

Gender Inequalities and the Status of Women in the Labor Market in Transitional Serbia¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the social position and economic participation of women in the changed environment of the post-socialist transition of Serbia, with special emphasis on processes of policy adjustment to the new European integration trends. In the centre of analytical debate is the question: What has the exit from socialism brought to women in terms of economic activity, choice of profession, social status and lifestyle? The Serbian labor market is characterized by a downward rate of activity of women and a high unemployment rate, the latter being the crucial factor in their unequal position. The inherited, accumulated problems of women are transferred and enhanced in the periods of transition, and the economic insecurity, fear of loss of employment and decrease in living standards become a reality for a majority of families. The study shows that the level of education of women is almost equal to that of men, but still women fail to enjoy quality jobs and successful professional careers to the same extent as men. Women in Serbia are similar to the women in other post-socialist countries in their lower earnings, though it must be noted that women earn less than men even in the most developed countries of the European Union. Typically female jobs are losing in the market race where there are still gender-specific jobs. New tensions lead to the two-fold vulnerability of women – at work and at home.

Introduction

The consequences of exiting from socialism and transitioning to a market economy have not been the same for women and men. The gender-specific jobs that women held during socialist times, such as jobs in state administration, the textile industry, education and social welfare, were the first either to be lost or to become low-paying jobs. To succeed in today's job market requires knowledge of modern technologies, and the mastery of specific skills often

contrary to the inherited patterns of women's employment. Women who lost their jobs during economic reconstruction in Serbia often found themselves in traditional roles at home: domestic duties, such as cooking and caring for children and the elderly, became a replacement for discrimination against women outside of the family. The process of accession to the European Union (EU) in recent years offers a new hope that women's status in Serbia will be similar to that of women in EU countries. As a potential candidate for EU membership, the Serbian Government has initiated a process of harmonization of legal standards using the EU legal framework - *acquis communautaire* – of which a part refers to gender equality and the overall improvement of women's position.

This paper is a comparative analysis based on my research on women's economic participation, with special emphasis placed on Serbian compliance with the EU integration process. I aim to show how the transition from socialism has affected women's economic activity, employment options, social status, and general lifestyle. In addition, I will explore the other dimensions that are dependent on personal achievement in the market game. This analysis includes measures of women's economic activity, the level of employment they have achieved, the shaping of gender-specific occupations, and the quality of employment, as well as gendered wage disparity. I will also discuss unemployment and poverty for women, including particularly vulnerable groups, such as the long-term unemployed, members of minority groups, and the rural population.

In line with the European concept, gender equality is perceived as an integral part of social justice, inclusion and solidarity. My study coincides with the endorsement of important national documents in the area of gender equality, such as the Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Women and Promotion of Gender Equality (2009) and the Action Plan for Improvement of Gender Equality, which propose concrete measures for the improvement of women's position in society.²

Low Employment Rates and Gender Stereotypes in Occupation Choice

Male employment rates in Serbia are higher than female employment activity rates, since men traditionally worked while women were more likely to stay at home and take care of household duties (cooking, cleaning, tending to children, elderly parents and/or other

dependants). The Serbian labor market is characterized by generally low employment rates for women, while unemployment rates tend to remain high and are thus seen as the greatest factor of gender inequality. Women make up approximately 40% of the labor force (aged 15-64). Women's activity rates in 2006 accounted for 54.6% of all women in the labor force (aged 15-64). This figure is considerably lower than male activity rate, which was 72.7% of all men in the labor force (Table 1).

Table 1: Activity, employment, and unemployment rates of population aged 15-64 by gender 2004-2006 (*in thousands*)

	Women			Men		
	2004	2005	2006	2004	2005	2006
Activity rate	57,9	56,2	54,5	75,1	74,3	72,7
Employment rate	44,0	40,8	40,6	63,1	61,2	59,2
Unemployment rate	24,1	27,4	25,5	15,9	17,6	18,6

Source: Women and Men in Serbia, 2008. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. Belgrade.

