

Rural Women in Serbia: Key Challenges in Enjoyment of Economic and Social Rights

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Abstract : In recent years, the disadvantaged and marginalised position of rural women in the Republic of Serbia has been recognised in a number of national strategies and policy papers. A number of measures have been adopted by the government aimed at economic empowerment of rural women and eliminating barriers to accessing decision making and economic and social opportunities. However, their implementation pace is still slow. The aim of the paper is to indicate the necessity of a comprehensive policy approach to eliminating discrimination against rural women that would include policy and financial commitments for enhancing agricultural and rural development as a whole, instead of taking fragmented measures targeting consequences instead of causes. The paper introduces main findings of the study of challenges, constraints, and opportunities of rural women in Serbia to enjoy their economic and social rights. The research methodology included the desk research and the qualitative analysis of the available data, statistics, policy papers, studies, and reports produced by the government, ministries and other governmental bodies, independent human rights bodies, and civil society organizations (CSOs). The findings of the study reveal that rural women are at great risk of poverty, particularly in remote areas, and when getting old or widowed. Young rural women working in agriculture are also in unfavorable position, as they do not have opportunities to enjoy their rights during pregnancy and maternity leave, childcare leave and leave due to the special care of a child. The study indicates that the main causes of their unfavorable position are related to the prevalent patriarchal surrounding and economic and social underdevelopment of rural areas in Serbia. Gender inequalities have been particularly present in accessing land and property rights, inheritance, education, social protection, healthcare, and decision making. Women living in the rural areas are exposed at high risk of discrimination in all spheres of public and private life that undermine their enjoyment of basic economic, social and cultural rights. The vulnerability of rural women to discrimination increases in cases of the intersectionality of other grounds of discrimination, such as disability, ethnicity, age, health condition and sexual discrimination. If they are victims of domestic violence, their experience lack of access to shelters and protection services. Despite the State's recognition of the marginalized position of rural women, there is still a lack of a comprehensive policy approach to improving the economic and social position of rural women.

Keywords : agricultural and rural development, care economy, discrimination against women, economic and social rights, feminization of poverty, Republic of Serbia, rural women

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