FROM CRISIS TO CAMPUS:
A STUDY ON GENDER EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BALKANS' POST-CRISIS ENVIRONMENT.

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Executive summary

This paper explores the post-crisis environments of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and Albania, focusing on how leadership in higher education and society impacts gender dynamics and supports gender equality. It examines the post-conflict period in Croatia and BiH, and post-communism in Albania., through interviews with EDI officers, gender equality experts, and university leaders. The study highlights the importance of addressing gender roles, equality, and gender-based violence (GBV) in these regions, with institutional governance, leadership, and bottom-up approaches identified as key interventions.

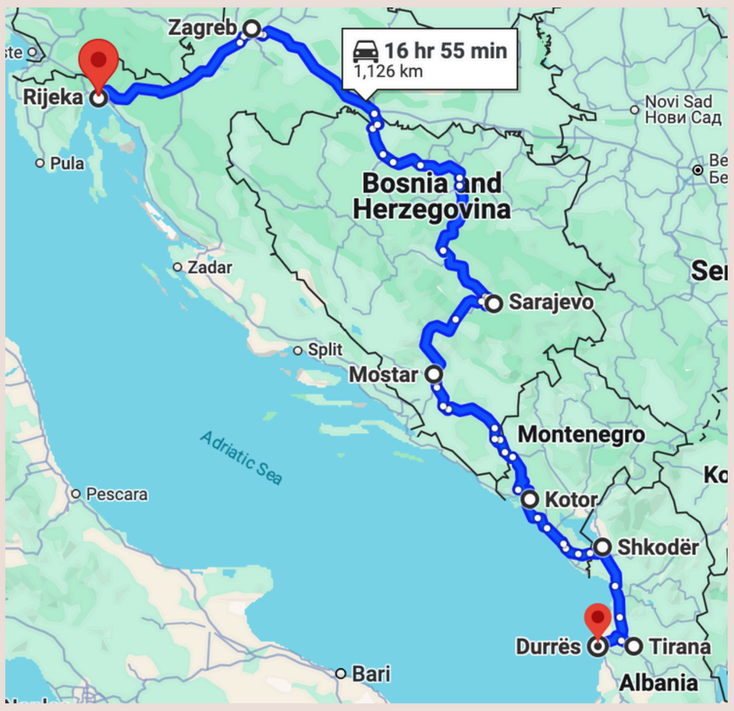

Figure 1
A map of all the places we visited during our research trip

Objective

- Aim to find the links between how the post-crisis environment of the Balkans is woven into gender and gender experiences
- Focus research to higher education

Methodology

- Data collection was based on semi-structured qualitative interviews allowing us to engage with cross-cultural lived experiences
- Utilised a purposive sampling method
- Interviewed EDI officers, gender equality experts, and university senior management professionals
- Analysed data thematically using tags to identify patterns
- Limitations included language barriers, recall bias, an overrepresentation of women, and geographical limitations.

Results and Discussion

After conducting the interviews, we were able to pull out five key themes which encapsulate how the crises have shaped gender experiences and propositions for meaningful change.

Narratives, perception and memory of the post-crisis environment	Gender equality	Gender-based violence	Institutional governance and Leadership
• Narratives act both as a recall and a symbolic tool, carrying stereotypes, as well as "truths" that vary across ethnic groups. • Given the multiple and contradicting narratives, we affirm the importance of open dialogue in higher education institutions to construct new narratives.	• Issues can be categorised into three areas: higher education, the workplace, and inequality denial. • The professional advancement of women continues to be hindered by the persistent barrier of the "double duty of care", pushed under Tito's leadership and by ethnonationalist elites.	• UNIGEM has recognised GBV at universities, although most reported cases are instances of verbal harassment. • Significant progress is still needed regarding subliminal gender dynamics within the education system.	• "One-size-fits-all" approach has been overly presciptive and neglects local needs. • Influence from the EU parallels policies of former Yugoslavia. • Policy implementation lacks initiative, where those in leadership positions replicate existing policy templates

Figure 2: A word cloud where the size of the word indicates the frequency it was used in our report

Bottom-up Interventions

From the above four themes, we were able to critically analyse the top-down interventions which paved the way for three bottom-up interventions, through the medium of higher education:

1. Institutional change
2. Increasing open dialogue
3. Adapting the education system

Conclusion

- Our analysis highlights the sustained impact which hostile periods can have on gender experiences within higher education institutions in Croatia, BiH and Albania
- We have found that universities are able to act as ideal incubators for gender-related interventions with their concentrated and dynamic environments vital for ideas to be developed and refined.

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