



This programme is funded  
by the European Union



## SERIES OF WEBINARS

### **A thousand ways to solve our problems: Preventing and responding to violence against women from an intersectional perspective**

#### *Ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds*

### **WEBINAR 1: Intersectional solutions to eliminate violence against women and girls in rural areas – on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women**

**Date and time:** 15<sup>th</sup> October 2020, from 2:30 PM to 4:30 PM CEST (GMT+2)

#### **Background paper**

This document aims to provide a snapshot of the situation of rural women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey, with an emphasis on issues related to violence against women and domestic violence, to inform and facilitate discussions to be held during the webinar “Intersectional solutions to eliminate violence against women and girls in rural areas in the Western Balkans and Turkey” on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October. The webinar will take place on International Day of Rural Women. This webinar is the first of the series of webinars “A thousand ways to solve our problems: Preventing and responding to violence against women from an intersectional perspective” organized by the European Union, the Council of Europe and UN Women, and designed to provide a space for knowledge sharing and discussion on how to prevent and respond to VAWG from an intersectional perspective, acknowledging and addressing the specific issues faced by minority and marginalized women from the Western Balkans and Turkey.

This document’s main sources of information are the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) national periodic reports; CEDAW Concluding Observations and shadow reports for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey; and Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) baseline reports, when available. The document also relies on the research work undertaken with the EU-UN Women regional programme “Ending violence against women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds” and research conducted by the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The document also highlights many obstacles and issues that prevent women and girls in rural areas from benefiting from quality and accessible services, enjoying decent economic benefits, and participating in decision-making arenas.

### **What is intersectionality?**

The concept of intersectionality was first coined in 1989 by Black feminist activist and academic Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw offered intersectionality as a tool to contextualize the specific ways African-American women were being subjected to both sex and race discrimination and the barriers they faced when trying to seek redress for this. Since then, the term 'intersectionality' has been used to understand women's experiences at the intersection of a number of simultaneous oppressions.<sup>1</sup>

Intersectionality recognizes that individuals can experience discrimination on the basis of multiple and intersecting identities. Specifically, CEDAW and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (also known as the Istanbul Convention) have observed that ethnic minority women, elderly women, women living in rural or remote areas, disabled women, migrant women, women in prisons and women and girls on the street are particularly vulnerable to disadvantage and discrimination. Discrimination and violence faced by these women is characterized by a unique simultaneous combination of several factors, and not by the simple addition of these factors. Accordingly, intersectional feminism centers the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression in order to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context. Intersectional feminism offers a lens through which we can better understand and address disparate impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in communities around the globe, but also international protests against racism and discrimination. Taking an intersectional feminist approach to the crises of today helps to seize the opportunity to rebuild better, stronger, more resilient, and more equal societies, by not only turning the tables on gender injustices, but rooting out all forms of oppression. It serves as a framework through which to build inclusive, robust movements that work to solve overlapping forms of discrimination, simultaneously.<sup>2</sup>

At an international level, CEDAW is committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination and achieving gender equality so that all women can exercise and enjoy their human rights. This implicitly includes a commitment to understanding and addressing intersectional discrimination. Under CEDAW, if sex and gender is one of the bases for discrimination, it is necessary to examine how other identities and factors contribute to discrimination. At a regional level, the legally-binding Istanbul Convention, which came into force on 1 August 2014, is considered a milestone in the fight against VAWG in Council of Europe countries. The Istanbul Convention likewise incorporates a theoretical framing of "intersectionality," as it recognizes the specific problems of women and girls exposed to multiple or intersectional discrimination and specifically urges parties to "take into account and address the specific needs of persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances" (Istanbul Convention, Article 12, part 3).

