

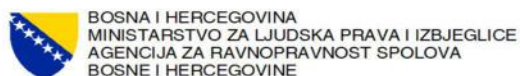
The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)

Report Study Tour on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Bosnia and Herzegovina



29–30 May 2025

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina



Introduction: Purpose and Context of the Study Tour

In 2025, the global community marks a significant milestone - the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Despite considerable progress since its adoption, numerous challenges persist across Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA), particularly in the realms of gender-based violence, economic empowerment, and political representation. These issues demand coordinated, context-specific responses grounded in policy and legislative reform.

Recognizing this imperative, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in partnership with the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) and the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA), organized a Study Tour on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The visit, held from 29 to 30 May 2025, brought together a diverse group of parliamentarians, researchers, and gender experts from EECA countries, aiming to facilitate peer learning, knowledge exchange, and capacity building.

BiH was selected as the host due to its rich, although complex, experience in institutionalizing gender equality. With its layered governance system and established legal frameworks, such as the Law on Gender Equality and entity-level gender mechanisms, BiH offers a valuable reference for countries seeking to strengthen implementation of gender-responsive legislation.

The tour was a direct follow-up to the 2024 Regional Parliamentary Conference in Dushanbe, and its objectives included:

- Enhancing understanding of BiH's legal and institutional gender equality structures.
- Sharing good practices and challenges across EECA countries.
- Exploring gender mainstreaming approaches, particularly in sexual and reproductive health (SRH), violence prevention, mental health, family policies, and labor laws.
- Strengthening inter-parliamentary and civil society collaboration on gender equality.

Day 1 – Session Summary: Opening Session and Institutional Overview

The Study Tour commenced on 29 May 2025 at the United Nations House in Sarajevo, with a warm welcome extended to participants by the organizing and host institutions.

Opening Remarks

Mrs. Marina Ridžić, Assistant Representative of UNFPA Bosnia and Herzegovina, opened the program, underlining UNFPA's central role in promoting gender equality in the country and expressed gratitude to the Government of Japan for supporting the initiative.

H.E. Toshihiro Aiki, Ambassador of Japan to BiH, emphasized Japan's commitment to international cooperation, particularly in areas of humanitarian aid, SRH, maternal health, and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. He referenced Japan's leadership in convening the Tokyo meeting on WPS and highlighted the Japan Trust Fund's strategic support for women's empowerment in BiH and globally.

Dr. Justine Coulson, UNFPA Representative for BiH, and Director for several Western Balkan countries, welcomed participants and acknowledged the longstanding partnership with AFPPD and APDA, particularly around shared priorities of population dynamics, SRH, and elimination of discrimination.

Mrs. Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić welcomed the delegation and expressed appreciation for the presence of all participants. She noted that BiH was the first in the region to establish gender centers at entity levels in Federation BiH and Republic Srpska, which later led to the formation of Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) BiH. She recalled the early support from the Government of Japan in institutionalizing gender equality mechanisms and highlighted the importance of regional cooperation, particularly between BiH and Central Asia, noting the shared experiences and opportunities for mutual learning.

Mrs. Filipović-Hadžiabdić reminded participants of key commemorative moments in 2025:

- 30 years of the Beijing Declaration,
- 25 years of UN Security Council Resolution 1325,
- 30 years since the Dayton Peace Agreement, and
- The 30th anniversary of the genocide in Srebrenica

Dr. Farukh Usmonov emphasized the AFPPD platform's role in uniting parliamentarians from 30 countries, addressing gender equality, youth engagement, and climate resilience. He spoke to the importance of strengthening national capacities to reduce female unemployment, increase women's entrepreneurship, and address unpaid care work.

Participant Introductions

During this session, participants briefly introduced themselves and shared their interest in the study visit. Throughout the opening session, participants expressed strong appreciation for Bosnia and Herzegovina's hospitality and the comprehensive program structure. Many emphasized the value of comparative learning and welcomed the opportunity to explore BiH's institutional and legal approaches to gender equality. There was a shared recognition of the importance of cross-cultural exchange, particularly among parliamentarians from countries with similar transitional and governance challenges. Several participants highlighted the need for continued inter-parliamentary collaboration and more frequent knowledge-sharing seminars to support legislative development and reform efforts in their own contexts. A common sentiment was the intent to adapt and apply BiH's good practices within their national frameworks, particularly in areas such as institutional coordination, legal harmonization, and gender-sensitive policymaking.



Session 2: Parliamentary Frameworks and Gender Representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Interactive Exchange with Participants

Following the initial presentations at the UN House, the study tour delegation proceeded to the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a session was held with members of the Commission for Gender Equality.

Mia Karamehić-Abazović, Deputy Chair of the Commission for Gender Equality, opened the session with an address. She acknowledged that some parliamentarians were unable to attend due to urgent obligations but stressed the importance of continuing the conversation, particularly in light of alarming trends such as the rise in femicide and domestic violence. She cited the Gracanica case, a particularly brutal femicide circulated widely via social media, as a wake-up call prompting legal reforms. As a result, the Parliament of the Federation of BiH (FBiH) has adopted key amendments to relevant laws, aligning them with international frameworks such as the Istanbul Convention and UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Karamehić-Abazović emphasized that despite the existence of institutional mechanisms and strategies, gender equality often remains under-prioritized. Many parliamentarians, she noted, are still not adequately familiar with gender equality frameworks.

