
Author: Milana Lazic

Great Expectations - Grounding EU Gender Equality principles into Serbian policy

Executive summary

The main purpose of the Policy Brief – “Great Expectations - Grounding EU Gender Equality principles into Serbian policy” is to examine the progress of the Republic of Serbia to access EU gender equality principles and ground them into their public policy. The main focus is limited to particular aspects of the problem to gender inequality in the area of gender mainstreaming and access to equal opportunities for women and men. The specific objectives of this policy brief is to give an overview of the adopted EU gender equality principles, point out the principles which are lacking and explore the ways for grounding EU gender equality principles with special focus on women’s access to economic opportunities and usage of gender equality as a principle at all levels of governance. This policy brief will also try to synthesize what has been done on a policy national level, as well as point out what needs to be particularly introduced.

This policy brief is relevant because it is written at the moment of adoption new legislative framework in the field of gender equality and the current process of EU accession: the new Law on Gender Equality that has been in the adoption procedure, the New Strategy for Gender Equality and its Plan of Action, as well as the adoption of Gender Equality Index for Serbia, the new EU instrument for measuring gender equality.

The key elements for creating policy options for this brief go in three directions: 1) There is a clear political will in this area and commitment of decision makers and public servants to take concrete steps in enforcing gender mainstreaming on a regular basis and create policies and measures for ensuring equal access to both women and men and monitor their implementation on the local level; 2) There is a political will, but no clear steps to be taken in order to ensure gender mainstreaming and create policies and measures for ensuring equal access to both women and men to monitor their implementation on the local level; 3) There is a lack of political will and thus no real commitment of decision makers and public servants to take concrete steps in enforcing gender mainstreaming on a regular basis and create policies and measures for ensuring equal access to both women and men, but persistent pressure of the EU and international community. Policy recommendations of this policy brief go in direction that it would be much more effective if Serbia would enforce gender mainstreaming at all levels of governance as a one of the preconditions for good governance and adopt policy measures to improve access to equal opportunities in favor of women. Following these two EU principles in gender equality would benefit Serbia for three main reasons: 1) by enforcing gender equality principles to all levels of governance would speed the accession process to the EU; 2) it would contribute to anti-discrimination policies and changing stereotypes of patriarchal gender roles; 3) improve of position of women and contribute to the development of the society.

Gender Inequality Grounded in Serbian Society

The main goal of this policy brief would be to examine what challenges Serbia faces while grounding EU gender equality principles into its policy.

The women, half of the population in Serbia, still fall down under vulnerable groups among Roma people, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants, people from

rural areas, LGBTIQ, according to the Second National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction. Women are still more economically deprived compared to men, earn less, have less powerful position, are fewer among decision makers and their gender roles are still stereotypical in dominant patriarchal society. Women MPs make 34% and there are 20% women in the Government (4 out of 19). Still only 5% of women are mayors and presidents in local self-governments.

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The women are the most populated vulnerable group at the labor market. The employment rate of women is 35%, compared to 50% of employment rate for men. The activity rate is 53,8%, compared to 69,9% activity rate of men. On a managing positions the number of men is almost doubled – 57.768, than women – 25.772. Women still face different types of discrimination in the field of labor and employment, where the half of the complaints submitted to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality where based on gender and sex. Pregnant women face high level of discrimination, even 38% of citizens are familiar with the case where woman got fired due to being pregnant. Around 76% of women entrepreneurs consider that they are not considered to be serious at their work, which is the indicator of one of the types of gender discrimination. Women in Serbia are less likely to own a farm in rural areas or to sing up to get a bank loan, while women managers are facing obstacles in order to upgrade their positions and to equal treatment as men. Vulnerable are women in villages and rural areas, especially because of economic difference between women and men. The big problem is that there is no systemic support for marginalized groups of women, e.g. Roma, women 45+, women victims of violence in family and partnership relations, etc.

When it comes to parenthood, women are facing difficulties in lacking access to health services, services for child care in rural areas, insufficient transport and access to cultural institutions.

What strikes the most is the high rate of femicide¹ and in the past few years their number is yearly over 40, meaning almost one women is murdered each week. This phenomenon shows that there is a lot to be done when it comes to equalizing the position of women towards men. These constrain witness non-equal cultural values and norms, as well as less assets owned by women and predominant role of women in child care responsibilities. According to the Time Use Survey done by Republic Statistical Office, women approximately spend daily around an hour and a half more than men taking care of children on average and approximately 5 hours of unpaid work on average compared to a little over two hours of unpaid work for men.

