



Research Article

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Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in Western Balkans between aspirations and reality

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the current situation on GRB as a tool to make budgets gender-responsive and achieve gender equality in Western Balkans. Apart from exploring the gap between the aspiration in implementing the GRB instruments and tools from one side and the obstacles encountered which are bound to be specific for any country or region. The general method used is the conceptual analyses as well as content analyses will be starting points when scrutinizing policy-papers that policymakers as well as programs of UN, UN Woman, EU and other foreign agencies are trying to implement in WB. Despite numerous gender policies having been adopted in Western Balkans over the last few decades, significant gender inequalities are persisting and there are gender policy implementation gaps. The paper concludes that there is a need to have sound laws and policies that meet the equivalent demand to implement them. Integrated GRB initiatives with gender equality goals could provide the basis for better gender equality outcomes and ownership from the central and local government administration, which is crucial in the long term and sustainable gender equality.

Keywords: Gender responsive budgeting, gender equality, Western Balkans.

1. Introduction

Since 2000, in recognition of gender inequalities, governments, both in the developed and developing countries in EU, have engaged in gender-responsive budgeting as part of the process of mainstreaming gender in their policies, programs and budgets. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is one of the ways by which governments demonstrate their commitment to gender equality by making suitable allocations in the budgets. "Introducing a gender perspective into government policies and budgets

can raise awareness of these differences and the resulting impacts of public policies on women and men" (Rubin & Bartle, 2021). According to Budlender (2004) GRB is "a form of analysis from a gender perspective" more than the numbers in the budget. The focus is "on the policy and programmes underlying those numbers" and the possible results following implementation (Budlender, 2004). It suggests that all parts of the budgeting and policy making must take into account the needs and interests of all citizenry and if it is to have a lasting effect, GRB must become an integral part of the government and public administration routine.

The WB countries have made efforts in achieving gender equality in their EU accession process. GRB initiatives were enforced by external drivers into the Western Balkans, in mid-2000s as a "rich tool" which could "provide information that allows for better decision making on how policies and priorities should be implemented and financed in order to achieve the goal of gender equality in different areas of life" (UNIFEM, 2010). According to Liiv & Kuan (2017), during the EU-accession period (1997-2004/2007), several reform initiatives were strongly impelled and shaped by the EU accession criteria and "conditionality", but there is however a shortage of internal drivers in WB countries who instinctively, support implementation of GRB policies. The WB countries have made efforts to achieve gender equality in their EU accession process, developing and adopting legal and policy frameworks and establishing institutions and gender equality mechanisms, but the implementation of gender equality policies remains a challenge. Countries in the region of the Western Balkans also still have a long way to go to achieve gender equality (EIGE, 2023). This leads to the research question which will try to address this paper, why there is so much effort/activities and little result?

This brief treatise will discuss the current situation on GRB as a way to achieve gender equality in Albania, Bosnia and Hercegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo (below referred to as Western Balkans WB) apart from exploring the gap between the aspiration in implementing the GRB instruments and tools from one side and the obstacles encountered which are bound to be specific for any country or region. From that point of view, exploring the relationship between the state of academically oriented inquiry as well as the efforts and practices to implement efficient tools is expected to provide a case study worth researching, and hopefully, in the long term, this contribution will complete the map/landscape of scholarly inquiry in the area. The paper will have as its leitmotif the gap between aspiration and reality from the perspective of Gender Responsive Budgeting in the WB countries.

The paper is organised as follows: the next section overviews the theoretical framework and relevant literature review. Section three discusses the research methods used followed by section four where an analysis of two western Balkan countries is outlined and where prerequisite factors for successful GRB are explained and contextualised, and the last section is conclusions.

2. A Theoretical Framework and relevant literature review

GRB aims to foster gender equality, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as transparency, accountability and the participation of civil society in the budget decision-making

process, thus being a tool for achieving good governance¹ standards (EU Analyses, 2014). On one hand, by pointing out the links between gender equality and efficiency and effectiveness, GRB makes institutions more aware of the consequences of their decisions on the society, thus giving citizens a new tool to evaluate the use of public resources. On the other hand, GRB requires the involvement of civil society in the process of public policy analysis and the “real” involvement of public administration at the national and local level (Osborne et al. 2008).

