

# **Gender Analysis of COVID-19 Response in the Republic of Serbia**

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All terms used in the text in the masculine grammatical gender include both the masculine and feminine genders of the persons to whom they refer.

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# 1. FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

The COVID-19 virus continues to spread around the world, resulting in millions of people infected globally, including thousands in Serbia.

While the virus itself does not discriminate, the impacts of COVID-19 are not gender-neutral. Both the immediate and long-term consequences of the pandemic disproportionately impact the lives of the marginalized, particularly women and girls.

Authorities are under immense pressure to respond quickly, resulting in actions that are taken without a diversity of perspectives, including gender. To illustrate, although curfews and stay-at-home orders can be effective tools in limiting the spread of the virus, they can also create dangerous situations for women and girls who are victims of domestic violence.

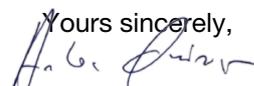
Gender analyses and sex-disaggregated data are crucial parts of a strong COVID-19 response. By informing decisions with accurate data that includes a gender perspective, we foster better outcomes not only for women and girls, but for society as a whole.

Therefore, it is my pleasure to present to you the **Gender Analysis of the COVID-19 response in Serbia**. With the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the authors conducted an in-depth study into existing mechanisms and measures taken by the Government of Serbia, including the legal framework for managing the epidemics and the declaration of a state of emergency, available social protection services, position of women exposed to gender-based violence, economic consequences, and other crucial domains.

For example, the study has found that one of the biggest changes for women during the pandemic, and particularly during the state of emergency, is the increased amount of unpaid work. The difficult circumstances were exacerbated by the undertaken measures, such as closing of kindergartens and schools, movement ban for persons older than 65, and enhanced hygiene, as the new responsibilities stemming from such measures are mainly performed by women.

This analysis also offers accounts of 84 diverse Serbian women and their experiences at the everyday micro-level, from which conclusions and recommendations regarding the measures, or lack thereof, were drawn. I hope this resource offers insight into the importance of gender analyses and assists you in creating gender-responsive policies, with the overall aim of safeguarding the progress on gender equality.

Yours sincerely,



H.E. Ambassador Andrea Orizio  
Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia



## 2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are very grateful to all interviewed women. Those 84 women, whose names must remain confidential, shared with us their thoughts in the days of intensified concern for physical and economic survival, health, schooling of children, difficult purchase of protective equipment and regular groceries. They helped us to see and understand the content of our common, unique, but also diverse and layered, female experience in the time of the pandemic. They helped us understand how the response to the situation of crisis contributed to the strengthening of gender roles, and where there was room for the improvement of gender equality. We believe that precisely these women have left a deep mark that will contribute to all of us to cope and organise even better in similar situations in the future.

We owe a great deal of gratitude to one another because we supported and listened to one another during the days when our routines were completely disrupted. As feminists and activists, we knew that “this evil” must yield some public good, so that the experience would not be in vain.

Finally, we owe the greatest gratitude to the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the OSCE Mission’s National Programme Officer Zorana Antonijević, Ph.D. who supported our initiative to conduct a gender analysis of the response to COVID-19 during lockdown. At the suggestion of Zorana Antonijević, the OSCE Mission very quickly and wholeheartedly supported the proposal to conduct a gender analysis of the response to the threat we referred to as corona, COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2.

Thanks to all that, we will remember the pandemic for our cooperation and active listening. In the post-pandemic era, we should apply the lessons learned.



### 3. SUMMARY: GENDER ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 RESPONSE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Before and after the declaration of the state of emergency, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted a set of measures in response to the epidemic. Some of these measures are epidemiological, while others are economic and social, adopted with the aim of reducing the negative effects of the epidemic and epidemiological measures.

The gender analysis of the adopted measures covered: the legal framework for managing the epidemic and declaring the state of emergency, considering the position of vulnerable groups and adopted measures - social protection services that were available, unavailable and the consequences of changes for women and men; the situation of women exposed to gender-based and domestic violence and the forms of protection available to them; the economic consequences of the state of emergency and the

epidemic, as well as the economic measures that have been adopted or announced; informing citizens from the aspect of the availability of information, situation of journalists and freedom of the media and representation of gender stereotypes in the media.

The adopted measures were considered from the point of view of possible effects on gender equality, from gender negative to gender transformative measures.

The second part of the analysis presents empirical data from qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with 84 interlocutors: women over 65, women entrepreneurs, Roma women and women with disabilities, as illustrations and testimonies of everyday life at the micro level from which the conclusions were drawn with recommendations for measures that were most useful and those that were lacking.

**The collected empirical data indicate key aspects of the response to the epidemic from a gender perspective:**

- ➔ *The declaration of the state of emergency is disputable from the constitutional and legal point of view. The legal basis for declaring the state of emergency is disputable. The state of emergency was declared by invoking the Constitution and referring to “public danger that threatens the survival of the state or its citizens”, instead of invoking the laws that regulate the “protection of the population against infectious diseases”. The Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency was adopted five days before declaring the epidemic of the infectious disease COVID-19. It is disputable why the National Assembly was excluded from deciding on declaring the state of emergency and adopting the measures during the state of emergency, why the National Assembly did not meet even though there were no obstacles to it, and the Constitution explicitly stipulates that in case of declaring the state of emergency it shall convene without any special call for assembly. The proposal for declaring the state of emergency was not submitted by an authorised proposer. The Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and the Decision on Lifting the State of Emergency do not contain any explanation. The Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency as well as the Government Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency were not submitted to the National Assembly for verification within 48 hours as prescribed by the Constitution, etc.*

- *Assessment of regulations on measures taken during the state of emergency:* Regulations are not gender sensitive. Measures related to vulnerable groups are rare. Some were subsequently adopted at the initiative of civil society organisations (CSOs), and on the recommendation of the Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality. The high frequency of regulatory changes undermines legal certainty. Citizens are confused and do not have the necessary information about their rights and restrictions on rights. There were numerous legal gaps in the regulations, i.e. decision-makers did not take into account the needs of vulnerable categories of citizens in the process of adopting the measures, due to which the regulations were subsequently amended immediately after their adoption. Several decisions were hasty, including those referring to the restriction of human rights, and therefore were repealed after only a day or two. Restrictions on human rights (e.g. freedom of movement) are not regulated by an appropriate regulation, and the legislators acted beyond their constitutional and legal powers; restrictions on some human rights, including absolute rights (e.g. the right to a fair trial), were subsequently regulated only after the application of measures (retroactive effect of regulations). In regulating and applying measures and imposing sanctions for their violations, unequal treatment of citizens and discrimination based on some of their personal characteristics are noticeable.
- Strategic documents (strategies and action plans) on actions in the circumstances of pandemics or epidemics, as well as on the protection of the population against infectious diseases, do not exist or have been adopted several years ago. Emergency action plans and strategies should be gender sensitive and include measures for people with different types of disabilities.
- Dissemination of information on the measures adopted by local authorities is uneven, especially in smaller local self-governments and villages. Referring to the information on various websites is not enough for many citizens, especially for the elderly, because the Internet is not available to them, they do not have a computer, do not know how to use it, etc.
- Dissemination of information about the epidemic and the measures was marked by restrictions on media freedoms, the arrest of a journalist, examples of misogyny and gender stereotypes in the media space, to which there were not enough official reactions. Communication plans and community involvement in the response to the epidemic need to be developed, at the local level, which would include measures to involve vulnerable groups.
- All data on the numbers of infected, deceased, hospitalised, recovered people need to be collected, processed and reported disaggregated by sex, as well as data on beneficiaries of assistance and support through pandemic response measures.
- Lack of targeted measures, at least at the state level, for vulnerable groups and special challenges for people living alone and over 65, people living alone with children under 12, Roma men and women, especially those living in informal settlements, persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities and developmental challenges, families of children and persons with disabilities due to the lack of services, migrants and asylum seekers, and the homeless.

- ➔ Roma women are in most cases the beneficiaries of social assistance, while men work informally; caring for children is predominantly the role and obligation of mothers. Roma women were in a particularly disadvantaged position, not only because of living in informal settlements, but also because of the lack of sources of income from informal work and increased obligations related to children's education, which was difficult for Roma children due to the lack of technical and other conditions. Financial support was most needed and assistance through social welfare centres did not reach all Roma families. There was not enough information and not enough was done to ensure the application of protection measures in Roma settlements.
- ➔ For women older than 65, the restriction of freedom, the lack of activity and possibility to move were expectedly the biggest challenges, which could be a trigger for health-related and other problems, while the services of volunteers, which were often mentioned, were unavailable.
- ➔ Information on COVID-19 virus was not sufficiently available to PWDs in the Republic of Serbia, although sign language interpreters and the "read to me" option were available on some of the government websites, but not on the official pandemic information site. Many weaknesses of the healthcare system have come to the fore in the epidemic and it is important to solve them permanently. It is necessary, through various methods, to ensure that information reaches every person with disability, as well as that protective equipment is more quickly and easily accessible to people with disabilities. A network of institutional support needs to be provided also in case of an epidemic.
- ➔ Since the beginning of the state of emergency, women's organisations have pointed out the particularly difficult and insecure position of women facing the situation of violence. Although this topic was on the agenda of the institutions (the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, the Ministry of Interior), additional and adapted solutions for safe reporting of violence in the situation of restricted movement were not created.
- ➔ The economic consequences of the epidemic and the state of emergency especially affected entrepreneurs and (self-) employed individuals in certain sectors whose activity was prohibited or disabled, informally employed individuals and single parents. Most women entrepreneurs get out of the state of emergency in debt, having managed to survive thanks to savings or borrowings from friends and relatives. Although a significant slowdown in the first two weeks of the state of emergency was beneficial for the quality of life of overworked and extremely busy women entrepreneurs, the financial problems came to the fore after that.
- ➔ Economic measures were adopted very quickly and provided support to economic operators with the aim of preserving liquidity, and most of them were actually aimed at retaining jobs. Although the measures were applicable to micro-enterprises, the self-employed and entrepreneurs, differences in the size of enterprises and activities, some of which were affected more and some less, were not sufficiently taken into account, while gender analysis and gender assessment of measures were completely absent in the process of their creation. Although the envisaged support covered also women-owned businesses, it is not enough to protect them from negative consequences, and it

is necessary to provide additional measures for the growth and development of women's business, such as loans or support in expanding to online business. Payment of VAT upon collection and exemption from taxes and contributions (incurred during the state of emergency) would be important measures and relief for women entrepreneurs.

- ➔ In general, the biggest change for women was the increased amount of unpaid work, along with working from home or in positions with the highest risk, such as in the health or supply sector. All unavailable services were provided by women who also performed additional work on the application of protection measures, hygiene maintenance, etc.
- ➔ Women also make up the majority of those who were most exposed or whose position changed the most due to the epidemic. The epidemic highlighted, sharpened and intensified the existing inequalities and pointed out the true meaning of the term "vulnerability". The most disadvantaged are those who are usually not visible in the system, the poor, the unemployed or informally employed who belong to vulnerable groups, with the majority of them being women. The state measures were not sufficiently aimed at supporting these categories of population or recognising the existing inequalities.
- ➔ Full salaries were not provided for the health workers who were in quarantine, in self-isolation or on sick leave due to COVID-19, and a 10% salary supplement was not available to them. At the same time, the salaries of nurses, who have borne the greatest burden of the epidemic, are the lowest, which means that this supplement of 10% is the lowest for them.
- ➔ Civil society organisations played a key role in providing direct support and assistance, as well as drawing attention to key issues that emerged during the state of emergency, such as the situation of Roma men and women in informal settlements, the inability of women to report violence safely, the situation of persons with disabilities, etc. At the same time, CSOs, even the licenced ones, were not sufficiently involved in the provision of services.
- ➔ Neither CSOs nor members of vulnerable groups participated in the work of crisis response teams, the decision-making process or the creation of services and measures, and a gender perspective was lacking. The crisis response team should include representatives of associations of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, as well as experts who are well acquainted with this field.

## 4. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this gender analysis is to determine whether and to what extent the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in cooperation with other stakeholders, **has integrated a gender dimension in the process of designing and implementing the measures and protocols adopted in response to the SARS-COV2 pandemic.** Integrating a gender-responsive dimension in a pandemic means recognising different needs of citizens and responding adequately to those needs, which can be very different depending on gender, age, place of residence, and/or state of health.

There are two big reasons for this:

1. The starting assumption is that the pandemic is not really an exception to the rule, but rather a condensate or concentrate of reality, and certainly its part under a microscope. Such magnification offers a chance to better and more clearly see the actual priorities and values driving the decision makers.
2. An epidemic that happens simultaneously worldwide is a rare opportunity to see how different countries respond to the same phenomenon, which is completely new for all of them and is happening in almost all parts of the world at the same time. Therefore, the time of the pandemic provides near-laboratory conditions for articulating a gender-responsive response to the crisis. By recognising strengths and weaknesses in individual responses, we contribute to the global community of gender-responsive knowledge and practices and influence future responses to the same and/or similar crises.

The present gender analysis belongs to a subgroup of rapid assessments and analyses<sup>1</sup> based on the intensive teamwork related to the collection and analysis

of qualitative data from different sources layered on the basis of the triangulation of different data on the same topic that is the subject of analysis. The central topic was how we, as individual women, the state and society, deal with the pandemic as a challenge that disrupts the normal course of events.

In the usual course of events, there are many gender-based inequalities, and discrimination is well documented. In the regulatory and strategic framework, we have instruments that should respond to these gender-based inequalities and discrimination. This is why it was important for us to see whether, during the crisis, the voice of the laws aimed at preventing inequality and strengthening equality was heard louder, or whether the prevailing atmosphere was that of informally codified gender relations pivoting around the masculine authority/leader and traditional patterns of power.

The most significant, in this joint venture, is the fact that the work, for the most part, took place during the state of emergency and the pandemic, i.e. in real time, and not as a subsequent analysis. This 'inside perspective' contributes largely to the value of this gender analysis. In addition, it should be noted that this is a rather detailed and comprehensive analysis, especially if we keep in mind that it is a rapid analysis.

Therefore, this document should be read as an analytical concentrate of testimony from the inside. Other analyses will address the effects of measures introduced during the state of emergency. This analysis looks at the process of introducing different measures and their possible gender aspects. One level of analysis is an expert assessment of gender impacts, and the other level consists of the subjective experiences of women who are covered or affected by these measures.

<sup>1</sup> Rapid assessment is a tool that allows a comprehensive analysis to be done quickly in situations where there is no time for the usual academic dynamics. This type of assessment involves focusing on specific characteristics of the problem, or on specific groups that are particularly affected, rather than on representative samples. The purpose is to identify and understand the problem more quickly, as well as to recognise the opportunities for improved planning of procedures and measures in response to the crisis. The World Health Organization, but also all organisations working in crises, use this tool often.

The methodological procedure consists of the following segments:

1. Critical analysis of the legal basis of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency, consideration of the scope and content of restrictions on human rights in the state of emergency in the regulations adopted from the introduction to the end of the state of emergency;
2. Consideration of the relationship between the regulatory and strategic framework, the gender agenda <sup>2</sup>and the measures adopted;
3. Gender analyses of specific measures in terms of design, coverage, barriers for certain groups and partial or complete exclusion of vulnerable groups;
4. Relevance of the measures in relation to the expressed needs of women from 4 groups: women in the age group of 65 or over, Roma women, women entrepreneurs and women with disabilities.

Each of these elements of gender analysis represents a small separate unit, but is also part of a new, more comprehensive and complex entirety.

Data for gender analysis were collected in the period from 15 March to 7 May 2020. The state of emergency lasted 53 days.

<sup>2</sup> The gender agenda includes the adopted strategies and plans for the promotion of gender equality, as well as available gender analyses and recommendations under international conventions relating to gender equality, human rights and non-discrimination.

**PART ONE:  
FRAMEWORK FOR  
APPLICATION OF  
STATE MEASURES  
IN RESPONSE TO  
COVID-19**

## 5. LEGALITY AND LEGITIMACY OF COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES

We are going to focus on three issues relevant to analysing the legality and legitimacy of COVID-19 pandemic response measures implemented during the state of emergency:

1. Declaration of the state of emergency and especially why the National Assembly was excluded from adopting the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and deciding on the measures taken in response to the pandemic.
2. Regulations on the restriction of human rights, in particular whether the restrictions were within the limits set by international human rights standards and the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.
3. Human rights during the state of emergency - status and restrictions, particularly the regime of absolute rights.

### 5.1. Declaration of the state of emergency

The legal environment in which the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency was adopted is established by both international and national law. The European Convention on Human Rights (Article 15 §

1) leaves to each state a wide margin of discretion<sup>3</sup> to assess the extent to which the right to life is endangered and to take the measures it deems necessary, and allows for the possibility of restricting human rights if the right to health protection is endangered.<sup>4</sup>In Serbia, it is regulated by the Constitution<sup>5</sup>, the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases<sup>6</sup>, the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management<sup>7</sup>, the Law on Defence<sup>8</sup>, the Law on the National Assembly<sup>9</sup>, the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly<sup>10</sup>, the Law on the Government<sup>11</sup>, the Law on Ministries<sup>12</sup>.

At the beginning, it is necessary to point out to different definitions of the nature of dangers to which the community is exposed in the circumstances of emergency<sup>13</sup>, the state of emergency<sup>14</sup> or the state of war<sup>15</sup>, because the measures taken and the scope of human rights restrictions depend on these definitions. In this context, the question arises of whether the introduction of the state of emergency, by invoking a constitutional provision that allows it, was the only possible response to the threat to the right to health caused by the COVID-19 pandemic or whether the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases could have been applied, achieving the same purpose and with fewer restrictions on human

3 Case of *Ireland v. The United Kingdom*, Judgment of 18 January 2010, Series A 25, paragraph 207. Source: Council of Europe, Information Document (SG Inf 202/7) of 7 April 2020

4 Article 5, paragraphs 1e and 2, Articles 8 through 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and Article 2, paragraph 3 of Protocol no. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights.

5 Articles 20, 39, paragraph 2 and Article 200 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

6 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 15/2016

7 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 87/2018

8 *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 116/2007, 88/2009, 88/2009 - as amended, 104/2009 - as amended, 10/2015 and 36/2018

9 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 10/2009

10 [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/narodna-skupstina-vazna-dokumenta-poslovnik-\(precisceni-tekst\)/ceo-poslovnik-\(precisceni-tekst\).1423.html](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/narodna-skupstina-vazna-dokumenta-poslovnik-(precisceni-tekst)/ceo-poslovnik-(precisceni-tekst).1423.html) (accessed on 5 April 2020)

11 *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 55/2005, 71/2005 - corrigendum, 101/2007, 65/2008, 16/2011, 68/2012 - CC Decision, 72/2012, 7/2014 - CC Decision, 44/2014 and 30/2018 - as amended

12 Article 12 of the Law on Ministries, *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 44/2014, 14/2015, 54/2015, 96/2015 - as amended and 62/2017

13 Article 2, paragraph 1, point 30 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases

14 The term used in the Constitution in cases where „public danger threatens the survival of the state or its citizens“ (Article 200, paragraph 1).

15 The term used in the Constitution (Article 201, paragraph 1)

rights. This Law defines the situation of emergency as “an event or state where the risks and threats or consequences of disasters, emergencies and other dangers to the population, environment and material goods are of such scope and intensity that their occurrence or consequences cannot be prevented or eliminated by regular actions, and it is therefore necessary to apply special measures”<sup>16</sup>, regulates the rights and obligations of all entities related to protection against infectious diseases<sup>17</sup>, measures for protection against infectious diseases<sup>18</sup>, emergency measures in case of declaring an epidemic or pandemic<sup>19</sup> including isolation and quarantine<sup>20</sup>, restriction of movement, control of the application of measures<sup>21</sup> and sanctions for non-compliance with these measures.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.1.1. Who adopted a decision on declaring the state of emergency?

