



Equality and Gender Mainstreaming Across Border

The project is funded by the European Union



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OF THE ROUND TABLE

“The Economic Opportunities for Women on the Local Level”

Held in Skopje, 27 April 2016

34 women activists, researchers and representatives of the local governments from Macedonia and Kosovo, gathered at a round table organized by the Association for promotion of gender equality Akcija Zdruzhenska, in Solun hotel in Skopje, on 27 April to debate the key challenges and to review the current policies in view of improving the economic opportunities of women on the local level.

The round table was organized in the framework of the project “Cross-Border Equality and Gender Mainstreaming”, supported by the EU under the IPA instrument for cross-border cooperation between Macedonia and Kosovo. The project is being implemented by Akcija Zdruzhenska, in partnership with the Kosovo Gender Studies Centre, the Community Development Institute - Tetovo and the Centre for Counseling and Support of Women Dora Dorës from Prizren.

The results and recommendations arising from the study **“The Status of Equality on the Labour Market and the Dignity, Integrity and Gender Based Violence in the Polog Region”** were presented at the round table, as well as the information from the study on the status of these issues in Kosovo.

In addition to the study recommendations, the following general conclusions and recommendations ensued from the discussion with respect to three key issues of discussion:

Which policies and programmes for employment, encouraging women’s entrepreneurship and reducing poverty are necessary on the local level?

- The absence of systemic integration of gender equality within the employment policies is a limiting factor for their efficiency and effectiveness**

Despite the fact that gender equality is imperative and there are targets in place in the current employment policies, including the active policies and programmes, aiming to increase the percentage of employed women, the national statistics and gender analyses have identified unequal opportunities for women on the labour market throughout a number of years: a high rate of economic inactivity, horizontal and vertical segregation, inequalities in salaries, poverty during employment.

In addition, there are no specialized programmes and measures targeting different categories of women, neither gender indicators nor specific criteria that may enable an equal access and opportunities for the women to be able to exploit the above measures.



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- **The offered types and methodology for implementing the active employment programmes and measures are highly disparate from women's needs and potentials.**

Women's economic empowerment is lately becoming an increasingly current topic, which is a positive trend. However, the State Statistical Office identifies a rise in the number of economically inactive women, especially women aging 35 to 49, which is an alarm that the active policies, including the programmes and measures for encouraging entrepreneurship, do not correspond with the needs on the ground.

When drafting national policies, it is important to take into account women's local specifics, challenges and needs. Moreover, the practice on the local level is treating women as a marginalized group, which is an inappropriate approach.

It is paramount to create the necessary conditions that will enable women to devote themselves to economic activities, since the limited access to local services (water, electricity, public transportation, kindergartens, disability day care centres, elderly care centres) overburdens women's everyday life, especially of those living in the rural areas, and coupled with insufficient information and participation, it prevents them from realizing their economic and other interests.

The current programmes and measures should be tailored so as to enable exploiting women's potential. The inappropriateness can be best illustrated through the questions whether women really need English language and computer courses when they are constantly unemployed? Whether they lack English to get employment and where will they find employment after the course? Whether the course location is accessible to all? Can a woman from Brvenica attend a course in Tetovo, considering the poor infrastructure?

It is necessary to overcome the cultural prejudices to women in business. Young women especially exceed the boundaries of cultural stereotypes, as the majority of them are well informed and educated in a broader environment. Women should be perceived as a resource and potential, rather than a poor category that needs assistance. There is a large number of inactive women in Macedonia, which means a large unexploited resource. Women's entrepreneurship must be promoted systematically. Successful women should be promoted as role models, since their authority in the community gives them the capacity to draw up an entire group of women, to negotiate with the municipality, etc.

The experience from the implementation of the economic empowerment programmes by encouraging entrepreneurship indicates that a large portion of the women possess the skills for which there is a demand on the market, but they need an access to information, systemic specialized support based on the identified needs instead of one-off trainings, finances/equipment, marketing and access to markets, etc.

It is necessary to take into account that women often only appear as business holders, whereas the real control or support comes from their husbands or family members. Therefore, it is necessary to implement an approach that will enable support for the women to run their businesses independently.

The tax policy and the insufficient access to finances are a limiting factor for a vast majority of the women who want to formalize, sustain or develop their small businesses by marketing and selling products on foreign markets. The high taxes are exhausting and loans are inaccessible because they do not own any property; therefore they need grant programmes with auxiliary measures to support the formalization and development of their businesses.

