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**Submission to United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in its adoption of a list of issue regarding the Fifth Periodical Report of the Republic of Albania under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**

**Submitting organisations: AgroPuka and AgriNet from Albania**

**LoIPR – List of Issues Prior to Reporting**

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1. **Submitting organisations**

This information was prepared by three organisations working in rural development in Albania, AgroPuka, AgriNet and AmaroDrom.

Agropuka is a producer association established in August 2001 as a non-profit organization. It has more than 300 members including producers, farmers, advisors and other interested persons. Agropuka's mission is to contribute to the integrated rural development of rural areas of Puka by encouraging and promoting rural economic development, with the aim of improving the living conditions of members of the association and communities living in rural areas of Puka and beyond. Since 2001, Agropuka has implemented several projects, with the main objective of contributing to the socio-economic development of rural areas, focusing on the empowerment of women, to facilitate and strengthen the roles of women in rural development programs, and to increase the access of rural women to development opportunities in the target local communities. The main activities of the organization, through the implementation of the gender policies of the Agropuka, address the increase of the participation of rural women in the decision-making processes and the creation of appropriate mechanisms for equal gender access to rural development programs and activities.

AgriNet was registered in February 2005 as a non-profit Organization. AgriNet supports 15 farmers organizations including at least 750 members, of whom 300 are women, on social and economic development. The organization develops and provides services to their members related to organizational development, technical assistance on production, business, and marketing development with the aim of increasing their income by farming. Gender equality is a very important focus mainstreamed in AgriNet’s organizational structures, functioning and activities. The main objectives are to promote and integrate gender equality and human-rights based approach, helping rural women to increase their social and economic status in the community and in their families by developing their organizational, managerial, social and professional capacities in order to lead the sustainable development process in the rural areas.

AmaroDrom (The Union for Development and Integration of Roma Community in Albania) has been established since 1996 as a non-profit Albanian membership-based organization with a focus in sustainable development and integration of Roma community in the Albanian society, while preserving Roma national identity. It operates on local and national level, in rural and urban areas, with various projects in the areas of education, human rights, infrastructure, culture, art, health. An essential part of our vision are equal Roma women and girls, where their needs for empowerment, integration and respect for human rights are realized.

1. **Suggested topics to be considered for the preparation of a list of issues:**

**Article 2**

Albania has ratified most international conventions and instruments related to the protection of women's rights, such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Albania has also adopted laws and bylaws regarding the economic, social and political rights of women. Article 18 of the Constitution of Republic of Albania is guaranteeng that ´´All are equal before the law and no one can be discriminated against ``[[1]](#footnote-1). Furthermore, in the Civil Code, women and men have the same rights in acquisition of property or co-ownership. Despite the efforts for guaranteeng equality between men and women through the laws, there is still a large gap between the legislation and its implementation. This is still a challenge for the Albanian government in terms of implementing gender equality laws and policies. Most women in rural areas are not aware of the human rights and specific women's rights protected with the national and international law framework. The reason for this is twofold. Women from rural areas are not included in development of the gender equality strategies, programs and plans and therfore, these documents are not reflecting the challenges of the gender inequalities and the needs of women in rural areas. Furthermore, these documents are not reflecting the needs of the diverse groups of women who live in rural areas, such as women with disabilities or women from ethnical minorities that are living in rural areas in Albania, such as Roma women. Roma women do not have the information of the existence of these documents nor have the chance to be included in their preparation.

Further, there are no real statistical data for the rural population in particular, especially for the women in rural areas, for many important parametars, including age, education, employment, property rights, disability, ethicity. The Institute of Statistics, as statistical agency in Albania, is publishing reports that are specifically reflecting the situation of men and women in Albania. The last report named ``Men and Women in Albania” from 2021, presents data disaggregated by sex in a comprehensive form for the entire Albanian population. However, these data are not disagragated by urban and rural areas of Albania and accordingly, they are not reflecting the situation with gender inequalities on rural level and the disparity between urban and rural areas.