The idea of gender budgeting as a strategy to achieve gender equality and gender mainstreaming² has been spreading for the past few decades (Stanimirovic & Klun, 2021) and in recognition of gender inequities, more than 80 countries have applied a gender perspective to their budget process (Rubin & Burtle, 2021). Gender budgeting has attracted considerable attention in Europe reaching a burgeoning momentum during the early 2000s, where it saw a full range of stakeholders promote a broad swath of activities under the rubric of gender budgeting (Quinn, 2018). At that time, there was an expectation that gender budgeting would “liberate” and “elevate” gender, and gender mainstreaming to the level of macroeconomic policy and thus expedite the realization of projected gender equality goals (Holvoet, 2006). In addition, advocates of the idea offered the approach that gender budgeting would contribute to the goals of efficiency, economy, and effectiveness (Sharp, 2003).

Understanding the enabling factors that contribute to success in the implementation of GRB is an important step (Rubin & Burtle, 2021; UN Women, 2015) and having them in place is a precondition for GRB implementation as they are the enabling environment of GRB.

2.1 Gender Equality and GRB in EU

While GRB is a relatively new topic in the EU, gender equality and gender mainstreaming has been an important topic since the creation of the Communities (EU Brief, 2014). The history of EU gender equality policy dates to the first EU gender directive in 1975 on the gender pay gap. Following the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, the EU endorsed gender mainstreaming as a guiding strategy toward gender equality and set about promoting the consideration of gender equality in all policy domains. In 1999 the Treaty of Amsterdam included the promotion of equality and the elimination of discrimination between men and women among the EU’s fundamental tasks.

¹ The ‘White Paper on Governance in the European Union’ was published in 2001, and it outlined several points on good governance. Amongst other points, it was mentioned that the European Union is striving to move in a direction that not only promotes but also operates in a good governance manner. The document calls upon the European Community to open up the decision-making process in order to include more relevant social actors and organisations. This will increase participation, which will consequently increase accountability and responsibility for all bodies concerned. http://ec.europa.eu/governance/white_paper/index_en.htm

² The European Commission defines gender mainstreaming as: “...the integration of the gender perspective into every stage of policy processes – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with a view to promoting equality between women and men. It means assessing how policies impact on the life and position of both women and men – and taking responsibility to re-address them if necessary. This is the way to make gender equality a concrete reality in the lives of women and men creating space for everyone within the organisations as well as in communities - to contribute to the process of articulating a shared vision of sustainable human development and translating it into reality.” <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=421&langId=en>

It has been argued that some European countries, including some member states, would not have been as open to the gender equality agenda were it not for the influence of the EU or other international donor organizations (Rubery 2015). While some countries have retreated from full compliance in the post-accession period (Sedelmeier, 2009), the legislative harmonization brought about by the implementation of the Employment and Social Affairs Chapter of the *acquis communautaire* has legitimized women's claim to genuine equality (Sloat, 2004). In line with, and to some extent because of, a Europe-wide policy push toward equal opportunities, and the ensuing increased participation of women in the labor market, there has been a change in the nature of gender relations across Europe. In addition to narrowing the gender employment gap, the rate of women entering higher education in most EU member states is higher than that of men, and the traditional nuclear family has, in some measure, given way to a diversity of partnership and family models (Quinn, 2016)

Nevertheless, Rubery (2015) argues that this "unstoppable revolution" in gender relations has failed to result in a major change in the domestic division of labour. On this basis, she concludes that progress toward gender equality remains highly dependent on public policy.

Rubery's (2015) analyses of the literature on the erosion of EU policy on gender equality prior to the crisis of 2008 points to a number of fronts on which this downgrading was evident. These include the co-option and transformation of gender equality ideals to satisfy other policy objectives (Rubery 2015), such as relieving demographic pressures, promoting flexibility in the workforce to comply with market demands, and the "Make Work Pay" policy, designed to mitigate welfare dependency (Rubery, 2015). In WB countries, the biggest gaps between the Western Balkans and the EU are found in the domain of money, which can be attributed to the much lower average income levels than in EU Member States (EIGE, 2023).