Karamehić-Abazović explained that BiH's House of Representatives currently has 42 members, of whom only 10 are women, while the House of Peoples has just one woman among 15 representatives. While electoral lists are subject to gender quotas, the system of open lists - where voters can select individual candidates rather than only parties - tends to disadvantage women. The party-dominated culture further deepens male overrepresentation, as parties often give greater visibility and support to male candidates.

The Commission maintains strong cooperation with international actors such as UNFPA and UN Women, as well as local civil society organizations. The Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) - a state-level body under the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees - plays a central role in developing and monitoring national strategies.

A key discussion emerged around the effectiveness of electoral quotas. Despite the legal requirement for gender-balanced candidate lists, participants noted that open-list voting systems weak their impact. For example, women may be listed but fail to secure enough individual votes. In contrast, closed-list systems, where voters choose parties rather than individuals, tend to result in a higher percentage of elected women - up to 38-40% in some countries in the region.

Delegates reflected on how patriarchal cultural norms also affect women's chances. Voters, both male and female, often show a preference for male candidates. Moreover, women candidates are subjected to double standards: their family roles are often emphasized in media coverage (e.g., being a mother of two or three children), which raises questions about their ability to balance public duties with private responsibilities. This is rarely the case for male candidates.

Participants shared comparative insights from their countries:

- Hon. Mazhitova Sharapatkan, MP Kyrgyzstan: A delegate highlighted the role of civil society and international cooperation in increasing female political representation. The country's new electoral law mandates at least one woman per electoral district - a strategy aimed at achieving 30 out of 90 parliamentary seats for women. However, challenges remain due to rising radicalism, which has adversely impacted women's rights and employment.
- Hon. Surayyo Dustmurodzoda, MP Tajikistan: Delegates noted 28–30% female representation in parliament and a 40-42% gender target in the presidency's nominations. They emphasized strong representation of women in education and health sectors (73% and 77% respectively) and highlighted 400 legislatives adopted in five years, including those related to the protection of women and children.
- Hon. Seyilov Bayly, a Member of Parliament from Turkmenistan, noted that while no quotas are in place, approximately 26% of parliamentarians are women. This highlights the active participation of women in the country's socio-political life. Women hold high-ranking positions, including Speaker of Parliament, Ombudsperson, and Deputy Cabinet Ministers. The country maintains an active partnership with the UN under the 2021–2025 cooperation agreement.
- Hon. Lidija Petkoska, MP North Macedonia: A participant explained that the 40% quota is enforced strictly where every third spot on the electoral list must be reserved for a woman. This structural rule ensures compliance and greater female representation.



Session 3: Strengthening Multisectoral Support for Survivors of Sexual Violence – Site Visit to the General Hospital “Prim. dr. Abdulah Nakaš”

The study tour continued with a site visit to the General Hospital “Prim. Dr. Abdulah Nakaš” in Sarajevo, home to Bosnia and Herzegovina's first Crisis Center for Victims of Sexual Violence. This groundbreaking initiative reflects the country's commitment to

multisectoral approaches in protecting survivors and ensuring access to comprehensive care.

Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić, Director of the Agency for Gender Equality of BiH (AGE), who expressed appreciation to the hospital's leadership for their hospitality and partnership, opened the session. She emphasized the significance of the memorandum of cooperation, signed between the hospital and relevant institutions, to establish the center and implement standardized procedures in cases of sexual violence.

Dr. Armina Rovčanin-Osmanović, specialist in gynecology and obstetrics and the key driver behind the initiative, outlined the complexity of establishing such a center. The protocol developed in collaboration with AGE, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, prosecutor's office, Ministry of social work, Ministry of Health, and the Foundation of Local Democracy (FLD), serves as a structured flowchart for managing cases of sexual violence. Although such cases are not frequent, they require immediate, sensitive, and coordinated action across institutions.

The center allows victims to bypass traditional bureaucratic and institutional barriers. Instead of going through a police station, victims are directly brought to the hospital by a non-marked vehicle, often accompanied by plainclothes female officers. A special entrance and waiting room are designated for these cases to ensure privacy and security.

The hospital protocol includes:

- Admission under NN (anonymous) code to protect identity.
- Immediate psychological and social support upon arrival.
- Comprehensive medical examination by both an emergency doctor (external injuries) and a gynecologist (reproductive health), assisted by forensic specialists.
- Use of rape kits, standardized and produced at the national level.
- Initial interviews and statement collection conducted on-site by the prosecutor, avoiding re-traumatization by reducing the number of interviews and locations.
- Continuous follow-up by a dedicated psychologist, who accompanies the survivor through the legal process if it proceeds.

This integrated response model significantly reduces the number of steps a survivor must take and increases the quality of care and dignity throughout the process.

Dr. Gavrankapetanović, Director of the Hospital, spoke about the institution's longstanding tradition and deep sensitivity to gender-based violence, especially in the context of Bosnia's recent history of war-related sexual violence. He emphasized the hospital's unwavering commitment to the center and its mission.

