

Twenty Years of Parliamentary Gender Equality Mechanisms in Serbia

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FOREWORD

The very idea of women in politics was once unthinkable. In the meantime, much has changed and undeniably great progress has been made, but this does not mean that we can boast that we have achieved full equality. Even today, it is not easy to be a woman in politics due to the very fact that, unlike a man, you have to prove more convincingly that you are worthy of the position you hold.

In recent years, Serbia has taken significant steps to increase the participation of women in public and political life. With more than 30% of women MPs in the national parliament and a large number of women in the highest executive bodies, Serbia has become one of the leaders in this regard in Europe. However, quotas alone are not enough. It is evident that the number of women in politics is increasing, but mostly in executive positions – currently only 21 women are presidents of cities or municipalities, and 34 women are presidents of city or municipality assemblies. Women bring new ideas and perspectives into political life, open dialogues and discussions on many topics that were not even present in public life. That is why women in politics are particularly valuable and have a great potential that we as a society must use and understand in the right way.

Back in 1918, in the elections for the Great National Assembly in Novi Sad, women were the first in Europe to have the right to vote, and elected seven women MPs. The presence of women in parliament was for a long time more an exception than a rule, and since then, the National Assembly as the highest legislative body has shown that it can be a mirror of society and a place where the right to equality is respected. An important step was the introduction of quotas, but women in the parliament showed political maturity and responsibility, and took a step further – they united through the Women’s Parliamentary Network, with the aim of achieving higher goals. In 2013, female MPs joined together for the first time with the intention to go beyond party programmes and differences, and, through the influence of the Women’s Parliamentary Network, to reach much further beyond the parliamentary benches and impact the change of life for the better for many women in Serbia, especially when it comes to the position of marginalised women. Increasing the number of women in the places where decisions are made, both at the level of the Republic and the local level, as well as in the positions where decisions are made on finances, security and all those issues that have been reserved mainly for men until now, remains a big challenge. On one occasion, I inferred together with the Secretary General of the OSCE Helga Schmid: “Without women at the table, there is neither peace nor stability – neither at the table nor outside it”.

The Commissioner for Protection of Equality, as a national institution for the fight against discrimination and the promotion of equality, co-operates, within the National Assembly, first of all with the parliamentary Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, as well as with the Women's Parliamentary Network, but also avails of all other platforms such as public hearings, conferences, debates and the like. We regularly examine the position of women and monitor progress in this area through the analysis of women's participation in public and political life, deeply aware that women's participation is a prerequisite for their overall economic and social inclusion. If there are no women in political decision-making positions, we have no chance to pursue quality public policies. Gender equality is a matter of sustainable development and, ultimately, a matter of our vital national interests. There is no democracy without the active participation of women in politics and focusing on the implementation of the principle of full equality of women and men in all social areas. That is precisely why parliamentary mechanisms for achieving gender equality are significant, as they provide women who have become MPs with an opportunity to use their personal example to encourage other women to get involved in political or public life. A clear example speaks volumes.

Brankica Janković, Commissioner for Protection of Equality

OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF FORMATION OF INSTITUTIONAL GENDER EQUALITY MECHANISMS IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

The process of forming institutional gender equality mechanisms unfolded under the influence of several factors whose cumulative and synergistic effects shape the environment in which the functioning of institutional mechanisms is possible. These factors include:

- Increasing the representation of women in public authorities, primarily in directly elected representative bodies of male and female citizens.
- The defining of international gender equality standards, including gender equality mechanisms as one of the standards and the transposition of these standards in national legislation.
- Comparative practice, experiences and examples of good practice as an incentive.
- The political will and readiness of political actors (political parties, public authorities) to accept and establish these new institutions in the system of public authorities.

1 International documents on gender equality mechanisms

The impetus for the formation of institutional gender equality mechanisms (hereinafter: gender equality mechanisms) were numerous universal and regional international documents. Gender inequality has been recognised as a global problem.¹ At the First World Conference on Women (Mexico City, 1975), the Decade for Women was declared and the World Action Plan was adopted, recognising gender equality mechanisms as instruments for achieving equal opportunities for women², which resulted in the establishment of national gender equality

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1 Back in 1962, the UN Commission on the Status of Women pointed out the importance of setting up national commissions on the status of women. See: Mršević, Z. (2011) *Ka demokratskom društvu – rodna ravnopravnost (Towards Democratic Society – Gender Equality)*, Institute of Social Sciences, p. 99.

2 See: Mršević, Z. (2001) *Standardi i mehanizmi za rodnu ravnopravnost u demokratskim zemljama (Gender Equality Standards and Mechanisms in Democratic Countries)*, Belgrade, OSCE; Mršević, Z. *Mehanizmi za rodnu ravnopravnost (Gender Equality Mechanisms)*, GENERO no. 12/2008 p. 7–22.

mechanisms in more than 90% of countries in the world.³ The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as a key document in the field of gender equality.⁴ At the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted⁵, emphasising the importance of gender equality mechanisms and essentially changing the approach to gender equality, with a focus on integration of the gender perspective into the process of creation and participation in decision-making on public policies. One of the prerequisites for this important change is the formation and functioning of gender equality mechanisms. The Platform for Action states that gender equality mechanisms formed at national levels are different and that their work is hampered by numerous obstacles such as: insufficient political support of the government, marginalisation of these bodies in the government structure, unclear mandates that make work difficult, lack of adequate staff, lack of training on gender equality, lack of data on gender equality, as well as financial resources and other logistics needed for their work.⁶

Several universal international documents on gender equality in various fields have been adopted. In this context, we single out those that explicitly mention gender equality mechanisms, such as the Plan of the Inter-Parliamentary Union to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life (1992)⁷, Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997)⁸, Worldwide Declaration of the International Union of Local Authorities (1998)⁹ etc.

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3 Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held on 15–26 July 1985, adopted in Nairobi in June 1992. Source: *Ravnopravnost spolova u međunarodnim dokumentima (Gender Equality in International Documents)*, Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo 2008. p. 104–105.

4 Adopted on 18 December 1979, ratified in 1981, “Official Gazette of the SFRY – International Treaties”, No 11/1981, available at: https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_ratificiji_konvencije_o_elimisanju_svih_oblica_diskriminacije_zena.html.

5 Available at: http://www.e-jednakost.org.rs/kurs/kurs/download/pekinska_deklaracija.pdf. For more information see: Pajvančić, M. and Petrušić, N. *Značaj institucionalnih mehanizama za ostvarivanje rodne ravnopravnosti (Importance of Institutional Mechanisms for Achieving Gender Equality)*, Proceedings of the Faculty of Law in Niš, No 67/2014. p. 26–27.

6 Chapter H, Strategic Objective H.1. points 156–210 *Platforms for Action*. Source: Op. cit. p. 70–71. After 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Republic of Serbia prepared the National Report on the Progress in the implementation of these documents, including gender equality mechanisms, p. 76–81. Available at: <https://www.rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2020-04/Nacionalni%20pregled%20Pekinska%20deklaracija%20SRB.pdf>.

7 The plan lists four key activities: explicitly guaranteeing the equality of men and women in the constitution or an act of constitutional force; adoption of a special law that ensures the principle of equality; formation of gender equality mechanisms, and gender-sensitive language in legislation. See: Mršević, Z. (2008) Op. cit. p. 12–14.

8 Article 4 of the Universal Declaration on Democracy: “The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences“. Inter-Parliamentary Council, 161st session (Cairo, 16 September 1997), available at: <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/documents/Univerzalna%20Deklaracija%20o%20demokratiji%20LAT.pdf>.

9 See: Mršević, Z. (2008) Op. cit. p. 12–14.

At the regional level (Europe)¹⁰, numerous documents on gender equality were adopted. The essential change was introduced by the Declaration on Equality of Women and Men (1988)¹¹ – which stipulates the equality of women and men as the fundamental principle integrated into all human rights, and defines gender discrimination as the violation of fundamental human rights – as well as documents of the European Commission from 1996¹² and the Council of Europe from 1966¹³ on gender mainstreaming in public policies. In several documents of the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Union adopted after 2000, gender equality mechanisms¹⁴, as part of the public authority system, are recognised as important instruments¹⁵, aimed at improving gender equality, ensuring co-ordination and co-operation in order to integrate gender equality into public policies¹⁶, creating conditions and measures for equal participation in political and public life¹⁷, strengthening of independent institutions in the field of human rights protection and gender equality¹⁸ etc.



- 10 The first Council of Europe Committee for the promotion of equality of women and men was established in 1979. For more information on gender equality mechanisms in EU states, see: *Effectiveness of Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Gender Equality. Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*, 24 August 2014, available at: http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/MH0213481ENC_0.pdf.
- 11 The Declaration was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 16 November 1988.
- 12 Document of the European Commission: *Incorporating Equal Opportunities For Women And Men Into All Community Policies And Activities* COM (96) 67 final. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:51996DC0067&from=EN>.
- 13 Council of Europe document *Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practices*, Expert Group Final Report, (EG-S-MS), Council of Europe, EG (99) 3, Strasbourg, February 1999. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/3c160b06a.pdf>.
- 14 E.g. Recommendation of the Council of Europe R (2000) adopted on 13 May 2000 at the 710th meeting of deputy ministers. Source: *Ravnopravnost spolova u međunarodnim dokumentima – Vijeće Evrope (Gender Equality in International Documents – Council of Europe)*, Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo 2008, p. 89–97; Recommendation of the Council of Europe No (2003) 3, adopted on 12 March 2003 at the 831st meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies. Source: Op. cit. 2008, p. 115–123.
- 15 Recommendations adopted at the Conference *Gender Mainstreaming: a step into the 21st century*, held in Athens on 16–18 September 1999. Source: Op. cit. 2008, Chapter II, p. 141.
- 16 Recommendation of the Council of Europe R (2000), Chapter VII. Measures for co-ordination and co-operation, point 50(i): “Set up a co-ordinating mechanism responsible for drawing up the national policy on combating trafficking and organising a multidisciplinary approach to the issue”. Source: Op. cit. 2008. p. 96.
- 17 Recommendation (2003) 3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 12 March 2003, at the 831st meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies. Appendix to the Recommendation, chapter A, point 16 – member states should “set up, support and strengthen the work of the national equality machinery in bringing about balanced participation in political and public life”. Source: Op. cit. 2008. p. 96.
- 18 The twelfth meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 6–7 April 2004, MC.DEC/14.04 – the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality in the Annex of Chapter IV, Item 42 recommends member states to “establish or strengthen existing mechanisms for ensuring gender equality”, with an emphasis on independent human rights institutions, and in Chapter V, point 44 (g) expresses the readiness of the Council of Europe to, as one of the priorities, support the building-up of national gender equality mechanisms as democratic institutions for advancing gender equality. Source: Op. cit. 2008. p. 64 and 66.

2 Gender equality mechanisms in Serbia – process initiation and formation

The impetus for the formation of gender equality mechanisms in Serbia were the conclusions from the women's conference held in Palić¹⁹ and the increased number of female MPs in the National Assembly after the elections held in December 2000. In such circumstances, the focus of activities on achieving gender equality was shifted to institutions. At that moment, the legal system lacked the necessary institutional prerequisites for realising the right to equal participation of women and men in the creation of and decision-making on public policies important for gender equality.²⁰ The work on the formation of gender equality mechanisms began at the conference "Perspectives of Women in the New Political Context".²¹ Proposals for the formation of gender equality mechanisms were based on the need for system institutions at all levels of government (assemblies, executive bodies, independent human rights institutions²²) to establish bodies responsible for gender equality, and they relied on international documents and experiences in other countries.²³ Support for the formation of these mechanisms and the activities of the first mechanisms established at the local level was provided by the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

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19 The conference was held in February 2000.

20 At the time of the Conference, the gender equality mechanism existed only in the federal government (the Yugoslav Commission for Co-operation with UNICEF and the Advancement of the Position of Women) and in AP Vojvodina (member of the Executive Council of AP Vojvodina in charge of women's issues). The status of the Yugoslav Commission for Co-operation with UNICEF and the Advancement of the Position of Women and its position in the federal administration are unclear. The Regulation on the Formation of Federal Ministries and Other Federal Bodies and Organisations and Services of the Federal Government ("Official Gazette of the FRY", No 41/2001), as well as the Rules of Procedure of the Federal Government ("Official Gazette of the FRY", No 41/2001) do not mention this Commission.

21 The conference was held on 22 June 2001 with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Star Network. For more information see: Pajvančić, M. *Ravnopravnost polova – reprezentovanje u skupštinama i institucionalni mehanizmi (Gender Equality – Representation in Assemblies and Institutional Mechanisms)*, Conference Proceedings (ed. Šijački, Z.) "Pet godina posle" ("Five Years Later"), Provincial Gender Equality Institute, Novi Sad, 2006, p. 16–23; Šijački, Z. *Mehanizmi za rodnu ravnopravnost i njihova uloga (Gender Equality Mechanisms and Their Role)* [electronic version], available at: http://www.e-jednakost.org.rs/kurs/kurs/download/mehanizam_za_rodnu_ravnopravnost.pdf.

22 For more information see: Orlović, S. *Nezavisna tela, četvrta grana vlasti ili kontrolor vlasti (Independent Bodies, the Fourth Branch of Government or the Controller of Government)*, Proceedings (ed. Pavlović, V. and Stojiljković, Z.) "Savremena država: struktura i socijalne funkcije" ("Modern State: Structure and Social Functions"), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Faculty of Political Sciences, Centre for Democracy, Belgrade, 2010, p. 231–269.

23 For more information see: Pajvančić, M. *Pravni okvir ravnopravnosti polova (Legal Gender Equality Framework)*, Novi Sad, Provincial Gender Equality Institute, 2008. Available at: <https://ravnopravnost.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/1-Pravni-okvir-ravnopravnosti-polova.pdf>.

3 Gender equality mechanisms in representative bodies

The primary activity focused on forms of institutional action in assemblies. Different possibilities (permanent or temporary working bodies in assemblies, groups of women parliamentarians/councillors, etc.) and their advantages and disadvantages were considered. The prevailing view was that the optimal solution was the formation of a permanent working body responsible for gender equality in assemblies. The advantages of this solution were reflected in the following:

- 1) The Assembly is a body representing male and female citizens. It is the highest authority that makes the most important decisions. Its working bodies have an important role in decision-making, submitting proposals and initiatives. The permanent working body for gender equality has a more favourable position in decision-making than the position held by male and female MPs as individuals.
- 2) A strong composition of the permanent working body made up of male and female MPs elected in direct elections. A direct election meets an important standard for the status of gender equality mechanisms, which requires that representatives in these bodies be appointed through a democratic process in order to be considered legitimate representatives of their groups.
- 3) Publicity of work of the Assembly and its working bodies, owing to which the field of gender equality is accessible to the general public.

The next step were the changes to the normative framework. Permanent working bodies for gender equality in the National Assembly, the Assembly of AP Vojvodina and the assemblies of local self-governments were formed through the amendments to the Rules of Procedure.²⁴ The Gender Equality Committee was set up as a permanent working body of the National Assembly.²⁵ The Committee considers proposals of laws and other regulations from the aspect of gender equality and monitors the conduct of policy, execution of laws and other regulations related to gender equality. The Gender Equality Committee²⁶ was established in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina as a permanent working body that considers proposals, decisions and gen-



24 The formation of local gender equality mechanisms was supported by the OSCE Mission, with whose help the first forms of institutionalised action to achieve gender equality at the local level were set up. This activity was also supported by the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government.

25 The Committee was set up in 2003. Article 68 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, "Official Gazette of RS", No 57/2003.

26 The Committee was set up in 2002. Articles 20 and 69 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, "Official Gazette of AP Vojvodina", No 23/2002.

eral acts from the aspect of gender equality and monitors the conduct of policy, execution of decisions and regulations relating to gender equality. The Gender Equality Law of 2021 stipulates that a permanent working body for gender equality be established in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina.²⁷

4 Gender equality mechanisms in executive authorities

In parallel with the establishment of working bodies in assemblies, the process of forming gender equality mechanisms in the executive authorities was also taking place.

Achieving gender equality presupposes direct participation in the creation of regulations and public policies. Hence the need to establish gender equality mechanisms also within the framework of executive authorities. The advantages of such form of institutional action are: the possibility of submitting proposals and launching initiatives; involvement in the preparation of regulations; direct influence on the creation of content and drafting of regulations; timely response to regulatory proposals prepared by administrative bodies; monitoring of implementation and supervision of the implementation of regulations; assistance of professional services; the possibility of engaging male/female experts; co-operation with civil society organisations; intersectoral co-operation, which is particularly important for gender equality given its multisectoral nature; budget funds available to the executive branch etc.