The employment rate of women in Serbia is below the 2007 EU average of 58.3%. On average, the proportion of the economically active population aged 15-64 in the EU-27 is higher. The employment rates of women in these countries vary as they correspond to differences in tradition as well as in support initiatives of social programs. Only Malta had a lower employment rate (36.9%) in 2006 than Serbia did (40.6%). In comparison to other European countries outside the European Union, only Turkey had a lower employment rate (23.8%). The Scandinavian countries boasted the lowest difference between men's and women's employment rates (EUROSTAT 2008).³

Analysis of the legal framework regulating employment and activity in Serbia shows that equality in the labor market is legally guaranteed, but the principles have not been entirely defined. Consequently, the legal framework regulating the position of women in Serbia's labor market on the whole is not aligned with the legal solutions as defined by the European Union.⁴ For instance, the law explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic affiliation, race, marital status, sexual orientation, and political orientation, and guarantees standards related to working conditions, education and other principles that need to be observed to achieve gender

equality. Still, certain legal regulations leave room for gender discrimination as, for instance, neither the role of labor inspectorate nor trade unions (which should monitor the implementation of employment standards) has been elaborated. Due to legal gaps, different forms of discrimination exist, such as unequal wages. Therefore, the legal system in this area is assessed as fragmented and inefficient (Kolin and Čičikarić 2010).

In addition to the inadequate legal framework, women face other challenges in the workforce as well. This is indicated by data on women's educational and professional options and their representation in managerial positions and "prestigious" jobs that bring higher earnings, as well as data on women's capability to start their own businesses and become entrepreneurs. Taking into account the comparative data about primary, secondary and college and university level education, which are considered key factors for vertical mobility, women on average attain higher levels than men. (Table 2)

Table 2: Level of education of population aged 25 and above, by gender, 2005 (%)

	Primary or lower education level	Secondary education	Higher education
Total	39.5	46.4	14.1
Women	30.6	53.3	16.1
Men	47.8	40.0	12.2

Source: Bajec, et al. 2008. *Social Protection and Social Inclusion in the Republic of Serbia*. European Commission and Economic Institute, Belgrade.

Though Serbian women have enjoyed overall success in education,⁵ their lack of technical skills limits their access to reliable and well-paid occupations. The selection of an occupation is often based on inherited stereotypes that women are not capable to work in technical occupations, and thus they are more often than men directed toward occupations requiring social science and humanities backgrounds. Female students comprise 65% of the students in social science and art departments and 50% in medical departments, yet only 25% of female students study in technical departments. From 2001 to 2005, most Serbian women were employed in the textile industry, where 85% of the workforce is female, followed closely by the health and social services (83%), and education (76%). At the other end of the spectrum, women made up only 14% of the workforce in electrical engineering. Female teachers are most common in low-income public educational institutions. For example, in primary schools, female teachers

outnumber male teachers by a ratio of up to three to one, and in secondary schools, they make up 50% of the teaching staff (Women and Men in Serbia 2008).

Gender disparities are also evident in the number of women appointed as lecturers and professors in different departments. Women hold 64% of appointed lectureships in philology departments, and roughly 45% in law departments. However, they hold only 9% in electrical and mechanical engineering departments, where only 6% of all teaching staff is women. Women are equally rare in high administrative positions in Serbian universities. Only six provosts at Serbian universities have been female (in Belgrade and Novi Sad). There has never been a woman in charge of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences and only 6% of its members are women. This is despite the fact that at the University of Belgrade women earned 31.6% of doctoral degrees and 34% of all master's degrees. The picture is similar in scientific research institutes. Overall, roughly half of female researchers (49%) hold doctoral degrees. For men, the same is true: 51% of male researchers hold a Ph.D. However, out of 162 scientific research institutes, only 22 are headed by women (Bogdanović 2006).

