THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE RURAL LABOUR MARKET IN BULGARIA – MANY CHALLENGES AND SOME SOLUTIONS

Bozhura Fidanska

Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Bulgaria

The greatest problems facing rural women in Bulgaria are: unemployment; declining or low incomes; economic problems caused by social changes; the heavy workload both in paid employment and at home; lack of free time and inequality in free time compared to men; low level of education; and depopulation of the rural areas, especially the migration of young rural women. In this paper an assessment of the position of women relative to men in the rural labour market is made, based on gender disaggregated data from a range of official documents and reports prepared by Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) of Bulgaria and others. It confirms the results of earlier studies that women occupy a generally disadvantaged position in agriculture and rural areas in Bulgaria. EU-co-funding programmes potentially provide a way of redressing this imbalance. Using the results from a mail survey conducted amongst beneficiaries, the extent to which women have benefited from some of the measures in the SAPARD programme is assessed, and also the ways in which gender issues have been mainstreamed into the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013 are reviewed. It can be concluded that Bulgaria is making significant progress in the development of rural areas, and especially in involving women as an active force in the labour market.

**Key words**: women, agriculture, rural areas, employment, SAPARD, Rural Development Programme

**JEL classification system**: Q18

**Introduction**

According to the OECD definition of rural areas (OECD, 1994), in the Republic of Bulgaria there are 20 predominantly rural NUTS3 regions, seven intermediate rural regions and only one predominantly urban region - the capital Sofia\(^1\). Predominantly and intermediate rural regions cover 98.8% of the territory and account for 84.3% of the population of Bulgaria\(^1\). The national definition of rural areas, however, defines rural areas as municipalities (LAU1) in which no settlement has a population over 30 000 people. This definition has been used under SAPARD and is also being applied in a slightly modified form in the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 for territorially based interventions. According to this definition, 231 out of total of 264 municipalities in Bulgaria are classified as rural; rural areas represent 81% of the Bulgarian territory and 42% of the population (MAF, 2007).

In 2004 the population of rural areas was 3.2 million\(^4\). The population density in rural areas is half of the national average (35.8 vs. 69.9 inhabitants per km\(^2\), respectively) (NSI (MAF calculations)). The average number of the population in rural municipalities is 13,800; however, there are significant differences between the rural municipalities. About 40% of the rural municipalities are of small size – with a population below 10,000 people, and in this group almost one third of the municipalities have less than 5,000 people. There are 18 rural municipalities with populations above 30,000.

The overall population of Bulgaria has been declining but in the rural areas the rate of population decline is significantly higher. The population in the rural areas has declined by over 1 million people in the period 1972–2004. In 2001–2004, the average annual rate of rural population decline was -10.5 per 1000 (% compared to -2.1% of urban. The major contributor of population decline in rural areas is the negative natural growth (-8.2% average for 2001–2004 vs. -3.7% for urban areas). Rural and urban areas have the same birth rates (8.7%) but the death rate of the rural population is significantly higher (16.8% average for 2001–2004 vs. 12.4% for urban areas). The migration from rural to urban areas contributed to -2.3% decrease of the rural population in the 2001–2004 period.

In 2004, the age structure of the rural population was less favourable than the urban one due to the comparatively low share of population of working age (56.8%, c.f. 65.0% in urban areas) (NSI, 2004). The share of the population below working age in rural areas was about 16%, c.f. 14.5% in urban areas. The share of the population above working age was 27% in rural areas and 20.5% in urban areas. In the North-West region, the share of the population above working age exceeded 30%.

---

1 Mailing address: Rural Development Directorate, Competitiveness in Agriculture and Food Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, 55 “Christo Botev” Blve. 1400, Sofia, Bulgaria. Email: bfidanska@mzh.government.bg

2 In order to achieve compatibility with the CMEF data, the population density in 2000 is used for the designation of the NUTS 3 regions. If 2004 data is used, the number of predominantly rural NUTS 3 regions is 21.