Pursuant to the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Council for Equality of Sexes was established in the executive bodies at the national level as a working body of the Government. Its composition was determined (representatives of a certain number of ministries and experts)²⁸, and its competencies were defined: proposing measures and intersectoral co-operation in the field of gender equality; consideration of compliance of laws with international conventions on women's rights and initiatives to eliminate discrepancies; monitoring the implementation of laws and international documents against sex discrimination and proposing measures for their implementation; monitoring the situation in the field of gender equality, proposing and undertaking measures and evaluating the effects of measures to achieve gender equality; initiating a programme of gender-sensitive statistics; monitoring the representation of women in elected and appointed positions; monitoring and analysing the criteria for selection and appointment to public positions; initiating the removal of obstacles in the elections and appointments of the less represented sex; education of employees in

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27 Article 62, paragraph 2 of the Gender Equality Law, "Official Gazette of RS", No 51/2021.

28 The decision was made in February 2003, "Official Gazette of RS", No 13/03, 83/04, 3/05.

government bodies in order to promote gender equality; initiating programmes and proposing measures for training women to participate in political life, etc. In 2009, the Council for Equality of Sexes grew into the Gender Equality Council, and ceased to exist after the election of the Government in 2014. In the same year, the Government formed the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality²⁹, competent to co-ordinate the work of the public administration in relation to gender equality³⁰, within which an expert group was formed that carries out professional activities related to gender equality.³¹ With the adoption of the Gender Equality Law in 2021³², for the first time, all gender equality mechanisms were regulated by law.³³ According to the new legal solutions³⁴, the Government of the Republic of Serbia is competent to: create, implement, monitor and improve gender equality policies, ensure the compliance of policies and measures undertaken in the field of gender equality with Serbia's international obligations; develop and pursue an active policy of equal opportunities in all spheres of social life, which ensures the equal participation of women and men in all stages of planning, preparation, making and implementing decisions that affect the position of women and men; define measures aimed at creating equal opportunities for exercising the rights and freedoms of women and men, preventing and eliminating gender-based discrimination; adopt the National Strategy for Gender Equality and the Action Plan for its implementation; establish the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality³⁵, with the task of streamlining and co-ordinating the work of government bodies related to gender equality, consider all issues important for gender equality and improve the state of gender equality; establish the Gender Equality Council³⁶ as an advisory body of the Government in which civil society is involved; perform other tasks in this area. Within the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality, a professional group was formed, involving representatives of other public authorities, the economy, the academia and the non-governmental sector.³⁷



29 The Co-ordination Body was formed on 30 September 2014 by the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Available at: <https://www.mgsi.gov.rs/lat/dokumenti/odluka-o-forminjanu-koordinajano-tela-za-rodnu-ravnopravnost>.

30 Item 2 of the Decision on the Formation of the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality.

31 Item 5 of the Decision on the Formation of the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality.

32 "Official Gazette of RS", No 52/2021.

33 Article 59 of the Gender Equality Law.

34 Article 60 of the Gender Equality Law.

35 Article 59, paragraph 1, item 3) and Article 60, paragraph 1, item 5) of the Gender Equality Law. The Co-ordination Body was formed by the Government Decision of 31 October 2022, which regulates the competences of the Co-ordination Body and the manner of its work. Available at: <https://www.rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2023-01/Odluka%20o%20osnivanju%20Koordinacione%20tela%20za%20rodnu%20ravnopravnost.pdf>.

36 Article 60, paragraph 1, item 5) of the Gender Equality Law.

37 The expert group was formed on 6 February 2023. Available at: https://rtv.rs/sr_lat/drustvo/koordinaciono-telo-za-rodnu-ravnopravnost-rezime-2022.-i-planovi-za-2023._1415416.html.

The first gender equality mechanism within executive authorities was set up in AP Vojvodina in 2001, when a female member responsible for gender equality was elected to the Executive Council of AP Vojvodina.³⁸ The Gender Equality Council as an advisory body, consisting of male/female representatives of provincial administration bodies and male/female experts, was established in 2003. The Council participates in promoting, creating and monitoring programmes, actions and policies that improve the position of women; lobbies for projects related to gender equality; monitors the implementation of regulations and proposes measures to improve gender equality; encourages activities in the field of gender equality in public, social and economic life; provides expert assistance to the Executive Council of AP Vojvodina, administrative bodies and civil society organisations in creating programmes for integrating the gender perspective into regulations, public policies and social life; collects and processes gender-sensitive statistical data; encourages the connection of institutions, public services, civil society organisations and individuals working in the field of gender equality, etc.

The Gender Equality Law³⁹ regulates for the first time the gender equality mechanisms formed by the bodies of the autonomous province within their competences and determines their composition, method of election, scope and method of work. The Law prescribes that the Provincial Government sets up the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality⁴⁰ of the provincial government for the purpose of harmonising the views of provincial administration authorities and organisations, other provincial organisations and services and the Gender Equality Council⁴¹ as an advisory body of the Provincial Government and envisages the possibility that, in addition to these mechanisms, other bodies dealing with gender equality can be formed.⁴² There is also the Gender Equality Institute in AP Vojvodina⁴³, entrusted with professional and analytical work; preparation and implementation of educational programmes; co-operation with gender equality mechanisms and relevant international bodies; publishing, etc.

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38 See Pajvančić, M. op. cit, 2006, p. 18.

39 Article 59, paragraph 1, item 4) and Article 62 of the Gender Equality Law.

40 Article 62, paragraph 3, item 1) of the Gender Equality Law. The Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality of the Provincial Government was established on 7 September 2022. The Decision on the Establishment of the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality of the Provincial Government, "Official Gazette of AP Vojvodina", No 38/2022.

41 Article 62, paragraph 3, item 2) of the Gender Equality Law.

42 Article 62, paragraph 4 of the Gender Equality Law.

43 The Institute was formed in 2004, "Official Gazette of AP Vojvodina", No 14/2004.

5 Gender equality mechanisms in administrative bodies

Gender equality mechanisms are also set up in administrative bodies.

At the level of the Republic, the Sector for Gender Equality was established in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2007⁴⁴. In 2008, it was replaced by the Directorate for Gender Equality⁴⁵, which was abolished in 2014⁴⁶. In the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Sector for Gender Equality was re-established. After the formation of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue in 2020⁴⁷, gender equality, anti-discrimination policies and promotion of gender equality are the responsibility of that Ministry. The new Gender Equality Law regulates for the first time the gender equality mechanisms within public administration bodies and explicitly states that ministries and other public administration bodies responsible for areas in which general and special measures to promote gender equality are determined and implemented represent gender equality mechanisms.⁴⁸ Accordingly, in a separate article⁴⁹, the Law regulates that all ministries and other public authorities integrate gender equality when creating, implementing, monitoring and improving sectoral policies, formulating laws, other regulations and activities in the domain of their competence, especially in areas where general and special measures for the promotion of gender equality are implemented. This provision is particularly significant considering the multisectoral nature of gender equality, as it mandates that a gender component be integrated into all sectoral public policies and regulations.

At the level of AP Vojvodina, in the provincial administration bodies from 2002 the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality⁵⁰ was responsible for gender equality. It was the first gender equality mechanism in provincial administration bodies. This Secretariat formed the Gender Equality Council as an advisory body in 2003.⁵¹ Since 2016, gender equality has been under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Secretariat for the Economy, Employment and Gender Equality⁵², and after 2016, under the jurisdiction of the Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality.⁵³

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44 "Official Gazette of RS", No 43/2007.

45 Law on Ministries, "Official Gazette of RS", No 65/2008.

46 Law on Ministries "Official Gazette of RS", No 44/2014.

47 Article 12 of the Law on Ministries, "Official Gazette of RS", No 128/2020.

48 Article 59, paragraph 1, item 2) of the Gender Equality Law, "Official Gazette of RS", No 51/2021.

49 Article 61 of the Gender Equality Law.

50 Articles 18 and 33 of the Decision on Provincial Administration, "Official Gazette of APV", No 3/2002.

51 "Official Gazette of APV", No 1/2003.

52 "Official Gazette of APV", No 37/2014.

53 Articles 32 and 35a of the Provincial Assembly Decision on Provincial Administration, "Official Gazette of APV", No 37/2016.

The status of gender equality mechanisms within executive bodies and public administration was unstable. Dynamic, continuous and essential changes in the status, competences and composition of these bodies testify to this. The key problems are their status, competences, personnel and financing, and the position of these bodies is particularly important, because the executive authorities prepare regulations and planning documents that define the directions of public policies, monitor and control their implementation. Gender equality mechanisms are regulated by the Law on Government and the Law on Ministries, and at the level of the autonomous province by other relevant regulations, which are often changed after elections and the formation of a new government. This had a significant impact on the stability of the status and content of jurisdiction of gender equality mechanisms in executive bodies and the public administration.⁵⁴ The novelties in the Gender Equality Law of 2021, which for the first time comprehensively regulates all gender equality mechanisms, including gender equality mechanisms within the framework of executive power and public administration, create normative assumptions for the stability of the position of these bodies in the structure of public authorities.

6 Gender equality mechanisms at the local level

The process of forming gender equality mechanisms started at the local level back in 2002.⁵⁵ During the next three years, they were formed in more than 50 municipalities in Serbia, 15 of which in AP Vojvodina. Local gender equality mechanisms were formed in different ways (pursuant to the municipal statute, municipal assembly decision, mayor's decision, etc.) and had different statuses in the structure of local government bodies (gender equality commissions in the assembly of local self-government units, persons in charge of gender equality, councils for gender equality within local government bodies, etc.). Until the adoption of the

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54 See: Đorđević, Lj. *Analiza Zakona o ravnopravnosti polova (Analysis of the Law on the Equality of Sexes)*, UNDP, Belgrade, 2010. Available at: www.undp.org, Pajvančić, M., Petrušić N., Jašarević S. *Komentar Zakona o ravnopravnosti polova (Commentary on the Law on the Equality of Sexes)*, Belgrade, Centre of Modern Skills, 2010. Available at: http://www.kss.org.rs/news/2013/09/src/1309komentar_zakona_o_ravnopravnosti_polova.pdf.

55 The programme for the formation of local gender equality mechanisms, which was supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro, covered the following municipalities: Kruševac, Niš (district), Prokuplje, Kikinda, Velika Plana, Zrenjanin (district), Požarevac, Zaječar, Valjevo, Užice, Knjaževac, Bor, Kragujevac, Sremska Mitrovica, Novi Sad, Zrenjanin (city), Belgrade, Topola, Arandelovac, Čačak, Sombor, Subotica, Niš (city), Kučevo, Novi Bečej, Aleksinac, Pirot, Jagodina, Loznica, Boljevac, Negotin, Kladovo, Majdanpek, Senta, Žitište, Kovačica, Nova Crnja, Vrbas, Sečanj, Irig, Sjenica, Prijepolje, Lebane, Medveđa, Tutin, Bujanovac, Preševo, Priboj, municipality of Medijana (Niš), Novi Beograd. Source: *Gender Equality*, OSCE, Belgrade, 2005, p. 22.

Law on the Equality of Sexes in 2009⁵⁶, which, for the first time, regulated only local gender equality mechanisms with a general norm⁵⁷, whose adoption was preceded by the activities of civil society organisations and male/female experts who drafted the model law⁵⁸, the emphasis of the activity was on staff education and the preparation of instructional materials (handbooks, manuals, guidelines, etc.)⁵⁹ in order to encourage and facilitate the work of these bodies. These activities have continued until today.⁶⁰ The impetus for improving the work of local gender equality mechanisms was the adoption of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life⁶¹ and the Declaration on Respect for the Gender Equal-

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- 56 For more information see: Pajvančić, M. *Analiza procesa usvajanja zakona iz oblasti rodne ravnopravnosti (Analysis of the Process of Adoption of Laws in the Field of Gender Equality)*, Proceedings (ed. Stojiljković, Z., Lončar J., Spasojević D. "Političke stranke i zakonodavna aktivnost Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije" ("Political Parties and Legislative Activity of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia"), Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade, 2012, pp. 79–135. Available at: <https://www.fpn.bg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/Politicke-stranke-i-zakonodavna-aktivnost.pdf>.
- 57 Article 39 of the Law on the Equality of Sexes, "Official Gazette of RS", No 104/2009.
- 58 See: *Ka zakonu o ravnopravnosti polova (Towards the Law on the Equality of Sexes)*, Provincial Gender Equality Institute, Novi Sad, 2006 and Proceedings (ed. Pajvančić, M.) *U susret zakonu o ravnopravnosti polova – evropska budućnost Srbije (Towards the Law on the Equality of Sexes – the European Future of Serbia)*, (conference held on 16 March 2006), Freedom House, CMV, BEFPE, Belgrade, 2006.
- 59 See: Pajvančić, M. Andelković, M. Maletin, B. Šijački, Z. *Ravnopravnost u našoj opštini (Equality in Our Municipality)*, Gender Equality Institute, Novi Sad, 2007. Available at: http://www.rodna_ravnopravnost_u_nasoj_opštini.pdf; *Institucionalni mehanizmi ravnopravnosti polova – mogućnosti na lokalnom nivou (Institutional Gender Equality Mechanisms – Opportunities at the Local Level)*, Proceedings "Žene to mogu – kako skrojiti politiku jednakih mogućnosti" ("Women Can Do It – How to Tailor a Policy of Equal Opportunities"), Belgrade, 2007; Pajvančić, M.: *Institucionalni mehanizmi ravnopravnosti polova na lokalnom nivou (Institutional Gender Equality Mechanisms at the Local Level)*, op. cit. 2008, p. 93–99, Pajvančić, M., *Ravnopravnost polova u političkom životu (Gender Equality in Political Life)*. Available at: <http://www.rs.cest.gov.ba/index.php/seminari-2011/2414banja-luka-application-of-the-law-on-gender-equality/554-material-mpajvancic-iv/file>; *Putevi za ostvarivanje rodne ravnopravnosti i jednakih mogućnosti – od ideje do prakse (Paths to Achieve Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities – From Idea to Practice)* – Manual for Officials and Local Self-Government Bodies in Charge of Gender Equality, (ed. Petrušić, N.), OSCE, Belgrade, 2007. Available at: http://www.sngo.org/storage/app/uploads/public/152/095/842/1520958426_Rodna_ravnopravnost_11_05.pdf.
- 60 See: Vladislavljević, A. *Praktičan alat za rodno odgovorno budžetiranje u tri koraka (A Practical Tool for Gender Responsible Budgeting in Three Steps)*, 2011. Available at: http://www.resurscentar.rs/rc_files/downloads/rob3_alat_za_rodno_odgovorno_budzetiranje_u_3_koraka.pdf, Babović, M. Vuković, O. Subotički, I. Prohaska, J. Janković, G. *Rodna ravnopravnost na lokalnom nivou (Gender Equality at the Local Level)*, training programme at the local level, 2013. Available at: <http://www.secons.net/admin/app/webroot/files/publications/Rodnaravnopravnostnalokalnomnivou-priru%C4%8Dnik.pdf>, Bačanović, V. *Nacrt programa za unapređenje kapaciteta lokalnih mehanizama za rodnu ravnopravnost (Draft Programme for Improving the Capacity of Local Gender Equality Mechanisms)*, 2016. Available at: genderhub.org.rs, Nikolin, S. Vladislavljević, A. *Rodno odgovorno budžetiranje (ROB) nova zakonska obaveza u sistemu upravljanja javnim finansijama u Republici Srbiji (Gender Responsible Budgeting (GRB) is a New Legal Obligation in the System of Public Finance Management in the Republic of Serbia)* – manual, 2017. Available at: <http://217.169.210.134/storage/app/media/dobro-upravljenje/pubs/Prirucnik%20za%20uvodnje%20ROB.pdf> etc.
- 61 European Charter for Equality of Women and Man in Local Life. Adopted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions in 2006. Available at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/08/the-european-charter-for-equality-of-women-and-men-in-local-life>.

ity Principle at the Local Level of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities⁶², as well as numerous continuous activities of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities related to the support and improvement of the work of local gender equality mechanisms.⁶³ Insights into their work and the difficulties they face are provided by research into the gender equality mechanisms at the local level.⁶⁴ The Gender Equality Law adopted in 2021 also regulates gender equality bodies established at the local level⁶⁵ and delegates the right to the assemblies of local self-government units to more closely regulate the election, competences and working methods of these bodies through their acts.⁶⁶ In the assembly of the local self-government unit, the Commission for Gender Equality was formed as a permanent working body of the assembly, which is composed of male/female councillors, and which is responsible for considering, from a gender perspective, all acts that are referred to the assembly for consideration and adoption.⁶⁷ The Gender Equality Council is set up in the administrative bodies⁶⁸, and consists of nominated or appointed persons, representatives of institutions, bodies and organisations in areas important for gender equality and the prevention and suppression of gender-based violence. Persons in charge of gender equality in local government bodies must also participate in the work of the Council, and provide the Council with professional and administrative-technical support in its work. The Gender Equality Council is responsible for initiating and proposing measures to improve gender equality. Bodies for



62 Available at: http://euintegracije.skgo.org/upload/Document/Doc/2013_01/Deklaracija_SKGO_o_rodnoj_ravnopravnosti.pdf.

63 For more information see: Aleksov, R. *Rodna ravnopravnost kroz SKGO akciju (Gender Equality Through SCTM Action)*, SCTM, 2015. Available at: http://www.skgo.org/storage/app/uploads/public/152/095/870/1520958706_2205_Final_200x200_RR_PRINT_FINAL.pdf; Bačanović, V.: *Uvođenje rodne perspektive i pristupa zanovanog na ljudskim pravima u komponente programa "Podrška lokalnim samoupravama u Srbiji na putu ka EU" (Introducing a Gender Perspective and an Approach Based on Human Rights in the Components of the Programme "Support to Local Self-Governments in Serbia on the Path to the EU")*. Available at: http://www.skgo.org/storage/app/uploads/public/152/095/876/1520958761_SKGO_analiza_2016_izvestaj_sa_preporukama_FINAL_73522.pdf; SCTM Gender Equality Network. Available at: <http://www.skgo.org/mreze/312> and <http://euintegracije.skgo.org/sr/submodules/documents/>.