It is necessary to identify and adapt the models/approaches/experiences that have proved to be good practices in the countries of this region and Europe in the area of supporting economic empowerment and the provision of equality of women on the labour market, including the promotion of equality within the business community and providing an equal access to public procurements for women's businesses.

- **Absence of systemic promotion and authentic local policies/programmes/measures for women's economic empowerment.**

The LED (Local Economic Development) plans of some LSG units actually include measures for economic empowerment, but they do not provide for any budget funds for their implementation. The justification that the municipalities do not possess any finances is not acceptable since the budget analyses imply high



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budget allocations/transfers for unidentified beneficiaries or purpose, or are even contrary to the identified priorities of the citizens, especially of the women.

The initiatives with proved potential for sustainable employment of women that provides dignified income largely stem from projects that are funded by development assistance. In order to ensure their sustainability, it is necessary to support them by integrating them into the local economic development policies and funding them from the LSG budgets. Additionally, sustainability can be ensured by integrating them as models/measures in the employment and budget plans of the central government.

How to improve the efficiency of the protection against sexual harassment, mobbing and other forms of discrimination against women at employment and in the workplace?

- **Discrimination and violence against women on the labour market (mobbing on women, and especially sexual harassment, are issues that are absent as an influencing factor on inequality and gender gaps in the employment policies).**

The high unemployment rate and job insecurity due to the employment contracts are the main factors that influence discrimination against women in the workplace.

The nature and consequences of the various forms of discrimination against women and the violation of their working rights, especially mobbing and sexual harassment must no longer be neglected. The consequences for the women – victims of this type of violence are diverse by nature: psychological, financial, loss of the job, degradation to a lower work position, being assigned a greater work load, not being assigned appropriate work duties, reduced concentration, continuous pressure to avoid the harasser during work hours, etc. The women that face such problems either resign themselves or are laid off. However, the fact remains that these women lose their jobs due to sexual harassment and they are the actual victims.

The profile of the victims includes young women, women that are employed with a verbal or part-time contract, women in the private sector, as well as women that are in the mid or lower positions in the company hierarchy.

It is necessary to harmonize the terms in the laws that address the issue of sexual harassment with the definition from the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men and to introduce specialized mechanisms for efficient operationalization of the protection.

The absence of an efficient protection system, especially in the private sector, the problems related to the impossibility to prove discrimination and sexual harassment, as well as the cultural restrictions, influence the extremely small number of reported cases through the mechanisms established by certain civil associations.

Trade union protection is also non-functional given the fact that the implementation of the adopted laws and regulations does not function in practice. The trade unions must function better and therefore it is best for the individual trade unions to stand together in real defence of the female workers' rights. The support mechanisms established in the trade unions cannot offer anything more than psychological support and counseling; hence the impossibility to confirm a positive outcome for the women from the court procedures as it is very difficult to prove such cases. It is necessary to organize more workshops, public debates and training for the employers, especially for the manager teams.

What is the possible contribution of the civil organizations to the improvement of women's position on the labour market?

Although the political context is assessed as highly unfavourable for the action of the civil associations, the conclusion is that the non-governmental organizations, especially those that are active in the local communities, can largely affect the improved treatment of the issue of economic empowerment of



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women as the focus of the future employment related policies. There are funds, but they are either small or planned in the area of social inclusion; therefore, action is necessary to direct the policies both towards the young educated women and the marginalized categories of women equally.

By contacting the women in the community directly, the NGOs can help identify their specific needs and potentials, provide information about the opportunities and support and advocate for public - funded relevant social services.

Greater involvement of the civil associations is necessary in view of systemic promotion, encouragement and advocacy of measures and funds for development of women's entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship and the transfer of responsibilities by the local self governments as a possibility for both providing services and access to employment of the vulnerable categories of women is also an opportunity for greater involvement of the civil associations in support of gender equality. One of the approaches is mutual exchange of information and experiences and cooperation on the national and regional level, in view of advocating effectively for changes in the employment related legislation and policies, including protection against discrimination and gender based violence.

The participants in the debate underlined the benefit of the visible effects of the support provided for the capacities of the organizations involved in the project and the exchange of information between the partners and the other organizations in dealing with the common challenges in the field of women's rights and gender equality. They also underlined the need for continuing the cross border cooperation after the completion of the project.



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