3 The analysis below is based on NSI regional statistical data (MAF calculations), unless stated differently.

4 The analysis below is based on the national definition of rural areas, unless stated differently. The OECD definition is used, where no data are available by national definition.
almost half of the total population above working age resided in rural areas. The number and the share of the aged population are increasing and those of the younger generations show a downward trend (MRDPW, 2005). This negative change in the age structure of the population leads to higher economic burden on the 15–64 age group (Popov et al, 2007).

The educational status of the rural population is significantly lower than that of the urban population. In 2001 the illiteracy rate in rural municipalities was two times higher than in urban areas, i.e. 1.7% of the population between 25 and 64 years of age 2001 (NSI, 2001 Population Census). Almost half of the population in rural areas had no secondary education, compared to 20% in urban areas. There were significant differences in the shares of the population with university education – 5.5% in rural areas versus 20.6% in urban areas. The share of adults aged 25–64 participating in education and training was only 1.3% in Bulgaria, and in the predominantly rural NUTS 2 regions it was even lower – 0.9%.

The economically active population in the predominantly rural areas was 1.851.000 people and in the intermediate areas 878.000 people (NSI Labour Force Survey, 2004). The predominantly and intermediate rural areas are characterised by a very low labour force participation rate. In 2004, less than half of the population above 15 years of age in the predominantly rural areas was employed or actively seeking a job. The low labour force participation rate is explained by the poor employment opportunities in rural areas. The total number of employed in the predominantly and intermediate rural regions was 2.388.000 people (NSI Labour Force Survey, 2004). The employment rate was very low – 42% of the labour force.

There are significant and persistent disparities in the unemployment rate of urban and rural areas. Whilst in urban areas the registered unemployment rate fell from around 13% in 2000 to under 10% in 2004, in rural municipalities the equivalent figures were 25% and 19.2% (Employment Agency data). In 34 rural municipalities, the unemployment rate in 2004 exceeded 30%. A significant problem in rural municipalities is the high level of long-term unemployment. In 2004, the long-term unemployment rate in rural areas was 11.3% compared to 3.6% in urban areas. The high long-term unemployment rate is explained by the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas and the deteriorating employability of the labour force. Surveys of rural areas show that despite the high unemployment, entrepreneurs encounter difficulties in finding qualified labour.

In 2003 the agricultural labour force amounted to 1.35 million persons, of which there were 336 300 persons employed full time in the agricultural holdings, with another 150 400 persons devoted to farm work more than 75% of the time (MAF Agrostatistics Directorate, Agricultural Census, 2003)\(^5\). Almost half of the agricultural labour force worked on the farm less then 50% of the working time. The agricultural labour force was equivalent of 791 600 Annual Work Units (AWU)\(^6\). One of the major problems in the agricultural sector is the aging of the labour force. In 2003 only 11.6% of the persons included in the agricultural labour force were less than 35 years old vs. 54.6% at the age of 55 and more (MAF Agrostatistics Directorate, Agricultural Census, 2003).

Low incomes and unfavourable working conditions in agriculture, as well as deteriorating living conditions in rural areas discourage young people from starting a career in agriculture. Young people are more mobile and less emotionally related to the land and countryside and there is a clear risk for a shortage of qualified labour, especially for production of labour intensive products.

According to Yanakieva et al (2008), the agricultural holdings faced significant barriers to growth in the transition period. They lacked access to credits and opportunities for vocational training, while at the same time, most of the holders entered agriculture with limited assets and knowledge. It is expected that with the current trend in economic growth, the increasing job opportunities and income generation in other sectors, the number of these subsistence farms and thus, the total number of holdings in Bulgaria, will register a significant decline.

There is evidence from many countries (e.g. Fieldsend, 2008) that women in rural areas face particular difficulties in terms of securing paid employment and are frequently expected to undertake many unpaid tasks both in the workplace and in the home. In the context of the generally unfavourable rural labour market indicators in Bulgaria, this paper seeks to assess the position of women relative to men in rural areas and to assess the impacts of EU co-funded programmes for agricultural and rural development on the status of women in the rural labour market.

