

FOR THE OLDER WOMEN'S VOICE



RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH ON THE POSITION AND PARTICIPATION OF OLDER
WOMEN IN POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE IN SERBIA AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
IMPROVING THEIR POSITION

The Research conducted by the associations Amity and FemPlatz puts the older women into focus, who outnumber their men peers, but are more neglected. Older women are not provided with the same opportunities to participate in policy-making and decision-making processes regarding the issues that concern them. This document is a call to action to increase awareness about the human rights of older women and to improve mechanisms to protect their human rights to participate in public / social and political life.

The research included 675 women of 65 and plus who live in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac, Bor, and Čačak, in order to get insight into the situation of older women in Serbia, their involvement in decision making that affects their lives and into the necessary additional measures required by the state and society.

The key findings of the Research are:

- **Older women are neglected in/by society.** Over 80% of older women feel that society does not pay enough attention to their position and needs.
- **Contribution of older women and their role in households and the community are not sufficiently visible.** They continue to make a significant contribution to their households even after retirement, most often by doing household chores and providing care for dependent family members, and those living in the rural by working in agriculture, as well.
- **Older women are not sufficiently informed about their rights,** or importance of their participation in public and political life, especially in relation to participation in decision-making that affects them.

Older women in Serbia are in a worse position comparing to older men, as well as comparing to women and men from other age groups:

- They are constantly and continuously **exposed to multiple discrimination** based on sex, gender, age, poverty, etc. Discriminatory attitudes are especially pronounced towards widows, older women living alone, older women with disabilities, older women living in rural areas.



- **The social exclusion of older women is significantly higher** comparing to older men since the rate of material deprivation is twice as high among them, and there is a significantly higher number of them without school or with incomplete primary education, which affects their social exclusion.
- **Not all older women have the same opportunities and equal access to health care and social welfare,** and the most common reasons are the distance from those institutions, poverty, inadequate access to public transport, as well as inaccessibility of transport, institutions, and services.
- **Violence against older women is widespread in Serbia,** but not sufficiently reported. Many older women have been suffering from violence from their spouses, partners, or other family members for years, but consider it an acceptable behavioural pattern. Studies show that about 20% of older people have suffered from some form of violence, as well as that women were more exposed to violence. Among the murdered women, 23.5% are older women.

Older women do not participate enough in organized community activities:

- Older women perceive their responsibilities and their personal free time in different ways.

Some have come to terms with the fact that household chores are only women's chores, they have accepted their role and do not try and do not think that something needs to be changed. The second group is aware that they need to change something in their attitude towards the self-imposed or imposed obligations, but they still do nothing. The third group of older women are those who know how to draw the line between household chores and their own personal free time.

- The majority of respondents are not members of any association, and only 7% of the respondents used to be a member of an association. The reasons are that they do not have time (half said that they worked in the garden or at their vacation home, 44% helped with grandchildren or other relatives and 15% worked for money or volunteered) then, that their household standard is poor, or they are not interested in participating.
- Among the active ones, most older women are active in pensioners' associations (28% of them), and only 2% are in women's associations, 2% in cultural and artistic associations, 5% in civil society organizations, and 1% in local communities.
- Respondents' interest in participating in organized services / programmes is to some extent influenced by their age, education, sources of income, place of residence and household standard.

The political participation of older women is at an exceptionally low level:

- Although the quotas are 40% for the women participation in the assemblies from 2020, which was respected in the elections, the participation of older women is minimal. In the Assembly of Serbia, among 39% of women, only 1.2% are older women. The largest number of women is at the City Assembly of Belgrade, where 46% are women, and 3.63% are of 65 plus, while in the assemblies of Novi Sad and Bor, there are no older women at all.
- 10 % of respondents are members of the political party, and among them, 7% have less than a year of party experience, which means that they joined a political party as older persons, which should be interpreted in the context of public attitudes that citizens are engaging into political life expecting personal gain.

- Only 2% of respondents hold a position in a party, while 20% of them previously held position, indicating that with the entry of women into old age, the already small portion power in political parties they have as women decreases even further.
- Less than a quarter of the respondents, current or former members of political parties participates or have participated in the decision-making bodies, and even then, it was at the lower levels (in work organizations, local communities, and the least number in the local self-government units).

Older women are aware of the importance of their participation in politics, whether they are personally interested or not:

- They recommend the participation of older women at all levels, from the local community to the national level, but also suggest that it is necessary to work on political education of older women. This does not necessarily have to be through political parties, but they can participate in the work of the local or housing community, in professional and other civil society organizations or in advisory bodies.



THEREFORE, IT IS NECESSARY TO:

Ensure the operation of councils for the older persons at the national level, with the mandatory participation of representatives of older women, as well as the establishment of senior citizens councils in local governments, which will proportionally include older women

It is necessary to approach this issue in a systematic way, both at the national and at the local level. At the national level, it is necessary to ensure operability and regular meetings, as well as the participation of the representatives of older women. It is also a way to ensure increased participation of older women in political and public life, ensuring their voice is heard when creating public policies.

Establish a quota for older women within the quota for women's participation in the electoral process

Experience to date shows that the number of women in the National Assembly and in local parliaments has increased only after the introduction of quotas for the participation of the underrepresented sex. Given the exceptionally low participation of older women, as shown by the conducted research, the introduction of a quota for older women will ensure an increase in their political participation and greater participation in decision-making.

Sensitize general public regarding the rights of older women

It is necessary to increase the sensitivity of civil society organizations and the general public to rights of older women to participate more in the public life of local community and in places where decisions affecting them are made, at all levels, in order to change legal framework and improve mechanisms for greater participation of women in public and political life. It is necessary to raise awareness and educate all community stakeholders about the principles of gender equality and fight against discrimination against older women.

Raise awareness and information level among older women about their rights, educate them about political processes and empower them to run in elections at all levels

In order for older women to be more involved in political and public life, it is necessary to inform them about their rights and organize education for them about political processes and models of participation in decision-making processes.

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In addition, measures are needed to empower older women to run in elections at all levels, especially in local community council elections.

Older women and men in Serbia - facts and figures

- In 2011, Serbia had 7,186,862 citizens, with 1,250,316 (17.40%) of them being 65 and plus, out of which 723,249 were women. The number of older women as well as the total share of older people is increasing annually, and the total number of inhabitants is decreasing.
- On 31st December 2019, total population of Serbia was 6,926,705 citizens, and with 1,451,818 (20.96%) of those 65 and plus, 828,944 being women.
- Almost a third of the total number of women in Serbia are older women (27.93% as of 31st December 2019),
- 144,407 older women (14.37%) have no pension comparing to 25,295 older men (4.25%).
- 107,000 older women are without school (formal education) comparing to 12,000 older men.

Older women quotes:

"It is a common place for women's lives to take place on the margins of society, outside the sphere of "public", in the area of "private", in the family. With retirement, they become even more firmly entrenched in the family ("grandma service") and, therefore, they disappear completely from the public sphere, where they did not get the same chances and opportunities as men, not even before. Discrimination against both women and the older persons of both sexes contributes to this. As a society / culture, we tend to underestimate the capabilities of senior citizens and, as a rule, do not have faith in them."

"In 90% of cases it's up to men (to decide). Nobody asks us anything, we are always humiliated by men ... we are poorly appreciated and respected, especially us, older women."

"Women are not interested and that's why they don't get involved in social and political life, in fact they believe it's not for them, and I'm one of them."

"The participation of older women is also important, because every proposal that is put forward for the benefit of us women, in any place, is important."

"Women are more oriented towards the common good, and less towards the government, and that is why they should be included where issues important not only for them but for all citizens are being discussed."