

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture

# Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture

July 2020

This publication was developed within the project "Key Steps to Gender Equality", implemented by the Agency for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women), with the financial support of the European Union. The attitudes, opinions and conclusions expressed in this publication belong exclusively to the authors, and do not necessarily express attitudes of UN Women, the United Nations, or any other organization under the auspices of the United Nations.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LFS	Labour Force Survey
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ICT	Information and communications technologies
IPARD	Instrument for pre-accession assistance for rural development
RGA	Republic Geodetic Authority
RS	Republic of Serbia
SORS	Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia
SIPRU	Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit
WHO	World Health Organization

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of abbreviations.....	3
Summary .....	6
1. Introduction .....	9
2. Serbia in the global pandemic flows and the labyrinth of gender inequalities .....	11
3. Impact of the pandemic and the Government measures on non-agricultural employment of rural women .....	15
4. Impact of the pandemic on the agricultural activity of rural women.....	19
4.1 Agricultural households and farms as a framework of the socio-economic position of rural women .....	19
4.2 Impact of the pandemic on the work of rural women engaged in agriculture .....	22
5. Knowledge about the Government's measures to support the economy and assessment of their effects on agricultural production .....	27
6. Social rights of rural women .....	31
7. Unpaid housework and family care .....	33
8. Concerns about various aspects of life .....	35
9. Conclusions and recommendations.....	37
9.1 Conclusions .....	37
9.2 Recommendations .....	39
Literature .....	41

## List of charts

Chart 1: Gender Equality Index for Serbia, 2018, for the domain of work, sub-domain of segregation and quality of work and domain of knowledge, sub-domain of segregation in education.....	11
Chart 2: Rural women employed outside agriculture by professional status, in %.....	15
Chart 3: Percentage of employed people who lost their jobs during April 2020 .....	16
Chart 4: Rural women by reasons for job loss, in % .....	17
Chart 5: Households by activities the products of which are most often sold on the market, in % .....	22
Chart 6: Women according to the most important tasks they performed during the state of emergency, multiple-choice, in %.....	23
Chart 7: The way in which the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of emergency affected the labour activity of women engaged in agriculture, multiple-choice, in % .....	24
Chart 8: Women by method of product sales, multiple-choice, in %.....	24
Chart 9: Women by the impact of the pandemic and the state of emergency on product sales, in %.....	25
Chart 10: Women by new methods of product sales, multiple-choice, in % .....	26
Chart 11: Assessment of agricultural support measures for mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, in %.....	29
Chart 12: Perception of measures needed to mitigate negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on agricultural production of women in the sample, in % .....	29
Chart 13: Women in the sample by whether they are covered by disability and pension insurance, in %31	
Chart 14: Women from the sample according to the sources of greatest concern, in % .....	35

## List of tables

Table 1: Households by the share of income from agricultural production and processing of agricultural products in total household income, in % .....	21
Table 2: Household duties before and during the state of emergency caused by the COVID pandemic (in %) .....	33
Table 3: Caring for the elderly and children before and during the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (in %) .....	34

## SUMMARY

SeConS in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), in the period April-June 2020, conducted a survey with the aim to examine the effects of the pandemic and the Government measures on the socio-economic position of women living in rural areas, with a special focus on their engagement in agriculture. This research was created within the project *Key Steps to Gender Equality* implemented by UN Women with the financial support of the European Commission (EC).

The research examined the effects of the pandemic and government measures on:

- agricultural activities of family farms and specifically on the roles of women related to decision-making and performing work within these farms;
- access of women and their farms to agricultural product markets;
- women's social rights, primarily health, pension and disability insurance;
- doing unpaid housework and providing family care;
- risk perceptions and concerns for various aspects of life in new conditions.

**The research was conducted through two components:** two telephone surveys with a standardised questionnaire and a qualitative survey conducted with semi-structured interviews with 10 rural women engaged in agricultural production and rural tourism. The first survey was conducted in April 2020, on a sample of 1600 men and women who were employed in February of the same year. There were 305 women from rural areas in the sample of that research. The second survey was conducted in early June on a sample of 80 women living in rural areas who were engaged in agricultural production.

**Impact of the pandemic on non-agricultural employment of rural women.** Rural women who are employed outside agriculture are mostly employed in private companies, most often outside their place of residence. In comparison to women from urban areas, rural women are often employed in the manufacturing industry, followed by commerce and somewhat rarer in education. During the state of emergency, the rural population was more likely to be affected by the loss of employment than urban, and rural women are a group that usually faced the loss of employment. In the majority of cases, rural women who lost their jobs were laid off because the company suspended its activities due to the restrictive Government measures in response to the pandemic (39.4%), but there is also a significant number of those who lost their jobs because their fixed-term contracts expired and a new one was not offered, as well as those who quit because they could not organize coming to work because the children had to stay at home due to the closure of kindergartens and schools. Compared to rural men, rural women were much more likely to quit because they could not organize coming to work in conditions when children had to stay at home.

Among rural women who lost their jobs, higher percentage of them registered with the National Employment Service than urban women who found themselves in the same situation. They, also in a higher percentage than urban women and rural men, tried to find a new job immediately.

With those rural women who remained employed there were changes in certain working conditions (they switched to working from home, working hours were reduced, salaries were reduced, they were forced to use annual leave, etc.). In such circumstances, most women said that they did not have an adequate

place or equipment to perform work duties and that they frequently had to organize their working hours at night so that they all could achieve it all. Majority of rural women felt frustrated because of overlapping of family and work life.

**Impact of the pandemic on the agricultural activity of rural women.** Majority of women live in registered farm households, which are most often registered to the husband or another male member of the household, while in 28% of cases these women are farm owners. Majority of households with registered farm own land of small size (1-5 ha), which is mostly registered to another member of the household.

The vast majority of households in the sample are engaged agricultural production (90%), more than half (52%) are engaged in processing of the agricultural products, but only 5% work in rural tourism. The most common forms of production are vegetable production, production of milk and dairy products, followed by sheep farming, production of berries and drupes, then cereal production, production of jams, fruit preserves, juices, winter preserves, poultry farming, pig farming and to a lesser extent production of nuts, spices and herbs, honey and cattle farming. The main decisions on the manner of production in 43.6% of cases are made by themselves, in 20.5% of cases it is decided by the husband and in 26.9% of cases, they decide together. From the outbreak of the pandemic to the research period, women were most often engaged in seeding, sowing, planting, preparing food for livestock and poultry, digging, and hoeing. Relatively frequent activities were gardening, dairy product processing, irrigation and preparation for selling and selling of food .

Pandemic and the state of emergency affected the economic activities of women in the sample, and thus they were no longer able to sell their products (because purchase of products by distributors stopped, marketplaces were closed, public transport to points of sale was suspended, supply chains were disrupted) and were forced to find alternative ways of organising the selling of their products. Almost all women started selling products through personal contacts, more than two in three women started accepting orders over the phone, 15.8% each started selling products over the internet and social media and selling them to distributors, and one in ten women started delivering products to customers' homes. Respondents who before the pandemic sold their goods through personal contacts or over the Internet less frequently faced adverse effects which the pandemic had on the sale of products.

**Government measures to support farmers.** During the pandemic, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the *Regulation on financial support to agricultural holdings through a facilitated approach to the use of credit in difficult economic conditions due to COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus*. Measures of particular importance to women in agriculture are the financial support to farms and financial support to households through a facilitated approach to the use of credit. Measure which allocates financial support is estimated as the best and thus more than half of the respondents claimed that it helped to mitigate the consequences of a pandemic. When it comes to the facilitated approach to credit, the effects are less visible, as half of women farmers are still unable to assess the effects. However, almost 40% of women rated this measure as very or partially positive. Respondents themselves pointed out types of measures that would be of help to mitigate the negative impact of a pandemic, so the vast majority of them claim that the necessary measures are financial support and higher product prices.

**Social rights of rural women.** One in ten women in the sample does not have health insurance, while majority who are insured have insurance through their spouses or other household members who are employed outside the household, or on the basis of their retirement status. More than a half of women do not have pension and disability insurance, among women who have, in most cases (46%) the insurance

is paid by the employer, in 36% of cases it is paid by themselves through a member or owner of the farm, and in 18% of cases it is paid by the farm owner.

**Unpaid housework and family care.** Respondents are predominantly responsible for all housework (cooking, doing the dishes, cleaning, doing the laundry and ironing), both before the pandemic and during the state of emergency. When it comes to caring for young children and the elderly, male household members are somewhat more often involved in this type of duties compared to other housework, but also when they are involved, they are more likely to perform them together with women rather than on their own.

**Concern about different aspects of life.** Respondents are most often concerned about their health and are afraid that they or someone close to them would get ill from COVID-19. Also, they expressed concerns that they will not be able to sell their products, that the state of emergency will be introduced again, that the economic situation of the household will deteriorate and they will not be able to provide livelihoods, and that a major economic crisis will occur. Some of the respondents pointed out that they do not know how they will finance the maintenance of the fields; how they will sell their products if strict measures are introduced again.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report was written during the period of exiting the state of emergency after the COVID-19 virus pandemic, which hit Serbia in the spring months of 2020 and was accompanied by restrictive Government measures, starting with the declaration of the state of emergency. Although it seems that life has somewhat returned to normal, the fear from the increased number of infected people is on the rise, along with concerns about the extent and depth of the consequences of the pandemic for the economy and various areas of social life.

To examine the impact of the pandemic and the Government measures on gender inequalities in Serbia and the specific position of women, SeConS – Development Initiative Group in partnership with UN Women conducted four separate analyses within the Gender Equality Facility Project funded by the European Commission (EC) in the period April-June 2020:

- 1) analysis of employment and working conditions of women and men who were employed in the month before the pandemic was declared, based on the data from a survey of the impact of the pandemic on employment in Serbia,
- 2) analysis in the field of the formal and informal care economy,
- 3) analysis of women's entrepreneurship, which includes two components – qualitative and quantitative research with women entrepreneurs;
- 4) labour activity status and position of rural women, with the focus on their involvement in agricultural production, which also includes both quantitative and qualitative research.

This report presents the findings of two surveys of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, one conducted on a random sample of 1,600 women and men who were employed immediately before the pandemic in February 2020 (in any way, including formally and informally employed, self-employed, etc.), and the second conducted in May 2020, immediately after the lifting of the state of emergency, on a purposive sample of rural households that have at least one woman who is actively engaged in agriculture.

### OBJECTIVES

The aim of this analysis is to examine the effects of the pandemic and the Government measures on the socio-economic position of women living in rural areas, with a special focus on their engagement in agriculture. Although the analysis also covered the broader effects on employment of rural women, including non-agricultural employment, it is primarily focused on women engaged in agriculture, with the aim of examining the effects of the pandemic and the Government measures on:

- agricultural activities of family farms and specifically on the roles of women related to decision-making and performing work within these farms;
- access of women and their farms to agricultural product markets, what were the key challenges and what strategies they tried to use to respond to the challenges;
- women's social rights, primarily health, pension and disability insurance;
- doing unpaid housework and providing family care;
- risk perception and concerns for various aspects of life in the new conditions.

However, the aim of this research is not only to describe the situation as it was as the pandemic was taking hold, but to use the findings as a factual basis for proposing short-term and long-term measures for improving the socio-economic position of rural women. Although Serbia has the key laws and policies specifically aimed at governing the area of gender equality and eliminating gender-based discrimination and gender inequalities,<sup>1</sup> as indicated by various independent reports by civil society organizations,<sup>2</sup> as well as the evaluation of the National Gender Equality Strategy,<sup>3</sup> laws need to be improved and policies need to be more consistently implemented to create a more favourable environment and instigate a more significant change.

