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Political and Democratic Participation of Migrant Women in the Republic of Serbia





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I. Migration and migrant women in the national context

In recent history, the Republic of Serbia has gone through different migration phases. The largest migrations in this region occurred during the 90s due to the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The civil wars that followed caused the forced displacement of millions of people who had to leave their homes, mostly from the former Yugoslav Republics and provinces Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, as well as Kosovo and Metohija. At the same time, citizens were leaving the territory of Serbia after years of sanctions and NATO bombing, but also because of the feeling that they were the losers of the transition, which is still an ongoing process in the Republic of Serbia. A more certain future, higher salaries, better standard of living, and state regulation are the main reasons for migration which shape migratory patterns in Serbia even today, as well as “threats to the freedoms and rights of citizens, accumulated injustice in society as a result of the arrogance of politicians in power, and situations in which they constantly ‘make fools’ of their citizens.”¹

As a consequence of bad political decisions imposed by Slobodan Milošević’s regime, society faced unemployment, a decrease in living standards, and poverty, which also affected migration flows. Migration continued even after the change of his regime and the assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić and is still ongoing. People of all ages and levels of education are leaving Serbia.

After Serbia and the EU signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement in 2008, the relations between the two sides were raised to a new level, which led to the abolition of visas for citizens of Serbia to enter the Schengen countries in December 2009. This also marked increased immigration from Serbia to the EU countries, given that the movement of students, businesspeople, etc., was facilitated. However, this also influenced the occurrence of individual citizens or entire groups, especially from poorer parts of the country, who went to EU countries in the hope that they would be able to stay there and get a job. That is why the EU countries insisted on signing so-called read-

¹ <https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/WFD-Serbia-Istraz%CC%8Civanje-i-analiza-Odlazak-mladih-i-nepoverenje-u-politiku-2020.pdf>

mission agreements with Serbia, based on which many Serbian citizens were returned to Serbia in previous years and still are returning. On the other hand, since the EU countries are continuously in deficit for the (highly qualified) labour force, some facilitated the arrival and employment of citizens of Serbia. For example, many doctors and medical staff left Serbia to work in Germany or Slovenia. The process of integration into the EU, which Serbia started in the meantime after becoming an official candidate country in 2012, only accelerated immigration from Serbia to the EU. It is assumed that tens of thousands of young and highly educated people leave Serbia annually and find work in the EU countries. In addition, the last census official data showed that Serbia lost about half a million inhabitants.² An article entitled "We are dying and fleeing Serbia too much: The painful slap that the last population census gave us"³ speaks in support of all the reasons why more than a million citizens left Serbia from the nineties until today. That trend of leaving the country practically has not stopped since then.

On the other hand, the country's geographical position greatly influences the fact that many refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from politically unstable and poor governing countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa go through Serbia. However, those numbers had increased manifold after the Arab Spring and especially since 2015 with a great influx of refugees and migrants, when only from the summer of 2015 to the spring of 2016 over a million of them passed through Serbia, primarily from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, but also from other countries towards the EU. There were days when over 10,000 people entered Serbia, which is why not all of them could even be registered. This situation and the large number of people who headed for the EU were significantly influenced by the emergence and expansion of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and its brutality towards non-believers, women, children, and ethnic and religious minorities, especially the Kurds and Yazidis. In that wave of refugees, thousands of individuals, families, and unaccompanied minors from these communities and nations came and passed through Serbia. After the EU signed an agreement with Turkey in March 2016 on the return of refugees and migrants and the closing of borders, the number of people that were passing through Serbia decreased but did not stop.

² <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-popis-stanovnistvo/32187570.html>

³ <https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/mnogo-umiremo-i-bezimo-iz-srbije-bolan-samar-koji-nam-je-opalio-poslednji-popis-stanovnistva/>

