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# Gender Focal Points: The Importance and Role for Law Enforcement



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Udruženje "Mreža policijskih službenica"  
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## Introduction

**P**olice agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) face under-representation of women in their ranks. This was confirmed by the findings of a survey conducted within the project "Police and Respect for Human Rights in BiH", according to which, in 16 police agencies, there were a total of 20% women<sup>1</sup>. When it comes to the status of police officers, research findings show that the representation of women is almost halved, because of the 16,660 police officers in BiH, only 9% were women.

Without intending to present in detail the findings of this research, they unequivocally indicate that issues of gender and gender equality are not very high on the list of priorities of the leadership of police agencies. Most of them do not have a program of measures aimed at achieving gender equality, although the Law on Gender Equality of BiH ("Official Gazette of BiH", number: 16/03, 102/09 and 32/10) requires its adoption. Also, out of 15 police agencies that provided data, only 6 (40%) have gender focal point(s) (GFP) in their ranks. These are the Directorate for

Coordination of Police Bodies of BiH, the State Investigation and Protection Agency (SIPA), the Ministry of Interior (MOI) of the Central Bosnia Canton, the MOI of the Bosnian-Podrinje Canton, the MOI of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton and the MOI of the West Herzegovina Canton. They generally have one contact person for gender issues, while only SIPA has three such persons<sup>2</sup>.

Within this paper, the focus will be on the role and importance of the GFP in the context of the work of police agencies, as one of the mechanisms that can improve the efficiency of police work.

## Gender focal point

Modern police agencies must be a mirror of the society they serve. Only in this way can they provide the required level of security for different categories of the population who have different security needs. For example, men, women, boys and girls face different security problems, as they may be victims of different crimes committed in different locations and by different perpetrators.

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<sup>1</sup> The research findings were based data obtained until the 1st of June 2020.

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<sup>2</sup> Complete research available at the website of the Centre for Security Studies: [www.css.ba](http://www.css.ba)

This is a gender perspective which, if taken into account, helps to create the most efficient strategies for policing [1].

In the process of integrating a gender perspective in policing, the GFP has a significant role. In fact, the analysis of the reviewed literature indicates that a GFP is easiest to understand as the most responsible, i.e. key person within a particular organization for the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy or program [2] - [4]. Gender mainstreaming or “gender mainstreaming” can be understood as a process of assessing the implications of any planned action for men and women in all areas and at all levels [5]. Also, a GFP is in charge of capacity building among other employees of the organization, in order to include the same gender issues in its work. This is a very important determinant in the work of the GFP, because it is by no means a person who will implement all activities within the strategy or programme [4].

What can be the scope of work of the GFP? By analyzing the work in various organizations, but also police agencies, the GFP should:

- participate in the decision-making process when it comes to creating the activities of the organization;
- advocate greater attention and integration of gender equality and women's empowerment into the organization's policies and programs;
- take care of gender balance within the organization;
- provide earmarked funds for gender mainstreaming activities;
- carry out research, assessments and audits regarding gender;
- act as a "helpdesk" when it is necessary to find information and materials related to gender issues;
- assist in the capacity building process of other employees in terms of gender concepts;
- identify colleagues' needs for information and training on gender mainstreaming and provide relevant training documents, materials and trainers;
- encourage colleagues to promote parity between women and men at events, trainings, projects, etc;
- cooperate with internal control and disciplinary mechanisms to support the resolution of complaints of

discrimination based on sex or ill-treatment in the police [1] - [3], [6].

The GFP should be appointed for a period of two to three years [2] - [4], [6]. This is an attempt to share the responsibility of the position with as many employees as possible, but also to avoid the notion that gender issues are just a woman's thing. Therefore, the position of GFP can also be held by a man. This has certain advantages, because men are more inclined to listen more and react more positively to men's advice, especially when it comes to personal behaviour [4]. In the context of the police sector in BiH, within which there are prejudices that this is a male area of work, aware and gender educated men in the position of the GFP could in the long run make a great contribution to breaking down prejudices from within. In any case, if a woman is appointed to the position of GFP, it is recommended that a man be appointed to the position of her deputy. The benefit of such an approach is, as emphasized, to avoid the impression that only women should be interested in gender issues [4].

Also, the practice of constantly appointing younger women to lower positions to this position should be avoided. Moreover, it is recommended that persons in senior positions be appointed to the position of the

GFP, who will have sufficient authority to perform the mandate within the organization [1].

The management of the organization should provide the contact person with adequate time, conditions and financial resources to perform his/her functions, as well as opportunities for acquiring additional knowledge and skills in order to make gender advocacy as effective as possible [2]. In terms of time, it is recommended that the GFP be given at least 20% of the working time for the specified function [3].

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

The GFP is one of the mechanisms that can improve the work of the police agency. The role of the GFP is not only to take into account the gender balance or better position of women within a particular organization, but to ensure that the entire organization and its employees integrate gender issues into all aspects of work. By integrating a gender perspective, police agencies create the conditions to respond to the security needs of different categories of the population.

However, a necessary condition for the functioning of the GFP is the awareness of the management of a particular organization

regarding gender issues and the existence of a strategy or program of gender mainstreaming at the level of the organization. In addition, care should be taken to appoint an adequate person to this position who ranks well in the organizational hierarchy. If a woman is appointed, it would be useful to appoint a man as her deputy, in order to avoid the belief that gender issues are exclusively a female matter. The contact person needs adequate resources and time to work, since it is not an additional job in addition to the existing one, but also continuous opportunities for additional development of expertise and skills in terms of gender concepts.

## Recommendations

*1. Appoint a GFP in police agencies where they do not currently exist.*

*1.1. When creating a new systematization of jobs, include the function of the GFP and clearly define all obligations and rights.*

*2. When compiling annual plans and programs of mandatory training for police officers and other employees, include gender concepts and the importance of gender equality as topics.*

*3. Perform continuous networking, exchange of experiences and education of GFP from police agencies. This can be done through projects and activities of the Association "Network of Police Agencies", but also other non-governmental organizations focused on the security sector and security issues in BiH.*

*3.1. Continuously raise awareness of the importance of gender issues and gender equality in the police sector in BiH, with a special focus on the management of police agencies.*

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