### **RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE**

The research was conducted using quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method is based on rapid assessment, which means that it had to be conducted in a short period, and given the limitations of movement, physical and social distancing, it could not be conducted with a face-to-face survey, but with a telephone survey, which limits the scope in terms of the number of topics that could be examined. The analysis was conducted on the data of two surveys. One was conducted at the peak of the pandemic and the state of emergency, in mid-April 2020, on a sample of 1,600 women and men who were employed in February 2020, before the pandemic and the state of emergency were declared. The sample of that research included 305 rural women, and the research was the basis for analysing the effects of the pandemic on non-agricultural employment of rural women, with comparative insights in relation to urban women and rural men. The second survey was conducted in the first half of June 2020 on a sample of 80 rural women who were at least partially engaged in agricultural production.

In addition to the survey questionnaire, a qualitative research was conducted and included 10 in-depth interviews with rural women engaged in agricultural production and rural tourism. The interviews were conducted over the phone because it was necessary to ensure physical distance. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires by researchers with many years of experience.

---

<sup>1</sup> Law on Gender Equality (“Official Gazette of the RS”, no. 104/2009); Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (“Official Gazette of the RS”, no. 22/2009), National Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2016-2020, Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination.

<sup>2</sup> SOS Vojvodina Network. (2019). *Priorities and Recommendations for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in Serbia: Shadow report to the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia*. Available at

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCSS%2fSRB%2f33868&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCSS%2fSRB%2f33868&Lang=en); FemPlatz. A11 (2018). *Information for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Pre-sessional Working group for the 72<sup>nd</sup> session on reviewing the Republic of Serbia*. Available at [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/SRB/INT\\_CEDAW\\_ICO\\_SRB\\_31783\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/SRB/INT_CEDAW_ICO_SRB_31783_E.pdf)

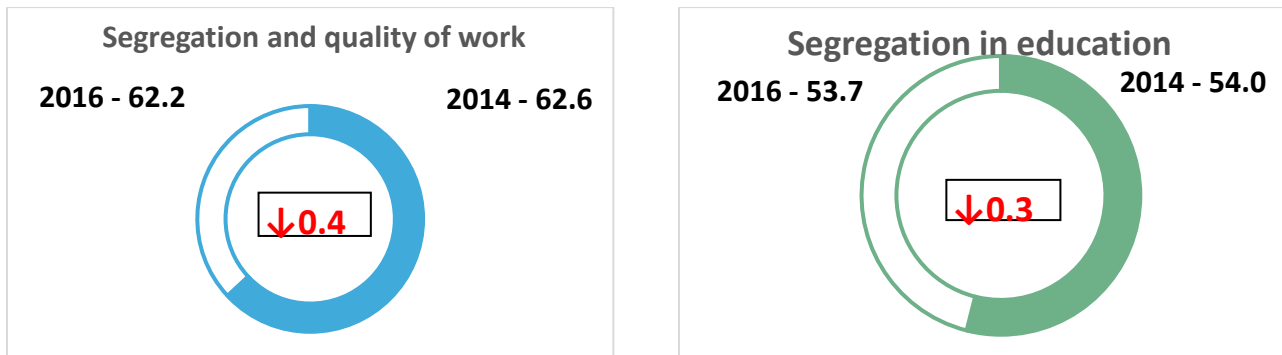
<sup>3</sup> SeConS. (2018). *Final Report of the Evaluation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Gender Equality Strategy of the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade. Available at <https://www.secons.net/files/publications/99-publication.pdf>.

## 2. SERBIA IN THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC FLOWS AND THE LABYRINTH OF GENDER INEQUALITIES

The research findings need to be considered in the context of long-lasting, structural processes and gender relations, i.e. gender regimes<sup>4</sup> in Serbia, which make the position of rural women unfavourable. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Government measures in response to it exacerbated the effects of these adverse conditions and strengthened the existing gender inequalities.

It is well known that Serbia is characterized by pronounced gender inequalities. They have been proven and described by numerous scientific and applied studies, and since recently have also been monitored by the Gender Equality Index, a tool used in the EU and candidate countries, which measures the level of achievement and the gender gap in six main policy domains: work, money, time, knowledge, power and health, as well as in two satellite domains – intersecting inequalities and violence against women.<sup>5</sup> According to the latest Gender Equality Index from 2018, Serbia was still a country of pronounced gender inequalities in all domains. These inequalities were significantly more pronounced compared to the EU average, and progress has been made (compared to 2016), although very small. One of the main axes of inequality noted by the Index refers to gender segregation, which is established during education and continues later in the labour market, and precisely this axis of inequality is one of the fundamental ones for understanding the results of this research.

**Chart 1: Gender Equality Index for Serbia, 2018, for the domain of work, sub-domain of segregation and quality of work and domain of knowledge, sub-domain of segregation in education**



Source: SIPRU, Gender Equality Index in the Republic of Serbia 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Gender regimes are understood to mean “relatively structured relations between men and women, masculinity and femininity, in the institutional and non-institutional environment, at the level of discourse and at the level of practice. This structuring is materialized in different gender roles, different gender identities and different gender representations...”. (Blagojević, M. (2002) “Women and men in Serbia 1990-2000: gendering the price of chaos”, in Bolčić, S, Milić, A. (ed.) Srbija krajem milenijuma: razaranje društva, promene i svakodnevni život” [Serbia at the end of the millennium: destruction of society, changes and everyday life], ISIFF, Belgrade: 283-314).

<sup>5</sup> SIPRU. (2018). *Gender Equality Index in the Republic of Serbia. Measuring gender equality in the Republic of Serbia 2016*, Belgrade.

Inequalities are also present in the domain of power, where despite the progress in the representation of women in the sphere of political participation, there has been little or no progress in the domain of distribution of economic and social power. Inequalities are also visible in the domain of money, because women have lower income than men, and certain groups of women are also exposed to higher risks of poverty. Inequalities in the domain of time show how much time and work women spend in the household and family care, i.e. doing unpaid housework, which is the time usually taken away from their free activities (very important for well-being and personal development), as indicated by the Time Use Survey.<sup>6</sup>

Neither the pandemic nor the measures of Government of the Republic of Serbia had a positive effect on reducing gender inequalities. On the contrary, they became more prominent in the specific context characterized by high risks of infection, especially among those who cared for the infected or had to perform other jobs with high risks of infection. They also became more prominent in a situation where numerous social services such as education, childcare, care for the elderly, people with disabilities, the ill, were transferred to the family, where these duties are extremely unequally distributed between women and men.

#### **A brief history of the pandemic and response to it**

First registered case in the world: China, 7 January 2020<sup>7</sup>

First registered case in Europe: France, 24 January 2020<sup>8</sup>

WHO declares the pandemic: 11 March 2020<sup>9</sup>

First registered case in Serbia: Subotica, 6 March 2020<sup>10</sup>

State of emergency declared: 15 March 2020<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> SORS (2016) Time Use in the Republic of Serbia in 2010 and 2015, Belgrade. Available at: [https://rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2017-01/Kori%C5%A1%C4%87enje%20vremena%20u%20Republici%20Srbiji\\_0.pdf](https://rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2017-01/Kori%C5%A1%C4%87enje%20vremena%20u%20Republici%20Srbiji_0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. Available at:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), 2019-nCoV outbreak: first cases confirmed in Europe. Available at:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/01/2019-ncov-outbreak-first-cases-confirmed-in-europe>

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), Health emergencies, available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies>

<sup>10</sup> Information from the official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health. Available at:

<https://covid19.rs/%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82%d0%b2%d1%80%d1%92%d0%b5%d0%bd-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b2%d0%b8-%d1%81%d0%bb%d1%83%d1%87%d0%b0%d1%98-%d0%ba%d0%be%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b8%d1%80%d1%83%d1%81%d0%b0-%d1%83-%d1%81/>

<sup>11</sup> ING-PRO, Decision on declaring the state of emergency, available at: <https://www.propisi.net/odluka-o-proglasenju-vanrednog-stanja/>

Number of cases and deaths on 11 April 2020 (start date of the first quantitative research): total number of cases is 3380, and total number of deaths is 74.<sup>12</sup>

Number of cases and deaths on 23 April 2020 (end date of the first quantitative research): total number of cases is 7276, and total number of deaths is 139.<sup>13</sup>

Number of cases and deaths on 5 June 2020 (start date of the second quantitative and qualitative research): total number of cases is 11667, and total number of deaths is 247<sup>14</sup>

Number of cases and deaths on 15 June 2020 (end date of the second quantitative and qualitative research): total number of cases is 12367<sup>15</sup>

The response to the pandemic in Serbia followed the "restrictive model", which included a package of measures such as closing the borders, suspension of public transport to reduce the mobility of people, relatively strict restrictions of movement with periods of curfew and lockdowns lasting for several days. At the start of the state of emergency, these measures were aimed at all citizens of the Republic of Serbia, including the population working in agriculture. It was soon realized that it is necessary to release farmers from some restrictions and allow them to implement the necessary agrotechnical measures, primarily due to the seasonal nature of the work that cannot be compensated, especially for frost protection. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management issued a public announcement related to this at the beginning of April, with instructions for applying for a movement permit during the curfew, intended for fruit and vegetable producers. Every agricultural producer (owner or user of the farm, or other agricultural land) was obliged to submit an electronic application for a movement permit to the Plant Protection Directorate. The application, in addition to containing personal data, had to specify the number of the farm, location where agrotechnical measures will be implemented, as well as the time and date, since the movement permit was valid only for the specified period.<sup>16</sup>

In such conditions, structural inequalities, including gender inequalities, become more visible. They led to the pandemic burden being distributed differently to women and men. As showed in the report on the

<sup>12</sup> Information from the official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health. Available at: <https://covid19.rs/%d0%b8%d0%bd%d1%84%d0%be%d1%80%d0%bc%d0%b0%d1%86%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b5-%d0%be-%d0%ba%d0%be%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b2%d0%b8%d1%80%d1%83%d1%81%d1%83-covid-19-11-04-2020-%d1%83-15-%d1%87%d0%b0%d1%81/>

<sup>13</sup> Information from the official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health, available at: <https://covid19.rs/%d0%b8%d0%bd%d1%84%d0%be%d1%80%d0%bc%d0%b0%d1%86%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b5-%d0%be-%d0%ba%d0%be%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b2%d0%b8%d1%80%d1%83%d1%81%d1%83-covid-19-23-04-2020-%d1%83-15-%d1%87%d0%b0%d1%81/>

<sup>14</sup> Information from the official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health, available at: <https://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/vest/347976/informacija-o-novom-korona-virusu-na-dan-5-jun-2020-godine-u-15-casova.php>

<sup>15</sup> Information from the official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health. Available at: <https://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/vest/348169/informacija-o-novom-korona-virusu-na-dan-15-jun-2020-godine-u-15-casova.php>

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (2020). How to get a movement permit: Instructions for fruit and vegetables producers. Available at: <http://www.minpolj.gov.rs/kako-do-dozvole-za-kretanje-uputstvo-za-proizvodjace-voca-i-povrca/?script=lat>. Accessed on: 29 June 2020.

effects of the pandemic on gender aspects of women's and men's employment and the division of responsibilities in the family, women bore a disproportionately greater burden. They made up the majority of employees who were at the front line of health risks due to the nature of their work, such as health care workers, supermarket clerks, employees in pharmacies, cleaners, etc. At the same time, a large number of employees switched to working from home, which imposed new burdens on women because they had to perform their work duties in conditions when they also had to take care of young children or school work of children when kindergartens and schools were closed.