In Serbia, by invoking the Constitution, the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency was adopted jointly by: the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister. The Decision was adopted on 15 March 2020 and came into force on the same day.<sup>23</sup> **In this context, it is necessary to emphasize that the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency was adopted even 5 days before proclamation of the epidemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus in Serbia by the Order of the Minister of Health on 20 March 2020.**<sup>24</sup>

The declaration of the state of emergency falls within the competence of the National Assembly<sup>25</sup>, which decides about it by the majority votes of the total number of deputies.<sup>26</sup> When the National Assembly is not in a position to convene, the decision on declaring the state of emergency is adopted by the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister together.<sup>27</sup> The Constitution stipulates that in such a case, this decision shall be submitted to the National Assembly for verification within 48 hours, or when the conditions are met for it to convene.<sup>28</sup> The information about who proposed the adoption of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency is contradictory and incomplete. At a press conference held the day before adopting the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency, the President of the Republic stated that “a state of emergency is introduced if the *Minister of Defence sends a letter to the Supreme Commander - the President of Serbia, stating that Serbia’s security is threatened.*”<sup>29</sup> The meeting held on 15 March 2020, at which the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency was adopted, followed “after the President Vučić received last night the assessment of the Ministry of Defence that the risks and threats caused by the coronavirus pandemic require the adoption of urgent measures within the purview of the President of Serbia.”<sup>30</sup> The question of who proposed the declaration of a state of emergency remains controversial, because the Minister of Defence has no right to propose the declaration of a state of emergency under either the Constitution or under the Law on National Defence<sup>31</sup>

16 Article 2, paragraph 2, point 30 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases.

17 Articles 9 - 14 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases.

18 Articles 14 - 50 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases.

19 Articles 50 - 54 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases.

20 Articles 73 - 76 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases.

21 Articles 77 - 87 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases.

22 Article 31 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases.

23 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 29/2020

24 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 37/2020

25 Article 99, paragraph 1, point 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 15, paragraph 1, point 5 of the Law on the National Assembly

26 Article 105, paragraph 2, point 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

27 Article 200, paragraph 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

28 Article 200, paragraph 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

29 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/sta-po-ustavu-srbije-podrazumeva-uvodjenje-vanrednog-stanja/> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

30 The meeting was held on 15 March 2020 before the adoption of the decision declaring the state of emergency. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/451323/proglaseno-vanredno-stanje-na-teritoriji-citave-srbije.php> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

31 Article 14, paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Law on Defence

or the Law on Ministries<sup>32</sup>, and the “letter from the Minister of Defence” or “the assessment of the Minister of Defence” does not have the status of proposal. The Constitution and laws regulating this field do not specify at whose proposal the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency is adopted. It is disputable who proposes this decision. It is also disputable who, and on the basis of which criteria, decides on whether the regulations governing the field of defence or the regulations governing the protection of the population from infectious diseases or the regulations governing the risks of disasters and emergency management will be applied in a specific situation.

The question remains of why the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency does not contain any explanation. The decision makers were obliged to explain the reasons why they declared the state of emergency, by invoking the Constitution but without any explanation, which “public danger threatens the survival of the state or its citizens”<sup>33</sup>, and why they applied the Law on Defence, which defines the state of emergency as “a state of public danger that threatens the survival of the state or its citizens, and which is a consequence of military or non-military challenges, risks and security threats”<sup>34</sup>, instead of declaring “the situation of emergency or the circumstances of emergency”<sup>35</sup> due to the pandemic<sup>36</sup> and the proclamation of the pandemic, by invoking the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases and the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management.

### 5.1.2. Why was the National Assembly excluded from deciding on the state of emergency and the measures of restrictions on human rights during the state of emergency?

At the moment of declaring the state of emergency, the National Assembly holds regular sessions<sup>37</sup>, while upon the declaration of the state of emergency it convokes without announcement.<sup>38</sup>The mandate of deputies in the current convocation lasts until 24 April 2020. Even if the National Assembly is dissolved in case of declaring the state of emergency, its full competence shall be re-established *ex constitutionem* and last until the end of the state of emergency.<sup>39</sup>The Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency, which is subject to the verification by the National Assembly, was not submitted to the National Assembly for confirmation within 48 hours, but as late as 40 days after its adoption.

Why did the National Assembly fail to meet as required by the Constitution? Invoking the Order on Banning the Gathering of More Than 100 (later more than 50) Individuals Indoors<sup>40</sup>, issued by the Minister of Health, cannot suspend the Constitution and the obligation of the National Assembly to meet immediately after declaring the state of emergency without announcement.<sup>41</sup>The National Assembly met as late as on 28 April 2020 (54 days after the declaration of the state of emergency) at the instigation of the Government, which submitted to the National Assembly for verification the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and the Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency. At the moment of convening and holding a sitting, the ban on gathering of a certain

32 Article 12 of the Law on Ministries

33 Article 200, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

34 Article 4, paragraph 1 of the Law on Defence, *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 116/2007, 88/2009, 88/2009 - as amended, 104/2009 - as amended, 10/2015 and 36/2018

35 Article 1, paragraph 1, points 7 and 9 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases

36 Article 1, paragraph 1, point 30 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases

37 Article 106, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

38 Article 106, paragraph 4 and Article 200, paragraph 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 48, paragraph 4 of the Law on the National Assembly

39 Article 109, paragraph 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

40 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 30/2020 and the amendment of 21 March 2020 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 39/2020

41 See more in: Marinković T: <https://nova.rs/politika/pravo-skupstine-da-se-sastane-jace-je-od-odluke-vlade/> (accessed on 29 April 2020)

number of individuals indoors was in force. This means that the ban is not and was not an obstacle for the National Assembly to meet, to adopt the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency<sup>42</sup>, or to confirm (or refuse to confirm) these decisions within 48 hours of their adoption.<sup>43</sup>In this context, it is important to emphasize that the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency, which prohibits indoor gatherings, exempts from this prohibition “gatherings of special interest to the work and functioning of state bodies and services”<sup>44</sup>, for which the Minister of Interior issues a special permission.<sup>45</sup> It can, therefore, be stated that the obstacles for holding a sitting of the National Assembly did not exist on 15 March 2020, when the state of emergency was declared, or on 28 April 2020, when the sitting of the National Assembly was convened.

The National Assembly, at the sitting held on 29 April 2020, passed the Decision on Confirmation of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency<sup>46</sup> and adopted the Law on Confirmation of Decrees (a total of 44 Decrees) Passed by the Government During the State of Emergency.<sup>47</sup>This time again, the proposal of the Decision on Confirmation of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and of the Law on Confirmation of Decrees Passed by the Government during the State of Emergency did not contain any explanation.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, the Decision on Lifting the State of Emergency came on the agenda. The Government’s website

states that “the Government of the Republic of Serbia has agreed at today’s meeting<sup>49</sup>, *at the initiative of the Ministry of Defence*, accompanied with an appropriate study in accordance with the *Law on Defence*, with the proposal that the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister should send *to the National Assembly a joint proposal for lifting the state of emergency*. The proposal states that the active epidemiological surveillance of infectious disease COVID-19 has been established in the territory of Serbia through the activities of the competent health organisations and state bodies. As a result of the application of preventive measures, the epidemic flow slowed down and the intensity of the virus activity decreased. Having in mind all current parameters, the proposal sent to the National Assembly states that COVID-19 can no longer be considered a disease of public health importance, representing a danger of the highest degree of risk, i.e. a public danger that threatens the survival of the state and its citizens<sup>50</sup>.”

This information also confirms that the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency sought the legal basis in the Law on National Defence and the Constitution, as well as that the powers related to deciding on declaring and lifting the state of emergency are not regulated. The fact that the right to propose this decision is not regulated is also indicated by the information that the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency was adopted “*on the basis of a letter from the Minister of Defence stating that the security of Serbia was endangered*”<sup>51</sup>, i.e. “*an assessment of the Ministry of*

42 Article 200, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

43 Article 200, paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

44 Article 4 of the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency, *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 31/2020, 36/2020 (Article 2 is not included in the consolidated text), 38/2020 (Article 2 is not included in the consolidated text), 39/2020, 43/2020 (Article 2 is not included in the consolidated text), 47/2020, 49/2020, 53/2020, 56/2020, 57/2020, 58/2020 and 60/2020.

45 Article 4 of the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency, *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 31/2020, 36/2020 (Article 2 is not included in the consolidated text), 38/2020 (Article 2 is not included in the consolidated text), 39/2020, 43/2020 (Article 2 is not included in the consolidated text), 47/2020, 49/2020, 53/2020, 56/2020, 57/2020, 58/2020 and 60/2020.

46 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 62/2020

47 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 62/2020

48 [http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/akta\\_procedura/2020/530-20%20lat.pdf](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/akta_procedura/2020/530-20%20lat.pdf) ; <https://www.paragraf.rs/dnevne-vesti/280420/280420-vest2.html> <https://www.paragraf.rs/koronavirus/strucni-komentari/pregled-svih-propisa-donetih-pre-i-posle-proglasenja-vanrednog-stanja.html> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

49 The meeting was held on 4 May 2020.

50 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/463470/vlada-saglasna-sa-predlogom-za-ukidanje-vanrednog-stanja> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

51 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/sta-po-ustavu-srbije-podrazumeva-uvodjenje-vanrednog-stanja/> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

*Defence*<sup>52</sup>, while the Decision on Lifting the State of Emergency was adopted “*at the initiative of the Ministry of Defence*”, as stated on the Government’s website.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, the question arises why a proposal for adopting the Decision on Lifting the State of Emergency was submitted to the National Assembly by only two (the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister) of the three constitutionally authorised entities (the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister)<sup>54</sup>, which make this decision, and therefore should jointly present its abolition to the National Assembly. In that respect, this proposal is formally deficient because it is submitted by two of the three entities determined by the Constitution as ones adopting this decision, so they should also propose its abolition.

### 5.1.3. Who decides on the restrictions on human rights during the state of emergency?

During the state of emergency, the National Assembly decides on the restrictions on human rights and measures by the majority votes of the total number of deputies.<sup>55</sup> If it cannot meet, the Government may prescribe these measures by decree, with the President of the Republic as co-signatory.<sup>56</sup> In that case, the Government is obliged to submit the decree for confirmation to the National Assembly within 48 hours of its adoption or when the Assembly is in a position to convene.<sup>57</sup> These measures were not decided by the National Assembly, but by the Government, which on 16 March 2020, with the co-signature of the President of the Republic, adopted the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency, which entered into force immediately upon its publication.<sup>58</sup> This Decree,

its amendments, which are adopted almost every day, and other regulations subject to verification were not submitted to the National Assembly for confirmation within 48 hours of their adoption.

The National Assembly, which in this period of year, according to the explicit constitutional provision<sup>59</sup>, should hold a regular spring session, does not meet. It is excluded from decision-making (but not from the responsibility towards citizens) on a number of issues important to the citizens of Serbia, including restrictions on their freedoms and rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are instruments to encourage the National Assembly to work and remind it of its constitutional duties - the Speaker of the National Assembly did not convene a sitting, although the Constitution obliges her to do so.<sup>60</sup>

After the Government submitted to the National Assembly for confirmation the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and the Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency on 25 April, the Speaker of the National Assembly convened a sitting of the National Assembly on 29 April 2020. Announcing the sitting, she prejudged the decision of the National Assembly and pointed out that these decisions of the Government would be confirmed in the National Assembly.

- The Government did not submit for confirmation the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency or the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency, as it was obliged to do within 48 hours of their adoption if the National Assembly can meet. There were no obstacles for the National Assembly to meet, which is confirmed by the fact that it met 40 days later, although all measures were in force at both times. The Government could encourage

52 The meeting was held on 15 March 2020 before the adoption of the decision declaring the state of emergency. <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/451323/proglaseno-vanredno-stanje-na-teritoriji-citave-srbije.php> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

53 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/463470/vlada-saglasna-sa-predlogom-za-ukidanje-vanrednog-stanja> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

54 Article 200, paragraph 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

55 Article 105, paragraph 2, point 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

56 Article 200, paragraph 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

57 Article 200, paragraph 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

58 *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 31/20, 36/20, 38/20, 39/20, 43/20 and 47/20

59 Article 106, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

60 Article 104, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 19, paragraph 1, point 2 of the Law on the National Assembly

the convening of the National Assembly. It did so only on 25 April 2020, 40 days after the adoption of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency. Then, the Speaker of the National Assembly (who has not addressed the public/citizens over the past two months) convened a sitting of the National Assembly for 28 April 2020.

- Deputies (at least 1/3 of them) who have the right to request the convening of an extraordinary session of the National Assembly could use that right by invoking the general legal standard “he who can do more can do less” also with respect to the request to convene a sitting during the regular session of the National Assembly.
- The attempts to encourage the work of the National Assembly were also the proposals in the Declaration of the WCSO (women’s civil society organisations and women experts on gender equality) adopted after the national consultations on the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic.<sup>61</sup>
- Appeals to the parliaments to exercise their competences even in such circumstances have come on several occasions from the EU officials.

#### 5.1.4. Initiatives for the assessment of the constitutionality and legality of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and the Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency

Several initiatives have been submitted to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Serbia by lawyers and civil society organisations to assess constitutionality. Decrees on Measures during the State of Emergency<sup>62</sup>; Orders on Restriction and Prohibition

of Movement of Persons in the Territory of Serbia<sup>63</sup>, etc. The initiatives challenge:

- The constitutionality of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and states that a pandemic or epidemic of infectious diseases is a natural disaster that endangers health, and not a public danger that threatens the survival of the state or its citizens. Accordingly, the submitters of the initiative believe that the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases, which regulates actions in such situations, should have been applied to this situation.
- Constitutionality and legality of the Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia<sup>64</sup>, because the Government, although responsible for this, did not prescribe specific measures of derogation from human rights, but authorised the Ministry of Interior to do so by its decision and with the approval of the Ministry of Health.<sup>65</sup>
- Constitutionality and legality of measures related to hearing (video link trials - “Skype trials”) of persons suspected for the violation of measures prescribed during the state of emergency which is a violation of the right to a fair trial, which has the status of an absolute right and which is not subject to restrictions even during a war or state of emergency.

There is no information on these initiatives on the website of the Constitutional Court. The latest information on the current activities of the Constitutional Court dates back to 5 March 2020, and after that only two documents of 22 March 2020 can be found on the website: *Instruction on the work of the Office of the Constitutional Court for direct receipt of submissions*

61 The Declaration was adopted on 9 April and forwarded to the Government, the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the National Assembly, and the Coordination Body for Gender Equality.

62 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 29/20

63 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 29/20

64 *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 34/20, 39/20, 40/20 and 46/20

65 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/vladavina-prava/neustavna-naredba-o-zabrani-kretanja/>

during the state of emergency and Notice concerning entry into force of the Decree on deadlines in court proceedings during the state of emergency declared on 15 March 2020. Based on that, it could be concluded that the Constitutional Court does not hold sittings during a state of emergency.

## 5.2. Regulations on the restriction of human rights in the context of international standards and the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

Framework for the analysis of measures: measures should be effective in the fight against the pandemic, but should also correspond to European values and may not endanger democracy, the rule of law and human rights. We consider the implemented measures only on a few examples that serve as an illustration, based on: *the entity that adopted the measure and the act prescribing the measure* (competence for adoption and regulation regulating the measure), *the test of proportionality* (restriction of rights proportional to health threats caused by the virus) and *timeframe of measures*.

### 5.2.1. Regulations on the restriction of human and minority rights prescribed during the state of emergency<sup>66</sup>

Constitution of the RS; Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases<sup>67</sup>; Order on Banning the Gathering of Individuals in Public Places and Indoors in the Republic of Serbia<sup>68</sup>; Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency<sup>69</sup>; Decision on Temporary Restriction of Movement of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants Accommodated in Asylum Centres and Reception Centres in the Republic of Serbia<sup>70</sup>; Decree on Misdemeanour for Violation of the Ministry of Interior's Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia;<sup>71</sup> Order on Organisation and Implementation of Quarantine Measure<sup>72</sup>; Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia<sup>73</sup>; Decision on the Status of Foreigners in the Republic of Serbia,<sup>74</sup> and other regulations, instructions<sup>75</sup>, Government conclusions, etc.

### 5.2.2. General observations on regulations governing measures adopted in the state of emergency

The analysis of the regulations leads to several general observations:

**Regulations are not gender sensitive, measures related to vulnerable groups are rare** (children, people with disability, the elderly - especially those in centres for gerontology<sup>76</sup>, pregnant women, people

66 See more details on the link <https://www.propisi.net/propisi-doneti-povodom-vanrednog-stanja-covid-19/> (accessed every day from 15 March 2020 to 30 April 2020 to have an updated list of regulations)

67 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 15/16

68 Official Gazette of the RS, nos. 30/20, 39/20, 40/20.....

69 Official Gazette of the RS, nos. 31/20, 36/20, 38/20, 39/20, 43/20, 47/20 and 49/20.....

70 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 32/20

71 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 39/20

72 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 33/20

73 Official Gazette of the RS, nos. 34/20, 39/20, 40/20 and 46/20

74 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 41/20

75 For example, the Instruction of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs sent to the directors of social protection institutions on 10 March 2020.

76 See Appendix II

with autism,<sup>77</sup> people with developmental challenges - especially those placed in appropriate institutions, chronically ill people, single parents, refugees, Roma, homeless people, etc.). In these circumstances, a particularly vulnerable group are health workers<sup>78</sup> (medical doctors, nurses, laboratory assistants, carers, cleaners, ambulance drivers, etc.), especially those who work directly with COVID-19 positive people and for whom it is necessary to prescribe additional special protection measures, work schedule that will allow them to rest, measures that will prevent them from introducing the virus into their families, etc. Special measures were gradually introduced for some vulnerable groups (for example, children, pregnant women, people with autism and people with developmental challenges, people with disabilities and other people who need the help of an assistant, etc.), often as suggested by citizens or initiated by the Commissioner for Protection of Equality<sup>79</sup> and the Protector of Citizens.<sup>80</sup> Observing the introduction of measures, it may be noticed that, especially in the first month, more attention, space and time in the media was dedicated to walking pets than, for example, the measures for particularly at-risk population when it comes to COVID-19 (chronic patients and patients suffering from rare diseases, the elderly, people with disabilities, health workers, etc.).

→ **There is a high frequency of changes in regulations** (for example, the Decision on the Declaration of COVID-19 Disease Caused by Infectious Virus SARS-CoV-2 <sup>81</sup>was amended 14 times during March and the first half of April). At the very beginning of the state of emergency, even lawyers had difficulties in following the changes in the regulations. Daily updates and consolidated

*texts were lacking. Citizens often did not have timely and accurate information about their rights and duties (for example, whether curfew starts at 5 p.m. or 3 p.m., whether pensioners can go shopping on Sunday, Saturday or Friday). This shortcoming, which undermined legal certainty, has been partially remedied, at least for those to whom the Internet is available. A list and consolidated texts of regulations can be found on a special site<sup>82</sup>, but the Internet is not available to many citizens (they do not have a computer or the necessary knowledge). At this moment, it is very difficult to follow the content of regulations and the time (moment, day) in which a certain rule was valid, which is important for the protection of human rights and legal security of citizens. Information on the content of current measures has been reported very superficially by the media; often the information was neither accurate nor complete, which introduced additional confusion (for example, the information on who will receive EUR 100).*

An illustrative example is the Decision on the Declaration of COVID-19 Disease Caused by Infectious Virus SARS-CoV-2, which first prescribed the possibility for the competent authorities to temporarily ban or restrict the entry and movement of persons coming from the virus-affected countries specified in the Decision. The amendment (16 March 2020) prescribes different treatment depending on whether a person comes from the country that is an epidemic hotspot or not, and depending on that, the duration of home isolation and surveillance is determined (14 or 28 days). After two days (18 March 2020), the Decision was changed

77 The Commissioner for Protection of Equality initiated the solving of this problem <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/inicijativa-kretanje-osoba-sa-autizmom-cir/> (accessed on 15 April 2020)

78 See Appendix I

79 For example, warning the public about stigmatisation of persons infected with COVID-19; warning about insults to Dr. Darija Kisić Tepavčević; initiative for issuing permissions to personal assistants and carers; recommendation to the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs regarding the movement of persons with autism, etc. <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/> (accessed on 15 April 2020)

80 For example, control of regularity and legality of response of the Ministry of Interior; control of the work of the Center for Gerontology in Niš and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs; appeal to local self-governments to issue permissions for movement faster; call on all authorities to respect the rights of the child, etc. <https://www.ombudsman.rs/> (accessed on 5 April 2020)

81 *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 23/20, 24/20, 27/20, 28/20, 30/20, 32/20, 35/20, 37/20, 38/20, 39/20, 43/20, 45/20, 48/20 and 49/20

82 <https://www.propisi.net/propisi-doneti-povodom-vanrednog-stanja-covid-19/>

and for the first time a mandatory measure of placing under medical surveillance for the period of 14 days (isolation at home) was prescribed. The very next day (19 March 2020), the Decision was changed again, and the measure of isolation at home was replaced by quarantine and the institution to which those persons would be sent was determined. According to the amendment to the Decision (28 March 2020), infected persons were sent to isolation in the facilities intended for that purpose, while the persons who were in self-isolation had to stay in isolation for additional 14 days upon expiration of the originally prescribed period. Then, the Decision is changed again (31 March 2020). The measure of quarantine in special facilities was again replaced by the measure of home isolation, while the persons who entered Serbia and had COVID-19 symptoms were immediately sent to an appropriate healthcare institution. Then, the new amendment to the Decision (1 April 2020) regulated the discharge of cured persons and their obligation to stay isolated for 14 days, as well as the possibility for a person who was in self-isolation due to contact with an infected person, but needed to leave Serbia before the expiration of the measure, to be allowed to leave Serbia, based on the sanitary inspector's decision on suspending the execution of the measure, if that person has not developed any symptoms of the disease by the day of submitting the request for suspension of the measure.<sup>83</sup> This caused confusion among citizens.