This became particularly evident after the outbreak of another conflict, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in the spring of 2022. In 2022, over 116,000 refugees and migrants came to Serbia (according to the government's Commissariat for Refugees and Migration), an increase of over 100% compared to 2021. This was nevertheless contributed by the thousands of refugees from Ukraine who came to Serbia, but also an increase in the number of people from other countries such as Burundi or Afghanistan: many people fled that country after the return of the Taliban to power during the summer of 2021. However, this number of refugees and migrants does not include citizens of Russia who came to Serbia in the same period. After the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the proclaimed limited mobilization in Russia in September 2022. It is presumed that most Russian citizens will temporarily reside in Serbia, even though their number is quite high: it is estimated that between 100,000 and 200,000 of them came to Serbia in 2022. These are mostly highly educated, young businesspeople from the IT sector, various start-ups, etc. who moved their jobs to Serbia. The Agency for Business Registers data speaks about this: the number of new Russian companies and entrepreneurs in 2021 was 159, while in 2022, there were as many as 4,187. The arrival of a large number of Russians was influenced by the positive social climate and traditionally good political relations between Serbia and Russia, the non-imposing of sanctions against Russia by the Serbian authorities, the free visa regime, and the maintenance of a direct airline between Belgrade and Moscow; besides Istanbul and Tbilisi, Belgrade remained the only European capital to which Russians could travel freely after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The unresolved Kosovo issue also directly impacted migration flows in Serbia in previous years. Since the status of the province was not resolved, and five EU countries refused to recognize Kosovo's independence, the citizens of Kosovo were on the Schengen blacklist for many years; that is, they had to obtain visas for EU countries. This influenced large migrations from Kosovo to the EU, especially in 2014, when a significant number of citizens of Kosovo went to EU countries via Serbia, many of whom were later returned. At the same time, Serbia's insistence that as few countries as possible recognise the independence of Kosovo, as well as for those countries that recognised it to withdraw that recognition, also influenced Serbia's visa policy towards them. Thus, Serbia cancelled the visas of those countries that supported it on the issue of Kosovo or withdrew their recognition. An illustrative example is the relationship with Iran, which refuses to recognise Kosovo's independence and has supported Serbia's position for

years: in 2017, Serbia cancelled visas for Iranian citizens, after which thousands of Iranians came to Serbia as “tourists” and then headed to other EU countries. After only a few months and pressured by the EU, Serbia had to re-introduce visas for citizens of Iran. A similar example is Burundi, which withdrew its recognition of Kosovo in 2018. That led to the improvement of relations between the two countries and the wave of Burundians who came to Serbia based on a bilateral visa-free regime but then tried to move to other European Union countries. Due to this “Kosovo visa” policy, Serbia was lately again criticised by the European Commission, which in the 2022 Progress Report, requested the government in Belgrade to introduce visas for citizens of Burundi, Tunisia, and India. After this, Serbia introduced a visa regime with Burundi and Tunisia until the end of 2022.

All these circumstances, the social, political, military, and economic situation in the countries of origin, as well as the bilateral relations between Serbia and individual countries, caused a large number of refugees and migrants to come to Serbia, who then try to move to other European countries. Many of these people are in a situation of long stay in Serbia, which means that they do not express intention to seek asylum in Serbia nor enter the asylum procedure but stay as long as necessary to find a smuggling route and continue their journey. They stay in Serbia from a few days to several years. The largest number of refugees and migrants reside in one of the 18 reception and asylum centres located throughout Serbia run by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration. This does not apply to women and children from Afghanistan who, fearing that the Taliban might find and take revenge on their families at home, nowadays stay in informal or private accommodations and do not register, which means that it is not possible to determine the exact number of Afghans currently residing in Serbia.

From the beginning of the refugee crisis, the state’s attitude towards refugees and migrants remained mostly humanitarian and not integrative, which means that the state mainly provided the necessary ad hoc aid in food, clothing, and accommodation, but not long-term support and integration programs. To some extent, this does not apply to children since, in previous years, many refugee and migrant children were enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Still a small number of them remained there, considering that their families continued to migrate. On the other hand, the attitude of civil society towards migration was changing; at the beginning it was also mainly humanitarian, however, civil society organizations have since established some

long-term services and support programs aimed at integration, such as empowerment and educational workshops, economic empowerment programs, etc.

Refugee and migrant women and children, victims of violence or human trafficking, face different challenges in Serbia. For example, although there are shelters in Serbia for women victims of partner and family violence, refugee women who have suffered violence cannot use this service or be accommodated in state shelters because the authorities are covering the stay costs only for Serbian citizens. This is why a small number of refugee women decide to report violence at all since the result is usually that they are moved to another room in the same reception centre where their abuser is. The number of formally identified victims of human trafficking among the migrant and refugee population is even smaller, despite the numerous risks of exploitation: it is only a few persons per year who are identified as victims (in 2022 – five officially identified victims from this population).