It is clear that Serbia suffers if the gender equality principles are not yet in place. Empowering women and providing them equal opportunities as men, could have influence on the National GDP and would have contribute to mainstream principles of gender equality as one of the key principles of social inclusion and sustainable development, since women are still under the spotlight of being vulnerable group.

1 Murder committed against women

In recent period, Serbia had put gender equality high on the political agenda, since the Deputy Prime Minister has formed Coordination Body for Gender Equality. The main policy failure is that the other line ministries do not recognize gender equality as important component of policy making and the political agenda does not always apply at the local level. Smaller and underdeveloped municipalities fail to include more women in the decision making process and face many stereotypes and different forms of violence.

The assumption is that Serbia has starting turning its focus towards EU gender equality principles, but also lacking in its absorption at the local level policy implementation. The newest Progress Report by European Commission stated that even though a new Coordination Body for Gender Equality was set up in October 2014 and has replacing the Gender Equality Directorate in the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, a sustainable institutional set up for promotion of gender equality with adequate resources needs to be ensured. „The increasing number of women killed by their partners is of concern. Emergency protection orders are not issued promptly, the number of shelters is insufficient and there is no state-run center for victims of sexual violence and no national women’s helpline. The protection of women against all forms of violence needs to be strengthened and mechanisms for coordinating the collection and sharing of data between all relevant actors in the system enhanced. Although the number of women members of parliament increased to 34 %, women’s participation in politics and in the private sector remains very low.” And when it comes to equal opportunities between women and men it was recognized that legislation needs to be fully implemented, particularly regarding the dismissal of pregnant women and women on maternity leave, sexual harassment, the gender pay gap and inequality in promotion, salaries and pensions. The European Commission had encountered amendments that were made to the labour law in July 2014 help to empower women at work, help working mothers to reconcile family and professional life, and offer greater protection to pregnant workers. However, women’s participation in the labour market as well as the gender pay gap need to be tackled further.

The Evaluation Report of the Republic of Serbia Plan of Action for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Improving and Promoting Gender Equality for the period 2010-2015 has shown that biggest progress was made in political and economic participation but only on the national level, as well as that on the local level the implementation was shown as unequal. Evaluation has also shown that there is an unequal promotion of good practices, efficiency often depends from donor support and system of monitoring and evaluation is often missing. The new draft of the National Strategy for Gender Equality

has been put in the government procedure for adoption and it recognizes three overall goals: fighting stereotypes and gender roles, improving economic position of women and vulnerable groups of women and gender mainstreaming into all levels of public policy. These goals are in line with both the current EU Strategy on Gender Equality but also the New EU framework for gender equality and women empowerment in External Actions (2016-2020).

Serbia has started a process of establishing Gender Equality Index, an EU instrument for ensuring gender equality inter alia equality between women and men, among EU member states. This instrument was introduced by European Institute for Gender Equality and in Serbia it was initiated by Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit together with Coordination Body for Gender Equality and Republic Statistical Office. The first results of Serbian Gender Equality Index will be available by the beginning of 2016. The process of gender responsive budgeting had started and will offer evidence on how is the public budget spent based on gender.

Three Directions of Potential Policy Options

The key elements for creating policy options for this brief go in three directions: 1) There is a clear political will in this area and commitment of decision makers and public servants to take concrete steps in enforcing gender mainstreaming on a regular basis and create policies and measures for ensuring equal access to both women and men and monitor their implementation on the local level; 2) There is a political will, but no clear steps to be taken in order to ensure gender mainstreaming and create policies and measures for ensuring equal access to both women and men to monitor their implementation on the local level; 3) There is a lack of political will and thus no real commitment of decision makers and public servants to take concrete steps in enforcing gender mainstreaming on a regular basis and create policies and measures for ensuring equal access to both women and men of, but persistent pressure of the EU and international community.

Out of these proposed three options, clearly the best one would be to ensure both political will and clear commitment of decision makers and public servants in enforcing gender mainstreaming on a regular basis and create policies and measures for ensuring equal access to both women and men, as well as monitor their implementation on the local level. In the recent period as it was explained under Section 3: Rationale for action on the problem, Serbia has shown clear political will to increase gender equality and improve position of women in society. Currently, the new legislative framework has been developed and the next step would be its appliance and implementation at all level of governance. These new legislative framework

should predict foundation on the new institution for gender equality at the central government that will have mandate to coordinate all issues on enforcing gender equality at all levels of governance and responsible to tackle issues of ensuring equal access to both women and men and coordinate those issues among all line ministries, other relevant institutions and proclaim how they should be tackled at the local level. This instituton should also be responsible for overall monitoring of the implementation of introduced legal framework, policies and measures, based on tangible indicators and evaluation.