However, some groups of women are particularly disadvantaged due to weaker economic participation, inadequate protection of social rights and less favourable access to services, resources, as well as lower social participation. The position of these women, including rural women, has been assessed as unfavourable in multiple aspects in various surveys and reports to the CEDAW Committee.<sup>17</sup> After the outbreak of the pandemic, there was growing concern that the position of women in this group could deteriorate and this research was conducted with the aim of gathering facts about the impact of the pandemic on their economic participation, with a special focus on agricultural production and processing of agricultural products, as well as their broader socioeconomic status. Based on the findings, measures for specific support to women in the pandemic conditions were proposed, along with medium-term measures that should empower women from this population and increase their resilience to various adverse circumstances, including pandemics.

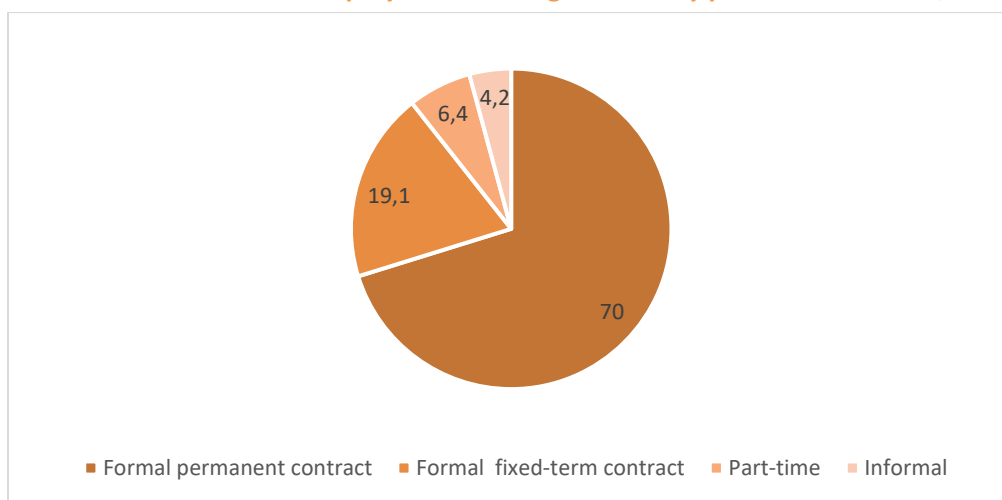
---

<sup>17</sup> Beker, K., Gujančić, R., Rudić Vranić, R., Čelović, Z., Nešić, R. and Simonović Veljković, G. (2017). *Izveštaj o položaju žena na selu u Srbiji [Report on the position of rural women in Serbia]*. Belgrade: UN Women Serbia.

### 3. IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC AND THE GOVERNMENT MEASURES ON NON-AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT OF RURAL WOMEN

The research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment of the population in Serbia included 305 women living in rural settlements, who were employed in February 2020. Among them, one in five were employed outside their place of residence, which indicates a significant share of those who commute to work, much higher than among women living in the city (3.1%). The vast majority of employed women (92.8%) were in the status of employed workers, i.e. they were employed by other employers, while 3.6% of women were self-employed. In these aspects, their employment characteristics do not differ significantly from employment characteristics of women living in urban areas, and a lower share of self-employed workers is noticeable compared to men from rural areas (3.6% vs 10%).

Chart 2: Rural women employed outside agriculture by professional status, in %



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

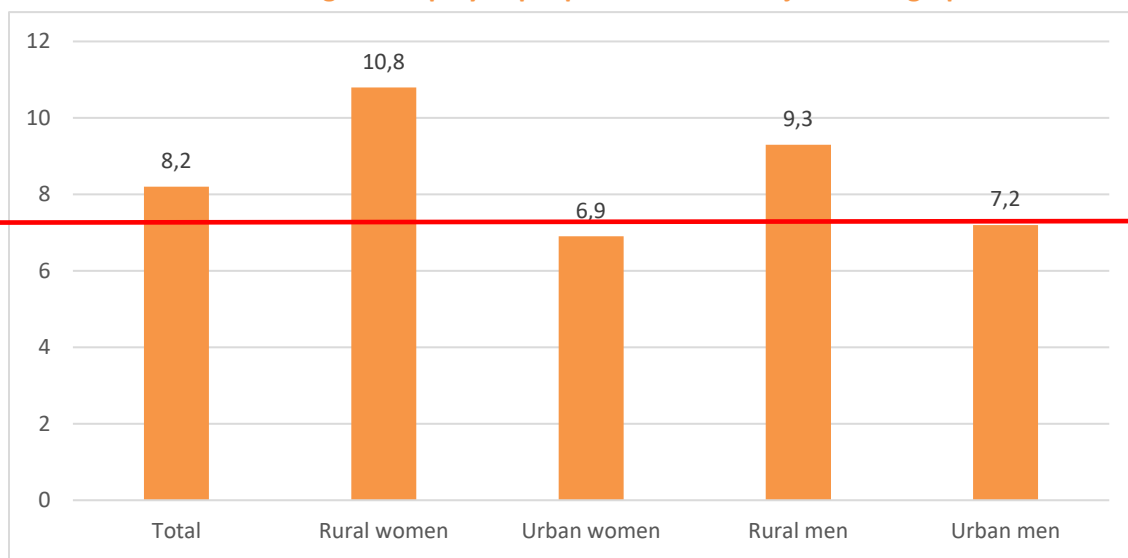
Most of these women were employed in private companies (60.1%), while 37% worked in public enterprises, institutions, public administration, and a small share worked in mixed enterprises (2.5%), cooperatives (0.4%) and NGOs (0.4%).

The employment structure of rural women differs from that of women from urban settlements. Rural women are more likely than urban women to be employed in the processing industry – 19% of employed rural women work in this sector compared to 9.5% of employed urban women. Employed rural women also recorded a higher share compared to urban women when it comes to employees in the trade sector (20% vs 15%), a slightly lower share of employees in education (13.4% vs 14.6%) and a significantly lower share of employees in health care and social protection (8.9% vs 16.8%). These sectors are also the sectors accounting for the largest share of employment of women both in rural and urban areas.

Compared to rural men, rural women are slightly less likely to work in industry (19% vs 22.6%), a bit more likely to work in trade (20% vs 17.5%) and significantly more likely to work in education (13.4% vs 5.4%) and health care and social protection (8.9% vs 2.7%).

In April 2020, during the state of emergency, 8.2% of employed people<sup>18</sup> lost their jobs. However, not everyone was equally affected. Rural population was more affected by job losses than the urban population, and women were more affected than men. Rural women are the group that felt the biggest consequences in terms of job losses (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Percentage of employed people who lost their jobs during April 2020



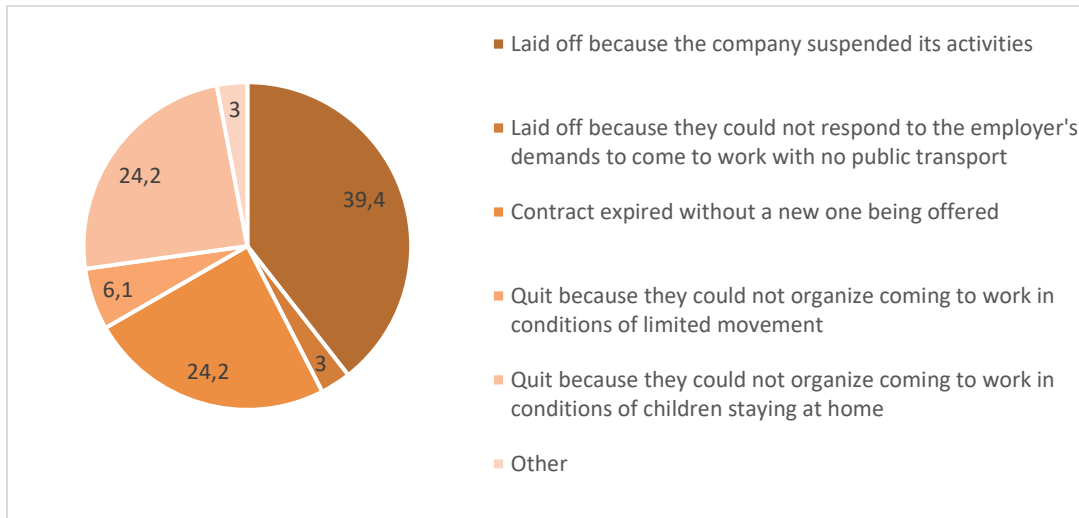
Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

In the largest number of cases, rural women who lost their jobs were laid off because the company suspended its activities due to the restrictive Government measures in response to the pandemic (39.4%), but there is also a significant share of those who lost their jobs because their fixed-term contracts expired and a new one was not offered, as well as those who quit because they could not organize coming to work because the children had to stay at home due to the closure of kindergartens and schools.

<sup>18</sup> “Employed persons are persons who have, during at least one hour in the reference week, performed paid job (in cash or in kind), and persons who have a job but were absent from it during that week. Employed people, in addition to people who have established employment and work in a company, institution or another type of organization or work as private entrepreneurs, include individual farmers, assisting household members, as well as persons who have performed some work they independently found and contracted (orally or in writing) without formal employment and for whom that work represented the only source of livelihoods. Therefore, the Survey does not take into account the formal status of the person being interviewed, but the employment status of that person is determined based on the real activity they performed in the reference week.” (SORS, LFS methodological guide, p. 2, accessed on 30 May, 2019 at <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2017/Doc/G201720107.docx>)



Chart 4: Rural women by reasons for job loss, in %



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

Compared to urban women, the reasons for job loss among rural women are more related to fixed-term contracts expiring (24.2% vs 13.2%), inability to go to work because the children stayed at home (24.2% vs 10.5%). In relation to rural men, the biggest differences are shown in the share of the reason of employed persons for quitting their jobs, because they could not organize coming to work in conditions of children are staying at home (24.2% among women and 9.7% among men).

A higher percentage of rural women who lost their jobs registered with the National Employment Service than urban women who found themselves in the same situation (30.3% vs 5.3%) and they tried to immediately find a new job somewhat more often (30.3% vs 26.3%). Compared to rural men who lost their jobs, rural women were somewhat less likely to register with the National Employment Service (69.7% vs 77.4%) and were more likely to immediately try to find a new job (30.3% vs 22.6%).

With the majority of women who remained employed (70%), there was a change in certain working conditions: almost one in four switched to working from home (23.5%), more than one in five said that their working hours or number of shifts were reduced (22.8%), 6.3% said that their salary was reduced, 7.4% were forced to use the annual leave, while 5.5% agreed with the employer to voluntarily use the annual leave to “share the burden”, 4% did not work because work was suspended.

The conditions of working from home did not suit all women who switched to this work mode. Almost one in three (30%) did not have an adequate place in the apartment/house where they could adequately devote themselves to work, 5% did not have adequate equipment, such as a computer, internet, etc., 44% worked at night to finish the work, 28% felt frustrated because their work intruded on their privacy during online meetings, video conferences, etc., and 23% felt frustrated because family members prevented them from dedicating themselves to work.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic  
position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture

In addition, more than one in four employed rural women (26%) indicated that they have an increased workload, 11% said that they are having difficulties with transportation to and from work, and 32% were exposed to high risks of contracting the virus in their workplace.