64 See: Bačanović, V. Božanić, D. Pajvančić, M. Maletin, B. *Jačanje kapaciteta institucionalnih mehanizama za rodnu ravnopravnost i sprovođenje politike jednakih mogućnosti na lokalnom nivou (Strengthening the Capacities of Institutional Gender Equality Mechanisms and Implementation of the Policy of Equal Opportunities at the Local Level)*, Women's Support Centre, Kikinda 2012. Available at: <https://cpz.rs/Dokumenti/Publikacija-Resultati-PDF.pdf>, *Prvi izveštaj Ženske platforme za razvoj Srbije 2017–2018. godina (The First Report of the Women's Platform for the Development of Serbia for 2017–2018)*. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/12991.pdf>; Bačanović, V. *Nacrt programa za unapređenje kapaciteta lokalnih mehanizama za rodnu ravnopravnost, 2016 (Draft Programme for Improving the Capacity of Local Gender Equality Mechanisms for 2016)*. Available at: genderhub.org.rs.

65 Article 63 of the Gender Equality Law, "Official Gazette of RS", No 51/2021.

66 Article 63, paragraph 3 of the Gender Equality Law, "Official Gazette of RS", No 51/2021.

67 Article 63, paragraph 1, item 1) of the Gender Equality Law.

68 Article 63, paragraph 1, item 2) of the Gender Equality Law.

gender equality co-operate with each other as well as with other gender equality bodies at the level of the local self-government unit, the autonomous province and the Republic.⁶⁹

7 Persons responsible for gender equality in public authorities

An important support for the improvement of gender equality and the work of gender equality mechanisms are *persons in charge of gender equality* in public authorities at all levels. After the adoption of the Law on the Equality of Sexes in 2009⁷⁰, which stipulates the possibility of appointing employees for gender equality and performance of activities in this area in local self-government bodies, within the framework of the existing organisation and the act on internal organisation and job classification⁷¹, administrative bodies at the local level, and then at the national and provincial levels, determined the person in charge of gender equality by their decisions. Practice has shown that this is necessary given the multisectoral nature of gender equality. The new Gender Equality Law, starting from the obligation of public authorities at all levels, to participate in the achievement of gender equality within their competences⁷², regulates the obligation of public authorities that have more than 50 employees and engaged persons to determine from among their employees the person in charge of gender equality in accordance with their act on internal organisation and job classification⁷³, as well as the tasks performed by these persons, which include: monitoring the implementation of policies and measures for achieving and improving gender equality under the remit of the body in which they are employed; monitoring the status of the sex structure of employees and engaged persons in the body in which they are appointed and reporting on the achieved level of gender equality in areas within the body's purview; co-operation with the Ministry and bodies for gender equality on issues important for achieving and improving gender equality; preparation of data, analysis of materials needed for the work of bodies for gender equality, etc.⁷⁴

8 Mechanisms for the protection of the right to gender equality

Gender equality mechanisms are complemented by independent institutions in the field of human rights protection, especially the Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality.

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69 Article 63, paragraph 2 of the Gender Equality Law.

70 "Official Gazette of RS", No 104/2009.

71 Article 39, paragraph 4 of the Law on the Equality of Sexes.

72 Article 59, paragraph 1, item 6) of the Gender Equality Law.

73 Article 64, paragraph 1 of the Gender Equality Law.

74 Article 64, paragraph 4, items 1) to 6) of the Gender Equality Law.

At the national level, in 2005, the Protector of Citizens was established⁷⁵. After the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in 2006⁷⁶, the Protector of Citizens became a constitutional institution. Within this institution, during the transfer of authority to deputies, specialisation was ensured for the performance of activities, which also includes the field of gender equality.⁷⁷ In 2012, the Protector of Citizens established the Gender Equality Council as a permanent expert advisory body⁷⁸, but a few years later this body was abolished.

After the adoption of the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination in 2010⁷⁹, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality was established as an autonomous, independent and specialised state authority that provides protection against discrimination, including gender-based discrimination⁸⁰. The establishment of this body testifies to Serbia's commitment to accept the recommendations of international institutions⁸¹ and form independent bodies for protection from discrimination, including gender-based discrimination⁸².

The first independent mechanism for the protection of human rights and the right to gender equality through the scrutiny of the legality of work of the public administration is the Provin-



75 Article 1 of the Law on the Protector of Citizens, "Official Gazette of RS", No 79/2005 and 54/2007. For more information about the activities of the Protector of Citizens in the field of gender equality and special reports on gender equality see: <http://www.ombudsman.rodnaravnopravnost.rs>.

76 Article 138 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, "Official Gazette of RS", No 98/2006.

77 Article 6, paragraph 2 of the Law on the Protector of Citizens, "Official Gazette of RS", No 105/2021. For more information about activities in the field of gender equality see: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php/izvestaji/posebnii-izvestaji>.

78 Among the Council's activities, we highlight the work on the Model Gender Equality Law. See: *Model zakona o rodnoj ravnopravnosti (Model Gender Equality Law)*, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Belgrade, 2017, available at: <https://rs.boell.org/sites/default/files/zrr.pdf>, and Special Report on the Representation of Women in Decision-Making Positions and the Activities of Local Gender Equality Mechanisms in Local Self-Government Units. Available at: https://ombudsman.rs/attachments/article/5901/Zastitnik%20gradjan_srpski.pdf.

79 "Official Gazette of RS", No 22/2009.

80 See: Petrušić, N. *Pravni status i pozicija Poverenika za zaštitu ravnopravnosti u arhitekturi nacionalnih institucionalnih mehanizama za rodnu ravnopravnost (Legal Status and Position of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality in the Architecture of National Institutional Gender Equality Mechanisms)*, Proceedings "Pravni sistem i zaštita od diskriminacije" ("Legal System and Protection from Discrimination"), Vol. 1, Faculty of Law, Kosovska Mitrovica, p. 65–86.

81 See: ECRI General Policy Recommendation No 2 on Specialised Bodies to Combat Racism, Xenophobia, Antisemitism and Intolerance, Available at: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/default_en.asp. For more information see: Petrušić N, Krstić I, Marinković T. *Komentar zakona o zabrani diskriminacije (Commentary on the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination)*, Judicial Academy, Belgrade 2014.

82 In terms of the activities of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, we highlight *Poseban izveštaj Poverenika za zaštitu ravnopravnosti o diskriminaciji žena (Special Report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality on Discrimination against Women)*, Commissioner for Equality, Belgrade, 2015. For more information about the activities of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality see: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/rs/izvestaji>.

cial Ombudsman established in AP Vojvodina in 2002⁸³ and elected in 2003. One of the deputy ombudsmen, along with a description of his responsibilities, is selected for the area of gender equality. By amending the regulations governing this institution in 2014⁸⁴, the decision to elect one of the deputy ombudsmen for gender equality was retained, but not the provision specifying his competences.⁸⁵



The experience of the past twenty years testifies to the desirable direction of action. We highlight three priorities:

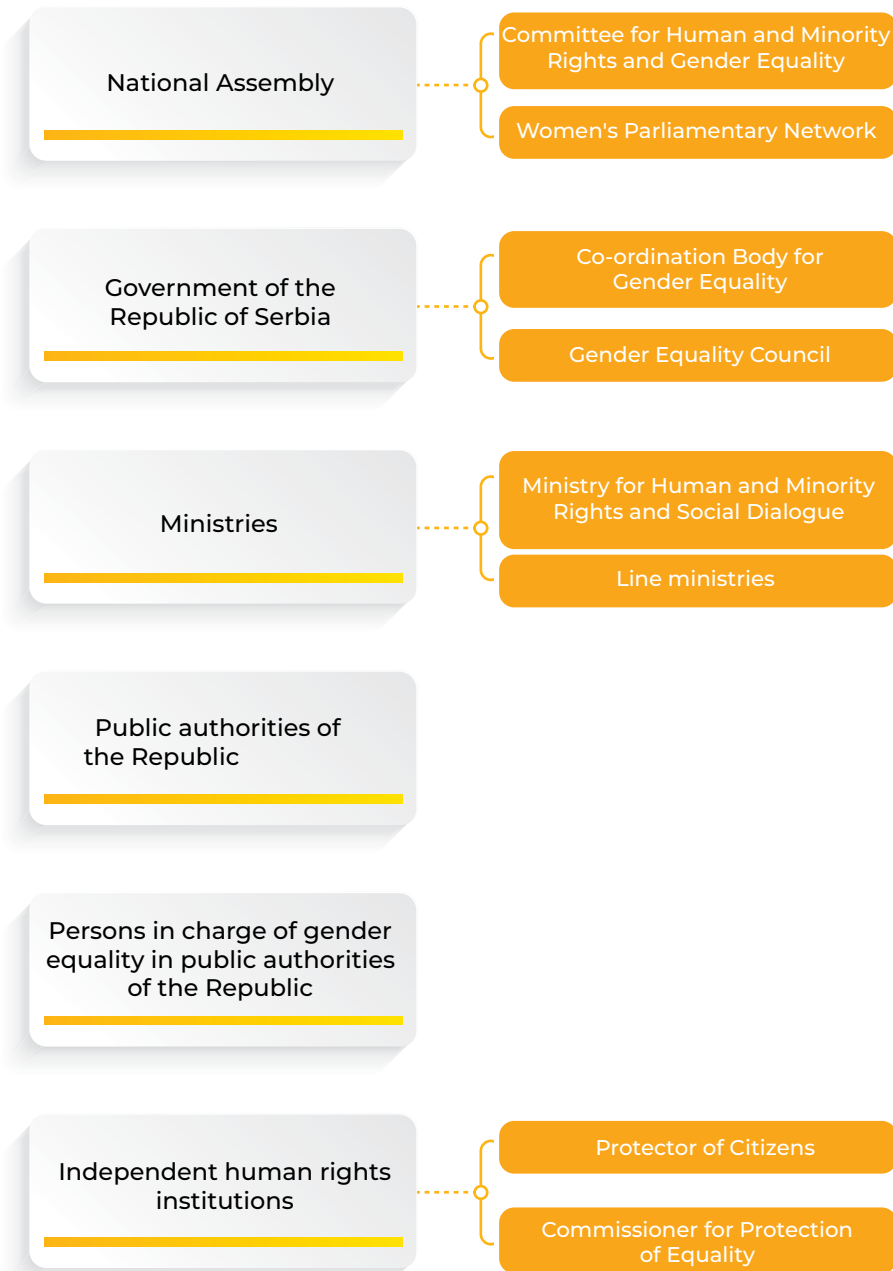
1. Harmonisation with new legal solutions, which includes the adoption of all normative acts prescribed by law: regulations for the implementation of laws adopted by the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, regulations adopted by the authorities of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina within their competences, regulations adopted by the bodies of local self-government units, regulations adopted by public administration bodies and all other public authorities within their competences, regulations adopted by employers, including acts adopted by political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations that regulate their internal organisation, gender equality mechanisms and the formation of these mechanisms.
2. Focusing on the effectiveness of instruments of implementation, monitoring, supervision and control (responsibility for the implementation of public policies) and protection of rights.
3. An intersectoral approach to gender equality in the operation of institutions (system assumptions and procedures that enable co-ordination and harmonisation of activities) in the design and use of instruments and the definition of parameters that set frameworks and operational plans for the implementation of gender equality policies.



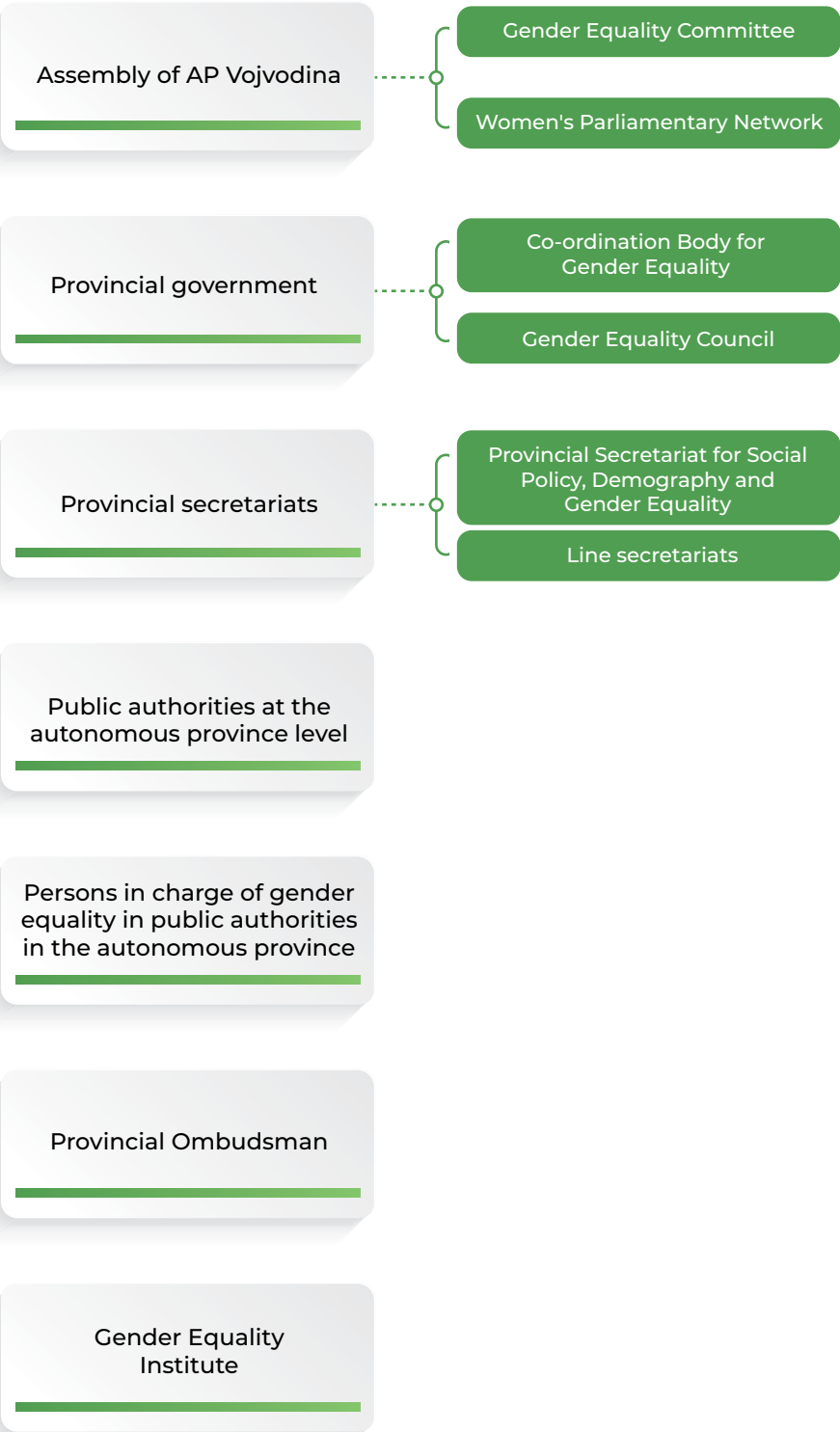
- 83 Decision on the Provincial Ombudsman, “Official Gazette of APV”, No 23/2002, 5/2004, 16/2005 and 18/2009. For more information about activities in the field of gender equality see: <https://www.ombudsnapv.org/riv/index.php/istrazivanja.htm> and <https://www.ombudsnapv.org/riv/index.php/dokumenti/posebni-izvestaji.html>.
- 84 Provincial Assembly Decision on the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman, “Official Gazette of APV”, No 37/2014.
- 85 Article 8, paragraph 1 of the Provincial Assembly Decision on the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman.

