



Gender equality at the local level

Jablanicki and Pcinjski Districts

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Introduction

This report represents the assessment on the conditions on gender equality at the local level in the 13 municipalities of Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts. The assessment was produced as a component of PBILD programme "Strengthening Capacity for Inclusive Local Development in South Serbia" and "Promotion of Peace Building in South Serbia". The programme creates framework under which South Serbia municipalities and six UN agencies jointly attempt to stimulate inclusive development in South Serbia.

Main objectives of the assessment are:

- To produce comprehensive picture on gender equality and women's participation in political, economic and social life in local communities;
- To assess in relation to national standards and regulatory commitments existing gender mechanisms at the municipal level and their contribution to policy and decision-making processes;
- To assess political, institutional, organizational and human capacities of key governmental and nongovernmental actors for gender equality and to identify gaps in local stakeholders settings for gender equality agenda;
- To define indicators which will enable monitoring of the improvements at the end of the programme;
- To develop policy recommendations for priority and strategic actions aimed to achieve improvement of gender equality, position and participation of women in local communities.

The assessment is grounded in combined quantitative and qualitative methodology. Quantitative research was based on available statistical data on relative position and participation of men and women in local communities. The assessment of stakeholders' perceptions, capacities and gaps in the institutional/organizational framework on the local level was based on focused group discussions (FGD) with local stakeholders from 13 municipalities (Bojnik, Lebane, Medvedja, Vlasotince, Surdulica, Vladicin Han, Crna Trava, Trgoviste, Bosilegrad, Bujanovac, Presevo) and two cities - Leskovac and Vranje. The analysis of policy framework for gender equality relied on key strategies for local development and social protection in local communities.

This report includes three main sections, conclusions and recommendations, while list of proposed indicators for monitoring the improvement is presented in the Annex. First chapter is

related to the commitments of Republic of Serbia to the international framework for gender equality and existing national standards that pose requirements for gender equality policies on the local level. Second chapter contains description of the present gender inequalities in 13 local communities. Third section entails the analysis of local capacities to provide adequate institutional, policy framework and community actions aimed to improve gender equality.

2. Institutional and policy framework for gender equality

Institutional and policy framework for gender equality includes several key components: international platforms and conventions that pose obligations on the Republic of Serbia in the field of achieving better gender equality; national institutions, laws and strategies that define regulations and tools for improvement of gender equality.

5.1. *International framework*

The most general policy framework for gender equality on the world level represents Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. This platform is main international strategic plan for women's empowerment. It aims at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is considered as a condition for people-centred sustainable development (Beijing Platform for Action, 1995: 7).

Beijing Platform for Action entails 12 key areas of concern: poverty, education and training, health, violence against women, armed conflicts, economy, political participation of women and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for women's empowerment, human rights of women and girls, media and environment. Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the Platform for Action and gender mainstreaming is defined as appropriate tool to improve gender equality.

“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.” (UN, 1997.)

As UN member, Serbia is committed to the principles and aims declared in Beijing platform and therefore all *national and sub-national* policies should be adjusted to the objectives and course of actions declared in the Platform.

Second important international convention is Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Convention defines forms of discrimination against women and creates framework for national actions directed towards elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The Republic of Serbia submitted first report to the CEDAW Committee in 2007. Based on the report, Committee produced recommendations for Republic of Serbia identifying actions that should be done in the course of advancement of women. Recommendations included improvement in the fields of political, economic participation, education of women, particularly from minority and marginalized groups, elimination on violence against women, etc. Among other things, it is required from Republic of Serbia to inform governments on *all levels* about needed actions in order to ensure their full implementation.

Having in mind the EU accession, relevant international policy framework for Serbia is defined by EU documents as well. EU has recently adopted new Strategy for gender equality for period 2010-2015 (EC, 2010). Among numerous documents and directives that regulate gender equality issues in various fields, of particular importance is The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life adopted by Council of European Municipalities and Regions in 2006. The Charter is addressed to the local and regional governments of Europe, who are invited to sign it, to make a formal public commitment to the principle of gender equality, and to implement, within their territory the commitments set out within the Charter. To assist in the implementation of these commitments, each signatory authority should produce Equality Action Plan, which sets out its priorities, actions and resources to this end. Additionally, each authority should engage all institutions and organizations in the local community, in the order to promote the achievement of real equality between men and women in practice.

Charter emphasizes that equality of women and men “constitutes a fundamental right for all, and essential value for every democracy. In order to be achieved, this right needs not only to be legally recognized, but to be effectively applied to all aspects of life: political, economic, social

and cultural.” (The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, 2006: 3). Local and regional authorities are recognized as spheres of governance closest to people, and therefore as actors who are best placed to combat the persistence and the reproduction of inequalities between men and women. They can, through their competences, and through cooperation with the whole range of local actors, undertake concrete actions in favor of gender equality.

1.2. National framework

During last several years important steps were made towards the building of institutional framework for gender equality in Serbia. Constitution of Serbia enacted in 2006 endorses equality of women and men and the policy of equal opportunities (article 15). National strategy for improvement of the position of women and gender equality was adopted in 2008 for the period 2008-2014. The Strategy includes set of strategic objectives: increased political participation of women and equal representation in decision-making bodies and processes; equality in economic participation; equality in education; improvement of women’s health and gender equality in health protection policies; prevention and eradication of violence against women and improved protection of victims of violence; elimination of gender stereotypes in media and promotion of gender equality (Government of RS, 2008). To achieve these objectives it is necessary to efficiently implement and coordinate policies on national and local levels. National strategy for prevention and combating gender based violence that will define objectives and instruments for actions against violence is under preparation

In 2009 two key laws were adopted: Law on equality of sexes and Law against discrimination. These laws establish key legal framework for gender equality and empowerment of women. Gender equality law stipulates that public authorities engage in development of equal opportunities policies in all spheres of social life. Women and men should equally participate in the processes of development of equal opportunities policies in all phases – from planning, enacting, to implementing decisions that impact the relative position of women and men (article 3). The law regulates gender equality in all relevant aspects and forbids gender based discrimination. Important regulations are defined in relation to the obligations of local authorities in providing equal opportunities framework in the local community. Local authorities are obliged to improve gender equality within their jurisdiction. Law stipulates establishment of permanent local mechanisms for gender equality (article 39).

Besides two overarching laws there are other laws that regulate position of men and women in different in public and private life, such as Law on labor (that regulates employment conditions

and in-work rights), Family law (that regulates sphere of intimate relationships and parental obligations), Criminal code (that introduces important regulations in the field of sanctioning violence against women), etc.

However, the implementation of laws and strategies is not sufficiently efficient which can be noticed from the data on actual gender inequalities. Therefore, the strengthening of institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming into the all relevant policies and implementation of laws and strategies, as well as monitoring conditions and trends, is of crucial importance for improvement of gender equality. Main national institutions for gender equality were established: Gender Equality Directorate of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the Republic of Serbia, Gender Equality Committee of the National Parliament, Trustee for the equality and Ombudsman's deputy for gender equality. So far, 70 local mechanisms for gender equality were established, but most of them are inactive and weak in capacities to induce gender mainstreaming in local policy framework. While national institutions, laws and policies provide general framework, efficient local gender mainstreaming is of crucial importance for the improvement of gender equality and empowerment of women in local communities. These local mechanisms are substantially different from one municipality to another, in line with the municipality's capacities, formal institutional form and efficiency in action. They usually have poor capacities since they do not contain permanently employed staff, they lack the appropriate budgetary funds and often they lack real political commitment to the promotion of gender equality as well as tools for implementation of adequate policies and measures.

6. Gender inequalities in Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts

Gender inequalities represent unequal chances of men and women to reach certain positions in the community, or to participate in certain spheres of social life. They represent unequal power to make decisions in family and public life, unequal chances to enjoy same rights, to carry equal obligations and burdens, and to achieve equal benefits from social participation. Unfortunately, official data available on municipal level are not sufficient for thorough analysis on gender inequalities in eleven municipalities and two cities in Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts. However, solid evidence base for gender equality policies is basic precondition for successful gender mainstreaming on the local level. Lack of data on the municipal level is not only the problem related to the inadequate evidence that should provide grounds for identifying problems and defining appropriate objectives and actions, but it is also the problem of inadequate grounds for monitoring the effects of necessary policies and their adjustments. However, even if not

sufficient, basic available data from official statistical sources, public evidences and several surveys indicate serious problems of gender inequalities in local communities of Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts. The inequalities are evident in political, economic participation, education, but also in sphere of private life which is marked by dominance of traditional, patriarchal norms and domestic violence against women.

Relative position of women and men and gender relations are established within the broader social context. Underdevelopment and scarcity of resources can contribute to the increase of inequalities when social power is unbalanced. Therefore it is important to observe inequalities between men and women having in mind general structural features of local communities in Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts.