## 4. IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY OF RURAL WOMEN

### 4.1 Agricultural households and farms as a framework of the socio-economic position of rural women

The research, which had a special focus on women from rural areas, covered women from three regions of Serbia: Vojvodina, Šumadija and Western Serbia and Southern and Eastern Serbia. Due to the nature of the sample, however, it is not possible to draw conclusions at the regional level, so the position of rural women will be observed at the level of entire Serbia. The sample has almost an equal share of women aged 30-50 (33.3%), 51-60 (34.6%) and women older than 60 (32.1%). We should have it in mind that this “distortion” of the age structure of women in the sample<sup>19</sup> is partly due to the fact that this is not a representative sample but a purposive one<sup>20</sup>, as well as the fact that women engaged in agriculture are older on average, especially those who are farm owners. According to the findings of the analysis conducted on the survey of farms, the average age of women who are farm owners was 65 in 2018.<sup>21</sup>

Women from the sample live on registered farms in 75% of cases. In 28% of cases, the owners of these farms are the respondents, and in 1.6% of the cases, the owners are other women from the household. This is slightly more than in the total number of farms, where, according to the Survey of the structure of farms from 2018, 19% of farm owners were women.<sup>22</sup> This time as well, the reason for the “distortion” of the image of women is the consequence of a purposive sample, including the fact that only rural households with women active in agriculture were selected. In the sample of this study, women living in households with a registered farm are slightly younger than women living in rural households without a registered farm (53.8 vs 57.9). However, on average, the oldest women are farm owners (59.2 years old).

The vast majority of households in the sample own land (95%), with 18.2% owning land of small size, up to 1 ha, 37.7% owning more than 1 ha and less than 5 ha, 27.3% owning land of more than 5 ha and less than 10 ha and 16.8% owning 10 ha or more. Households with a registered farm have a significantly higher average land size (6 ha vs 2.3 ha).

Only in 23.4% of cases, the respondent was a registered owner of at least a part of the land. However, while the average size of the land owned by households in the sample is 5.2 ha, the average size of land owned by women is more than twice as small – 2.5 ha. This aspect of the property gender gap has been

---

<sup>19</sup> In terms of the higher share of older women in the total sample in relation to their share in the total population of rural women.

<sup>20</sup> Rural women who are at least partially engaged in agriculture were selected for the sample, not rural women in general.

<sup>21</sup> Bogdanov, N, Babović, M. (2019) Labour force and work on farms – status and trend. Survey of the structure of farms, 2018. Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade.

highlighted multiple times and despite the measures that have been taken in recent years, the effects on the property status of women in rural areas are still lacking.

Namely, in 2018, the *Law on the Registration Procedure with the Cadastre of Real Estate and Utilities*<sup>23</sup> was amended, the law defined that property acquired in marriage is automatically registered as joint property, unless the “the statement of both spouses is submitted to the cadastre stating that in the specific case it is not joint but individual property of one of the spouses, or if, based on a document used for registration, the spouses acquire property with certain shares” (Article 7). However, the effects of this law on rural women are not big because it is still a prevalent practice in rural areas for women to move into their husband's house after marriage, and the law stipulates that in the case of already registered property, a special request must be submitted to register the property as joint property<sup>24</sup>.

In addition to the practice of moving into the husband's house, there is another reason why women are less likely to own property, and it refers to customs in inheriting property which imply women waiving their right to inherit property in favour of male family members. According to the data presented in the *Report on the position of rural women in the Republic of Serbia*, almost the same number of male and female heirs were present at probate proceedings, but as many as 36% of women waived their right to inheritance, compared to 19% of men.<sup>25</sup> Women who waived their right to inherit property most often did it in favour of their brothers (55%), mothers would usually waive their right in favour of their sons (13%), and only 2% did it in favour of their daughters<sup>26</sup>. Women in rural areas are evidently faced with cultural barriers characteristic of patriarchal societies, which imply that property is passed on to male members of the household and that women should waive their right to inherit property in favour of male family members.

The findings of the qualitative component of the research further support the presented data. Almost all interviewed women live in households that have a registered farm, which is most often registered to the husband or another male member of the household (father, son, father-in-law). Also, the land in possession is almost without an exception registered to male household members. Women own land in less than a quarter of cases, and they are farm owners usually only if there are no adult male members in the household.

---

23 Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2019f). Law on the Registration Procedure with the Cadastre of Real Estate and Utilities. Official Gazette of the RS, no. 41/2018, 95/2018, 31/2019.

25 Beker, K., Gujančić, R., Rudić Vranić, R., Čelović, Z., Nešić, R. and Simonović Veljković, G. (2017). Izveštaj o položaju žena na selu u Srbiji [Report on the position of rural women in Serbia]. Belgrade: UN Women Serbia. 2017:55.

26 Ibid. 2017:55.

The average household size of women in the sample is 3.94 members, with 6.2% of women living alone, 25% living in a two-member household, 35.8% in households with three or four members, and 33.3% in households with five or more members.

The vast majority of households in the sample are engaged in agricultural production (90%), more than half (52%) are engaged in processing of agricultural products and only 5% in rural tourism. Due to the small number of households engaged in rural tourism, it was not possible to analyze this aspect of women's economic activities. Income from agricultural production and processing of agricultural products is very important for most households. As can be seen from the following table, for almost 42% of households, income from agricultural production makes up half of the total household income and in 44% of cases it makes up the majority of the total income. For more than half of households, income from the sale of processed agricultural products makes up half or more of the total household income. So, this strong reliance on agricultural production and processing of agricultural products characterizes the conditions in which the women from the sample work and live.

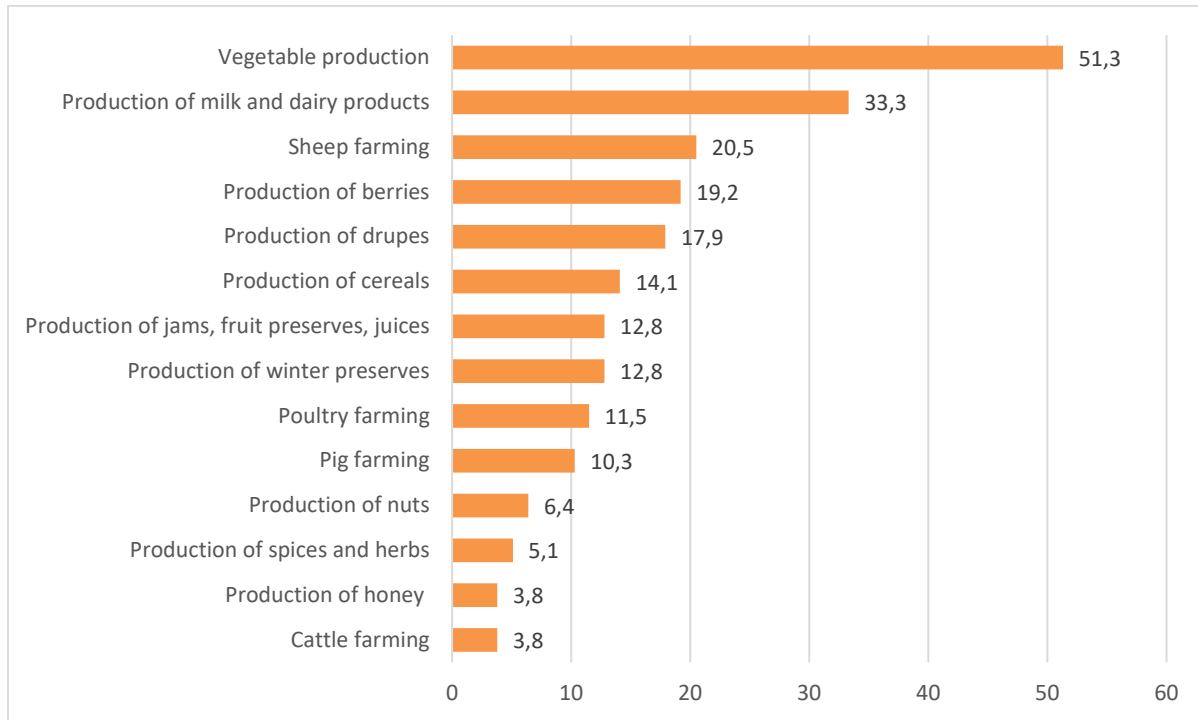
**Table 1: Households by the share of income from agricultural production and processing of agricultural products in total household income, in %**

Type of activity	Share in total household income, in %	
	Agricultural production	Processing of agricultural products
Less than 50%	14.0	47.3
50%	41.7	38.9
More than 50%	44.3	13.8

Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

The most common forms of production bringing household income are vegetable production, production of milk and dairy products, followed by sheep farming, production of berries and drupes, then cereal production, production of jams, fruit preserves, juices, winter preserves, poultry farming, pig farming and to a lesser extent production of nuts, spices and herbs, honey and cattle farming (Chart 5). According to what women included in the qualitative component of the research said, it can be noticed that they are more often in charge of the production of milk and dairy products, including milking cows and sheep, as well as preparing jams, juices, fruit preserves, winter preserves and similar.

Chart 5: Households by activities the products of which are most often sold on the market, in %



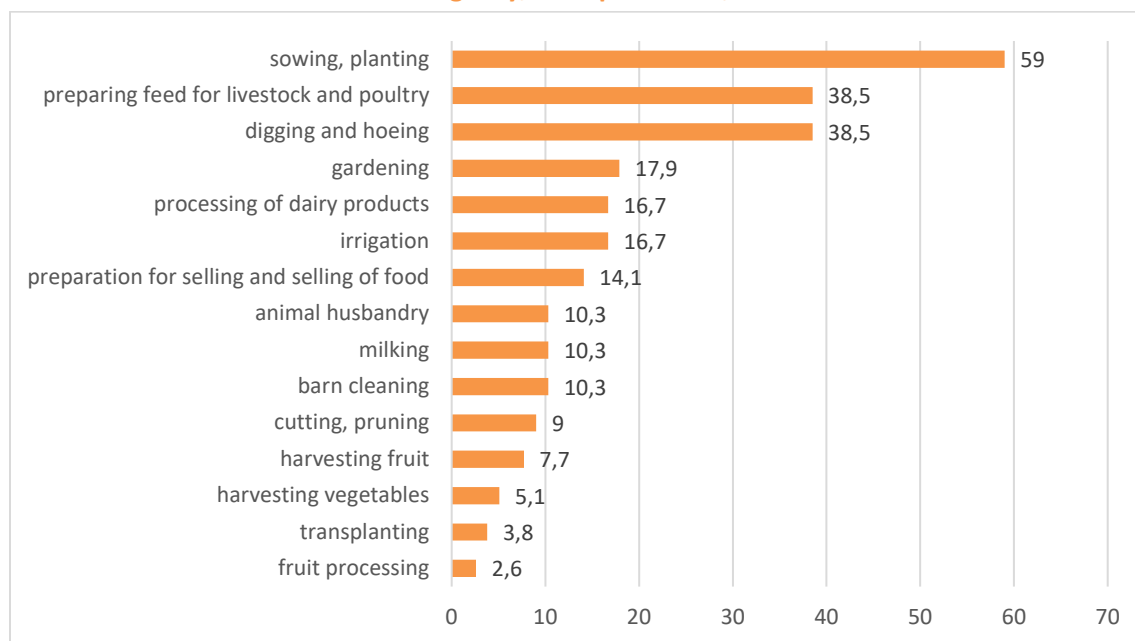
Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

According to what women from the sample said, the main decisions on what their work related to agricultural production will look like in 43.6% of cases are made by themselves, in 20.5% of cases it is decided by the husband and in 26.9% of cases, they decide together. Women engaged in agriculture spend an average of 5.6 hours a day in agricultural work, with the shortest time given by women being 1.5 hours and the longest as long as 12 hours. The average time of work on agricultural jobs varies depending on the work season. Outside the agricultural work season, it averages 2.3 hours a day, while in the agricultural work season, it amounts to 7.5 hours a day.