ANNEXES:

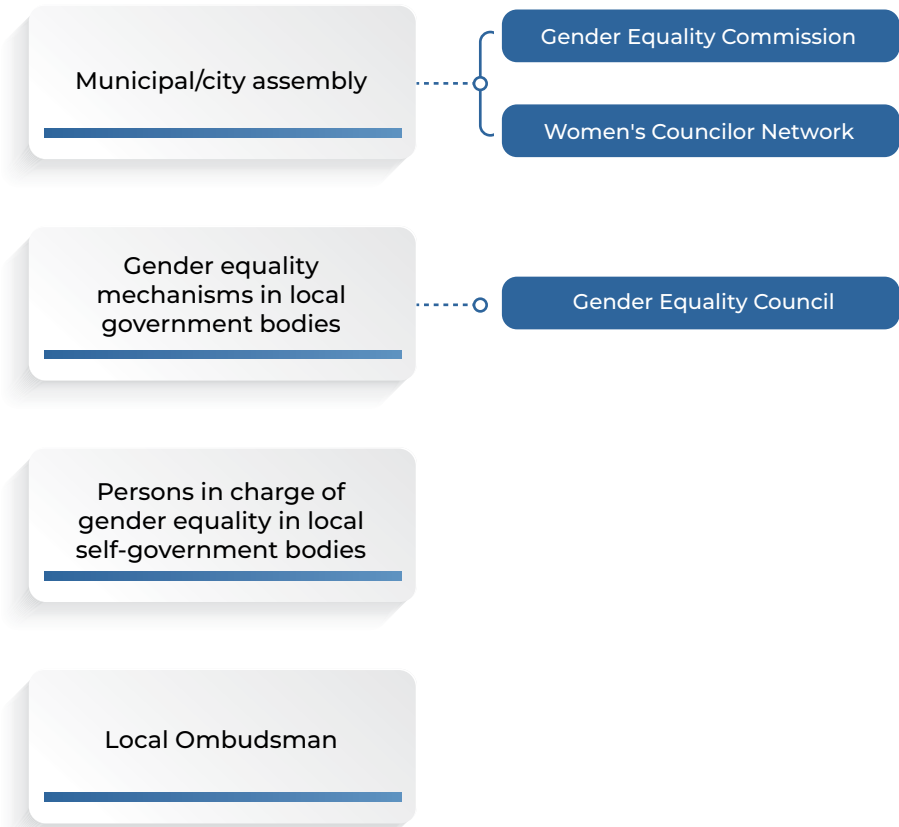
GENDER EQUALITY MECHANISMS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL



GENDER EQUALITY MECHANISMS AT THE LEVEL OF THE AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE



GENDER EQUALITY MECHANISMS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL



GENDER EQUALITY MECHANISM OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA IN 2003–2023

1 Introductory remarks

Institutional gender equality mechanisms⁸⁶ are the key factors of the effective implementation of the gender equality policy. In Serbia, their formation began after the democratic changes in 2000, and that process unfolded with many obstacles, wanderings and hesitations, with frequent changes in the status and structure of institutional mechanisms.⁸⁷ The experiences gained were, however, valuable during the creation a branched system of institutional mechanisms at the national, provincial and local levels, which was normatively shaped by the Gender Equality Law of 2021.⁸⁸

In Serbia, one of the first national institutional gender equality mechanisms was the Gender Equality Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, established in 2003 as a permanent working body of the National Assembly.⁸⁹ In 2012, its responsibility was taken over by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.⁹⁰ Since 2003, when the Gender Equality Coun-

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86 The term “institutional gender equality mechanisms” refers to bodies in charge of the promotion of gender equality and support for the inclusion of gender equality in general policies in all areas. They usually consist of a central government body complemented by an inter-sectoral co-ordination structure for gender equality and contact persons or centers responsible for the inclusion of gender equality in ministries. See: EIGE’s Gender Equality Glossary & Thesaurus. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/overview> (accessed on 27 July 2023).

87 Pajvančić, M. Petrušić, N. *Značaj institucionalnih mehanizama za ostvarivanje rodne ravnopravnosti (Importance of Institutional Mechanisms for Achieving Gender Equality)*, Proceedings of the Faculty of Law in Niš, 2014, No 67, p. 25–44.

88 “Official Gazette of RS”, No 52/2021.

89 Article 68g of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, “Official Gazette of RS”, No 57/2003. This permanent working body was one of the 29 permanent working bodies of the National Assembly (see Article 44 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly).

90 Article 52 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, “Official Gazette of RS”, No 20/2012. The Committee was one of 19 committees of the National Assembly.

cil was founded, until today, in all convocations⁹¹ the National Assembly has had a permanent working body that is active in the field of gender equality (hereinafter: the parliamentary gender equality mechanism). The formation and operation of the parliamentary mechanism are one of the important steps towards a gender-sensitive parliament, which is a parliament that “values and prioritizes gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices, and outputs towards these objectives.”⁹²

Twenty years of continuous work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism represents a kind of jubilee and an occasion for summarising its activities in regard to gender mainstreaming in public policies and the promotion of gender equality. The aim of this section is to examine and analyse the activities of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the twenty-year period of its operation. The results of the analysis can contribute to broader understanding of the institutional framework of gender equality in Serbia and underpin further and deeper research.

This section is based on publicly available data on the composition and work of the Gender Equality Committee and the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, published on the website of the National Assembly.⁹³ The key source of data are the summarised minutes (notes) from sessions and information on public hearings⁹⁴ organised by the



91 In the 2003–2023 period covered by the research, the National Assembly had nine convocations: V convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (22 January 2001 – 27 January 2004); VI convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (27 January 2004 – 14 February 2007); VII convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (14 February 2007 – 11 June 2008); VIII convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (11 June 2008 – 31 May 2012); IX convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (31 May 2012 – 16 April 2014); X convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (16 April 2014 – 3 June 2016); XI convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (3 June 2016 – 3 August 2020); XII convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (3 August 2020 – 1 August 2022); XIII (current) convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (from 1 August 2022).

92 Childs, S. Palmieri, S. *Gender-sensitive parliaments: feminising formal political institutions*, Chapters, in: Sawyer, M. Banaszak, A. L. True, J. Kantola, J. (ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Governance*, chapter 14, pages 174–188, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023. Cited according to: Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament. A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region, OSCE Mission to Montenegro, Podgorica, 2022, p. 7.

93 Available at: <http://www.parlament.gov.rs/>.

94 Public hearings are a form of work at the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia and one of the forms of direct participation of citizens in the exercise of public authority, which enables citizens to be directly involved in the legislative process and decision-making on laws. The rules on public hearing were for the first time regulated by Articles 83 and 84 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly from 2010 (“Official Gazette of RS”, No 52/2010). For more information about public hearings see: Pajvančić, M. *Javno slušanje – oblik rada Narodne skupštine (Public Hearing – Form of Work of the National Assembly)*, Proceedings of the Faculty of Law, Novi Sad 2012, vol. 46, No 3, p. 7–18; Orlović S. *Javna slušanja kao institucija parlamentarne prakse (Public Hearings as an Institution of Parliamentary Practice)*, Belgrade, UNDP, 2007.

Committee.⁹⁵ The minutes contain basic data on the topics of the sessions, as well as a summary of the discussions and adopted conclusions, while the information on public hearings is somewhat more substantial.⁹⁶

The website of the National Assembly contains information on the composition of the Committee and summarised minutes (notes) and information from sessions and public hearings of the Committee within all convocations of the National Assembly, with the exception of data relating to the work of the Gender Equality Committee during the fifth convocation of the National Assembly (2001–2004). Due to this, it was not possible to analyse the work of the Committee in the one-year period of its activity, from 2003, when it was founded, until 2004, when the mandate of the fifth convocation of the National Assembly expired.

The research results are systematised in three parts. The first part consists of an analysis of the work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in each of the eight convocations of the National Assembly and a critical overview of the role it plays in the implementation and promotion of gender equality. In the second part, the data on the gender structure of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism are presented and critically analysed. The third part consists of concluding remarks, in which the key findings of the research are compiled and summarised.



95 Minutes from Committee sessions sometimes do not contain all the information prescribed by Article 76 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly from 2002, i.e. Article 81 of the current Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly. Some minutes lack complete information on the oral and written proposals presented, as well as on the positions taken by the Committee. The information on a public hearing is more comprehensive and provides an insight into the topic of the public hearing, the statements made and the positions taken by the participants of the public hearing, and can be a model for drawing up the minutes of regular Committee sessions.

96 Minutes from sessions and information about public hearings were written in gender-insensitive language, which is unacceptable, since this is a parliamentary gender equality mechanism, which is expected to be one of the promoters of the use of gender-sensitive language in parliamentary and public communication.

2 Overview and analysis of the work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism

2.1 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the sixth convocation of the National Assembly (2004-2007)

In the 2004–2007 period, the Gender Equality Committee (hereinafter: the Committee) acted as a permanent working body of the National Assembly.⁹⁷ The committee held 27 sessions, the largest number of which was devoted to the consideration of drafts and proposals of laws.

The work of the Committee in this period was marked by activities aimed at considering different versions of the Draft Law on the Equality of Sexes, and it received proposals and comments from individual ministries. As many as eleven sessions of the Committee were entirely devoted to this Law. The Committee initiated the adoption of this Law with the decision made at the seventh session held on 28 July 2004. As stated in the minutes from this session, the Committee “by the majority of votes accepted the proposal to draft a special law on the equality of sexes, similarly to modern European legislation and neighbouring countries”. Different versions of the draft law were discussed at as many as nine sessions, and at the last seventeenth session on 27 June 2006, the Proposed Law on the Equality of Sexes was considered and supported in principle.

Several proposed laws were also considered at sessions: the Proposed Family Law (XI session of 23 December 2004), Proposed Criminal Code (XVIII session of 12 September 2005) and Proposed Law Amending the Law on Financial Support for Families with Children (VIII session of 21 September 2004). It is also important to mention the conclusion of the Committee adopted at its XV session on 16 May 2005 – in their parliamentary groups, members of the Committee should launch an initiative to amend the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament, which would regulate the representation of the less represented gender in the legislature.

In addition to considering the draft laws, the Committee dealt with other issues important for gender equality. As particularly significant, we single out: activities on the formation of the Subcommittee for Children’s Rights (XIII session of 18 February 2005), which was a forerun-

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97 According to the provisions of Article 68g of the then valid Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, the Committee was in charge of considering the proposals of laws, other regulations and general acts from the point of view of improving and achieving gender equality, analysing the conduct of policy, implementation of laws, other regulations and general acts by the Government of the Republic of Serbia and other bodies and officials accountable to the National Assembly, from the point of view of respect for gender equality.

ner of the Committee for Children's Rights, which has been operating as a special permanent working body of the National Assembly since 2012.

At the meetings of the Committee, some specific problems of gender discrimination faced by groups and individuals were discussed. Thus, for example, at the XVII session of 11 July 2005, the Committee discussed the problem of discrimination against women employed in the "Ipol Seval" aluminium rolling mill A.D. Sevojno in connection with the implementation of the social programme. The Committee requested from the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy to review the findings of the Labour Inspection Department regarding the legality of the implementation of the social programme and determine the potential responsibility of the competent inspector and to report to the Committee thereon, and recommended that the Privatisation Committee should consider the problem of company employees and enable trade union representatives of the company to oversee the implementation of the social programme.

The Committee's activities on establishing co-operation with other institutional mechanisms and increasing its visibility are significant. With this aim, the Committee prepared a project proposal with which it applied for development support from the OSCE, within which visits to local committees and commissions for gender equality were planned, as well as forums in local communities.⁹⁸

At the XXI session held on 17 February 2006, at the invitation of the Committee, Sonja Lokar, a member of the Working Group for Gender Equality of the Stability Pact, took part in the work and pointed out the gender dimensions of unemployment and insufficient representation of women in political life. At the session, the Committee discussed "the degradation of the female workforce, which occurred simultaneously with the degradation of the areas in which women are most represented"; the solutions reached by individual countries of the European Union, as well as "the need to reach a consensus on these issues so as to solve the problem of unemployment through constant education".

At the XXVI session held on 30 May 2006, members of the Association of Women – Aviators of Serbia and Montenegro took part in the work, informing the Committee about discrimination against women aviators.

The activity of the Committee on improving knowledge and raising the awareness of male/female MPs about gender discrimination should also be mentioned. The Committee made

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98 The project proposal was adopted at the 5th session of the Committee, held on 14 May 2004.

the decision that male/female MPs should participate in education about gender equality and forms of discrimination, organised by the Voice of Difference – Group for the Promotion of Women’s Political Rights, in co-operation with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Norway.⁹⁹

It is evident that the Committee was open to co-operation with international organisations and civil society, as evidenced by the fact that as many as nine sessions were attended by male/female representatives of international and non-governmental organisations, professional associations, the academia, other institutional mechanisms and government bodies, at the invitation of the Committee. In fact, a large number of sessions were held with the direct support of international organisations, within the framework of projects that they implemented in co-operation with government bodies and civil society organisations. During this period, the Committee considered various forms of structural discrimination against women.

2.2 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the seventh convocation of the National Assembly (2007–2008)

In the VII convocation of the National Assembly, the role of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism was performed by the Gender Equality Committee, whose status and jurisdiction remained the same. The Committee held nine sessions. In the Work Plan of the Committee, which was adopted at the III session held on 14 September 2007, “initiating the adoption of the Law on the Equality of Sexes” was determined as a priority task, as well as work on issues related to the education and professional development of women, their position in the labour market and handling citizen complaints relating to gender discrimination. In addition, the Plan envisages controlling the work of the Government and other bodies in the part that concerns the implementation of gender equality.

One of the problems to which the Committee paid special attention concerned sensationalist media reports that insult the dignity and human rights of women, especially victims of violence. As many as four sessions were dedicated to this topic.

At the III session, the decision was made to form a working group that will prepare a letter to all media and state institutions that are responsible for the field of the media. As stated in the minutes, this letter should be signed by “all members of the Committee, with the request to send them a notice about what certain media outlets and state institutions have done regarding the problem”.

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⁹⁹ The decision was made at the 5th session of the Committee held on 14 May 2004.

Media reporting was the topic of the IV session of the Committee on 26 September 2007. At this session, the increasingly frequent abuse of information in the media, which violates human rights, was pointed out. The conclusion was adopted that the Committee should send a letter of protest to the media and journalists' associations in which it strongly reacted against the phenomena of victims of violence being exposed to humiliation and their dignity being violated. The direct reason for sending the protest letter were the current cases of publication of photos of victims of domestic violence and rape in the media. In addition, the Committee took the position that in the coming period "it will monitor the behaviour of the media and initiate changes to the regulations in order to prevent the abuse and manipulation of victims for sensationalistic purposes" and called on journalists' associations to respond in a timely manner to the occurrences of unprofessional behaviour of journalists and violations of the code of ethics. There is no information on whether the note and the protest letter were sent to journalists, nor on whether media outlets and competent authorities notified the Committee about the measures taken.

At the V session of the Committee on 3 October 2007, the topic was the media. The immediate cause was the show "48-Hour Wedding", with the bride, the groom and the bride's mother presenting slapping and beating women as a socially desirable pattern of behaviour, as well as the reactions of the director of Radio Television Serbia (RTS) to the criticism of an MP, who described the show as an "extraordinary socio-psychological study" – the director stated that the MP's criticism was a political attack on him. On this occasion, the Committee sent a request to the then RTS director to resign, as well as the request to the RTS Board of Directors to relieve the director of his duties if he refused to resign.

The Committee discussed the problem of violence against women on several occasions. The VIII session of the Committee, held on 27 November 2007 in the form of a round table on the occasion of 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, was dedicated to the causes and consequences of violence against women. The President of the National Assembly, representatives of government bodies and non-governmental organisations participated in the work of the round table. Data on the prevalence of violence against women, especially domestic violence, were presented at the round table, and after several hours of discussion, it was concluded that the problems of domestic violence and violence against women "require a multi-layered approach, improving the efficiency and promptness of judicial authorities, provision of psychological and other professional assistance to victims, as well as better work on violence prevention". At the IX session of the Committee, held on 5 December 2007, the Proposal of the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Vio-

lence against Women was considered and defined, and was referred to the regular parliamentary procedure.¹⁰⁰

By exercising its control function, at the VII session of 6 November 2007, the Committee considered the Report on the Work of the Gender Equality Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in the Mandate from 2004 to 2007, and got acquainted with the priorities of the Sector for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in the field of gender equality.

One of the specific problems dealt with by the Committee concerns the petition of the president of the municipal assembly of Knić regarding the initiative of a group of councillors that she should be relieved of her duties, which is explained by the fact that “the elected person in the position of the president of the municipal assembly of Knić went on a one-year maternity leave and with her departure paralysed the work of the municipal assembly of Knić”. The Committee made the decision to send an urgent request to the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to re-examine the case and provide feedback to the Committee.

2.3 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the VIII convocation of the National Assembly (2008–2012)

In the VIII convocation of the National Assembly, there were no changes regarding the status and competences of the Gender Equality Committee. During the four-year mandate, the Committee held 37 sessions, which were devoted to various current topics important for achieving gender equality.

One of the main characteristics of the work of the Committee in the 2008–2012 period was that the work was carried out according to pre-determined annual work plans, and that reports were drawn up on the Committee’s one-year work,¹⁰¹ which was not the practice of the Committee in the earlier period.

Another important characteristic of the Committee’s work is reflected in the activities aimed at strengthening the gender competences of male/female members of the Committee, which are necessary for the implementation of gender-sensitive supervision. To that end, three sessions of the Committee in the form of seminars, organised with the support of the OSCE Mis-

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100 There is no information on whether this declaration was ever adopted by the National Assembly.

