

Pancevo, 13th March 2023

Submission regarding the country visit of Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Women's rights and gender equality in Serbia

Although some progresses have been made in regard to legislation and public policies in the area of gender equality (e.g. adoption of the Law on gender equality, Strategy on gender equality and accompanied action plan), the fulfillment of women's rights and overall advancement of gender equality is undermined.

Major issues affecting the human rights of women/girls in Serbia include widespread violence against women in private and public domain; difficult economic position – although women are more educated in Serbia, they are less employed, work on less paid positions or insecure and precarious jobs, they are overburdened with unpaid work, while the austerity measures and non-proportional COVID-19 measures affected women more than men. These all affect their dignity of life, but also leaves limited opportunities for more active civil and political participation.ⁱ Although there are many different issues pertaining to women's rights and gender equality in Serbia, this information letter with **focus on violence against women and girls in private and public domain**, as safety is the basic pre-requisite to fulfilment of other human rights.

Safety of women and girls: the institutional response to violence against women can be summarized by 1) inadequate mechanisms for the implementation of legislation or mechanisms that are not functional and outdated operating procedures, 2) serious lack of capacities of the institutions relevant for prevention and protection of women from violence (general and specific training of professionals, under-staffed institutions, lack of material resources), and 3) inadequate multi-sectoral cooperation even when it is compulsory by the law.

- **Femicide** as the most extreme manifestation of violence against women has not been tackled by the governmental institutions in the previous years. Since 2020, there have been 91 femicides in Serbia (nine in 2023 so far), while one third of them were committed by using firearms. Major issues: the risk assessment has not been conducted properly or at all in cases where women had reported the violence prior to femicide (the control procedures after the femicides established this fact and the accountability of the institutions); there is no official, reliable, and publicly available data about femicide; there is a leniency in punishments (in almost one third of femicide cases, the court sentenced a perpetrator to 10 to 15 years of prison).ⁱⁱ Since 2021, organization FemPlatz and other civil society organizations are asking



for the establishment of [the Femicide watch](#) and defining femicide as a specific form of crime, but little progress has been made.

- **Violence against women/girls in public spaces:** almost half of the women/girls are afraid of physical attack, rape/attempt of rape, sexual harassment, attack with the firearms. Overall, 37% of women assess the safety of women in public spaces with the lowest score, while 52,4% assess the work of the local self-governments on preventing violence in public spaces with the lowest score, and 42,2% for the police. Of all the women who experienced violence in public spaces, every fifth experiences stalking, every fourth unwanted touching and grabbing, every third violent behavior in public spaces. As high as 71% of women who experienced violence in public spaces did not report it, while from 12% of those who reported it to officials, every second states that the authorities had not taken any action. As high as 9,2% of women experienced rape or attempt of rape in public spaces.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Violence and harassment against women journalists,** especially journalists from independent media and/or journalists reporting on women's rights, violence against women, gender equality. Several women journalists, who first reported on cases of sexual violence and rape that shook the public in the previous years have been exposed to SLAPP cases (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) and online threats, attacks, and slur campaigns.
- **Violence and gender-based stereotyping of women politicians;** although the quota system introduced by the set of election legislation increased the number of women in representative institutions, women politicians are constantly exposed to gender-based stereotyping, slur campaigns, verbal violence, especially women politicians from opposition political parties. Such slurs and harassment most frequently come from the Members of the Parliament and there is no accountability for their actions.
- **Violence against women at risk of multiple and intersectional discrimination,** including Roma women, women with disabilities, rural women, LBT+ community and others. For instance women with mental disabilities (intellectual and psycho-social) in residential and psychiatric institutions are exposed to [forced abortions, administration of contraceptives without consent, horizontal and vertical violence of all forms](#) (physical, sexual, economic, psychological), while their free movement is restricted. The situation has exacerbated during and after the COVID-19 epidemics and disproportional measures introduced.

The Strategy for the prevention and combating gender-based violence against women and domestic violence 2021-2025 was adopted in 2021, but the accompanied action plan has never been adopted, the funds for its implementation have never been allocated, so the implementation of this policy is hindered, and the purpose of such policy is in question.



FemPlatz
UDRUŽENJE GRAĐANKI

FemPlatz is a women's rights organization working primarily on research in the topics under-represented and under-researched in the region, evidence-based advocacy, and capacity building. The main areas of work include women's rights and gender equality, safety of women and girls, and political and civic participation of women, especially those at risk of multiple and intersectional discrimination. FemPlatz regularly prepares and submits reports and information letters to international human rights treaty bodies, prepares annual report on the status of women's rights and gender equality in Serbia, uses research findings for advocacy towards national institutions and authorities.

FemPlatz, Milosa Obrenovica 67/14, Pancevo, Serbia

Contact person: Biljana Janjic, executive director (biljana@femplatz.org)

ⁱ More information can be found in the Annual Report on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Serbia, prepared and published by FemPlatz, available at https://femplatz.org/library/reports/2021-10-18_PreneraZena_2020_EN.pdf

ⁱⁱ Findings of the research in femicide and attempted femicide in Serbia conducted by FemPlatz; available at <https://femplatz.org/index.php?l30>

ⁱⁱⁱ Research results "Violence against women and girls in public spaces in Serbia" conducted by FemPlatz in 2022; available at https://femplatz.org/library/publications/2022-09_Nasilje_u_javnim_prostorima.pdf