## 4.2 Impact of the pandemic on the work of rural women engaged in agriculture

Respondents were asked to list the five most important tasks they performed during the state of emergency. Based on the responses presented in the following chart, women in this period were most often engaged in sowing, planting, preparing feed for livestock and poultry, digging and hoeing. Relatively frequent activities were also gardening, dairy product processing, irrigation and preparation for selling and selling of food (Chart 6).

**Chart 6: Women according to the most important tasks they performed during the state of emergency, multiple-choice, in %**

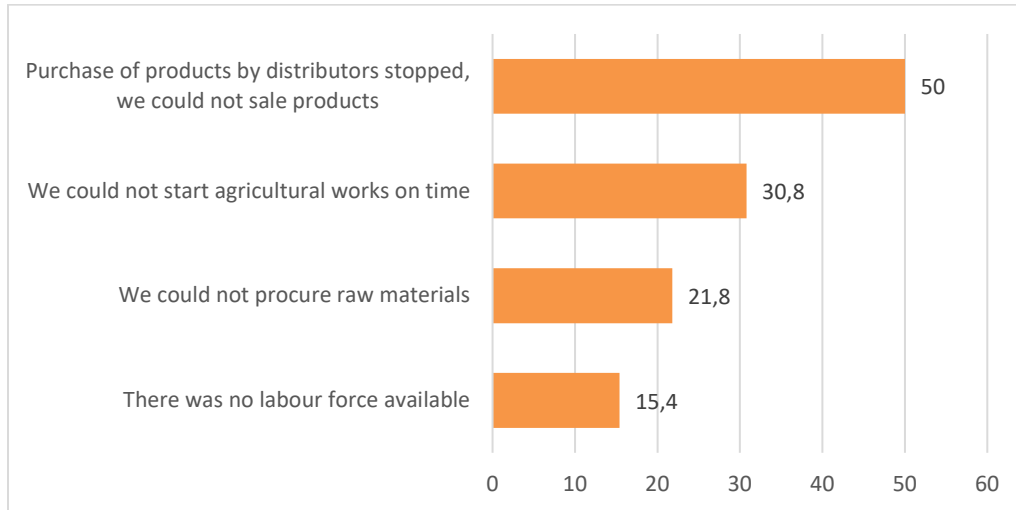


Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

The pandemic and the state of emergency had multiple effects on the economic activities of the women in the sample. In half of the cases, they were no longer able to sell their products, either because the purchase of products by distributors stopped, marketplaces were closed, public transport to points of sale was suspended, or because of disrupted supply chains. Almost one in three women also faced the problem of not being able to start agricultural works on time due to restrictions of movement or other reasons. More than one in five were not able to procure raw materials, and 15% also complained about labour force shortages (Chart 7).

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture

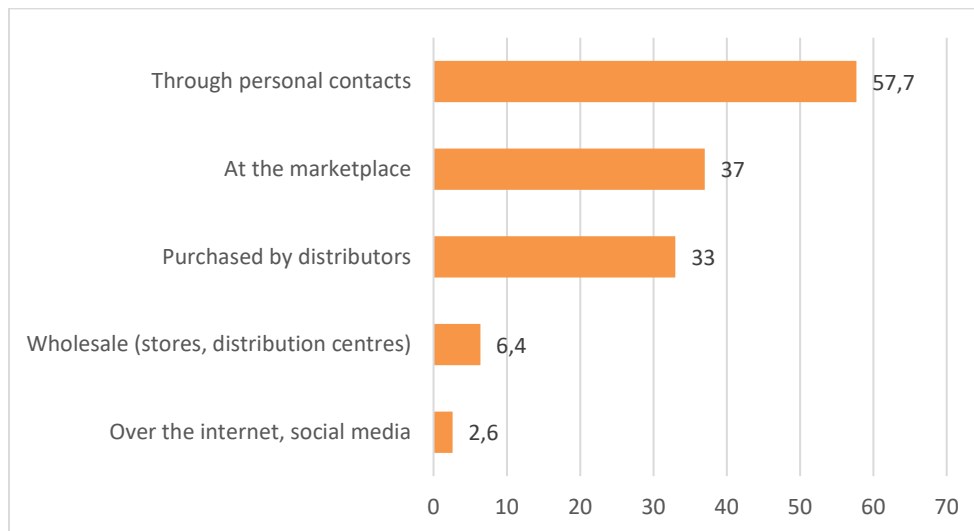
**Chart 7: The way in which the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of emergency affected the labour activity of women engaged in agriculture, multiple-choice, in %**



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

Supply chain disruptions and no access to the market were big consequences of the pandemic and the state of emergency. Before the pandemic, more than half of women were selling their products through personal contacts, more than one in three were selling at the marketplace, one in three were selling products to distributors and only 2.6% were selling products over the internet and social media.

**Chart 8: Women by the method of product sales, multiple-choice, in %**

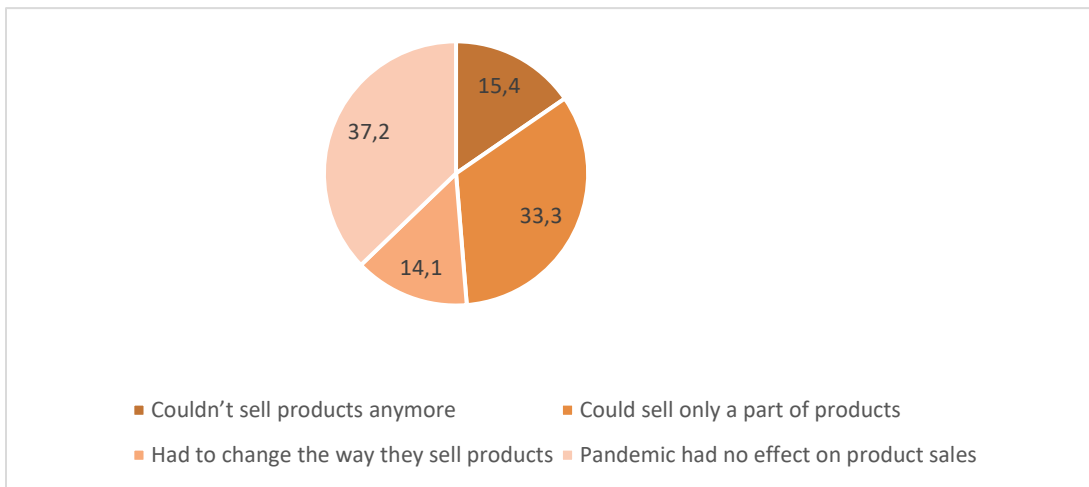


Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020



The outbreak of the pandemic and the declaration of the state of emergency did not affect product sales for more than one in three women in the sample. One in three could continue selling only part of the products, 14% of women had to change the way they sell products and 15% could no longer sell products at all. Respondents who were selling their products through personal contacts or over the internet before the pandemic were less likely to face the impact that the pandemic had on the sale of products because supply chains were shorter and independent of traditional markets of distributor purchases and marketplaces – 11% vs 22.6 % of respondents who sell their products in other ways said that they could not sell their products.

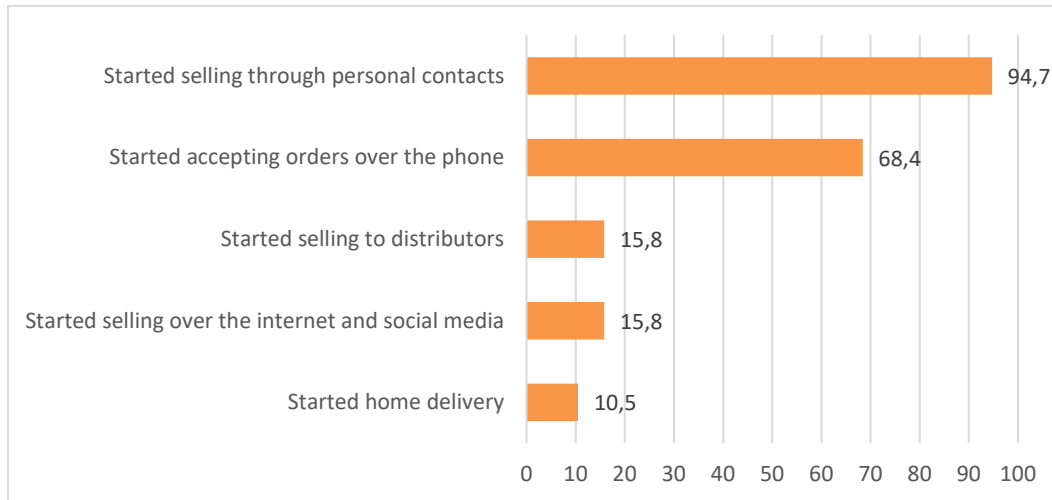
Chart 9: Women by the impact of the pandemic and the state of emergency on product sales, in %



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

The crisis in supply chains caused by the pandemic and the state of emergency was also an opportunity for innovation. Women who faced the problem with selling products started looking for new ways of selling that they had not used before. One in four women (24%) said that due to due to disruptions in sales chains, they found new ways to sell products. Almost all women started selling products through personal contacts, more than two in three women started accepting orders over the phone, 15.8% each started selling products over the internet and social media and selling them to distributors, and one in ten women started delivering products to customers' homes (Chart 10). It should be borne in mind that women most often combined these different methods of selling products.

Chart 10: Women by new methods of product sales, multiple-choice, in %



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

The research findings indicate that innovation was sustainable in most cases. 74% of women who introduced new methods of selling products, continued using these new methods even when the state of emergency was lifted.

It is important to point out that there is a pronounced gap between rural women and urban women when it comes to the use of information technologies, in favour of urban women. According to the SORS data, 60% of rural women use a computer compared to 76% of urban women, while 65% of rural women and 81% of urban women use the internet.<sup>27</sup> This piece of data is especially important to us when it comes to innovations for marketing products, because, as we could see from the data on sales methods, the share of online sales of products was very low, and this can be a very successful way for women to market their products. To increase the use of this sales method, it is necessary to organize training courses that would teach farmers how to use computers, the internet and social media for this purpose, because this is the future not only in emergencies, but also in regular times, and can boost the income from agricultural production.

<sup>27</sup> Database of research on the use of information technologies (2019). In: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia.

## 5. KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S MEASURES TO SUPPORT THE ECONOMY AND ASSESSMENT OF THEIR EFFECTS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

The legislative framework for implementation of the policy in the field of agriculture and rural development, in addition to the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development, also includes the Law on Incentives in Agriculture and Rural Development and by-laws, which define the detailed conditions for using incentives. In accordance with the provisions of this law and the Regulation on the distribution of incentives in agriculture and rural development, in Serbia during 2019, beneficiaries of the budget support were entitled to the following types of incentives: direct payments, incentives through rural development measures, special incentives, credit support and IPARD incentives. Some of the incentive measures also envisage certain benefits for women, such as lower interest rates for credit support, additional points in evaluating applications for support for young people in rural areas, etc. The condition for access to incentive measures is having a registered farm.