### **SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY: AN INTRODUCTION**

Rural women make up over a quarter of the world's population and a majority of the 43 per cent of women in the global agricultural labour force, yet they face intersecting inequalities, discrimination and difficulties which produce a unique and compounded level of violence. As recognized by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, women living in remote and rural areas are a group particularly vulnerable to violence, given intersectional forms of discriminations against them as a result of a combination of specific and overlapping factors (e.g., gender, place of residence, disability,

---

<sup>1</sup> [The value of intersectionality in understanding VAWG, UN Women, 2019](#), page 3

<sup>2</sup> [Intersectional feminism: what it means and why it matters right now, UN Women, 2020](#)

age). Compared to women living in urban settings, rural women face intersectional forms of gender-based discrimination and violence nurtured by highly prevalent traditional customs and values, a lack of rural development characterized by a high poverty rate, stereotypes regarding rural lifestyle stemming from urban populations, a lack of access to information and education, a lack of proximity to services, and other challenges. Women and girls living in rural areas also encounter multiple inequalities and discrimination when seeking women's support services, which often fail to respond appropriately and in a context-specific way to their needs.

Because of a lack of official sex-disaggregated data in rural areas in the Western Balkans and Turkey, the exact percentage of women living in rural areas is unknown. However, the few available studies reveal that the population of men is higher than women in rural areas. In Albania, for instance, the average ratio was 107 males for 100 females in 2016.<sup>3</sup>

Concerning the poverty rate among rural women, all CEDAW concluding observations highlight the precarious conditions of rural women and girls, disproportionately affected by poverty and limited access to employment, social security, and health and reproductive care. Limited access to employment is partially explained by widespread gender-based discrimination and violence against rural girls and women grounded in the prejudices that they should assist in the household, get married and have children instead of pursuing education and formal employment. Despite an evident lack of data on the prevalence of all forms of violence against rural women, research conducted to date reveals a strong positive correlation between rates of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence and women's participation in unpaid work in the informal economy where women living in rural areas are over-represented. Together with VAWG, gender-based discrimination in rural areas of the Western Balkans and Turkey also severely limits rural women's access to power, decision-making, resources and fulfilment of rights, and even to a high occurrence of sex-selective abortion, as observed in some rural parts of Serbia.<sup>4</sup>

### **Who are rural women in the Western Balkans?**

Women in rural areas are more likely than women in urban areas to have only primary education or less (7 per cent versus 3 per cent, respectively) and less likely to have completed tertiary education (15 per cent versus 31 per cent, respectively). Slightly more rural women are disabled than urban women (7 per cent versus 5 per cent, respectively) and more rural women than urban women are poor (12 per cent versus 9 per cent, respectively). Rural women tend to be slightly older (19 per cent of urban women are 50–59 compared with 22 per cent of rural women; 22 per cent of both urban and rural women are over 60).<sup>5</sup>

### **VAWG IN RURAL AREAS: A DISSIMULATED PUBLIC ISSUE GROUNDED IN TRADITIONAL HARMFUL GENDER ROLES**

Despite Western Balkans countries' and Turkey's ratification of the Istanbul Convention (with the exception of Kosovo\*, which recently amended its Constitution to include the Istanbul Convention in the list of directly applicable legal instruments for the protection of human rights), research conducted

<sup>3</sup> [Aborti selektiv me bazë gjinore në Shqipëri, Shoqata Together For Life, 2018](#), page 14

<sup>4</sup> [Women's rights in Western Balkans, European Parliament, 2019](#), page 30

<sup>5</sup> [OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Well-being and safety of women, Experiences of disadvantaged women thematic report, 2019](#), page 97

\* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UN Women, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

in Western Balkans shows that women who are doing unpaid work in a family business, which is characteristic of rural women, are more likely to report having experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 (33 per cent versus, 23 per cent overall) and in the 12 months prior to the survey (16 per cent versus 7 per cent overall).<sup>6</sup> Women doing unpaid work in a family business are over three times more likely than women working in formal settings to have experienced attempted rape from an intimate partner, and more than twice as likely to say that they have consented to some form of sexual activities out of fear of the consequences of their refusals.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the Western Balkans, women living in rural areas are also more likely to perceive some physical violence as a normal part of marriage.<sup>8</sup> In Serbia for instance, a higher proportion of women living in rural areas tend to agree that sexual intercourse without consent is justified compared to women living in urban areas.<sup>9</sup> In Kosovo, the prevalence of physical violence was shown to be higher in rural areas, including childhood physical violence.<sup>10</sup> Also common to all countries of the Western Balkans, rural women are more prone to intimate partner violence related to alcohol abuse than women living in urban areas.<sup>11</sup> Similar to the Western Balkans, in Turkey, prevalence data clearly indicates higher rates of lifetime exposure to physical and/or sexual violence by intimate partners in rural areas compared to urban settings.<sup>12</sup> Lifetime exposures to partner violence ranges from 27 to 43 percent, and the rate of violence within the last 12 months varies between 5 and 11 percent among regions, with central Anatolia recording the highest level of violence in both categories.<sup>13</sup>