2.1. Socio-economic context

Local communities in two districts are heterogeneous according to number of features: size of population, density of population that makes them more or less rural, demographic structures that create specific local human capital significant from the perspective of development, employment and needs for social protection, ethnic composition that brings diversity of cultures and interests particularly within the legacies of recent ethnic conflicts. Although they are different in economic structures and potentials, the main common feature of local communities from Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts is underdevelopment and high level of poverty.

Municipalities range from very small in terms of population size (Crna Trava) to larger (Leskovac), but even two cities would fall into the category of rural areas according to OECD standards (population density is below 160 inhabitants per 1km²). Municipalities of Crna Trava, Bosilegrad and Trgoviste have extremely low population density which, among other things, creates unfavorable conditions for outreach of important policies and measures. Bojnik, Vlasotince, Medvedja, Bosilegrad, Vladicin Han, and particularly Crna Trava have problem of ageing population above the average for Serbia. At the same time, all municipalities (except Vranje) have extremely lower national income than average for Serbia.

Population and economic indicators

	Total population	Inhabitants per 1km ²	Children dependency ratio ¹	Old population dependency	Ageing index	Average age	Level of national income
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¹ Ratio of population aged 0-14 to working age population (15-64).

				ratio ²				Serbia=100 2006.
Srbija	7498001	-	23.38	24.65	105.9	41.1		100
Jablanicki								
Bojnik	11942	45	16.61	24.02	130.9	43.1		40.4
Vlasotince	31395	102	16.64	17.59	107.9	41.4		24.8
Lebane	23344	69	17.63	17.44	105	41.2		29.7
Leskovac	150653	147	11.68	16.37	102.5	40.8		49.2
Medveđa	10314	20	18.80	19.62	109.4	41.2		16.9
Crna Trava	1782	6	7.95	36.08	376.2	53.4		53.7
Pcinjski								
Bosilegrad	8555	15	14.97	22.98	139.2	43.7		21.4
Bujanovac	45279	98	18.48	10.18	40.1	32.9		27.8
Vladičin Han	22380	61	15.75	17.19	112.5	41.7		31.8
Vranje	86950	101	18.58	12.98	77.6	38.6		88.3
Preševo	39341	149	21.41	7.70	25.6	29.2		14
Surdulica	20666	33	16.88	16.54	91.3	40.1		38.1
Trgovište	5533	15	19.66	18.01	87.4	40		26.7

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), Municipalities in Serbia, 2009, 2006.

Multiethnic composition contributes to the specific features of the Region. In municipalities of Presevo and Bujanovac majority of population is Albanian, in Bosilegrad majority of population is Bulgarian, while in the rest of municipalities, Serbs constitute population majority. Furthermore, municipality of Medvedja has significant share of Albanian minority, municipalities of Bujanovac and Bosilegrad have significant share of Serbian minority. Bulgarian ethnic group is also present in municipality of Surdulica, while Roma ethnic group is significantly present in municipalities of Bojnik, and Surdulica.

Ethnic composition of local population

Districts	%							
	Serbs	Albanians	Bosnians	Bulgarians	Macedonians	Muslims	Roma	Other/ Unknown
Jablanicki								
Bojnik	88.95	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.39	0.66
Vlasotince	98.64	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.09	0.00	0.83	0.42
Lebane	94.15	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.10	0.00	4.67	1.05
Leskovac	94.34	0.01	0.00	0.05	0.16	0.01	4.47	0.94
Medveđa	66.57	26.17	0.01	0.05	0.10	0.04	1.00	6.06
Crna Trava	98.67	0.04	0.00	0.31	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.98

² Ratio of population older than 64 to working age population.

Pcinjski								
Bosilegrad	13.17	0.00	0.00	70.86	0.42	0.00	0.00	15.55
Bujanovac	34.14	54.69	0.02	0.08	0.08	0.01	8.93	2.05
Vladičin Han	93.76	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.11	0.01	4.72	1.17
Vranje	93.02	0.01	0.00	0.40	0.24	0.03	5.32	0.97
Preševo	8.55	89.10	0.05	0.00	0.06	0.04	0.92	1.28
Surdulica	82.35	0.01	0.02	4.52	0.15	0.03	9.55	3.37
Trgovište	98.49	0.08	0.00	0.19	0.44	0.00	0.00	0.80

Source: SORS, Municipalities in Serbia, 2009.

Data on labor market conditions are available from Labour Force Survey only on the level of district. According to these data, in 2009 Pcinjski district had lower employment rates and much higher unemployment rates than average for Serbia.

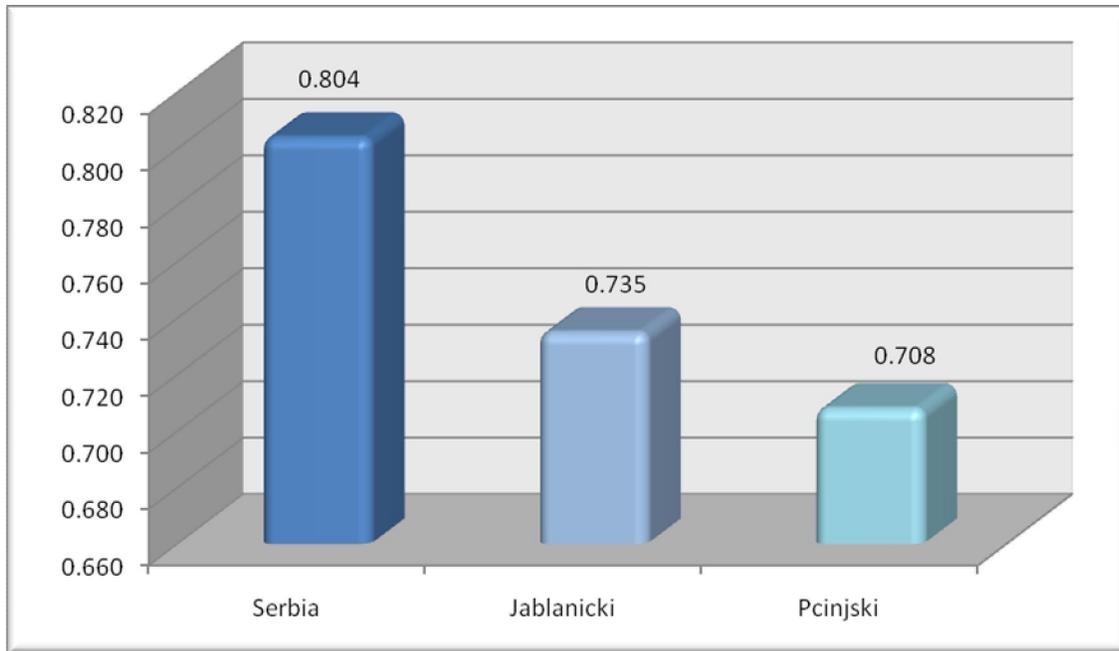
Employment and unemployment rates for population 15+

	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
Serbia	41.2	16.1
Jablanicki	47.3	13.5
Pcinjski	38.0	24.1

Source: SORS, Labour Force Survey, 2009.

High level of poverty also marks the socio-economic conditions in the region of South-East Serbia. Despite the decrease of percentage of the poor population between 2002 and 2007 (from 27.2 to 18.7), rural areas of the Region of South-East Serbia remained the areas with highest poverty rates in Serbia. Level of development measured by Human development index (that takes into account education, life expectancy and generated gross domestic product value), is low in both districts. Jablanicki district is positioned as 21st and Pcinjski as last one (25th) district in Serbia according to this indicator of development.