According to the findings of the study on gender aspects of agriculture and rural development<sup>28</sup>, in 2019, there was a total of 16,675 applications for incentives for rural development financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia. 44.6% applications were approved, and among them, 19.6% were submitted by women. When it comes to the amount of funds allocated, women received 23.2% of the total amount of funds. Women made up 24% of beneficiaries of the IPARD programme in the period 2017-2019. It can be observed from the above data that women are a minority among the beneficiaries of support measures, which corresponds to them being a minority among the farm owners.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a number of measures to support the economy. Two measures are of particular importance for women engaged in agriculture: financial assistance to farms in order to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 and financial support to farms through easier access to loans in aggravated economic conditions due to COVID-19.<sup>29</sup> The Government of the Republic of Serbia prescribed several conditions for the payment of one-off financial assistance to farms, in order to mitigate the consequences caused by the disease. The conditions that had to be met were that the farmers are the owners of the farm, which is registered and is in the active status, that they have registered land where they grow vegetables in a protected area, or that they are owners of branded and registered animals (cows, sheep or goats), or that they are owners of marked and registered beehives, or the owner of the beehive is a member of the family agricultural household and is 70 or more years of age in 2020. In addition, farmers' access to the use of loans was

---

<sup>28</sup> SeCons. (2020). *Rodna ravnopravnost, poljoprivreda i ruralni razvoj u Republici Srbiji [Gender equality, agriculture and rural development in the Republic of Serbia]*. FAO. The study is in preparation

<sup>29</sup> Government of the Republic of Serbia (2020). *Regulation on financial support to agricultural holdings through facilitated access to the use of loans in aggravated economic conditions due to the COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus*, "Official Gazette of the RS", no. 57/2020

facilitated by subsidizing a part of the interest. Subsidizing a part of the interest is possible for the following activities: development of animal farming, land farming, fruit production, wine growing, vegetable production and flower farming, procurement of animal feed, investment in machinery and equipment, investments in certain types of machinery and equipment used in crop production and liquidity. Natural persons (owners of a commercial family farm), entrepreneurs and legal entities are eligible for credit support<sup>30</sup>.

Research data indicate that the measure granting financial aid is assessed as better. Almost half of the women in the sample say that the measure partially helped them mitigate the consequences of the pandemic and almost 14% that it helped them a lot. Although the sample is not large enough to allow for a more detailed analysis of the differences between women who assessed the measures as positive and those who did not, the basic insights show that in fact, the financial support measures gave better effects for women on medium and large farms and that among them there is a larger share of those focused on the production of vegetables and berries. Among women who assessed the financial assistance measure as positive, the average size of the land owned by the household is 6 ha, and among women who cannot assess it or assessed it as having no effect, the average land size is 3.7 ha. Among women who assessed the effect of the measure as positive, almost two out of three produce vegetables, 44% milk and dairy products, 32% berries and 27% drupes. Among women who could not assess it or assessed it as having no effect, slightly more than half produce vegetables (52%), there is a higher share of those engaged in poultry and sheep farming (22% each), as well as those who earn their income from selling winter preserve (26%), jams, fruit preserve, juices (22%).

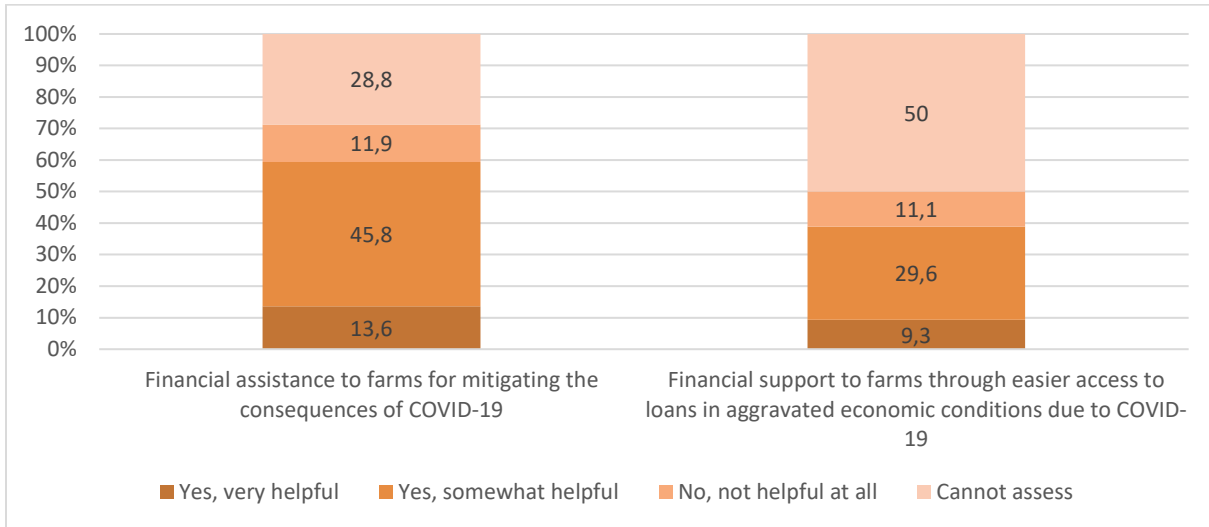
When it comes to the second measure, easier access to loans, its effects are less visible, because half of the women in the sample cannot assess the effects of this measure for now. The share of those who assess it as having no effect is the same as with the previous measure, while almost 40% of women assessed this measure as very or partially positive.

---

<sup>30</sup> Legal entities are entitled to this type of support in cases of agricultural cooperatives with at least five members of the cooperative registered in the Register as owners or members of five different registered farms, or if they are classified as a micro or small legal entity in accordance with the law governing accounting.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture

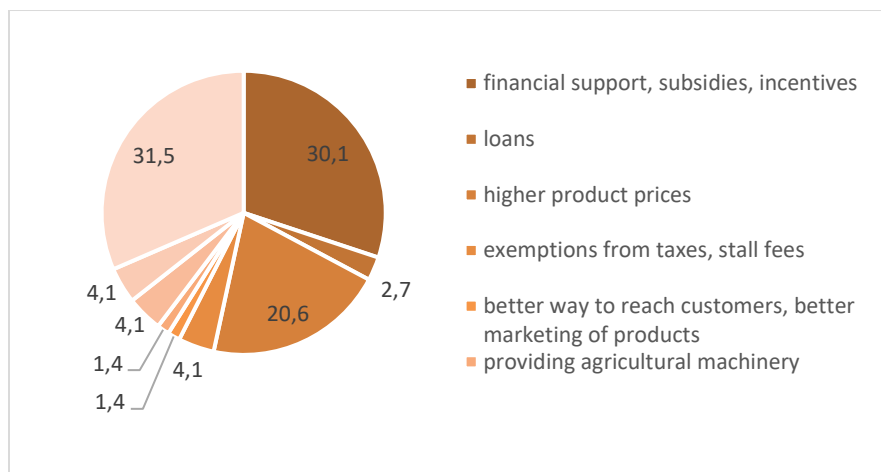
**Chart 11: Assessment of agricultural support measures for mitigating the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, in %**



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

Women were also asked to say what types of measures would help mitigate the negative consequences of the pandemic on their agricultural production. Chart 12 shows that almost one in three women say both that they do not need anything and that they need financial support measures, subsidies, financial incentives, slightly more than one in five indicate that they would benefit from a higher price of products, while the rest of the measures were significantly less represented, such as lower taxes, exemptions from paying stall fees at marketplaces, lower prices of raw materials, etc.

**Chart 12: Perception of measures needed to mitigate the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on agricultural production of women in the sample, in %**



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

When it comes to measures that would be needed to mitigate the negative effects on food processing, women in the sample said in 44% of cases that no measures could help them, 27.8% indicated that financial support would help them, 22.2% said a better way to reach customers and 6% did not know what would be useful for them.

*"The best measure would be to determine the price of our product. When I walk into a store, I know how much soap or any product costs. Do that and then we won't need subsidies or any help."*

Woman farmer from Ljubovija, aged 48

*"We need better agricultural conditions, irrigation systems and guaranteed product prices. Only people who have been abroad can invest a bit more... Without a strong farmer, there is no strong state, and they have forgotten that."*

Woman farmer from the Aleksinac area, aged 63

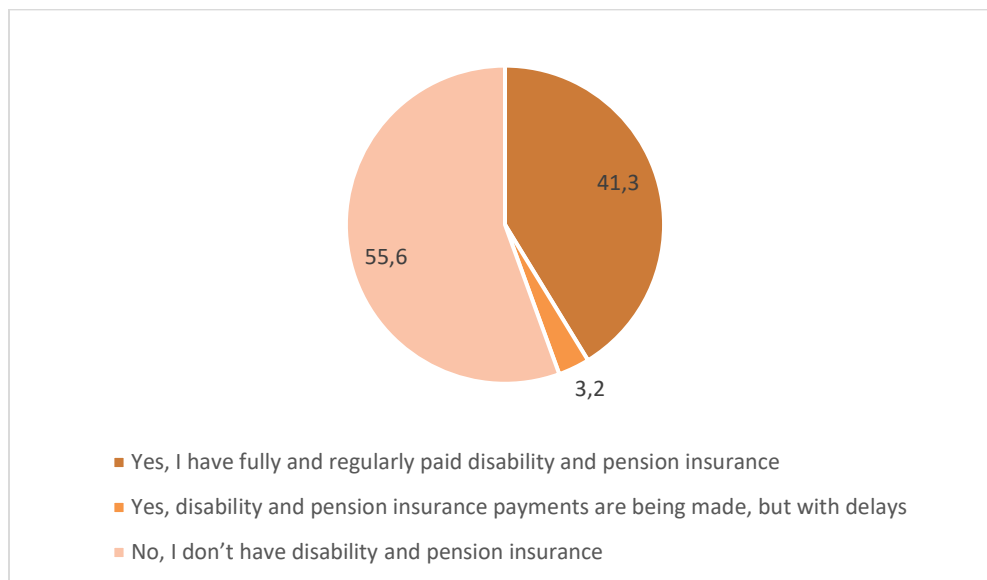
*"We must not go there (take loans – author's note). We have not had any income for a month now, and the loan must be repaid. If I had a steady income, why not."*

Woman farmer from the Aleksinac area, aged 53

## 6. SOCIAL RIGHTS OF RURAL WOMEN

The endangered social rights of rural women, especially those who are economically engaged only within the family farm, have been pointed out several times based on the findings of various researches.<sup>31</sup> The findings of this research indicate that the situation has not changed significantly. One in ten women in the sample does not have paid health insurance, which makes it difficult to access health care. Among those women covered by health insurance, 30% have insurance through their spouses or other household members who are employed outside the household, 18% on the basis of a registered farm, 16% on the basis of their own employment outside the farm, 10% on the basis of unemployment and 27% on the basis of their retirement status. More than half of women do not have disability and pension insurance (Chart 13).