**In light of this information, we respectfully invite the Committee to ask the Government of the Republic of Albania the following questions:**

1. **Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure the disaggregation of data not only on gender basis but also ‘rural women vs urban women’, women with disabilities who live in rural areas vs urban areas, women from ethnical minorities who live in rural areas vs urban areas?**
2. **Please provide information on the measures taken to educate women, including young women, girls and boys from rural areas, women with disabilities and Roma women, on the human rights and the existence of human rights mechanisms, including the existence of this Convention?**

**Article 7**

The social inclusion of women is not happening with the same intensity throughout Albania and it is important to note that women from rural areas are often out of the focus of national plans and policies. The Government of Albania, through the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, has approved the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030, logically linked to the previous strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020. All responsible ministries and institutions are in charge of the implementation of the Strategy, both on national and local level. Despite the fact that in its content this document includes the fulfillment of the standards and obligations deriving from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the participation of women in decision-making processes at the local level remains very low. According to data available, in the local elections of 2019, 13.1% of the winning candidates for mayors were women. There were 49.0% women in the the lists for the elections for municipal councils in 2019 which resulted with participation of 43.7% women in the municipal councels. In 2020, the percentage of women owners or menagers in active enterprises is 25.5%.[[2]](#footnote-2) Such a position does not favor the influence of women on development plans and decision-making processes important for the development of the local community. Also, the political representation of rural women in the municipal councils is not equal to that of women in urban units, but there is lack of data about the percentage of rural women in the councils. Even if women are represented in the local municipal councils, their voice is weak, because they are still influenced by the strong gender and social norms that politics is only for men. Therefore, women, especially from the rural areas, are not fully involved in policy-making processes and they still act by the will of the political parties’ leaders.

On the contrary, rural women are more involved in activities organized by civil society organizations rather than the ones organized by politicians:

*“They (politicians) come to visit us once in four years, only when there are elections”, is a sentence that is often said by women in Albanian villages*

Women need to be more involved in decision-making processes and development of program and policies, so that their influence is stronger and their needs are met. Development policies and programs in local communities should be based on the rights and potentials of rural women. The social plans drafted by the various municipalities during the last years do not specify properly, how the participation of rural women in decision-making can be realized, nor how the access to the resources will be improved for rural women, so they can be economicly empowered. It is, therefore, necessary to promote the participation of rural women, especially the ones from the marginalized groups (women with disabilities, women from ethnical minorities, especially Roma women) in local decision-making processes.

The lack of response to the needs of rural women, should be replaced by concrete interventions and programs in the field of empowerment of rural women, improving their participation in local decision-making processes and the labor market.

**In light of this information, we respectfully invite the Committee to ask the Government of the Republic of Albania the following questions:**

1. **Please provide information on measures taken to encourage the active participation of women, especially diverse groups of women (women with disabilities, Roma women) in decision-making processes in rural areas.**
2. **Please provide information on measures taken to ensure the participation of rural women and civil society organizations representing rural women in the development of national programs, strategies and action plans in the field of gender equality and agriculture.**

**Article 14**

1. **Social and health care**

The Ministry of Health is committed on improving access and quality of health services, improving infrastructure, higher wages of health workers and new equipment in hospitals, focusing only on urban areas. Women from rural areas in Albania are forced to travel tens of kilometers for medical visits to nearby cities, and the state is doing little to install primary medical services in these areas. In reality, in certain rural areas in the territory of the Republic of Albania, rural residents and women are not under primary health protection.[[3]](#footnote-3) They do not have the opportunity to follow and check their health condition, to advice for taking preventive measures and early detection of diseases. Women from rural areas do not receive the necessary information on the importance of conducting regular health visits, especially because the existing social norms are suggesting that they should to visit a doctor when they are really sick.