Further in the text, attention will be paid to understanding the concepts of immigration, and foreigners granted temporary residence, migration - women migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum seekers in the context of migration flows of the Republic of Serbia.

Immigration is defined by Article 2 of the Law on Migration Management⁴ as a relocation to the Republic of Serbia from another country, which lasts or is expected to last longer than 12 months.⁵

In 2021, the largest number of immigrants were from the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation (21.4% and 14.8%). What can be seen by comparing the previous and the observed year is a double decrease in the number of immigrants from China.⁶

The Law on Foreigners⁷ states that **temporary residence** is a residence permit of a foreign citizen in the Republic of Serbia, which is granted to a person who intends to stay in the Republic of Serbia for more than 90 days based on: employment, education or learning the Serbian language, studying, participating in the programmes of international student exchange, professional specialisation, training

⁴ "Official Gazette of RS", No. 107/12

⁵ Such a definition and monitoring of immigration is in accordance with the Regulation on Community Statistics on Migration and International Protection.

⁶ See more at the Migration Profile of the Republic of Serbia for 2021: <https://kirs.gov.rs/media/uploads/Migracije/Publikacije/Migracioni%20profil%20Republike%20Srbije%20za%202021-%20godinu.pdf>

⁷ "Official Gazette of RS", No. 24/2018 and 31/2019, Article 40

and practice, scientific research work or other scientific, educational activities, family reunification, performing a religious service, medical treatment or care, ownership of the real estate, humanitarian stay, status of a presumed victim of human trafficking, status of a victim of human trafficking, and other justified reasons in accordance with the law or international agreement.

In 2021, 17,560 temporary residence permits were issued for the first time. Most approvals were issued to citizens of the People's Republic of China (46.6% based on employment), Turkey, and the Russian Federation.

Migration - migrants are those who decide to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death but mainly to improve their lives by finding work or, in some cases, for education, family reunification, or other reasons.

Refugees are persons fleeing conflict or persecution. Due to the protection granted by international law, the countries refugees find themselves in must not expel or return them to situations where their life and freedom are threatened. The cornerstone of refugee protection is the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Geneva Convention), which defines a "refugee" as someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country."

The term **asylum seeker** refers to a migrant who seeks international protection. In accordance with the European law, international protection can take the form of refugee status or subsidiary protection. If a foreign country considers that migrant needs to be protected, but for reasons not specified in the Geneva Convention, it may grant subsidiary protection instead of a refugee status.

A massive wave of migrants and refugees went through Serbia in 2015 on their way to Western Europe. This wave of migration has placed Serbia in front of a serious challenge in managing the refugee crisis; the need to organize accommodation, food, medical assistance, and other social protection services for all persons on the route. In response to the crisis, the country primarily used the capacities activated during the refugee crisis that arose after the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. After the countries of the Western Balkans closed their borders to the passage of migrants, it created a

new crisis for thousands of people who remained imprisoned in Serbia and other countries of the region.

When it comes to the demographic picture of migration in Serbia, according to the reports of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia, in the period from 2015 to today, Serbia has been a transit country for a high number of refugees who passed through the Balkan route in their migration to countries of the European Union. Data on the exact number of refugees in Serbia change over time due to changes in migration flows and policies and other factors. Unofficial estimates support that around one and a half million people passed through Serbia in search of refuge.⁸73

The share of women in the total number of refugees and migrants in the Republic of Serbia varied from year to year. It is important to note that, in addition to the fact that Serbia was a transit country for most people on their way to EU countries, many people were forced to seek refuge in the Serbia due to the closure of borders and other factors. However, there have been no political or systemic efforts to enable these people to participate and be represented in the public and political life of the country.

⁸ See more at: <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/svet-54014677i>

II. The position of migrant women in political life

In Serbia, this is a complex topic that requires a deeper understanding of their situation and the challenges they face. Migrant women are persons who have migrated or are refugees who have arrived in Serbia from different parts of the world, often seeking safety, protection, or better economic opportunities. They face numerous obstacles and discrimination, which makes their integration into society and participation in public life even more difficult.