→ **Legal gaps**<sup>84</sup> that became apparent in practice immediately after the adoption of the measures and which needed to be addressed quickly (for example, child care when a single parent is infected; caring for people in need of care when a carer or personal assistant is infected or unable to move because of "curfew" (the purpose of using

this militaristic term is unknown, except perhaps to cause fear among citizens because it was actually the restricted freedom of movement); reduction of salaries of the health workers infected with the virus and placed in appropriate institutions, because they were treated as being on a sick leave<sup>85</sup>; pharmacies did not work at the time when people over the age of 65 were allowed to go out and therefore they could not buy medicines, etc.)

→ **Haste in decision making**<sup>86</sup> (for example, prescribing by the Government Conclusion, at the proposal of the General Secretariat of the Government that only the Crisis Response Team was allowed to provide information on the state of emergency, and revoking this measure, by the Government Conclusion<sup>87</sup> on its termination, also at the proposal of the General Secretariat of the Government; similarly, press conferences were held without the presence of journalists, and questions were asked by e-mail, although it was possible to use a video link - this was also cancelled after a few days).

→ **Regulation of issues by inappropriate acts**<sup>88</sup> (for example, the Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice on the basis of which the first "Skype" trial was held and the Conclusion of the High Judicial Council; it was subsequently regulated by the Decree on the Mode of Participation of the Accused in the Main Trial during the State of Emergency, although this restricts one of the rights related to the right to a fair trial, which has the status of absolute right and is not subject to restrictions even in times of war, which means that it cannot be restricted by a Government decree.)

83 Source: *Ljudska prava i COVID-19 - analiza izmene pravnog okvira tokom vanrednog stanja i uticaj na uživanje ljudskih prava* Yucom, Beograd. <http://www.yucom.org.rs/ljudska-prava-i-covid-19/> (accessed on 29 April 2020)

84 Its Conclusion 5 no. 53-3008/20-2 of 3 April 2020 the Government recommended employers to pay full salaries in all cases where employees were absent from work due to the coronavirus infection and placed in an appropriate institution.

85 The Commissioner for Protection of Equality initiated the solving of this problem <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/> (accessed on 29 April 2020)

86 Government Conclusion (05 no. 53-3010/20) 3 April 2020, *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 50/2020

87 Government Conclusion (05 no. 53-2928/20) of 31 March 2020, *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 48/20

88 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 49/20

→ **Subsequent regulation** (for example, the Decree on the Mode of Participation of the Accused in the Main Trial during the State of Emergency was adopted on 1 April 2020, after a series of “Skype” trials had already been held).

→ **Unequal treatment of citizens in applying measures and imposing sanctions for the violations of measures** - different treatment in the same or similar situation - indirect discrimination. For example, some citizens received written self-isolation orders, others received verbal orders or no orders; unequal treatment in imposing sanctions for the violation of movement ban (for example, a singer and a football player caught socialising in a hotel at the time of the movement ban were symbolically punished by isolation at home and a settlement; a farmer returning from the field in his tractor and violating the movement ban, which until that day was after 5 p.m. and on that day after 1 p.m., was fined the amount of 50,000 dinars); inconsistent application of measures and lack of more complete surveillance and control over their implementation (for example, all primary care physicians had a duty to call their patients within a certain period, especially chronic patients; some did it, others did not; out of a total of 256 patients in the Centre for Gerontology in Niš, 140 patients and 4 health workers tested positive for COVID-19, because the measures were not complied with, there were visits, going out of the centre and even indications that the symptoms of the disease were concealed, the director of the centre was arrested and charged with a serious crime against human health<sup>89</sup>, etc.).

**Provision of information at the local level is uneven, and in smaller local self-governments and especially**

**in villages citizens are not informed** about the situation in the local community, measures taken by public authorities and especially local self-governments within their competencies. There are very few local media and this is now being felt, while the Internet is available and used by a small number of people.

→ **Strategic documents**<sup>90</sup> (strategies and action plans) on protection of the population from infectious diseases **do not exist or were adopted several years ago** (for example, the National Strategy of Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations was adopted in 2011<sup>91</sup>, the Health Care Plan in 2012, etc.)

## 5.3. Human rights during the state of emergency - status and restrictions

### 5.3.1. General provisions on the restrictions of human rights - Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia allows the restrictions of human rights both in regular circumstances<sup>92</sup> and in the circumstances of emergencies<sup>93</sup> in accordance with the international standards on the restrictions of human rights.<sup>94</sup> The conditions under which the restrictions of human rights are allowed in regular circumstances are prescribed by the Constitution. Human rights may be restricted: 1) if the Constitution permits such restriction; 2) if the purpose is allowed by the Constitution; 3) to the extent necessary to meet the constitutional purpose of restriction in a democratic society and 4) without

89 Source: information announced at the press conference on 13 April 2020 at 3 p.m.

90 [http://www.podaci.net/\\_gSRB/propis/Plan\\_zdravstvene\\_zastite/P-zozor03v1215.html](http://www.podaci.net/_gSRB/propis/Plan_zdravstvene_zastite/P-zozor03v1215.html) (accessed on 5 May 2020)

91 <http://mup.gov.rs/wps/portal/sr/dokumenti/Strategije/!ut/p/z1/04> (accessed on 5 May 2020)

92 Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

93 Article 202 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

94 Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights

encroaching upon the substance of the relevant guaranteed right. The Constitution also prescribes the obligation of all state bodies, particularly the courts, when restricting human rights, to consider the following: 1) the substance of the restricted right; 2) pertinence of restriction; 3) nature and extent of restriction; 4) relation of restriction and its purpose; 5) possibility to achieve the purpose of the restriction with less restrictive means (test of proportionality).

The freedom of movement<sup>95</sup> and the freedom of assembly may be restricted while respecting these general constitutional provisions on the restriction of human rights, with the aim of protecting public health and preventing the spread of infectious diseases.<sup>96</sup> The situation of restrictions on human rights is much more delicate because their content and scope depend on whether the circumstances of emergency, the state of emergency or the state of war has been declared. In these circumstances, it is important to point out the difference between the restrictions of absolute human rights that cannot be derogated from during the state of emergency or war and the restrictions of all other rights where such derogation is allowed.

### 5.3.2. Absolute rights

The absolute rights, which are not subject to restrictions even during the state of war according to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia<sup>97</sup> are: dignity and free development of individuals<sup>98</sup>, right to life<sup>99</sup>, inviolability of physical and mental integrity<sup>100</sup>, prohibition of slavery, servitude and forced labour<sup>101</sup>, with the exception that “labour or service of military persons, or labour or services during war or state of emergency in accordance with measures prescribed on the declaration of war or state of emergency shall not be considered forced labour”<sup>102</sup>, treatment of persons deprived of liberty<sup>103</sup>, right to a fair trial<sup>104</sup>, legal certainty in criminal law<sup>105</sup>, right to legal person<sup>106</sup>, right to citizenship<sup>107</sup>, freedom of thought, conscience and religion<sup>108</sup>, churches and religious communities<sup>109</sup>, conscientious objection<sup>110</sup>, freedom of expressing national affiliation<sup>111</sup>, prohibition of inciting racial, ethnic and religious hatred<sup>112</sup>, right to enter into marriage and equality of spouses<sup>113</sup>, freedom to procreate,<sup>114</sup> rights of the child<sup>115</sup>, prohibition of forced assimilation.<sup>116</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia follows the standards defined in international documents, but the set of absolute rights is wider than the set of absolute rights in international documents.<sup>117</sup>

95 Article 39, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

96 Article 54, paragraph 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

97 Article 202, paragraph 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

98 Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

99 Article 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

100 Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

101 Article 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

102 Article 26, paragraph 4 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

103 Article 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

104 Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

105 Article 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

106 Article 37 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

107 Article 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

108 Article 43 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

109 Article 44 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

110 Article 45 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

111 Article 47 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

112 Article 49 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

113 Article 62 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

114 Article 63 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

115 Article 64 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

116 Article 78 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

117 Compare Article 202 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Protocols 6, 7 and 13 and Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

### 5.3.3. Measures for the restriction of human rights in the state of emergency - were the rights violated?

Here are some illustrative examples:

**Violation of the right to dignity of the person**<sup>118</sup> - This absolute right was violated more than once in public addresses, especially by government representatives, with abusive words (hypocrites, selfish, etc.) and threats and intimidation by stating that there would be no enough places for the dead in the cemeteries if the prescribed measures were not complied with.

**Violation of mental integrity**<sup>119</sup> - This absolute right was violated by degrading treatment of citizens, especially persons over 65 years of age (for example, the measure of allowing elderly people to go shopping once a week from 3 to 7 a.m., that is, in the middle of the night, interrupting their sleep, causing fear in them, and making them feel insecure and humiliated) as well as public addressing of public authorities on several occasions in an elevated and threatening tone of voice, derogatory words and insults (hypocrites, selfish), threats and intimidation (for example, stating that there would be no enough places for the dead in the cemeteries if the prescribed measures were not complied with, the armed soldiers patrolling in twos along Knez Mihajlova Street, although there is no hospital or healthcare institution in that street, and one of the most frequently given reasons for engaging the army was that they would guard hospitals and health workers).

**Violation of the right to a fair trial**<sup>120</sup> as an absolute right. The “Skype” trials organised on the basis of the Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice<sup>121</sup> and

the Conclusion of the High Judicial Council<sup>122</sup> for the criminal offences Failure to Act Pursuant to Health Regulations During Epidemic<sup>123</sup> and Transmitting Contagious Disease<sup>124</sup> (Article 249 of the Criminal Code) are contrary to the principle of immediacy and publicity of court proceedings.<sup>125</sup>

**Discrimination**<sup>126</sup> - The discriminatory nature of some measures that restrict human rights, which is contrary to the explicit constitutional provision that measures adopted during a state of emergency must not be discriminatory.<sup>127</sup> This particularly refers to different treatment in the same or similar situation (for example, unequal treatment of citizens returning to Serbia in relation to the measure of isolation - some received a written decision, others received a verbal notification or no notification at all; believers younger than 65 could participate in religious rites before Easter and act “according to their conscience”, while those older than 65 could not do so because their freedom of movement was limited). Unequal treatment of citizens who did not adhere to the prescribed measures (they were punished, but there are also differences in the manner of punishing different individuals), on the one hand, and religious communities whose individual dignitaries openly opposed the prescribed measures, on the other hand. About ten days before the Easter holidays, “a sort of negotiations” were held between the church and public authorities on complying with the measures of distancing and banning movement, although the Constitution prescribes that “Serbia is a secular state” and “churches and religious communities shall be separated from the state” (Article 11). In addition to guaranteeing the freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 43) and the status of churches and religious communities (Article 44) as absolute rights, the

118 Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

119 Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

120 Article 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, but also the rights referred to in Article 33 in accordance with the position of the European Court of Human Rights.

121 Recommendation no. 112 – 01 – 557/2020 – 05 of 17 March 2020

122 Conclusion no. 119 – 5 – 132/2020 – 05 of 18 March 2020

123 Article 248 of the Criminal Code

124 Article 249 of the Criminal Code

125 <https://www.cepris.org/licni-stavovi/ilic-virus-neznanja-nikad-ne-spava/> (accessed on 5 April 2020)

126 Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

127 Article 202, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia

Constitution also explicitly stipulates that “freedom of manifesting religion or belief may be restricted ... if it is necessary to protect lives and health of people” (Article 43, paragraph 4) and that “the Constitutional Court may ban a religious community... if its activities infringe the right to life, right to mental and physical health (Article 44, paragraph 3).

#### **Restriction of freedom of movement and violation of other rights of persons over 65 years of age**

Freedom of movement was suspended for these persons for a continuous period of 6 days (144 hours) and on the seventh day for another 20 hours (a total of 164 hours per week), under threat of a sanction. This measure lasted longer than a month from 18 March to 21 April (a total of 35 days). The test of proportionality was not applied (would the measures have an effect even with a lesser degree of the restriction of rights?) For example, people over the age of 65 could have been allowed to walk and shop during the curfew for one hour, and to get medicine (this was mainly impossible because the pharmacies did not work at night), instead of going out, only for shopping, during the night when it is unsafe (many elderly people are afraid and do not leave their homes at that time). The content of these measures (necessary measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus) and the manner in which they are regulated restrict the human rights of a large number of elderly people (more than 1,700,000 pensioners) and are not in accordance with the Constitution (Article 20).

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Finally, there are a few **positive examples**. There are certainly many more.

Positive examples include: gender statistics used in reporting on COVID-19 deaths at press conferences; use of sign language on several TV channels, not only in informative shows but also in shows related to COVID-19; engaged and responsible attitude of medical doctors who treat patients suffering from rare diseases

and who called their patients immediately after the outbreak of the epidemic and informed them about the further course of treatment with the recommendation not to go to work (example of the Clinical Centre of Vojvodina); reactions of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality and the Protector of Citizens; employment of 2,500 young doctors; a video game prepared for Easter by students of the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Novi Sad<sup>128</sup> in order to organise a “virtual” egg painting competition and thus facilitate the traditional egg breaking manifestation (“tucijada”) to be held in Mokrin in the virtual space.

128 Information announced at the press conference of the Crisis Response Team on 13 April 2020 April 2020

## 5.4. Conclusions - Legality and legitimacy of COVID-19 response measures

- Regulations are not gender sensitive, measures related to vulnerable groups are rare, and even when such measures were adopted, it happened subsequently at the initiative of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality or civil society organisations.
- The frequency of regulatory changes is high, which compromises legal certainty. Citizens are confused and do not have the necessary information about their rights and restrictions on rights.
- There were numerous legal gaps in the regulations that became evident in practice immediately after their adoption. It is indicative that these gaps often referred to vulnerable categories of citizens whose needs were not taken into account by decision-makers in the process of adopting the measures, due to which the regulations were subsequently supplemented and people were often forced to manage as they could in such situations.
- Several decisions and measures were hasty, including those referring to the restriction of human rights, and therefore were repealed after only a day or two.
- On several occasions, restrictions on human rights were not regulated by a relevant regulation, and the legislators acted beyond their powers prescribed by the Constitution and law.
- Restrictions on human rights (for example, the right to a fair trial), including absolute rights that cannot be limited during a state of emergency or war, were regulated by adopting regulations subsequently (retroactively), after the application of certain measures in practice.
- In applying measures and imposing sanctions for their violations, unequal treatment of citizens and discrimination based on some of their personal characteristics are noticeable.
- Dissemination of information on the measures applied on the local level and adopted by local authorities is uneven, especially in smaller local self-governments and villages. Moreover, referring to the information on various websites is not enough for many citizens, especially for the elderly, because the Internet is not available to them, they do not have a computer, they do not know how to use it, etc.
- Strategic documents (strategies and action plans) on the protection of the population against infectious diseases either do not exist or have been adopted several years ago.

## 5.5. Recommendations - Legality and legitimacy of COVID-19 response measures

- After the end of the state of emergency, consider the gender aspects of human rights restriction measures, in particular: whether the measures covered vulnerable groups; whether human rights restrictions were within the limits allowed by international standards and the Serbian Constitution; whether the objective sought to be achieved by the measure could have been achieved with less restriction of rights (test of proportionality); whether the measures were in line with the prohibition of discrimination; whether equal treatment of all citizens was ensured in the implementation of measures; whether citizens had complete and timely information on the measures related to their daily life, especially whether they were informed about the measures taken by local self-governments within their competences; whether oversight and control of the implementation of human rights restriction measures were performed; whether there were violations of human rights (which rights were violated, in what way, who were the holders of those rights, who violated the rights by an act or action), etc.
- Supplement the regulations and eliminate the legal gaps that were evident in practice during the pandemic and the state of emergency.
- Adopt strategic and planning documents about the protection of population against infectious diseases.
- Initiate (through an initiative or proposal) before the Constitutional Court a procedure of assessing the constitutionality of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency, the Decision of the National Assembly on the Confirmation of the Decision on Declaring the State of Emergency and the Decision on Lifting the State of Emergency.
- Initiate (through an initiative or proposal) before the Constitutional Court a procedure of assessing the constitutionality of the Government Decrees adopted during the state of emergency, especially the decrees restricting human rights, as well as the constitutionality of the Law on Confirmation of Government Decrees Adopted During the State of Emergency.
- In special reports of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality and the Protector of Citizens, immediately after the end of the state of emergency, process and publish data on the number of citizen complaints, which human rights they related to, who violated their rights, whether the competent institutions responded.
- Monitor the actions of the Constitutional Court regarding initiatives for the assessment of the constitutionality and legality of the regulations adopted during the state of emergency, as well as constitutional complaints filed because of human rights violations.
- Monitor regularly reports, responses, research, publications, initiatives of both civil society and individuals related to the human rights regime during the state of emergency, especially human rights violations.

## 6. DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

This section includes an overview of measures in the field of information adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia during the state of emergency and the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic. The results of content analyses and media monitoring are not yet available, but media coverage will certainly be the subject of various surveys in the coming period.

In emergencies or epidemics, the media are especially important because of information on health protection and the application of measures for the protection of the health of population, but also because of the right of citizens to information. The role of the media is to inform citizens on issues of public interest, which is defined by Article 15 of the Law on Public Information and Media<sup>129</sup> as:

### What is informing?

- 1) True, impartial, timely and complete informing of all citizens of the Republic of Serbia;
- 2) True, impartial, timely and complete informing of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia who belong to national minorities in their mother tongue;
- 3) Informing the members of the Serbian people living outside the territory of the Republic of Serbia in the Serbian language;
- 4) Preservation of the cultural identity of the Serbian people and national minorities living in the territory of the Republic of Serbia;
- 5) Informing the foreign public in foreign languages when it is of interest to the Republic of Serbia;
- 6) Informing persons with disabilities and other minority groups;
- 7) Supporting the production of media content in order to protect and develop human rights and democracy, promote the rule of law and social state, free development of personality and protection of children and youth, development of cultural and artistic creativity, education, including media literacy as part of the education system, development of science, development of sports and physical education and protection of the environment and human health;
- 8) Promoting media and journalistic professionalism. In most countries, including Serbia, the media code of ethics includes the protection of the health, safety and life of the population as one of the most important public interests.

Article 17 of the Law on the Protection of Population against Infectious Diseases<sup>130</sup> defines informing health workers and the population as one of the special measures for the protection of the population. Article 49 defines this measure more thoroughly:

<sup>129</sup> *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 83/2014, 58/2015 and 12/2016

<sup>130</sup> *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 15/2016 and 8/2020) [https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon\\_o\\_zastiti\\_stanovnistva\\_od\\_zaraznih\\_bolesti.html](https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_zastiti_stanovnistva_od_zaraznih_bolesti.html)

“Public health institutes are obliged to inform health workers and the population about the reasons and manner of implementation of special measures for suppression and prevention of infectious diseases, especially in cases where cooperation of health workers and the population is necessary for the implementation of special measures for suppression and prevention of infectious diseases.

Health workers or legal entities that perform health care activities may inform other health workers and the population only about the measures that they implement.

At the proposal of the Public Health Institute established for the territory of the Republic of Serbia, in the cases referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article, the minister shall inform health workers and the population about the implementation of special measures for suppression and prevention of infectious diseases.”

Article 51 defines the implementation of measures in a situation of emergency, which includes the occurrence of an insufficiently known infectious disease or the possibility of mass transmission, and provides for activating the system of communication in a state of emergency.

In addition to these basic roles of the media, concerning the protection of the right to information about the issues of public interest, communication aimed at preserving the health and life of the population, the media have an indisputable influence on attitudes, behaviour and emotions. First of all, they tell us what we should think about, and then in what way we should think about it. That is precisely why media standards (guides, codes of journalists, reporting guidelines) and rules of good media practice include the ones related to the protection of the rights of minority and vulnerable groups, the prevention of stereotypical reporting and the conveyance of offensive and discriminatory content.

Accordingly, the measures and activities undertaken by the Republic of Serbia in the field of information are viewed from three aspects:

- Protection of the right to information of the population, including minority and vulnerable groups;
- Protection of media freedom and the welfare of journalists;
- Prevalence of stereotypes and prejudices against women and other minority groups.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN), in collaboration with other UN agencies and the Risk Communication and Community Engagement Working Group, has created a specialised guide for the inclusion of marginalised groups.<sup>131</sup> The vulnerable and marginalised groups are defined as those that: depend heavily on the informal economy; occupy epidemic hotspot areas; have inadequate access to social services or political influence; have limited capacities and opportunities to cope and adapt and; have limited or no access to technologies. Specific measures are recommended for children, people with disabilities, women and girls, pregnant women, people living with HIV, gender-based violence survivors, refugees and migrants, the elderly, people living in existing humanitarian emergencies, people with pre-existing medical conditions, sexual and gender minorities, ethnic and gender minorities.