The Foundation for Local Democracy (FLD) plays a crucial role as a civil society actor, building bridges between institutions and ensuring accountability. FLD and AGE highlighted that the GREVIO report (2023), monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, called for specialized institutional support for survivors. In response, AGE facilitated the establishment of similar specialized rooms in Tuzla, with Mostar planned as the next city.

AGE also fosters international cooperation and has benefited from expertise exchange with Spain, including training for medical personnel. They hope that similar exchanges and training programs can be extended to Central Asian countries.

Delegates engaged in a robust discussion around victim privacy, reporting mechanisms, and sustainability:

- Privacy is protected through the NN code system and discreet transportation protocols. All institutions involved in the protocol have received internal training, ensuring coordinated implementation.
- A psychologist funded through donor support, who remains in contact with the survivor throughout any legal proceedings, ensures follow-up care.
- Mandatory reporting: In BiH, healthcare institutions are legally obligated to report all suspected cases of sexual violence to the prosecutor's office, even if the survivor does not wish to press charges. This contrasts with systems like Sweden, where evidence can be stored and reporting delayed for up to five years.
- The low rate of reported cases (under 1%) was attributed to societal stigma and mandatory reporting laws, which may discourage survivors from seeking help.
- Delegate from Armenia noted that donor funds remain the primary source of financing, and emphasized the need for stronger state support.

The session concluded with a guided tour of the Crisis Center, where participants met staff and observed the specially designed spaces that reflect a survivor-centered approach. Delegates commended the sophisticated integration of health, legal, and psychosocial services, and many expressed interest in replicating similar models in their home countries.



Session 4: Legal Education and Gender Equality – Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo

The afternoon session of the first day took place at the Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo, an institution with a distinguished history in legal education and a pioneering role in the institutionalization of gender studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The session offered a deep dive into the evolution of gender-sensitive legal education and the ongoing efforts to bridge academia, policy, and legal frameworks in advancing gender equality.

Professor Mirza Hebib, Vice Dean for International Cooperation, who welcomed the delegation on behalf of the faculty, opened the session. He highlighted the longstanding international engagement of the Faculty of Law, particularly within Eurasian academic circles, and emphasized the faculty's role in initiating projects focused on gender, law, and social transformation.

Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić paid tribute to Professor Jasna Bakišić Muftić, a pioneer of gender studies in the region and who was present in Beijing in 1995 when the

Declaration was adopted and was among the first to write on women's rights in its aftermath. Filipović-Hadžiabdić acknowledged Professor Bakišić Muftić's foundational role in launching regional gender studies programs and embedding gender into the legal education landscape.

In her address, Professor Jasna Bakišić Muftić reflected on three decades of work to institutionalize gender in legal education. She described early resistance rooted in ignorance and traditionalism, and how today's challenges lie in retrenchment and political marginalization of gender issues. Despite such barriers, the faculty has built a solid academic foundation, thanks to collaborative support from younger colleagues and the international academic community.

She outlined the development of the Master's Program in Gender and Law, a joint effort with Professor Amila Ždralović, and regional partners from Croatia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, and Italy. The curriculum now integrates gender both as a standalone subject and across interdisciplinary areas such as criminal law, family law, and social protection.

Professor Bakišić Muftić underscored that topics such as violence against women, political participation, and media representation of female politicians are no longer niche themes - they are central to understanding legal inequalities in practice. Nevertheless, gender topics in law are often relegated to "female" domains (family, social law), while traditionally "male" areas like finance or governance remain gender-insensitive.

Professor Amila Ždralović, who launched the Gender and Law master's program in 2022, elaborated on the program's structure. She explained that gender perspectives are merged into multiple legal disciplines and that faculty-wide assessments, supported by the FIGAP program, confirmed that nearly all-legal faculties in BiH include at least one gender-relevant course in their curriculum.

Ždralović emphasized the broader academic-advocacy ecosystem developing around the program. She chairs the Gender Equality Council at the University, which has produced guidelines for preventing gender-based violence and is currently finalizing a rulebook on disciplinary responsibility for gender-based misconduct. She also mentioned the soon-to-be-published first issue of the Journal for Women's Studies, another institutional step toward mainstreaming gender discourse.

She spoke openly about the synergies and tensions in collaboration with parliamentarians: while researchers are often invited to thematic sessions of the Parliamentary Commission on Gender Equality and sometimes influence changes, the success of such collaboration depends heavily on political will, ideology, and openness among MPs.

NGOs also play an essential role - organizing events where academics and politicians meet, creating spaces for advocacy and policy innovation. One successful example involved a property rights project, which resulted in a policy recommendation requiring spousal consent during property sales, aiming to address the low rates of female property ownership.

Participants raised the terminological ambiguity between *gender* and *sex*, a contested issue across the region. Faculty members stressed the importance of aligning national terminology with international standards, as established in documents like the Beijing Declaration and CEDAW. Debates around gender identity, same-sex families, and

emerging social realities exist across all EECA countries, and freedom and human dignity must remain guiding principles in legal interpretation.

There was consensus that progressive legal norms do not automatically produce social change. Legal standards are only effective when combined with implementation tools, awareness campaigns, and gradual cultural transformation.