Traditional harmful gender roles that place women in subordinate positions and identify men as ‘heads of households and holdings,’ as well as attitudes of not interfering in ‘family matters’, contribute to high rates of violence in rural areas, particularly intimate partner violence. These same issues also account for low reporting of VAWG to institutions.<sup>14,15</sup> A general lack of confidentiality is another overlapping barrier to reporting violence, pointed out as particularly problematic among women living in rural areas, yet not addressed by any women’s support services.<sup>16</sup> Besides, as men living in rural areas have more time to socialize and create contacts than rural women, they are more likely to know someone working within reporting institutions that could help them to evade any consequences of being reported.<sup>17</sup> As observed in Albania, out of 1038 women who reported violence in 2017, 743 were residing in urban settings while 295 were residing in rural areas, revealing disparities in the geographical distribution and the number of complaints filed by women victims of violence based on their geographical place of residence.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the enforcement of laws meant to prevent VAWG and guarantee gender equality is severely hindered in rural areas by the above-stated pervasive traditional patriarchal customs and values.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> [OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Well-being and safety of women, Experiences of disadvantaged women thematic report, 2019](#), page 29

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, page 31

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, page 38

<sup>9</sup> [OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Well-being and safety of women, Serbia results report](#), page 21

<sup>10</sup> [OSCE-led survey on well-being safety of women-Kosovo results report, 2019](#), page 18 and 78

<sup>11</sup> [OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Well-being and safety of women, Experiences of disadvantaged women thematic report, 2019](#), page 34

<sup>12</sup> [Research on domestic violence against women in Turkey, 2014](#), page 438

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, page 85

<sup>14</sup> [GREVIO baseline report on Turkey](#), 2018, paragraph 14

<sup>15</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women’s organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 4

<sup>16</sup> [OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Well-being and safety of women, Experiences of disadvantaged women thematic report, 2019](#), page 40

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, page 72

<sup>18</sup> [UPR Shadow Report for the period 2014-2018, Center for Legal Civic Initiatives](#), paragraph 17

<sup>19</sup> [Women’s rights in Western Balkans, European Parliament, 2019](#), page 8

## RURAL GIRLS HAVE HIGHER CHANCE TO MARRY AND FEWER CHANCES TO PURSUE AND COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION

Poverty low education levels and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) are major factors that increase the likelihood of women and girls' exposure to violence and its physical and psychological consequences. In Turkey, more than 32 per cent of women living in rural areas reported having been married before the age of 18, compared to 25 per cent for women living in urban settings.<sup>20</sup> Also in Turkey, between 2009 and 2014, 3,364 girls gave birth before the age of 15, and 151,727 gave birth between the ages of 15-17.<sup>21</sup> In Serbia, 4.7 per cent of girls from urban areas were married before the age of 18, compared to 10.1 per cent of rural girls.<sup>22</sup> In Albania, CEDAW expressed concerns about the persistence of harmful practices such as CEFM, families choosing husbands and the payment of a bride price or dowry, which remain prevalent in rural and remote areas. It also notes with concern the re-emergence of concepts of justice (*kanun*) and codes of conduct that condone killings of women and girls in the name of so-called "honour."<sup>23</sup> In Turkey, CEDAW expressed concerns about the ongoing practice, especially in rural and remote areas, of giving girls as brides to settle blood feuds, and the continued payment of "bride prices" in certain regions.<sup>24</sup> In the same country, reported cases of girls who have been raped or harassed being forced to marry their perpetrators in the name of preserving so-called family honour are not isolated.<sup>25</sup> In Kosovo, young women and girls in rural areas remain specifically vulnerable to CEFM, especially among non-majority communities such as the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, rural girls have fewer chances for education than girls living in urban settlements due to discriminatory beliefs that a girl's primary duties should be to assist in the household, get married and have children. In Serbia, illiterate women constitute 1.6 per cent of the population in urban settlements but 5.5 per cent in rural settlements.<sup>27</sup> In the same country, 9.9 per cent of women living in urban settlements did not go to primary school, compared to 30.4 per cent for women living in rural areas; 50 per cent of women living in urban settlements have a high school education, while this drops to 36 per cent for women in rural areas; and 23 per cent of women living in urban settlements received higher education compared to 6 per cent of women living in rural areas.<sup>28</sup>