Although communication and information technology skills in Serbia are underdeveloped in the labor market in general, women in particular lag behind in this respect. According to the latest research, young people aged 16 to 24 are most likely to know how to use a personal computer in Serbia. This technical know-how is indispensable for obtaining quality employment and for the development of professional careers. In this age group, 86% of men and 84% of women had mastered necessary computer skills; other age groups have a significantly lower level of computer skills (Women and Men in Serbia 2008). The next age group (25-54) has only partially managed to master such computer skills (men – 54% and women – 47%). The oldest age group (55-74) can barely operate a personal computer: only 11% of men and 10% of women use this technology. Reviewing the data on Internet usage by age and gender, the situation is even more unfavorable: 71% of men and 64% of women use Internet in the youngest age group, 46% of men and 34% of women in the middle age group, and only 7% of men and 6% of women in the oldest age group. Women's use of the Internet in Serbia is two times lower than the average among women in EU countries.⁶

Inherited Patterns and New Inequalities

While the postindustrial technological development of Western countries confirms a decrease in gender disparities and the increasing inclusion of women into “prestigious” and managerial positions outside the home, post-socialist countries such as Serbia exhibit inherited inequalities that further aggravate the position of women in these new democracies. The reasons for contemporary gender disparities may thus be linked to the position of women under socialism.

With a view toward the ideological promotion of gender equality in employment, the socialist states took over different economic and social functions for the family and developed a set of generous social benefits for families with children, especially at the work place. This, in turn, ensured that a relatively high degree of children were supported by state welfare and many women found employment outside of the home. However, women in socialist societies opted for lower-level professions, especially work requiring patience and manual coordination or jobs lacking managerial opportunities. Men occupied most “prestigious” professions. Women have always been a minority in technical and managerial positions. The Polish scientist Barbara Lobodzinska says a review of the communist approach to the proclaimed equality of women is necessary and proves that the accumulated, inherited problems of women became manifested during transition periods (Lobodzinska 1996). Lobodzinska claims that even though women comprised 50% of the entire workforce, the communist power structure encouraged traditional patriarchal exploitation of women through discrimination, dependency and gender subordination. During communism, there was also a wide gap between the gender equality the socialist state proclaimed and the actual position of women, while the division of responsibilities at home and the choice of profession rested on stereotypes and the traditional division of labor. Therefore, a “double burden” pushed women towards low-paying and low-prestige jobs.

In the course of the market transition, confusion appeared regarding how to overcome inherited discrimination and how to achieve women’s self-realization while maintaining the objectives of a market economy. The contemporary model of a successful woman alters and implies her inclusion into the market of “prestigious” professions. At this point, her success in technical professions is only possible with a command of modern technologies and markets, the ability to operate a computer, and knowledge of foreign languages. Of course, all of this must be

combined with performing her duties at home. A successful presence on the free market requires different attitudes, skills and aspirations, an entrepreneurial spirit, competitiveness, an ability to sell her skills and other characteristics that are not developed overnight. The concept of a "good job" shifts from low wages and secure jobs under socialism to riskier professions that often involve frequent career changes and the ability to master new roles and skills throughout the entire career path.

These new employment trends impose new requirements that are difficult to fulfill with such inherited stereotypes about women's role in the family, and particularly in situations where adequate social support services for families do not exist (child care institutions, help at home, services for the elderly). Typically, female patterns of employment continuing from the previous socialist period require adjustment to capitalist market conditions that stress entrepreneurship and competition, along with life-long education and building individual capacities. Well-paid jobs are good for women's career development, yet these most often demand flexible working hours, frequent traveling, and longer periods away from home, which are obstacles for preserving balance between family duties and work.