#### **Recommendations related to the engagement of women and girls are:**

- Ensure that community engagement teams are gender-balanced and promote women’s leadership within these.
- Provide specific advice to people - usually women - who care for children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups in quarantine, and who may not be able to avoid close contact.

<sup>131</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/COVID-19\\_CommunityEngagement\\_130320.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/COVID-19_CommunityEngagement_130320.pdf)

→ Design online and in-person surveys and other engagement activities so that women in unpaid care work can participate. Take into account provisions for childcare, transport, and safety for any in-person community engagement activities.

→ Ensure that frontline medical personnel are gender-balanced and health facilities are culturally and gender sensitive.

#### **Recommendations related to pregnant women are:**

→ Develop educational materials for pregnant women on basic hygiene practices, infection precautions, and how and where to seek care based on their questions and concerns.

→ Translate these materials into local languages and adapt to local contexts.

#### **Key recommendations related to communication are:**

→ Implement national risk-communication and community engagement plan for COVID-19, including details of envisaged public health measures.

→ Use the existing procedures for pandemic influenza if available and appropriate. Conduct rapid assessments to understand target audience, perceptions, concerns, trusted information sources, language preferences, influencers and preferred communication channels.

→ Prepare local messages based on community questions and concerns and pre-test them through a participatory process, specifically targeting key stakeholders and at-risk groups.

→ Identify trusted community groups (local influencers such as community leaders, religious leaders, health workers, community volunteers) and local networks (such as women's groups,

youth groups, business groups, and traditional healers).

→ Ensure that risk communication and community engagement plans include gender analysis and data disaggregated by sex, age, pregnancy and disability, where available.

→ Establish privacy and protection guidelines for assessments and health documentation.

→ Map existing community groups to be engaged in the Risk Communication and Community Engagement, including women's groups and disability network.

→ Disaggregate all data collected by sex, age and disability.

→ Disseminate information tailored to different needs based on community data: visual, hearing, intellectual and physical impairment.

→ Establish targeted forums to communicate with vulnerable groups. Consider factors such as their literacy and technology requirements.

→ Ensure that radio shows and communication materials do not reinforce gender or other stereotypes. For example, do not only depict women in childcare or domestic work contexts.

Dissemination of information during the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic was marked by a global “infodemic” that ran in parallel with the pandemic. From 31 December 2019, when the World Health Organization announced the cases of pneumonia of unknown cause, until 12 January 2020, when the new virus began to be written and talked about globally, and until 13 February 2020, 9,387 media articles were published in English, of which 1,066 mentioned the word “fear”.<sup>132</sup> In order to reduce the fear among the population, as explained subsequently, the leadership of the Republic of Serbia at the press conference on 26 February 2020, at the time when Italy

132 <https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/02/feeling-panicked-about-coronavirus-media-coverage-of-new-epidemics-often-stokes-unnecessary-fear/>

had already recorded the first death (22 February 2020) and 17 confirmed cases, tried to belittle the risk of the epidemic and the consequences of virus infection. Pulmonologist Branislav Nestrović stated at that press conference:

“I really appeal to people to stop watching television, news ... Really, don't believe unverified information. The epidemic in China is coming to an end, it started on 7 December. It is already known that the virulence of the virus has been decreasing. So the virus is getting weaker and weaker. It is usually weak. **For example women, let me say about women. So definitely estrogens protect women. Women have very mild forms, practically do not die from this new virus. Therefore, as far as women are concerned you are free to go shopping in Italy. I hear that they will have big discounts, since not a single person will come to Italy. So prepare your husbands a little, you know it well, mentally.** I'm kidding, but I really think, this story was funny to me. It's the third variation of this virus, SARS, MERS and this is the weakest of the three<sup>133</sup>.”

Measures to ban gatherings were soon introduced, followed by the state of emergency. Citizens were informed through the media/press conferences that were held daily<sup>134</sup> and virus information centre were

established<sup>135</sup>. The Public Health Institute announced twice a day the number of tested and diseased citizens, while the number of deaths resulting from the consequences of the virus was announced once a day.

Numerous platforms and overviews of the number of diseased and deaths globally have been developed.<sup>136</sup> The World Health Organization published on its website every day the number of infected, recovered and deceased on a global level<sup>137</sup>, but also the responses to the most common misconceptions about the virus<sup>138</sup>, such as the preventive effect of injecting bleach or disinfectants in the body.

The “read to me” option for the visually impaired is available on all websites of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and sign language interpretation for people with hearing impairments was used at press conferences. On the official website of the Ministry of Health dedicated to COVID-19 - <https://covid19.rs/>, neither this option nor information in the languages of national minorities or Latin script is available.

**Data on the number of infected persons and deaths are not disaggregated by sex.**



133 <https://youtu.be/w5wGaF5n5aQ> (video of the statement, viewed on 9 May 2020)

134 Audio recordings of press conferences from the Conference Hall of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, for the period 12-24 March 2020 and for 6 and 12 May 2020, are available on the website of the Republic of Serbia.

135 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/454242/novi-kontakt-centri-i-platfome-za-informisanje.php>

136 <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/03/30/822491838/coronavirus-world-map-tracking-the-spread-of-the-outbreak?t=1589454554646>

137 <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

138 <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

On 28 March, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Conclusion on informing during the new coronavirus pandemic, centralising public information and threatening with sanctions applicable in the state of emergency any “unauthorised person” who published information related to the treatment of this disease. The Government Conclusion stated that the COVID-19 Crisis Response Team, headed by the Prime Minister, was exclusively in charge of informing the public about the situation and consequences of the infection. All information to the public was to be given by the Prime Minister or a person authorised by the Crisis Response Team.

According to the Government’s decision, mayors, presidents of municipalities and local crisis response teams are in charge of “directing” all information

regarding the situation and consequences of the infectious disease COVID-19 in their territories “exclusively” to the Crisis Response Team.

“All medical information concerning the measures implemented by health care institutions, health workers or legal entities that perform health activities” is also “directed” to the Crisis Response Team through the Public Health Institute. The same Decree passed by the Government Conclusion was repealed on 2 April 2020.

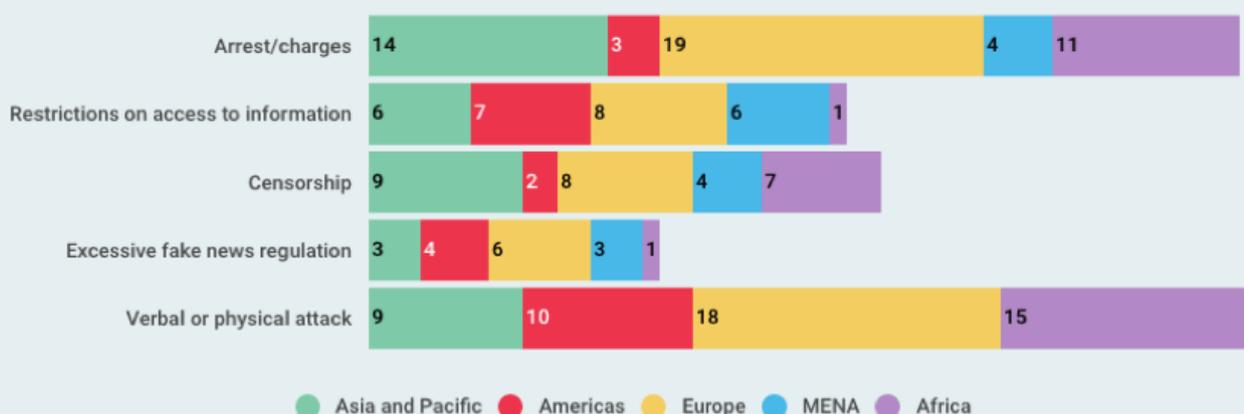
The repeal of the Decree was preceded by criticism from lawyers, the First Commissioner for Information of Public Importance Rodoljub Šabić, reactions from international organisations and journalist associations, but also the arrest of *Nova.rs* journalist Ana Lalić.<sup>139</sup>

From 11 to 21 April, press conferences were held without the presence of journalists, who could submit their questions in advance. The European Federation of Journalists announced that this measure was a bad media practice.

The International Press Institute<sup>140</sup> monitored media freedoms violations on a global scale, including arrests, restrictions on access to information, censorship,

excessive fake news regulation, verbal or physical attacks on journalists.

### COVID-19: Number of Media Freedom Violations by Region



139 <http://ba.n1info.com/Regija/a421680/Ana-Lalic-novinarka-portala-Nova.rs-privedena-i-pritvorena-zbog-pisanja.html>

140 <https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

The International Federation of Journalists sent to the Association of Journalists of Serbia the guidelines for reporting during the epidemic. These guidelines, intended primarily to protect the health and safety of media workers, include: health at workplace - in newsrooms, travel arrangements, safe reporting in COVID-19 affected areas and joint support for freelance journalists whose income will be affected by the epidemic<sup>141</sup>.

The International Federation of Journalists announced the research findings according to which female journalists suffer more stress and anxiety due to the pandemic than their male colleagues.

“While three-quarters of all journalists have faced restrictions in reporting on COVID-19, the IFJ global survey results on the impact of COVID on press freedom show that women tend to be generally equally or less impacted by the pandemic. The Federation particularly emphasizes the impact of quarantine safeguards on journalists’ private lives and the stress amplified by a combination of journalistic duties and concerns that often burden women.

- 35% of women and men have shifted their focus to covering COVID-19 related stories
- Only a quarter of women as opposed to almost half of men have claimed a loss of revenue.
- 7,4% of women against 6,5% of men have lost their jobs
- Women suffer less than men from lack of equipment at home and in the field.
- 19% of women against 27,5% men have claimed difficulties in finding independent sources
- Almost 10% of both women and men pointed at increased inequalities at work.

- However, the survey shows that 2/3 of women as opposed to half of men have experienced increased anxiety and stress.<sup>142</sup>

Women make up the majority of media employees, but they are still less represented in editorial positions. Attacks on female journalists are more common than attacks on male journalists, and women in this profession are exposed to sexist, misogynistic and gender stereotypical attacks<sup>143</sup>.

In the official informative videos of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, women and men are shown stereotypically.

In the video “If you love me, go away from me” - about the need of social distancing from the mother, wife, grandfather and grandmother, from the perspective of a man, and in the video “Self-isolation”<sup>144</sup> that contains instructions on self-isolation and shows a young man in self-isolation lying, talking on the phone, working on the computer or walking around the apartment, while information on home hygiene, cooking, garbage disposal, shows a female person.

The Association of Journalists, the Association of Female Journalists Against Violence, the media and the general public, reacted sharply and demanded from the B92 television journalist to apologise to Dr. Darija Kisić Tapavčević.<sup>145</sup> Host Oliver Jakšić asked the Deputy Director of the Public Health Institute of Serbia *Milan Jovanović Batut* to comment on the decision that “a lady goes to Niš with Minister (Branislav) Nedimovic” when the situation during the coronavirus pandemic in that city was the most difficult, which is most similar to the state of war or the “frontline”.<sup>146</sup> No one from this television issued any official statement on that occasion.

141 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/smernice-ifj-a-za-bezbedno-izvestavanje-u-vreme-korona-virusa/>

142 <http://www.rtcg.me/koronavirus/svijet/278785/novinarke-trpe-veci-stres-zbog-pandemije-od-svojih-kolega.html>

143 One of the recent examples is the attack of Dragan J. Vučićević on the journalist and editor Žaklina Tatalović, which is why the Commissioner for Protection of Equality and the President of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality spoke out: <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/napad-informera-na-novinarku-n1/5392454.html> or death threat against journalist Jovana Gligorijević: <https://www.dijalog.net/drzavni-organi-hitno-da-reaguju-povodom-pretnji-upucenih-novinarki-vremena-jovani-gligorijevic/>

144 <https://youtu.be/Ha-wpJo0Sao>

145 <https://www.dijalog.net/grupa-novinarke-protiv-nasilja-prema-zenama-tv-b-92-i-oliver-jaksic-duzni-izvinjenje-svim-zenama/>

146 <https://youtu.be/iZrJahhBmal> - appearance of Darija Kisić Tepavčević on B92 television.

## 6.1. Conclusions and Recommendations - Dissemination of Information

- Some of the information was available for people with visual or hearing impairments, but not in the languages of national minorities.
- Information was difficult to access for families and households without TV sets and technical equipment, as well as for people with a low level of digital literacy.
- The Government Conclusion and the press conferences held without the presence of journalists called into question the freedom of the media and the right to access information.
- Neither national and local communication plans nor epidemic response plans that would include the engagement and information of various population groups have been developed.
- Data on the number of infected, deceased, hospitalised individuals were not systematically processed and disaggregated by sex.
- Information, protective equipment, activity plans, which would include unhindered dissemination of information, along with the protection of the health and safety of journalists, have not been officially provided/adopted.
- Representatives of institutions did not officially respond to the cases of misogynistic and stereotypical reporting and statements.
- The preparation of audio-visual materials did not take into account the avoidance of gender stereotypes, while adapted materials for different groups were not available.

## 7. SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND PARTNERSHIP WITH CSOs

The period of the state of emergency was marked with advocating the spirit of unity and intergenerational and general social solidarity, which, as an idea, was promoted at all levels. However, the two key principles on which an effective response to health risks and good crisis management depend - the principle of equality and protection of human rights and the principle of participation and solidarity - were not applied.<sup>147</sup> The application of the principle of equality and protection of human rights should ensure gender-responsive crisis management, protection of human rights and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups, especially the poor, the elderly, children, persons with disabilities, refugees and displaced persons and other marginalised and deprived groups. The meaning of the principle of participation and solidarity is reflected in the participation of citizens in designing the content and implementing the activities of risk reduction and expressing their needs for assistance, which must be accessible to all under equal conditions.

During the state of emergency, the provision of assistance to the most vulnerable categories of the population shows that it is provided on two parallel tracks that have very few points of contact. One track is assistance and support organised by public authorities at the national, provincial and local levels, and the other track is assistance and support provided within the civil sector (engagement of CSOs, informal groups and individuals).

In this section, we point out the key challenges in communicating the risks and the way of identifying the needs of the most vulnerable populations during the state of emergency.

Assistance and support organised by public authorities is financed from the state budget, as well as with donations of private (domestic and foreign) companies, well-known individuals<sup>148</sup> and international organisations. Numerous private companies have donated funds and goods from their production facilities<sup>149</sup>, some in direct agreement with the authorities, and some within the initiatives of international organisations, such as UNICEF, which organised fundraising on several occasions.<sup>150</sup> The largest part of the funds was used for the procurement of medical and protection equipment for employees in health care institutions, public authorities and public services, and a smaller part of the funds was used for direct assistance and support to the most vulnerable categories of the population.

Although an adequate response to the crisis implies consideration of risks and needs of deprived and marginalised groups, practice shows that risk-related communication was non-inclusive, which had a negative impact on the planning and implementation of protection and support measures for the most vulnerable social groups.

147 Articles 7 and 8 of the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 87/2018)

148 See: <http://sportklub.rs/Tenis/ATP/a327864-Djokovic-donira-milion-evra-za-respiratore-u-Srbiji.html>, [https://www.b92.net/sport/fudbal/vesti.php?yyyy=2020&mm=03&dd=28&nav\\_id=1670566](https://www.b92.net/sport/fudbal/vesti.php?yyyy=2020&mm=03&dd=28&nav_id=1670566) (4/5/2020)

149 See: <https://lat.rtrs.tv/vijesti/vijest.php?id=381882>; [https://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/vojvodina/backa/nove-donacije-privrede-za-borbu-protiv-korona-virusa\\_1114011.html](https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/vojvodina/backa/nove-donacije-privrede-za-borbu-protiv-korona-virusa_1114011.html); [https://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/vojvodina/backa/sombole-donirao-pet-miliona-dinara-za-kupovinu-respiratora\\_1111180.html](https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/vojvodina/backa/sombole-donirao-pet-miliona-dinara-za-kupovinu-respiratora_1111180.html) (5/5/2020)

150 <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/korona-virus-covid-19> (4/5/2020)

### Existing resources of CSOs are not sufficiently used

The great knowledge and resources of CSOs have not been used, although they have extensive experience in working with vulnerable groups and are well acquainted with the situation in the field. Instead of being recognised as partners in the complex process of developing adequate responses to the crisis, they were largely ignored. In the process of creating measures of protection and support to the population, there was no any type of consultation with CSOs dealing with the improvement of the position of certain vulnerable groups, such as women's organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities, Roma organisations, organisations dealing with the elderly, children and others. They were not present at the sessions of gender-blind and gender-unbalanced crisis response teams, where issues of importance for health protection and provision of support to the vulnerable population were discussed. The opportunity to engage Local Coordinators for Roma Issues, who work in 76 municipalities in Serbia and <sup>151</sup>who are well aware of the challenges encountered by the Roma community and can contribute to creating effective measures to reduce risks and meet the needs of the Roma community, was not used. It is indicative that some local self-governments, which are key actors in the system of strengthening community resilience, issued orders to CSOs, which reflects a complete lack of understanding of their position and social role.

Recommendations and appeals sent to towns and municipalities by public authorities also show their attitude towards CSOs. The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government sent a letter to local self-governments, recommending, among other things, to town/municipal authorities to include a coordinator for Roma issues in their work and thus provide additional support to this vulnerable and marginalised group.<sup>152</sup> The Office for Cooperation with Civil Society appealed to local self-governments and their crisis response teams to base their relations with associations and other civil society organisations on the principle of partnership and cooperation.<sup>153</sup> In a letter to local self-governments, the Office points out that *"in the current circumstances in which we all face serious challenges to life and health, the civil society, as in previous similar situations, has made its existing capacities available and demonstrated its readiness to contribute to easier overcoming of the current situation, and therefore we call for their recognition and engagement."*

In considering the cooperation of public authorities with CSOs, it should be borne in mind that during the state of emergency the key channel of communication, i.e. focal points for cooperation with civil society organisations in government bodies at the national, provincial and local levels, were inaccessible, although their very purpose is to establish and encourage direct communication and cooperation between administrative bodies and CSOs. Therefore, the main channel through which CSOs were able to react in cases of violations of rights and omissions in crisis management were independent human rights bodies.

Acting on complaints and on his own initiative, the Protector of Citizens issued several recommendations and initiatives. For example, he submitted an initiative to the Prime Minister to amend the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency, exempting from the restrictions of movement victims of domestic violence, who left their homes to protect themselves from violence, and also recommended to presidents

151 See: <https://ljudskaprava.gov.rs/sh/press/vesti/romski-koordinatori-pomazu-u-opstinama-i-gradovima-srbije>

152 Letter no. 90-00-00022/2020-27 of 13 April 2020 Available at: <http://mduls.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/Dopis-MDULS-manjine.pdf> (4/5/2020).

153 Available at: <https://civilnodrustvo.gov.rs/vest/saop%C5%A1tenje:-partnerstvom-sa-civilnim-dru%C5%A1tvom-do-efikasne-podr%C5%A1ke-gra%C4%91anima-i-gra%C4%91ankama-u-uslovima-vanrednog-stanja.37.html?newsId=1171> (4/5/2020)

of municipalities and mayors to provide existential conditions for living and hygiene maintenance in all Roma settlements<sup>154, 155</sup>

The Commissioner for Protection of Equality issued dozens of recommendations for measures and initiated amendments to numerous regulations. Their content points to the challenges faced by certain vulnerable groups, but also to the failures of public authorities in crisis management and meeting the needs of citizens. Here are, for example, two recommendations concerning the cooperation of public authorities with CSOs.