An interesting question was raised about the receptivity of Generation Z to gender discourse. Faculty noted that while the overall share of radical or highly liberal students hasn't increased dramatically, female students are visibly more self-aware and assertive. A growing number now engage critically with gender issues.

Regarding career pathways, it was noted that women are highly represented in the judiciary, particularly among judges and prosecutors, but remain underrepresented in the executive branch and higher-level political roles. This disparity highlights the importance of embedding gender awareness not just in legal education, but also in the culture of governance and administration.



Day 2 – Session 1: Strengthening Sexual and Reproductive Health Systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The second day of the study tour began with an in-depth session hosted by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCP) of Bosnia and Herzegovina, held at the Council of Ministers' Building in Sarajevo. The session focused on intergovernmental coordination, strategic frameworks, and public health policies, particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and cancer prevention.

Biljana Čamur Veselinović, Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, opened the session by introducing the MCP's broad mandate. As one of nine ministries of the Council of Ministers of BiH, MCP's competencies include coordinating inter-entity and inter-sectoral policies in education, science, culture, employment, and health. In the field of health, where core competencies rest with the entities (Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska) and cantons, MCP plays a central coordinating and harmonization role, working with international partners and local institutions.

There are eight public universities and eight public medical faculties across BiH, with university clinical centers in Banja Luka, Foca, Sarajevo, Mostar, and Tuzla, and hospitals in all major cities. MCP coordinates activities across these institutions through the Conference of Ministers of Health, chaired by the MCP Minister, and maintains active partnerships with the EU, WHO, UNFPA, and UNICEF.

The MCP representative emphasized the alarming rates of cancer-related mortality: 18.7% in FBiH, 16.47% in RS and 16.7% in Brčko District (2020 data). These statistics have urged the development of national-level strategies, such as the Strategic Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health, and entity-level action plans. Key initiatives include cancer-screening programs for cervical, breast, colon, and prostate cancers, which are supported by UNFPA and conducted in partnership with the EU.

A representative from the EU Delegation to BiH restated the EU's longstanding support to the health sector, having invested more than €50 million, with an additional €11.5 million program pending implementation. The representative clarified that health falls under the "soft acquis", meaning EU member states are encouraged, but not required, to align health policies. The EU Commission's recognition of the need for preventive care, particularly in oncology, has enabled ongoing investments, especially in early detection programs and screening infrastructure.

Ms. Enida Ćerimagić, UNFPA's National Program Analyst for SRH, presented UNFPA's "Three Zeros" Transformative Goals for 2030: Zero unmet need for contraception, Zero preventable maternal deaths and Zero gender-based violence and harmful practices. She elaborated on UNFPA's technical and financial support for the development of medical guidelines, including the clinical protocol for rape survivors, which laid the groundwork for the multisectoral model seen during the Day 1 hospital visit.

UNFPA has also been instrumental in:

- Introducing the HPV vaccine in Sarajevo Canton, later extended across FBiH, RS, and Brčko.
- Initiating a comprehensive cancer research initiative, consisting of seven interlinked studies (e.g., legislative analysis, service mapping, data review etc.), designed to inform evidence-based screening programs for cervical, breast, colorectal, and prostate cancers.

These programs underscore the complexity of BiH's health governance and the importance of securing consent and coordination across all administrative levels to access and utilize EU funds effectively. In addition, support from bilateral donors, particularly Japan, has been crucial, both financially and through capacity-building partnerships.

A representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) outlined its two-year cooperation cycles with BiH, focusing on health system reforms, crisis response, and non-communicable diseases. WHO provides technical assistance and quality assurance, especially in screening-based prevention of cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

The dialogue that followed raised critical questions from visiting parliamentarians:

- Hon. Tsovinar Vardanyan, MP Armenia asked about BiH's health insurance model. It was explained that mandatory public health insurance exists at the entity and canton levels. Employed individuals are insured through their contracts, while unemployed persons can gain coverage by registering with the Employment Office or through spousal rights.
- Dr. Ikegami Kiyoko, Vice Chair/Secretary General of APDA inquired why both MCP and entity ministries oversee health. MCP clarified its coordinating role, which was established when the Council of Ministers was expanded. Despite multi-layered governance, cooperation is strong, as demonstrated by the

functioning Conference of Ministers and the Health Agency with participation from all levels.

- Hon. Mohd Islam Mohd Isa, MP Malaysia asked whether BiH allows public patients to access private healthcare. The answer confirmed that public insurance covers care in private clinics if the public system cannot provide timely service, with partial or full cost reimbursement depending on the case.
- Ms. Karakulova Mehri, officer from UNFPA Turkmenistan raised a question about gender mainstreaming in health policy. MCP confirmed that gender-responsiveness is integrated into all national strategic documents, across sectors like health, education, and social policy, in line with EU alignment efforts.

The session concluded with consensus that early detection, intersectoral coordination, and universal access must remain central pillars of BiH's approach to public health, particularly SRH. Delegates appreciated the transparency and complexity of BiH's model, as well as the multi-level partnerships sustaining it.



Day 2 – Session 2: Advancing Family-Friendly Policies and Gender-Sensitive Labor Reform

The second session of the day took place at the Federal Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and centered on legislative efforts to promote gender equality through labor laws, parental leave reform, and care-sensitive policies. The session brought together parliamentarians and commission members with representatives of UNFPA and visiting delegates to exchange insights on reconciling work and family life in ways that empower women and foster demographic resilience.