In addition to wage inequality, the work environment in Serbia is a frequent source of frustration and discrimination. There is no comprehensive research into the treatment of employees in Serbia, but it is a well known fact that both men and women are exposed to problems at the work place and are not protected with respect to payments of sick leave, absence, or with respect to working conditions, safety and health in the workplace. Focus-group studies conducted by the Association of Business Women in Serbia (Popović-Pantić and Petrović 2007) show that women are often harassed at work, especially in small and medium-sized companies. Furthermore, their working conditions are poor, as they lack guaranteed rights and they are frequently laid off if they become pregnant. Poor treatment in the workplace is the most frequently heard complaint among older female workers and unemployed women. Additionally, many employers avoid employing women in traditionally male positions, such as engineering positions, or often employ women in positions requiring good looks. According to the National Employment Service report, single mothers or younger women are in a particularly unequal position as employment advertisements often include specifications for candidates' looks and age. Discrimination against women in the labor market also includes the concrete questions

frequently posed to women at job interviews that inquire about family plans or maternity, and which employers can use as the basis for not hiring women.

Survey results on inequalities between women and men in Serbia are similar to those in most post-socialist states. These show that women mostly work in poorly paid jobs, that they are frequently employed in the gray economy, and are infrequently found in managerial and “prestigious” positions. As a result of numerous comparative studies in the region (Gender in Transition 2007), findings have been published asserting that the position of women in these countries differs significantly from that of women in Western Europe.

Data from EUROSTAT (2009), which monitors earnings information for men and women in the European Union, also show that women earn less than men for the same work. The pay gap between genders is defined as the difference between average gross hourly earnings of paid male and female employees. According to these data, women earn 17.4% less than men when looking at the average of the EU countries for 2007.⁷ EUROSTAT data show that women in the EU have poorer prospects of having a successful career and that there exists a pay gap between genders. These issues remain a cause for concern to all who are engaged in the improvement of women’s position in these countries. However, data on gender disparities in EU countries indicate an increase in women completing their studies in the technical and natural science, and that the share of women in managerial positions is growing. Comparative results show that women comprise one third of the total number of managers in these countries. Overall, postindustrial employment trends in highly developed European countries have changed and technological development has spurred a decrease in disparities and an increase in the number of women in “prestigious” professions and managerial roles outside of the home.

Unemployment and Poverty

Reports on unemployment indicate that it affects women more than men. Furthermore, women’s position in the labor market is shaped by poor prospects for full-time employment and a high probability of working in unpaid jobs at home or the in “gray economy.” This is still a significant source of income for unemployed women.⁸ Statistics show that unemployment for women in the labor force is 1.5 times higher than unemployment for men in the same work

period. According to data from the National Employment Service, 25.5% women were unemployed in 2006, which is far more than men - 18.6% (Table 3).

Table 3: Structure of unemployed persons 2004-2006 (%)

	Unemployment rate	Long-term unemployment rate (over 1 year)	Unemployed young people (15-25 years old)	Unemployed females	Unemployed males
2004	19,5	76,6	43,4	24,1	15,9
2005	21,8	77,8	40,9	27,4	17,6
2006	21,6	80,6	39,0	25,5	18,6

Source: Government of Serbia. 2007: Report on the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy

Overall, the ratio of the unemployed to the total labor force is 18.3% in Serbia. As Table 3 shows, women's unemployment rate increased from 24.1% in 2004 to 25.5% in 2006, one of the highest rates in Europe. Although younger women are often unemployed, single mothers are in a particularly vulnerable position (especially if their children are small or disabled), as are housewives and women who are elderly, ill, disabled, refugees, Roma, or uneducated, as well as those who live in rural areas, or are victims of violence. In comparisons with total unemployment rates in the Western Balkan countries, Serbia is in the middle. Unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina is 30%, in Croatia – 15%, in Montenegro – 12.6%. In every country in the region, the unemployment rates for women are higher than those of men. Numerous studies such as UNICEF (1999) and UNIFEM (2006) indicate that unemployment, poverty, economic insecurity, and fear over the loss of economic status or a drop in living standards are becoming a reality for the majority of families in Central and Eastern Europe during market transition. Conditions have only worsened as a result of the recent global financial crisis. According to the latest EUROSTAT data, the unemployment rate in EU countries was 8.5% in 2009, up from 7% in 2008 (EUROSTAT 2009).⁹