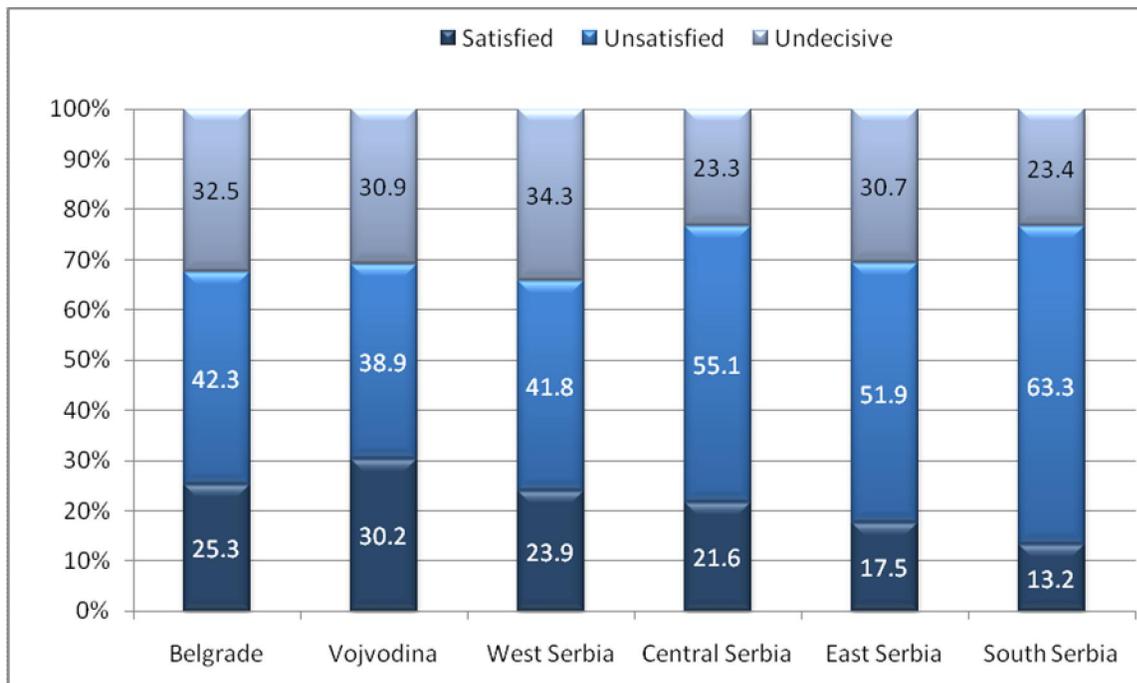
Human Development Index, 2005.



Source: UNDP, 2008: 213.

Data from UNDP survey on social inclusion in Serbia indicate lowest level of satisfaction with present living standard among population in South Serbia in comparison to the other regions. Almost two thirds of South Serbia respondents were not satisfied with their living standard.

Satisfaction with living standard, Serbia, 2009.



Source: UNDP, Social Inclusion Survey, 2009.

The burdens of underdevelopment, high levels of unemployment and poverty contribute to the inequalities between men and women since women face stronger obstacles to the access of key social resources, such as employment, education and political power.

2.2. Gender inequalities in political participation

Participation of women in political decision making is an extremely important aspect and precondition of establishing gender equality. This participation can be observed in several aspects: as share of women among members and top ranks of political parties, as share of women among deputies of municipal assemblies and executive branches of local governments. Official statistical data indicate that after local elections in 2008, share of women among members of local parliaments, in majority of municipalities, is still very far from 30% which is proclaimed as starting objective for the improvement of gender equality in political participation by Government of Serbia (through Millennium Development Goals, National Strategy for Empowerment of Women and Improvement of Gender Equality).

Share of women among members of municipal parliaments, 2008.

	% of women
Srbija	21,2
Jablanicki	
Bojnik	7,4
Vlasotince	17,8
Lebane	12,9
Leskovac	28,0
Medveđa	14,3
Crna Trava	15,8
Pcinjski	
Bosilegrad	19,4
Bujanovac	19,5
Vladičin Han	18,9
Vranje	26,2
Preševo	15,8
Surdulica	25,7
Trgovište	20,0

Source: SORS, Municipalities in Serbia, 2009.

Meanwhile some municipal assemblies experienced changes in composition. In some local parliaments change went in direction of higher share of women (like in Lebane – from 12.9% to 25.8%), while in other took form of decrease of share of women (like in Leskovac – from 28% to 21.3%). However, there is no single municipality or city where share of women in local legislative authority reached 30%.

Further, data on gender profile of persons on the top positions in local governments indicate even lower share of women. When observation is limited on key top positions: president of municipality, deputy president of municipality, president of assembly and head of public administration directorate, it can be noticed extremely low participation of women (only 5 in all local governments).

Representatives of top positions in local government by gender

Municipalities/cities	Position			
	President of municipality/major	Deputy president of municipality	President of assembly	Head of municipal administration
Jablanicki				
Bojnik	m	m	m	m
Vlasotince	m	m	m	m
Lebane	m	m	m	m
Leskovac	m	m	m	m
Medveđa	m	m	f	f
Crna Trava	m	m	m	m
Pcinjski				
Bosilegrad	m	f	m	m
Bujanovac	m	m	m	m
Vladičin Han	m	m	f	m
Vranje	m	m	m	m
Preševo	m	m	m	m
Surdulica	m	m	m	f
Trgovište	m	m	m	m

* data not available

Legend: m=male, f=female.

While objective data clearly indicate this underrepresentation of women in legislative and executive political power on the local level, qualitative research findings indicate that representatives of local authorities, including female members of parliament, often have

inaccurate impression that women are significantly represented in local governance structures. In almost all municipalities, participants in focused group discussions (FGD) from local authorities shared impression that there are “a lot of women” in local governance structures, even more than men. However, when asked to provide number of women in local parliament, in few municipalities, participants were surprised about low share of women. The impression is partly related to the high share of employed women in local government as supportive staff. But the fact is that positions on the top of municipal hierarchies are still predominantly filled by men. This gap in perception of representation of women in local governance should be one of priorities for improvement of gender equality in the aspect of political representation of women.

Data on share of women in political parties on the local level are not available and that should be the subject of further research aimed to provide grounds for political empowerment of women and gender sensitization of political parties. The increase of women among members and leading bodies in political parties is necessary precondition for filling the gap in political representation of women in local governance structures. ‘Soft indicators’ obtained through qualitative research support the assumption on underrepresentation of women in the basic and leading structures of political parties. Women, participants in FGD from local branches of political parties (DS, G17, PUPS) shared impression on low share of women among leading parties structures. Within the local branches of political parties there are women’s forums or networks, but according to available information, these women’s party branches are mostly focused on temporary projects related to women’s health, combat against violence, and similar, and much less on promoting women’s political participation and introducing gender mainstreaming in local policies.

Low political participation of women has to be observed within the context of prominent traditional values which prevent full participation of women in public sphere, but also within the context of lack of trust in political agencies and local state institutions which is equally present among men and women in South Serbia (Cesid, 2010).

2.3. Gender economic inequalities in local communities

Data on gender economic inequalities on the local level are scarce. Usually as main indicators on gender economic inequalities are taken data on relative position on the labor market of men and women. However, this is only the ‘top of the iceberg’ in the context of economic position, access to economic resources and economic power of men and women. Other important aspects of economic position are also very important, such as gender assets gap (which is key

base for economic power and chances to successfully engage in labor market), differences and specific features of poverty among men and women, division of unpaid domestic labor and access to the money in the household. Unfortunately, these important indicators are not target of monitoring not only on the local level, but on the national, and even on the international. Therefore, our knowledge on economic inequalities between men and women are mostly limited on employment and unemployment.

Second problem appears in the form of inadequate data on comparative labor market position of men and women. While on the national level Labor Force Survey offers data disaggregated by gender in accordance to international standards (activity, employment, unemployment and inactivity specific gender rates), on the local level this kind of Labour Force Survey (LFS) data are not available. The only available data on municipal level is share of women among employed and unemployed (based on LFS data) and data from employers' records on the municipal level that are processed by SORS (within RAD statistics) but which are limited only to employed in enterprises, institutions and organizations (they do not include persons employed with entrepreneurs or informally employed). This kind of data is not sufficiently precise for systematic monitoring of comparative position of men and women on the local labor markets. However, data on gender specific activity, employment, unemployment and inactivity rates are of crucial importance from several reasons. Firstly, it is well known fact that women, particularly in more traditional communities enter labor market in smaller proportions than men. Secondly, from national level data we know that among those who enter labor market, smaller proportion of women succeeds to attain employment in comparison with men. Thirdly, from national level data we also know that among unemployed, women face more the problem of long-term unemployment than men (Babovic, 2010, 2007).

From the data in the table presented below can be noticed that women are significantly underrepresented among employed persons in all municipalities and two cities. On the other side, women are overrepresented among unemployed persons in Bujanovac, Presevo, Bojnik, Vlasotince, Leskovac, Vladicin Han, Vranje and Surdulica. But the fact that share of women among unemployed in the rest of municipalities can also hide the fact that women are less engaged in labor market and more present among inactive local population which cannot be observed from this kind of data. Therefore we can assume that in municipalities in which share of women among employed as well as among unemployed is low, we face the problem of high inactivity among women, which means that they do not enter in labor market in same proportions as men. This weak labor market position creates ground for weak overall social position of women, leaving them limited to the sphere of private family life, household responsibilities and with increased chances to be excluded not only from labor market, but from political power, adequate economic resources and efficient social networks.

Share of women among employed and unemployed, 2008.

