

Standard and rights factory's female workers in Republic of Srpska

In jaw of depriving and poverty

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Almost, all textile and shoes factories in RS act exclusively so called loan jobs: for foreign customers, from materials and modes which they send them, they produce shoes and confections which are sold per high prices at western market. Only, the price of work is enormously low. It is tragicomically that these jobs are led in official statistics as export that gives politic men for right to praise themselves with "high rate of export".

It is difficult for workers in Republic of Srpska, but for female worker is worse. It is the fact which does not deny trade union, or authorities, either nongovernmental organization. Banja Luka's Helsinki parliament of citizens did the investigation under patronage of UNIFEM recently, and only confirmed that many women exposed to permanent hidden discrimination, although, according all valid laws they are completely equal with men.

-Women older from 40 year, pregnant women, and mothers of under-age children are in especially hard position. Dragana Dardic one of investigation editors states that 21 pregnant women asked legal help because of loosing their jobs, according to information from Federation of Labour Union RS during year 2006 and year 2007. Bosko Tomic minister of Labour RS reacted with the statement as he said "There is no theory that pregnant woman stays without job". He said that after publishing results of investigation which rise big media's dust.

-The law is clear, anyone mustn't fire pregnant woman. Even, if that happened, let that fired female worker freely consult to me, and I will personally begin proceedings against employer - said Mr Tomic.

That such thing happens in spite of European tailored laws and Minister's pleading show examples from practice. Employers often force pregnant female workers to work over time in conditions dangerous for health urging them in that way to give notice herself. It happens that employers abuse their legal ignorance.

How unpunished fire pregnant women

"Female worker K.S. worked in catering establishment as a waitress. When employer found out that she was pregnant, he used her legal ignorance and led her to sign agreeing break of working relations, although, she actually didn't want to stop work. When she realized that she cheated, female user consulted for legal help". This is only one from 683 cases breaking working rights women in Banja Luka, which are recorded in documentation of NGO Vasa prava in last five years.

Fired pregnant women in majority cases after they consult for help from Trade Union or some from nongovernmental organizations, they sue employer and they got the cause. Still, it happens that unscrupulous employers save.

-There are known cases that pregnant woman lose cause because employer at the court proved that he did not give notice because of pregnancy, than due to other reasons, and the crucial argument is that supposedly he did not know that the female worker was pregnant. That's way is very important that pregnant worker on time inform employer about her pregnancy, on that way that later she can support by documentary evidence. The safest way is that written information about that present at protocol of the company, and save the copy of the official letter - suggests Goran Dragisic from NGO Vasa prava.

When the dressmakers fall in coma

Firing pregnant women is only one segment of breaking women's rights in region of work. The oftenest types of silent discrimination are those which hard prove.

So, the fact is that women in average earn less than men, but not because they have lower education, it is because they work weaker paid jobs. So, for example women present even 80 % labour in textile and leather industries which belong among the weakest paid trade branch in Republic of Srpska. The salaries which are the most often at limit from minimal 250 KM per month are not the only one evil. Conditions of work are very often unbearable, even, 700 women work in the workshops.

So, female workers of Trebinje's "Novoteks" worked even 12 hours a day on the temperature close to 50 degrees under tin roof last summer. They decided to strike only when eleven dressmakers fell in coma at work place, and because of heat stroke finished in first-aid station. TV cameras came at the place of happening, Gender center, Trade Union, and inspection of work reacted, and even after media's scandal employer had mercy and built in air-condition in the workshops.

Female workers from confection factory "Borac" in Prijedor have similar problems.

-We are frizzing in winter, we work wrapped in blankets. We fall in coma in summer because of heat - said one from 230 female workers, who wanted to stay anonymous because of fear that she can stay without job and salary from 200 KM. Milan Stojanovic director of "Borac" banned entering in company to journalist and trade-union members.

The source over the shoulders female workers

It is not curiosity that employers in this region paid less salaries from guaranteed by law 250 KM, and non paid overtime work in this branch is almost regular appearance. So, female workers from Mrkonjic Grad's company "Mladost" got the minimum wage only after strike which last one month. Employer promised them after strike together with 250 KM salary "even" paid sick leave and reimbursement for overtime work!

-My salary has been till now 250 KM, but I have been working this job for 40 years. Believe me that, there are female workers who earned hardly 100 KM - says Milka Cvijic dressmaker of "Mladost". Almost all textile and shoes factories in RS act exclusively with so called loan jobs: for foreign customers form materials and according models which they send them, they produce shoes and confections which are sold per high prices at western market. Only, the price of work is enormously low. It is tragically that these jobs are led in official statistics as export that gives politic men for right to praise themselves with "high rate of export". Just thanks to such statistics Municipality Derventa has the biggest rate of export in RS. In this town which has long tradition shoes industry, in three factories is employed more from thousand women. Majority of them work for salary from about 300 KM.