**Methodology**

The assessment of the position of women relative to men in rural areas is based on gender disaggregated data from a range of official documents and reports prepared

---

5 In this paper three main sources of data on agricultural employment are used: 2003 Agricultural Census; NSI employment statistics and NSI Labour Force Survey (LFS). The used source is indicated in the references. The definitions of agricultural labour force used in 2003 Agricultural Census comply with European Commission Decision 2000/115. NSI data on employment covers hired employees, self-employed, unpaid family workers, working business owners and is based on registered agri company statistics and 2003 Census data on employment in non-registered farms of physical persons. NSI Labour Force Survey is a quarterly household sample survey and complies with Eurostat recommended categories and methodology.

6 2003 Agricultural Census data is used in this section, unless stated differently.
by Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAF) of Bulgaria and others. The results of this assessment are interpreted in the broader context of the status of rural women in Bulgaria. In the case of the SAPARD programme, a mail survey conducted amongst beneficiaries designed to collect information from the supported companies on: assets, output, employment, value added, markets, compliance with environmental legislation, as well as, purpose of SAPARD investments, structure of investment costs, profile of the beneficiary, etc. The survey frame included all beneficiaries with approved projects and 164 mailed questionnaires were returned by the deadline, representing a final return rate of 39%.

Results

The position of women in the rural labour market

In 2004 the share of women in the rural population was 51%. In the working age population the share of females was 46% but it was 63% in the population above working age due to higher life expectancy of women. In rural areas the female employment rate was 9-10 percentage points lower than the male, which was close to the country average. The gender differences in economic activity rates varied between regions, depending on the labour market situation.

Table 1. Agricultural labour force data by size classes of UAA, by legal status of farms and by sex for the period 1 October 2004 to 30 September 2005 in Bulgaria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size classes of Utilized agricultural area (dca)</th>
<th>Total labour force</th>
<th>Agricultural holdings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natural persons</td>
<td>Legal persons and sole traders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>men women</td>
<td>men women men women men women men women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>16 297  9 797</td>
<td>13 440  7 683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.1-0.9</td>
<td>48 248  39 931</td>
<td>48 109  39 837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0-2.9</td>
<td>113 175  97 635</td>
<td>112 748  97 400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0-4.9</td>
<td>89 169  75 488</td>
<td>89 062  75 388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0-9.9</td>
<td>128 034  108 171</td>
<td>127 719  107 896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.0-19.9</td>
<td>93 301  72 735</td>
<td>92 903  72 438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.0-49.9</td>
<td>52 542  38 552</td>
<td>51 961  38 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.0-99.9</td>
<td>14 687  10 228</td>
<td>14 054  9 390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0-199.9</td>
<td>7 638  5 042</td>
<td>6 635  4 057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200.0-299.9</td>
<td>3 071  2 222</td>
<td>2 123 1 256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300.0-499.9</td>
<td>3 052  2 007</td>
<td>1 699  994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500.0-999.9</td>
<td>3 321  1 424</td>
<td>2 010  874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;1000</td>
<td>29 944  10 106</td>
<td>3 044  1 175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>602 480 437 338</td>
<td>565 506 456 522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the reference period 2004/2005, the MAF Agrostatistics Directorate collected data from the 1 October 2004 to the 30 September 2005. The labour input in the holdings is recorded for the 12 months. The definitions of the types of agricultural holdings shown in Table 1 are as follows. A ‘natural person’ is a private farmer not registered under the Trade Law, the Law on Cooperatives or the Law on Obligations and Agreements but having agricultural activities or self-employed as agricultural producer. A ‘natural person-sole trader’ is a natural person, registered as sole trader under the Trade Law. ‘Companies’ are agricultural enterprises registered under the Trade Law. ‘Companies’ are agricultural enterprises registered under the Trade Law. Women represented approximately 42% of the total agricultural labour force (Table 1). Amongst natural persons, the percentage was slightly higher (45%), but only 31% of natural person-sole traders, 32% of sole traders and 36% of the labour force in companies were women. Of equal note is that women were disproportionately highly represented on the smaller agricultural enterprises. For example, women account for over 46% of natural persons in the 1.0-2.9 ha size classes, but were particularly poorly represented on farms of over 500 ha.