In the recommendation concerning the problem of transporting cancer patients during the movement ban, the Commissioner recommended the Government to take measures to use the potential resources of CSOs *“that have certain capacities and are willing to participate, such as organisations that deal with protection of persons with disabilities, women, the elderly, youth, national minorities, migrants and refugees, LGBT population”*, pointing out that they *“have developed channels of communication and assistance and are best acquainted with the problems of these groups.”* In the opinion of the Commissioner, *“a synchronised joint action of all actors certainly contributes to a more efficient solution of the aforementioned problems and facilitating support to those who need it.”*

In the recommendation issued in handling a complaint of the Standing Conference of Roma Citizens' Associations - ROMA LEAGUE, in which this organisation pointed to some serious problems faced by the Roma national minority, the Commissioner stated that *“in creating concrete measures at the local level, direct participation of representatives of Roma associations is very important for the entire local community”*, because they *“live in the same conditions in which representatives of the Roma national minority live and can best see the concrete measures that need to be taken in order to protect them.”*<sup>156</sup>

One of the characteristics of the activities of local authorities in providing direct assistance and support to vulnerable citizens is their reliance on volunteer work. The specificity of volunteer work during the state of emergency is reflected in the fact that volunteers were recruited precisely to provide assistance during the state of emergency and that their application and verification of legal requirements for volunteering<sup>157</sup> was centralised through the National Volunteer Application Platform<sup>158</sup>, established by the Government. In addition to the invitation sent to citizens to apply, the Platform states that the “competent services check and approve” all applications, and then “approved volunteers” are contacted by town and municipal centres with detailed instructions and first tasks. It is unknown why the application of volunteers was centralised despite the fact that the organisers of volunteering are bodies in local communities.<sup>159</sup> There are no publicly available data on how many volunteers applied in this way, nor is it known whether volunteers from permanent town and municipal volunteer centres had to apply through the national platform and obtain “approval” before engaging in local community activities.

The Government has established a single contact centre for assistance to the elderly, through which the elderly can call for help with the purchase of food and medicine and get in touch with town and municipal call centres. Other citizens had access to telephone numbers of the centres organised in all local communities.<sup>160</sup> Volunteers are mainly in charge of providing assistance to the elderly in the purchase of food and medicine and the packaging and distribution of food and hygiene parcels intended for vulnerable social groups. The ways of organising the work of volunteers are different. In some municipalities, local crisis response teams give daily tasks to volunteers and are in charge of their training, provision of protective equipment and identification

154 Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php?start=10> (4/5/2020)

155 Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php?start=5> (4/5/2020)

156 Recommendation of measures no. 596/20 of 21 April 2020 Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/polozaj-roma-u-romskim-nas-cir/> (4/5/2020)

157 Article 12 of the Law on Volunteering (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 36/2010)

158 [www.budivolonter.gov.rs](http://www.budivolonter.gov.rs). (4/5/2020)

159 Article 4 of the Law on Volunteering

160 Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/extfile/sr/call-centri.pdf> (4/5/2020)

documents.<sup>161</sup> Some municipalities have established volunteer services, and in some municipalities volunteers work in permanent volunteer centres.<sup>162</sup>

It is evident, however, that CSOs are not engaged in providing assistance and support services, which is also true for those CSOs that are licenced and have a high level of expertise and experience, which demonstrates a generally negative attitude of the authorities towards CSOs.

It should also be noted that the state of emergency provided an opportunity for officials to promote the concept of human security, social justice and gender equality in their public appearances and present them to the public as principles and starting points on which social and economic recovery and development will be based. Unfortunately, this opportunity was not used. Those who, in public appearances, were expressing gratitude to medical staff and employees in vital sectors did not stress that women were in the frontline of response to the crisis, bearing the incomparably greater burden of the crisis, nor was this phenomenon in any way problematised. Attention was focused on the elderly, while all other vulnerable groups remained out of focus. Therefore, exposure to the virus, risk of infection and access to community resources fully reflected the existing lines of dominance, marginalisation, and gender and other discrimination, which is a poor guarantee for future activities.

Finally, it should be noted that the bright side during the state of emergency were the lines of assistance and support within the civil sector. After the initial confusion and disorientation in the new circumstances, citizens, informal groups and civil society organisations spontaneously engaged in collecting and providing help and support to those in need, especially

the elderly, who were publicly recognised as the most vulnerable group. These civic initiatives and activities are characterised by rapid mobilisation, clear recognition of the needs of certain vulnerable groups, innovation and the use of modern technologies.

The media reported about dozens of touching examples of neighbourly care, humanity and solidarity.<sup>163</sup> Numerous social media groups provide information and are a kind of platform for establishing contacts and agreeing on the time, place and way of providing specific help. On the Facebook Group “Help Fellow Citizens in Quarantine - Serbia”,<sup>164</sup> which gathers over 10,000 members, there are hundreds of posts in which citizens across the country offer their help, as well as plenty of information and multimedia content on the ways to protect against infection. The lack of protective equipment was the reason for establishing a group of makers “The Visionaries of Serbia” with over 4,500 members, who use 3D printers to make and donate visors to medical staff.<sup>165</sup> A group of female designers from the non-profit association “BFW Design Collective” sews cotton face masks for medical staff, volunteer associations and humanitarian organisations.<sup>166</sup> The artists of the opera and orchestra of the Serbian National Theatre in Novi Sad, in addition to bringing food to the doorsteps of their fellow citizens, “also brought theatre” organising short concerts for them. The Association of Psychotherapists of Serbia provides free online psychotherapeutic help to citizens.<sup>167</sup> Joint Action Roof Over Your Head has organised a “solidarity kitchen” that provides 100 to 200 meals a day to the homeless and vulnerable families.<sup>168</sup> During the state of emergency, many CSOs focused their activities on informing and providing legal and other assistance and support to the groups they work with.

161 Such approach was applied, for example, in Pirot. See: [https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/jutros-su-na-teren-izaslji-prvi-volonteri-gradskog-staba-za-vanredne-situacije-u-pirotu/\(4/5/2020\)](https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/jutros-su-na-teren-izaslji-prvi-volonteri-gradskog-staba-za-vanredne-situacije-u-pirotu/(4/5/2020))

162 Thus, according to media reports, in Belgrade, volunteers are engaged in 17 volunteer centres, where they receive and respond to calls from senior citizens and help them with the purchase of food and medicine. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/premierka-ana-brnabic-obisla-danas-volonterski-centar-na-vracaru/fketw4e>

163 See, for example, [https://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/vojvodina/novi-sad/solidarnost-komsija-lepsa-strana-zivota-u-zajednici\\_1112003.html](https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/vojvodina/novi-sad/solidarnost-komsija-lepsa-strana-zivota-u-zajednici_1112003.html); [https://talas.rs/2020/03/23/kako-firme-u-srbiji-i-u-svetu-pomazu-u-borbi-protiv-korone/\(4/5/2020\)](https://talas.rs/2020/03/23/kako-firme-u-srbiji-i-u-svetu-pomazu-u-borbi-protiv-korone/(4/5/2020))

164 See: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SugradjaniSrbije/about> (4/5/2020)

165 See: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/vizionarisrbije/about> (4/5/2020)

166 See: <https://www.donacije.rs/projekat/pokrivalice-covid19/> (4/5/2020)

167 See: [https://savezpsihoterapeuta.org/korona-virus/\(4/5/2020\)](https://savezpsihoterapeuta.org/korona-virus/(4/5/2020))

168 See: <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a588923/Apel-ZA-Krov-nad-glavom-Obezbediti-beskucnicima-lekarsku-negu.html> (4/5/2020)

### There was no budget support for women's organisations

The member organisations of the Network of Women Against Violence and women's organisations operating in other areas reorganised and adapted their work to the new circumstances by providing assistance and support to the most vulnerable groups of women: women exposed to violence, older women, rural women, Roma women, women with disabilities and other vulnerable groups of women. The fact is, however, that there was no support for their activities. According to available data, during the state of emergency, direct institutional grants supported the work of only 20 local women's organisations that provide psychosocial and legal assistance and support through local SOS hotlines to women victims of gender-based violence. The grants were provided by redirecting funds from the project "Improvement of Women's Safety in Serbia", implemented by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality in cooperation with UN Women, with the financial support of the Norwegian Embassy.<sup>169</sup>

## 7.1. Recommendations - Solidarity

- Explore and identify challenges in risk communication and providing assistance and support to vulnerable social groups during the state of emergency and how to use the resources of local women's organisations, organisations of persons with disabilities, Roma organisations, organisations working to improve the situation of the elderly, LGBT people and other vulnerable groups;
- Prepare a gender-responsive economic and social recovery programme based on the principles of social justice, in a participatory process that ensures effective communication with vulnerable groups;
- Use CSO resources in planning and implementing recovery measures and ensure that their work is sustainable in the long run;
- Promote and advocate for the full participation of women in the creation and implementation of community recovery measures at all levels and the gender-equitable distribution of work in the private and public spheres;
- Reaffirm the role of civil society, promote active citizenship and the interest of the public good (education, health, social protection system, culture) and work on strengthening partnerships and cooperation with CSOs.

<sup>169</sup> See: Promoting and protecting women's rights at national level, Serbia, available at: [https://www.promoting-and-protecting-women's-rights-at-national-levelcoe.int/en/web/genderequality/promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#{"63001324":33}](https://www.promoting-and-protecting-women's-rights-at-national-levelcoe.int/en/web/genderequality/promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#{) (4/5/2020)

**PART TWO:  
STATE MEASURES  
AND LIVES OF  
WOMEN IN  
THE STATE OF  
EMERGENCY**

## 8. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND MEASURES FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

During the state of emergency, most social protection services were either suspended or provided with restrictions and under changed conditions.

Due to the epidemic, the Post of Serbia suspended the payment of social assistance, pensions and child allowances on 20 March 2020. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs issued a statement saying that this was a mistake and that the payments would be normalised, and that people 65+ would receive pensions to their home addresses<sup>170</sup>. Payments from the budget of the Republic of Serbia include:

- ➔ Financial social assistance, special monetary benefit, foster care allowance and allowance for assistance and care of another person
- ➔ Child allowance and parental allowance
- ➔ Paid maternity leave, child care leave and special child care leave benefits;
- ➔ Other benefits based on birth and child care and special child care;
- ➔ Payments deriving from the basic rights of veterans, disabled military retirees and families of fallen soldiers.

The Social Welfare Centres<sup>171</sup> suspended direct work with beneficiaries as well as the work of the Day Care Centre for Children with Developmental Disabilities and other services provided directly to beneficiaries.

The scope and type of services vary in local self-governments (depending on what they finance and

organise), but during the state of emergency these services were not available. These services, depending on local decisions on social protection, based on the Law on Social Protection (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 24/2011)<sup>172</sup> include:

1. **assessment and planning services** - assessment of the condition, needs, strengths and risks of beneficiaries and other significant persons in their environment; assessment of guardians, foster carers and adoptive parents; development of individual or family plans for the provision of services and measures of legal protection and other assessments and plans, provided by local self-governments;
2. **day services in the community** - day care; home care; drop-in centres and other services that support the stay of beneficiaries in the family and immediate environment, provided by local self-governments;
3. **independent living support services** - supported housing; personal assistance; training for independent living and other types of support necessary for the active participation of beneficiaries in society, provided by local self-governments;
4. **counselling therapeutic and social educational services** - intensive crisis support services for families; counselling and support for parents, foster carers and adoptive parents; support for families caring for their child or adult family member with disabilities; maintaining family relationships and family reunification; counselling and support

170 <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/saopstenje-za-javnost-21>

171 Example of the changed work regime of the Social Welfare Centre in Požarevac [http://www.sattelevizija.com/vesti/jedna\\_vest/novi\\_rezim\\_rada\\_centra\\_za\\_socijalni\\_rad\\_pozarevac\\_20321115005](http://www.sattelevizija.com/vesti/jedna_vest/novi_rezim_rada_centra_za_socijalni_rad_pozarevac_20321115005)

172 [https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon\\_o\\_socijalnoj\\_zastiti.html](https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_socijalnoj_zastiti.html)

in cases of violence; family therapy; mediation; SOS hotlines; activation and other advisory and educational services and activities;

5. **accommodation services** - accommodation in a family of relatives, foster or other family for adults and the elderly; placement in a residential care institution; accommodation in shelters and other types of accommodation, provided by the Republic of Serbia, the autonomous province and local self-governments.

Most of the services were not available and the procedures for using social protection services were hindered or stopped, and communication with the Social Welfare Centres took place by phone, mail or e-mail.

Humanitarian and other activities at the local level were organised by crisis response teams in municipalities and towns.<sup>173</sup> The needs assessment was carried out in cooperation with the Social Welfare Centres, but it was not gender sensitive and was not conducted everywhere.

Special difficulties during the state of emergency and epidemic were faced by: single parents, Roma men and women (especially those living in informal settlements), people with disabilities, people 65+ (especially people living alone), migrants, asylum seekers and homeless people. No special measures were adopted for these vulnerable groups, and many of the existing services ceased to function.

## 8.1. Targeted measures for particularly vulnerable groups

In the state of emergency, targeted measures are an instrument to ensure that women and men, girls and boys from certain vulnerable social groups are adequately protected from infection and receive appropriate assistance and support, while respecting their living conditions and vulnerability. The purpose of targeted measures is to prevent indirect discrimination in access to goods and services of vulnerable groups in the conditions of the state of emergency.

The analysis of targeted measures taken during the state of emergency<sup>174</sup> shows that the essence of most of these measures is an even greater restriction of human rights compared to the restrictions applied to other citizens. Only a small number of measures are aimed at meeting the existential needs of members of vulnerable groups in the conditions of the state of emergency. The introduction of these measures was most often the result of the recommendations of independent human rights bodies - the Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, mainly at the initiative of civil society organisations (CSOs), which means that these bodies were a kind of channels through which the requests were articulated and sent to the competent authorities.

Below is an overview of the most important measures targeting vulnerable groups, indicating also the absence of measures that are needed. The overview is preliminary and does not claim to provide a complete and comprehensive insight into all targeted measures taken during the state of emergency at the national, provincial and local levels.

173 An overview of some of the activities carried out and measures taken at the local level is available on the website of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities <http://www.skgo.org/strane/372>

174 The analysis relies on the regulations applicable as of 2 May 2020

### 8.1.1. Elderly people

Although the life situation of older women and men<sup>175</sup> is different and depends on a number of factors, in the conditions of the state of emergency a sensitive approach was not applied in assessing the need for measures, but the measures are general and differ only in whether they apply to the elderly in private accommodation or those placed in collective accommodation facilities.

The key measure related to the elderly in private accommodation is the ban on movement, introduced on 18 March 2020 by the *Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia* of the Minister of Interior.<sup>176</sup> This Order bans the movement of persons over 65 years of age, who live in populated areas with more than 5,000 inhabitants, as well as persons over 70 years of age in populated areas with up to 5,000 inhabitants (hereinafter: the elderly). The movement ban measure has been gradually relaxed. From 21 March 2020<sup>177</sup>, the elderly were allowed to move from 3 a.m. to 8 a.m. on Saturdays, from 22 March 2020 on Saturdays from 3 a.m. to 7 a.m., and from 21 April 2020<sup>178</sup> on Fridays from 4 a.m. to 7 a.m., for the purpose of purchasing

groceries, as well as on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. the next day, in a duration of 30 minutes, up to 600 meters in diameter<sup>179</sup> from the place of residence. According to the latest amendments to the Decree of 25 April 2020<sup>180</sup>, movement was allowed every day from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. in a duration of 50 minutes, and the Decision on Relaxing the Measure of Movement Restriction During the State of Emergency of 30 April 2020<sup>181</sup> allowed the elderly persons to move also on Friday, 1 May 2020, twice in a duration of 60 minutes, up to 600 meters in diameter from the place of permanent or temporary residence.

The acts banning the movement of the elderly do not contain any explanation, while and in the media government officials informally explained this measure with the need to protect the elderly as a particularly vulnerable group, where the death rate due to COVID-19 is extremely high. Due to the lack of explanation, it is not possible to find out the objective reasons why elderly people carry a higher risk of infection and transmission, or whether the possibility of introducing milder measures was considered before prescribing a measure of movement ban.<sup>182</sup> The measure of banning the movement of the elderly, which until 21 April 2020 meant going out only once a week, at night, not only is a

175 The share of the elderly in the total population is 19.2%. Most of them are women, who make up two thirds of single elderly households. See: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2017/PdfE/G20176008.pdf> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

176 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 34/2020 of 18 March 2020. The Order was adopted on the basis of Article 2 of the Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 31/2020), which stipulates that the Ministry of Interior, with the approval of the Ministry of Health, may temporarily restrict or prohibit the movement of persons in public places. The Belgrade Centre for Human Rights submitted an Initiative for instigating a procedure to assess the constitutionality of Article 2 of the Decree, as well as Article 3 of the Decree, which stipulates that the Ministry of Interior, with the approval of the Ministry of Health, may order certain individuals or groups infected or suspected of being infected with the infectious disease COVID-19 to stay at the address of their permanent or temporary residence, with the obligation to report to the competent health care institution. The submitter of initiative considers that, according to the provisions of the Constitution, in cases where the National Assembly is unable to meet, only the Government, by its decree and with the co-signature of the President of the Republic, is authorised to prescribe measures of derogation from human and minority rights during the state of emergency (type, conditions, scope and duration of restrictions). Therefore, the authorisation of the Government of the Republic of Serbia to prescribe measures derogating from human and minority rights, in case the National Assembly is unable to meet, with the co-signature of the President of the Republic, cannot be delegated to ministries by any act of the Government or the President of the Republic, that is, it cannot be left to public administration bodies to determine by their acts the type, conditions, scope and duration of restrictions on human rights guaranteed by the Constitution, without the participation of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the President of the Republic. The initiative is available at: <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Inicijativa-za-pokretanje-postupka-za-ocenu-ustavnosti-policijski-%C4%8Das.pdf> (accessed on 2 May 2020).

177 Order on Amendments to the Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 39/2020).

178 Decree on Amendments to the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency of 9 April 2020 (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 58/2020)

179 The Decree contains the terms "place of permanent residence" and "place of temporary residence", which are wrong, taking into consideration the definitions of these terms contained in Article 3 of the Law on Permanent and Temporary Residence of Citizens (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 87/2011).

180 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 60/2020

181 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 63/2020

182 It is evident, however, that the high mortality rate due to COVID-19 is also present in younger people who suffer from chronic diseases, have weakened immunity, etc., whose movement is not prohibited in the way it is prohibited for the elderly. This is confirmed by the data of the Public Health Institute on the the average age of the deceased, which varied: 63.2 years (4 April 2020), 68.6 years (14 April 2020), 76 years (13 April 2010). Available at: <https://covid19.rs/>, accessed on 2 May 2020) It is interesting that the data on the age of the deceased stopped being published in mid-April, and only the data on the sex structure of the deceased remained.

disproportionate restriction of freedom of movement,<sup>183</sup> but also has a negative impact on the mental and physical health of the elderly. On that occasion, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality recommended to the Government of the Republic of Serbia to review the adequacy and frequency of time slots set for the movement of the elderly in order to mitigate this measure.<sup>184</sup>

The ban on movement particularly affects the elderly, who are unable to leave their homes and purchase food and medicine on their own, and who do not have the help of family members or close people. Since the introduction of the state of emergency help lines for the elderly have been organised in local self-governments (LSG). Assistance in the purchase of food and medicine is provided by the volunteers of municipal volunteer centres,<sup>185</sup> while other forms of assistance are provided by local services. However, in some municipalities these assistance and support lines are not available during the general movement ban, which causes major problems when the movement ban lasts for a longer period of time (e.g. on weekends). There are also problems with access to information about assistance and support options<sup>186</sup> because the telephones of most local services are generally only available in the morning.<sup>187</sup>

Elderly people who live alone are also in a very unfavourable position, and they need someone else's

care and help. Women are majority in this category of elderly people who need such help. Although the Order on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons in the Territory of the Republic of Serbia of 18 March 2020 provided for the possibility that the Ministry of Interior issued a special movement permit, until 6 April there were no rules on the procedure for issuing such a permit. Due to the movement ban, family members and informal carers of the elderly were unable to assist the elderly in their daily activities.<sup>188</sup> *The procedure for obtaining permits for informal carers, published on the website of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy on April 6,*<sup>189</sup> is very complicated and inefficient. Although the e-Government Portal has simplified the submission of requests and the issuance of electronic permits, this type of communication is not available to everyone, so the problems with obtaining permits remain unresolved.<sup>190</sup>

Elderly beneficiaries of various types of social assistance, after a certain delay, which occurred due to the refusal of the Post of Serbia to pay social benefits,<sup>191</sup> continued to receive payments. Pensioners were paid full pensions in one instalment, but a small number of pensioners who decided to temporarily receive their pensions at their home address<sup>192</sup> received pensions with delay. During the state of emergency, many local self-governments organised the delivery of free food and hygiene parcels to pensioners with the smallest

183 It has been assessed that this measure does not substantially differ from the criminal sanction of being prohibited to leave the apartment without electronic surveillance, and is stricter than the house arrest, which allows the convicted person to stay outdoors for up to two hours daily in the period from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. and to leave the premises to go to work and in other cases. (See: Nikola Kovačević, Analiza mera odstupanja od ljudskih i manjinskih prava tokom vanrednog stanja u Republici Srbiji izazvanog epidemijom zarazne bolesti COVID-19, Inicijativa za ekonomska i socijalna prava, mart 2020. <https://www.a11initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Analiza-mera-odstupanja-derogacija-od-ljudskih-i-manjinskih-prava-tokom-vanrednog-stanja-u-Republici-Srbiji-izazvanog-epidemijom-zarazne-bolesti-COVID-19-1.pdf> - accessed on 2 May 2020)