The fact that a large number of women are excluded from work represents a key challenge to the objective of social integration. Long-term unemployment is defined as the proportion of the labor force that has been unemployed for twelve months or more and represents

an enormous problem that disproportionately affects middle-aged women and women with the lowest educational qualifications. The share of women among the long-term unemployed is high. Currently, 74% of all the unemployed are women who have been waiting for a job for more than one year, while only 69% of men have been unemployed for over one year. This indicates that long-term unemployment affects both sexes, but women are particularly vulnerable. Long-term unemployment is often connected with social exclusion which leaves certain social groups isolated. The longer the period of unemployment, the more entrenched a person becomes in social exclusion through his or her inability to afford material goods, services, and housing, while their social contacts are also often reduced due to a lack of money for socializing or to the stigma of being unemployed. Long-term unemployment gives rise to the loss of motivation and skills, resulting in inactivity, a reduction of opportunities for future employment, and an increased burden on social funds. According to data from 2005, the average period of unemployment in Serbia was 44 months, while in EU countries, some 80% of all registered unemployed persons find employment within six months.

According to the Report on the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Government of Serbia 2007), unemployment is the key reason for the feminization of poverty in Serbia. In 2006, 8.8% of people in Serbia had incomes below the poverty line. Large families in rural areas (particularly in southern Serbia), children under the age of 18, the elderly (aged 65 and over), households headed by females, and households headed by someone with only primary-school education were the most vulnerable categories among those living in poverty. But the feminization of poverty is not only characteristic of households with an unemployed woman: low-income households that deviate significantly from the national average are constantly unable to maintain a decent standard of living.

Marginalized Categories of Women in the Labor Market

Women with special needs, Roma, and women living in rural areas have additional problems in the labor market, and the unemployment of marginalized women is far higher than that of the general population. For instance, data show that unemployment of Roma women in Serbia is twice as high as that of other populations, which, coupled with poor social protection for this marginalized population,¹⁰ results in a high level of social exclusion and a vicious circle

of poverty. A recent study confirms this and recommends programs aimed at the social inclusion of Roma within the framework of the poverty reduction program in Serbia (Bajec, et al. 2008). The same data indicate that only 9% of Roma women are employed. The main reasons for unemployment and poverty among Roma are low levels of education, leaving school early, and illiteracy (35% of Roma men and 51.6% of Roma women are illiterate). Comparative studies of women's position in the labor market in the countries in transition show that Roma, women with low educational qualifications, disabled persons, and women in rural areas are the greatest losers in the transition from socialism, as their employment opportunities are smaller, while a high probability of marginalization and poverty exists, as well as family violence (Gender in Transition 2007).

A high rate of unemployment affects persons with disabilities, of whom only 13% are employed. There are approximately 700,000 disabled people in Serbia. Of these, two-thirds are unemployed women who likely could work, depending on the nature of their disability. NGOs that promote the integration of disabled people more fully into society point to numerous obstacles and discrimination that disabled women face in securing employment. According to the data from the Center for Self-Reliant Life of the Disabled, men with disabilities have twice as many problems in finding employment than non-disabled men, irrespective of the type of disability. The position of women in this respect is even worse. Disabled women are usually employed in poorly paying jobs (Rajkov 2004). However, things may be changing for the better. To prepare for EU accession, the Serbian government enacted the Law for Prevention of Discrimination of Disabled Persons, which guarantees social inclusion and employment, if possible, for disabled people. The Law on Professional Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities, which would oblige employers to hire persons with disabilities, is being planned.

