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Postcommunist Gender Differences in Non-Farm Rural Employment — The Case of Bulgaria

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Abstract

Bulgaria is a transition country, intending to join the European Union. After the fall of the communist regime, the societal position of women has been affected by reduced public spending and massive job losses. Consequently, women are increasingly engaged in the informal market. It is plausible that these negative effects are greater in the rural than in the urban regions because of the smaller number of opportunities to cope with the social and economic transformation and the subsequent negative effects for women. Lack of investment and infrastructure is hindering the rural areas from recovering as business is moving away into the urban parts of the country. The young and educated migrate to the cities, leaving the hope for improvement on the shoulders of the shrinking and aging rural population. For those, who remain, agriculture is usually the base for subsistence, but it is rarely sufficient to ensure an acceptable living standard and so the non-farm rural employment emerges as an exit of the poverty spiral.

In this context it is important to examine in which way and to which extent women and men use the non-farm rural sector to change their economic situation to the better. Moreover, this study analyses to what extent the transition process caused deterioration of the “iron gender equity” enforced by the communist regime. This study’s sample consists of 100 households in rural Bulgaria, most of which have non-farm income. The quantitative data was collected through standardised questionnaires. In order to gain deeper understanding additional qualitative interviews were conducted in 20 of the sample households. The determinants of gender differences are analysed on the basis of multinomial logistic regression models. Also, qualitative analysis will be used to complement the study. We will draw conclusions on policy implications of the results in regard to gender-differentiated non-farm rural employment: income differences, pattern of employment, and attitudes.

Keywords: Bulgaria, gender, non-farm employment, rural development