The highest share of illiterate women, as well as the greatest disparities between the literacy of women living in urban and rural areas, exist among women over 50 years of age, highlighting the intersection of age with other forms of discrimination. Low rates of computer literacy also disproportionately affect rural women, who are the least represented among the computer literate population, although computer literacy is now crucial to access to information and employment opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, rural girls are more likely to drop out of school than rural boys or both girls and boys living in urban settings. In Turkey<sup>30</sup> and North Macedonia,<sup>31</sup> CEDAW remains concerned about the high dropout

---

<sup>20</sup> [GREVIO report on Turkey](#), 2018, paragraph 237

<sup>21</sup> [Shadow NGO Report on Turkey's Seventh Periodic Report to CEDAW](#), [The Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW, 2016](#) page 18

<sup>22</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women's organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 72

<sup>23</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Albania, 2016](#) paragraph 20

<sup>24</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report, of Turkey 2016](#), paragraph 30

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*

<sup>26</sup> [Child marriage in Kosovo, UNFPA, 2014](#), page 4

<sup>27</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women's organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 40

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, page 41

<sup>29</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women's organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 42

<sup>30</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report, of Turkey 2016](#), paragraph 43

<sup>31</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2018](#), paragraph 33

rate and underrepresentation of girls and women in vocational training and higher education, in particular in deprived rural areas. More specifically, in Turkey, the extension of compulsory education until 12 years of age might allow pupils, subject to parental approval, to opt for home schooling from 12 years of age and to continue their education at specialized religious schools (*imam hatip*). CEDAW is concerned that this may have a particularly negative effect on girls, given that home and religious-based education may reinforce the traditional role of girls as wives and mothers and may not be subjected to such rigorous monitoring as the state school system.

### INSUFFICIENT AND POOR-QUALITY SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS

Women's limited access to legal aid services, especially in rural and remote areas, as well as the absence of hotline services for women victims of violence also partially explain the low reporting rates of violence among rural women.<sup>32</sup> If CEDAW noted with appreciation the adoption of the Law on Providing Free Legal Aid in 2016 and the training provided for judges and prosecutors on gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is concerned about rural women's insufficient access to free legal aid who wish to report gender-based discrimination and violence.<sup>33</sup>

Limited funding means that most of the organizations providing services are concentrated in large urban areas. Although the past fifteen years had seen an increase in NGOs providing support services for women who experience violence, women living in rural areas regret that these services are mainly accessible in urban settings.<sup>34</sup> The same issue is observed in Montenegro where non-governmental organizations providing counselling operate in big cities such as Podgorica or Nikšić; likewise, specialist support services are concentrated in big municipalities.<sup>35</sup> In Kosovo, childcare services are predominantly located in Pristina, leaving rural women with no access to childcare.<sup>36</sup>

The concentration of general and specialist services and opportunities in urban areas nurtures already-existing rural women's and girls' dependency on public transportation, which is rarely regular or affordable, if available at all. Crises like the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted public transportation provision in rural areas, putting rural women at a higher risk of isolation and preventing them from seeing friends or wider family.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, women in these situations are often only able to call SOS helplines when the perpetrator is not around,<sup>38</sup> and are exposed to higher risks of these helplines being unexpectedly disrupted, as has been the case during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