Chart 13: Women in the sample by whether they are covered by disability and pension insurance, in %



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

Among women with regularly paid disability and pension insurance, in most cases (46%) the insurance is paid by the employer, in 36% of cases it is paid by themselves through a member or owner of the farm, and in 18% of cases it is paid by the farm owner. If we exclude women for whom agricultural work on the farm is an additional work activity, i.e. who are employed outside the farm (and of course excluding retired

31 Babović, M. and Vuković, O. (2008). Rural Women in the Status of Family Helpers in Agricultural Households: position, roles and social rights. Belgrade: UNDP Serbia.

Beker, K., Gujančić, R., Rudić Vranić, R., Čelović, Z., Nešić, R. and Simonović Veljković, G. (2017). Izveštaj o položaju žena na selu u Srbiji [Report on the position of rural women in Serbia]. Belgrade: UN Women Serbia.

women), we come to the fact that as many as two in three, or 66% of women who are exclusively engaged in agriculture on family farms do not have pension and disability insurance. This is a fact that has been flagged for more than a decade, but without any effect.



## 7. UNPAID HOUSEWORK AND FAMILY CARE

Unpaid housework and family care are one of the most pronounced forms of discrimination against women in Serbia. Various studies have indicated that women in households are the main providers of unpaid housework and care for children and the elderly. Changes in this area of gender relations are very slow.<sup>32</sup> The measures taken in response to the pandemic significantly changed everyday life in households. Household members spent much more time together, child care and children's school work and care for the elderly largely shifted from institutions to families due to the closure of kindergartens and schools, as well as community social protection services for the elderly. Changes in the everyday life of families also created opportunities for redistribution of responsibilities, but, as the research findings show, this, unfortunately, did not happen.

The data presented in the following table show that women were predominantly responsible for all housework: cooking, doing the dishes, cleaning, doing the laundry and ironing, both before the pandemic and during the state of emergency (Table 2). When we compare these data with unpaid housework performed by women in urban areas, we can conclude that although urban women have a leading role in housework, male household members in urban areas are more often involved in housework, especially in cleaning the house and washing the dishes.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 2: Household duties before and during the state of emergency caused by the COVID pandemic (in %)**

Activity	Cooking		Doing dishes		Doing laundry		Ironing		Cleaning, tidying up	
	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency
I	86.4	86.4	82.7	84.0	85.2	85.2	84.0	85.2	80.2	82.7
Husband/partner	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2	1.2
Another woman in the household	9.9	7.4	11.1	9.9	8.6	8.6	7.4	7.4	7.4	6.2
Another man in the household	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Partner and I together	2.5	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	6.2	4.9	8.6	7.4

<sup>32</sup> Babović, M. (2009) "Working strategies and intra-household relations: Serbia 2003-2007" in Tomanović, S, Milić, A. (ed.) Contemporary Families in Serbia in the Comparative Perspective, ISIFF, Belgrade.

<sup>33</sup> SeConS (2020), COVID-19 and employment in Serbia: impact of the pandemic and measures for its prevention on employment and working conditions, available at: <https://www.secons.net/files/publications/113-publication.pdf>

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture

Another woman and man together	1.2	1.2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
A person who is not a member of the household for compensation in cash or in kind	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

When it comes to caring for young children and the elderly in the household, the role distribution is somewhat different, i.e. male household members are somewhat more often involved in this type of duties compared to other housework, but also when they are involved, they are more likely to perform them together with women rather than on their own (Table 3).

**Table 3: Caring for the elderly and children before and during the state of emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (in %)**

Activity	Care for young children	Care for young children	Controlling (pre)school work	Controlling (pre)school work	Care for the elderly	Care for the elderly
	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency	Before the pandemic	During the state of emergency
I	25.9	24.0	30.8	32.0	59.3	63.0
Husband/partner	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Another woman in the household	33.3	36.0	23.1	24.0	7.4	3.7
Another man in the household	3.7	4.0	3.8	4.0	0.0	4.0
Partner and I together	33.3	28.0	34.6	28.0	33.3	29.6
Another woman and man together	3.7	8.0	7.7	12.0	0.0	3.7
A person who is not a member of the household for compensation in cash or in kind	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

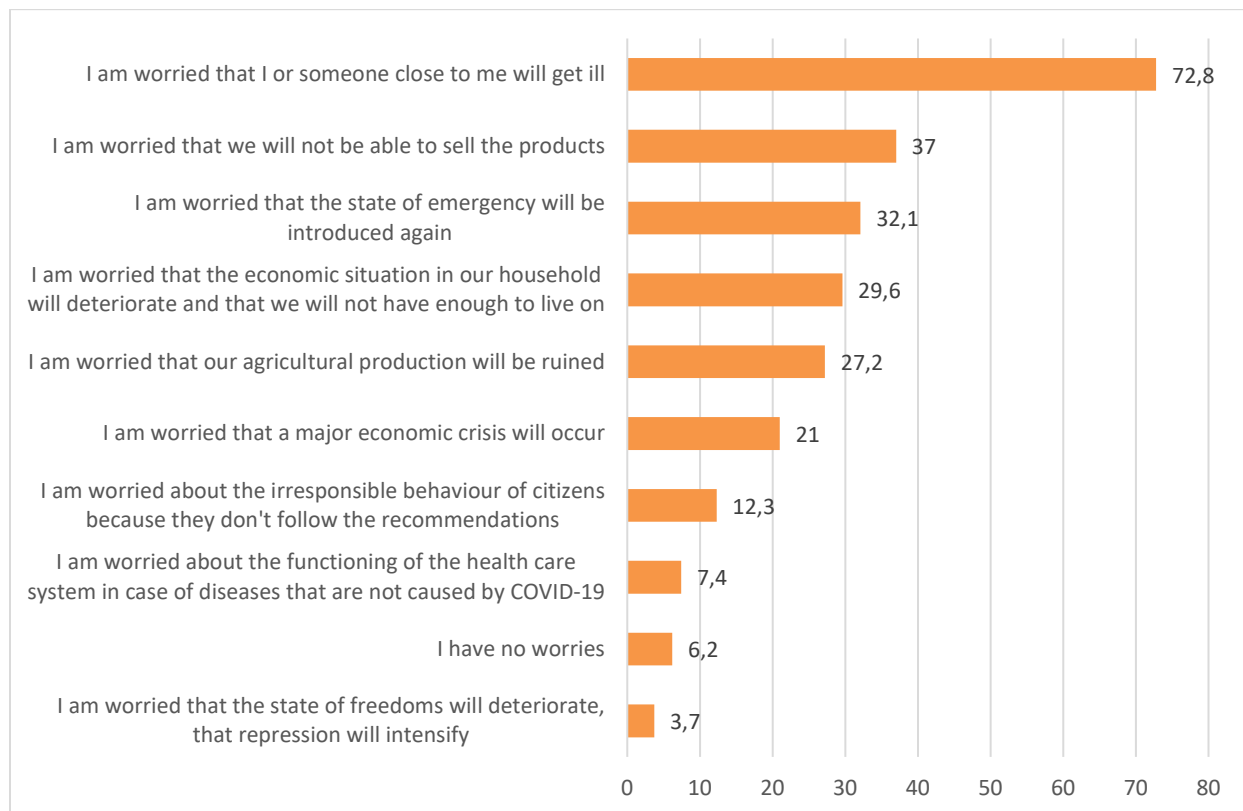
Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

## 8. CONCERNS ABOUT VARIOUS ASPECTS OF LIFE

The COVID-19 pandemic brought all citizens into completely new circumstances, which were also reflected on their concerns related to the new situation. Similar to the general sample of employed people, women engaged in agriculture are most often concerned about their health and are afraid that they or someone close to them would get ill from COVID-19 (Chart 14). Regardless of the fact that this research was conducted later in relation to the research on the general sample of employed people, it can be observed that the fear of health risks is not decreasing. In April 2020, two in three employed people (66%), both women and men, had this fear. In the sample of women engaged in agriculture, it is even more prominent, several weeks later.

Behind the concern for health, most often expressed concerns are that they will not be able to sell their products, that the state of emergency will be introduced again, that the economic situation of the household will deteriorate and they will not be able to provide livelihoods, and that a major economic crisis will occur (Chart 14).

Chart 14: Women from the sample according to the sources of greatest concern, in %



Source: SeConS, Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and measures for its prevention on the socio-economic position of rural women, with the focus on agriculture, 2020

The findings of the qualitative research also confirm that there are reasons for concern. The women farmers interviewed are primarily concerned about the health of their household members, but also about the economic consequences that are yet to be felt in the upcoming period. Some of the respondents pointed out that they do not know how they will finance the maintenance of the fields, how they will sell their products if strict measures are introduced again, and those who work in the non-agricultural sector are concerned that they could lose their jobs. Almost all respondents said in the interviews that they are especially concerned about the future of young people. According to them, while the older generations are used to periods of social crises and deep recessions, this is not the case with younger generations, who are already looking for a way out in leaving the country. On the other hand, some respondents say that they are not worried at all and believe that they will manage to survive even during the new wave of the pandemic.

*"We weren't selling anything, we don't know how we will pay for the maintenance of our fields."*

(Woman farmer from Bojnik, aged 53)

*"We managed to get through this, but what if it happens again... I noticed this was a bit harder for younger people – those who didn't live through the inflation, bombing."*

(Woman farmer from the Aleksinac area, aged 58)

*"If the pandemic comes again, the economy will go down, everything will go down... If it repeats, I will lose my job."*

(Woman farmer from Sirogojno, aged 59)

*"We are resourceful, we can take it... we are used to it, most other nations could not take what we can, a German could not... These are our troubled women, there is nothing they could not do... We have no standard, we're used to that, we keep moving. You know what we need? Just to be healthy and not to be hungry."*

(Woman farmer from the Aleksinac area, aged 63)

*"The pandemic didn't worry me at all, as if it never existed... While we have agriculture and greenhouses, we are not concerned about the economy. "*

(Woman farmer from Sirogojno, aged 58)

## 9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 9.1 Conclusions

Rural women who were employed outside of agriculture were the group most affected by job losses after the pandemic and the state of emergency were declared, more so than urban women or rural men. Their employment differs in general from the employment of urban women, but also rural men. They are more likely to be employed in industry than urban women and more likely than rural men to be employed in trade, education, health care and social protection. They were mostly employed in the private sector, and as many as one in five were employed outside their place of residence. These characteristics of their employment also led them to experiencing harder consequences of the pandemic in terms of job losses.

The most common reason for losing their job was companies in which they were employed suspending their activities, but compared to other groups of women and men, they were much more likely to quit because they could not organize coming to work in conditions when child care was transferred to the family due to the closure of kindergartens and schools, as well as due to movement restrictions caused by the suspension of public transport and the curfew.

A higher number of rural women who lost their jobs registered with the National Employment Service compared to urban women who also lost their jobs, and they were somewhat more likely to find a new job immediately.

With the majority of rural women who remained employed in non-agricultural sectors, there was a change in working conditions. Almost one in four switched to working from home, and more than one in five worked shorter hours. The conditions of working from home did not suit all women who switched to this work mode. Almost one in three did not have an adequate place to work in their living space, a large number of women had to work at night to get all the work done, and there's a significant number of those who felt frustrated because their work intruded on their privacy or because their family prevented them from dedicating themselves to work.

Almost one in three rural women who remained employed said they were exposed to high risks of contracting the virus in their workplace, and more than one in four that they had higher workload than before the pandemic.

Women who are engaged in agriculture on family farms are the farm owners, property owners and persons deciding on production on the farm only in a small number of cases. Most women actually represent simple workforce on the farm. Women in the sample live in households which are in most cases registered agricultural holdings and are engaged in at least some form of agricultural production, and in more than half of the cases also in the processing of these products. Only a small number of households from the sample is engaged in rural tourism, which is why it was not possible to analyse in greater detail the consequences for this activity.

