Migrant Women in Politics and Democratic Life

Advocacy Group gathered around NGO Atina represents an informal women’s body, made up of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women, with the intention to address and advocate for better living conditions, access to justice and human rights for all migrant and refugee women in the Republic of Serbia. The Group carries out activities, actions, and meetings with relevant decision-makers, sharing their own experiences and recommendations for improving the position of refugee and migrant women in the Republic of Serbia. The Group was founded in 2018 and so far had more than 20 members.

The Advocacy Group members recognised only the initiative of NGO Atina as an opportunity to participate in political and democratic life in Serbia. The respondents stated that they believe such an initiative exists at the national and international levels, but that they are lacking at the local level to bring migrant women together.

Barriers to Participation for Migrant Women

- A language barrier excludes migrant women from participating in public debates, political processes, or public services.
- Discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and migration status: They are often exposed to sexism, racism, and xenophobia, which can result in their exclusion from public life.
- Economic vulnerability: Most often, migrant women face unemployment, or work in low-paid jobs where they are exposed to exploitation and poor working conditions. Low income and an inadequate social protection system affect their financial independence and reduce the possibility of becoming engaged in public life.
- Lack of access to education can limit migrant women’s professional development and political participation opportunities.
- Lack of information about their rights, opportunities and resources can hinder them in integrating and participating in public life.

Recommendations to Promote and Improve the Participation of Migrant Women

- Language and communication: Access to language programmes and translation services to ensure that migrant women who do not speak Serbian language can communicate with political institutions.
- Education and empowerment: Migrant women should be empowered through education about the political system of Serbia, their political rights, and opportunities for political engagement.
- Promotion of gender equality in political life, adoption of policies and laws that protect the rights of migrant women, and prevent discrimination based on gender.
- Economic empowerment to reduce economic vulnerability and enable them to become actively engaged in political life.
- Support and mentorship: This may include mentoring by women leaders, political mentors, and civil society organisations dealing with women’s and migrants’ rights.
- Inclusiveness of political processes to ensure that migrant women have access to political positions, authorities, and political organisations, both at the local and national levels.

Number of Migrant Women in Serbia

In the period from 2015 to today, Serbia has been a transit country for about one and a half million refugees who passed through the Balkan route in their migration to countries of the European Union. In 2022, over 116,000 refugees and migrants came to Serbia, an increase of over 100% compared to 2021. It is not possible to determine the exact number of women migrants in Serbia, as many of them choose to stay in informal or private accommodations and do not register upon arrival.

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