Rural women victims of violence are less likely than women living in urban settings to benefit from the multiple services provided by shelters. In Albania for instance, the concentration of shelters in the capital and in a limited number of other localities (Elbasan, Vlorë and Shkodra) leaves a wide portion of women living in rural and remote areas without sufficient protection.<sup>39</sup> In Montenegro, there are no state-funded safe houses for victims of violence, except one dedicated to trafficked victims. The three independent shelters for women facing domestic violence that do exist are run and funded by NGOs. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, all nine of the available safe houses are run by NGOs. Particularly revealing, the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina did not allocate any funds to the safe houses in

---

<sup>32</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Albania, 2016](#), paragraph 32

<sup>33</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), 2019, paragraph 13

<sup>34</sup> [OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Well-being and safety of women, Experiences of disadvantaged women thematic report, 2019](#), page 71

<sup>35</sup> [GREVIO baseline report on Montenegro, 2018](#), paragraph 20

<sup>36</sup> [Women's rights in Western Balkans, European Parliament, 2019](#), page 27

<sup>37</sup> [Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on specialist services for victims and survivors of violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey: A proposal for addressing the needs, UN Women, 2020](#), page 13

<sup>38</sup> [A thousand ways to solve our problems: An analysis of existing violence against women and girls approaches for minoritized women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey", UN Women, 2018](#), page 32

<sup>39</sup> [GREVIO baseline report on Albania, 2017](#), paragraph 103

2015.<sup>40</sup> This trend is also observed in Kosovo, where rural women's access to specialist services is much more limited than access for women living in urban settings.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, rural women have more difficulties reaching services related to reproductive health, gynecological examinations, and family planning counselling. CEDAW concluding observations note the limited access to sexual and reproductive health services for rural women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, who are often unaware of the availability of such services. Some barriers faced by rural women in accessing these services include the far-away location of specialist service providers, a lack of gynecologists, deficient infrastructure and public transportation, and prejudices toward rural women.<sup>42</sup> In Serbia, cases of rural women who did not have gynecological examination for over 20 years are not isolated,<sup>43</sup> while in North Macedonia, the number of gynecologists cover only 50 per cent of the country's demand.<sup>44</sup>

When services are made available in rural areas, their quality leaves much to be desired due to the inadequate staffing of rural health care centers owing to the drain of medical professionals and long waiting list conducive to corruption.<sup>45,46</sup> In the Western Balkans, women living in rural areas are less likely than those in urban areas to indicate being satisfied with the police (43 and 50 per cent, respectively).<sup>47</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, health facilities typically do not have accessible health equipment for gynecological care, such as examination tables. In Turkey, specialist, qualified and experienced staff is particularly lacking in violence prevention and monitoring centers (*Şönims*) in rural areas, where support and monitoring services are provided to prevent violence and to implement protective and preventive measures.<sup>48</sup> Besides, women living in some rural parts of Turkey abstain from making application in fear of a lack of confidentiality and the possibility of the perpetrator to hear about the application, as social workers in violence protection monitoring centers might be relatives, associates, friends or acquaintances of the perpetrator of violence.<sup>49</sup>

## DISPROPORTIONATE BURDEN OF WORK AND POVERTY RATE AMONG RURAL WOMEN

High rates of unemployment, lack of training opportunities and qualifications, and lower levels of education make rural women more vulnerable to unemployment and poverty, despite a heavy burden of work. In Montenegro, rural women carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid and physically challenging work under difficult conditions, such as having limited access to running water and/or electricity and childcare facilities.<sup>50</sup> In North Macedonia, rural women bear the burden of domestic activities, spending four times more time on housework than men.<sup>51</sup> In Serbia, rural women work nearly one hour longer than men per day, except that they spend 65 per cent of their time doing unpaid work, while men spend 69 per cent of their time doing paid work. On the weekend, women also work

---

<sup>40</sup> [A thousand ways to solve our problems: An analysis of existing violence against women and girls approaches for minoritized women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey](#), Imkaan, 2018, page 33

<sup>41</sup> [OSCE-led survey on well-being and safety of women – Kosovo results report, 2019](#), page 83