Women in rural areas of Serbia are particularly marginalized since most of their work is not paid and is undervalued by society, although they almost fully perform all the duties related to the maintenance of rural households and the subsistence of multi-generational families. According to the 2002 Census, 44.2% women who live in villages have no education (have not even completed primary school), which places rural women in a particularly vulnerable position. Rural women predominantly work in agriculture and their economic and social status is conditioned by the expressly unfavorable status of rural households, fragmented agricultural land

(3.5 ha on average), extensive farming (as opposed to intensive farming), absence of market orientation and specialization in agriculture, poor infrastructure of rural towns, limited access to health care and social protection, a low quality of life, and a high risk of poverty. Rural households without agricultural land or with small farms (up to 1 ha) are at the highest risk for poverty. According to the Report on the Implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Government of Serbia 2007), they represented a total of 71% of the poor. The same report underlined that the elderly are at a greater risk for poverty than the population of Serbia as a whole, but there are notable differences between genders - elderly women are even more at risk than elderly men, particularly if they live in rural areas.

The unjust division of labor in rural areas implies the necessity of opening up new windows of opportunity to improve education and empower women in their participation in the labor force contingent. In this respect, it is particularly important to reduce discrimination in the labor market and eradicate poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, especially for women in rural areas whose vulnerability is multiplied if they are disabled, members of ethnic minorities, or victims of other forms of discrimination or violence. Future policy in this area should create a positive framework by including gender policies into policies in rural areas to improve of general living conditions for women, promote of female entrepreneurship, and encourage them to become more economically active.

New Traditionalism and Confusion of Values

Additional obstacles for women in the labor market may be found in the system of values and patterns of family life. The persistence of traditionalism in family relations, the revival of patriarchal values, and the division of labor in transitional Serbia is noted by several sociological surveys (Milić 1997, 2007; Blagojević 1995; Kolin 1995; Bobić 2004). The protective pattern of a family persists and supports asymmetrical gender roles. In particular, women's unemployment supports traditional stereotypes as universal social protection programs shrink or disappear. In the context of market reforms in the 1990s, this meant that previously available state services for children, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups were no longer provided. Studies have found that during social transition, women's responsibility for securing social responsibilities in the family increases. For example, two-thirds of all families take care of elderly relatives, and

women most often assume this role (i.e., daughters who take care of their elderly parents). The family is still considered the only viable option for supporting the elderly, while the increasing problems during old age, especially chronic illnesses and disability, result in pressure on the institutional care facilities for the elderly. The capacities of state institutions to accommodate the elderly have been weakened as state funding was slashed. Commercial elderly homes and other alternatives are only just starting to take hold in the country. Thus, women have carried the burden of caring for the elderly as state welfare programs have shrunk.

Serbia is located in the region where the South European cultural family model prevails. In this model, women's worth lies within the family, in the development of informal ties and support, and in raising children. A model of female sacrifice is interminable throughout life. The deeply rooted traditional forms of solidarity that slowed modernization of social relationships in the past persist today. The surveys referenced above have mentioned that these relationships have even strengthened in situations where compensation for social vulnerability has necessitated a return to traditional familial roles.

A pronounced patrilineal pattern of relations in Serbian rural families is still evident in property and real estate relations and reflects a strong polarization of the sexes. The patrilocal type of settlement and inheritance of property is the dominant pattern of rural life according to which households are based and organized in the home of the husband. For this reason, women neither own agricultural land (84% is owned by men) nor the houses they live in (88% are owned by men), and rarely own any resources for agricultural production. Men are identified as the owner in 73% of households and women in only 27%, which is a consequence of common law in inheriting property. The patrilineal system of inheritance and ownership in Serbian rural families contributes to the polarization of rights between women and men and, consequently, to the difference in their positions. A survey entitled "Family and Position of Women in Rural Serbia," supported by the Association for Women Initiative in 2002, indicates the submissive position of women and persistence of traditional patterns both in the type of inheritance ("the male inherits everything... a son inherits all that is in the courtyard and the land") and in the management of the property and house (Rajković 2002). Throughout her life, a woman in a rural environment is subordinate to her father, husband, or son. The same survey of rural families in Central Serbia finds that men (sons, fathers, fathers-in-law, husbands, sons-in-law) are owners of the house and land in almost 90% of households. As a rule, rural women live in a household with patrilineal