-We are aware that the salaries are low, but we are powerless in this situation. We can not get better conditions from foreign customers because the price of labour in Turkish, Albania, and Asian countries is lower that at us. For example, we produce winter shoes for one German company, those shoes are the best shoes in Europe, and it is sold with prices from 300 EURO per pair. We get for producing one such pair of shoes six from eight KM per pair. I have worked in China and I convinced myself that Chinese work these jobs for double lower prices - says Radovan Pazurevic director of the factory shoes "Sanino". It is interesting that in such factories directors and managers mostly are men, and workers are women in more than 90 % cases, and they mostly uneducated. Majority of them commute even far village about 50 kilometers to the factories.

The hell in illegal workshop

Loan jobs, which almost women work, they are not connected only to textile and leather industries than they connected to electro and metal industries, too. Besides factories in which it is worked under hard conditions and for small salaries but legal, occasionally are opened illegal workshops in which reign atmosphere from the darkest age former accumulation of capital.

M.S. 48 year old female worker from Banja Luka testifies how she earned wage in such one workshop, and she stayed without job because of bankruptcy few years ago.

- We worked in an abandoned workshop of some bankrupted company. We did not know for whom we work, and we were not registered. We wind the coil for some small electric motors. We worked from morning till darkness, and we sometimes carry materials to home and continue work till late in night, but the norm was almost impossible to achieve. One female colleague rebelled and told to the boss that she will report him, he told her to not to come anymore at work. She came the next day; she cried and begged him to receive her again. We earned from 100 KM to 200 KM per month. I know that is miserable but we at this age can not find better job. They brought the salary at work and they paid in cash. That was five or six months, and then the boss disappeared. It seems that still someone register him - testifies M.S.

The second region in which women make majority of labor is officially the weakest paid trade branch: catering industry and trade. Work on Sundays and holidays, and unpaid overtime work is almost regular phenomenon in this. The rights on

paid sick leave and by the law prescribed annual holiday are brought often.

-They aren't rare prohibitions of using annual holidays. Let's say, if female worker during the year stays five or six days at sick leave, they say to her: "You used your holiday although sick leave and holiday according to law haven't any connection. Although, the law's minimum is 18 works' days of holiday, very often holidays have been cutting at all ten days. The female workers don't get decision about annual holiday on which they could complain. More often case especially in trade and catering industry that there is not real annual holiday, because the female workers work off days which they count them as an annual holiday. For example, while one female worker at annual holiday the second one works per two shifts, and the first one returned from annual holiday they change the roles - says Velka Odzakovic, general female secretary of Union Trade RS.

Women punished because of climacteric and childbirth

Female workers who are in older age are in special hard position. So, one waitress from one Mrkonjic Grad's company consulted for help from Gender center RS because employer moved her at worse work place with very strange explanation.

He stated that she can not work her job with guests in the hall because she is nervous, since she is in climacteric. But, damaged female worker didn't have any health problems, neither guest complained at her behavior - testifies Jelena Milinovic from Gender Center RS.

Milka K. high qualified cook from Banja Luka, who has already retired tells us what kind of degradation suffered last years before pension.

-When my company in which I had worked all my life became private enterprise, our boss told us that we have to work overtime but that it would be paid. We had in that month per 100 hours overtime work. I didn't get anything except regular salary at the end of the month, but he gave 50 KM to my younger colleague. Simply, he knew it that I can not complain, because two years before pension I can't find better job - says Milka K.

While older female workers are victims of belittling and harassing, young female workers often forced even for years work unregistered.

-We had case of one female worker who worked more than 5 years on black in one textile factory. They registered her only after persistent appeals, and year after that she went on maternity leave. Although, employer regularly got reimbursement from Fund for children's protection for maternity leave in lasting from one year. Employer called her after five months. She refused that. She came at work place when her maternity leave had expired, but she received the notice. Employer did not give her two salaries. The female worker sued him and proceeding is on going - testifies Goran Stojanovic, collaborator in services for free legal help Trade Union RS.

Maternity leave in lasting from one year which is guaranteed by the law obviously is a thorn in a lot of employers' side. It is a public secret that in majority private enterprises which employed women's labor it is stabilized the practice that the young mothers return at work after six months maternity leave supposedly "voluntary agreement". That behind that voluntary often hide pressures testifies example of female worker S.M. who consulted help from Trade Union; because employer informed her that she after finishing maternity leave will be moved at work place far 150 kilometers from headquarter of the company and place of her residence.