	% of women among employed	% of women among unemployed ³
Srbija	43.7	54.0
Jablanicki		
Bojnik	35.2	51.8
Vlasotince	38.6	50.7
Lebane	45.1	49.8
Leskovac	44.7	51.2
Medveđa	41.7	46.5
Crna Trava	29.9	46.8
Pcinjski		
Bosilegrad	35.5	49.3
Bujanovac	34.5	52.0
Vladičin Han	33.3	58.6
Vranje	39.6	57.3
Preševo	30.2	53.8
Surdulica	39.1	54.0
Trgovište	35.2	44.4

Source: SORS, Municipalities in Serbia, 2009.

Whole range of indicators on position of women and men on the labor market is missing, such as informal employment, chances for the on-job promotion, gender pay gap, etc. Besides that, data on relative poverty of women and men are also not available on the level of municipalities or on the level of districts. However, some data on gender asset gap are available from independent social surveys. Recent survey on quality of life of men and women in Central Serbia, which was focused on several aspects of gender inequalities and domestic violence against women revealed very low ownership over key assets among women. For the purposes of this analysis subsample of southern municipalities (Bojnik, Surdulica, Vladičin Han, Leskovac, Vlasotince and Bujanovac) was differentiated with the aim to compare asset ownership between women from South Serbia and the average for Central Serbia. The ownership of three assets was investigated: house or apartment, land and cars. Results indicate comparatively lower share of women who own houses and cars in South Serbia than in Central Serbia as whole. On the other hand, percentage of women who own some portion of land is higher due to the already mentioned predominantly rural character of the Region.

Women owners of different household assets, 2010.

	%	
	Central Serbia	South Serbia

³ Data refer to the unemployed persons registered at National Employment Service.

Women owners of house/apartment	15.5	11.4
Women owners of land	17.8	34.0
Women car owners	13.4	7.4

Source: UNDP, data base from survey "Quality of life and health conditions of women in Central Serbia, 2009.

Low asset ownership of women effects unfavorable economic position of women in two main ways. On one hand prevents them to provide sustainable self-employment or entrepreneurship, since lack of assets creates obstacles to access to financial resources (bank transactions, credits, etc.). On the other hand, low asset ownership increases chances for financial poverty and material deprivation of women.

2.4. Inequality in access to social welfare

The access to different social welfare resources is partly consequence but partly cause of weak economic position of women. In this respect it is important to pay attention to access to education, health, social insurance and social protection services. Report on the progress in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for Serbia (Government of Serbia, 2010) indicates that boys and girls are equally enrolled in primary schools. However, lower enrollment is recorded among Roma children in general, and particularly among Roma girls in comparison to Roma boys. Having in mind that in several municipalities in South Serbia Roma population has significant share in local population, it is reasonable to assume that lack of education of Roma girls represents one of the important problems in this region. Second problem emphasized in MDG report is related to decrease in enrollment of rural boys in secondary education, and increase of their dropout from secondary schools. Again, having in mind that municipalities in South Serbia are predominantly rural, this problem can be another significant problem related to the gender imbalance in education. Unfortunately, no precise data were available for this region in Serbia.

But if we focus attention to the overall population old 15 and over, it can be noticed that gender imbalances in education is still very prominent, despite newer trends of gender equality in school enrollment (at least in population majority). From the table below we can see that differences in education between men and women are still high. Share of persons without school and with only elementary school education is higher among women than among men. At the same time, share of persons with secondary and university education is significantly lower

among women than among men. However it is important to keep in mind that presented data come from population census in 2002, and should be taken with caution.

Education according to gender, 2002.

Education		Without school	Elementary school	Secondary school	University
Srbija average	w	27.69	25.17	37.09	10.05
	m	16.49	23.59	47.32	12.60
Jablanicki					
Bojnik	w	59.45	19.95	18.82	1.78
	m	40.60	24.62	30.69	4.08
Vlasotince	w	42.79	23.74	28.82	4.65
	m	26.58	28.98	37.17	7.26
Lebane	w	46.12	22.40	27.56	3.91
	m	32.08	25.57	35.65	6.71
Leskovac	w	37.13	21.44	34.56	6.87
	m	22.60	22.65	44.34	10.41
Medveđa	w	50.93	30.12	16.17	2.78
	m	31.09	34.89	28.13	5.89
Crna Trava	w	65.82	19.34	12.38	2.46
	m	35.84	32.85	25.95	5.35
Pcinjski					
Bosilegrad	w	47.20	25.25	21.83	5.72
	m	27.05	33.32	30.44	9.19
Bujanovac	w	42.95	42.52	12.15	2.37
	m	25.64	40.26	27.61	6.50
Vladičin Han	w	43.91	27.01	23.94	5.14
	m	24.57	30.20	37.16	8.08
Vranje	w	29.31	29.27	33.46	7.95
	m	15.98	31.59	41.23	11.20
Preševo	w	37.56	49.50	10.41	2.53
	m	19.43	41.82	30.09	8.67
Surdulica	w	35.09	34.64	27.29	2.98
	m	30.77	21.65	38.53	9.05
Trgovište	w	44.75	32.71	21.00	1.55
	m	25.87	36.49	33.29	4.35

Source: SORS, Municipalities in Serbia, 2009.

Another problem related to the gender differences in education is segregation according to occupational profiles. This aspect is important because it creates base for later gender segregation according to occupation in the labor market. Data on enrollment of girls and boys

in different secondary schools (general, technical, medical, etc.) were not fully available. However, partial available data indicate stronger inclination of boys towards professional (particularly technical) schools and higher inclination of girls toward general secondary schools.

Secondary school students according to gender, school year 2010/2011.

Municipalities/cities	General secondary school		Professional secondary school	
	m	f	m	f
Jablanicki				
Bojnik	-	-	47.4	52.6
Vlasotince	45.9	54.1	73.1	26.9
Lebane	44.6	55.4	69.5	30.5
Leskovac	*	*	*	*
Medveđa	*	*	*	*
Crna Trava	-	-	41.2	58.8
Pcinjski				
Bosilegrad	*	*	*	*
Bujanovac	42.3	57.7	55.1	44.9
Vladičin Han	40.7	59.3	71.8	28.2
Vranje	*	*	*	*
Preševo	41.4	58.6	66.8	33.2
Surdulica	*	*	*	*
Trgovište	-	-	54.3	45.7

* data not available

- type of school does not exist

Source: municipalities

While inequalities in education create grounds for later inequalities on the labor market, it is important to notice that labor market inequalities create grounds for inequalities in social insurance, particularly in retirement insurance. Again data are not available on municipal level. However, several surveys revealed that lack of social insurance is typical for rural women who are engaged as family helpers in household agriculture production, among Roma and generally among poor population. Having in mind that share of rural women, Roma and poor population is high in the region it can be assumed that lack of social insurance represents significant problem related to the socio-economic position of women and men in South Serbia. Survey on social exclusion in rural areas in Serbia (SeConS, UNDP, 2010) indicates that rural population in South-East Serbia has highest share of persons without health insurance (16.5%) in comparison with other regions (Vojvodina -7.5%, Central Serbia – 13.5%, Western Serbia – 13.0%).

Data from the same survey indicate high share of persons without retirement insurance in the region of South-East Serbia. But the share of persons without retirement insurance is higher among women than among men.

Retirement insurance of rural population according to gender (retired persons excluded), South-East Serbia, 2009.

	%	
	Women	Men
Persons who pay alone public retirement insurance	11.1	14.8
Persons who pay alone private retirement insurance	3.3	2.7
Persons who have retirement insurance through employment	18.9	32.9
Persons without retirement insurance	66.7	49.7

Source: SeConS, UNDP, data base from survey Social exclusion in rural areas in Serbia, 2009.

Lack of health and retirement insurance of rural population indicates serious obstacles in exercising welfare rights. Having in mind depopulation of rural areas, particularly in mountain areas in some Southern municipalities, this problem poses the question of poverty and quality of life in old age of significant share of population in South Serbia.

2.5. *Inequalities in family life*

Gender inequalities in private life are the hardest to observe. In this field lack of official data is the most prominent. First precise insights will be available after time use survey that will be conducted in 2011 by SORS for the first time in Serbia. The question is if data will be available on regional and local level. In this sphere of gender relations it is important to focus attention on few key aspects: gender division of household unpaid labor, access to the money in the household and domestic violence. Data from social survey indicate very high level of gender inequalities in household work. Again, for purposes of this analysis region of South Serbia including municipalities Bojnik, Surdulica, Vladicin Han, Leskovac, Vlasotince and Bujanovac was extracted and compared to the whole Central Serbia. From the following table can be noticed that inequalities in household work are only slightly higher in South Serbia than average for

Central Serbia. It is important to keep in mind that data are representative only for households with female members age 18+.

Households in which women perform mostly activities alone, 2010.