While women's integration into the labour market has expanded, this has not resulted in increased economic independence or a lessening in the dual burden of paid work and unpaid work in the household (Pearson and Elson 2015). In addition, while women increased their share of the labour market, they are overrepresented in nonstandard jobs, with the added associated instability. Gender Equality Index of WB countries shows that countries in the region have made noticeable progress in the political power sub-domain. These positive tendencies in political power can be attributed to existing legal quotas (EIGE, 2023).

The EU 2020-2025 Strategy on Gender Equality mentions the opportunity to reform the economy to achieve greater gender equality and to make gender mainstreaming the pivotal strategy for gender equality.

3. Research methods

As this paper attempts to contribute to exploring the gap between the expectations and reality in WB as a case study, the general method used is the conceptual one rather than empirical. Conceptual analyses, as well as content analyses, will be starting points when scrutinizing policy papers that policymakers as well as programs of UN, UN Woman, EU and other foreign agencies are trying to implement in WB. Their

findings and reports will undergo thorough content analyses. Testing their validity, replicability and reliability will be both empirical and content-analyses oriented, testing the hypotheses that the finding will be able to answer questions about the gap mentioned earlier.

This paper on the GRB in WB experiences derived based on a broad range of research materials, including policy documents, research, and assessment reports from international organizations as well as national civil society organization, and personal observations as a participant in UN Women GRB initiatives in Albania and WB countries. The policy documents were general gender equality policy documents, meanwhile there were documents/reports/assessments/ projects related to the implementation of GRB practices at national level in the government administration. At this point, the paper will aim to provide answers to significant questions related to the situation on GRB implementation in WB countries including the effectiveness of tools or tool-kits (papers and manuals) applied to mainstream GRB as part of a general human development objective to promote and achieve gender equality.

From the six countries in WB, which reported the use of Gender responsive budgeting for promoting gender equality, the analysis of the existing literature helped in identifying two countries of particular interest. There was information on GRB in these countries mainly from government publications and websites and a few academic publications.

We began analysing the budget documents published on the government websites of the selected countries, which were supplemented with extensive documentary evidence published by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, GRB activists and practitioners that assessed the implementation of GRB.

4. Gender Responsive Budgets in Western Balkans

There are very few scholars' articles on GRB in Western Balkans, but on the other hand there are reports from UN Women and other women and gender organizations that are available and offer some optic into the situation in WB countries, as noted by Steccolini (2019) gender budgeting –has been neglected by public administration scholars, giving rise to calls for further attention.

The literature available on GRB stresses the importance of prerequisite factors in the successful implementation of GRB, and thus we give some focus on what they are, as well as giving illustrative examples in the Western Balkan context. Then we give an overview of the situation of GRB implementation in the Balkan countries, giving focus to the two country cases, looking specifically at the relation of gender equality and GRB. Analysed as part of the political criteria for EU accession, some of the issues, such as gender-based violence, insufficient political participation along with lack of institutional capacities of gender equality bodies, are common to all WB states (CSF Policy Brief N.4, 2018).

4.1 Prerequisites and enabling factors of GRB in Western Balkans Contexts

GRB is a strategy tool which on the one hand can help to improve planning and budgeting and on the other supports implementation of legal requirements to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and to ensure budgeting for

women's rights. It requires a major shift in traditional thinking and in practice. It involves opening up the process of budget-making to a wider group of stakeholders; it calls for a re-prioritisation of equality issues; it necessitates the matching of policy commitments with resource allocation. According to (Quinn, 2018; Council of Europe, 2005), political will, accountability, allocation of specific human and financial resources, co-ordination of information and training and availability of gender-disaggregated data can be regarded as preconditions of gender budgeting.

4.1.1 Political will

Political will is a key precondition if gender budget initiatives are to be successful. Active political commitment to promoting gender equality and recognition of gender budgeting as a strategy contributing to gender equality goals are absolutely necessary for effective gender budgeting.