101 Plans of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism and reports on their implementation are not publicly available, so they were not the subject of analysis.

sion and with the engagement of female experts on gender issues, were dedicated to introducing a gender perspective into the work of the National Assembly. This was the form, for example, of the XXXIII session (12 October 2012), where the process of mainstreaming gender equality in all stages of the policy development process, from creation to implementation, was presented to the Committee members. Experiences and good examples from comparative parliamentary practice were discussed, as well as the work and experiences of the Gender Equality Committee of the National Assembly. At the XXXV session (9 November 2011), the Committee was informed about the results of the gender analysis of the National Employment Strategy, i.e. the practical application of gender analysis – a key tool for gender mainstreaming in public policies. At the XXVII session (10 November 2010), female gender equality experts informed the Committee male/female members of examples of good practice in introducing the principles of gender equality into public policies, plans and budgets.

In the 2008–2012 period, a large number of Committee sessions had the form of round tables dedicated to various topics. The XXXVIII session of the Committee (4 April 2012), held in the form of a round table, was dedicated to marking the action “Month of Roma Women’s Activism”. The XXXI session of the Committee (7 April 2011), held in the form of a round table on the occasion of the International Roma Day, was also dedicated to the position of Roma women in Serbia. At the XXIII session (28 September 2009) held in Niš, the Proposal of the Law on the Equality of Sexes was presented and arguments were given in support of its adoption.

The Committee also organised several public hearings, on the occasion of marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Thus, on 25 November 2010, the Committee organised the public hearing “The role of the media in the fight against violence against women”. During the public hearing, alarming data on the number of murdered women and the prevalence of violence against women were presented. Male/female representatives of media associations pointed out that the media “depict circumstances in society and that representatives of the media, as creators of public opinion, should also participate in such gatherings”. In the following year, on the same occasion, the Committee organised a public hearing “Interdepartmental co-operation and support mechanisms for victims of violence”. This event brought together a large number of male/female representatives of relevant ministries, the police, the civil sector and the academia. The need to further strengthen co-operation with independent bodies, the non-governmental sector and awareness raising about violence against women was pointed out. Public hearings certainly contributed to making the problem of violence against women more visible, but it is questionable how much they influenced the improvement of the social response to violence against women.

A significant part of the Committee's activities was devoted to considering the reports of competent authorities and independent bodies, as well as their work plans.¹⁰² The Committee considered useful the reporting of independent bodies on the implementation of certain laws, pointed out the challenges in preparing state reports on the implementation of international treaties, as well as the problems of the division of the non-governmental sector in terms of participation in the preparation of reports. During the consideration of individual reports, the Committee made proposals regarding priority topics. Thus, at the XXIX session held on 8 March 2011, when the Report on the Work of the Directorate for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for the Period January–December 2010 was considered, the Committee positively assessed the work of the Directorate and the co-operation between the Committee and the Directorate and highlighted the need to pay more attention to the position of women in the countryside and to monitoring the implementation of the Law on the Equality of Sexes in local self-governments.¹⁰³

One of the characteristics of the work of the Committee is the holding of meetings outside the seat. The XXVI session (20 September 2010), in the form of a round table, was held in Žitište, and was dedicated to the position of women in the countryside. At the next session held on 22 September 2010, the Committee adopted several conclusions: the establishment of better co-operation at all levels of government and the engagement of all relevant actors in order to improve the economic position of women in the countryside, and informing them as well as possible and amending the legal regulations that would make it possible for women in rural areas, based on work in a rural household, to exercise certain rights as from employment, including the right to benefits during pregnancy and after childbirth, as well as rights arising from pension and disability insurance. The XIII session of the Committee was held outside the seat.

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102 At XXI session (1 June 2010), *Redovni izveštaj Zaštitnika građana za 2009. godinu (Regular Report of the Protector of Citizens for 2009)* was considered, in the part concerning gender equality and the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. At XXX session of the Committee (10 March 2011), the Committee considered *Objedinjeni II i III periodični izveštaj o primeni Konvencije o eliminaciji svih oblika diskriminacije žena (CEDAW) (Combined II and III Periodic Reports on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW))*.¹⁰² At the XXIX session held on 8 March 2011, *Izveštaj o radu Uprave za rodnu ravnopravnost Ministarstva rada i socijalne politike za period januar–decembar 2010. godine (Report on the Work of the Directorate for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for the Period January–December 2010)* was considered. At the XXI session (13 April 2010), the activity plans of the Directorate for Gender Equality for 2010 and the Gender Equality Council for 2010 were considered and adopted.

103 At this session, the Committee sent an invitation to all political parties that did not draw up an action plan with special measures for encouraging and improving the equal representation of women and men in their bodies and did not submit it to the Committee. This obligation referred to political parties whose male/female candidates were elected as members of parliament, i.e. councillors, as prescribed by Articles 35, paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Law on the Equality of Sexes ("Official Gazette of RS", No 104/2009).

The Committee's agenda also included consideration of proposed laws. At the XXV session (20 July 2010), the Proposed Law Amending the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance was discussed in general, and at the XIX session (10 December 2009) the Proposed Law on the Budget of the Republic of Serbia for 2010 – Section 21 was discussed. As many as five sessions of the Committee, one of which took the form of a round table, were devoted to the consideration of the Proposed Law on the Equality of Sexes. At the XVII session (18 November 2009), the Committee supported the Proposed Law and the amendments that were accepted by the Government, and formulated six of its own amendments. The topic of the XI session (27 May 2009) was the Proposed Law on Military, Labour and Material Obligation, from the perspective of achieving gender equality. The data from the minutes show that the Proposed Law on the Equality of Sexes was the only law to which the Committee gave its amendments, while there were no amendments or comments regarding the proposals of other laws.

In accordance with its powers, on two occasions the Committee considered and condemned the sexist and offensive behaviour of public officials towards MPs: at the VI session (10 April 2009) it condemned the “inappropriate speech of MP Tomislav Nikolić at the session of the National Assembly on 13 February 2009, in his address to MP Gordana Pop-Lazić”, and at the XII session (13 April 2010), he “most strongly condemned the verbal violence of MP Velimir Ilić against MP Jelena Trivan, in the show “Upitnik”, broadcast on the RTS public broadcaster, on 12 April.

It is worth noting that the Committee also considered two individual petitions: a petition from a single mother from Belgrade and the president of the SOS hotline for women and children victims of violence from Belgrade regarding the lack of space to work.¹⁰⁴

2.4 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the ninth convocation of the National Assembly (2012–2014)

The role of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the 2012–2014 period was performed by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality (hereinafter: the Committee), in the status of a permanent working body of the National Assembly. The

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104 In regard to the petition of the single mother, the Committee suggested to the petitioner that she should initiate a labour dispute against the company where she worked, or that she should address the city's Protector of Citizens (XXV session, 20 July 2010). Regarding the petition of the president of the SOS hotline for women and children victims of violence regarding the lack of space for work, the Committee decided to “contact the representatives of the SOS hotline and find out what specific help the Committee could provide, with the idea that, if necessary, the Committee should send a letter to the President of the National Assembly to temporarily provide this organisation with premises for work in the building of the National Assembly”. This petition was the reason for the conclusion that the operation of the SOS hotline should be solved systematically.

responsibilities of this body in the field of gender equality are identical to those of the former Gender Equality Committee.¹⁰⁵

In the two-year mandate, the Committee held 23 sessions and organised six public hearings, of which only eight sessions and three public hearings were devoted to topics in the domain of gender equality, which is slightly more than a third of the Committee's overall activities. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that the agenda of three of the total eight sessions of the Committee concerned only the decision on organising a public hearing, so that, in practice, only five sessions were devoted to considering topics in the field of gender equality. On the other hand, at sessions and public hearings, the Committee considered several topics in the field of human and minority rights that have a pronounced gender dimension, such as, for example, prevention of torture, patients' rights, international adoption, etc., but, according to data from minutes, they were not considered from a gender perspective. On the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the Committee, in co-operation with the Committee on the Judiciary, Public Administration and Local Self-Government, organised a public hearing on the topic "Report of the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture for 2012".¹⁰⁶ Although it is known that women, particularly those from multiple discriminated groups, face specific problems in prison, as well as in psychiatric and social institutions, during the discussion the issues related to torture against women were not examined by male/female participants. Given the said, it can be concluded that the Committee focused much more on human and minority rights and that topics in the field of human and minority rights were not considered from a gender and intersectional perspective.

All sessions and public hearings were held at the seat of the Committee, so the practice of holding meetings outside the seat, which existed in the previous period, was discontinued.

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105 According to the provisions of Article 52 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality considers the draft of a law and other general act and other issues in the field of: exercise and protection of human rights and freedoms and the rights of the child; implementation of ratified international treaties regulating the protection of human rights; exercising the freedom of religion; the position of churches and religious communities; exercise of the rights of national minorities and inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of Serbia. The Committee co-operates with national minority councils. The Committee considers the draft of a law and other general act from the point of view of promoting and achieving gender equality, examines the state of policy making, the implementation of laws and other general acts by the Government and other bodies and officials accountable to the National Assembly, from the point of view of respect for gender equality. The Committee also performs other tasks, in accordance with the law and these Rules of Procedure. The subject of analysis in this document are only the Committee's activities in the field of gender equality.

106 The public hearing was organised with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, through the project "Strengthening the Oversight Role and Transparency of the National Assembly", implemented in co-operation with the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

In this mandate, the Committee continued with the practice of adopting annual work plans. However, the work reports were not considered by the Committee, and there is no information on whether they were compiled at all.

The Committee's work in the field of gender equality was marked by public hearings, which drew the public's attention to certain challenges in achieving gender equality.

The first public hearing was held on 26 November 2012, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, on the topic "Fighting Domestic Violence". The event brought together the male/female representatives of numerous government bodies, independent bodies and international and non-governmental organisations. Data on the prevalence of violence against women in the family were presented and the activities undertaken to combat this violence were presented. The female representatives of women's organisations pointed out the need for the National Assembly to improve, through amendments, the legislative proposals that are in the procedure and to more effectively perform the oversight function regarding the implementation of laws that regulate the protection of women from violence. It was concluded that it was necessary to urgently ratify the Istanbul Convention, amend the Criminal Code and set up a government team that will adequately deal with the problem of domestic violence.

The second public hearing was held on 3 December 2013, on the topic: "National Implementation of the Recommendations of the CEDAW Committee of the United Nations and the CAHVIO Convention of the Council of Europe (Istanbul Convention)". The public hearing was part of the project "Strengthening the Oversight Role and Transparency of the Parliament", which was carried out by UNDP and the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation, in co-operation with the National Assembly. According to information from the public hearing, this event brought together the male/female representatives of numerous international organisations and government authorities, who pointed out the need for better implementation of international treaties, as well as the role of the National Assembly in monitoring their implementation. There were several female speakers from the non-governmental sector at the event.

"Women's entrepreneurship in Serbia" was the topic of the third public hearing held on 26 November 2013, with the support of the German GIZ and the Association of Business Women of Serbia. At this event, which brought together male/female representatives of government bodies and women's organisations, numerous data were presented about the insufficient number and bad position of female entrepreneurs, and the need for wider encourage-

ment of female entrepreneurship and the creation of a favourable environment for the work of small and medium-sized enterprises were pointed out.

The fourth public hearing on the topic “Aging – Years of Life: From Privilege to Discrimination” was held on 26 October 2015. The organisers of the public hearing were the Committee and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, and support was provided by the USAID Judicial Reform and Government Accountability Project. The focus of the public hearing was on different forms of discrimination based on age in different areas, but in light of the information from this public hearing, it can be concluded that a broader intersectional approach in looking at discrimination against the elderly was missing.

The Committee’s agenda also included the annual reports of independent human rights bodies, which the Committee supported, adopting the conclusions that were sent to the National Assembly for consideration.

During its mandate, the Committee considered and supported two proposed laws: the Proposed Law on Ratification of the Amendment to Article 20, Paragraph 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Proposed Law on Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (XXI session, 11 July 2013).

One of the topics that the Committee considered were the gender dimensions of disaster risk reduction. At the IV session of the Committee, in the form of a round table, which was held on the occasion of the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction on 12 October 2012, on the topic “Women and Girls: Invisible Power in Strengthening Resilience”, the Study on Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, prepared by UNDP, was presented. During the discussion, the achieved results were pointed out and it was concluded that there is a need for greater inclusion of women in all phases of work on disaster risk reduction, as well as for more effective gender mainstreaming in this area.

2.5 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the tenth convocation of the National Assembly (2014–2016)

In the two-year period, the role of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism continued to be performed by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, whose status and competences remained the same.

In this period, the Committee held 43 sessions, almost double the number of sessions that were held in the previous two-year period. The fact that only 15 sessions were dedicated to topics in the field of gender equality, which, as in the previous convocation, made up about 34% of the total number of sessions, cast a shadow on such intensive work of the Committee. On the other hand, the Committee discussed at sessions a number of topics related to the exercise of human and minority rights, but an inspection of the minutes from these sessions shows that they were discussed in a gender-neutral manner, without considering their gender dimensions. Such an approach, for example, was applied in the consideration of topics concerning the position of persons with disabilities, the elderly and persons discriminated on various grounds. On 3 December 2015, on the occasion of the International Human Rights Day, a joint session was held on the topic “Inclusion of persons with disabilities – accessibility and empowerment”. It was organised by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality and the Committee on Labour, Social Issues, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction. However, there was no consideration of the position of women and girls with disabilities, and a focus was placed on the problems of inaccessibility in the context of social inclusion. A similar approach was applied at the XXVII session of the Committee (3 December 2014) when, on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the “Road Map of Deinstitutionalisation in the Republic of Serbia” of the Protector of Citizens was presented.

The work of the Committee within the X convocation of the National Assembly was also marked by the holding of sessions outside the Committee seat, which contributed to the visibility of the Committee and the improvement of co-operation with local authorities. Two sessions held outside the Committee’s seat were dedicated to topics in the field of gender equality: the XV session held on 18 November 2014 in Vrnjačka Banja and the XXXVI session held on 27 November 2015 in Zrenjanin. In addition, a joint session of the parliamentary and provincial gender equality mechanism was held for the first time (10 December 2015). The reason for holding the joint session was the marking of the International Human Rights Day, and the session was dedicated to considering achievements and perspectives in the fight against violence against women. At the session, the need to harmonise domestic legislation with the Istanbul Convention was emphasised, as well as the importance of co-operation between the two committees and the need to exchange experiences, especially in terms of expanding the network of mechanisms for the protection of gender equality, strengthening support and protection of victims, economic empowerment of women and better co-ordination between all institutions.

The Committee considered the annual and special reports of independent human rights bodies.¹⁰⁷

The topic of violence against women was the focus of several Committee sessions. At the XXXVI session (27 November 2015), which marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, in which representatives of numerous government and provincial and local self-government bodies participated, the so-called “Zrenjanin model” in the fight against domestic violence, as an example of good practice, was presented. The alarming data on 36 murdered women during 2015 were presented and it was concluded “that the Committee, at one of the next sessions [...] will make relevant conclusions that will be referred to the competent institutions for further action”. At the XVIII session of the Committee (10 December 2014), on the occasion of the International Human Rights Day, the Model Gender Equality Law of the Protector of Citizens was presented, including the most significant innovations that can improve the practical application of the gender equality principle in special areas covered by law. The protection of women from violence was also the topic of the XVI session of the Committee (25 November 2014), when the Special Report of the Protector of Citizens on the Implementation of General and Special Protocols for the Protection of Women from Violence was considered. At the meeting that brought together representatives of government authorities and the non-governmental sector, information was presented on how to implement the protocol, especially at the local level, while pointing out the key challenges in co-operation and co-ordinated action of institutions. The role of gender equality mechanisms and the actions of competent authorities in cases of domestic and partner violence were the topic of the XV session of the Committee, which was held with the support of the OSCE Mission in Vrnjačka Banja on 18 November 2014. It was stated that an effective legislative framework and its effective implementation, preventive measures and elimination of the causes of violence are important for the achievement of gender equality and for the purpose of preventing violence against women.¹⁰⁸

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- 107 At the XXVII session held on 5 May 2015, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the institution of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, the Special Report of this body on discrimination against women was considered. At the VI session (30 May 2014) the Regular Annual Report of the Protector of Citizens for 2013 was considered, and at the V session (29 May 2014) the Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality was considered.
- 108 In addition to Committee male/female members, the Gender Equality Head of the Protector of Citizens, representatives of the municipalities of Vrnjačka Banja and Novi Pazar, representatives of social welfare centres from Niš, Kraljevo, Kruševac and Vrnjačka Banja, representatives of the Gender Equality Council from Novi Pazar and Kraljevo, representatives of the Kraljevo and Kruševac police administrations and representatives of numerous non-governmental organisations took part.

At the beginning of its four-year mandate, the Committee formed several special working groups, including a working group for gender equality (IX session, 15 October 2014). However, there is no information about the tasks, nor about any activities of this working group.

2.6 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the eleventh convocation of the National Assembly (2016–2020)

Within the framework of the XI convocation of the National Assembly, the role of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism was performed by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, and there were no changes in its status and competence.