Ms. Jelena Pekić, Member of the Parliament of FBiH, introduced the session by emphasizing the relevance of policies that balance professional and private life, including parental leave, flexible work arrangements, and support for family caregiving. She noted how such measures are key to increasing women's participation in the labor market and responding to ongoing demographic challenges.

Mr. Dragan Mioković, Speaker of the House of Representatives of FBiH, provided a structural overview of the two-house FBiH Parliament, composed of 98 directly elected representatives in the House of Representatives and 80 cantonal delegates in the House of Peoples. He stressed that gender equality is not a marginal issue in BiH's democratic framework, but a strategic imperative merged into the legislative agenda. Currently, only 59 of the 188 FBiH parliamentarians are women, falling short of the 33% threshold. The Speaker expressed a commitment to ensuring greater representation in future election cycles and to leveraging legal and budgetary tools to build a more equitable society.

In a personal reflection, Mioković noted the importance of shifting societal expectations, recounting how his own family recently opted for shared parental leave, a practice once considered taboo. He linked such individual decisions to broader policy efforts that seek to dismantle patriarchal norms and enable full gender equality.

Ms. Marijana Šipuljak, presented recent findings on the gendered burden of unpaid care work. In BiH, women spend an average of nearly 7 hours per day on unpaid domestic labor - almost double the EU average of 3.5 hours. These imbalances not only hinder gender equality but suppress economic activation and worsen demographic trends.

She outlined importance of UNFPA's partnership with parliamentary commissions to align national laws with the EU Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and caregivers. Key reform proposals include:

- Differentiation between maternity and parental leave: 42 days of mandatory maternity leave, followed by parental leave that can be shared between both parents.
- Flexible usage of parental leave: Allowing parents to alternate, work part-time, or divide leave periods.
- Breastfeeding rights during working hours: Up to 2 hours of paid leave, as per ILO conventions.
- Flexible work arrangements: Institutionalizing contracted flexible schedules to support caregiving responsibilities.
- Paid caregiving leave: 5 days per year for employees who care for a sick family member.
- Paternity leave: 10 paid working days for fathers after childbirth.

These proposals, many of which were generated in joint workshops with MPs, aim to dismantle gender stereotypes, redistribute care responsibilities, and create structural support for working families.

Mr. Fuad Abaspahić, Head of the Commission for Labor and Social Protection, emphasized the importance of male engagement in advancing gender equality. He affirmed that these proposals are not "women's issues," but family issues, economic issues, and societal issues. Abaspahić committed to advocating for the proposed amendments within parliamentary structures and emphasized the importance of modeling shared responsibility as parliamentarians.

The proposal package is expected to move forward under the leadership of the Ministry of Labor, with broad support from across party lines. The Commission is confident that the draft Labor Law will include these reforms, paving the way for a more balanced and equitable labor framework.

Participants from visiting delegations provided reflections and country comparisons:

- Hon. Surayyo Dustmurodzoda, MP Tajikistan: Maternity leave of up to 2 years is available, with monthly financial support and free pediatric health services until the age of 5. Islamic values influence family structures, with men traditionally seen as providers. However, the state is increasing support for early childhood services and emphasizing parental responsibility through the Constitution.
- Hon. Seyilov Bayly, MP Turkmenistan shared Turkmenistan's experience, noting that mothers are entitled to 56 days of leave (70 days for complicated births) with a guarantee of job retention for up to 3 years. Mothers with 8 children receive the "Maternal Love" Order, as well as exemption from utility payments.

The retirement age for women is 57, and it decreases depending on the number of children. Women who have given birth to 8 or more children retire at age 52. The Fund for the Protection of Children's Rights supports children in need not only within the country but also beyond its borders.

- Hon. Mohd Islam Mohd Isa, MP Malaysia: Raised a question on religious and cultural pluralism in BiH. Mioković responded by affirming BiH's multiethnic and multireligious heritage as a source of strength rather than division. While some political actors exploit differences, society remains largely unified, especially in times of crisis or shared need.
- Dr. Ikegami Kiyoko, Vice-Chair/Secretary General of APDA: Asked about BiH's EU accession efforts. It was explained that BiH must align with 14–15 accession chapters, with human rights and rule of law being the most challenging. LGBTQ+ rights and judicial independence remain contentious but necessary areas for alignment. Despite recent political standstills, economic and public support for EU membership remains strong.
- Hon. Tsovinar Vardanyan, MP Armenia: Noted during the discussion, she mentioned that she is actively working on introducing family-friendly policies in her own country and expressed a deep understanding of the challenges involved.



Cultural Program and Hosted Lunch: Experiencing Sarajevo's Heritage

Following the morning sessions on health and family policy, participants were invited to explore Sarajevo's rich cultural and historical heritage through a guided walking tour of the city. Organized by the Cantonal Tourist Organization, the tour showcased Sarajevo's unique blend of Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and modern architecture, illustrating the country's centuries-old tradition of multiculturalism and coexistence. Participants visited key sites in the Old Town (Baščaršija) and the symbolic point where East meets West, experiencing firsthand the layered identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital.