Furthermore, clear instructions and appropriate follow-up by the Government administration are crucial. Only if gender budgeting is pursued with a sense of political will and commitment of high-level civil servants can it accomplish its aims.³ It is only when Gender Budgeting is pushed forward with a sense of political commitment that it can realise its aims.

4.1.2 Accountability

Active political commitment to promoting gender equality and recognition of gender budgeting as a strategy contributing to gender equality goals are absolutely necessary for effective gender budgeting. Gender budgeting is defective if political will is missing (Nolte et al., 2021). Governments need to be held accountable for their national and international commitments to gender mainstreaming in general and gender budgeting more specifically (EU Policy Brief, 2018). Sharp and Broomhill (2002) consider that gender budgets are 'a mechanism for establishing whether a government's gender equality commitments translate into budgetary commitments. So, governments are held accountable for establishing gender mainstreaming in their policies, as well as assigning clear responsibilities, when goals and procedures are clearly outlined, accountability is strengthened. This also implies that roles and responsibilities within the administration need to be defined. Parliaments are in a core position to question and even to instruct governments on budgetary matters. NGOs and other civil society groups and the media can raise awareness and mobilize citizens to demand accountability and fair raising and distribution of public resources. Furthermore, precise definitions and country contextualization of goals and procedures of gender budgeting strengthen accountability.⁴

³ The organization of study tours was one of the most commonly used strategies to build political will in the SEE GRB initiatives. The Evaluation Report on the project noted that "the organization of study tours (to Austria, Belgium, Iceland and Italy) increased GRB awareness and helped to generate necessary political will and commitment of high-ranking civil servants towards GRB. The involvement of such high-ranking officials was a critical enabling factor for GRB implementation in the countries." (UN Women, 2017).

⁴ In the SEE Countries GRB initiatives, ministries of finance and other civil servants already had a good understanding about the importance of budget transparency and participatory approaches to budgeting through the existing public reform processes. This provided an important entry point for GRB (UN Women, 2017).

4.1.3 Human and financial resources

Political will should also turn into human and financial resources for necessary analysis, capacity-building and co-ordination, thus calling for active high-ranking civil servants' commitment (UN Women, 2017). Successful gender budgeting cannot be provided in addition to regular job duties. Additional qualified personnel and financial resources to carry out research, develop necessary expertise, train officials and co-ordinate the gender budget process are therefore prerequisites of successful gender budgeting. Without sufficient financial resources, government officials may not perceive gender initiatives as being in their best interest, due to competing policy priorities and incentives (Sen, 2000).

4.1.4 Co-ordination of information and training

GRB work demands cross-departmental cooperation and the involvement of different actors and be clear what their different roles are and what their contributions can be (Klatzer, 2015). Co-ordination throughout the budget process is crucial for successful gender budgeting, in order to collect and exchange data and maintain a continuous flow of information among all players involved. Training, clear instructions and guidelines for implementation, monitoring and consultation throughout the budget cycle and gathering and systematization of data, methods, tools and good examples, facilitating the exchange of experiences are done through coordination.⁵ Institutionalising a specific 'Coordination Mechanism/Unit' within the administration helps to ensure the effectiveness as well as the efficiency of the process.

4.1.5 Gender-disaggregated data

Gender-disaggregated data is a key precondition for gender budgeting and a necessary basis for assessing the gender impact of policies in general. Gender-disaggregated data in reference not only to monetary gender disparities and inequalities but has to include the distribution of unpaid work between men and women, in many cases, this will be the first measure when starting gender budgeting.⁶

⁵ In Albania, through training, mentoring, exchanges, a knowledge platform, e-learning, UN Women supported the formation of a pool of national experts on GRB. The experts participated in all training initiatives organized within the project and were also engaged to assist other partners in the GRB processes. In BiH strategic partnerships were developed between UN Women and academic institutions to include GRB in the curricula. Thus, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Sarajevo introduced a GRB course in its Masters in Gender Studies Program curriculum and the RS Gender Centre at the University of Banja Luka organized a five-day Summer Gender School. In FYR Macedonia, a team comprised of an international and a national expert on GRB developed a "CSO toolkit on gender responsive budgeting" and designed and delivered a comprehensive training to CSOs focusing on advocacy for GRB. The combination of their experiences and perspectives ensured that the training and toolkit are closely tailored to the needs of the CSOs and applicable in the institutional context of FYR Macedonia. (UN Women)