After the outbreak of the pandemic and the introduction of the state of emergency, women worked mainly on preparatory agricultural activities, since the season of agricultural works was not yet in full

swing. The pandemic had the strongest impact on the suspension of purchase or sale of products, and to a lesser extent, the consequences were felt in the delay in the start of agricultural works (especially because the measures of movement restriction also applied to farmers at the beginning of the state of emergency), the ability to procure raw materials and the lack of labour force. Disruptions in supply chains made women resort to new product sales channels, so almost all women in the sample activated personal contacts, more than two in three women switched to taking orders over the phone, and a smaller number of women started selling products to distributors, selling them over the Internet, social media or delivering them in person to homes of customers.

The research shows that these innovations were not temporary, but that most women, as many as three out of four, continued to sell products using these new methods that were established during the state of emergency, even after the state of emergency was lifted. The findings of the research once again pointed to the importance of digital literacy and access to digital technologies and the internet among rural women, and it is well known that both digital literacy and access to technologies are lower among rural women.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management implements various measures to support agriculture, and within these measures, farms owned by women have certain advantages. During the pandemic, the Government of the Republic of Serbia also adopted special measures: financial assistance to farms and financial support to farms through easier access to loans. Women from the sample assessed the first measure as more favourable, while for the second measure in most cases they said that they were not able to assess it yet. When asked which measures they would need the most, most of them said financial support, incentives, subsidies, followed by a higher price of products, and almost one in three answered that they do not need any special measures.

The state of social rights related to the work of rural women is very worrying. One in ten women does not have health insurance, and two out of three who are not pensioners and not employed outside the farm do not have pension and disability insurance.

Unpaid housework and family care are predominantly the responsibilities of women, and compared to households in urban areas, households in rural areas are characterized by an even more unequal division of responsibilities in the household. In that respect, the pandemic did not change anything.

The everyday life of rural women is also characterized by concerns for health, their own and of their families. This is by far the biggest source of concern for most women. A large number of rural women are also worried that they will not be able to sell their products, that measures like those during the state of emergency will be introduced again, that the economic situation of their households will deteriorate and they will not be able to provide livelihoods for themselves, and that a major economic crisis will occur.

## 9.2 Recommendations

### SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Training of rural women to acquire basic skills of using the internet. The internet use would be of particular importance during crises (such as the pandemic), so they can sell agricultural products online, given that the marketplaces were closed.
- Supporting initiatives that contribute to the inclusion of rural women who are basing their business strategy on specialization in primary production into market chains. All forms of support for the development of short supply chains and growth of competitiveness in local markets can be of great importance for maintaining their economic activity in the conditions of epidemiological constraints.
- Digitization of agricultural extension services that would enable their services to be used via the internet or mobile phone apps, so they can be available to women for advice on production, procurement of raw materials, etc., including during the pandemic. Simultaneous provision of information to women about the possibilities of using these services in these formats, with the development of instructions for the use of applications. Given the higher average age of women working in agriculture, who are much less likely to use digital technologies, it is very important for these services to also be available by phone.
- Developing mobile phone apps or internet portals that would represent virtual marketplaces, and which could connect customers with rural women that are geographically close to them and that are grouped according to product types.
- Introducing new forms of delivery that may or may not engage rural women, which would enable the delivery of products to the addresses of customers. This initiative should also be supported by the introduction of online payments to women's bank accounts, which would also increase their financial independence.
- Redefining incentive measures for farmers, taking into account the specific position of women. The most important measures adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia were the financial assistance to farms in order to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 and financial support to farms through easier access to loans in aggravated economic conditions due to COVID-19. These measures are intended for owners of farms, and since women are less likely to be owners of farms, they did not have the opportunity to apply for these incentives.

### **LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- The new Gender Equality Strategy, with the accompanying action plan, for the period 2021-2025 should take into account the specific needs of rural women and include systemic measures to improve their position. The evaluation of the measures from the current Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2016-2020 showed that this set of recommendations was not effectively implemented in the previous period, so it would be necessary to revise them in accordance with the findings of the evaluation.
- It is necessary to examine the effects of the existing support system for women farm owners (additional points in the ranking of incentive requests, lower interest rates on loans and additional points for LEADER-like support), especially in relation to the possibility of introducing special measures, better adapted to types of women's agricultural businesses.
- Continuous increase of women's digital literacy and improving their access to digital technologies and the internet.
- It is necessary to conduct an evaluation of support measures to rural development, which envisage specific benefits for women in agriculture. The analysis of effects should be conducted according to the types of incentives, the amount of support that women received, types of incentives depending on the size of the farm and the region, etc.
- It is necessary to provide support for strengthening the capacities of local self-government units, in order to adjust local programmes and incentives from local budgets for agriculture, so they are more adequately adjusted to the real needs of women from rural areas, especially in the post-pandemic situation.
- Improve women's access to transportation, through increased possession of driver's licenses and more equal use of family cars, but also through improved public transport services in rural areas (higher frequency, schedule, better connectivity, more affordable prices), bearing in mind that women are much more frequent users of this types of transportation, as well as the fact that they frequently commute to their place of work.
- Calculate the value of unpaid work of rural women and raise awareness of its value, given that women usually perform this part of the work in the household.
- Campaigns to eliminate gender stereotypes and promote a fairer division of housework and family care organized by local civil society organizations can have a significant effect.



## LITERATURE

### Publications:

Babović, M. and Vuković, O. (2008). *Rural Women in the Status of Family Helpers in Agricultural Households: position, roles and social rights*. Belgrade. UNDP Serbia.

Babović, M. (2009). "Working strategies and intra-household relations: Serbia 2003-2007", in Tomanović, S, Milić, A. (ed.) *Contemporary Families in Serbia in the Comparative Perspective*, ISIFF, Belgrade.

Beker, K., Gujančić, R., Rudić Vranić, R., Čelović, Z., Nešić, R. and Simonović Veljković, G. (2017). *Izveštaj o položaju žena na selu u Srbiji [Report on the position of rural women in Serbia]*. Belgrade: UN Women Serbia.

Blagojević, M. (2002) "Women and men in Serbia 1990-2000: gendering the price of chaos", in Bolčić, S, Milić, A. (ed.) "Srbija krajem milenijuma: razaranje društva, promene i svakodnevni život" [*Serbia at the end of the millennium: destruction of society, changes and everyday life*], ISIFF, Belgrade:

Bogdanov, N., Babović, M. (2019). *Labour force and work on farms – status and trend*. Belgrade: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. Available at: <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2019/Pdf/G20196006.pdf>

FemPlatz, A11. (2018). *Information for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Pre-sessional Working group for the 72nd session on reviewing the Republic of Serbia*. Available at:

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/SRB/INT\\_CEDAW\\_ICO\\_SRB\\_31783\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/SRB/INT_CEDAW_ICO_SRB_31783_E.pdf)

SORS. (2016). *Time Use in the Republic of Serbia in 2010 and 2015*, Belgrade. Available at [https://rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2017-01/Kori%C5%A1%C4%87enje%20vremena%20u%20Republici%20Srbiji\\_0.pdf](https://rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2017-01/Kori%C5%A1%C4%87enje%20vremena%20u%20Republici%20Srbiji_0.pdf)

SORS. (2017). *LFS methodological guide*, p. 2, Available at <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2017/Doc/G201720107.docx>, accessed on 30 May 2020

SeConS. (2018). *Final Report of the Evaluation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Gender Equality Strategy of the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade. Available at <https://www.secons.net/files/publications/99-publication.pdf>.

SeConS. (2020). *COVID-19 and employment in Serbia: impact of the pandemic and measures for its prevention on employment and working conditions*. Available at: <https://www.secons.net/files/publications/113-publication.pdf>

SeCons. (2020). *Rodna ravnopravnost, poljoprivreda i ruralni razvoj u Republici Srbiji [Gender equality, agriculture and rural development in the Republic of Serbia]*. FAO. The study is in preparation

SIPRU. (2018). *Gender Equality Index in the Republic of Serbia. Measuring gender equality in the Republic of Serbia, 2016*. Belgrade.

SOS Vojvodina Network. (2019). *Priorities and Recommendations for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in Serbia: Shadow report to the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia*. Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCSS%2fSRB%2f33868&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCEDAW%2fCSS%2fSRB%2f33868&Lang=en)

### **Databases:**

Database of research on the use of information technologies (2019). In: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia*.

### **Laws/Strategies/Regulations:**

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (2020). *How to get a movement permit: Instructions for fruit and vegetable producers*. Available at: <http://www.minpolj.gov.rs/kako-do-dozvole-za-kretanje-uputstvo-za-proizvodjace-voca-i-povrca/?script=lat>, accessed on 29 June 2020.

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2009). *Law on Gender Equality*. Official Gazette of the RS, no. 104/2009.

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2019). *Law on the Registration Procedure with the Cadastre of Real Estate and Utilities*. Official Gazette of the RS, no. 41/2018, 95/2018, 31/2019.

Government of the Republic of Serbia. (2020). *Regulation on financial support to agricultural holdings through facilitated access to the use of loans in aggravated economic conditions due to the COVID-19 disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus*, Official Gazette of the RS, no. 57/2020

### **Online sources:**

WHO. (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic*. Available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>, accessed on 25 May 2020.

WHO. (2020). *First cases confirmed in Europe*. Available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/01/2019-ncov-outbreak-first-cases-confirmed-in-europe>, accessed on 25 May 2020.

WHO. (2020). Available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies>

COVID 19 official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut". *Information about the novel coronavirus on 6 March 2020*. Available at: <https://covid19.rs/%d0%bf%d0%be%d1%82%d0%b2%d1%80%d1%92%d0%b5%d0%bd-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%b2%d0%b8-%d1%81%d0%bb%d1%83%d1%87%d0%b0%d1%98-%d0%ba%d0%be%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%b8%d1%80%d1%83%d1%81%d0%b0-%d1%83-%d1%81/>, accessed on 29 May 2020.

National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. (2020). *Decision on declaring the state of emergency*. Available at: <https://www.propisi.net/odluka-o-proglasenju-vanrednog-stanja/> accessed on 29 June 2020.

COVID 19 official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut". *Information about the novel coronavirus on 11 April 2020 at 3 p.m.* Available at: <https://covid19.rs/%d0%b8%d0%bd%d1%84%d0%be%d1%80%d0%bc%d0%b0%d1%86%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b5-%d0%be-%d0%ba%d0%be%d1%80%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b2%d0%b8%d1%80%d1%83%d1%81%d1%83-covid-19-11-04-2020-%d1%83-15-%d1%87%d0%b0%d1%81/>, accessed on 29 June 2020.

COVID 19 official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut". *Information about the novel coronavirus on 5 June 2020 at 3 p.m.* Available at: <https://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/vest/347976/informacija-o-novom-korona-virusu-na-dan-5-jun-2020-godine-u-15-casova.php>, accessed on 29 June 2020.

COVID 19 official website of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the Institute of Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanovic Batut". *Information about the novel coronavirus on 15 June 2020 at 3 p.m.* Available at: <https://www.zdravlje.gov.rs/vest/348169/informacija-o-novom-korona-virusu-na-dan-15-jun-2020-godine-u-15-casova.php>, accessed on 29 June 2020.