In the 2016–2020 period, the Committee worked according to pre-prepared annual work plans, but the reports on their implementation were not considered by the Committee, nor is there any information in the minutes about whether they were prepared.

The Committee held a total of 25 meetings and organised four public hearings. As in the previous four-year period, a significantly smaller part of the Committee's activities was dedicated to gender equality, and certain topics in which the gender dimension is particularly significant, such as migration, the position of persons with disabilities, persons discriminated on various grounds and the elderly, were generally viewed in a gender-neutral manner. Thus, for example, the XXV session of the Committee, held on 2 December 2019, in co-operation with the Committee on Labour, Social Issues, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction, on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, was held on the theme "Accessible Future". According to the available data, a gender-sensitive approach was not applied in the analysis of this topic, so there was no consideration of the position of women and girls with disabilities.

In exercising its role in the legislative process, at the IX session (14 November 2016), the Committee considered in principle the Proposed Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Proposed Law Amending the Criminal Code, which introduced new criminal offenses for the purpose of harmonisation with the Istanbul Convention: stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, genital mutilation, and envisaged stricter penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence. The Committee supported both proposals.

In this four-year mandate as well, the Committee considered the reports of independent human rights bodies and government authorities.¹⁰⁹

A significant activity of the Committee was the organisation of public hearings, but only one of them was dedicated to the gender issue. It was the public hearing on the topic “Prevention of Violence Against Women”, held on 26 November 2019. The results of the research on violence against women conducted by the OSCE Mission were presented and it was pointed out that, despite improvements in the legislative framework, not enough was done to prevent violence against women, in which early education on gender equality, improvement of co-ordinated and efficient operation of all system institutions in ensuring protection against violence play a significant role.

On the occasion of the International Roma Day, the Committee devoted its XV session (3 April 2018) to the topic “The Right to Choose a Partner and Draw Attention to Child Marriage in the Roma Population”. The session was organised in co-operation with the Roma Women’s Centre “Bibija”, as part of the “Month of Roma Women’s Activism” campaign. The results of the research “Child Marriages in the Roma Population in Serbia” were presented at the session. In the discussion, the problem of child marriage was discussed comprehensively and from a gender perspective, and examples of good practice of integrating Roma men and women into the local community were pointed out, as well as the importance of raising the educational level of the Roma population, especially women, for whom education opens perspectives for a dignified life, employment and health protection. It was concluded that the Committee would continue to pay attention to the problem of child marriage in the coming period, as well as that it is necessary to work on empowering the Roma population and enforcing the law, and on attracting greater interest of society to resolve the problem of child marriage.

2.7 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the twelfth convocation of the National Assembly (2020–2022)

As in the previous period, in the two-year period of the XII convocation of the National Assembly, the role of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism was performed by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, in an unchanged status.

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¹⁰⁹ At the XVI session (22 May 2018), the Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for 2017 was considered; at the XIV session (13 February 2018), the Report of the Republic of Serbia within the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review was considered; and at the IV session (22 September 2016) the Report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for 2015 was considered.

In the 2020–2022 period, the Committee held 13 sessions. The good practice of holding public hearings was not continued, nor were Committee sessions held outside its seat. According to the available data from the minutes, the Committee did not adopt annual work plans, nor did it prepare reports on its work.

Of total 13 sessions, seven sessions were devoted to topics in the field of gender equality. Thus, for the first time, the issues of gender equality were dominant in the work of the Committee.

Two sessions of the Committee were devoted to consideration of the Proposed Law Amending the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination and the Proposed Gender Equality Law. At the VII session (14 May 2021), these proposals were discussed in principle and the Committee supported their adoption. At the VIII session (20 May 2021), the proposals were considered in detail. MPs submitted ten amendments to the Proposed Law Amending the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, and the Committee proposed accepting three amendments and additionally submitted its own three amendments. Sixty-nine amendments to the Proposed Gender Equality Law were submitted, and the Committee proposed to the National Assembly to accept 17 amendments and reject the others.

One of the topics that the Committee paid attention to was the implementation of the Law on Prevention of Discrimination of Persons with Disabilities and the Law on Employment and Professional Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities. At the III session of the Committee (3 December 2020), the Draft Report on the Post-Legislative Scrutiny of the Law on Prevention of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities and the Law on Employment and Professional Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities was presented.¹¹⁰ The Report is gender-neutral, and so was the discussion on the application of these laws, and therefore an assessment of their effects on women and girls with disabilities did not take place.

Five sessions of the Committee were devoted to considering the reports of independent human rights bodies and work plans and reports on the work of government bodies.¹¹¹ In the discussion about the report and work plans, there were no critical remarks or suggestions.

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110 The report was prepared within the regional programme of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

111 At the XII session (22 December 2021), the Regular Annual Report of the Protector of Citizens for 2020 and the Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for 2020 were considered. At the XI session (19 November 2021), three reports of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue for the periods: January–March, April–June and July–September 2021 were considered. At the V session (17 December 2020), the Committee considered the Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for 2019, and at the IV session (17 December 2020) the Regular Annual Report of the Protector of Citizens for 2019 was considered. At the II session (16 November 2020), the activity plan of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue was considered.

2.8 Work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism in the XIII convocation of the National Assembly (2022–2023)

In the current XIII convocation of the National Assembly, the Committee held four sessions and organised one public hearing. According to the data from minutes, the work plans and the report on operation for 2022 were not adopted.

The information on the work of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue (III session, 28 March 2023) was considered at sessions. The Committee accepted this information and the reports of independent human rights bodies.¹¹²

On the occasion of the International Roma Day, the Committee, in co-operation with the Roma Women's Network of Serbia, organised a public hearing on 5 April 2023 on the topic: "Every Child has the Right to Childhood, Let's Stop Child Marriage". At this event, which brought together a large number of female/male representatives of government authorities, international and non-governmental organisations, the results of the work of the National Coalition against Child Marriage, the Roma Women's Network on Child Marriage, and the Initiative for the Change of Normative-Legal Acts in the Republic of Serbia of Importance for the Prevention of Child Marriages were presented. The causes of child marriages in the Roma population and the need to improve the position of the youngest Roma women were emphasised at the event, which necessitates a clear policy and intersectoral co-operation, with the full participation of the Roma community and society.

3 Composition of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

During the twenty-year operation of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism, the number of its male/female members changed. The Gender Equality Committee had 15 members,¹¹³ while the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality had 17 members.¹¹⁴

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112 The following were considered: the Regular Annual Report of the Protector of Citizens for 2021 and Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for 2021 (II session, 22 December 2022). No conclusions have yet been adopted regarding these reports.

113 Article 68, paragraph 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly. The number of male/female members of the then committees was not the same. Some committees had 25 members, some 21, some 17, the most committees had 15 members, and there were also committees with 11 male/female members (See Articles 45–68g of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly).

114 According to the current Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, all Committees have 17 male/female members, with the exception of the Security Services Control Committee, which has 9 male/female members. (See Articles 48–66 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly).

The composition of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism mostly reflected the political structure of the National Assembly in a concrete convocation.¹¹⁵

The gender structure of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism was not constant. When it comes to the chairwomen/chairmen of the parliamentary mechanism, the available data indicate the following:

Number	Period	Name and surname of the chairman/ chairwoman
1	2003 - 2004	Lejla Ruždić Trifunović, Democratic Party
2	2004 - 2007	Lejla Ruždić Trifunović, Democratic Party
3	2007 - 2008	Elena Božić Talijan, Serbian Radical Party
4	2008 - 2012	Gordana Paunović Milosavljević, Serbian Radical Party
5	2012 - 2014	Meho Omerović, Social Democratic Party of Serbia
6	2014 - 2016	Meho Omerović, Social Democratic Party of Serbia
7	2016 - 2020	Meho Omerović, Social Democratic Party of Serbia, from 17 July 2019 Jasmina Karanac, Social Democratic Party of Serbia

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115 The website of the National Assembly lacks data on the composition of the Gender Equality Committee in the 5th and 6th convocations of the National Assembly.

Number	Period	Name and surname of the chairman/ chairwoman
8	2020 - 2022	Muamer Bačevac, Social Democratic Party of Serbia
9	from 2022	Muamer Bačevac, Social Democratic Party of Serbia

The above data show that during the twenty years of operation of the parliamentary mechanism, the number of women and men at the head of the Committee was equal. As regards the gender structure of the male/female members of the Committee, it changed over time, but women were constantly represented in a higher percentage, and in certain periods in a significantly higher percentage compared to their representation in the National Assembly. However, there is a noticeable trend of a rising number of men in the composition of the Committee: in 2008–2012 there were only two men, in 2012–2014 there were six men, including the chairman of the Committee, in 2014–2016 there were four men, including the chairman, in 2016–2020 two men, in 2020–2022 seven men, while an almost complete gender balance has been achieved in the composition of the current Committee, in which there are eight men out of a total of 17 male/female members. It can be assumed that the improvement of the Committee’s gender structure towards establishing a gender balance is an expression of increased understanding that gender equality is not a “women’s issue”, but the question of sustainable social development and respect for human rights, which is equally important for both women and men. However, further and more in-depth studies are needed to confirm this assumption.

4 Concluding remarks

The establishment of a parliamentary gender equality mechanism was one of the important steps towards a gender-sensitive parliament, which is a parliament that includes a gender perspective in all its roles – legislative, supervisory and representative.

An analysis of the twenty-year work of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism shows that there have been significant fluctuations in terms of the scope and content of its activities. This was influenced by various factors, including the personal interest and commitment to the idea of gender equality of the persons at the head of the parliamentary mechanism, as well as its male/female members. The dynamics of the work of the mechanism of the National

Assembly reflects the dynamics of the implementation of gender equality policy in Serbia. The increased intensity of its activities is noted during the work on laws on gender equality, especially the Law on the Equality of Sexes, as well as during the implementation of projects and development programmes of international organisations.

Law proposals that were the subject of consideration at the sessions of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism show that its influence on gender mainstreaming in legislation had a modest scope. The reasons should be sought in the lack of understanding of the multisectoral nature of gender equality and the need for the gender perspective to be integrated into all laws, including those that are gender-neutral at first glance, such as laws in the field of education, energy, economy and other areas. Due to the lack of recognition of the gender dimensions of these laws, they were not considered at the sessions of the parliamentary mechanism. It can be assumed that one of the causes of such a situation is insufficient professional support for the Committee in conducting the gender analysis, gender impact assessment and application of other methods and tools for gender mainstreaming in legislation.

Since 2012, the role of the parliamentary mechanism has been performed by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality. Although the unification of these three areas provides the opportunity to consider gender equality issues in the context of human rights, it seems that in practice this model has not confirmed its effectiveness, because when considering topics in the area of human and minority rights, their gender and intersectional perspective was mostly absent.

In exercising its oversight function, the parliamentary gender equality mechanism achieved, viewed as a whole, limited results. This is evidenced by the small number of plans and reports on the work of executive authorities that the parliamentary mechanism considered, as well as the fact that it accepted them without an in-depth analysis and discussion. The weak results are a kind of reflection of negative trends in the oversight of the National Assembly over the work of executive authorities.

During the twenty-year operation of the institutional mechanism, the practice of public hearings was not constant, nor of the same intensity. Although they were mostly organised to mark international holidays and were within the framework of projects of international organisations, which gave the public hearings a festive tone, their holding contributed to greater visibility of various forms of gender discrimination and the parliamentary mechanism itself. The visibility of the parliamentary mechanism was also supported by the holding of sessions outside the seat, but their number is relatively modest.

The transparency of the work of the parliamentary mechanism was at a relatively satisfactory level. The practice of holding sessions in the form of round tables, in which representatives of independent human rights bodies, the non-governmental sector and the academic community participated, contributed to this. In addition, the level of transparency has been significantly increased with the introduction of the practice of publishing recordings of Committee sessions, which began in 2012.

The co-operation of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism with other permanent working bodies of the National Assembly was not developed to a greater extent, as evidenced by the small number of joint sessions organised in co-operation with other committees.

The composition of the parliamentary gender equality mechanism mainly reflected the political structure of the National Assembly in a concrete convocation, according to Article 28 of the Law on the National Assembly. Women and men were at the head of the parliamentary mechanism for an equal period of time – ten years respectively. The representation of women was higher than the representation of men, with an evident trend of gradual establishment of a gender balance.

Despite positive developments, in Serbia, gender inequalities, accumulated over centuries and deeply woven into social structures, are still present in all spheres of public and private life. In the upcoming process of gender mainstreaming in laws and public policies, which will undoubtedly, as so far, be accompanied by numerous challenges and obstacles, the role of the parliamentary mechanism will continue to be very important. Not only positive, but also negative experiences gained during twenty years of work are valuable for its future activities, because they provide insight into the assumptions that must be ensured so that the contribution of the parliamentary mechanism to the advancement of gender equality becomes greater, more efficient and more effective.

GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY OF AP VOJVODINA¹¹⁷ IN 2003–2023

1 INTRODUCTION

In the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, from the moment of democratic changes (in 2000), the issue of gender (in)equality was immediately tackled strongly and decisively by the institutionalisation of this issue. All mechanisms were established and all acts under the jurisdiction of the autonomous province were passed. It is assumed that this would not have happened if women activists and politicians had not entered the institutions from the streets and continued their struggle there.

The formation and work of the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina cannot be analysed outside the context in which it was created. Institutional gender equality mechanisms were established in AP Vojvodina in the period from 2000 to 2004,¹¹⁸ which, in accordance with the competences of the province, could be set up: the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality; Gender Equality Council; Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina; Deputy Provincial Ombudsman in charge of gender equality; Provincial Gender Equality Institute. The Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina was established in 2003 and it is its twentieth anniversary this year.

The need to establish institutional mechanisms both in the assemblies and in the executive branch was recognised in light of the opportunities ensured by the institutionalisation of gen-

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116 majasedlarevic@yahoo.com. The author was a provincial MP in the mandates of 2004–2008, 2008–2012, 2012–2016 and 2016–2020 and Vice-President of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina from 2008 to 2012.

117 We would like to thank the Service of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina for their committed effort in collecting and preparing the material that was given to us for the purpose of this research.

118 In this paper, the terms “equality of sexes” and “gender equality” are equated. The author indicates a clear difference between the terms “sex” and “gender” and holds that it is more correct to use the term “gender equality”. However, one must take into account the timeframe in which the Gender Equality Committee and other provincial mechanisms were established, and that the term “equality of sexes” (which has remained in the name of the provincial mechanisms to this day and has not been changed) was then dominantly used, while the term “gender equality” came to life and began to be dominantly used later. These two terms are used equally in the paper and have the same meaning.

der equality in both the parliamentary and the executive branch of the government because it enables the submission of proposals, the launching of initiatives, involvement in the preparation of laws¹¹⁹, direct influence on the drafting of laws, responding to proposed laws prepared by ministries, monitoring the implementation of laws, assistance of expert services, the possibility of engaging male/female experts, co-operation with the civil sector, interdepartmental co-operation, which is extremely important for gender equality, budgetary resources available to the executive branch, gender-sensitive budgeting and the like.

In 2002, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina laid the institutional foundations for gender equality with the establishment of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina in January 2003, and in the same year with the establishment of the Provincial Ombudsman, which, from the very start, in addition to deputies, also had a deputy for gender equality. Good practice continued in 2004 with the adoption of the Declaration on Gender Equality and the Decision on Gender Equality, and the establishment of a special institution which, as an expert body, deals with gender equality – the Provincial Gender Equality Institute. Even today, twenty years later, these mechanisms are actively advocating the strengthening of local mechanisms, achievement of gender equality and introduction of the principle of equal opportunities in all public policies, which will be partly shown in this document, at least as far as the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina is concerned.

2 ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEE OF THE ASSEMBLY OF AP VOJVODINA

The Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, as the highest representative body of the Province, through the amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, ensured the establishment of the Committee for the purpose of considering and analysing issues within the competence of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, proposing of acts, examining the situation in certain areas and performing other tasks. At the session held on 23 December 2002, the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina were adopted, and entered into force on 8 January 2003.¹²⁰

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119 The Assembly of AP Vojvodina is the authorised proposer of laws, Article 107, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.

120 “Official Journal of AP Vojvodina”, 23/2002, available at: www.paragraf.rs, accessed on 12 July 2023.

The Gender Equality Committee was established on 22 April 2003, by the election of the chairperson and female and male members of the Committee.¹²¹ The President of the Assembly, in agreement with the heads of parliamentary groups, i.e. MPs – representatives of political parties represented in the Assembly, proposes candidates for chairpersons and members of the Committee, proportionately to the number of MPs that those political parties have in the Assembly.¹²² The Committee “considers proposals of decisions and general acts from the point of view of improving and achieving gender equality.” The Committee examines the state of policy conduct, execution of decisions and general acts by the Executive Council from the point of view of respect for gender equality.¹²³ The Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina were changed several times from 2003 to 2023. The current Rules of Procedure¹²⁴ stipulate that “the Gender Equality Committee considers proposals of programmes, decisions and general acts in the field of equality between women and men, considers analytical and other materials in the field of equality between women and men, considers acts from the point of view of improving the equality of women and men, examines the conduct of politics, the execution of decisions and general acts by the Provincial Government from the point of view of equality and other issues in the field of gender equality”.¹²⁵

Shorthand notes from the Committee sessions are kept in the form of minutes containing basic information about topics and discussions, and were not a fruitful source of data for the analysis.¹²⁶

3 ANALYSIS OF THE WORK OF THE GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEE

The work of the Gender Equality Committee was followed through six mandates: 2000–2004, 2004–2008, 2008–2012, 2012–2016, 2016–2020 and 2020–2024.