Two associated implications arise from this. Firstly, according to official statistics, the percentage of men involved in farms as managers is higher than the percentage of women (Table 2). In 2003 about a quarter of the farm holders being also farm managers, had other gainful activity outside agriculture. One fifth of the farm managers had their main occupation outside agriculture (ranging from 8% in farms above 100 ESU to 23% in farms below 1 ESU). Secondly, on small farms the vast majority of the labour force were family workers. The non-family workers employed in agricultural holdings were 59 500 in 2003 and the majority of them were employed in the larger holdings (75% were in holdings above 40 ESU). Thus on small farms, women frequently have the status of
spouse of the holding owner or manager, and represent a source of unpaid labour.

Table 2. Holding managers by sex, labour input of holding managers and persons working on farms in Bulgaria for the 12 month period to 30 September 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Holding managers</th>
<th>Labour input</th>
<th>Persons working on the farms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>440 095</td>
<td>259 276</td>
<td>602 480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>94 518</td>
<td>53 317</td>
<td>473 338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>534 613</td>
<td>312 594</td>
<td>1 075 818</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In recent years the quality of jobs offered to women has deteriorated and the working hours have increased, particularly in remote areas and in villages of rural areas. The widespread occurrence of subsistence and semi-subistence farming has increased the share of women employed as non-paid family workers and related to it long working hours in poor working conditions. In rural areas with stagnating economies, men work on seasonal jobs outside the rural municipalities, while women have to care for the family and the subsistence farms. At the same time the share of women working in low paid jobs in the informal economy such as in the clothing and leather industry enterprises has also increased (Dimova and Radeva, 2005).

The heavy workload both in paid employment and at home; lack of free time and inequality in free time compared to men are accompanied by other issues such as lack of extension and knowledge in home economics, home management and entrepreneurship; social problems such as the increasing consumption of alcohol (especially by men); inadequate and distant or declining health care and social services; lack of household services and equipment; unhealthy nutrition and poor health; deficiencies in the rural infrastructure; social isolation; lack of social and cultural activities in villages; the low social status of rural women and the tradition that women are outsiders in public life; the traditional division of labour inside families and women’s economic dependence on men and women’s lack of self-confidence in their potential.

The evidence suggests, therefore, that women occupy a generally disadvantaged position in agriculture and in rural areas in Bulgaria. This situation has been increasingly recognised (e.g. Dimova and Radeva, 2005; Trakova, 2005) and, through the EU co-funded programmes for agricultural and rural development, the first efforts have been made to redress this imbalance.

Impact of the SAPARD Programme

In the 2000–2006 programming period, Bulgaria benefited as a pre-EU accession country from support under the SAPARD Programme. The total public support under the Programme including the national co-financing amounted to EUR 592.961.125. The official launch of the Programme in Bulgaria was on 1 June 2001 with the publication of the detailed regulations for the implementation of the three accredited measures, which also had the largest budgets, namely Measure 1.1 (Investments in agricultural holdings, EUR 201.782.489); Measure 1.2 (Improving processing and marketing of agricultural and fishery products, EUR 197.684.453); and Measure 2.1 (Development and diversification of economic activities, providing for multiple activities and alternative income EUR 75.337.197). The number of holdings/companies in the rural sector that received assistance from the SAPARD amounted to 2.34% of the total number of the cooperative farms, 7.71% of the total of Bulgarian agri-companies and 0.0048% of physical persons. The number of processing companies supported by SAPARD was 112, representing about 7.5% of the total number of processing companies in the country.

The mail survey data (Agriconsulting Europe, 2003) showed that in the SAPARD supported investments (within all the three measures), women occupied 42% of the jobs. The highest percentage of women (47%) work in the food processing companies supported through Measure 1.2 (Fig. 1). The share of women working in agricultural holdings and companies under the other two measures was 38% under Measure 1.1 and 34% under Measure 2.1.

![Fig. 1. Distribution of labour force by sex in SAPARD supported companies and agricultural holdings in Bulgaria.](image-url)
As a comparison, the share of the labour force aged 55+ years in the total labour force employed in agriculture was 52%. The age structure in SAPARD supported investments is more favourable. The share of the labour force aged 60+ in the supported agricultural holdings under Measure 1.1 is only 8.3%, and in the other two measures it is around 2% (Figure 2). The largest number of employed in agricultural holdings in rural areas are in the most active working age (between 30-59 years). In all the three measures this share is 57% on average. The largest number of persons of that age group are employed in the supported agricultural holdings under Measure 1.1.