	% of households in which women conduct activity mostly alone	
	South Serbia	Central Serbia
Cooking	94.5	94.2
Washing dishes	94.2	92.8
Washing laundry	98.8	96.5
Ironing	98.0	95.7
Cleaning house	87.6	88.6
Taking care of small children	75.0	81.3
Taking care of school duties of children	63.0	68.9
Taking care of elderly family members	84.1	77.8

Source: UNDP, data base from survey "Quality of life and health conditions of women in Central Serbia, 2009.

It can be noticed that women in South Serbia are less engaged alone in care of small children and school work of children in comparison to the average for Central Serbia. Partly that can be the consequence of lower share of single mothers in the region. According to data in overall sample for Central Serbia 10% of women are divorced, while in South Serbia share of divorced women is 5.3%.

Data on the access to the household money also indicate stronger patriarchal patterns in the South Serbia households. It is important to emphasize that in Serbia generally women do not have power of strategic decision making about money in the household. But this feature is even more prominent in South Serbia. Namely, while in Central Serbia 27.1% of women have power to make strategic decisions on allocation of money in the household, in South Serbia their percentage is lower – 22.8% (SeConS, UNDP, Quality of life and health issues of women in Central Serbia, 2010).

Finally, important indicator of power relations among men and women in the family is the presence of domestic violence. Data from the same survey indicate significantly lower prevalence of domestic violence against women in South Serbia. However, this lower prevalence rate can be the consequence of underreporting of experience with family violence, not necessarily the consequence of actually lower prevalence.

Prevalence of different forms of domestic violence against women, South Serbia, 2010.

	% of women who reported experience with particular form of domestic violence during the life	
	South Serbia	Central Serbia
Economic abuse	11.2	15.8
Physical violence	13.5	21.6
Psychological violence	39.2	48.7
Sexual violence	2.3	3.8

Source: UNDP, data base from survey "Quality of life and health conditions of women in Central Serbia, 2009.

Economic abuse is defined as restriction posed to women to employ, as well as restricted access to the household money, or forced confiscation of woman's personal money. Physical violence includes various forms of physical abuse: from slapping, kicking, through suffocating, beating, until heavy attacks by weapon, burning, etc. Psychological violence includes various forms of humiliating, insulting, threatening to woman, while sexual violence include forced intercourse followed by physical or psychological threat. The lower prevalence of all forms of domestic violence against women does not have to indicate lower presence of violence, but lower willingness of women to report about such experience. In small, more traditional communities this is usually the case. Only 7% of women who experienced violence asked for support from institutions (mostly police and center for social work).

Nongovernmental organization "Human Rights Committee Vranje, SOS phone line Vranje – for help and support to the victims of violence in family" has conducted research on institutional framework for support to victims of domestic violence in district of Pcinjski in 2008 and 2009. Research findings indicated low efficiency in some parts of the institutional framework. During the observed period, almost 2000 cases of domestic violence were reported to the police. However, only 220 criminal charges were submitted to the prosecution (half by victims and half by police). Prosecution has rejected over 1/3 of charges mostly with the explanation of lack of evidence due to the reluctance of victims to testify against perpetrators. Trials in cases of family violence are on average long (about 8 months) and convictions weak.

In both districts there are shelters for victims of violence and different forms of support delivered by CSOs. However, the problems are manifest in the aspect of inter-municipal cooperation. As it was registered during qualitative research, victims of violence from municipalities that did not sign protocol of cooperation (i.e. Medvedja) were refused to be provided with support in Leskovac shelter.

Presented data indicate overwhelming inequalities between men and women in South Serbia. Therefore, it is important to estimate capacity of local institutional framework and various local

stakeholders to carry out efficient gender equality policy which can contribute to the improvement of the present state.

2.6. Gender inequalities and socio-cultural participation

Social participation of women in Southern Districts of Serbia, as well as features of dominant local cultural life are important factors that are contributing to the reproduction of gender stereotypes and inequalities. Data from recent survey on migrations and socio-economic conditions in Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts, conducted by Cesid (2010), have revealed lack of social participation of both, men and women and predominantly passive forms of cultural consumption.

Extremely low participation in any type of social organizations, whether interest, professional, hobby, cultural or other, indicates low level of social capital of men and women. In this aspect gender inequalities are not prominent. However, it is important to notice that low level of social participation and weak social capital represent significant obstacles for potential of women to represent their interest and to act in direction of improvement of their own position and to promote gender equality.

Participation in social organizations according to gender

Social organizations	% of respondents who are not members	
	men	women
Political parties	77.2	87.6
Nongovernmental organizations	92.5	94.1
Unions	91.8	91.9
Professional associations, cooperatives	89.6	93.1
Religious organizations	70.9	87.1
Hobby organizations	83.3	93.6
Cultural, artistic organizations	92.8	93.1
Sport organizations, clubs	87.6	94.6
Youth, students' organizations	94.7	96.0

Source: Cesid, 2010.

Same survey indicated predominantly passive patterns of cultural consumption and behavior during leisure hours. Time is mostly spent in watching TV, while more proactive forms of

cultural participation, such as attendance of cultural events (theatre, concerts, cinemas, and other forms of cultural performances) is extremely low.

Most frequent leisure activity according to gender

Activity	% of respondents who activity as most frequent leisure activity	
	men	women
Watching TV	60.8	62.9
Socializing with others, going out	18.4	14.0
Reading books	1.7	8.7
Using internet	7.3	5.2
Other	11.8	8.2
Total	100	100

Source: Cesid, 2010.

However, even more proactive cultural participation should be taken with caution, since many of cultural manifestations offer content that is traditional in representation of gender roles, therefore contributing to the reproduction of gender inequalities through gender biased values. Examples are numerous, starting from cultural manifestations that are advertised on official websites of municipalities and cities where women as agents of culture and art are usually associated with traditional handicrafts, folklore, etc; or taking into account ways in which local media represent women as agents of populist music, and similar.

These gender stereotypes are deeply rooted and changes in perception of gender roles are slow, because new generations adopt similar values through socialization. But not only parents and people from their social environment are carriers of gender stereotypes. Educational system, with present content is significant mediator of gender stereotypes. As recent analysis of subjects in handbooks for elementary and secondary schools in Serbia indicated (UNDP, 2010), significant part of educational material is gender biased, therefore contributing to the reproduction of gender stereotypes in new generations.

3. Capacities of local 'infrastructure' for gender equality

Estimates of local capacities to develop and implement complex and systematic gender equality policies and activities have to take into account several key aspects:

- Presence of specific gender equality bodies in the local government, overarching gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming in local policies and actions;

- Perceptions and approach to gender equality issues by key local stakeholders, including government, public institutions (for employment, education, health care, social protection, etc.), developmental agencies, civil society organizations, media.
- Perceptions of local stakeholders on possibilities to improve gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the local community.

To collect data on these aspects, focused group discussions (FGD) were organized with representatives of stakeholders from 11 municipalities (Bojnik, Lebane, Medvedja, Vlasotince, Crna Trava, Surdulica, Vladicin Han, Bosilegrad, Trgoviste, Bujanovac and Presevo) and two cities (Leskovac and Vranje). Participant in FGD were representatives from political parties, local governments, agencies/offices for local economic development, local branches of National Employment Service, centers for social work, inspectors for education, women's non-governmental organizations, other civil society organizations that provide support to vulnerable groups, local media. Their role is to provide favorable setting for gender equality in their local communities and to promote changes that can bring improvement in perceptions and activities of other local actors (i.e. employers, teachers, citizens).

3.1. Gender equality mechanisms and policies

Two main questions are under concern in this respect: are there specific gender equality mechanisms in local governance structures and is it gender mainstreaming present in the processes of development, implementation and monitoring of key local policies? To answer these questions briefly, it is appropriate to say that local *mechanisms for gender equality are not established in all municipalities, and even where they were established, they were not functional; gender equality issues are very sporadic in local policies and gender mainstreaming is completely absent from local policy making.*

Local mechanisms for gender equality

Jablanicki	
Bojnik	+
Vlasotince	-
Lebane	+
Leskovac	+
Medveđa	+
Crna Trava	-
Pcinjski	
Bosilegrad	-

Bujanovac	+
Vladičin Han	-
Vranje	+
Preševo	-
Surdulica	-
Trgovište	-

- local mechanism not established

+ local mechanism established

Half of municipalities are still lacking gender equality mechanisms. But already established mechanisms are not active, and even some members of local gender equality councils are often not aware of purpose of that body. Local mechanisms are mostly established as assembly committee, but in some municipalities (i.e. Lebane) there are double mechanisms since local GE councils were already established through OSCE programme. However, between these bodies (the one established by OSCE programme and the other established by local assembly) there is no cooperation mostly due to the inactivity of both. It is important to notify that 'old' GE councils (established through OSCE programme) were active, organizing activities aimed to improve women's health, employment, cooperating with Directorate for gender equality on the central level. Composition of those local mechanisms was different, since they included representatives from the local government, public institutions and CSOs, while newly established mechanism are limited to the local government. The difference can be noticed in powers of two types of local mechanisms. While 'old' ones have only advisory power and possibility to implement projects and programmes, the newly established ones have legislative power.