First, migrant women often face a language barrier, making it difficult to communicate and access information. A lack of language skills can exclude them from participating in public debates, political processes, or public services.

Second, migrant women face discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and migration status. They are often exposed to sexism, racism, and xenophobia, which can result in their exclusion from public life. Discrimination can exist in various spheres, including access to education, health care, employment, and political participation.

Third, migrant women often face economic vulnerability. Most often, they face unemployment, and if they are employed, they work in low-paid jobs, such as jobs in agriculture, catering, or domestic work, where they are exposed to exploitation and poor working conditions. Low income and an inadequate social protection system affect their financial independence and reduce the possibility of becoming engaged in public life.

Fourth, migrant women often lack access to education and information. Lack of education access can limit their professional development and political participation opportunities. In addition, the lack of information about their rights, opportunities and resources can hinder them in integrating and participating in public life.

It is especially important to point out that refugee women face gender-based violence to a great extent, as well as inadequate systemic support when responding to violence.

The position of migrant women in political life in Serbia is challenging, and they often face various obstacles that hinder their active participation in political processes. Although there are laws and political initiatives that promote gender equality and inclusion, migrant women

still face numerous challenges that prevent them from actively engaging in political life. To participate in political life, it is necessary first to define the possibility of refugees and migrants entering the labour market. The Law on Foreigners⁹ foresees the possibility of employing foreigners.¹⁰ Foreigners can establish companies or register as entrepreneurs and do business in the Republic of Serbia without restrictions. Regarding the employment of foreigners, the conditions that the foreigner must fulfill are a visa for a long stay based on employment, a permit for temporary or permanent residence, and a work permit. A work permit issued based on a long-stay employment visa is issued for the maximum validity period of that visa. A work permit issued to persons who are asylum seekers is issued upon personal request nine months after entry into the asylum procedure^{76, 11}. Depending on the type of work permit, the request for issuance is submitted either by the foreigner (if it is a personal work permit or a work permit for self-employment) or by the employer. In Serbia, the National Employment Service is responsible for issuing work permits. From the end of 2020, the possibility of submitting a combined application for temporary residence and work permit has been introduced.

Findings from the interviews with professionals in the area of migration

For this paper, 13 interviews were conducted with professionals in the field of management and provision of support to the vulnerable categories among migrants and refugees.

Representatives of the non-governmental, international, and state sectors participated in the interviews. The largest number of participants comes from the state sector (71.4%), followed by international organisations (14.3%), while a small percentage (7.1%) is made up of representatives of the civil sector, i.e., universities.

Regarding the parts of the country where they are active, a significant number of respondents come from Belgrade, 46.2%, while the

⁹ "Official Gazette of RS", No. 24/2018 and 31/2019

¹⁰ A foreigner is any person who does not have the citizenship of the Republic of Serbia, Article 3, para. 1

¹¹ In recent months, the civil sector has been active in advocating the amendment of this provision and enabling earlier inclusion in the labour market. More on the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Employment of Foreign Citizens can be found here: http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/predlozi_zakona/13_saziv/634-23%20-%20Lat..pdf

same percentage (46.2%) works in the south of the country on the border with North Macedonia. In addition to the aforementioned participants, 7.7% of professionals who participated in the research are active in the east of the country.

In their opinion, the participation of migrant women/asylum seekers in public and political life is lacking (Chart 1).

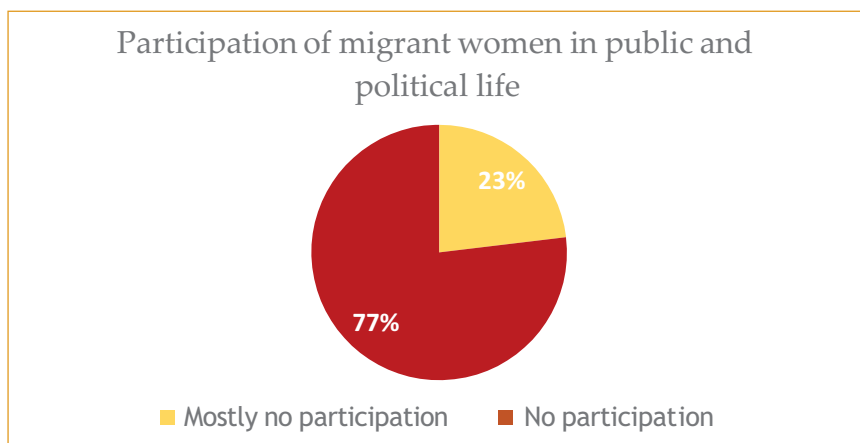


Chart 1 – Assessment of the participation of migrant women in political life in Serbia