184 Recommendation of measures no. 560/2020 of 14 April 2020: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/preporuka-mera-u-vezi-dozvola-za-kretanje-rada-linija-cir/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

185 See: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/halo-trebaju-mi-mleko-hleb-i-lekovi-evo-kako-svi-stariji-od-65-godina-mogu-da-dobiju/qbhq260> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

186 In this regard, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality pointed out to the Ministry of Health the inaccessibility of a single contact centre for assistance to the elderly at number 19920, published on the COVID-19 website, and recommended that telephone numbers of all LSGs where senior citizens could get help should be published on the website. See: Recommendation of measures no. 380/2020 of 6 April 2020: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/preporuka-mera-ministarstvu-zdravlja-u-vezi-brojeva-cir/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

187 See: <https://euprava.gov.rs/media/Uputstva/IMENIK%20PSTINA.pdf> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

188 The Protector of Citizens warned about this problem. See: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/usluga-pomoc-u-kuci-tokom-vanrednog-stanja> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

189 See: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/izdavanje-dozvola-za-kretanje-tokom-policijskog-casa>

190 In mid-April, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality issued a recommendation to the Government of Serbia to simplify the procedure of issuing movement permits. See: Recommendation of measures no. 560/2020 of 14 April 2020: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/preporuka-mera-u-vezi-dozvola-za-kretanje-rada-linija-cir/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

191 Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/453111/nastavak-isplate-socijalnih-davanja-od-ponedeljka.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

192 See: <http://www.cekos.rs/instrukcija-o-na%C4%8Dinu-privremene-isplate-penzija-za-lica-sa-navr%C5%A1enih-65-i-vi%C5%A1e-godina-%C5%BEivota> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

pensions and the elderly without this type of income, both in urban and rural areas.<sup>193</sup>

As regards the elderly in residential care, the Order on the Prohibition of Visits and Restrictions on Movement in Residential Care Institutions for the Elderly of 14 March 2020<sup>194</sup> **prohibits visits to all social protection institutions for the elderly, and while their beneficiaries are forbidden to leave the premises. Admission of new residential care beneficiaries is allowed only with medical documentation confirming that a person is not infected with the virus, and each newly admitted beneficiary is preventively put in 14-day isolation within the institution. Persons who provide services necessary for the functioning of institutions, and who are not employed in those institutions, are allowed to stay and move in the facilities of institutions exclusively for the purpose of performing jobs and activities that ensure the continuity of the accommodation service.**<sup>195</sup>

Although the measures for the protection of persons in residential care institutions for the elderly were introduced on 14 March 2020, the day before the introduction of the state of emergency, and although the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs issued dozens of instructions on how employees in social and residential care institutions should act to prevent infection<sup>196</sup>, announced a decision permitting additional employment in these institutions<sup>197</sup> and delivery of protective equipment,<sup>198</sup> the presence of COVID-19 virus was confirmed in 35 social protection

institutions and residential care institutions for the elderly, where a total of 563 beneficiaries and 113 employees were infected.<sup>199</sup> The exact number of elderly people tested positive for virus is not known, however, since the data are summarised and not even disaggregated by sex.

The occurrence of the virus in social protection and residential care institutions was the reason for the Protector of Citizens to order the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs to conduct direct control in certain institutions, and to request from 20 social protection and residential care institutions, founded by the Republic of Serbia and AP Vojvodina and in which the presence of coronavirus was confirmed, to provide him with documentation and answer the questions regarding the circumstances and measures taken to protect the health of beneficiaries.<sup>200</sup> However, there is no information on whether a procedure of control has been initiated against any of these institutions.

### 8.1.2. Persons with disabilities

Since the introduction of the state of emergency, persons with disabilities (PWDs) have found themselves in a difficult situation because their specific position and individual needs have not been taken into account. The problems faced by PWDs are different, primarily depending on whether they are in institutional care or not, whether they live alone or with a family.

193 Data available at: <http://www.skgo.org/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

194 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 28/2020

195 By the Decree on Amendments to the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency of 9 April 2020, these measures became an integral part of the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 53/2020). They refer only to residential care institutions for the elderly, while for other institutions the order of the line minister sent to the directors of social institutions of 28 March 2020 is valid. <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/vanredno-stanje/2020.03.28.%20Nalog%20001.pdf> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

196 The overview of instructions is available at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/vanredno-stanje/Pregled%20akata%20minrzs%20o%20delovanju%20V2.pdf> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

197 See: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/452037/danas-odluke-o-dodatnom-zaposljavanju-u-gerontoloskim-centrima.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

198 See: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/453267/za-gerontoloske-centre-deset-hiljada-zastitnih-maski.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

199 The presence of COVID-19 virus was confirmed in the Centres for Gerontology in Niš, Kruševac, Knjaževac, Mataruška Banja, as well as in Gerontology Centre "Jelenac" in Aleksinac, Organisational Unit in Tešica, Residential Care Home for the Elderly in Smederevo, the Residential Care Unit for Adults and the Elderly in Novi Pazar, the Shelter for Adults and the Elderly in Belgrade, the Residential Care Facility for Adults and the Elderly in Kulina, as well as in the Residential Care Homes for Adults and the Elderly "Stara pruga" in Umca, "Radost" in Negotin, "MeliorVita" in Zemun, "Doživeti stotu" in Zemun, "Elite Home Star" in Progar, "Eskulap centar" in Niš, "Nana" in Belgrade, "Nada" in Belgrade, "Sveti Trifun" in Železnik and "Sunčev breg" in Belgrade. <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/informacija-na-dan-02-05-2020-ustanove-socijalne-zastite-za-smestaj-korisnika-i-organizacije-socijalne-zastite-za-smestaj-korisnika> (accessed on 1 May 2020)

200 Available at: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php?start=5> i <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php?start=10> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

As regards PWDs in institutional care, the measures adopted were mainly aimed at preventing illness and the spread of infection. The Decree on Organising the Work of Social Protection Institutions for Accommodation of Beneficiaries and Social Protection Organisations for Providing Residential Care during the State of Emergency<sup>201</sup> stipulates that if a beneficiary or an employee or a person otherwise engaged to work in the institution gets an infectious disease, the infected person shall be sent to a health care institution for treatment, while other beneficiaries, employees and persons otherwise engaged to work shall stay in a 14-day isolation in the institution. There is no data on how the isolation of beneficiaries and employees is ensured and how the transmission of the infection is prevented, bearing in mind that institutions do not have enough space, nor is there data on whether it is still practiced that women with disabilities/service beneficiaries are engaged in taking care of other beneficiaries.<sup>202</sup> Although the line ministry issued dozens of instructions in order to prevent infection<sup>203</sup> after the Decree had been passed, the presence of the virus was confirmed in 29 institutions for residential care of children and adults, including institutions for children and adults with disabilities, where a total of 438 beneficiaries and 115 employees were infected.<sup>204</sup>

School closures and distance learning are not accompanied by special measures that would enable children with disabilities in institutions to follow online classes, that is, to be educated according to individual educational plans, with appropriate pedagogical support.

As regards children and adults with disabilities who are outside the institutions of the system, one of the key problems is the inability to get help and support from personal assistants, informal caregivers, relatives and friends who do not live with them in the household due to the ban on movement in the evening. Numerous organisations and individuals pointed out this problem, so the Commissioner for Protection of Equality recommended that licenced personal assistants and informal caregivers should be included among the persons to whom the Ministry of Interior would issue a movement permit at their personal request.<sup>205</sup>

The introduction of distance learning was not accompanied by appropriate measures that would enable children with disabilities to exercise the right to education under equal conditions, and the termination of the work of pedagogical assistants further aggravated the situation, for which the competent authorities tried to find a solution.<sup>206</sup> There were problems with financing the work of personal assistants of children with disabilities.<sup>207</sup> The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development announced that schools were obliged to include in their operational plans distance learning with pupils educated on the basis of individual educational plans, and that teachers had to create special adapted materials for pupils who needed a structured individualised approach and to make them available to pupils in a manner agreed with the parents, as well as to prepare content, learning instructions and way of obtaining feedback, in order to monitor the progress of pupils and provide additional support. Psychological support to parents of children who are educated on the basis of individual educational plans

201 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 54/2020

202 See: [http://femplantz.org/library/2020-04-13\\_Ustanove\\_soc\\_zastite\\_i\\_COVID-19.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2u0WWHKTQWQoD1LLK9G0DKGRVjZmB3L9-beaJYBAsOx\\_MWCBUBSv9ml5E](http://femplantz.org/library/2020-04-13_Ustanove_soc_zastite_i_COVID-19.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2u0WWHKTQWQoD1LLK9G0DKGRVjZmB3L9-beaJYBAsOx_MWCBUBSv9ml5E) (accessed on 2 May 2020)

203 Available at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/vanredno-stanje/Pregled%20akata%20minrzs%20o%20delovanju%20V2.pdf> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

204 Data available at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/informacija-na-dan-02-05-2020-ustanove-socijalne-zastite-za-smestaj-korisnika-i-organizacije-socijalne-zastite-za-smestaj-korisnika> (accessed on 1 May 2020)

205 Initiative to the Government regarding movement permits for informal caregivers and provision of home help services during the state of emergency, no. 011-00-5/2/2020-02 of 26 March 2020 Although the Commissioner for Protection of Equality proposed a simplified permit issuance procedure, the proposal was not accepted. (See: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/inicijativa-vladi-povodom-dozvole-kretanja-neformal-cir/>)

206 See: <https://nova.rs/drustvo/vise-od-300-novosadske-dece-sa-smetnjama-bez-licnih-pratilaca/>

207 Thus, the public was disturbed by the news that 450 personal assistants of children with disabilities in Belgrade had stopped providing services because the City of Belgrade terminated the contract with the humanitarian organisation "Dečje srce" (Child's Heart), thus leaving children with disabilities without support, but after the publication of this news in the media they were returned to work. See: <https://direktno.rs/beograd/260362/pratioci-dece-s-posebnim-potrebama-vraceni-na-posao.html> (accessed on 2 May 2020) The similar situation happened in Novi Sad. See: <https://nova.rs/drustvo/vise-od-300-novosadske-dece-sa-smetnjama-bez-licnih-pratilaca/>

should be provided by class teachers, teachers and psychological and pedagogical services in telephone contact with parents or via e-mail.<sup>208</sup> However, there are no aggregate data on how teaching is carried out in practice on the basis of individual educational plans, especially in case of children whose parents do not have access to modern ICT, although there are schools that overcome this difficulty in a good way.<sup>209</sup> One of the problems faced by children with disabilities is the suspension of the services of speech therapists, special educators and physiotherapists, which has led to regression in their progress.<sup>210</sup>

The termination of the work of day care centres and kindergartens opened the problem of caring for children whose parents are employed, but due to the nature of their work are not allowed to work from home,<sup>211</sup> in accordance with the Decree on Organising Work of Employers During the State of Emergency.<sup>212</sup> *The problem is further aggravated by the fact that some employers allow only mothers, and not fathers, not to come to work during the state of emergency for the purpose of taking care of their children.*

There are scarce data on the availability of psychological help and support for persons with disabilities. Some mental health institutions offer psychological counselling over the phone, but information about this service is only available on their websites.<sup>213</sup> There is more information in the media about psychological counselling services provided by numerous professional associations on a voluntary basis.

Informing people with sensory disabilities is relatively satisfactory because the services of sign interpreters

were used in informative and other programmes. The Viber Community channel “Ministry of Labour - PWD” has been created, through which people with disabilities can be informed about the current situation caused by the corona virus.<sup>214</sup> However, it is difficult for people with hearing impairments to establish contact with health care, social and other institutions and services, because they generally do not practice communication with citizens via SMS.<sup>215</sup>

### 8.1.3. Roma men and women

The most important factor of vulnerability of Roma men and women in the situation of pandemic is life in informal settlements, without communal infrastructure (electricity, water, bathrooms, sewerage networks, etc.) and adequate conditions for maintaining hygiene, inability to maintain social distancing, overcrowding. According to the data from the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2016-2025<sup>216</sup>, about 70 percent of Roma population live in informal settlements - there are 593 of them in Serbia. Many of these settlements and Roma families were disconnected from the electricity supply even before the state of emergency, but they were not connected to the grid after the state of emergency was declared. The Commissioner for Protection of Equality recommended to the power distribution company JK “Elektroprivreda” to supply electricity to vulnerable social groups, including Roma men and women from informal settlements.<sup>217</sup> The situation was aggravated by the termination of work of 120 health mediators, which created additional health and safety risks for Roma men

208 Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/452652/ucenje-od-kuce-za-ucenike-koji-rade-po-iop-u.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

209 See: [https://www.rtv.rs/sr\\_lat/mladi/obrazovanje/subotica-nastava-za-decu-sa-smetnjama-u-razvoju\\_1108803.html](https://www.rtv.rs/sr_lat/mladi/obrazovanje/subotica-nastava-za-decu-sa-smetnjama-u-razvoju_1108803.html) (accessed on 2 May 2020)

210 See: <https://nova.rs/drustvo/vise-od-300-novosadske-dece-sa-smetnjama-bez-licnih-pratilaca/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

211 The Commissioner for Protection of Equality sent an initiative to allow employed parents of children with disabilities and children with rare diseases to work outside the employer's premises in all cases where such work can be organised, and if that is not possible, to allow them to stay at home to take care of their children. Initiative no. 011-00-5/2/2020-02 of 26 March 2020 Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/inicijativa-vladi-povodom-dozvole-kretanja-neformal-cir/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

212 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 31/2020

213 See: <http://www.svetisava.rs/psiholoska-podrska-u-vreme-vanrednog-stanja/>; (accessed on 2 May 2020) <https://www.037info.net/psihijatrijsko-psiholoska-podrska-tokom-vanrednog-stanja/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

214 See: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/453546/za-osobe-sa-invaliditetom-sve-informacije-i-putem-vajbera.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

215 See: <https://nova.rs/drustvo/apel-pomozite-gluvim-osobama-u-vezi-sa-koronavirusom/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

216 <https://www.ljudskaprava.gov.rs/sh/node/19980>

217 Recommendation no. 550/2020 of 9 April 2020 Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/preporuka-mera-za-snabdevanje-el-energijom-cir/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

and women during the state of emergency.<sup>218</sup> According to the statements of the officials, since the declaration of the state of emergency, in cooperation with EPS (power distribution company), electricity supply has been provided for several Roma settlements,<sup>219</sup> but there is no data on how many Roma families have been connected to the power grid.

Numerous requests of CSOs to public authorities and recommendations by independent bodies testify to the difficulties faced by Roma men and women in unhygienic settlements during the state of emergency. Thus, due to the lack of drinking water in the informal settlement “Čukarička šuma”, a water tank was provided on the recommendation of the Protector of Citizens.<sup>220</sup> The Protector of Citizens sent a letter to all local self-governments to take measures to meet the existential needs of the residents of Roma settlements, primarily drinking water and food and hygiene parcels, as well as to disinfect Roma settlements.<sup>221</sup> Handling the complaint of the Standing Conference of Roma Citizens’ Associations - ROMA LEAGUE, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality recommended to the Government of the Republic of Serbia to take measures to ensure full access to clean water in all settlements, as well as to consider re-establishing the work of health mediators.<sup>222</sup>

Due to the impossibility of earning income from work in the informal economy, many Roma families face difficulties in satisfying their basic existential needs. The delay in the payment of financial social assistance, which was resolved in the meantime, also contributed

to that situation.<sup>223</sup> According to the information of the Red Cross,<sup>224</sup> food and hygiene parcels were distributed to Roma families, but there is no aggregate data on the number of Roma families that received these parcels, so it is not possible to assess whether the parcels reached everyone who needed this type of help. There is no information on whether hygiene parcels contained products for protection of sexual and reproductive health and feminine hygiene, especially during the menstrual cycle.

The decision on distance learning was not accompanied by measures that would enable all Roma children to have access to teaching content broadcast on RTS channels, including children living in households without electricity and/or without TV sets. The absence of such measures puts children in an unequal position in terms of exercising the right to education, to which the termination of the work of pedagogical assistants has additionally contributed.

Roma women are exposed to multiple discrimination<sup>225</sup>: as women, especially because of traditional norms that are widespread in the Roma community (dominant gender role of mother and wife resulting in early marriages<sup>226</sup>, limited educational opportunities, especially for girls<sup>227</sup>, having many children, minor teenage pregnancy and childbirth, unemployment, childcare and domestic work) and as Roma women facing stereotypes and prejudices and discrimination against the Roma national community.<sup>228</sup> The disadvantageous position of most members of the

218 The Standing Conference of Roma Citizens’ Associations - ROMA LEAGUE addressed the Ministry of Health on that occasion and warned that people’s lives were endangered and that the entire society was put in a state of general danger, but did not receive any response.

219 Statement of the President of the Coordination Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma on the occasion of the International Roma Day. Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/457874/vlada-srbije-snazno-posvecena-unapredjenju-polozaja-roma-.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

220 See: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php?start=5> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

221 See: <https://www.ombudsman.rs/index.php?start=10> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

222 See: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/polozej-roma-u-romskim-nas-cir/>

223 <https://mondo.rs/Info/Ekonomija/a1298699/Posta-hitna-ispalta-ocijalnih-davanja-i-novcanih-naknada.html>

224 Available at: <https://www.redcross.org.rs> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

225 Regional Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) in relation to discrimination against Roma women in the fields of health care, child marriage, provision of support and protection to Roma women victims of domestic violence (UN WOMEN, 2019).

226 <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/2671/file/De%20C4%8Diji%20brakovi%20u%20romskoj%20populaciji%20u%20Srbiji.pdf>

227 According to the annual reports of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Roma, especially Roma women, are the most discriminated group in Serbia, and based on a survey conducted by the same office, about 60% of Roma men and women consider that they are treated unequally in institutions, employment, etc. <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/izvestaji/>

228 <https://mics.unicef.org/>

Roma national community (poverty, material deprivation, low level of education, inadequate housing conditions, etc.) affects also women, but gender roles shape the specifics of the position of Roma women and limit their opportunities to improve their position.

Organised support to the Roma community was provided by citizens' associations, in cooperation with donor agencies, and the biggest problem was the lack of financial resources and opportunities for informal work.<sup>229</sup>

#### 8.1.4. Single parents

Due to the closure of schools and kindergartens, single parents,<sup>230</sup> as well as people living alone with children, most of whom are mothers (79% of single-parent families are mothers with children), have faced with the problem of reconciling their work and child care, especially bearing in mind that due to the movement ban they could not rely on the support of extended family members, the child's other parent or paid assistance.

Single parents who, due to the nature of their work, are forced to go to work are in a particularly difficult, dead-end situation. According to media reports, some mothers who chose to stay at home were threatened with dismissal.<sup>231</sup>

Regarding this problem, government officials announced various measures: the Prime Minister announced the adoption of a recommendation that would allow mothers of children under 12 not to go to work, but to work from home, with paid benefits,<sup>232</sup> the line minister said that the Government recommended to employers to "allow one of the parents to take care of children, and for the chronically ill and single parents to

work from home", and on 17 March, the President of the Republic said in his address that "mothers of children under 12 have a full salary and can take care of their children, without any consequences".<sup>233</sup> The Decree on Organising Work of Employers During the State of Emergency of 16 March 2020 did not offer a solution for employed single parents, and some employers did not allow employees to work from home even in cases where it was possible. After the session of the Social and Economic Council, the line minister appealed to employers to allow single parents of children under the age of 12 to work from home, whenever possible.<sup>234</sup> *The Recommendation of the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government for organising the work of public administration and state institutions envisages special protection and work from home for parents of children up to 12 years of age (as well as chronically ill and persons older than 60 years).*<sup>235</sup>

Handling the requests of single parents, the Commissioner for Protection of Equality on 5 April sent an initiative to the Government of the Republic of Serbia to issue instructions that would enable the employer to allow single parents who could not organise work from home to stay at home to take care of their children, as well as to give priority to employed parents, without discrimination on the grounds of sex, in deciding on employees who would perform work outside the employer's premises.<sup>236</sup>

On several occasions, parents' associations appealed to the Government to allow single mothers who had no one to leave their children with to stay at home during the state of emergency, while finding ways to relieve employers of the burden during the period in which their female workers had to stay at home with their

229 More about the experiences of Roma women during the pandemic is available in the chapter "Testimonies of Roma women about the pandemic".

230 This term denotes single parents in the legal and factual sense, so that it includes parents who take care of the child alone because the other parent does not actually exercise parental rights and duties, regardless of the reasons for that.