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121 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No: 020-5 of 22 April 2003).

122 Article 30 of the then Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina.

123 Article 69 of the then Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina.

124 Available at: <https://www.skupstinavojvodine.gov.rs/Strana.aspx?s=poslovnik&j=SRL>, accessed on 13 July 2023.

125 Article 74 of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina.

126 The minutes are the source on which the analysis relies; they are kept in the archive of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina in hard copy and in electronic form.

Work of the Gender Equality Committee in the mandate of 2000 (2003)–2004

In 2003, the Committee held three sessions, and in 2004 (before the end of that mandate) two more sessions. Sixteen items of the agenda were discussed at five sessions: the Information on the national and gender structure, level of education, manner and date of entering into employment in provincial, municipal and city administration bodies in the territory of AP Vojvodina, Information on the position of women in AP Vojvodina for the 2002–2003 period, work report and work plan of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality, as well as the work plan of the Secretariat. The Declaration on Gender Equality, the Proposal of the Decision on Gender Equality, and the Proposal of the Decision on the Establishment of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute were adopted, laying the foundation for systemic development and improvement of gender equality in AP Vojvodina.

Table 1

Session	Date	Agenda
1	8/7/2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Election of the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee2. Information on the state of gender equality3. Information on the state of employment and unemployment in AP Vojvodina in the period January–December 2002 with data for the period January–March 2003
2	20/10/2003	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Consideration of the Proposed Decision on Gender Equality (working version)2. Consideration of the Proposal of the Decision on the Establishment of the Fund for Encouraging Women’s Entrepreneurship (working version)3. Report on the Activities of the Provincial Secretariat for Employment and Gender Equality between two sessions of the Gender Equality Council4. Report on the planned activities of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality until the end of 2003 and the first half of 2004

Session	Date	Agenda
3	16/12/2003	1. Information on national and gender structure, level of education, method and date of establishment of employment in provincial, municipal and city administration bodies in the territory of AP Vojvodina
4	5/8/2004	1. Proposal of the Declaration on Gender Equality 2. Proposal of the Decision on Gender Equality 3. Proposal of the Decision on the Establishment of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute
5	14/9/2004	1. Information on the position of women in Vojvodina in 2002/2003

Despite the fact that the Committee considered information that contained a comprehensive analysis of the position of women in Vojvodina and made important decisions regarding the achievement of gender equality in AP Vojvodina, there were no persons interested in participating in the discussion or only some female/male members actively participated. This shows the attitude of some female/male members of the Committee towards the sessions and work of the Committee as a bureaucratic procedure in which they have no obligation to actively participate in the consideration of a document, no matter how relevant it is for the field that the Committee deals with. The analysis of the data from the minutes of Committee sessions indicates the following:

- 1) Only four male/female members (out of 11) were present at all sessions.
- 2) Two male/female members of the Committee did not attend any session, and one of them was a woman.
- 3) At each session of the Committee, only one member of the Committee (chairman) took part in the discussion.
- 4) As many as five male/female members of the Committee never participated in the discussion, two of whom were women. This indicates the lack of interest of certain male/female members in this area and an irresponsible attitude towards the obligations that member-

ship in the parliamentary committee implies. The fact that women also have such an attitude shows that they are not sensitised to gender issues.

- 5) Gender-sensitive language was not used in any minutes; apart from female members of the Committee, the provincial secretary for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality and member of the Executive Council Jelica Rajačić Čapaković was present at all sessions, and at every session female representatives of other secretariats and/or institutions of the provincial administration participated, but their functions were not specified in the feminine gender.

Work of the Gender Equality Committee in the 2004-2008 mandate

In this period, the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina held 14 sessions and discussed a total of 44 agenda items. In addition to considering the annual reports of the provincial ombudsman, reports on the work of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality and the Provincial Gender Equality Institute, the information on the representation of women and men in representative and administrative bodies in AP Vojvodina after the local and provincial elections in 2004 was considered, as well as the information on representation of women and men in public enterprises in AP Vojvodina, information on the development of local gender equality mechanisms, information on the number of illiterate women in the territory of AP Vojvodina and measures to reduce the illiteracy rate, information on employment and unemployment of women and men in AP Vojvodina, international co-operation and Committee activities. At the tenth session, held on 11 May 2007, the Proposed Law on the Equality of Sexes was defined and was later referred to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia by the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, as the authorised proposer.

Table 2

Session	Date	Agenda
1	21/2/2005	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Election of the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee 2. Annual Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2004 3. Information in the field of employment of women in Vojvodina in the period January–September 2004 4. Report on Work of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality in the field of gender equality for 2004 5. Information on the representation of women and men in representative bodies and public administration bodies in AP Vojvodina after the local and provincial elections in 2004
2	27/6/2005	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on the activities of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality in connection with the development of the Draft Law on the Equality of Sexes 2. Information on the development of local gender equality mechanisms 3. Information of the Provincial Ombudsman regarding solving the problem of domestic violence (three pieces of information)
3	14/9/2005	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Director of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 2. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 3. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute

Session	Date	Agenda
4	11/11/2005	1. Consideration of the Statute of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute
5	9/3/2006	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the Proposed Decision Amending the Decision on the Establishment of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 2. Information on the number of illiterate women in AP Vojvodina and measures to reduce the rate of illiterate women 3. Information on co-operation of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality with international and other foreign and domestic organisations and institutions in the field of gender equality
6	9/5/2006	1. Information on the state of employment and unemployment in AP Vojvodina in the period January–December 2005
7	25/9/2006	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defining the Proposed Decision Amending the Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute in Novi Sad 2. Excerpt from Information on the state of employment and unemployment in AP Vojvodina in the period January–June 2006 3. Annual Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2005
8	14/2/2007	1. Preparation for the organisation of the international meeting of female representatives of the Danube region and cities with topics related to the protection of women's rights (21 and 22 March 2007 in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina); formulation of topics for the said meeting
9	18/5/2007	1. Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2006

Session	Date	Agenda
10	11/5/2007	1. Defining the Proposed Law on the Equality of Sexes
11	14/5/2007	1. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Dismissal of the Director of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 2. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Director of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute
12	15/6/2007	1. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2006
13	22/11/2007	1. Information on the representation of women and men in public enterprises in AP Vojvodina with the opinion and recommendation of the Provincial Ombudsman 2. Information on the activities of women's non-governmental organisations in AP Vojvodina 3. Preparation for the Parliamentary Conference of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina against violence against women scheduled for 26 November 2007 – Support for the Council of Europe campaign
14	14/3/2008	1. Consideration of the Information on gender equality in provincial bodies with conclusions 2. Consideration of the concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the initial report of the Republic of Serbia

Unlike the previous one, in this mandate a discussion was conducted at each session, but only some female/male members participated in it. In addition to male/female members of the Committee, female/male representatives of other gender equality mechanisms in AP Vojvodina attended all sessions. The assistant provincial secretary for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality¹²⁷, provincial ombudsman and his deputy for gender equality, provin-

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127 Jelica Rajačić Čapaković, Provincial Secretary for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality and member of the Executive Council of AP Vojvodina in 2000–2004 (author's note).

cial secretary for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality, director of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute and others were most often present. The analysis of the data from the minutes of Committee sessions indicates the following:

- 1) All female/male members of the Committee were present at only two sessions.
- 2) There was discussion at all sessions; the most active in discussions, proposing of topics and giving guidelines for work were the chairwoman and deputy chairwoman of the Committee.
- 3) Three male/female members of the Gender Equality Committee, two of whom are women, never discussed at sessions.
- 4) In the minutes, gender-sensitive language is used inconsistently, but more consistently than in the previous mandate. It is noticeable that the position of the chairwoman and deputy chairwoman of the Committee, assistant provincial secretary, deputy ombudsman and director of the Institute are written in the feminine gender, but the position of the provincial secretary for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality is stated in the masculine gender. In signing each minutes, the female Secretary of the Committee signs in the masculine gender. This means that the use of gender-sensitive language depends solely on the will and determination of the woman performing the function, because at that moment, the use of gender-sensitive language was not yet prescribed.

Work of the Gender Equality Committee in the 2008–2012 mandate

The Committee held nine sessions where 25 agenda items were considered. The Report of the Provincial Ombudsman and the Report on the Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute, the Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for Protection Against Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence in AP Vojvodina, the Report on the Research Programme on the Position of Rural Women in AP Vojvodina were considered. The Committee was the proposer of the Decisions on the Dismissal and Appointment of Members of the Managing and Supervisory Boards of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute, as well as the Decision on the Dismissal and Appointment of the Director of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute.

Table 3

Session	Date	Agenda
1	22/7/2008	1. Election of the deputy chairman of the Committee
2	18/9/2008	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the Proposed Decision on the Strategy for Protection Against Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for the Period from 2008 to 2012 2. Consideration of the Report on Work of the Gender Equality Institute for 2007 3. Consideration of the Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2007
3	25/5/2009	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the Report on Work of the Gender Equality Institute for 2008 2. Consideration of the Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2008 3. Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for Protection Against Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence in AP Vojvodina for the period from 2008 to 2012 4. Report on the Research Programme on the Position of Rural Women in AP Vojvodina

Session	Date	Agenda
4	11/2/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposed Decision on the Dismissal of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 2. Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 3. Proposed Decision on the Dismissal of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 4. Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute
5	17/3/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the Report on Work of the Gender Equality Institute for 2009
6	13/5/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2009
7	17/12/2010	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of Information on the implementation of the Strategy for Protection Against Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Gender-Based Violence in AP Vojvodina in the period 2008–2012 2. Consideration of Information on the activities of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality in establishing a unique system of records on violence in the family context.
8	30/3/2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report on the Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2010 2. Proposed Decision Amending the Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute in Novi Sad
9	26/5/2011	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2010

In the mandate period of 2008–2012, nine sessions of the Committee were held. Despite the important topics that were on the agenda, not all male/female members were present at any of the Committee's sessions, nor did all those present participate in the discussions. As shown in the minutes, the then Provincial Secretary for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality was never present at the sessions of the Committee, and when the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality was in charge of one of the items on the agenda, a female assistant of the provincial secretary was present at the sessions. Unlike in the previous ones, in this mandate different information based on which the state of gender equality in AP Vojvodina could be seen was not considered. Only some female and male members actively participated in the discussions on the items on the agenda. Although it is far from a desirable state, it can be said that this represented a certain kind of progress compared to the first convocation, in which the chairman was the only one who participated in the discussions at certain sessions. The analysis of the data from the minutes of Committee sessions indicates the following:

- 1) Five male/female members (out of 11) were present at all sessions.
- 2) One member of the Committee did not attend any session.
- 3) At each session, two female members and one male member took part in the discussion.
- 4) Four male/female members of the Committee never discussed at the sessions, including two women. This indicates the lack of interest of individual male/female members in this area and an irresponsible attitude towards the obligations that membership in the Committee entails. The fact that women also have such an attitude shows that they are not sensitised to gender issues.
- 5) Gender-sensitive language is not used in the minutes, although at the ninth session of the Committee, as part of the discussion regarding the consideration of the Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2010, it was emphasised that the Provincial Ombudsman made, and the Government of AP Vojvodina accepted the recommendation on gender-sensitive language in public use.

Work of the Gender Equality Committee in the 2012–2016 mandate

The Committee held 37 sessions, where 69 agenda items were discussed. The following were considered: the Proposal of the Provincial Assembly Decision on the APV budget, Proposed Decision on the Programme for the Protection of Women against Domestic and Partner Violence in the APV for the 2015–2020 period and proposed amendments. The Committee was

the proposer of decisions on the dismissal and appointment of the Managing and Supervisory Boards of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute. The Committee attended public hearings on the occasion of marking: the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Human Rights Day, and the event “Independent Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council”. Joint sessions were held with the Committee on Health, Social Policy and Labour on the topic “European Cervical Cancer Prevention Week”, the Committee on Budget and Finance on the topic “Integrating a Gender Perspective in the Budget Reform Towards Budget Policies that Effectively Contribute to Improving the Position of Women and Men in APV”, the Security Committee on the topic “Initiative of the Provincial Secretary for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality on the Occasion of the Current Tragic Events”, the Committee on Information on the topic “Gender-Sensitive Language and its Use and the Image of Women in the Media with a Focus on Gender Equality” and the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia – “Achievements and Perspectives in the Fight Against Violence Against Women”. Considerations focused on the Model Gender Equality Law of the Protector of Citizens, the Draft Gender Equality Law and the annual reports on the operation of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute, reports of the Ombudsman, as well as information on: held public hearings, a held meeting with representatives of the municipalities of the Jablanica district, activities and plans of the Provincial Secretariat for the Economy, Employment and Gender Equality in the prevention and protection against domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence, the implementation of the NAP for the implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council in the Republic of Serbia, the reproductive health of men in AP Vojvodina and the like.

Table 4

Session	Date	Agenda
1	10/7/2012	1. Election of the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee
2	17/9/2012	1. Consideration of the Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2011
3	1/10/2012	1. Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2011
4	23/11/2012	1. Preparation for participation in the action “Sixteen Days of Activism Against Violence Against women”

Session	Date	Agenda
5	26/11/2012	1. Marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women “Fighting Domestic Violence”
6	10/12/2012	1. Marking the International Human Rights Day “Execution of Judgments of the Court of Human Rights in the Case of Serbia”
7	1/2/2013	1. Information about public hearings held on 26 November and 10 December 2012 in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, which were attended by members of the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina 2. Information about the meeting held with representatives of the municipalities of the Jablanica district on 24 January 2013
8	25/3/2013	1. Use of gender-sensitive language
9	2/4/2013	1. Report on Work of the Gender Equality Institute for 2012
10	9/4/2013	1. Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2012
11	15/5/2013	1. Analysis of research in services for women’s health care in AP Vojvodina
12	10/10/2013	1. Independent monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the NAP for the implementation of Resolution 1325
13	29/10/2013	1. Position of women in national minority councils in Serbia 2. Information on the activities of the Women’s Parliamentary Network of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina

Session	Date	Agenda
14	13/11/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on the activities and plans of the Provincial Secretariat for the Economy, Employment and Gender Equality in the prevention and protection against domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence
15	23/12/2013	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analysis of work and conclusions in 2013 2. Preparation of work plan and programme for 2014
16	22/1/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European Cervical Cancer Prevention Week
17	3/4/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2013
18	17/4/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on the implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council in the Republic of Serbia
19	16/5/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report of the Provincial Ombudsman for 2013 2. Initiative for the formation of the working group 3. Launching the initiative for the introduction of gender statistics in the collection and processing of data on domestic violence in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Government of the Republic of Serbia

Session	Date	Agenda
20	16/6/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Dismissal of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute in Novi Sad 2. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute in Novi Sad 3. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Dismissal of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute in Novi Sad 4. Defining the Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute in Novi Sad
21	9/9/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
22	17/9/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Programme for the Protection of Women against Domestic and Partner Violence in AP Vojvodina for the period 2014–2020, with a focus on the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
23	12/11/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender budgeting – state and perspectives 2. Information on the reproductive health of men in AP Vojvodina
24	19/11/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Position of women and men in the Republic of Serbia in 2014

Session	Date	Agenda
25	18/12/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposed Decision of the Provincial Assembly on the Budget of AP Vojvodina for 2015 2. Proposed Decision on the Programme for the Protection of Women against Domestic and Partner Violence in AP Vojvodina for the period from 2015 to 2020
26	23/12/2014	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Amendment to the Proposed Decision on the Programme for the Protection of Women against Domestic and Partner Violence in AP Vojvodina for the period from 2015 to 2020
27	21/1/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrating the gender perspective into the budget reform towards budget policies that effectively contribute to the improvement of the position of women and men in AP Vojvodina
28	19/2/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposed Annual Work Programme of the Committee 2. Model Gender Equality Law
29	30/3/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European perspective of the development of gender equality and women's empowerment
30	20/4/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2014
31	22/5/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report on Work and Final Account of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2014
32	22/5/2015	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the initiative of the provincial secretary for the Economy, Employment and Gender Equality regarding the current tragic events

Session	Date	Agenda
33	23/6/2015	1. Gender-sensitive language and its use 2. Image of women in the media with a focus on gender equality
34	29/7/2015	1. Working meeting on the Proposed Gender Equality Law
35	10/11/2015	1. Consideration of the Draft Gender Equality Law
36	10/12/2015	1. Achievements and perspectives in the fight against violence against women
37	29/12/2015	1. Analysis of work in 2015

The Committee was most active in this period. A total of 37 sessions were held, of which two sessions were held in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in co-operation with the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia¹²⁸, while one joint session with this Committee was held in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina. In addition to participating in conferences in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia organised by the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, the committees intensively co-operated on the consideration of the Draft Gender Equality Law and other topics related to this area. Intensive co-operation was established with four committees of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (the Committee on Health, Committee on Security, Committee on Budget and Committee on Information) in connection with the gender aspect of topics under the remit of these committees, as well as active co-operation with regional representatives from Austria and Sweden on issues important for gender equality, when guests presented to female and male members of the Committee the situation of gender equality in their countries and examples of good practice from their regions. Due to the tragic events and the fact that 26 women were murdered by 22 May 2015 since the beginning of the year, a special session was convened¹²⁹ on this topic. In this mandate, the Women's Parliamen-

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128 The session was attended by Meho Omerović, Committee's Chairperson.