When asked to evaluate the measures offered to improve the position of migrant women/asylum seekers in political life, with a score of 1 to 4, the majority of respondents opted for the measure that provides financial support to migrant women for self- organization and the establishment of women’s associations (46.5%), while obtaining the right to vote was marked as the least important (46.5%). In second place in terms of importance were the affirmative action measures and the implementation of gender quotas in political organisations (30.7%).

When it comes to proposals for improving the position of migrant women, solutions such as advocacy activities stand out, as well as the role of the non-governmental sector in facilitating and supporting these processes.

One of the respondents, a representative of the state sector in charge of accommodation and reception of refugees, pointed out that political activities and actions are prohibited during the stay in the accommodation facilities, which entails the promotion of political parties and ideologies. He stated that this ban also applies to employees in

this part of the system, considering that neutrality and objectivity are preserved in this way.

A representative of the international organisation stated that it is important to start with access to education, which must be guaranteed to all migrant girls and women, as well as greater participation in the initiatives of local non-governmental organisations. In terms of the level of discrimination against migrant women, the majority of respondents believe that there is a higher level of discrimination against migrant women compared to other women (61.5%), followed by those who believe there is no discrimination against migrant women (30.8%). In comparison, a few (7.7%) believe that all women are equally discriminated against and that migratory status does not contribute to the level of discrimination.

When it comes to factors that can improve the participation of migrant women in political life, the highest number of respondents believe that it is necessary to improve the education and informedness of the general population on the rights of migrant women (53.8%). At the same time, they consider the participation of a greater number of migrant women in management positions at the local government level (46.1%) is least important. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the respondents believe a prerequisite for participation in political life is the achievement of a certain level of education among the general public that could accept and understand the need for greater inclusion of migrant women in political life. Therefore, it can be indirectly concluded that the respondents point to an insufficiently favorable social climate for encouraging greater inclusion of migrant women in political life, and they consider it necessary to inform the general population in this sense.

When asked if there is any fund or type of financial support aimed at the promotion and inclusion of migrant women in political life, all respondents stated that they are not aware of the existence of such a fund, and that the existing measures do not provide for the incentive to have migrant women included in political life.

A representative of the international organisation stated that it would be important to establish such and similar funds that would encourage women's participation in political life, especially women from marginalised categories, including migrant women.

In conclusion, the respondents emphasised the importance of the inclusion of migrant women in the work of local non-governmental organisations, considering it a temporary solution in the process of their more active participation in political life, as well as the necessary

establishment of a greater degree of openness of social and political factors towards migrant women. At this point, it is important to consider that the largest number of respondents in this research come from the state system, and the conclusions are presented following the views of the representatives of that part of the system. On the other hand, representatives of the non-governmental sector emphasise the importance of creating systemic solutions that would enable the inclusion of migrant women in public life, as well as more efficient access to the labour market and education. In addition, it is important to emphasise that civil society organisations in Serbia are not supported by state institutions; the state does not financially support even the organisations that run licensed services in the social protection system. In this regard, the burden of this proposal from the state institutions would fall exclusively on civil society organisations, which, even under these circumstances, barely find ways to maintain their services.

III Participation of migrant women in democratic life

If we consider that democratic life implies equality, freedom, and respect for all citizens regardless of their origin, sex, gender, religion, nationality, or any other characteristic, the participation of migrant women in democratic life is crucial for the realisation of these values. Migrant women face challenges that can limit their participation in democratic life, such as language barriers, cultural differences, discrimination, and social isolation. However, these obstacles can be overcome through the active integration of migrant women into society and the political process.