As a highlight of the cultural itinerary, the group was welcomed to Saburina Kuća, one of the oldest preserved residential houses in Sarajevo, which opens its doors exclusively for special guests. This intimate setting provided participants with an authentic glimpse into traditional Bosnian architecture, hospitality, and cuisine.

Mr. Irfan Čengić, Mayor of the Municipality of Stari Grad, greeted the delegation, expressing his warm welcome and pride in hosting the group in Sarajevo's oldest municipality. He emphasized the importance of international cooperation, dialogue, and mutual understanding, especially in a city that historically represents a meeting point of civilizations and cultures.

The lunch served at Saburina Kuća featured traditional Bosnian dishes, and the environment offered a serene and reflective moment for participants to continue informal conversations and strengthen personal and professional connections. The participants, who expressed admiration for Sarajevo's hospitality, resilience, and architectural beauty, especially appreciated this cultural pause.



Final Session: Media, Geopolitics, and the Power of Narrative – Visit to Al Jazeera Balkans

The final formal session of the study tour was held at the headquarters of Al Jazeera Balkans (AJB) in Sarajevo. This session offered participants an opportunity to reflect on the role of media in shaping public discourse, especially around sensitive issues such as gender equality, democracy, conflict, and foreign influence.

Participants were welcomed by Mr. Ehmed Fočo, Director of the Al Jazeera Documentary Festival, who introduced the work of AJB as a regional media outlet that employs journalists from across the Western Balkans, operating bureaus throughout the region with editorial management centralized in Sarajevo. He emphasized the station's commitment to objective reporting, journalistic ethics, and covering underreported stories that shape public understanding.

Harun Karčić, Executive Producer and Editor of the geopolitical program *Granice Istoka* (*Borders of the East*), delivered a compelling presentation on global transitions and regional vulnerabilities. He reflected on the origins of AJB in 2010 and the evolution of regional media in the context of foreign geopolitical interests.

Karčić discussed:

- AJB's mission to unpack global events and connect them to life in the Western Balkans.
- The station's coverage of major crises such as the wars in Syria and Ukraine, the migrant crisis, and the annexation of Crimea.
- The shared post-communist transition between the Western Balkans and Central Asian countries, marked by economic upheaval, corruption, and increased exposure to foreign influence from actors including Russia, China, Turkey, the U.S., and the EU.

Participants learned that while some Western media institutions and donors are downsizing or closing (e.g., IRI, USAID, NDI), other global actors are filling the vacuum, such as TRT (Turkey), TIKA, Xinhua (China), Russia Today, and others. Karčić cited an example in which a podcast previously funded by USAID was later approached by a

Chinese news agency offering substantially higher funding in exchange for positive media content about China's technological and defense policies.

This sparked meaningful reflection among participants about media independence, ethical journalism, and the strategic role of media in democracy. Karčić encouraged parliamentarians to remember: *"You need the media, and they need you."*

Following the session, participants were invited on a guided tour of the AJB studios, where they saw firsthand the production spaces and editorial offices. The informal setting allowed for open conversation and questions about media cooperation, ethical standards, and regional storytelling.

Participants expressed appreciation for the transparent discussion and valued the opportunity to explore how narratives are shaped, challenged, and constructed in a dynamic and complex region.



Conclusion and Wrap-Up: Reflections and Farewell

The study tour concluded with a farewell dinner at the Hotel Mövenpick, attended by participants, organizers, and key institutional partners.

The evening was marked by reflection, networking, and a shared commitment to continuing regional and interregional collaboration on gender equality and inclusive development.

Participants left Sarajevo inspired by BiH's complex, yet resilient model, and equipped with actionable insights to inform legislative efforts in their own countries.

Appendix 1: Program

Study Tour on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Bosnia and Herzegovina

29-30 May 2025

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Programme

28 May 2025, Wednesday

Day 0: Arrival and check in to the [Hotel Movenpick Sarajevo](#)

(Logistic Note includes all addresses and indicates free dinner in hotel or locations nearby)

29 May 2025, Thursday

Day 1: Examining Legal Frameworks and Institutional Mechanisms

8.20 Meeting at the lobby to depart for the UN House

08.45-9.00 Welcoming coffee at the UN cafeteria garden

09:00 - 09:30 Welcome Session at the UN House

- MC: Justine Coulson, the UNFPA Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Country Director for the Republic of Albania, Republic of Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia, and Director for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)
- H.E. Toshihiro Aiki, The Ambassador of Japan to Bosnia and Herzegovina,
- Samra Filipovic Hadziabdic, Director of the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Farrukh Usmonov, Executive Director, Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD)

09.30 - 09.45 Session 1: Introduction of Participating Parliamentarians; Objectives of the Study Tour and modality

MC: Marina Ridjic, Assistant Representative, UNFPA CO BIH

09.45-10.15 Session 2: BiH Landscape: Navigating Governance, Gender Mechanisms, and Legal Frameworks

Presenter: Samra Filipovic Hadziabdic, Director of the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina

- To provide participants with a clear understanding of the governmental structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including its key institutions and levels of governance.
- To analyze the existing gender mechanisms in place within BiH, identifying their roles, responsibilities, and effectiveness in promoting gender equality.
- To critically examine the relevant legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms in BiH that address gender equality, including their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for potential improvement.