*“I haven’t visited a doctor in a while, although I have severe headaches. Sometimes I try to cure it by my own with home remedies, or when my husband’s goes in the town buys me medicines from the pharmacy. I think this will pass, it is because of the menopause, I just have to wait…”*

Considering women’s sexual and reproductive health rights, rural women have very little or no opportunity to excersice this rights, especially women from remote areas. During 2021, significant lack of health care services was reported by rural women, especially gynecological services and mammographic examinations. The National Health Report 2021 shows a large gap of the available health services between urban vs rural areas. In many villages, rural women are left without a gynecologist or mobile service that provides gynecologycal services. They need to travel hours in order to be able to realize their right to gynecologycal examination. As a result of the disparity between the urban and rural health services, statistics are showing that pregnant women from rural areas have very limited access to prenatal health care and they are having only one more visit to gynecologyst than the number of visits made in 1990.[[4]](#footnote-4) The Ministry of Health's Sexual Reproductive Health Development Strategy for the period 2017-2021 emphasizes and acknowledges inequalities in maternal mortality related to socio-economic inequalities and the level of poverty between regions.[[5]](#footnote-5) These indicators are higher in the northeastern areas of the country.

Roma women, especially the ones living in sub-urban and rural areas, are facing double stigmatization, by the healthcare workers, but also in their families. The patriarchal and conservative mentality of men in Roma families and the physical distances to healthcare services, prevent Roma women to travel and access the healthcare centres. When it comes to knowledge on sexual and reproductive health rights, the majority of Roma women have very low knowledge within this area. Information for contraception received by young Roma women and girls is mainly from informal sources, especially civil society organisations. The number of medical examinations during pregnancy and after birth is lower than recommended. The same patterns are visible also after birth. Consequently, many Roma women are affected by various infections. In the absence of family planning, the number of abortions for unwanted pregnancies also remains high. One of the reasons for the high number of abortions are limited access to information and limited access to healthcare services. Another challenge is low level of education among Roma parents for prenatal and postnatal care which directly influences the growth and health of children.

Concerning the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, analysis[[6]](#footnote-6) show that Roma communities are the ones most affected by the pandemic. Living in overcrowded households, without clean water and sewage system left many of Roma women and families without possibilities for regular hygiene, making them more vulnerable to the virus. The access to medicine and healthcare services has also become even more restricted or even unreachable in the time of pandemic.

**In light of this information, we respectfully invite the Committee to ask the Government of the Republic of Albania the following questions:**

1. **Please provide information on measures to provide accessible and quality health care services for women in rural areas and Roma women, including for sexual and reproductive rights of women?**
2. **Education**

The empowerment of rural women in education is not happening to the same extent throughout Albania. As a result of their exclusion from informal trainings or educational programs, they are less educated and consequently less involved in economic and political life. Rural women are still perceived through their traditional role of mothers and wifes in the family. The government, despite the existing national legislation and education reforms, is not taking into account the problems that rural women are facing due to lack of education and information in various areas of public life. The gender labour gap between women and men is larger to persons with lower levels of education.

According to the Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Albania for 2021, the highest unemployment is oriented to rural women with 8-9 years of education, falling by 50% to rural women with secondary education.[[7]](#footnote-7) Encouraging rural girls to be included an education is one of the most effective solutions against unemployment. According to a qualitative survey conducted with fourty rural women from Northeastern Albania, about their perception for the importance of education and the interlinks between education and employment, ownership, decision-making, as well as the degree of self-confidence [[8]](#footnote-8), the main reasons for girls' dropping out of school occurs mainly due to economic reasons and the distance of the villages from the nearest school. Young girls in rural areas live relatively far from public schools. The family budget is insufficient to provide transportation for their daughters to schools far from the area. Responsible institutions are not taking the necessary measures to provide safe transportation to the educational facilities. As a result, due to the low number of students, schools are closed.[[9]](#footnote-9)

School dropout among rural girls (14-18) is higher compared to boys from rural areas and it is mostly caused by the economic situation of their families and the lack of infrastructure. For these reasons, the access to education in rural areas remains one of the biggest challenges for young girls. Lack of data regarding the level of education of rural women and girls remains the greatest challenge. According to UNICEF, only the regions of Tirana and Durres had triangulated lists of children and conducted home visits to identify children out-of-school. All other regions do not have proper data regarding the school dropouts[[10]](#footnote-10).