Why women bear discrimination

The answer on question why women bear discrimination at work place maybe hides in results of investigation which group of psychologists did last year at the territory whole BiH. The subject of investigation was the fears which bother citizens of our country. It turned out that the biggest number of citizens and female citizens scared of the notice at work more than illness, war or natural disaster. In the country with more than half million unemployed this result should not to astonish anyone - comments Banja Luka's psychologist Srdjan Puhalo.

The fear from losing job is probably reason because women the most often consult for help when only when endangered their elementary workers' rights, while mobbing and sexual harassing at work bear without resistance, although it is known that such cases are not rare. Even, in rare cases when they report mobbing they don't succeed to prove it, and there fore it isn't known any case that the abuser punished.

While men whose workers' rights also endangered, they find way to resist and defend themselves, women the most often unprotected and do not dare to rebel. How such game of power and weakness function in practice shows the example of one female worker from one private metal factory.

-We didn't have workers at one machine on which should carry cargo heavy from 20 to 30 kilos, so the manager ordered to young colleague 20 years old boy in his prime to take over that job. He rebuffed impolitely him that he doesn't want to do that, and if he once more suggests that, that he will beat up. He expressed just like that. I expected that the manager will punish him, but that didn't happen. Simply, he told me to do that job, and I accepted although, I'm 50 years old and only 50 kilos. It is hard for me, but what can I do. I am self-supporting mother, I'm divorced and I' a lodger. This job is all I have. The manager knows that, same as he knows that I can not wait him behind the corner and beat him up, neither have not I had husband, nor brother who would do that for me - says this female worker.

Exactly because of such situation, but because of become established prejudice about men and women jobs and roles very often happens that women at work place with regular work's tasks do some marginal secondary jobs. Of course, they do that without any reimbursement.

-When we finish the work men go at the beer, we clean the workshop. When we expect some visit, they request us women to stay after shift to clean the circle. We arranged goods when is delivered - says Mira Gojkovic, president of Trade Union in company "Standard" in Gradiska.

Seminars in factories' workshops

Such, but much serious examples gender discrimination at work place women often don't recognize as "problematic". The fact that men in mostly women's companies managers and bosses, and even presidents of Trade Unions organizations it is accepted without thinking. Harassing of pregnant women, young mothers or female worker before pension it is tolerated without complaining as "women's evil destiny".

-Recognizing of discrimination and knowing of protection instruments are extremely important in situation such is in BiH, where equality guaranteed by the law, but in the practice the laws are often ignored - says Emina Abrahams Doter, female coordinator of program for BiH in International confederation of Trade Unions.

Just because of these reasons International Confederation of trade Unions organized the program in which 14 Trade Union's female activists from whole BiH educated for trainers for about gender equality at work place. They got the task to organize daily seminars about this subject. Such one seminar held in Gradiska's "Standard", and women who stayed without job after 20 years length of service because of privatization and bankruptcy took part at that seminar besides women who work in this factory.

-It was interesting to watch how for only few hours female colleagues who I have known for years change their attitudes. They all state at beginning of the seminar that they equal with men and that "there aren't those discriminations at us". After conversation with female trainers they started to recognize situations and state by themselves examples in which they played the second fiddle at work place, and in their families only because they women - says Mira Gojkovic.

September's calculation

Still, recognizing of discrimination at work place is just the first step. The question is: Are the female workers ready to engage in uncertain fight for achievement their law's rights in such situation? Majority of them is occupied with everyday fight for surviving. As Stoja Skrbic female shoemaker with 27 years length of service from Banja Luka says, the salary has never been less and has never been harder to earn it.

According Trade Union's statistic average salary of employed in economy is a little bit bigger from 400 KM monthly. So, two employed in economy earned monthly less from 1000 KM. According so called "Trade Union's consumer's basket" which as valid acknowledge Movement of consumers RS, for decent life for four- member family it is necessary more from 1.600 KM per month. Last time when were actual supplying of books, clothes, and shoes for schoolboys, then buying firewood and food provisions to such one family was need about 3000 KM.

-Worker's family simply can not ensure that even if both parents employed. That's way people work per two or three additional jobs, runs into debts, they go from credit to credit, and interests rise, they calculate and they are desperate. Because of that workers are more and more sick; their families are in crisis, psychical health was broken, and that's way simply in big problems - concludes female presidents of Trade Unions RS Ranka Misic.

She admits that is more difficult for female workers than workers in this situation, especially if they are mothers. But, how find way out from the labyrinth of depriving and poverty, the answer no one has offered for now.