

## **FemCities Conference 2016**

### **Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM) experience – An on-going organisational change towards gender equality in Serbia**

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Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities – National association of local authorities in Serbia has a mission to advocate the interests, provide high quality services and support development and improvement of local self-government in Serbia through joint work of its members, according to European standards. Good local government provides high quality services to the citizens and gives them possibility to enjoy their rights which are mostly being achieved on local level. SCTM's vision is a local government based on the principles of good governance, professionalism, efficacy and efficiency. SCTM believes that integrating gender perspective in local governments activities can contribute to both human rights and to the increase of quality of services through more efficient resource allocation.

SCTM actively cooperates with CEMR and promotes the Charter for Equality of women and men in local life since 2009, first by translating and sharing the document at conferences and round tables, and with a more focused support in last five years. In 2009 Serbia adopted Law on equality between sexes, and this document assigned some duties to local level, for which they were unprepared. SCTM recognized that an intensive support will be needed. That is how the idea of a new project and international cooperation was born. In 2011 SCTM started implementation of a Program "Support to Local Governments in Serbia in the EU Integration Process" financed by Sweden and technically supported by SALAR (Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities). One of the five components of the program was "Gender Equality at Local Level" which was inspired by the national policies in area of gender equality (law, National Strategy and Action Plan for advancement of women and gender equality) and international framework defined by the Council of Europe, United Nations and EU. A strong focus was put on gender mainstreaming. The cooperation of SCTM and SALAR was recognised by the Observatory of the European Charter for equality of women and men in local life as a good practice example in applying the Charter in area of international cooperation and twinning. During implementation of the programme, SCTM had a Working Group on gender equality and formed a Network of professionals and elected representatives on local level in charge for gender equality issues. The Presidency and the Assembly of SCTM adopted several important documents to promote gender equality, such as: Declaration on respecting principle of gender equality at local level, SCTMs Policy document in the area of gender equality and Strategic plan that underlines gender equality as one of the main principles of the association's work. Even the Statute of SCTM was changed in order to secure a seat in the Presidency for at least one women mayor, as proposed by one member municipality.

Besides these important decisions, SCTM was actively working in raising capacities of local officials for gender equality work. Many training courses, round tables and conferences were organised in order to provide space for sharing knowledge and networking. The gap in

participation of women and men in decision making bodies of SCTM and at local level is still significant. To increase participation of women in decision making bodies is a challenge that will remain unresolved in the years to follow, nevertheless SCTM had an approach that gender perspective should become integral part of all processes regardless of who is in the boards. Stronger focus was put on raising capacities of practitioners and agenda setters on local level and within SCTM structures. SCTM used the potential of modern technologies to create an interactive database for collection of data from local level. Also, an online benchmarking tool was created to assess the performance of municipalities in their gender equality work. Networking of practitioners and decision makers' interest in working and advocating for gender equality was also supported by development of e-platform for professional exchange and horizontal communication. Not forgetting their basic purpose, SCTM was actively cooperating with national institutions in charge of gender equality, independent bodies, ministries, governmental bodies and representatives.

After five years of actively working on gender equality, the organisation became recognised as a relevant stakeholder in the issues of gender equality and no process on national level took place without the participation of SCTM. After completing the Program, SCTM started a new round of cooperation with SALAR financed by the Swedish government, so the support for gender mainstreaming at local level will continue until 2020. The new programme "Support to Serbian LSGs on the road to EU accession: enabling high quality services, stakeholder dialogue and efficient local administration" will have a strong focus on gender mainstreaming at local level, and a special attention will be paid to other thematic areas such as: environmental protection, improving business climate and risk reduction, and emergency management.

Very important aspect of SCTMs work in gender equality is for the organisation's own gender equality attitude to change, so that all the outcomes change as well. The process of organisational change is rather slow and difficult to register, but it should be sustainable and irreversible.

In summary, on one hand the work of SCTM was aiming at internal organisational change in improving capacities for mainstreaming gender perspective in all thematic areas that SCTM is covering, and on the other hand on advocating interests of local level on the national scene and providing services to municipalities such as: trainings, networking, experience exchange, tools and methods for better performance.