Moreover, the Albanian government is not properly implementing in practice, the national plans regarding the inclusion of rural women in various trainings, especially on agriculture and livestock.[[11]](#footnote-11) Women in rural areas are in great need of expert advice, improved access to new technology, training and improved access to markets, thus improving their access to resources. According to the same qualitative survey conducted with fourty rural women from Northeastern Albania, women have expressed their will and need to participate in trainings connected with food production and livestock, which they would like to integrate in their work and the community. But, this requires sufficient and sustainable funding. Consequently, policy-making processes need to include consultative measures that enable and encourage the active participation of women in rural areas.

**In light of this information, we respectfully invite the Committee to ask the Government of the Republic of Albania the following questions:**

1. **Please provide information on measures taken by the government to provide access to primary and secondary education for young girls from rural areas?**
2. **Please provide information on measures taken by the state on the inclusion of rural women in various vocational trainings, especially on agriculture and livestock, in order to increase women's access to markets?**
3. **Employment and unpaid work**

Despite the evident efforts made by the Government to strengthen employment policies and a professional and innovative employment sector, little has been done at the local level. According to the Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Albania and the Labor Force Survey for 2020, rural women are less likely to participate in the labor market. In terms of the population aged 15-64, the participation of women in the labor force has a slight decrease in 2020, with 61.2% from 61.6% in 2019. The structure of active employees that participate in the labour market shows that 43.3% of women are paid employees while 22.8% of them are unpaid workers in the family business. In 2020, 41.4% of female employees were employed in the agricultural sector, declining by 0.2% compared to the previous year.

 In Albania, rural women are more involved in informal employment and unpaid work than men in rural areas. The sectors most affected by informal workers and unpaid family workers are the agriculture and tourism sectors, where rural women are the majority of the workforce. This means that in a high percentage, rural women are not realizing their labor, health and social security rights. Roma women are also represented with high percentage in the informal economy, working as paid domestic workers and cleaners or in street vending or petty trade.

Women and girls in rural areas of Albania experience multidimensional inequality. Rural women are more represented in informal employment, unpaid agricultural family work and other domestic activities. State childcare services are lacking in rural areas. This increases the workload of women in the family and contributes to reinforcing the gender-based stereotype of reproductive activities as an "only women role".

Moreover, women farm managers represent only 6.47% of the total number of agricultural farm managers. In most cases, women have become farm managers if they are widowed or there are obsticals where the husband can not perform this role (migration for example). Rural women also invest more time in food preparation, cleaning, childcare and other family and houshold activities and invest six times more time in care work than men. This reduces the employment opportunities and economic empowerment of women.

*"Our voice is not heard, the local government does very little, no funds are made available from the budget of the municipality today for gender issues, for social problems "*

*"I dedicate the whole day from 4 am to 11 pm to agricultural work, care of the family and the remaining time to cooking and housework "*

The situation with unpaid work becomes even more alarming when there are members with disability in the family, considering the absence of support services for children and people with disabilities.

*“I’m blind of 1st category and my mother is recognized as my companion, we both receive a “ridiculous” economic support considering how high the minimum standard of living is. My concern is for my mother because the state doesn’t recognize her social contribution. So, she will not receive any social allowance for the retirement. What should she do? By constantly caring for me, she is not able to work. I want to ask why isn’t the status of a companion considered as a real job?*

*I did not even benefit from scholarships because this kind of facilitation is reserved for the students that come from families that receive economic support. As a disabled person I feel really abandoned by the government, there are no facilities for us, in order to be integrated into labor market.”*

**In light of this information, we respectfully invite the Committee to ask the Government of the Republic of Albania the following questions:**

1. **Please provide information about the measures the Government is taking for the economic empowerment of women and formal employment in rural areas?**
2. **Please provide information about the measures the government is taking to recognize the unpaid work of women in rural areas?**
3. **Access to land and financial resources**

Albania has established equal rights between men and women regarding the land ownership. Consequently, according to the Constitution of Albania and the Civil Code, women have the same rights as men to property / land.[[12]](#footnote-12) However, property continues to be registered in the name of men. Although, there is no sex disegrageted data on land ownership, divaded by rural vs urban population, rural women are estimated to own only 6.47% of farm land out of the total number of farm land owners[[13]](#footnote-13). As a result of the strong social and gender norms and customary practices that give priority to men in inhereting and managing the land and the property, rural women often do not claim their land ownership rights. Moreover, women in rural areas are not informed about their land rights.