<sup>42</sup> [Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2018](#), page 41

<sup>43</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women's organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 36

<sup>44</sup> [Women's rights in Western Balkans, European Parliament, 2019](#), page 83

<sup>45</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), paragraph 37

<sup>46</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women's organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 36

<sup>47</sup> [OSCE-led survey on violence against women – Well-being and safety of women, Experiences of disadvantaged women thematic report, 2019](#), page 73

<sup>48</sup> [GREVIO baseline report on Turkey, 2018](#), paragraph 45

<sup>49</sup> [Shadow Report on Turkey's First Report on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for submission to the GREVIO Committee by the Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform Turkey, September 2017](#), page 35

<sup>50</sup> [CEDAW concluding recommendations on the second periodic report, 2017](#), paragraph 38

<sup>51</sup> [Women's rights in Western Balkans, European Parliament, 2019](#), page 27

longer than men (6 hours for women among which 5 are not paid, and 5 hours for men among which 2.5 are not paid). Women living in urban and rural areas work nearly the same number of hours, but women living in rural areas spend half an hour more doing unpaid work (five hours), compared to women from urban areas (4.5 hours).<sup>52</sup> In Albania, rural women do more total work (paid and unpaid work) than either men or women in urban or rural settings.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, as their husbands emigrate abroad or engage in small trade, Albanian women are left to shoulder the greatest share of farm work. As demonstrated in Kosovo, the COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the unpaid burden of care work for women – women’s hours dedicated to cleaning has increased by 18 per cent compared to men, and time spent cooking and serving meals has increased by 29 per cent compared to men.<sup>54</sup>

Although women’s contributions to family farming businesses are particularly important, this usually has no bearing on their role in the management of the family farm or in decision-making. Despite Albanian legislation recognizing rural women as members of the agricultural household and co-owners together with the rest of the family members, rural women are rarely seen as heads of farming households.<sup>55</sup> In North Macedonia, only 10 per cent of women participated in the management of agricultural holdings in 2016, and only 4 per cent of women were owners of a property/house.<sup>56</sup> According to the results of the 2011 census, only 27.6 per cent of holdings are registered to women, out of which the majority use very little agricultural land. 88 per cent of houses in rural areas are owned by men, and 84 per cent of women do not own agricultural land. The participation of women in decision-making on the agricultural holding is very low, with only 15.9 per cent of the women managing the holdings, that is, making decisions on the organization of the agricultural production on the holding.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, 63 per cent of women living in rural areas are an informally engaged labour force for agricultural activities.<sup>58</sup>

Informal work also prevents women from benefitting from maternity leave, pensions, and social protection allowances, keeping them in precarity and poverty.<sup>59</sup> In Serbia, 17.8 per cent of rural women do not have any health insurance, and the reasons stated are lack of money to pay for the insurance (19 per cent); lack of money to pay taxes (19 per cent); informal agricultural work (14 per cent); and lack of willingness on the part of household members to pay insurance for the woman (4.8 per cent). In Turkey, the rate of women working in rural areas or employed as unpaid family workers without any social security was 79 per cent in 2015.<sup>60</sup> Besides, as seen above, informal unpaid work not only prevents women from rising from poverty and enjoying decent living conditions, but also increases the likelihood of experiencing intimate partner physical/and or sexual violence.

The heavy and disproportionate burden of work also leave rural women’s and girls’ needs for social and cultural participation unmet. In Serbia for example, tourist travel, excursions or visits to cultural monuments are undertaken by only around 14 per cent of rural women, and the main reasons given for this are a lack of time and financial resources. Rural women would prefer to spend their free time travelling (25 per cent), doing sports and recreational activities (19 per cent), and passively resting at home (11 per cent). The social participation of rural women is extremely low, and cultural participation

---

<sup>52</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women’s organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 19

<sup>53</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Albania 2016](#), paragraph 127

<sup>54</sup> [Rapid Socio-Economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Kosovo, 2020](#), page 43

<sup>55</sup> [CEDAW Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention, Fourth periodic report of States parties due in 2014 Albania, 2014, paragraph 177](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Measuring Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture with Survey-Based Experimental Economics Method](#), 2019, page 10 and 33

