



Sida

# Gender responsive budgeting (GRB) in North Macedonia

NORMATIVE DIALOGUE ON GENDER EQUALITY

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**Normative dialogue addresses Swedish values and priorities and is part of Sida's global advocacy work to get better development results to reduce poverty and promote a human rights based approach, gender equality, conflict prevention and the integration of the environment and climate change perspective. This brief is an example of a normative dialogue on gender equality between Team Sweden, Swiss Development Cooperation and UN Women on one hand and the Government of North Macedonia, including 21 local municipalities on the other hand.**

## BACKGROUND

Initially, there was very little interest in Gender Responsive Budgeting<sup>1</sup> (GRB) in North Macedonia both from the government and the donor community. Gender equality, generally, was not seen as a priority, but rather as an add-on. UN Women, together with the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish Embassy in North Macedonia identified that the budget processes at both local and central level in North Macedonia were gender blind.

As a response, the Swedish Embassy in North Macedonia, joined forces with the SDC in 2018 to support UN Women in the implementation of the program "Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia [2018–2022]". At the same time, the program partners also used the momentum to bring focus to this issue as the government of North Macedonia was preparing a new organic Law on Budget.

## DIALOGUE PROCESS IN THE PROJECT

The arguments raised by government officials during meetings were the additional workload and the lack of capacity/expertise within the government to work on GRB. It required a lot of dialogue and diplomatic discussions to support public authorities and officials to understand the benefits and needs of incorporating GRB in the new government Law on Budget.

The Swedish Embassy in North Macedonia raised the importance of GRB in continuous dialogue with high level officials but also in the sector working group with other donors in the country, the public sector management group, as well as in dialogue on a technical level during bilateral meetings with the Ministry of Finance. The normative dialogue process, though not structured, has required a lot of continuity and persistence, where the need to work for gender equality has been emphasized at every meeting and thus GRB as an enabler and a tool to achieve gender equality. The Swedish Ambassador was also engaged in the process and raised gender equality issues both with the Prime Minister and other ministers/ government representatives as well as with members of the parliament.

A continuous cooperation and dialogue with UN Women as implementing partners was maintained to help them identify the needs for support in the GRB process, whether technical or dialogue support and how the embassy can support this process.

## MAIN RESULTS

Sweden has to a larger degree brought the importance of gender equality, and GRB specifically, on the agenda in the country. The achievement of the dialogue processes has been in contributing to the institutionalization and more systematic application of GRB in the policy making and budgeting processes.

<sup>1</sup> Council of Europe defines Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. It means a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality.



**UN Women representatives in North Macedonia meet Minister of Finance to discuss the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting and the new Organic Budget Law as an avenue for its systematic and sustainable integration in the public financial management. November 2020, Skopje.**

Photo: UN Women office in North Macedonia

For example, an event organised by the Swedish Embassy, together with UN Women and UNDP, resulted in the introduction of GRB at municipality level with many of the local authorities. During the event, a video on snow ploughing<sup>2</sup> was screened to demonstrate the benefits of the GRB approach at the local level, [Sustainable Gender Equality - a film about gender mainstreaming in practice - YouTube](#)

There has also been a change within the donor community in the country. Where previously, gender equality and specifically GRB has not been a priority, a shift has happened with several donor communities becoming very supportive of this processes. Some are also providing technical support and expertise to the Ministry of Finance on Gender Responsive Budgeting.

The integration of GRB in the organic Law on Budget is seen as a major achievement resulting from extensive advocacy, awareness raising and investment in capacity development of key stakeholder, though all partners involved agree that this aspect could be further strengthened. The need for this has particularly been raised by the GRB watchdog network, and CRPM<sup>3</sup> in particular, who through the embassy's support, approached Women's Parliamentarians Club in the formulation of amendments to the new law.

<sup>2</sup> Created by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions – SALAR

<sup>3</sup> CRPM- Center for Research and Policy Making is primarily a think tank from North Macedonia that initiated the Gender Budget Watchdog Network – [www.gbwn.net](http://www.gbwn.net) – which unites 88 organizations from Western Balkans and Moldova with capacity to apply GRB tools in holding governments accountable for distribution of public funding for needs of women and men.

## KEY TAKE AWAY

- Partnering up with another donor in the country that initiated and jointly drives this process has been recognized as very important and fruitful. The need for building synergies and harmonizing with other programs and donors is very important in these processes.
- Working simultaneously at both central and local level and addressing the issue in legislation, capacity building and in implementation has had an impact on changing the mindset about the need of GRB with different officials at various levels of government structures. To further strengthen these processes, it is necessary to support the government and other stakeholders in operationalizing the legal changes, putting in place all the instruments and building the capacities further.
- The role of CSOs is very important and the GRB watchdog network that has been established in the region, with the support from Sweden, has played an important role in providing their specific knowledge and perspective, engaging the public and making sure that these processes “leave no one behind”. It is important to continue to support a broader representation of the civil society in the dialogue processes.

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**Training with Mayors and Presidents of municipal councils, and ZELS lobby group on gender equality for the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting at the local level, organized by ZELS under the UN Women gender-responsive budgeting project. September 2020, Skopje.**

Photo: UN Women in North Macedonia