing them as their husbands or friends.

” *“The society has a prejudiced attitude towards female sex workers as filthy and bad women, the worst, and among those who say that are some of their clients. It is considered that, since those women do the job they do, police can do whatever they want to them.”*

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” *“People are always trying to lower a woman. Even if she finishes college, and sells sex in order to put herself through school, she’ll still be rejected by people.”*

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” *“Female sex workers are exposed to violence of clients. A client can swindle her, use the service, refuse to pay, he just opens the door and kicks her out.”*

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In the opinion of the focus group participants, men doing commercial sex work are in a better position than women because they stick together and there is solidarity among them. Part of the participants had another opinion; that men selling sex services are worse off because what they do is unacceptable by the society, since it was always a women’s profession.

” *“Male commercial sex workers are a lot more open about what they are and what they do. They are more stigmatized but are more proud of what they are.”*

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” *“There are transgendered people in Belgrade and sometimes police come and push them around, more than in case of female sex workers. They just come up to them and start kicking them. Why, I don’t know... maybe there’s something wrong with them, because that is simply not acceptable.”*

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## 7. Prisoners

Both men and women of the prison population live in specific conditions. In the male groups, there is a strong desire to prove oneself, to dominate, so they form a kind of an informal structure of

power, based on criminal rating, strength, income, and power. There is a high level of aggression. The most powerful dominate, while the weaker serve in a similar way to what is expected of women – they do the washing, prepare food, wait on them, and similar. Homosexual behavior is very common in male prisons, but also closely linked to violence and domination. Men force themselves on other men, which is accepted because it is considered a situational necessity and not genuine homosexuality (they stay 'straight'). The active ones have a high rating in the prison hierarchy, while the passive ones are on the bottom. At the same time, there is a high level of aggression towards 'genuine' homosexuals in the prison.

In female prisons there are also informal structures, but in this system they form 'families' where there are roles of a father, a mother, children, even relatives. The prison staff plays some of the roles as well. The dominant role belongs to the person who has the role of a mother in that 'family'. In a female prison, it is all right to be lesbian, but the prison staff harshly punishes homosexual relationships. Furthermore, in female prisons there is love between homosexual prisoners, which is not a case in male prisons..

” *“The division within a male group is into stronger and weaker. That is how they classify as male or female. The one who is stronger is 'the man', and a weaker man does chores which, by our traditional roles, belong to women – washing, ironing, cleaning.”*

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” *“In male prisons, the division to male and female is determined in a cruel physical manner. ”*

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Dress code in a female prison is rigid (while in male prison it is not), uniforms are obligatory, length of the skirt is defined by regulations (below the knee), so as to avoid provoking male prisoners that they come in contact with.

” *“You know that a skirt above the knee can be very provocative for the boys who work in the kitchen. They do have contact, even though they are separated.”*

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## **GENDER ISSUES AND HIV EPIDEMIC**

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General participants' opinion is that there is a wide-spread lack of knowledge and information on gender issues. Thus, it is necessary to talk about these topics, to help people understand what gender issues are, and how they permeate every segment of the society. There is also an impression that gender inequality does not exist in our society, that it is all happening to someone else, and that it only gets mentioned in cases of severe violence against women. At the same time, there is no readiness to take up less drastic examples and recognize everyday life situations where gender division plays an important part.

There were other opinions, too: That gender issues are not a priority and that we can deal with gender equality only after we have resolved some fundamental problems of the society, on all levels. One participant stated that the roles of men and women had changed significantly in the last 20 years, that there are swift changes happening in that area, and if we continue going at this pace, we will soon enter into matriarchy.

” *“Of course we need to talk about this, too. We should strive to progress towards a more perfect society, but we might be putting the cart before the horse. First we have to solve problems on all levels, the family, the school...”*

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” *“We simply don’t see the fine points of gender inequality...”*

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The participants agreed that gender issues play an important part in HIV vulnerability of women and men, and that they have to be taken into consideration in order for the fight against HIV epidemic to be successful. Although participants do not feel that there is discrimination in the provision of preventive and other services for men and women, they did recognize some examples where gender divisions had influenced the type of service and the manner in which it was provided. For example, the counseling services on family planning, which are available as a standard within gynecological health services, and as such are meant primarily for women and not for men as well. In that way, they confirm a gender based notion that a woman is responsible for family planning and for the protection from sexually transmitted infections.

On the subject of who is in a worse position, and in what way, there were different opinions, but they have recognized the risks caused by gender division and social stereotypes in cases of both men and women. In favor of the opinion that men are more exposed to HIV infection, there were arguments that men are expected to be promiscuous, to pay less attention to their health, and to expose themselves to risks. Homosexual men are at a particularly great risk, they are exposed to violence and discrimination. Men in prison and injecting drug users are exposed to sexual violence the most; they are exposed to danger in multiple ways.

On the other hand, women are more endangered because they do not have the power to negotiate or decide on having safer sexual relations, where they would be protected from infections and unwanted pregnancies. Women are also the victims of gender based violence, including sexual violence, inside and outside marriage. By the tradition, they are raised to be passive and not to know a lot about efficient ways of protection. Women are marginalized by the society and, as a rule, they are more condemned than men in case they have an illness of drug addiction, HIV, or they are commercial sex workers. Female members of the Roma national minority also face multiple discrimination.

After the discussion on this topic, it was concluded that both women and men are vulnerable, and that different gender roles put us at risk, in different ways.

” *“Who is free enough to use VCT services, who is encouraged enough? Is a woman encouraged enough? We are talking about social determinants...”*

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” *“I have noticed that it is a lot easier to work with female sex workers because girls want to talk about other problems as well, they don’t just come to get condoms, while the injecting drug users just enter, take what they need, there’s no talking, no counseling. Girls are more interested to talk and more open towards receiving any kind of help.”*

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## IDEAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INCLUSION OF GENDER DIMENSION IN THE NATIONAL RESPONSE TO HIV EPIDEMIC

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Within the National office for HIV, there is a person in charge of gender issues, and that is one of the mechanisms to help with the inclusion of gender dimension in the national response to HIV epidemic. A lot of hopes are placed in the Gender Equality Law, which is expected to set a series of other strategies in motion.

Non-governmental organizations have shown their readiness to engage in the formulation of the gender policy and to support its implementation in practice, but there is simultaneously a doubt whether it will be possible to implement gender policy in institutions. So far, gender dimension has not been included in most of the activities conducted within the rounds of the Global fund.

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” *“There is one approach towards the male population, and another one towards the female. That needs to be considered in the national response to HIV.”*

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” *“My institution absolutely welcomes all forms of cooperation... if it is directed towards providing better care to our patients.”*

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” *“It simply means taking gender roles of men and women into consideration. If we have both men and women, we have to consider the needs of both of them.”*

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” *“I think that gender issues are a very important segment in fighting HIV. (...) It is also important that we ourselves, in the first place, understand gender issues and the needs of women, men, transgendered persons, so that we can provide them with support.”*

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