<sup>57</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women’s organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 1

<sup>58</sup> *ibid* page 16)

<sup>59</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2018](#), paragraph 35

<sup>60</sup> [Shadow Report to CEDAW regarding the seventh reporting cycle of Turkey Report submitted by the Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW, 2016](#), page 18



is mostly passive.<sup>61</sup> Precarious living conditions of rural women are compounded by the limited focus on rural women's economic empowerment in rural development strategies and plans. In Albania, the participation of women in both vocational training and knowledge information sharing about agriculture and rural development is very limited: only ten percent of beneficiaries of extension services are women. Some of the reasons for the low participation of women in extension services training are: male-dominated communication channels that control the flow of information and fail to reach and mobilize rural women; the identification of men as "heads of households and holdings" and women as "wives of farmers"; stereotypical links between machinery, technology and men; women's reduced self-confidence in areas and roles outside socially stereotyped gender roles; locations of trainings and meetings that are inaccessible to women since they have limited access to public transportation, are discouraged from attending trainings held in locations defined as "men's places" such as bars, and may be expected to ask for permission from their husbands to attend the trainings.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, rural women's lack of participation and representation in all spheres of life is another issue, as CEDAW pointed out in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>63</sup> CEDAW expressed concerns about the absence of temporary special measures to promote the political representation of rural women. Namely, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are no women from vulnerable groups in the state parliament. In Kosovo, no women from vulnerable groups are part of the local governments. In Montenegro, there are no representatives from vulnerable groups in local government or national parliament.<sup>64</sup> In Serbia, although positive steps have been taken in national-level institutions related to women's participation and their increased visibility, there are no women in 89 per cent of local leadership structures; 98 per cent of rural women have never had the opportunity to participate in the development process, despite 60 per cent of rural women expressing willingness to get involved in any form or organized joint action at the local level.<sup>65</sup>

## AREAS OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY CEDAW AND GREVIO

### To address and prevent gender-based discrimination and VAWG in rural areas:

- Sensitize rural women and men, girls and boys, and local religious and community leaders on the rights of rural women and girls, with the aim of eliminating discriminatory social attitudes and practices, particularly those which condone gender-based violence;
- Take effective measures aimed at preventing, investigating, prosecuting and punishing acts of violence against rural women and girls, whether perpetrated by the state, non-state actors, or private persons;
- Ensure that victims living in rural areas have effective access to justice, including legal aid, as well as compensation and other forms of redress/reparation, and that authorities at all levels in rural areas, including the judiciary, judicial administrators and civil servants, have the resources and political will needed to respond to violence against rural women and girls and to protect them against retaliation when reporting abuses;
- Ensure that integrated services for victims, including emergency shelters and comprehensive health services, are accessible to women and girls in rural areas. Increase the financing of shelters run by non-governmental organizations and put in place mechanisms for contracting,

---

<sup>61</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women's organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 51

<sup>62</sup> [Gender, Agriculture, and Rural Development in Albania – Country gender assessment series, Food and Agriculture Organizations of the United Nations](#), page 9

<sup>63</sup> [CEDAW Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019](#), paragraph 41

<sup>64</sup> [Women's rights in Western Balkans, European Parliament, 2019](#), page 16

<sup>65</sup> [Shadow Report to the CEDAW regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia Report submitted by the members of an informal network of women's organizations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017](#), page 51.

delegating to or obtaining the services of non-governmental organizations in order to respond to the needs of all women who are victims of gender-based violence. Such services should avoid stigmatization and protect victim privacy and dignity;

- Set up rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centers in sufficient numbers, recalling that one such center should be available per every 200,000 inhabitants and be accessible in rural areas.