In the processing companies, 54% of the employees are between 30 and 59 years of age. However, in these companies young employees form a significant proportion. In the processing companies supported through SAPARD, the share of young persons (up to 30 years of age) is 28%, while this age group constitutes 19% of the labour force in the supported agricultural holdings and companies in rural areas under the other two measures.

The mail survey data shows that 88% of the supported entities were owned and managed by men. The highest number of women owners and managers was under Measure 1.2 (17%). They constituted only 9% of the owners/managers of supported investments under Measure 2.1. About 62% of all owners or managers were between 50-59 years of age. Only three owners of the supported agricultural holdings under Measure 1.1 were young – up to 30 years. In the other two measures, there were no managers/owners below 30 years of age. Owners/managers of the supported projects have very high educational attainment – 70% have university degrees (for all three measures). The highest (87%) is the share of university graduates under Measure 1.2. About 30% of the owners under Measure 2.1 and Measure 1.1 have secondary vocational education. In fact, there were no managers/owners among the beneficiaries who have lower than secondary vocational level of education.

The Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

The objectives of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) are addressed by 30 measures. The implementation of the programme was started with 23 measures, of which 18 (111, 112, 121, 122, 123, 141 and 142 of Axis 1; 211, 212, 214, 223 and 226 of Axis 2; 311, 312, 313, 321 and 322 of Axis 3; and 511 of technical assistance) will be implemented in the entire programming period 2007-2013. Measures 143, sub-measure 2 of 431 and 611 were to be implemented by the end of 2009. Three measures were planned to start in 2007 but are now postponed (41, 421 and sub-measure 2 of 431). Seven measures (114, 124, 125, 126, 213, 224 and 341) will be introduced at a later stage, after a change to the RDP to introduce the relevant measure details in line with the procedure in Article 6 (c) of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006.

The employment targets in the Programme by Axis are summarised in Table 3. The contribution of Axis 4 has been quantified considering job creation specifically for the administrative structures of LAGs, which will require adequate manpower.

### Table 3. Targets for job creation / retention by axis in the Rural Development Programme in Bulgaria, 2007-2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis</th>
<th>Retained number</th>
<th>Retained %</th>
<th>Created number</th>
<th>Created %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10 994</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>3 129</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13 054</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 375</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13 800</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28 423</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>17 749</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
vestments in physical and human capital will exceed these short term benefits.

In accordance with Article 8 of Council Regulation 1698/2005, the Managing Authority (Rural Development Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture and Food) will seek to ensure that equality between men and women and non-discrimination1 are respected in the stages of programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the RDP. All measures under the programme are open to all beneficiaries on an equal basis, regardless of race, ethnic origin, religious conviction or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The MA has also sought to ensure compliance with the national legislation in the following fields: the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Labour Code, and the Law on Protection from Discrimination in all activities related to the RDP.

In the selection of projects under measures 311 (Diversification into non-agricultural activities) and 312 (Support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises) priority will be given to projects proposed by women. For both of them the involvement of women could be extremely important (for activities related to rural tourism for example). It is therefore important to provide adequate priority to enterprises managed by women. In the selection of projects under measure 321 (Basic services for the economy and rural population), priority will be given to projects for development of services for vulnerable groups. Where relevant, under the programme monitoring indicators data will be collected on the numbers of males and females participating in/benefiting directly from the Programme. This data will be reported to the Monitoring Committee. In addition, the programme evaluations will seek to establish the extent to which equal opportunities has been provided in the implementation of the project, measure or programme.

Discussion

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria “Citizens shall have the right to work. The state shall take care to provide conditions for the exercising of this right … Workers and employees shall be entitled to … guaranteed minimum pay and remuneration for the actual work performed … in accordance with conditions and procedures established by law” (Art. 48: 1-5, cited by Dimova and Radeva, 2005). Even so, women occupy a disadvantaged position in agriculture and rural areas in Bulgaria, and are frequently expected to undertake a wide range of unpaid tasks (such as looking after children and elderly relatives) as well as working on the family farm. Dimova and Radeva (2005) called for “developing a gender strategy to ensure the economic rights of women”.