129 The session was attended by Miroslav Vasin, Provincial Secretary for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality and Vice-President of the Government of AP Vojvodina, Siniša Radaković, Chief of the Novi Sad Police Administration, Danica Todorov, Deputy Provincial Ombudsman for Gender Equality, Anita Beretić, Assistant Provincial Gender Equality Secretary and Vesna Šijački, director of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute.

tary Network (WPN) of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina was established, and the Committee successfully and intensively co-operated with the WPN of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, holding joint sessions, conferences on various topics and other joint activities, such as marking the campaign “Sixteen Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women”. The analysis of the data from the minutes of Committee sessions indicates the following:

- 1) Not all male/female members of the Committee were present at any session.
- 2) Only at one session was the provincial secretary for the Economy, Employment and Gender Equality present, and in other cases when the subject of the session was within the purview of the Provincial Secretariat, the sessions were attended by the female assistant provincial secretary in charge of gender equality.
- 3) Although not all male and female members of the Committee participated in the discussion, at each session the items on the agenda were discussed.
- 4) Unlike the previous convocations, the minutes in this mandate were written almost consistently in gender-sensitive language. The functions of the chairwoman and deputy chairwoman of the Committee, as well as female guests from other institutions (provincial ombudsman, deputy ombudsman in charge of gender equality, assistant provincial secretaries, etc.) were written in the feminine gender. Slight deviations that can be observed in some places in the minutes can be considered unintentional errors.

Work of the Gender Equality Committee in the 2016–2020 mandate

The Committee held 13 (out of 15 scheduled) sessions, where 29 agenda items were discussed. The reports of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman and the Provincial Gender Equality Institute were discussed. The International Men’s Day and Human Rights Day were marked, and the Committee participated in the campaign against violence against women. The Committee was the proposer of the Decisions on dismissals and appointments of members of the Managing and Supervisory Boards of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute.

Table 5

Session	Date	Agenda
1	8/7/2016	1. Election of the Deputy Chairman of the Gender Equality Committee
2	15/7/2016	1. Report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2015 2. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2015
3	18/11/2016	1. Current issues on the occasion of the International Men’s Day, 19 November
4	9/12/2016	1. Information regarding the conclusion of the campaign “Sixteen Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women”
5	25/1/2017	1. European Cervical Cancer Prevention Week 2. Vaccination against human papillomavirus (HPV) infection
6	1/3/2017	1. Annual Work Programme of the Committee for 2017 2. Information on the implementation of the Programme for the Protection of Women against Domestic and Partner Violence in AP Vojvodina in 2015 with conclusions
7	10/4/2017	1. Report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2016 2. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2016
8	-	- (no data)

Session	Date	Agenda
9	6/7/2017	1. Appointment of persons for the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council – Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia (2017–2020)
10	-	- (no data)
11	10/11/2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposed Decision on the Dismissal of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 2. Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 3. Proposed Decision on the Dismissal of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 4. Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute
12	20/11/2017	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Familiarisation with the programme “Sixteen Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women” 2. Marking the International Men’s Day
13	26/3/2018	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual Report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2017 2. Proposed Annual Work Programme of the Committee for 2018

Session	Date	Agenda
14	4/5/2018	1. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2017
15	9/4/2019	1. Report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2018 2. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2018 3. Proposed Annual Work Programme of the Gender Equality Committee for 2019

After the intensive work of the Gender Equality Committee in the previous mandate, 15 sessions were held in this mandate.¹³⁰ In addition to regular activities within its competence, in co-operation with the Committee on Health of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, the Committee considered topics in the field of women's health and prevention, followed the implementation of the programme for the Protection of Women against Domestic and Partner Violence and, for the first time, appointed persons for implementation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council – Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia (2017–2020) on behalf of AP Vojvodina. The analysis of the data from the minutes of Committee sessions indicates the following:

- 1) All male and female members of the Committee were present at three sessions.
- 2) The provincial secretary for social policy, demographic policy and social care for children was present at two sessions, and the female assistant provincial secretary or another male/female representative of the Secretariat was present at other sessions.
- 3) A discussion was held at all sessions, but not all male and female members participated.
- 4) Co-operation with the Committee on Health continued and a joint session was organised.



130 The archive contains minutes from 13 sessions. This refers to items 8 and 10 in Table 5, given that there are no minutes from the 8th and 10th sessions of the Committee.

5) The work of the Committee in this mandate was characterised by frequent changes of the Committee’s secretary. As many as five were changed, which resulted in the lack of minutes from the eighth and tenth sessions. The use of gender-sensitive language largely depends on who takes the minutes of the session, i.e. who from the professional service is in charge of following a certain session.

Work of the Gender Equality Committee in the 2020–2024 mandate

In the current mandate, ending on 28 April 2023, the Gender Equality Committee held nine sessions, and 22 agenda items were discussed. The Committee considered the reports of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman and reports on the work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute, determined the proposal of representatives of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for a female member and female deputy member of the Political Council for the Implementation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council – Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia and was the proposer of decisions on dismissals and appointments of members of the Managing and Supervisory Boards of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute.

Table 6

Session	Date	Agenda
1	30/11/2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Election of the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee 2. Campaign “Sixteen Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women”
2	5/2/2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2019 2. Proposal of the Annual Work Programme of the Committee for 2021

Session	Date	Agenda
3	19/4/2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual Report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2020 2. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2019 3. Report on Work of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2020
4	15/6/2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposed Decision on the Appointment of the Chairperson of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute
5	30/8/2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determining the proposal of representatives of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina for a member and deputy member of the Political Council for the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council – Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia
6	26/10/2021	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Proposal of the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Managing Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute 2. Proposal of the Appointment of the Chairperson and Members of the Supervisory Board of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute
7	1/6/2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consideration of the Annual Report of the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman for 2021 2. Proposal of the Annual Work Programme of the Committee for 2022
8	24/6/2022	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Report on Work and Activities of the Provincial Gender Equality Institute for 2021

Session	Date	Agenda
9	30/1/2023	1. Determining the proposal of representatives of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for a member and deputy member of the Political Council for the Implementation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council – Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia

In the current convocation, at nine sessions held so far, the Committee mostly dealt with ongoing issues under its competence. No activity was observed that could be cited as innovation or specificity compared to the previous convocations. The analysis of the data from the minutes of Committee sessions indicates the following:

- 1) Only one session was attended by all male and female members of the Committee.
- 2) There were discussions, but a small number of female/male members of the Committee participate in them.
- 3) The Provincial Secretary for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality was never present at the sessions of the Committee – most often the female undersecretary attended the sessions instead of him. Even the Provincial Protector of Citizens – Ombudsman was never present at the Committee sessions. The female deputy in charge of gender equality attended instead of him.
- 4) The specificity of this convocation of the Committee is reflected in the fact that all the minutes are precisely and consistently written in gender-sensitive language, except when it comes to the function of the chairwoman (chairman) of the Gender Equality Committee, which is always indicated exclusively in the masculine gender, even though it is performed by a woman. This suggests that the MP who is the chairwoman of this working body insists that her function be stated in the masculine gender.

4 COMPOSITION OF THE GENDER EQUALITY COMMITTEE IN 2003–2023

Mandate 2000–2004.¹³¹ Chairman: Zlatko Milićević; Female and male members: 1. Gordana Čomić 2. Jelena Jevtić 3. Miroljub Lješnjak 4. Donka Stančić 5. dr Marija Popin 6. Zorica Bundalo 7. Telleki Julijana 8. Pavela Jano 9. Petar Pešić 10. Tođeraš Jonike.

Mandate 2004–2008.¹³² Chairwoman: Jadranka Beljan Balaban; Female and male members: 1. Zdenka Jokić 2. Seleši Đendi 3. Petar Andrejić 4. Maja Sedlarević 5. Aleksandra Sujić 6. Milena Stupar Vasić 7. Velibor Radusinović, PhD 8. Takač Marta.

Later, in 2006, Gordana Kalnak was elected as a member of the Committee¹³³.

Mandate 2008–2012.¹³⁴ Chairwoman: Tanja Jovanović; Female and male members: 1. Seleši Đendi 2. Vislavski Leona 3. Goran Ivić, PhD 4. Branislav Damjanov 5. Dane Pribić 6. Bohuš Jan 7. Dragana Latovljević 8. Milena Maksimović 9. Marija Radojčić 10. Jelena Milinić

Later, Jadranka Beljan-Balaban was elected as a member of the Committee instead of Dane Pribić¹³⁵.

Mandate 2012–2016.¹³⁶ Chairwoman: Stojanka Lekić; Female and male members: 1. Ilija Vojinović 2. Seleši Đendi, MA 3. Darko Vukoje 4. Tanja Dokmanović 5. Nada Bodrožić 6. Vera Ugrčić Ilić 7. Goran Gonda 8. Nataša Lalić 9. Takač Zoltan 10. Marijana Četojević.

Later, in 2014, instead of Marijana Četojević, Ivana Zečević was elected as a member of the Committee¹³⁷, while in 2015 Kovač Tinde was elected as a member of the Committee instead of Takač Zoltan¹³⁸.

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131 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-5 of 22 April 2003).

132 Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No: 020-19, 30 October 2004).

133 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-19/2006, 12 December 2006).

134 Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-14/08, 16 July 2008).

135 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-14/08, 11 October 2010).

136 Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-15/12, 22 June 2012).

137 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-15/12, 19 June 2014).

138 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-15/12, 8 April 2015).

Mandate 2016–2020.¹³⁹ Chairwoman: Ana Tomanova Makanova; Female and male members: 1. Nada Milanović 2. Snežana Sedlar 3. Stojanka Lekić 4. Darko Vukoje 5. Mia Strajin 6. Rajka Lučar 7. Jelena Delić 8. Goran Gonda 9. Maja Sedlarević, MA 10. Gizela Crkvenjakov.

Later, in 2016, Dragana Đurić Bulatović was elected as a member of the Committee, instead of Gizela Crkvenjakov.¹⁴⁰.

Mandate 2020–2024.¹⁴¹ Chairwoman: Latinka Vasiljković; Female and male members: 1. Milica Božić 2. Buranj Hajnalka 3. Nataša Lalić 4. Stojanka Lekić 5. Smiljana Glamočanin Varga 6. Marina Nedeljković, PhD 7. Milan Subotin 8. Ivana Rosić 9. Vesna Furundžić 10. Gizela Crkvenjakov.

Later, in 2020, Goran Puzić was elected as a member of the Committee instead of Milan Subotin¹⁴², while in 2022, Jelena Lopušina was elected as a member of the Committee, instead of Smiljana Glamočanin Varga¹⁴³.



139 Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-13/2016, 20 June 2016).

140 Decision Amending to the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-13-2/16, 28 September 2016).

141 Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No 020-13/2016, 20 June 2016).

142 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (No: 020-17-1/2020-01, 17 December 2020).

143 Decision Amending the Decision on the Election of the Chairperson and Members of the Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina (Np: 020-17-1/2020-01, 28 June 2022).

Table 7: Overview of the participation of women and men in the composition of the Committee by mandate

Mandate	2003 - 2004	2004 - 2008	2008 - 2012	2012 - 2016	2016 - 2020	2020 - 2023
Chairman/ Chairwoman	1/0	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/1
Female members	6	8	6 7	6 7	8	9
Male members	4	2	4 3	4 3	2	1
Changes	0	1 ž	1 f/1 m	1 f/1 f 1 f/1 m	1 f/1 f	1 m/1 m 1 f/1 f
Total	11	11	11	11	11	11

The overview of the decisions on the appointment of the chairman/chairwoman and members of the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina shows the following:

- 1) Only in the first mandate, when the Gender Equality Committee was formed, it was headed by a man, and in all other mandates the Committee was headed by women.
- 2) In the second mandate (2004–2008), the Chairwoman of the Committee was from the ranks of the minority partner in the ruling coalition (Jadranka Beljan Balaban from G17+), in the third mandate (2008–2012) the Chairwoman of the Committee was an MP from the ranks of the opposition (Tanja Jovanović from the Serbian Radical Party), in the fourth mandate (2012–2016) the Chairwoman of the Committee was from the opposition (Stojanka Lekić from the Serbian Progressive Party), in the fifth mandate (2016–2020) the Chairwoman was from the opposition (Ana Tomanova Makanova from the Democratic Party), while in the current, sixth mandate, the Chairwoman of the Committee is an MP from the largest party in the ruling coalition (Latinka Vasiljković from the Serbian Progressive Party).

- 3) In all mandates, female members are represented in greater numbers than male members.
- 4) The decisions were written exclusively in the masculine gender and the rule of using gender-sensitive language was not respected.

5 CONCLUSION

After twenty years of their operation, the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina and other gender equality mechanisms in AP Vojvodina demonstrate the will of the provincial administration to continuously deal with the improvement and achievement of gender equality in Vojvodina and the need to institutionally deal with the (in)equality of women and men, which is what we continue to witness.

The analysis of the work of the Gender Equality Committee shows the fluctuation of the status and activities of the Committee as a working body of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina, which depend on the person who leads it, the person's interest in the topic, personal stance and the stance of the party the person comes from, as well as the female and male members of the Committee, their interest in the topic, regular attendance at meetings and participation in the discussion and work of the Committee. The relationship with the relevant provincial secretariat is also indicative (the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality / Provincial Secretariat for the Economy, Labour and Gender Equality/ Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demographic Policy and Social Care of Children / Provincial Secretariat for Social Policy, Demography and Gender Equality). The analysis of the minutes shows that in the first two mandates, the female provincial secretary, in addition to current issues and information on the state of gender equality in AP Vojvodina, regularly submitted work reports and spoke about the work plans of the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality, while in later mandates, those reports were absent, and, eventually, the competent provincial secretary never or almost never attends the sessions of the Committee. This means that the borderline between the legislative and executive branches has been lost and it has been forgotten that the legislative branch is superior to the executive branch and that the competent Committee, as a parliamentary working body, should not only monitor but also supervise the work of the competent secretariat and other institutions in the field of gender equality.

Following the work of the Committee through the mandates by the number of sessions, topics that were dealt with and co-operation that was achieved (or did not take place at all) testify to the status and activities of the Committee and co-operation with other gender equality mechanisms. For instance, in one mandate (2012–2016), 37 sessions were held, co-oper-

ation was achieved with four other working bodies of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina and the competent committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, the Women's Parliamentary Network was formed, while, for instance, in the current mandate, nine sessions have been held so far, where only ongoing issues under the competence of the Committee were considered, while no initiative, extraordinary activity or proposal for co-operation was on the agenda. It is noticeable that, in contrast to the first mandate, when the competent secretary attended each session, actively participated in the work of the Committee and submitted a report on her work to the Committee, later this was less and less the case, and in the current mandate, the Provincial Gender Equality Secretary never attended a session of the Gender Equality Committee. It is an example of the attitude of the executive branch, or its part, towards the Assembly of AP Vojvodina and its working bodies. These examples show that the work of the Gender Equality Committee cannot be viewed outside the context of the socio-political circumstances in which the Committee operates.

Two conclusions can be drawn in relation to the use of gender-sensitive language in the minutes. First, the use of gender-sensitive language depends on the will of the person who takes the minutes (male/female Secretary of the Committee) and the person who presides over the session (chairman/chairwoman or deputy chairman/chairwoman), who together with the male/female secretary prepares the convocation and the minutes for consideration and adoption. Over time, the situation with the use of gender-sensitive language has improved and it is used more consistently in subsequent mandates. Second, the use of gender-sensitive language depends on the political will of the current political elite represented in the assembly, and the evidence for this is that after several mandates of gradual introduction and regular use of gender-sensitive language, gender-sensitive language is used in the minutes of the sessions of the Committee in the current mandate, except for the position of the current chairwoman, who insists on signing as: the chairman. Despite the adopted Gender Equality Law, which regulates the use of gender-sensitive language in the public sphere, the will to implement the Law is lacking.

All the above is a reflection of the society in which we live. On the one hand, we witness innovative initiatives necessary for building a democratic and civil society (such as the Gender Equality Committee of the Assembly of AP Vojvodina and other gender equality mechanisms in AP Vojvodina), and on the other hand, we attest to patriarchal norms which are deeply embedded in society, are difficult to overcome, and hinder the processes of democratization.