Recommendations for Grounding EU Gender Equality Principles in Serbian Society

Policy recommendations of this policy brief go in direction that it would be much more effective if Serbia would enforce gender mainstreaming at all levels of governance as a one of the preconditions for good governance, and adopt policy measures to improve access to equal opportunities in favor of women. Following these two EU principles in gender equality would benefit Serbia for three main reasons: 1) by enforcing gender equality principles to all levels of governance would speed the accession process to the EU; 2) it would contribute to anti-discrimination policies and changing stereotypes of patriarchal gender roles; 3) improve of position of women and contribute to the development of the society.

Becoming EU member state is a clear political goal of the Government of Serbia. The set of explanatory screenings were held, and now Serbia is awaiting the date to open negotiation Chapters. If Serbia enforces gender mainstreaming at all levels of governance as one of the preconditions of good governance that would increase the rule of law and anti-discrimination principles incorporated among the public policy reform process. This would also mean the respect of human rights, women and minority rights. Women visible at all levels of decision making process, more women on the managing positions and more women in politics would contribute to breaking of gender stereotypes and typical gender roles. Gender equality needs to be present as horizontal issue on the levels of governance and in all key policies and reflected in all strategic documents.

Gender analysis of policies and measures needs to be used on a regular bases by all line ministries and national institutions when creating policies, so that evidence of how certain policies and measures affect women and contribute to gender equality. Gender sensitive statistics and evidence should also be collected on a regular basis by the Republic Statistical Office and all existing Statistical Departments within both national and local level institutions, as well as usage of sex segregated data when planning policies at all levels of governance. Both national

and local budgets need to be gender responsible and to plan ahead public money spending. This also means that we need to ensure full operationalization of human and technical capacities and ensuring functioning of local gender equality mechanisms. These mechanisms need to be monitored and evaluated and human and financial capacities secured.

Multisector cooperation needs to be established on a regular basis and human capacities specialized in introducing gender mainstreaming into public policies have to be developed. This will be done by centralizing principle of gender equality within the Government, which is predicted by the Draft Law on Gender Equality. This new Body should be responsible for overall coordination within central government but also monitoring the mechanisms for gender equality on the local level. Also, innovative approaches, knowledge and good practices that come from civil society need to be recognized and used as role models and for cooperation between government and non-governmental sectors.

The estimation of yet unpublished analysis done by Foundation for Development of Economic Sciences and supported by the World Bank estimates that if Serbia would increase participation of women on the labor market and have access to equal opportunities as men that would have increased national GDP for around 9%. This witnesses that adoption of policy measures have impact on improvement of access to equal opportunities in favor of women.

The contribution on improving access to equal opportunities in favor of women would contribute to increasing human capacities and getting more competence on the labor market, and by allowing women equal access to economic opportunities the presumption is that more women will get to work and more women will improve their current position on the labor market and increase their economic status. The Government should strongly usage of anti-discrimination tools, e.g. increased inspection institutes, to decrease cases of discrimination of women at labor market for various reasons: sex, pregnancy, disability, marital status, nationality, etc. One of the particular measures should

refer to equal pay for both men and women for the same job positions. The mechanisms for allowing equal career advancement for both women and men should be developed. In the area of entrepreneurship, the particular incentives for developing women entrepreneurship and mechanisms of support should be developed. Special subsidies and mentorship support should be offered for both entrepreneurship and increased employability for vulnerable groups of women should be introduced, e.g. Roma women, women experiencing violence, women victims of human trafficking and other. These processes should be jointly coordinated and monitored by line ministries in charge for employment and education. It is also very important to encounter examples of project based good practices done by civil society organizations, with the support of the donor community.

Applying concrete policies and measures of equal opportunities throughout increased participation of men in care economy and parenthood is also very important. This would mean to actively promote role of men in taking care of children, and increased their participation in non-paid work, more concretely housework. This would also affect the changing stereotypes of patriarchal gender roles and media should promote these role models of men in parenthood publicly. Government should also stimulate men to use the opportunity for parental leave.

All of the actions should follow International Conventions that Serbia has ratified in the field of gender equality and done in partnership with both donor support and partnership with civil society.

Milana Lazić, BA pol.sci

Human Security and Gender Equality Coordinator,
Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of Serbia

MA student of International Security and MA student of Gender Studies,

Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade

Undergraduate Exchange Program, University of Wisconsin Eau Claire

Member of Open Society Foundations Alumni Network

Milana.lazic@gov.rs

milanalazic@gmail.com

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