231 See: <https://www.021.rs/story/Info/Srbija/236856/Mame-su-zakon-Samohrane-majke-u-strahu-od-gubitka-posla-zbog-virusa-korona.html> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

232 <https://biznis.telegraf.rs/info-biz/3166181-stariji-od-65-roditelji-dece-do-12-i-hronichni-bolesnici-da-rade-od-kuce> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

233 Available at: <https://direktno.rs/vesti/drustvo-i-ekonomija/260657/sta-je-sa-predlogom-vlade-da-majke-dece-do-12-godina-ostanu-kod-kuce.html> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

234 See: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/452037/danas-odluka-o-dodatnom-zaposljavanju-u-gerontoloskim-centrima.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

235 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/donete-preporuke-za-organizovanje-rada-u-javnim-upravama-i-drzavnim-institucijama/>

236 Initiative to the Government for drafting Instructions for the action of employers during the state of emergency Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/inicijativa-vladi-za-izradu-instrukcije-za-pos-cir/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

children.<sup>237</sup> Despite the announcements and appeals of public authorities, the problem faced by single parents regarding the reconciliation of their work and child care has not been satisfactorily resolved.

### 8.1.5. Migrants and asylum seekers

The Decision on Temporary Restriction of Movement of Asylum Seekers and Irregular Migrants Placed in Asylum Centres and Reception Centres in the Republic of Serbia dated 16 March 2020,<sup>238</sup> whose provisions became part of the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency of 9 April 2020,<sup>239</sup> restricted the movement of asylum seekers and irregular migrants and established increased surveillance and security of these facilities, guarded by the Army.<sup>240</sup> Leaving the facilities is allowed only exceptionally and in justified cases (going to the doctor or for other justified reasons), with a special time-limited permission of the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.

Regarding these measures, a complaint was lodged with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality for discrimination against refugees, migrants and asylum seekers on the grounds of legal status, origin and place of residence, explaining that any person could be a carrier of the virus, that no case of coronavirus had been confirmed among refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, and that persons from these groups living in private accommodation were not subject to any special restrictions on movement compared to other citizens.<sup>241</sup>

One of the problems faced by migrants and asylum seekers is the lack of information on Government measures during the state of emergency. CSOs pointed out this problem, appealing that all the Government decisions adopted during the state of emergency should be officially translated into English and available in all collective accommodation facilities, and that persons who did not speak Serbian or English should be provided with translation into a language they understood.<sup>242</sup>

Regarding the education of children migrants and asylum seekers, the Ministry of Education informed the public that TV sets and computers had been provided to migrant children accommodated in reception centres, with the support of the Commissariat for Refugees, to allow these pupils to watch the lectures on RTS 3 and educational platforms.<sup>243</sup> However, there is no publicly available data on how the following of classes is organised, or on possible support measures in education, given the level of the knowledge of the language in which distance learning is conducted. Moreover, there is no information on whether any special measures were taken for unaccompanied migrant and asylum-seeking children and whether the work of their guardians was adjusted to the conditions of the state of emergency.

Due to the impossibility to leave migrant centres, women face difficulties regarding the purchase of products for the protection of sexual and reproductive health and hygiene maintenance, especially during the menstrual cycle. It is unknown whether and how these needs of women were met.

237 See the appeal of association „Mame su zakon“ (Mothers Rule): Available at: <https://www.021.rs/story/Info/Srbija/236856/Mame-su-zakon-Samohrane-majke-u-strahu-od-gubitka-posla-zbog-virusa-korona.html> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

238 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 32/2020

239 Article 6 of the Decree on Amendments to the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency of 9 April 2020 (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 53/2020)

240 Although the movement restriction measure applies only to migrants and asylum seekers who are accommodated in migrant centres, the Commissioner for Refugees Vladimir Cucić gave the following statement for the media: *“It is good that the decision was made and that it has a strong effect of a directive and that it gives us the opportunity to treat in a different way those who are not in the centres at the moment, but will certainly be collected and sent to one of the centres or assembly points where they will first be subjected to a medical examination and triage as part of an overall set of measures to prevent the spread of the virus.”* According to the data presented by the Commissioner, there are 6,000 migrants in 17 centres in Serbia, and *“absolutely no one is suspected for coronavirus.”* Source: RTV website, 17 March 2020

241 On 21 April 2020, the association of citizens Initiative for Economic and Social Rights A11 lodged a complaint with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality “for the discriminatory legal regime to which refugees, migrants and asylum seekers are subjected.” <https://www.a11initiative.org/izbeglice-trazioci-azila-i-migranti-nezakonito-i-arbitrano-liseni-slobode-na-osnovu-diskriminativnih-kriterijuma/>

242 An appeal to respect human and minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution and ratified international treaties during the state of emergency, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights. Available at: <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/apel-da-se-za-vreme-vanrednog-stanja-postuju-ljudska-i-manjinska-prava-zajamcena-ustavom-i-ratifikovanim-medunarodnim-ugovorima/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

243 Available at: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/452652/ucenje-od-kuce-za-ucenike-koji-rade-po-iop-u.php> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

### 8.1.6. Homeless people

The ban on movement and other measures during the state of emergency have particularly affected the homeless because they do not have even the minimum conditions for maintaining hygiene and satisfying their basic existential needs. During the state of emergency, the shelters for adults and the elderly and the shelters for children, which housed a number of homeless people, continued to operate, but the work of the drop-in centre was suspended, so that the homeless outside the shelter are not able to use day services of the drop-in centre.<sup>244</sup>

The homeless who had used the service of soup kitchens before the state of emergency continued to use this service, but those who are not users of soup kitchens have been left at the mercy of citizens and mostly eat waste from garbage containers. Immobile and poorly mobile homeless people, who are on the edge of existence, are in a particularly difficult situation.

There is no information that any measures intended for the homeless were implemented during the state of emergency. The modest assistance provided to them in the form of food parcels is the result of the engagement of CSOs and informal groups of individuals.<sup>245</sup>

## 8.2. Recommendations - Social protection and measures for vulnerable groups

- In employing additional people in social protection institutions, which will certainly improve the quality of services and increase staffing levels in these institutions, it is necessary **to ensure equal employment conditions for women and men in all positions.**
- It is necessary to provide **health workers** with adequate protective equipment and protocols that would minimise the risk of exposure to the infection. It is necessary to provide the **full amount of salary** for persons who are on sick leave due to the coronavirus infection (confirmed cases), including health workers who are sick or in quarantine;
- **Provide child care** for health workers and those who have to work, and material assistance for the families of the health workers or employees who have died from the virus;
- It is necessary to organise **alternative forms of public transport**, so that it is available to employees, but also to other persons who need it;
- It is necessary to **encourage employers** to provide single parents (persons living alone with children) with the opportunity to work from home, even if it involves the redistribution of work, but also to **ensure the implementation of the decision on work from home for one parent of children under 12, through controlling the compliance with the decision by employers;**

244 See: <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/beograd/3431165/gde-da-se-sklone-beskucnici-i-deca-sa-ulice-samo-ovde-mogu-tokom-policijskog-casa> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

245 See: <https://www.donacije.rs/projekat/beskucnici-pomoc-covid19/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

- The poorest households and households without permanently employed persons (neither in the private nor in the public sector) need to be **provided with the amount of the minimum salary during the epidemic, in order to compensate for potential income from informal work;**
- It would be necessary to increase the amounts of child allowance and benefits for the poorest families with children, in order to neutralise the lack of free meals at school or kindergarten as much as possible;
- It is necessary to issue instructions regarding **the seeing of children and parents who do not live with their children**, as well as to ensure the possibility of collecting alimony;
- It is necessary to organise **voluntary and other shopping services as well as other types of services for persons over 65 years of age**, especially those living alone and persons with disabilities, of course while complying with all health protection measures;
- In quarantine and sanitation centres, it is necessary to **apply measures and protocols for protection against violence**, as well as appropriate support for vulnerable groups;
- Collected data on the number of laid off persons, as well as those on forced leave, **should be disaggregated by sex;**
- **In the crisis response teams, it is necessary to ensure the representation** of citizens' associations, associations of persons with disabilities and Roma, and to conduct needs assessments according to gender-sensitive methodology and include them in protection and rescue plans.
- **It is necessary to further monitor the redistribution of budget funds at the local and national level**, in the field of social and child protection, in order to get insight into the consequences of the epidemic and measures of its suppression on the availability and quality of social protection services;
- It is necessary to encourage the **development of alternative models of services of caring** for children and other dependent household members in the situations where standard ways of providing services do not function;
- After the end of the state of emergency, perform a comprehensive analysis of general measures at the national, provincial and local levels in terms of their consequences for certain vulnerable social groups, bearing in mind the vulnerability of these groups and gender dimensions of these measures;
- Examine targeted measures for certain vulnerable groups from the aspect of human rights and gender equality and record which measures were needed but not adopted;
- Identify gender and other inequalities in access to community resources during the state of emergency and map the unmet needs of women and men, boys and girls from vulnerable groups; after the end of the state of emergency, prepare a complete and comprehensive gender-responsive programme of social and economic recovery, taking into account the negative effects of the state of emergency on members of vulnerable groups, and with their full participation.

## 9. CAPTIVES AND REBELS IN THE TIME OF CORONA: WOMEN 65+

### 9.1. Introduction and purpose of interviews with women over 65 year of age

Women 65 years of age or over are a particularly important group for this gender analysis because they are most directly affected by the total ban on movement, followed by slightly loosened restrictions, introduced hastily in the Republic of Serbia, without any

consultation with the groups that are directly affected, primarily women and men 65 years of age and over, organisations working with the elderly, independent institutions and human rights organisations. It is a huge group of people in which women make up the majority.

Bearing in mind that women account for 51.3%<sup>246</sup> of the total population of the Republic of Serbia, that they dominate in the category of middle-aged and elderly population and that significantly more women (60%) than men (40%)<sup>247</sup> live in single-person households, it is important to capture and note the direct impact of the Government's measures on them.

Among the elderly households whose holders are older than 65, there are as many as 3/4 of female households. The percentage of women who said they lived in households where they "barely make ends meet" is 1.2% higher than men who said the same thing. In the category of widow/widower, there are 3.4% more women than men. In residential care facilities for adults and the elderly, more than 60% of beneficiaries are women. The average old-age pension for women is 23,000 and for men 29,000. The average disability pension for women is 21,000 and for men 25,000. The rate of severe material deprivation among elderly women is 23.6%, and among elderly men - 17.4%. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for female pensioners is 16.9%, and 13.3% for male pensioners. Among the informally employed over 65 years of age, more than 80% are women.<sup>248</sup>

The sample for telephone interviews<sup>249</sup> consisted of 20 women for whom the main entry criterion was to be 65 years of age or older. In addition to this criterion, care was taken to include respondents from different municipalities and towns in order to collect data on different experiences and life situations of women living in urban and rural areas, those living in apartments and

houses, alone and with other family members or friends. The necessary condition was that they voluntarily agreed to an interview that lasted from 20 to 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the period from 15 April to 6 May 2020. The respondents were reached through snowball sampling, which means that the initial group consisted of 3 known women who recruited

<sup>246</sup> Source: Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 2017

<sup>247</sup> Idem.

<sup>248</sup> Idem.

<sup>249</sup> Three respondents stated that it was more convenient for them to write the answers by e-mail, and they did so. Others were interviewed by phone.

other respondents from among their acquaintances. In order to avoid the dominant influence of one milieu, one contact could give a maximum of 2 to 3 new contacts.

The aim of the interview was to collect primary data on living conditions, changes in everyday life caused by the introduction of the state of emergency and the application of health protection measures, the respondents' ability to meet their basic needs from available income as well as the availability of necessary support. The respondents talked about their state of health, as well as about difficulties and unmet needs in the pandemic. Finally, as users of various measures, they assessed the extent to which these measures suited their needs.

## 9.2. Description of sample

The interviewed women were from 65 to 86 years old. As regards the place of residence during the state of emergency, the respondents are from Belgrade, Jelača, Kragujevac, Kratovo, Kruševac, Milatović, Novi Sad, Čačak, Smederevo and Smederevska Palanka. The two women moved from their permanent place of residence to another address. Eight women live alone during the state of emergency, six live with their husband or partner, four in a multi-member family, one with the daughter, and one woman lives with her friend. Seven women in the sample do not have health problems, and 13 women suffer from chronic diseases. During the state of emergency, 12 women live in apartments and 8 in houses. The basic data on the interviewed women are shown in the table.

No.	Age	Town	Living with	House or apartment
1	80	Belgrade	Female friend	Apartment
2	66	Novi Sad	Alone	Apartment
3	66	Milatovići	Husband	House
4	70	Užice	Alone	Apartment
5	73	Novi Sad	Partner	Apartment
6	69	Novi Sad	Alone	Apartment
7	66	New Belgrade, but currently in the village	Alone, but currently with her brother and sister-in-law	Apartment, but currently in the house
8	86	Novi Beograd	Alone	Apartment
9	66	Belgrade	Husband, but the children are in their own apartments in the same building	Apartment in the house
10	72	Belgrade, but currently in Grocka	Husband	Apartment, but currently in the house
11	67	Belgrade	Husband and sister	Apartment
12	79	Kragujevac	Alone	House
13	73	Belgrade	Alone	Apartment
14	81	Surčin	Husband	House
15	65	Kratovo	Husband, son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren	House
16	81	Jelača	Son, daughter-in-law, two grandchildren and grandson's wife	House
17	76	Smederevska Palanka	Daughter	Apartment
18	69	Kruševac	Husband	House
19	68	Smederevo	Alone	Apartment
20	74	Čačak	Alone	Apartment

## 9.3. Main findings

### 9.3.1. Life situations

Asked **where they lived, with whom they lived and what their family situation was**, the women answered:

*I'm 80 years old, a widow, and I have a personal pension. I live in Belgrade, on the 5th floor, in the city centre. I live with a family friend's daughter. I have no children - one fear less. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I live in an apartment, in the city, alone and I can only walk in the urban block and around the urban block on days when pensioners are allowed to go shopping. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*I live in Novi Beograd, on the 3rd floor of a residential building. Luckily, I have a 7-metre long terrace, accessed from two rooms, where I walk. I also have wonderful flowers. I'm 86 years old, a widow for 19 year, I have a daughter and two grandsons. I live alone, they don't come in, they just bring all I need once a week. My daughter came twice. I broke into tears. My grandchildren come, put the masks on, we talk in front of the door. I have orchids that my daughter gave me for my birthday, so I took them to the door, and she took a photo of me with a mask and orchids. This isolation is not hard for me. I've got used to it in my life. Well, I haven't got used to it, but I remember. I experienced the air-strikes at the age of 7, then the occupation, and my dad died before the war. We lived in Crveni krst. I remember the 1941 air-strikes, followed by the occupation; we had a curfew that lasted for four years and we were not allowed to go outside, play, or whine; we didn't have balls, we didn't have dolls, our mothers sewed dolls and balls for us. It was difficult after the occupation also, we used ration stamps, and my mother struggled. She fed us, educated us, we remained normal.*

*We had no comfort. That's how I experienced 1999. I experienced air-strikes three times in my life: In 1941, in 1944 - when allegedly our allies bombed us, and in 1999. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I live in Milatovići, in a house in the village, my husband and I, our children have left.*

*I live in the city; I have a large terrace and last night I did gymnastics with my three neighbours on the terrace. During the day, I walk on the terrace for a long time, we have a coffee around 5 o'clock, and then I made them do the exercises. My niece, who lives in France, tells me that someone recorded us, so they put the video on Facebook on the bulletin board of Užice; she says that there were more than 9000 views and that she also watched us. Pensioner from Užice*

*I am 73 years old. I live in the city, in an apartment, luckily I have a terrace and I live in a building with a yard where I can walk because it is fenced and closed with the gate. I have been living with my cohabiting partner for over 10 years. I have two children (they are adults - 40 and 45 years old) and four grandchildren. Children have their families and their children. I could say that my family situation is stable, both in the narrow and broad sense (the families of my children). Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*I'm 74. I'll be soon 75 years old. It's an advanced age, everything has shaken up. I live alone in an apartment, on the 3rd floor. Pensioner from Čačak*

*I live with my husband in a house with 6 apartments because my husband knew that we would have small pensions because we were self-employed, so he had this idea to live from renting apartments. I live in an apartment; my daughter and my son are also here, in their own apartments. I also have a yard, which is not a big one. Every meter means a lot and only now have I realised what it means to have a house and how big a difference it is. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I'm 65, I live in Kratovo, near Priboj. It was hard for me. One is afraid, I am afraid for myself and for my family. I have a husband, 66, a son, a daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. Normally, all of us sit in every day. They don't go anywhere. We move in the yard, go to the field, to the barn, but we're still scared. We wash our hands, we disinfect. We wash our hands non-stop, and I use Asepsol if I go out somewhere and touch the handles, although we don't go anywhere. I don't go to the store. Perhaps to my neighbour's place, next door, but keeping a distance. A coffee with distance. I have a terrace close to the street, we sit to have a coffee, she goes her way, and I go my way. Pensioner from Kratovo*

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*I was born in 1939; I'm 81 years old. I live with my son and daughter-in-law and two grandchildren and I also have a granddaughter-in-law. I have them to take care of me. I have 4 great-grandchildren. I live in Jelača. It's near Priboj, behind the Kratovo spa. The pensioner from Jelača that we interviewed while she was chasing the goats. She says that sometimes the goats are faster and sometimes she is faster than the goats.*

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*I live in the city with my husband and sister who is now with us, we haven't escaped in time. I live in a building and I really don't go for a walk. Only to go shopping, and if there is a queue, I don't even go in, but I go around 5 or 5.30h. Usually, I wake up around 7 or 7.30h. One has to obey the law, I can't go anywhere*

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*now. I said, the Constitution was violated, the Constitution was not respected. First the Decree that changed 11 times and that was adopted in a non-constitutional way. If you deviated, you must strictly adhere to the law. First Vučić signed, then Dačić co-signed, Brnabić didn't even sign it. Everything is sloppy. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I live in Belgrade, but I moved to Grocka, I escaped secretly, but now we are back, we have given the house to the juniors. I live in a building in Belgrade, and we have a house in Grocka. I have a husband, a daughter and a son and three grandchildren. I live with my husband. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*How, who cares how I live and why are you asking me anyway? Only some scribbling, it's useless. I am 80 years old. I will now turn 82. I live with my grandfather, in the village in a house in Surčin. I have two daughters. One is 59 years old, the other is 55. They are married and have their own houses and children. Pensioner from Surčin*

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*Eh, my torments. I live, if it's life, in an apartment all day. My daughter goes out rarely, brings what we need, then she cleans everything, washes a hundred times, so that I don't get infected. She really takes care of me. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka*

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*I live in Belgrade, in my apartment, alone and I am 73 years old. I have two sons. The children are grown-ups and live separately with their families. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I came here to be with my brother and daughter-in-law, but I usually live in Belgrade alone, but now I couldn't stand it alone. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I live in my house, alone. Pensioner from Kragujevac*

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*I live with my husband in a house. We have a garden, it's my lifesaver. I get busy with the flowers and some onions and tomatoes that I have. Pensioner from Kruševac*

*I'm alone in my apartment. Pensioner from Smederevo*

### 9.3.2. New everyday life

The next set of questions referred to changes in everyday life and the subjective attitude towards measures and pandemic. **The word that women most often use to describe their experience during the state of emergency is humiliation.** Most of the respondents describe their experiences as **a great change compared to usual everyday life, as concern for physical fitness and the future, as isolation from dear people, children and grandchildren, as impossibility and deprivation.**

**Women living in the city and in the apartment are much more affected by the ban on movement** than women living in the countryside. This is logical for two reasons: the lower limit for the ban on movement was 65 years in the city and 70 years in the countryside, and secondly, the experience with this ban is completely different for the households that live in houses and have a garden than for those locked in apartments. There are also respondents who **claim that their lives have changed very little or not at all, and most of them live in the countryside.**

The sample also includes several women who **sneaked out of their houses** at the times when movement was allowed for people under 65 years of age. **They violated the ban knowingly, out of rebellion and disagreement, being aware that such a ban is unconstitutional and that their deprivation of liberty is not in the function of their protection.** However, the rebels took great care to protect themselves while staying outside. Therefore, in addition to the anxiety due to confinement, many women in the group of respondents also felt the **burden of injustice done to them.**

The main conclusion that can definitely be deduced from the testimonies of the respondents is that **women in the category of 65 and over are not a homogeneous group**, and that all their experiences are diverse, including the experience of pandemic and the state of emergency. However, during the pandemic, doctors and politicians referred to this group as our pensioners, our elderly, people over 65 and the like. This is why the **whole experience was perhaps the most difficult for those women whose professions are such that they necessarily understood technical or practical aspects** (for example from the point of view of legal and medical professions), in addition to influencing their personal mood or well-being.