10.15-10.45 Q&A (30min)

10.45-11.00 Walk to the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (15min walk)

11.00 - 12.00 Session 3: Parliamentary Assembly of BiH and understanding BiH's Legal Framework for Gender Equality

Speakers:

Mia Karamehić- Abazović, Deputy Chair of the Commission for Gender Equality in the Parliamentary Assembly

Rejhana Dervišević, Deputy Chair of the Commission for Gender Equality in the Parliamentary Assembly

Marina Pendeš, Member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights in the House of Peoples of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Former Minister of Defense of Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Presentation by the Commission on Gender Equality of the BiH Parliament on key areas of work aligned with global Conventions.
- Gender Equality Initiatives and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)
- Interactive Q&A session.

12.20
Nakaš"

Walk toward the General Hospital "Prim. dr. Abdulah

12.30-13.30

Session 4: Site visit, Hospital Abdulah Nakas, The Rape crisis centre

Host: Mr. Med. sci. Armina Rovčanin-Osmanović, Specialist in Gynecology and Obstetrics at the General Hospital "Prim. dr. Abdulah Nakaš" in Sarajevo

- To gain a comprehensive understanding of the current health support services and organizational structure within Hospital Abdulah Nakas relevant to survivors of sexual violence.
- To learn about the operational framework and specific services provided by the Rape Crisis Center, including their integration with hospital services

13:30 - 15:00

Lunch at Four Seasons Restaurant

15.10

Bus Pick-up in front of the Restaurant

15:30 - 17:00

Session 5: Faculty of Law in Sarajevo

- Speakers: Vice Dean for Scientific Research, Professor Amila Ždralović
- Vice Dean for International Cooperation, Professor Mirza Hebib
- Professor and Lead gender expert: Jasna Bakšić Muftić

- To provide participants with a concise overview of the historical development of the legal system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a specific focus on tracing the key milestones and reforms related to gender equality legislation from its inception to the present day.
- To critically examine the current national and entity-level legislative frameworks in Bosnia and Herzegovina that address gender equality, identifying their core principles, scope, and mechanisms for implementation
 - Speakers: Amra Hadžić, Project manager, Foundation for local democracy
 - Selma Begić, Project manager, Foundation for local democracy
- To gain a comprehensive understanding of the Foundation for Local Democracy's vision of a society with equal opportunities and their mission focused on protecting and advancing the human rights of marginalized groups, with a specific emphasis on their recognized role as a leading non-profit organization in the gender empowerment and protection area within Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- To delve into the Foundation for Local Democracy's core principles and strategies, particularly their work in combating gender-based violence and empowering women. This session aims to provide participants with a practical understanding of effective approaches and identify best solutions utilized by the Foundation in the field of gender equality and protection within the BiH context

17.00

Bus Pick-up in front of the Faculty

Optional:

- a) Cable car drive, 17.30, the host is the Cantonal Minister of Culture and Sport, Kenan Magoda
- b) The other group goes to the hotel or stays in the city

Return by the cable car in the Sarajevo city center by 19.00

Free time

30 May 2025, Friday

Day 2: Addressing Key Challenges and Fostering Collaboration

09:30 - 10:30 Session 1: Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH (The Council of Ministers' Building)

- Participation: Entity-level Health Authorities
- Speakers: To Be Confirmed (TBC)
- Thematic Workshop 1: Strengthening SRH Services and Cervical Cancer Prevention
 - Presentation on BiH's strategies and programs for SRH, including cervical cancer prevention and treatment.
 - Panel discussion with healthcare professionals, policymakers, and civil society representatives working in this area.
 - Interactive session: Identifying adaptable strategies for EECA countries.

11.00 - 12.00 Session 2: Thematic Workshop 3: Promoting Family-Friendly Policies and Human Capital Development (Federal Parliament) confirmed

Moderators: Lana Prlić and Jelena Pekić, Members of the Parliament of the Federation of BiH

Speakers:

- Dragan Mioković, Speaker of the Federal Parliament of BiH, House of representatives
- Alma Kratina, Head of the Commission for Gender Equality
- Fuad Abaspahić, Head of the Commission for Labor and Social Protection
- Presentation on BiH's family-friendly policies (e.g., parental leave, childcare support) and their impact on women's economic participation and demographic trends.
- Discussion on human capital development strategies with a gender lens, including labor laws and skills development.
- Sharing of policy examples and potential adaptations for EECA countries.

12:15 - 14:00 OPTIONAL

- a) Jummah Prayer (Fridays) with the Mayor of Old Town, Irfan Čengić
- b) Where East Meets West: Sarajevo city

14:30 - 15:30 Lunch hosted by the Mayor of Old Town, Mr. Irfan Čengić, at Saburina Kuća

16:00 - 17:00 Session 3: Visit to Al Jazeera Balkans Office

Ehmed Fočo, Director of Aljazeera Documentary Festival

Harun Karčić, Executive producer, Current Affairs, Aljazeera Balkans

Nejra Kozarić, Executive producer, Aljazeera Documentary Festival

- Media tour: Exploring fact-checking methods, content creation workflows, and relevant digital tools.
- Discussion with editors on the "Giving Voice to the Voiceless" agenda and best practices for collaboration between Al Jazeera, human rights defenders, and UN agencies in Bosnia.