⁶ Gender Equality Indexes, are now adopted by four countries (Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro). Where data is lacking, the Country Reports should include a specific recommendation to authorities to improve collection of sex-disaggregated data and public access to data, but the Gender Disaggregated data needs to be improved and reported better by all WB countries, especially much more focus should be given in the local administration. (Kviina till Kvinna, 2020)

4.2 Discussion on Gender responsive budgeting in WB Countries

In the majority of countries, the most common practice is approving state level legal framework and “setting up relevant administrative machineries or conducting training sessions for public officials” (Stotsky, 2016). However, the analyses of UN Women GRB projects, conducted in 2017, found that progress towards gender equality in the region had been uneven despite repeated affirmed commitments to it by the governments of the project countries. The report explained this lack of progress as a result of “socio-cultural factors” such as “persistent patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes about men and women’s gender roles, responsibilities, and capabilities which have perpetuated discrimination against women.”

The evaluation reiterated the tendency of external actors, as astutely noted by Tea Hadziristic (2016), to explain the continued slide of the Western Balkans countries in gender equity measures by the persistence of “traditional values.” Hadziristic, pointed to “patriarchal values and the remnants of the communist order as key obstacles to the development of women’s rights and prospects in general.” Another 2017 report commissioned by the UK Department for International Development, suggested that “the biggest challenge for improving gender equality is changing the mentality of both women and men towards traditional gender roles” (Browne, 2017). Indeed, the effectiveness of GRB projects in the countries of the Western Balkans, with their estimated cost of 6-10 million Euros, has not been easy to undergo an evaluation to be established (V. Bojičić-Dželilović and A. A. Hozić, 2021). Andrea Sephar’s (2018) states that since the mid-2000s, noteworthy progress has been made in each of the countries⁷ he studied in introducing regulatory measures and frameworks to support GRB, including laws, strategies, action plans, budget guidelines and the like, but the implementation is lacking behind.

As noted above, in WB countries the GRB regulatory framework at the national government has progressed and a gap can be easily observed between the former and the practices and implementation. National commitments had been made in the form of gender action plans or laws, but they were often poorly implemented and under-funded. Frequently, implementation revolved around a few activities within those plans but there is need to move from commitments on paper into meaningful actions, and to tackle mainstream policy domains, where the government attention is concentrated (UN Women, 2017).

Despite these factors externally driven projects, in the last decade have continued to be focusing on introducing gender responsive budgeting in the region have been implemented and are continuing to be implemented by UN WOMEN, or in some way involved UN Women. Sephar (2018) also adds other international donors contributing at local level such as USAID, UNDP, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, Austrian Development Agency and Helvetas.

The first GRB project, was implemented between 2006 and 2010 in four countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR Macedonia and Serbia. The program focused on capacity building among stakeholders (government officials, civil society associations, and external researchers) and identified thematic areas in each country (education, agriculture, local economic development, etc.) that could be targeted by

⁷ BiH, Macedonia, Serbia.

GRB (UNIFEM, 2010). The second, follow-up project, was between 2011 and 2013 centred on the implementation and cross-country exchanges of experiences and knowledge about the GRB process (UN Women, 2015). The third project (2013-2016),⁸ which included Moldova, had three objectives, better reflection of gender equality concerns in sectoral programs and budgets at the central and local levels, better oversight of local government programs in pursuit of gender equality commitments and exchange of knowledge that would facilitate replication of good practices and lessons learned (UN Women, 2017).