**To ensure that legal frameworks are non-discriminatory and guarantee access to justice to rural women:**

- Conduct a gender impact analysis of current laws to assess their impact on rural women;
- Increase rural women's awareness and legal literacy by providing them with information on their legal rights and the existence of plural legal systems;
- Ensure free or affordable access to legal services and legal aid;
- Dismantle barriers to rural women's access to justice by ensuring that formal and informal justice mechanisms and dispute resolution alternatives are available to them;
- Ensure physical access to courts and other justice mechanisms, for example, through the provision of mobile courts which are accessible to rural women;
- Provide training to the judiciary, lawyers, law enforcement officials, paralegals, traditional leaders, and other relevant authorities and officials in rural areas, on the rights of rural women and the negative impact of discrimination against them.

**To guarantee rural girls and women's rights to education:**

- Ensure quality accessible and affordable education for all rural girls and women, including those with disabilities, by improving educational infrastructures in rural areas; increasing the number of qualified teachers, including women; ensuring primary education is compulsory and provided free of charge; and ensuring education is provided in local languages and in a culturally appropriate manner;
- Provide systematic training for personnel at all levels of the education system on rural girls' and women's rights, and on the need to combat discriminatory sex- and/or gender-based, ethnic and other stereotypes that limit rural girls' and women's educational opportunities;
- Implement awareness-raising to change negative attitudes in rural areas towards girls' education and provide incentives to support rural girls and their parents in off-setting the direct and indirect costs of education, including through scholarships and financial support, loans and cash transfers, and transportation;
- Implement programmes reducing rural girls' engagement in unpaid care work, which constitutes a barrier to school attendance, and protect rural girls from labour exploitation, child and/or forced marriage, and gender-based violence, including sexual violence and abuse, both within and outside of the school system;
- Ensure schools' adequate water facilities and separate, safe, sheltered latrines for girls, and offer hygiene education and resources for menstrual hygiene, with special focus on girls with disabilities;
- Provide adult literacy programmes for women in rural areas;
- Provide tailored and targeted on-the-job training to rural women's professional needs, and ensure they have equal access to technical and vocational education and skills training, such as sustainable farming practices, animal health and improved husbandry.

**To eliminate discrimination against rural women in economic and social life and promote their economic empowerment:**

- Recognize their crucial contributions to local/national economies and to food production, as well as to the well-being of their families and communities, including contributions through unpaid care work and work on family farms;
- Recognize and include rural women's equal rights to land in any land distribution, registration, and titling or certification schemes;
- Ensure that they are able to effectively and directly benefit from economic and social programmes by involving them in the design and development of all relevant plans and strategies, such as those related to health, education, employment, social security, etc.;
- Ensure that macroeconomic policies, including trade, fiscal and investment policies, as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements, are responsive to the needs of rural women and strengthen the productive and investing capacities of small-scale women producers;
- Improve rural working conditions, including by providing paid maternity leave; setting living wages, with urgent attention to the informal sector; and taking steps to prevent sexual harassment, exploitation, and other forms of abuse in the workplace;
- Ensure that rural women engaged in unpaid work and/or in the informal sector have access to non-contributory social protection, and that those employed in the formal sector have access to contributory social security benefits in their own right, irrespective of their marital status;
- Review relevant laws, regulations and policies which limit rural women's access to decent employment and eliminate practices which discriminate against women in rural labour markets, such as not hiring women for certain jobs;
- Promote transition to formal financial services and ensure rural women's access to credit, loans, matrimonial savings, insurance and domestic payment services, on the basis of equality with rural men, as well as promote their economic, financial and business skills;
- Develop employment programmes for all victims of violence;
- Encourage and support the setting up of local women's and girls' centers working to empower women and girls.

**To guarantee rural women's access to healthcare:**

- Ensure that quality health care services and facilities are physically accessible and affordable for rural women, including older women, female heads of household, and women with disabilities (provided free of charge when necessary); culturally acceptable to them; and staffed with trained medical personnel;
- Repeal laws and regulations which place obstacles on rural women's access to health care, including access to sexual and reproductive health services, particularly laws that criminalize or require waiting periods or third-party consent for abortion;
- Disseminate care information in local languages and dialects through several media channels, including in writing, through illustrations and verbally;
- Ensure adequate water and sanitation services in rural health care facilities.

All rights reserved. No part of this background paper may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission.

This background paper was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Regional Programme on Ending Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds" and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women, its Executive Board or the United Nations Member States. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.