In addition to improving access to education, and health care, and exercising other rights, it is essential to support organisations that deal with the issues of migrant women, support them and empower them to participate in political life. Including women from marginalised groups, including migrant women, in political and democratic life can lead to changes in political agendas, policies, and practices that are more sensitive to the needs and interests of these groups. This, in turn, contributes to creating a democratic society that respects diversity and is open to all its citizens. For this study, NGO Atina's team conducted interviews with six women from the refugee and migrant population who are active members of the Advocacy Group¹² gathered around Atina. Of all the Advocacy Group members who participated in the interviews, five live in Serbia, while one is in France. Concerning the country of origin, two respondents come from Iran¹³, while the remaining four are from Burundi¹⁴.

The respondents' average stay in European countries is around 3.5 years (from leaving the country of origin to arriving in the first country on European soil). When asked about their experience of discrim-

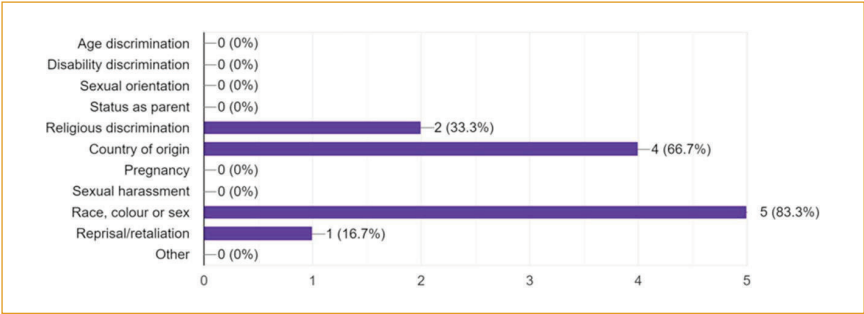
¹² The Advocacy Group gathered around NGO Atina represents an informal women's body made up of refugee and migrant women intending to address and advocate for better living conditions, access to justice and human rights for all migrant and refugee women in the Republic of Serbia. The Group carries out activities, actions, and meetings with relevant decision-makers, sharing experiences and recommendations for improving the position of refugee and migrant women in the Republic of Serbia. The Group was founded in 2018 and so far had more than 20 members.

¹³ More on migration from Iran can be found here: <https://www.dw.com/en/lost-in-belgrade-iranian-refugees-head-to-serbia-as-tourists/a-43363216>

¹⁴ More on migration from Burundi can be found here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/03/23/false-hope-burundians-duped-into-paying-big-for-serbia-asylum/>

ination during their stay in the Republic of Serbia, the respondents answered in equal percentage that they faced discrimination rarely, sometimes, and often. No respondent was exempt from discrimination of varying intensity and frequency.

When asked which institution/organisation and actors they most often felt discriminatory attitudes from, the respondents primarily mentioned representatives of state institutions in the accommodation facilities they used upon arrival in the country. In the second place, situations of discrimination related to employment and job search stood out. The respondents emphasised that in those situations, they encountered discrimination and were deprived of opportunities to enter the labour market. Some respondents stated that when seeking health services, they encountered discriminatory attitudes from professionals. Regarding the basis of discrimination, the largest number of respondents recognised race and gender (Graph 2).



Graph 2 – The basis of discrimination

Regarding access to rights, all respondents recognise that they do not have the same degree of access as women who are residents when it comes to employment, healthcare, and political life. On the other hand, 5 out of 6 research participants believe they do not have the same access even when it comes to protection from violence, legal support, education, or social services.

When asked which areas they recognise as the source of greatest deprivation when it comes to access to rights compared to women who are residents, the majority of respondents stated access to social rights and services, then access to employment and legal support, followed by healthcare and other parts of the system. Only one respondent stated that the impossibility of inclusion into political life, in addition to other parts of the system, was drastically visible.

It is important to pause for a moment and consider the possibility of understanding access to and participation in, political life. Many women refugees and migrants were significantly denied access to rights during the entire transit. The question arises whether they actually have an expectation that they will be included in political life during the transit. On the one hand, political life can be considered only participation in political processes and organisations, while on the other hand, this participation can be viewed much more widely, and a different body of rights and opportunities can be seen through it, however, this is a topic for a separate analysis. Based on the above, it can be concluded that, to the greatest extent, migrant women do not consider that their participation in the democratic life of a society is at all possible since they do not have access to elementary parts of the social system. In the footsteps of feminist political theorists such as Bell Hooks¹⁵ and Angela Davis,¹⁶ the inclusion of women from marginalised groups in democratic and political life has a direct impact on the advancement of their rights and, thus on the advancement of the democratic life of society as a whole.