The reasons for inactivity of local GE mechanisms are hard to identify. In one municipality as reason was mentioned resignation of the council's president and reluctance of the assembly president to call for the session in which new president will be elected. In several other municipalities it was emphasized that council was only recently established (i.e. Bojnik) while in the rest of municipalities it was not possible to name the reason for inactivity. That leaves the impression that establishment of GE committees represents formal compliance to the national Law on gender equality, but actually there is no sufficient political commitment to the issues of gender equality or to the introduction of gender mainstreaming into the local governance structures and policies. This impression is supported by ignorance on the mandate of GE committees even among committee members and members of parliament who voted for the establishment of such local mechanisms.

However, in some municipalities (i.e. Vlasotince) there is pressure from other stakeholders (particularly women's organizations) to establish local GE mechanism. It is recognized need to

have body or person in charge for gender equality that can bridge the gap between local government and other actors focused on gender equality issues in local community, and to provide support for community based gender equality actions. But it was emphasized that is needed to establish committed and active body not only formal. This pressure 'from the bottom' is not common for many municipalities but is important factor that can contribute to the functionality and efficacy of local GE mechanisms.

Second important problem is the absence of gender mainstreaming in local policies. Several findings lead to this conclusion. All municipalities have adopted strategies for local economic development and most of them local strategies for social protection. Several municipalities have developed employment action plans and action plans for youth. Content analysis of these documents indicates heavy neglect of gender equality issues. Several GE elements are present in local strategic documents:

- Gender disaggregated data within the description of socio-economic context, but without analysis on gender inequalities and problems;
- Gender aspects are more present in social protection sphere while they are completely absent from developmental issues;
- When gender issues are recognized as important, they are limited mostly to the health care and domestic violence.
- Employment of women is recognized as important problem in several cases, and measures were identified for improvement of women's employment.

Again it is hard to identify the reasons for negligence of GE issues. In some cases the local government representatives would explain that strategy was developed and adopted during previous government but could not explain why new governance actors did not make any changes. One of the possible reasons can be strong focus on serious problems of underdevelopment and poverty, and lack of awareness on gender equality issues as integral part of developmental processes and decreasing poverty, as one representative of local government suggested:

"When we were drafting this strategy (for local development), over 70 men and women were involved in the process, but nobody recognized the importance (of gender equality). Nobody recognized the problem of gender inequalities and discrimination. Maybe because there were other, more important problems, or the reason is something else."

Representatives of local economic development offices/agencies reported that development plans and projects are not assessed from the perspective of gender equality. Some participants shared the opinion that some gender related issues are not appropriate to be subject of the strategy. As example was mentioned gender pay gap.

“You can’t include that in the strategy...regardless the fact that we are the province in this country, we have our lifestyles and mechanisms and we cannot eliminate some things. Women are here maybe unequal to men, because we here cook alone, we prepare winter stores alone, we clean houses alone... That cannot be part of the strategy”. (representative of center for social work).

Some fragmentary positive examples can be found in few cases, where gender equality is integrated as one of priorities for improvement of position of young population, where women’s employment and education is considered as significant element of local development. In other cases position of women is considered only in the case of health protection and in the context of domestic violence. *Therefore, it can be concluded that systematic gender perspective and particularly gender mainstreaming as tool for integration of gender perspective in developing, implementing and monitoring local policies are not present in local policy making.* For better understanding of this state of art is important to examine more closely perceptions and actions of local stakeholders related to gender equality issues.

3.2. Gender equality perceptions and actions of local stakeholders

Discussions about local problems and position of men and women in local communities with various stakeholders who participated in FGDs lead to following conclusions:

- Generally, representatives of local government and political parties (excluding representatives from women’s networks/forums), as well as representatives of majority of centers for social work are less sensitive to gender equality issues and problems than representatives of national employment service, CSOs and local media.
- Perception of gender inequality problems is vague, mostly limited to few aspects, often contradictory and only several participants were familiar with multidimensional and complex nature of gender inequalities;
- Lack of awareness is partly grounded in lack of evidence base – participants who work in organizations that provide support to women or whose work is related to the gender disaggregated data are more familiar with problems of gender inequality.

During FGDs it was obvious that local stakeholders are focused on severe problems of underdevelopment in their communities. When asked to identify three most important problems they reported on the problems of unemployment, low education, poverty, economic underdevelopment, political and interethnic conflicts, migrations, discrimination of minorities, depopulation, etc. Gender inequalities were not recognized among the most significant local

problems. When discussion was refocused to gender equality it appeared that some participants do not perceive different impact of mentioned problems to men and women, while others would readily open discussion on unfavorable position of women. Arguments of the first type of participants were that men and women are in the same unfavorable position in respect of unemployment and poverty, or that problem of women's position is individual problem, only for women who 'are not capable, proactive'.

"We, women should fight alone for our status or functions... Everybody has to fight for themselves... If woman is capable and can provide her own position in the enterprise, in place of work...I mean the question is about quality of woman, but education also... If somebody does not want to fight for itself, than it will remain where is now" (member of municipal assembly).

Arguments of the second type of participants were numerous and will be explained later. Here it is important to emphasize one important finding. Participants who were not aware of the problems of gender equality were in majority of cases open to hear others, and even openly admitted that they learned important things during discussion. Only in few cases they would insist in the argument that there are no systematic inequalities, or discrimination and only in one case participant did not change starting position after discussion (journalist). This indicates that raising awareness of the local stakeholders represents crucial precondition of improvement of 'local infrastructure' for gender equality, and that majority of stakeholders will be willing to participate in trainings, seminars or similar educative activities, and moreover, will be willing to hear and learn about gender equality problems. However, it is hard to say, based on FGD findings, would they be willing to incorporate this new perspective into their work, not only because it is hard to estimate their individual readiness, but because their work depends also on institutionalized rules and procedures.

Discussion on the problems of gender inequalities can be classified along several main topics: participation of women in policy making, employment and economic position of women, education, women's health and violence against women.

It can be noticed that representatives from the municipal and city authorities often misplace political participation of women with employment in municipal administration. Similarly, appointment of women as managers of public institutions creates impression among participants that all channels for institutional and in-work promotion are open to women. Coming from public administration or institutions, participants in FGDs actually have distorted picture of gender inequalities. In many occasions they would emphasized that in 'their' institution/office/unit there are more women than men. Sometimes they would even emphasized that high share of women in administrative municipal positions can be owed to the president (male president) who has more confidence in women staff (Surdulica). The reason for this impression is limited perspective obtained from their immediate environment (women are

more employed in public sector as supportive staff) and lack of insights in solid evidence relevant for the whole local community.

Similar misinterpretation can be noticed in relation to the education. It was reported that educational chances of boys and girls are equal, but the segregation according to educational profiles can be explained by differences in interests and that concentration of boys in technical schools is the consequence of qualification profiles that are offered in these schools, such as drivers, traffic technicians, IT technicians, etc. It was even explicitly emphasized that segregation is not a relevant problem.

“The division on traditionally male and female occupations remains. There are occupations for which male strength is needed, such as carpenter. Because of the nature of the work, this kind of job requires man.” (female representative of local government)

The gender pay gap was mentioned only in one case, while in the other case this problem was regarded as ‘central-level problem’. On the other hand, as gender inequality in education was recognized limited access of girls from Roma and poor families to education and their early drop out from schools.

Unemployment of women was one of the most often reported problems. It was emphasized in several occasions that privatization of enterprises in several municipalities (Surdulica, Vladicin Han) had huge impact on women’s unemployment, since enterprises that were big employer of female work force were restructured and then closed. Women who lost jobs during these processes are mostly over 45, faced with big obstacles for re-employment.

But even if poor economy and deindustrialization create same framework for men and women, it was reported that chances for the coping with unemployment are unequal for men and women. It was explained that men can move to the another city or to the another state to find the employment (at least seasonal), while women are limited to the local labor market and forced to accept worse labor conditions while providing care for the family during the absence of men. Women often work informally, for very small salary (for cleaning services some will have only 200 RSD per day in Pcinjski district), while men can have 30 EUR per day during construction work in Belgrade or in Montenegro. It was concluded that this brings women in subordinated position. But some (female) government representatives accepted this fact as inevitable. It is considered as ‘normal’ fact that women should stay at home and take care of family.

“It is in our education...man is the head of the family” (female government representative).

Other participants identified as important problem traditional culture and passivism of majority of women. Women are subordinated to men in the family, they carry out all housework.