19:00 - 20:30 Wrap-up and Farewell Dinner - Hotel Mövenpick

Appendix 2: List of participants

Participants' List				
No		Name	Country	Position
Participants from Asia				
1	Hon.	Tsovinar Vardanyan	Armenia	MP, Chair of Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs
3	Dr.	Ikegami Kiyoko	Japan	Vice-Chair/Secretary General of APDA
4	Hon.	Nurgul Tau	Kazakhstan	MP; Secretary to Committee for Social and Cultural Development
5	Hon.	Mazhitova Sharapatkan	Kyrgyzstan	MP; Member of Committee on budget, economy and fiscal policy
6	Hon.	Kubanychbekov Ilimbek	Kyrgyzstan	MP; Member of Committee on social policies
7	Hon. Dato	Mohd Islam Mohd Isa	Malaysia	MP; Member of Committee on Public Account
8	Mr.	Norfikri Azri	Malaysia	Parliamentary officer
9	Hon.	Lidija Petkoska	North Macedonia	MP; Member of Committee on equal opportunities for women and men
10	Hon.	Seyilov Bayly	Turkmenistan	MP; Member of the Committee for Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms
11	Ms.	Charyeva Ejebay	Turkmenistan	Parliamentary officer
12	Ms.	Muradova Feride	Turkmenistan	First Secretary of the International Organizations Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
13	Ms.	Karakulova Mehri	Turkmenistan	UNFPA Turkmenistan
14	Hon.Ms.	Dustmurodzoda Surayyo	Tajikistan	MP; Deputy Chair of Committee on foreign affairs
15	Mr.	Qahhorov Abduaziz	Tajikistan	Adviser to Deputy Speaker
16	Dr.	Usmonov Farrukh	Japan	Executive Director of AFPPD
Officials from Host (Bosnia and Herzegovina)				
17	Ms	Samra Filipović-Hadžiabdić	BiH	Director, Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina
18	Ms	Mia Karamehić-Abazović	BiH	Deputy Chair, Commission for Gender Equality, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina
19	Ms	Rejhana Dervišević	BiH	Deputy Chair, Commission for Gender Equality, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina
20	Ms	Marina Pendeš	BiH	Member, House of Peoples, Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Former Minister of Defence
21	Ms	Dr. Armina Rovčanin-Osmanović	BiH	Specialist in Gynecology and Obstetrics, General Hospital "Prim. dr. Abdulah Nakaš", Sarajevo
22	Ms	Prof. Amila Ždralović	BiH	Vice Dean for Scientific Research, Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo
23	Mr	Prof. Mirza Hebib	BiH	Vice Dean for International Cooperation, Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo
24	Ms	Prof. Jasna Bakšić Muftić	BiH	Professor and Lead Gender Expert, Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo
25	Ms	Amra Hadžić	BiH	Project Manager, Foundation for Local Democracy
26	Ms	Selma Begić	BiH	Project Manager, Foundation for Local Democracy
27	Ms	Biljana Čamur Veselinović	BiH	The Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina
28	Ms	Lana Prlić	BiH	Member of Parliament, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Vice President, Social Democratic Party (SDP BiH)
29	Mr	Dragan Mioković	BiH	Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
30	Ms	Alma Kratina	BiH	Head, Commission for Gender Equality, Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
31	Ms	Jelena Pekić	BiH	Member of Parliament, House of Peoples, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Deputy Speaker, Sarajevo Canton Assembly
32	Mr	Fuad Abaspahić	BiH	Head, Commission for Labor and Social Protection, Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
33	Mr	Irfan Čengić	BiH	Mayor, Municipality of Stari Grad, Sarajevo
34	Mr	Predrag Puharić	BiH	Sarajevo City Mayor
35	Mr	Edhem Fočo	BiH	Director, Al Jazeera Documentary Festival
36	Mr	Harun Karčić	BiH	Executive Producer, Current Affairs, Al Jazeera Balkans
37	Ms	Nejra Kozarić	BiH	Executive Producer, Al Jazeera Documentary Festival
Partners of UNFPA, International Organizations and NGOs				
38	Ms.	Justine Coulson	BiH	UNFPA Representative
39	Ms.	Hande Diker	Turkiye	UNFPA Regional Programme Analyst
40	Mr.	Marina Ridjic	BiH	UNFPA CO
41	Ms.	Una Biser	BiH	UNFPA CO
42	Ms.	Edina Musmulja	BiH	UNFPA CO
Embassy				
43	H.E.	Aiki Toshihiro	Japan	Ambasador
Interpreters/Photographer/Videographer				
44	Mr.	Damir Omeragic	BiH	Interpreter (EN)
45	Ms.	Svjetlana Pavelic	BiH	Interpreter (EN)
46	Ms.	Natalia Dmitrieva	BiH	Interpreter (RU)
47	Ms.	Inna Bazdarevic		Interpreter
48	Ms.	Imrana Kapetanović	BiH	Photo
49	Mr.	Aziz Čeho	BiH	Video
50	Mr.	Ahmed Bradarić	BiH	journalist