When asked to name initiatives or organisations that improve and promote the participation of migrant women in democratic and political life, members of the Advocacy Group recognised only the initiative of NGO Atina, that is, the Advocacy Group, as an opportunity to participate in political and democratic life in the country. The respondents state that they believe that the Advocacy Group is an initiative that exists at the national and international levels, but that similar initiatives are lacking at the local level to bring women together.

When asked what they believe may influence the improvement of the position of migrant women in political life, the respondent primarily cited education and awareness raising among citizens about the importance of non-discrimination against migrant women and refugees (in order of importance). Among other things, they also recognised that measures of affirmative action aimed at ensuring a greater presence of migrant women in managerial positions at the local level are of great importance. It is interesting to note that the responses of the Advocacy Group members actually correspond with the view of professionals about the factors that can contribute to improving the position of migrant women in political life, citing education and informing the public in the first place.

¹⁵ Politics of Literacy: A Conversation, Vol. 14, No. 1, Special Issue: Collaboration and Change in the Academy, 1994

¹⁶ See more at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/10/19/t-magazine/angela-davis.html>

In the concluding remarks, respondents stated that they believe self-organization of migrant women into informal groups would greatly improve their participation in democratic life, that is, their initiative is crucial for improving their position. One respondent stated that education is of greatest significance in this matter and that without access to education, a higher level of participation of migrant women in political life cannot be expected.

The attitude of one respondent was particularly interesting, as she actually expects to gain access to political life only in the destination country, and her expectations regarding participation in democratic life are tied to her destination, that is, one of the EU countries.

IV Representation of migrant women in the media

The representation of migrant women in the media in Serbia is often problematic and based on stereotypes, prejudice, and sensationalism. Migrant women are often portrayed as victims, persons of lesser importance, or as a danger to society, and their stories, strengths, and experiences are marginalised.

The media often use sensationalist headlines and stories about migrant women, which affects the creation of a negative perception and reinforces the existing prejudices in society. In addition, the language that is most often used implies that all migrant women are passive victims, completely deprived of the ability to act in their own interests. Media coverage of issues related to migrant women usually focuses on violence, poverty and discrimination, which can be useful in raising awareness, but at the same time reinforces stereotypes about migrant women as insufficiently educated or integrated into society.

A research NGO Atina conducted during 2013/2014, entitled Migrant population in local communities in Serbia⁸²,¹⁷ dealt with the issue of presenting refugees and migrants in the media. The role of the media was assessed as mostly negative, both at the national and local levels.

¹⁷ Read more at: <http://www.atina.org.rs/sites/default/files/Migranti%20i%20migrantkinje%20u%20lokalnim%20zajednicama%20u%20Srbiji.finalno.pdf>

V Recommendations

Improving the political position of migrant women in Serbia requires an integrated approach that will address the various challenges they face. Some of the key recommendations resulting from interviews with professionals and migrant women are concerning:

1. Language and communication

Access to language programmes and translation services is needed in order to ensure that migrant women who do not speak the language can communicate with political institutions. This includes providing interpretation services at political rallies, debates, and meetings, as well as providing opportunities to learn the Serbian language.

2. Education and empowerment

Migrant women should be empowered through education about the political system of Serbia, their political rights, and opportunities for political engagement. This may include providing educational programs, seminars, and workshops on political participation, leadership, and political skills.

3. Gender equality

It is necessary to strongly promote gender equality in political life, in order to ensure equality of rights, opportunities, and resources for migrant women. This requires political will to promote gender equality, adopt policies and laws that protect the rights of migrant women, and prevent discrimination based on gender.

4. Economic empowerment

Ensuring the economic empowerment of migrant women can help reduce economic vulnerability and enable them to become actively engaged in political life. Economic empowerment also includes providing access to education, training, mentoring, and financial resources to support political activities.

5. Support and mentorship

It is necessary to provide support and mentorship to migrant women who want to engage in political life. This may include mentoring by women leaders in certain fields, political mentors, and civil society organisations dealing with women's and migrants' rights.

6. Inclusiveness of political processes

Political processes must be inclusive and ensure that migrant women have access to political positions, authorities, and political organisations, both at the local and national levels.

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