The land registration process which began in 2000 with the aim of regulating land ownership also identified the “head of the household” as the owner / administrator of the property. The need to identify the “head of the household” for land registration reinforces unequal gender power relations within the family and reduces the women's access to property and land rights. Traditional inheritance practices are reinforced even more after the marriage, where women live with the husband's family and many of them lose their share of the property belonging to them by their families due to lack of information about their rights.[[14]](#footnote-14) According to the data from the Cadaster Agency in Albania, the ownership of the agricultural land, forests and pastures belongs to women with 18.5% compared to 81.5% of men.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Failure to register or co-register property in the name of a woman in rural areas is influenced by a number of factors, such as low access to information about property and/or inheritance rights, imbalanced power relations on family level and exclusion from the decision-making processes. This further weakens the already low economic and social status of women and reduced access to obtain loans, subsidies and ventures.

According to a qualitative survey conducted with fourty rural women from Northeastern Albania, about their reasons why they do not claim inheritance rights, women answered that ,,they do not ask for a share in the inheritance because everyone knows that when you get married you schoud not ask for property from the father”.

*,,If I seek to inherit property from my family, I will destroy the relationship with the brothers and for me their love is very important.”*

The women who participated in this syrvey emphasized that the state is not doing much to transform the existing gender norms or to answer some of the needs of women from rural areas conserning their need for infrastructure adjustments (bridges and roads), access to soft loans so they will be able to start a small family business, improved access to new technology, training and microcredit opportunities, as well as improved access to markets. Local government through the information offices should have specific information plans for property / land rights, raise awareness campaigns in the villages in order to increase awareness of legislation on women's land rights and promote gender equality.

**In light of this information, we respectfully invite the Committee to ask the Government of the Republic of Albania the following questions:**

**Possible questions:**

1. **Please provide information on measures taken to improve the financial inclusion of women from rural areas, including land ownership and control over resources?**
2. **Please provide information on measures taken by the state in order to increase awareness of women's land rights legislation and promote gender equality?**
1. Constitution of the Republic of Albania (2017) / Article 18 / Pg.9 - Available at <https://klp.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Kushtetuta-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Institute of Statistics in Albania "Women and Men in Albania",2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pregnant women in rural areas forgotten by the health system - Available at https://citizens-channel.com/2017/09/08/grate-shtatezena-ne-zonat-rurale-te-harruara-nga-sistemi-shendetesor/

 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. National Health Report,2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Strategic Document and Action Plan for Sexual and Reproductive Health 2017-2021,2021 – Available at https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/STRATEGJIA\_E\_SHENDETIT\_RIPRODHUES\_2017-2021\_Final\_5\_dhjetor\_2016-1.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Swedish Development Organization We Effect conducted a regional analysis on the impact of Covid – 19 from gender perspective. The submitting organizations from Albania were part of this analysis. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Institute of Statistics in Albania "Women and Men in Albania",2021 -- Available on albanian language at <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/8713/burra-dhe-gra.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Study "Status of Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in the Puka Region",2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. According to the information from the Kukes Education Office, they indicate that 3 schools of 9-year education have been proposed to be closed due to the small number of students. While the Has Education Office informs that 2 schools will be closed due to the low number of students

Gazeta KOHA (2020) ,’’ Valë mbylljesh të shkollave në Kukës, Tropojë dhe Has’’ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Study ‘’ Identification of out-of-school children reaching the compulsory school age in Albania ’’,2017 Available at- <https://observator.org.al/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/al-Dokumentimi-OOSC-Shqip%C3%ABri-Dhjetor-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gender Equality, Agriculture and Rural Development in Albania (2016) -- Available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i5413o/i5413o.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Constitution of Albania, Article 41 ---Available at https://klp.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Kushtetuta-2017.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gender Equality, Agriculture and Rural Development in Albania (2016) / Page 12-- Available at <https://www.fao.org/3/i5413o/i5413o.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Kushtetuta e Shqiperise ,neni 41---Aavailable at <https://klp.al/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Kushtetuta-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Tradition Denies Albanian Women Right to Property | Balkan Insight [↑](#footnote-ref-15)