kin, where male authority is predominant. 68% of female respondents indicated that the authoritarian-type of decision-making persists because male members of household alone decide on all the issues relevant to production. The budgets in the majority of households are centralized with key control being in the hands of men. When they need money for personal needs, the study states, half of the interviewed women are forced to ask for it from other (mostly male) household members, though one-third has a “secret fund” they put money into from selling produce or working for other households.

Conclusion

During the turbulence of the last two decades, women in Serbia have become distanced from the processes of employment and the economic status of women in developed EU countries. Although male and female equality in the labor market is legally stipulated, numerous interconnected indicators on the position of women show that Serbia has a high level of gender inequality in the labor market. Studies point to the unfavorable social and economic position of women in Serbia and present data on the high unemployment rate, long waiting periods, lower wages and high risk of poverty for vulnerable groups, all of which call for special social policy programs.

Table 4: Gender Position in the Labor Market: Incentives and Challenges

INCENTIVES

EU integrations, acceptance of relevant values and strategies in different areas, normative and institutional promotion of gender equality.

Tradition of feminist movement and strong women’s organizations that promote social integration and economic empowerment.

New challenges in employment, jobs in reform projects and international

CHALLENGES

Low employment rate of women, discrimination on the labor market, high unemployment, weak chances of reemployment of women, high level of poverty of women.

Extremely low level of representation of women in managerial positions, well paid, prestigious positions.

Inherited stereotypes in choice of profession, low level of technical

companies for highly qualified younger professionals.

knowledge.

Employment incentives in National Employment Service, affirmation of new forms of employment (cooperatives and various forms of alternative economy).

Difficult position of marginalized groups of women: Roma, the disabled, single mothers, elderly women, refugees, and the particularly difficult position of women in rural areas.

Strong exploitation of female resources in private domain and heavy burden of women's reproductive role.

Inherited patriarchal patterns on women's place in the family and society, persistence of traditionalism in contemporary conditions.

The surveys conducted to date confirm the low number of women interested in politics: politics being an unlikely topic of discussion, insufficient information about politics, and the absence of aspirations to take an active role in political parties (Čičkarić 2005). Nevertheless, women are very much engaged in citizens' associations, voluntary organizations, the social economy, and in third-sector organizations in general. Over the past decade various women's associations were founded that promoted entrepreneurship, with the most significant being: the Association of Business Women from Belgrade; the Business Association of Women from Novi Sad; Femina Creative from Subotica; the Center for Enterprises, Entrepreneurship and Management; the Academy for Female Entrepreneurship from Kikinda; Teodora from Niš; and Ažin from Belgrade. The programs of these associations aim to fight against stereotypes in employment, establish centers for female entrepreneurship, improve women's skills for business and management, and promote women's accomplishments. These goals can provide information on funding opportunities and trainings for women interested in starting new businesses. The main objectives focus on vertical mobility of women and improving the status of women in society. One of their most promising suggestions is to improve loan disbursement to promote female entrepreneurship and all forms of self-employment, since the lack of access to capital presents key obstacles for women's entrepreneurship. Many of these groups' activities are

anchored in the strong feminist movement that, beginning in the 1980s, developed alternative programs focusing on various issues related to female status problems in Yugoslav society.