“Here, culture is strongly patriarchal. This culture prevents women’s access to public sphere. It is considered that home is their place. This is male society. Girls are taught from earliest age that they should be quiet and to obey...” (male representative of local government).

Unbalanced gender relations and subordinated position of women intersect public and private sphere. In the private sphere, extreme consequences of such power imbalance can be found in domestic violence against women. Participants reported that domestic violence against women is still taboo topic in the region. Representatives of Centers for social work (CSW) from some municipalities shared the impression that women are still reluctant to ask for support in cases of violence. In municipality of Lebane, presently there is only one case of violence that is processed in the court. Participants from women’s organizations emphasized that southern municipalities have many factors that contribute to the violence against women: poverty, psychological consequences from war engagement, etc. Violence and control over women took also form of preventing women to ask for custody over children in the case of divorce, which is emphasized as problem in some ethnic groups, strong traditional practice against which CSW does not have efficient instruments, as reported by director of this institution.

It is important to emphasize that participants in FGDs expressed their opinions simultaneously as representatives of institutions and organizations, and as individuals. Some of them showed much more gender sensitivity than it can be observed on the level of their institution/organization. This is the case particularly with some journalists who were quite aware about gender inequalities and specific problems of women, while they were also aware that media are not contributing to the improvement of the situation. To bridge the gap between sensitive individuals and insensitive institutions/organizations, or vice versa, it is important to design changes that will include thorough and systematic gender equality framework on the institutional/organizational level. This conclusion is even more supported by the findings related to the present activities and perception of improvement of local framework for gender equality.

3.3. Present actions and perceptions on the possibilities to improve gender equality on the local level

During FGDs information was collected on various activities that are conducted by local stakeholders related to the improvement of gender equality. Furthermore, participants were asked to share opinions about possible ways of promoting gender equality on the local level. Findings in this aspect lead to following conclusions:

- Activities of different stakeholders aimed to improve gender inequality are lacking or they are very fragmentary.
- There is no stable, long-term, regular cooperation between different stakeholders in the same municipality, nor between municipalities, related to the gender equality issues.
- For the improvement of gender equality it is needed simultaneous 'top-bottom' and 'bottom-up' intervention.

Already described lack of pro-active and efficient gender equality mechanisms, gender mainstreaming in local policy making and adequate strategies/action plans, are the important factors which lead to the fragmentary, uncoordinated actions related to gender equality in local communities. Information that participants from various institutions/organizations provided during FGDs indicates that some fragmentary gender equality actions have been implemented mostly in the fields of employment, health protection and in the form of protection or support for victims of violence. The other actions, such as actions related to increase of political participation of women, protection of rights in working place and similar are very sporadic and temporary.

Local governments are not committed to the gender equality policies. All preconditions for gender mainstreaming are missing. Local mechanisms are inactive and presently they do not show any willingness to initiate mainstreaming gender into the local policies. There is no regular monitoring of gender inequalities, and consequently there is no evidence base for policy making on gender equality issues. There are no strategies, action plans for gender equality, there is no gender balanced participation in organizational structure of local government, and even women who are involved in political decision making process are in majority of cases not aware of gender equality importance and problems.

Political parties usually have some form of women's network or forum, but their activities vary across the parties and within the same party across the municipalities. Some are quite active the others have been just occasionally conducting short-term actions or programmes. But cooperation between women's organizations from different parties is very rare, and even cooperation within the same party in neighboring municipalities is not regular.

Local branches of national employment service (NES) have been conducting different activities aimed to improve employment of women. They are providing employment programs for unemployed women, such as (re)training, job clubs, and public works (such as home care). But access to self-employment programmes is limited to women because of weak asset ownership which makes women ineligible for financial markets important for start-up and developing business. Therefore the female entrepreneurship is not efficient tool for improvement of women's employment. Some local offices are providing specific programmes in the context of high share of rural women in the local population. The example is training for traditional arts in

Lebane. However, the problem remains because of lack of jobs and still spread practice of employers to employ men for certain jobs. The possibility to act against that practice is limited since official forms that employers should fill with vacancies description still contain fields for required sex and age. This should be the subject of changes on central level and within the scope of work of labor inspection in opinion of representatives of local NES offices.

Centers for social work are generally not gender sensitive. Representatives from these institutions were in majority of cases very competent in elaboration of the problems and programmes, but without any specific gender focus. The exemption is (the only male representative) who was very aware of specific women's problems, but also aware of inadequate capacities of CSW to deal with these specific problems. The only gender specific activity of CSWs was related to the support for victims of violence. One of the important observations from representative of CSW was that causes for inadequate gender sensitivity partly come from inability to assess the service from the perspective of beneficiaries and in accordance to the needs of beneficiaries.

Local media representatives informed that position of local media is very weak and that number of local media has decreased significantly during last period. Therefore, the capacities to use local media as channels for promotion of gender equality are reduced as well. Nonetheless, majority of local media is not at all active in the field of gender equality. Public media are under control of local governments and editors are directed by the interests of the founder. Therefore, the lack of interest in gender equality issues can be understood as lack of interest of local governments. As for private media, it was concluded that they are lead by profit interests, which undermines their role as media for education, awareness raising and promoting important social issues such as gender equality. It was also noticed that positive examples of successful women in local communities are lacking in the local media coverage.

Civil society organizations have been implementing mostly temporary programmes and projects. Except SOS phones for victims of violence and shelter, other activities are donors driven and temporary. Generally, majority of participants had impression that there is not enough CSOs in smaller municipalities. In some existing organizations are not active, and cooperation with local government is missing. It was emphasized that one of the role of local governments is to support civil society organizations, but instead of those who are traditionally financed from local budget (such as hunting and similar societies) it is important to finance organizations and projects focused on the improvement of the position of different groups, including women. Support from local government is often only declarative, verbal, but not financial or grounded in some project partnership.

"To be perfectly clear, I do not say that I do not get the support (from the local government). The President of municipality accepts meeting with me, listens to me, offers me a coffee, but

everything ends when I leave and close the door of his office. There is no further support. The money is not an excuse; there are many things that can be done without money." (activist from women's organization).

Lack of coordination and cooperation is recognized as one of the important problems in building more adequate and efficient framework for gender equality. This includes cooperation between different stakeholders within the same municipality, as well as across-municipality cooperation. However, some participants had different opinion:

"We are just applying rules; there is no need to be coordinated (on inter-municipal level)". (representative of local government).

Representative of local economic development office emphasized that stakeholders are individually poorly informed on gender inequality problems, there are neither adequate strategic plans nor coordinated actions, and communication between government, public institutions and civil society is not developed. Due to the lack of formalized protocols for cooperation, victims of violence from one municipality are not eligible to obtain support in another municipality (as it was case between Medvedja and Leskovac).

It was very good observation of one participant that lack of coordination and cooperation has roots in underdevelopment of local civil society, small number of civil society organizations, but also in underdevelopment of institutions, and weak communication between these two groups of stakeholders.

Finally, participants were asked about opinion what can be done to improve local framework for gender equality? Who should lead and coordinate action? Some of participants emphasized the need to provide general framework in the form of strategies, action plans, and identified local government as leading actor. Others emphasized the importance of 'bottom-up' initiatives in the form of raising awareness of women so they can be more active in improving their position and fighting against discrimination. Third type of opinions was referring to coordinated simultaneous action from the top and the bottom, and involvement of all stakeholders in the process. But majority of participants agreed that in any case it is needed to have active and efficient local gender equality mechanism whether in the form of council, assembly committee or in the form of trustee for gender equality on the local level.

4. Conclusions

Gender equality is necessary precondition for every society that tends to be established along the principles of inclusive development and social justice. In that sense, promotion of more gender balanced communities should be the autonomous and authentic objective of every local community. However, there are certain obligations that are coming from the international and national level, which have to be taken into account when developing local institutional and policy framework for gender equality. Main international obligations are defined by Beijing platform for action, by Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and by European gender equality framework, including the charter aimed to define principles and standards for gender equality on the local level. As member of UN and along the process of EU accession, Serbia should provide adequate actions that are in accordance with commitments to the international principles for gender equality. Gender mainstreaming represents main strategy to achieve adequate institutional framework, policies and processes in the practice. Important steps were made on the national level during last several years, in respect of the establishment of main institutional framework, development of gender equality strategy and enactment of gender equality law and law against discrimination.

However, the analysis presented in this report came to conclusion that presently in local communities of Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts, there are neither significant tendencies to establish systematic policy framework for gender equality 'from below' (from local actors and governments), nor significant tendencies to develop adequate framework by implementing principles and standards 'from above' (national level and international community).

The analysis presented in this report leads to two main conclusions:

- Local communities in Jablanicki and Pcinjski districts are marked by prominent gender inequalities;
- Local framework for improvement of gender equality and empowerment of women is not favorable.