Similar programs were also implemented in Kosovo and in Serbia by UN Women (former UNIFEM) and other UN agencies but with different foci – in Kosovo, GRB was linked to initiatives related to gender-based violence while in Serbia, GRB activities came under the umbrella of the project on women's economic and social rights (Spehar, 2018). Gender Budgeting manuals are published in WB countries as early as 2013/2014, although with limited application thus far. The projects implemented repeatedly has been focused on capacity building, knowledge, cross country exchanges and implementation acceleration and improvement.

Regional and local governments' proximity to people's everyday lives means there is potential to respond more directly to women's and men's needs when it comes to public policy and service delivery (Quin, 2016). There is immense potential to use participatory gender approaches and improving the principle of good governance and co-decision making, involving the local population, where there is a planning process in place. But at this level there are sporadic examples in different countries around the world, and very few in Western Balkans.

4.2.1 Country Case Studies

North Macedonia

The country gained candidate status to the EU in June 2014, and also is continuing to receive support for its gender budgeting initiative from UN Women.

The concept of gender budgeting was first referenced in the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, 2008–2012. Early initiatives focused on gender budget analyses of key policies and programs with particular relevance for gender equality, including employment, social protection, the self-employment program, the human rights program, the program for information and communications technology development, and the rural development program.

The GRB initiative was given its first impulse in the legislation on equal opportunities between women and men in 2012. In this law there was gesticulation on a Strategy on Gender Responsive Budgeting, thus making GRB a young initiative. The "Strategy for introducing Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Republic of Macedonia 2012-2017", was published in July 2012 and had been developed by senior government administrators with technical support from UN Women. The legal basis for the strategy is contained in the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, adopted by the national Assembly earlier that year.

According to the document published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

⁸ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), North Macedonia and Moldova "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies in Southeast Europe and the Republic of Moldova, Phase II" regional project (2013 -2016).

“The strategy is focused on three strategic areas: 1) introducing a gender perspective in the programs and budgets of the budget beneficiaries at central and local level, 2) improving the legal framework for the inclusion of gender responsive budgeting, and 3) strengthening the institutional mechanisms and capacity building that are required for incorporation of the gender perspective in the creation of policies and programs and related budgets.”⁹ The principal provisions of the Strategy on Gender Responsive Budgeting include a mandate for the systematic inclusion of equal opportunities in all budget processes.

The Macedonian civil society organizations have expressed some concern that the government has failed to introduce a promised decree that would have put gender budgeting on a sounder legal footing (Quinn, 2016). A further review, cited within the framework of the European Commission’s Exchange of Good Practices on Gender Equality, notes that the 2014 budget does not contain any information on sex-disaggregated output indicators. The government assessed the availability of data, and four institutions were selected in 2014 to pursue a gender budgeting approach through the course of a medium-term budget cycle of three years, concluding in 2017. One critical area was rural development. In preparation for the rollout of gender budgeting, UN Women commissioned a study to look at how rural women fared in terms of government policies and services and the extent to which women received grants and subsidies. Findings show that analysis to differentiate the needs of men and women, undertaken to inform the development of the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, was not reflected in the strategy’s objectives. Policy incoherence in the selection criteria for grants and subsidies, not owning land are obstacles to women accessing grants and subsidies; a complex application process and a system of communication of the schemes that favours men are additional challenges. The recommendations point to infrastructural needs in rural areas that would benefit women, including construction of sidewalks and shelters at bus stations and improving the water supply.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has responsibility for the coordination of gender budgeting throughout the administration, including reporting annually to the government. An Interdepartmental Advisory and Consultative Group provides support and guidelines and plays a monitoring role alongside the ministry. The Ministry of Finance has included an instruction on gender budgeting in its budget circular and is responsible for reviewing the gender budget statement submitted by the pilot institutions. The statement is to contain analysis from a gender perspective of the selected program and specify a target that represents an improved gender equality outcome, with appropriate indications.

The USAID/Macedonia Gender Analyses Report in 2019, points out that beside progress made in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report, the country ranks well above average on educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment, while below average on economic participation and opportunity. North Macedonia has committed to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and aligned its legislation to achieving de jure and de facto gender equality. Yet significant discrepancies exist between legal

⁹ <https://www.globalwps.org/data/MKD/files/2012%202017%20Strategy%20for%20Introducing%20Gender%20Responsive%20Budgeting.pdf>

frameworks and their implementation, especially in rural areas, gender gaps appear in labour-market activity, with high inactivity among rural and ethnic minority women.

While gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) will be compulsory with the new Organic Law on Budgeting, the capacity and understanding to carry out GRB in policy and budgets is lacking. At the governmental level, there is a lack of awareness regarding gender inequality, as it is not prioritized in efforts to address social cohesion (USAID, Gender Analyses 2019).

Bosnia Hercegovina (BiH)

BiH submitted its European Union (EU) Membership Application in February 2016, and since then, has been working on the adaptation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and establishing a joint coordination mechanism.

The BiH Law on Gender Equality, adopted in 2003 and amended in 2009, provides the framework for the gender institutional mechanisms which implement it and monitor its implementation. The obligation to implement GRB was mandated by the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina, adopted in 2006, 2013 and lately in 2018 an updated "Gender Action Plan (2018-2022)" was approved and it includes a separate chapter on GRB.

Gender budgeting initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina started in 2005 with a handbook entitled "Gender sensitive budgets: an opportunity for reducing poverty BiH", developed and promoted by the BiH Gender Equality Agency and two Entity Gender Centres (Gender Equality Mechanisms). The government of BiH started to adopt 'gender-responsive budgeting' in 2008 with the first gender analysis of policy issues in sectors of rural development, employment, and entrepreneurship. What followed, in the period between then and now, was continuation of efforts to introduce GRB within a larger Public Finance Management reform at all levels of government and public administration. GRB is, at least in theory, part of the Budget Management Information System used at all four layers of government in BiH (state, entity, canton, local governments). However, its actual implementation at local level is sporadic and usually piloted by relevant projects (USAID BiH, 2016). UN Women Gender Analyses 2021 states "Despite a carefully designed legal, strategic, and institutional mechanisms for advancing gender equality, women in BiH still face many challenges and obstacles in achieving full equality in all areas of life".

5. Conclusion

The first general conclusion that can be drawn is that there are gender policy implementation gaps and an analysis is crucial to understand why, despite numerous gender policies having been adopted in Western Balkans over the last few decades, there are significant gender inequalities persisting in them. "In spite of recent efforts such as subsuming gender policies under newly enacted international human rights legislation in the countries in the region, the general perception continues to be that gender equality enjoys a merely *de jure*, rather than *de facto* presence (Sephar, 2018). GRB initiatives are new and are introduced as a tool to achieve good governance in public administration but, looking at GRB, it is unlikely to take hold

if the enabling factors are not in place and if unless government decision-makers explicitly acknowledge gender inequities and make it an integral part of the public administration routine.

No country can be considered fully “developed” in terms of how far they have progressed with their gender policy and GRB implementation processes, even though they have progressively adapted the legal and regulatory framework. To put it differently, the implementation gaps in the WB countries gender policy will be removed only when the provision of sound laws and policies is met with the equivalent demand to implement them. Coordination between gender equality goals and gender budgeting could be greatly improved. In most instances where a gender equality strategy is in place, some of the goals articulated overlap with national economic goals. (Quinn 2018). Integrated GRB initiatives with gender equality goals could provide the basis for better gender equality outcomes. International assistance, UN Women in particular among others, has contributed to the rapid pace of change in agenda-setting on gender equality issues in the region, including GRB. As a result, politicians in the region can no longer dismiss the importance of gender inequality in their societies, but “donor support has been shown to have its drawbacks as well, one of which is the tendency towards international policy ownership and financial dependency” (Sephara 2018), thus ownership from the central and local government administration is crucial in the long term and sustainable gender equality. Costa et al. (2013) show that gender budgeting must have the support of powerful stakeholders that can participate in the legislative process and influence governmental decision-making. Otherwise, gender budgeting risks becoming a ‘feel-good’ concept that is ultimately implemented only when resources are abundant or when it is used as a populist measure, whenever government wants to show that it is doing something positive for gender equality.

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