Because women are the greatest losers during periods of transition, cooperatives and different forms of social enterprises have been recognized as a model for women's economic empowerment. Therefore, the contemporary feminist movement is directed towards the social economy and alternative forms of production and provision of services through establishing new forms of employment. The most frequent drivers of employment in the social economy are non-governmental organizations promoting the employment of vulnerable and underprivileged groups, as well as projects, mainly experimental, offering programs for strengthening social cohesion and integration. The promotion of this new approach includes programs within the framework of new forms of employment in sectors that were traditionally "investor driven," while traditional companies cannot find a socially acceptable response to unemployment. One of the first initiatives in this area was the Association for Female Initiative's program promoting cooperatives ("Female Cooperatives – Challenge and Opportunity") as well as business or service organizations where members jointly own and control activities, and promote solidarity, self-help and care of the community.

Notes

¹ Many thanks to Zachary Kelly for his editorial assistance with this article.

²After the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union in 2008, Serbia became a potential candidate for membership and efforts were stepped up on internal reforms aimed at improving the position of women. The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, endorsed in early 2009, came into effect as did the Law on Gender Equality. In line with the European perspective, the Strategy for Improvement of the Position of Women and Promotion of Gender Equality was adopted in 2009. This is the single most important document relevant to promotion of human rights and the policy of equal opportunities. The Strategy was developed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Gender Equality Directorate and UN Development Programme, and the key objectives it is based on refer to decision-making, economy, education, violence against women, media and public opinion. The National Action Plan for Improvement of the Position of Women is developed by the Gender Equality Council involving experts and representatives of government and non-government institutions.

³ EUROSTAT (The Statistical Office of the European Commission) presents a range of statistics of 27 EU Member States. In some cases the countries candidates or potential candidates are also included. Available at <http://www.ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>.

⁴ The position of women in 27 EU Member States is promoted through the policy defined by the EU on the basis of four principles. The first principle guarantees women equal rights at the labor market, in training for employment, career development and work conditions. This principle also includes incentives for prevention of sexual violence and exploitation at work, and includes establishment of national bodies in charge of monitoring gender equality. The second principle refers to inequalities of payment for work and guarantees equality of men and women. Same payments for the same work are guaranteed for all types of earnings. The third principle refers to improvement of working conditions for specific categories of women such as pregnant women, women following delivery and nursing mothers, while the fourth principle promotes self-employment of women. Since labor market segregation continues to burden the status of gender equality in the EU Member States, numerous incentives and instruments of active employment policies are implemented to improve the position of women at the labor market and fulfill the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.

⁵ Statistics for both sexes indicate a low educational capacity of population in Serbia since 14.1% have a maximum secondary school education. According to the Census data, only 6.5% citizens have a university degree (Women and Men 2008).

⁶ According to the EUROSTAT data (2009) 62% of women and 67% of men aged 16-74 used the Internet in 2008 (EU-27). Broken down by Member States, more than 80% of women use the Internet in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The lowest levels of Internet use are registered in Romania (31%), Greece (36%), Bulgaria, Italy, and Cyprus (39%), indicating that Serbia, with some 35% women using the Internet, would be in the group of EU states with the lowest level of Internet use.

⁷ The highest gender gap is in Estonia, where women earn 30.3% of earnings of men, Austria (25.5%), Czech Republic and Slovakia (23.6%). The lowest differences in earnings between women and men in the EU countries appear in Italy, where women earn 4.4% less than men, Malta (5.2%), Portugal and Slovenia (8.3%) (EUROSTAT 2009).

⁸ A significant part of economic activities is conducted in the so called "gray economy" where an estimated 1.2 million Serbian citizens worked in 2005, mainly because they could not find employment in registered companies, according to the Progress Report on 2nd Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation in Serbia of 2007 (Government of Serbia 2007).

⁹ Among the EU countries, the lowest unemployment levels are in Holland (2.7%), while the highest are in Spain (15.5%), Latvia (14.4%) and Lithuania (13.7%). (During the same period, the unemployment rate in the U.S. was 8.1%, and in Japan 4.4%) (EUROSTAT 2009).

¹⁰ According to the 2002 Census of Population, there are 114,000 Roma in Serbia. However, the estimated number of Roma in the total population of Serbia ranges between 350,000 - 400,000 (Government of Serbia 2007).

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