In rural areas, such a strategy should take several factors into account. Most rural municipalities are located outside the growth poles of the largest and medium-sized cities in Bulgaria. Their remoteness from large urban centres, the small population and low population density create additional constraints to socio-economic development (Traikova, 2005). The rural areas outside agglomerations have suffered higher population decline, have a less-educated labour force and experienced much higher unemployment rates. There is a need to improve physical infrastructure and quality of basic services in these municipalities in order to improve their competitiveness and ability to retain younger and better educated population, particularly young rural women.

The educational level of women in rural areas is lower than that of men and there is some illiteracy. There are secondary and high schools in agriculture, but none in home economics or rural entrepreneurship. There is also some adult education and training. The perceived educational needs of rural women are in home economics, nutrition, entrepreneurship, planning, management and decision-making, financing and leadership. There are some extension services in setting up a business, but none in home economics. Traikova (2005) makes the following policy implications in order to stimulate the non-farm rural economy (NFRE) and thus promote female employment:

- Tax policy should encourage small and medium-sized businesses. Decreasing taxes and social insurance contributions would foster the NFRE and also decrease the share of the grey economy.
- Access to credit should be improved and credit application procedures should be simplified in order to grant fair access also for small entrepreneurs.
- Better control of privatization and anti-corruption measures are needed for utilising the maximum potential of rural entrepreneurship.

The development and implementation of gender equality policy in Bulgaria is coordinated by the National Council on Equality between Women and Men (NCEWM). The NCEWM was set up by Government Decree 313/17.11.2004. NCEWM is chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and its members include representatives of all government ministries, of academic institutes, national organisations of the social partners and NGOs, as well as the State Agency for Child Protection, the Executive Agency for Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises, the State Refugees Agency, the National Social Security Institute and the National Statistics Institute.

Through SAPARD, the proportion of jobs occupied by women in the supported investments was similar to the percentage of women in the total agricultural labour force but it is clear that the position of women in the rural labour market in Bulgaria remains a disadvantaged one in an already difficult economic environment. NCEWM was in-
involved in the consultations for the preparation of the RDP to ensure that gender equality is respected in the design of rural development measures. NCEWM is invited as a permanent member in the RDP Monitoring Committee.

Particularly through the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013, Bulgaria is now making good progress in the development and diversification of rural areas, especially involving women as an active force for change. The lessons learned can be applied during the pre-EU accession period in other countries in the region, such as Albania, Kosovo and FYRO Macedonia where, as Dimova and Radeva (2005) point out, a clear lack of economic opportunities for rural women remains.

Conclusions

1. The greatest problems facing rural women in Bulgaria are: unemployment; declining or low incomes; economic problems caused by social changes; the heavy workload both in paid employment and at home; lack of free time and inequality in free time compared to men; low level of education; and depopulation of the rural areas, especially the migration of young rural women.

2. There are about 2.9 million people living in rural areas and about half of them are women. The role of agriculture in the economy is important. The share of agricultural labour force is 20% and agricultural production accounts for 16% of the total production. The main employment opportunities for women in rural areas are in agriculture and they work full-time, part-time and seasonally in cooperatives and private farms. Whereas the level of mechanisation on the state and cooperative farms used to be high, privatisation has brought a lot of problems to the small farms.

3. Poverty is related to a diversity of issues: income and consumption, education and health, risk and empowerment. Rural poverty is generally associated with inequality and poor access to resources, services and markets. Employment services for rural people are also lacking. This puts additional burdens on rural women: female-headed households are among the poorest of the poor.

4. Women have a secondary, subordinate role in society compared with men. At the beginning of the transition towards the market economy women lost more jobs than men. In both rural and urban areas women have a higher unemployment rate than men, while men have a relatively higher monthly salary than women.

5. The priority needs of rural women in Bulgaria are increased participation in entrepreneurship and public decision-making. Through SAPARD, and even more through the Rural Development Programme 2007–2013, progress has been made in addressing these needs.

References