The inequalities are evident in political and economic participation, in education, but also in sphere of private life which is marked by dominance of traditional, patriarchal norms and domestic violence against women.

Local mechanisms for gender equality are established in majority of municipalities, but they are not functional, while gender equality issues are very sporadic in local policies and gender mainstreaming is completely absent from local policy making.

Generally, representatives of local government and political parties (excluding representatives from women's networks/forums), as well as representatives of majority of centers for social work are less sensitive to gender equality issues and problems than representatives of national

employment service, CSOs and local media. Perception of gender inequality problems is vague, mostly limited to few aspects, and often contradictory. Lack of awareness is partly grounded in lack of evidence base.

Activities of different stakeholders aimed to improve gender inequality are lacking or they are very fragmentary. There is no stable, long-term, regular cooperation between different stakeholders in the same municipality, or between municipalities, related to the gender equality issues. For the improvement of gender equality it is needed simultaneous 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' intervention.

5. Recommendations

Taking into account main conclusions based on the analysis of quantitative data and qualitative survey, and striving to the objectives defined by key international and national strategic documents, recommendations are defined with the aim to enable development of more favorable framework for gender equality on the local level. Following actions are recommended to this end:

1. Awareness on importance of gender equality from the perspective of inclusive development and socially just community should be raised among local government officials, political parties, representatives of public institutions and local media. This can be achieved through several activities:
 - General awareness raising campaign;
 - Specific trainings tailored according to specific features and roles of different actors;
 - Public debates that will include representatives of various stakeholders groups (i.e. local governments, political parties, CSOs, media, etc.);
 - Concrete actions aimed to empower women that will have high visibility;
 - Publicly presenting positive examples and successful stories about local women who are successful in various fields (entrepreneurship, science, art, etc.).
2. Systematic knowledge on dimensions and conditions of gender inequalities should be developed among all stakeholders (government, political parties, public institutions, CSOs

and media). While some of stakeholders are familiar of some aspects of gender inequalities, majority is still missing 'whole picture'. This can be achieved through:

- Appropriate trainings or training modules which will introduce the facts about relative position of men and women in various dimensions (political, economic participation, wellbeing, education, socio-cultural participation, power in intimate relationships, etc.);
 - Quantitative and qualitative surveys on gender inequalities in general, or focused on certain aspects of gender inequalities, with reports that will be delivered to stakeholders;
 - Public presentations on various aspects of gender inequalities.
3. Knowledge on significant international and national gender equality framework should be raised particularly among local government officials and political parties. For this purpose it is needed to supply local governments with key international documents translated to local languages (such as Beijing platform, CEDAW convention, EU charter, National strategy, etc.) or with one document that will present key documents in condensed and comprehensive manner, indicating what is the role of local governments within the framework defined by these documents. This should be one of the tasks of local GE mechanisms.
4. Local government officials should be trained in gender mainstreaming, and specific gender mainstreaming toolkit should be developed for these purposes, appropriate for local level. The toolkit should include at least following modules:
- International and national legal and policy framework;
 - Basic concepts that are in the background of gender equality policy and gender mainstreaming;
 - Institutional and policy architecture for gender mainstreaming on the local level;
 - Methods and procedures for monitoring gender equality on the local level;
 - Methods and procedures for mainstreaming gender in designing local public policies, legal instruments and budgets;
 - Impact assessment of local policies from the perspective of gender equality;

- Networking and cooperation between different stakeholders in the local community and between local communities with the aim to provide efficient gender mainstreaming and to improve gender equality in respective communities.
5. It is important to raise capacities and responsibilities of local gender equality mechanisms. Their activity and efficiency can be raised also through the networking with Gender Equality Directorate of the MLSP, with various sectors in local government, with local stakeholders and with local GE mechanisms from other local communities. They should play the 'node' role in the gender equality networks, and backbone for introducing gender mainstreaming into a local institutional framework.
 6. Commitment of local governments to gender equality should be raised, and European charter for equality of men and women in local life can serve as good ground to trigger this commitment.
 7. Overarching gender equality strategy or action plan is needed for defining objectives, identifying priorities and designing actions for the improvement of gender equality. Local plans/strategies should be in line with national strategy but elaborated in accordance with local specific conditions. The role of other stakeholders should be taken into account when designing action plan. Besides tools for implementation, plan should define precise indicators for monitoring the progress and to establish regular reporting system for further interventions.
 8. Existing key strategies should be reexamined and redesigned taking into account gender equality principles, standards, and impacts on the position of men and women.
 9. Local offices/agencies for economic development should introduce gender perspective in developmental plans and projects.
 10. Gender sensitive budgeting should be introduced on the regular basis. In order to establish gender sensitive budgeting it is necessary to base the budget planning on gender sensitive analyses.
 11. It is important to define precise indicators for monitoring GE on the local level, and to regularly collect data according to defined monitoring indicators. For that purpose more solid evidence base should be established. This can be partly done by better cooperation

with Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, but partly by improvement of local evidences and reporting systems. Gender sensitive statistics should be available on the level of municipalities or districts that will enable monitoring of following aspects:

- Political participation, including share of women among MPs of local assemblies, share of women among presidents of local parliaments and municipalities/cities, share of women among top executive positions in local governments;
- Enrollment of boys and girls in elementary and secondary education, segregation according to educational profiles, enrollment of young men and women in university education, literacy. Gender specific data should be disaggregated also by vulnerability criteria (urban/rural, ethnic minority, displacement, disability, etc.).
- Comparative labour market indicators, including gender specific activity, employment and unemployment rate, share of informal employment among men and women, share of women among persons employed during last year, long term unemployment among men and women.
- Social welfare which should include at least health and retirement insurance coverage, but also indicators on reproductive health of women.

12. It is important to stimulate cooperation between different stakeholders and different municipalities. Local governments can be one of the key actors to initiate or stimulate this kind of cooperation, while CSOs can be the other actor who can play this role in building partnerships. Cooperation should be formalized through protocols.

13. Protocols of operations of key public institutions: CSW, NES, education and health care institutions, judicial institutions and police, should be reexamined and redefined in accordance with gender equality standards.

14. Producers, editors and journalists from local media should be trained in gender equality and their awareness on significance of gender equality issues should be raised.

15. CSOs should be stimulated to broaden their focus from women's health and violence to other aspects of gender inequalities and cooperation between women's organization and other CSOs should be developed with the aim to integrate gender perspective in the work of organizations that are dealing with other forms of vulnerability and empowerment.

ANEX: Indicators for monitoring the progress

For the purposes of monitoring the progress in gender equality on the local level two sets of indicators were proposed:

1. Indicators for monitoring gender equality
2. Indicators for monitoring development and functionality of gender equality institutional framework and policy.

Indicators for monitoring gender equality

Aspect	Indicator
Political participation of women	Share of women among members of local parliament
	Share of women among top ranks in major parliamentary parties
Economic participation	Gender specific employment rates
	Gender specific unemployment rates
	Gender specific inactivity rates
	Share of women among managers
Education	Education structure of men and women age 15+
	Percentage of men and women who left school before completed secondary education age 18-24
Social welfare	Share of persons without health insurance among men and women
	Share of persons without retirement insurance among men and women
Violence against women	Number of reported cases of violence to the police, CSW
	Percentage of criminal charges filed in cases of domestic violence in comparison to the overall number of reported cases
	Percentage of convictions in cases of domestic violence in comparison to the number of prosecuted cases

Indicators for monitoring development and functionality of gender equality institutional framework and policy

Aspect	Indicator
Gender equality mechanisms	Established
	Number of meetings during referent period
	Number of decisions made
	Number of initiatives proposed by GE committee and adopted by parliament
	At least 5 initiatives with other stakeholders from local community
	Number of visits/exchanges with local mechanisms from other local communities
Gender mainstreaming through local government	European charter for equality of men and women in local life signed
	Strategy/action plan for gender equality drafted and adopted
	Strategy for local economic development revisited from gender perspective
	Strategy for social protection revisited from gender perspective
	Budget analysis from gender perspective produced
Gender mainstreaming through local public institutions	Protocols of operations of police, CSW, NES, Education and health institutions revisited from gender perspective
	Protocols of operations of police revisited from gender perspective
	Protocols of operations of CSW revisited from gender perspective
	Protocols of operations of NES revisited from gender perspective
	Protocols of operations of educational institutions revisited from gender perspective
	Protocols of operations of health care institutions revisited from gender perspective
Gender mainstreaming through projects	Number of projects planned by local economic development agencies/offices with the gender perspective
	Number of CSOs projects related to gender

	equality
	Structure of CSOs projects according to the main objective/topic
	Number of projects related to gender equality implemented in partnerships

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