

ROLE OF WOMEN IN NEW GOVERNANCES

The policy on gender equality and on strengthening women's position in society, as one of the fundamental principles of the democratic system of the Republic of Croatia, has been accepted at the highest level by the adoption of relevant legal documents and by the establishment of pertinent institutional mechanisms within the Croatian Parliament and the Government of the Republic of Croatia. Article 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia places gender equality among the highest values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia.

Besides establishing the Gender Equality Committee of the Croatian Parliament in 2011, the Office of the Gender Equality Ombudswoman in 2003 and the Government Office for Gender Equality in 2004, the most significant steps regarding equality policy were the ones taken in the direction of improving the national legal framework.

The new Gender Equality Law, adopted by the Croatian Parliament on 15 July 2008, introduced gender quotas into the Croatian electoral legislation (Council of Europe's definition on the considerable gender imbalance among public and political decision-makers had been adopted and the obligation to include *at least 40% of the under-represented gender* into their lists of candidates at all levels of elections had been imposed on political parties and others in charge of proposing candidates. The said percentage is to be attained by the third regular elections). Also, for the first time the Law defined the role and the status of County commissions for gender equality as bodies who are, together with the public attorney's, the Government Office for Gender Equality and men and women coordinators in public administration, responsible for the implementation of the Gender Equality Law.

The Law on the election of members of the representative bodies of the units of local and regional autonomy stipulates that political parties are to take gender equality into account while proposing their lists of candidates, whereas the Law on political parties stipulates that every political party is to receive 10% higher financial funds for their party's activity for every female member of parliament (i. e. for an MP of the underrepresented gender).

National strategic plans for promoting gender equality adopted in 1997, 2001 and 2006, as the fundamental strategic documents of the Republic of Croatia aimed

at eliminating discrimination against women and establishing real gender equality by implementing equal opportunities policy, confirmed the obligations Croatia assumed when adopting the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action of the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The National Policy on Gender Equality for the period from 2011 to 2015 consists of seven key action areas and obligates the Republic of Croatia to take the gender dimension into account in all aspects of politics by implementing special measures related to: 1) promoting women's human rights and gender equality; 2) creating equal opportunities in the labour market; 3) improving the implementation of the gender-sensitive education; 4) balancing the participation of women and men in decision-making processes; 5) combating all forms of violence against women; 6) promoting international cooperation and gender equality outside the borders of Croatia; 7) further strengthening institutional mechanisms and methods for the implementation of the equal opportunities policy. Proceeding from the fact that gender equality is one of the fundamental principles of the *acquis communautaire* and that safeguarding equal opportunities and combating gender discrimination are universal goals and integral components of all EU programmes and policies, the Republic of Croatia, as an acceding country and future member of the European Union, is obliged to implement not only the objectives defined in the EU legislation, but also those cited in the strategic documents that European Commission has adopted with the view of combating gender discrimination in the EU Member States. The strategic targets and objectives of the European Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010 – 2015 are incorporated in the Croatian National Policy on Gender Equality 2011-2015.

The section entitled *Equality in political and public decision-making processes* of the National Strategy on Gender Equality underlines the objective of achieving a balanced proportion of men and women in representative and executive bodies at all levels. Although significant progress has been attained in the area of women's political participation, women, except for the judiciary, remain the underrepresented gender in political and public decision-making processes, i. e. in representative and executive bodies at both national and local level. The percentage of women in the total number of Members of the Croatian Parliament increased significantly since parliamentary elections in 1990, when it had totalled 4.6% until the elections in 2000

when it grew to 22.5%. Since the parliamentary elections in 2000 the percentage of women has not changed significantly, ranging from 21 to 23%. In the current parliamentary term there are 25% of female MPs, which is, according to the data provided by the Inter-parliamentary Union, above average in the EU Member States (24%) and above average in national parliaments around the world (18.9%). Women Members of the Croatian Parliament are proportionally represented in the memberships and presidencies of parliamentary committees. Progress has also been noted in women's participation in the government, the percentage of female ministers having grown from 6.3% in 1992 to 13.6% in 2012 (from 1990 to 1992 there were no women ministers).

The percentage of women among high-ranking officials and senior officers in state and public services increased as well, from 20% in 2000 to 30.5% in 2011, as did, though remaining low, women's participation in the diplomat profession: from 8% of women ambassadors in 2000 to 18.5% in 2011. The participation of women in the legislative and the executive is still very low, although significant progress was observed at the 2009 local elections, when the percentage of female county councillors grew by 7.4% (from 13.4% to 21.9%), city councillors by 5.1% (from 14% to 21.4%) and municipal councillors by 4.1% (from 7% to 15.5%) with respect to the women councillors elected at local elections in 2005. The average representation of all women councillors in the representative bodies of local and regional authorities' units totalled 11.5% in 2001, 12.9% in 2005 and 15.4% in 2009. However, women are still not represented in the composition of 106 out of 429 municipal councils, i. e. in 24.75% of them. The negative trend was indicated at direct elections for local level executive functions when only 21 women were elected head of municipality (4.9%), 6 were elected mayor (4.7%) and 1 county head (5%). Only in the judiciary women make a significant majority, are not the underrepresented gender and the number of women judges has continuously been growing. In 2010 in most Croatian courts of first instance women made up for 70% of municipal court judges, 67% of commercial court judges and 73% of magistrates' court judges. There are more female than male judges at the Administrative Court (76%) and at the Higher Magistrates' Court (63%). At the Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia 50% of judges are women and at the Constitutional Court 38%. 64% of state attorneys and their substitutes at the State Attorney's Office are women.

The Government Gender Equality Office campaign aimed at increasing women's participation in candidates' lists for the local elections in 2009 and the parliamentary elections in 2011, and the financing of non-governmental organizations' projects for the same elections should be highlighted as examples of good practice. A large number of round tables, conferences and public debates have been organized or co-organized by institutional mechanisms, non-governmental organizations and County commissions on gender equalities, targeted researches have been conducted and information on the most important national and European documents related to gender equality has been spread. Under the auspices of the Government Office for Gender Equality, on the eve of the 2013 elections, a campaign is being launched aimed at improving women's participation in decision-making processes at the local level, especially since women representation at the local level is far beneath the one required by law. For the first time sanctions will be imposed on parties not respecting the quota of at least 40% of the underrepresented gender on their lists of candidates, as stipulated by the Law on Gender Equality.

The legislative and institutional changes, as well as the numerous activities and campaigns have achieved progress, yet not the complete eradication of different forms of discrimination against women or a society of equal opportunities for both genders. The most important indicators of women's unequal position consist in their disadvantageous position in the labour market, their underrepresentation in political and public decision-making processes, the frequency of different forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, and the persistence of gender stereotypes.

As all other countries, Croatia is facing ongoing challenges of bridging the gap between *de facto* and *de jure* equality more swiftly and of eradicating the structural causes of power imbalance between men and women in different aspects of social life.