



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FARMERS (NFF)

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NFF ADVOCACY FACTSHEET

Human Rights in Rural Communities: A Focus on Economic Challenges, Limited Access, and Discrimination in Republic of North Macedonia

Rural poverty-economic and social poverty, limited access to rural services and effects of climate changes

FACTS

Rural areas in North Macedonia cover about 88.7% of the territory, and 47.5% of the total population lives in these areas. With an almost unchanged number of arable land in the past two decades, Macedonian agriculture recorded 418,823 hectares of arable land and orchards and 41,255 hectares of orchards and vineyards. According to statistics from April 2020, a total of 277,026 hectares were sown, of which 58% cereals, 8% industrial crops, 19% horticultural crops, 19% forage crops.

The agricultural sector is characterized by small agricultural households with more diverse production, half of which are less than 1 ha. Larger farms (agricultural companies) represent about 1% of the total agricultural population and cultivate about 10% of the total arable land.

For the period 2017 - 2019, according to the State Statistical Office, on average 45% of the total number of employees in the country (342.474) are employed in rural areas. 19% of them are self-employed, and 12% are unpaid family workers. Rural women are the least active in the labor market, especially women in the age group of 40-59.

The rural poverty in the country is still progressing as indicated in the MDPA Report 2023 (According to the data, in 2020, the poverty rate of people in the Republic of North Macedonia was 21.8%. The Gini coefficient was 31.4%). The villages are the most affected by poverty, especially in the area of infrastructure, limited access to social, health and educational services, social life does not exist, low purchase prices of agricultural products, low income and climate change push the people living in rural areas in greater poverty compared to the urban areas. Climate change is a serious problem for rural areas. In the country, there is an occurrence of high temperatures, floods, frost, hail, earthquakes, landslides. According to the World Bank analysis, RNM has already become a country with high exposure to various natural disasters, especially: floods, droughts, extreme temperatures, hail and earthquakes.



The National Federation of Farmers (NFF) is the largest organization of farmers in the Republic of North Macedonia, reaching a number of more than 10.000 farmers, focusing on lobby and advocacy for the social and economic rights of the small-scale farmers and deprived population in rural areas. In addition, the organization promotes the HRB approach. The National Federation of Farmers with support of Swedish Development Organization We Effect prepares the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Report (MDA) on the national level. The National Federation of Farmers (NFF) holds relevant meetings with institutions where a focus is placed on the human rights of rural population.

Recommendations for the State:

- To implement obligations from the adopted UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas, with a focus on Articles 3, 6, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18
- To ensure that state policies and programs address rightful access to fundamental services such as healthcare, education, social services, employability and infrastructure in rural areas. This should include improvements in transportation networks, communication systems, and irrigation systems in conformity with Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2.3, 3, 13.1, 13.2 and 13.3.
- To create financial support measure (subsidy) to stimulate contract farming and its consistent implementation (regulated by the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development), especially before the start of the season, through which the supply and demand for fresh products would be regulated.
- To prepare mechanisms for improvement and availability of the employees – it is important to work on equal access for men and women in rural areas
- To implement the new Law on Advisory Services in Agriculture, enabling effective knowledge transfer for adapting agriculture to the new climate changes.



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Discrimination of marginalized groups (women, youth and people with disabilities)

FACTS

Rural women, youth and people with disability are facing with a lot of challenges leading them to negative implications. These challenges include social exclusion, unemployment, gender discrimination, unequal distribution of income and resources, the dominance of traditional norms, deprivation of ownership of agricultural land and property, lack of entitlement to paid parental leave, and restricted access to education, information, healthcare, as well as public and social services.

Data analyses from the State Statistical Office for employees by gender and place of residence (urban/rural) for 2019 show that the number of employed women in urban areas is 178.247, while in rural areas it is 86.647. As employers, there are 6.749 women in urban areas, while in rural areas the number of women is significantly lower (1.567 women). There are 8.816 self-employed women in urban areas compared to 12.065 in rural areas. In urban areas 22.578 women fall into the category of "unpaid family worker", and in rural areas, this number is 23.544 women (70 % of total unpaid family workers). Shown in percentage, the woman in rural areas appears as an employer with only 0.5% and as a self-employed person with only 3.5%. In 2020, there were 175.088 registered agricultural holdings in the Single Register of Agricultural Holdings. Of these, 38.328 are registered women as holders of agricultural holdings. Only 5% of women in rural areas own property, usually inheriting it after the loss of their spouse. This leads to a situation in which the woman entrepreneur is limited in owning the means to run and develop her own business. Deep-rooted traditions and patriarchal norms discourage women from retaining control over inherited property. **In response to this situation, supportive measure for women farmers and young farmers as part of the "Program for financial support for rural development" has been taken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, in collaboration with socio-economic partners. There has been an improvement in dialogue between the non-governmental sector and the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, aimed at improving the economic and social conditions of women farmers. Program for Social Security Support for Women Farmers enabling the utilization of benefits during periods of inability to perform agricultural work due to childbirth was established by the Ministry of Agriculture and has been implemented since 2023.**

Recommendations for the State:

- To continue the collaboration between the non-governmental sector and institutions aimed at improving the economic and social situation of rural women and other marginalized groups in rural areas on national and local level, especially people with disability
- To support and implement a Human Rights-Based Approach in all programs and measures, with direct inclusion of marginalized groups from rural areas in conformity with Sustainable Development Goals 2.2, 2.5, 5.2 and 5.4 as well as recommendation No.42 (2018) from the CEDAW Committee's sixth periodic report on the Republic of North Macedonia
- To adopt measures to register and recognize the work of rural women and make provisions for recognizing their rights to social benefits, including retirement pensions and other social protection allowances in conformity with recommendation No.36 (2018) from the CEDAW Committee's sixth periodic report of the Republic of North Macedonia
- To ensure that rural women, youth and people with disability have access to subsidies and rural development support measures to the greatest possible extent
- To implement educational campaigns to increase the number of women and youth landowners and property owners in rural areas and provide support and education for women and youth to be equal partners in managing agricultural farms in conformity with Sustainable Development Goals 5.7, as well as recommendation No.42 (2018) from the CEDAW Committee's sixth periodic report of the Republic of North Macedonia

The recent census in North Macedonia in 2021 confirmed significant migration trends, with 1,781 populated places affected, including 205 empty villages. In addition, internal migration, particularly from rural to urban areas, constitutes 34% of all migrations within the country.

One of the biggest problems in the agricultural sector in the country is the aging of the workforce. According to the data in 2020, the participation of young farmers (till 40 age), who are owners of registered agricultural holdings are 14% of total number of agricultural holdings (24,423 out of a total of 175,088). The lower incomes compared to other alternatives in the national economy and the inadequate living conditions in rural areas act as a disincentive for young people to stay and start agricultural businesses.

The majority of farmers have completed or incomplete primary education (44.5% or 80,269 people) and secondary education (43.3% or 77,996 people). Only 9,359 of them, or 5.2%, have formal education in agricultural sciences.

51% of people with disabilities live on the poverty line in rural areas.

This factsheet was produced for the Universal Periodic Review Pre-session 46 on Republic of North Macedonia by Biljana Petrovska - Mitrevska, Project manager in National Federation of farmers. For more information, contact via email at nff@nff.org.mk / biljana.petrovska@nff.org.mk



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