*I feel humiliated, closed. You are ordered to walk, but you can't. Suddenly, you don't exist as a person. We are all the same: both active and inactive and very sick and quite healthy. What especially humiliates you is the change of consciousness around you. The supermarket workers were ordered to ask for an ID card if someone is older, and if the person refuses to show, to call the police. So, they force him/her into a situation where he/she will pay a*

*fine of 50,000 to 150,000 dinars. No one will help you, but you become a source of fear, as if you were a disease. There was a twist of argument: "There's an old man!" Those who say that perceive us, not themselves, as a danger. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*The hardest thing for me is the inability to move. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*First of all, the Government's attitude towards the elderly and respect for their dignity. This group is not unique in its characteristics and needs, so it is necessary to take various measures to improve the situation of the elderly, such as providing home care service, material support for the poorest, allowing movement and providing protective masks, gloves and disinfectants.*

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*It has changed, the sale of our products is going poorly. Markets are rarely open now; normally we sell potatoes and milk, cheese and cream when we have them. It's difficult, there are no reserves, it's impossible, because we invest everything. We were supposed to sow, but sales stopped and now we are waiting to sell one thing to buy another. There are no young people in the village, only one married couple in 20 houses. Woman without regular income, Milatovići*

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*I have so much to say that I can't in one sentence. When it all started, my behaviour was great. I played music in the yard, danced, organised the garden, and then my son came back from France and said two hours later: "I have a fever." He called the relevant number and in a couple of hours the ambulance came, they were wearing masks, and the whole thing hadn't even started yet, so we were amazed. A few hours later he informed me that he had bilateral pneumonia, that they kept him, that they did a test on him, and then he stayed in the Clinic for Infectious Diseases for 3 or 4 days. Then the result came that he was negative, and he had been next to the guy who was positive, they were lying next to each other. The conditions were disastrous. There was no glass on the windows, it was cold, they were lying in jackets, covered with blankets, it was dirty. That really scared me. Then they wanted to transfer him to the Pulmonary Department. When he saw that he was negative, he left on his own initiative. He came home, he was supposed to be under the*

*control of the police, but he didn't get anything, any paper. He didn't even know he shouldn't go out. They only started saying that later. Just like this young girl Jovana who was put in prison. He did go out. The police came 2 or 3 times and he was just lucky to be home at that time. I wanted to disclose that it was a chaos there. He didn't let me. At the same time, my daughter, who is a single mother, only thought about what would happen to her 12-year-old child if something happened to her. She is in a special mental state. She got a fever and said she had a sore throat and pain in her lungs. She went to the Clinic for Infectious Diseases at 5 p.m. She waited until nightfall in a group of people to be examined. Next to her, there was a girl with a temperature of 39, who called an ambulance, and then came on her own, by public transport. When it was my daughter's turn, the doctor examined her lungs with a stethoscope and told her to go home. And what can I say now? I think the worst of it all. And then, a few days ago, late in the evening, a message arrived from my son-in-law, the husband of this middle daughter, that she had been admitted to the VMA (Military Medical Academy) with intestinal obstruction, terrible pain, and the son-in-law and 3 little girls were at home. Hell. I have no more strength or capacity to receive it all. She is now released home, but she was there for 10 days. Colonoscopy, scanner, it turned out to be inflammation of the small intestine. She is working on her PhD. She has a deadline and she worked 16 hours a day, she ate irregularly and so on. Apparently, the VMA needs an anesthesiologist, but they don't have one. She waited 5 or 6 days, wasn't allowed to eat, only infusion, thin, without strength. Horror. When the VMA does not have an anesthesiologist! We pulled strings, the director of a private clinic intervened. Well, he got infected with corona 2 days later, and that clinic advertises to receive patients, and the director has corona. Wherever I turned, horror. I knew the health care system wasn't functioning, but this... I'm a little bit*

*better now. I feel awful for not being allowed to go out, it's very humiliating. I am still active and now I have to be an old woman who can do nothing in this situation, I can only take care of myself and my husband. He hasn't recovered either, and three years ago he had a stroke and now he has aphasia, a speech disorder. The brain is damaged and it's the beginning of dementia. He can't read anymore. He only kept his swearing centre, it was not damaged. Food, beer, that's ok and whatever he is interested in, his boat, fishing, that part of the brain is not damaged. Before, when there was a problem, I would always focus on solving it, and now I can't do anything. First time when we went out at 4 a.m. I cried. At night, the two of us and some old people, shaking with their sticks. However, since human beings are cattle, we get used to it. Like it's a great thing, you get up early and go. Pensioner, Belgrade*

*We don't really have a restriction, we can't go on the road, but we can go to the meadow, and we're afraid because the road leads to the meadow. We don't visit each other. In the neighbourhood here, two old women died, one can't express condolences. That's hard for me, honestly. We have a store, usually it's open until 8 or 9 p.m., now only until 4 p.m., so you have no place to go. Woman without regular income, Milatovići*

*I respect the measures and I cope with the epidemic because I have to. It's hard. Socialising has changed the most, we have all become lonely. The hardest thing to cope with is loneliness. The woman I share the household with helps me. I communicate by phone with my friends who are mostly in Belgrade, but also in Sarajevo. What I miss the most is socialising and seeing my friends. I haven't seen anyone except my household members for seven weeks. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*Some sadness has overwhelmed me, it's so great that it won't go away. It all crashed down on me. I cry secretly not to upset my daughter. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka*

*Nothing has changed for us. We are in the village, when our children go, they use masks and gloves, and I am not afraid, why should I be afraid? I passed through all sorts of things in my life and I was also sick. I'm not afraid, I underwent surgery 28 years ago. My right breast was removed, my right arm is swollen, my left one also, but it has to be that way. I help my children with the gardens. While I was tying the cow about 9 years ago, it tore off half of my finger. Pensioner from Jelača*

*I usually walk a lot and now I've started to do physical exercises for about 40 minutes a day. We try to do some physical exercises and then to read. I gave a few Skype interviews, it was awful the first time, and later on it was great. I had a huge fear that something would break down. You're talking to the wall. Once you get used to it, it's not a problem. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*My husband and I have a tea, sometimes also coffee. We have breakfast and then we do our separate activities. I go to the garden, he reads the newspapers and informs me. I prepare lunch for two days, so I don't have to do it every day. We don't need much. We call our children to hear how they and our grandchildren are. We watch the news to see what's going on, some TV series and that's it. Pensioner from Kruševac*

*On Fridays I go to the store and to the pharmacy, all on foot and around the neighbourhood, usually around 6 o'clock, and I do everything in an hour. I like to go. I'm getting less fit now. I have been locked down since 16 March. For the first time, I'll use today the Government's relaxed measures. I'm not sure if it had to be like that or if we are really so undisciplined. The situation is much better*

*in Novi Sad and there are fewer deceased people. I don't think it had to be so threatening. The approach could have been different, as in Croatia. It is intimidating and rude to people. People are intimidated, especially those who suffer from diseases. They scare us even more than they should and it will have huge implications. It's important to me to move. Circulation should be improved. I violated the ban twice last week. People say I'm doing well physically. I put on a mask and glasses and walked. I miss it, and I'm not fit. I don't carry an ID card, so if they (police) stop me, let them guess. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*My day hasn't changed much. Now I have more time and I started doing what women do in the house, I cleaned the closets. I have a lot of clothes, so now I'm putting them in the bags that I will bring somewhere. It takes time to do that. I'm sad that I can't go out. I am 70 years old; I usually walk a lot; I live on the 5th floor without an elevator; I go to Staparska banja and back; it's 15 km. Now I make up with these primitive walks on the terrace. Pensioner from Užice*

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*Everything has changed, and only when things start to slowly return to the state before the pandemic will we begin to understand how big the changes are and how much each of us has changed. Being this age, I had the opportunity to gain different experiences (war, air-strikes, state of emergency after the assassination of the Prime Minister... all sorts of things), but none of them was like this. For all that before we knew it would definitely stop at some point. So, there was certainty and some kind of prospect. And then everything is much easier to bear. It is not the case now, and uncertainty and anticipation (I don't know of what, but that's how I feel) is depressing because people of my age don't have a life ahead of them. It is somehow behind them, and they have some "other prospect" ahead of them, not to specify it. And maybe they just wanted*

*to wait for that prospect somehow peacefully and safely. That's not the case now. Will this happen again in the autumn or in the spring, how long will the virus "walk" around the planet, shall we continue to be just afraid or shall we just move away as it has been the case now - there are no answers to all these questions, nor can anyone give them at this point of time. All this offers no hope. One shouldn't think. In this context, there is also a ban on movement. There is a lot to be said about how the measures were communicated to us, about whether they considered the way they would be implemented, how many times they changed the time when it was allowed to get out from isolation, whether the citizens were informed, etc. The measure is justified (which is confirmed also by the daily reports of the Crisis Response Team). But that's not all. A lot of questions would have to be answered, because this measure has affected a large number of Serbia's residents (more than 1,500,000). The way in which the public authorities addressed the elderly is an example of violation of the right to dignity of the person and violation of their psychological integrity, and violation of these rights is not allowed even during the war. On the first day after the imposition of the state of emergency, the Prime Minister "attacked" the elderly in an elevated tone and using inappropriate words (they really rushed in crowds to the counters of post offices and banks because they hurried to pay their bills before the ban) and threatened to impose a ban as a punishment for disobedience, on several occasions she addressed the citizens with derogatory words (selfish, hypocrites), while the President threatened that there would be no enough places in the cemeteries for all of them. The freedom of movement was suspended for the elderly for a continuous period of 6 days (144 hours) and for another 20 hours on the seventh day (a total of 164 hours per week), under the threat of sanction. This measure lasted more than a month (35 days in total). The hours in*

*the middle of the night reserved for shopping were also humiliating and inappropriate for old people (causing fear, discomfort, interrupting their sleep). At the same time, the pharmacies did not work in these hours, so they could not buy medicines. Isolation measures were necessary but the manner in which they were applied was not proportionate to their intended aim. The restriction of rights was greater than it should have been, and the aim would have been achieved with a milder restriction of rights (e.g. to have the right to go shopping but also to walk after the beginning of "curfew" from 6 to 8 p.m. every other day). Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*I was in a bad mood for the first 5 days in Belgrade, in the apartment. It was unexpected and sudden and I had a lot of plans in March and April. I was supposed to travel to 10 poor municipalities in the south of Serbia to talk to the elderly, and then I was annoyed because I couldn't leave the apartment. I missed my walks and when I had the first opportunity, I ran away. I am not qualified for answering whether it has to be like that, we have to listen to the professionals, but was it necessary to impose so many restrictions on pensioners? I believe that it could have been more humane. I'm not sure how good that solution is to go shopping from 4 to 7 in the morning. In my opinion, they should have given at least an hour for a walk, maybe during the curfew, in order to avoid the possibility of contact with the younger population as much as possible; that could have been done and would not have caused any risk. The elderly are very disciplined and respect the measures. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*The rule is broken in the morning, the dog is taken for a walk. A rebel. Come on, rich people, politicians will not determine how I have to live until I die. The hardest thing for me is the lack of freedom of movement. I want to go to Kalemegdan. Well, everything has changed for me. My life hasn't had much meaning since I*

*retired, and now it's completely meaningless. There is a woman who comes occasionally to help me clean up and now she can't. Pensioner from Belgrade, 72 years old*

*I've been on the phone all day. My daughter calls, my friend calls, my neighbour calls. I'm just talking. My daughter won't let me move anywhere. She says: "Don't you dare go out". Pensioner from Čačak*

*I don't mind the ban. I am alone, but I am not lonely. I have my routine. I get up, take a shower, nothing is difficult for me. I get in the bathtub by myself and get out, all in slow motion, but I manage. I don't drink coffee but tea, I make lunch for two days. There is a man living in my building, a little younger than me, downstairs and I give him lunch. I started keeping a diary from the introduction of the state of emergency, I already have 60 pages. I write everything, what I notice, whom I call, who calls me, what I do, what I see in the nature, I look at the Sava river and then I write, and so on. I have a wonderful terrace. I have lavender, rosemary shrubs and various flowers. Nothing is difficult to me, except for not seeing my children. But I contact them by phone. My daughter sends me to bed by phone every day. I have a lot of high school friends. 19 people called me on the phone for Easter. Pensioner from Belgrade, 86 years old*

*It's all the same to me. I don't go anywhere when it's not the state of emergency either. Pensioner from Kragujevac*

*I like to read. Now I took Jesenjin to read again and enjoy. Pensioner from Smederevo*

*We are in the countryside, as if there was no epidemic. Nothing has changed. I usually don't go anywhere. I'm not very mobile. We are old. The only thing is that sometimes I have to ask other people to get some bread for me. I don't like when others bring me bread. Then I*

*put it in the freezer and take it out every day. My children bring me bread also when they come. My husband also went by car to buy bread several times, violating the ban. There is no one, who will control us? I communicate by phone*

*mainly with my children and relatives. I don't know what I miss. Not being able to go to the hairdresser. I will go as soon as this ban is lifted, or she will come to my place. Pensioner, Surčin*

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### **Life is looking for new solutions for rural women**

Personally, I find it difficult not being able to go to the office and doing everything I have planned, but even now when the measures are relaxing, I'm not sure that they will allow large gatherings of the elderly and that will bother me a lot. First, the Health Festival that we planned has been postponed to 10th and 11th June. We will see if it will be allowed even then. We had plans for June 15 - World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, and we wanted to bring it to the National Assembly. I also don't know if they will allow training. This is a fantastic opportunity for me, because I used to come to the village on holidays and it was all different. Now I see how different it is here compared to what it was like when I was a child. Now I have the opportunity to talk to my sister-in-law about women in the village, she was born in 1958. Older women in the countryside are very diligent workers. My sister-in-law, who is only 5 or 6 years younger than me, does all the work and doesn't get tired, and she does both women's and men's work, and my brother, for example, doesn't enter the barn at all. They all work side by side with men, while younger women do not, they are housewives in the house and prepare lunch, and men go to the field. They are smarter. I am just unhappy about how much more these older women have to work physically, and it is very uncertain whether they will be able to sell. Women are producers, and they have no income now. They can't sell dairy products either, only milk. Women are very deprived in terms of income, and they invest a lot of work. They even sow more, because they are afraid of how it will be in the autumn and winter. We buy crates of apples cheaply, 20 dinars per kilogram. E-market has been announced, which is good, but it works for those who have a computer. In the village only the younger ones have it. Digitalisation among the elderly is important. We, as an NGO, applied on behalf of the rural women from Dragačevo and Trstenik to reduce the damage caused by COVID. We will give half of 5,000 euros, which is the grant amount, for women to get trained and have a computer. And we will buy for them some fertilisers for the autumn sowing. Pensioner and activist from Belgrade

*I'm bothered with the inability to move and the lack of fresh air. I have a couple of friends with whom I talk, we exchange those nonsenses via Vber. I can't even manage to read, except the newspaper that I buy on Fridays. I haven't*

*even finished the cleaning of my closet. It's an illusion when they say now I'll do this, now I'll do that, and I have no motive. They constantly intimidate you. I really don't like that. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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### 9.3.3. Disinfection, hygiene and protection

Considering that the most frequent “advice of professionals”<sup>250</sup> was that it was necessary for citizens to pay additional attention to hygiene, and especially to wash their hands with soap and lukewarm water for 20 seconds, as well as to wear masks and gloves, and to disinfect the handles and the space in their homes, the respondents talked about what measures of disinfection, cleaning and protection they adhered to, and whether it was a great additional obligation for them in the state of emergency.

The answers show that the **protective equipment was not easily accessible to all respondents, and that they had to manage somehow to purchase, sew or improvise it. The improvised masks, of course, do not provide any protection and only served to alleviate the respondents’ fear from going out in the street.**

Due to the ban on movement, **they could not go to the pharmacy, and their relatives also had to use masks and gloves. In pharmacies, there was a limit of 5 or 10 disposable gloves per purchase.** This was especially a problem in the beginning, when there was a shortage of protective equipment, but over time the supply stabilised. **The women who violated the ban and went to the pharmacy were best supplied. On the other hand, the experience in villages is completely different because masks and gloves were not in regular use, nor was their lack a special cause for concern for the respondents.**

Disinfection of handles and floors is the “advice of professionals” that seems to have been best received. **All respondents disinfected handles and floors fairly regularly**, although some cleaned them with Asepsol, which was reported in the media to be ineffective against the SARS-CoV-2 virus. In the village, there was less pressure not to touch anything and to disinfect everything, so the respondents were more relaxed about it and more or less engaged in **regular house cleaning activities, with slightly enhanced personal hygiene.**

*I’m not obsessed with disinfection, I take care, normally, I put on a mask and gloves when I go up and down the stairs. I was the director of a social protection institution. I am a modest person, but it was different now. Because you have to buy vitamins at the pharmacy. The prices of fruit have jumped. Lemon was 150 dinars, the price is now 300. I don’t like to wear a mask, it chokes me, but I buy both a mask and gloves, I need them often. Pensioner from Užice*

*We have no disinfection, nothing, just hygiene. Probably it’s the clean air, so there are no infected people. Woman without regular income, Milatovići*

*I clean normally, I’m not fanatical about cleaning and disinfection. I wear a mask and gloves, but we don’t live in Aerosol. I buy everything at the pharmacy, they adore us there because we are big consumers. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I bought the masks 2 days ago, because they were not available before. At home, I have alcohol and tenants in 2 apartments, they pass by, I clean, wash my hands, but I did not exaggerate. I hear my friends and I can see from what they say that they do it more. Normally, I wash handles and hands. Pensioner from Belgrade*

250 The expression “advice of professionals” was one of those that marked 53 days of the state of emergency in Serbia.

*I have, I bought a one-litre concentrate that has to be diluted. I have Domestos, alcohol, I am a chemist by profession. I don't have extra work with cleaning, I clean normally, I don't have a reason why, no one visits me, I don't go anywhere. I vacuum once a week, wipe the floors and add a little bit of Domestos or disinfectant. I also wipe the handles when I return from the store. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*I got protection. I buy masks and gloves at the pharmacy. Whenever I go, I buy some, if there are any. I also use the ones for dying hair. I dye myself, so I have them. I used to do it before as well. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*We don't use any of it. I don't go anywhere outside the village. I tried to buy gloves, masks and disinfectants in Guča, but they didn't have any. We have some alcohol from before. It is important to have gloves, disinfectants and masks. I asked quite a few old people with whom I talked about how they got them and*

*they told me that when they went to the store, they were given one glove for that day and after that they couldn't use it anymore. Those who are dog owners, who walk dogs, I think that is the most important thing for them. Also, I hear that there were no lemons in Belgrade. We had them, but they cost 350 dinars, now they can be bought in Belgrade as well. Pensioner from Belgrade who stays in the village during the state of emergency*

*I sewed masks, boil-washed them, ironed them, put them on. My son bought some gloves, nothing special, some Asepsol for hands. Pensioner from Kratovo*

*We don't go anywhere. I clean normally. Pensioner from Kruševac*

*My daughter cleans all day. I help. First we used brandy when there was no Domestos, now we have all sorts of cleaning agents. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka*

#### 9.3.4. Pensions, other income and expenses

The respondents answered the questions **whether they received a pension, whether they had other or additional sources of income, and whether they managed to cover with their income all regular and possible additional expenses** caused by the pandemic and the state of emergency.

Some respondents **referred to state aid** through a direct one-time transfer in the amount of 4,000 dinars.

The sample mostly includes **respondents who have a pension**. In two households, this **small pension is the only permanent source of income in a multi-member rural household**. **The former entrepreneur and the women who receive agricultural pensions actually receive a very small monthly amount of 12,000 to 19,000 dinars**. Even the bigger pensions are not too big and cover relatively modest expenses, but the respondents claim that they can live on their income and manage to cover all expenses because they are modest. This is partly because the **respondents have, at least occasionally, additional income** from agriculture or under authorship agreements or **live in a household with more sources of income or pensions**. In this respect, the sample for gender analysis is above the average for Serbia.

The respondents say that they do not have large additional costs related to the state of emergency because they are not allowed to go out, but they **have some additional costs related to the purchase of vitamins and other dietary supplements intended to strengthen immunity, gloves, masks, disinfectants, and the purchase of lemon whose price was doubled during the epidemic according to the respondents**.

Some respondents **also say that they spend less now than usual**, because they do not go out. The particularly difficult position of women living in the village is highlighted.

*I don't have a pension. He (my husband) doesn't have a pension yet, he needs to buy back some missing years of service, but he can't work anywhere, and so. Woman without regular income, Milatovići*

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*I receive a pension and, in these circumstances, my income is enough for me to live and I can satisfy all my daily needs on my own. Pensioner, Novi Sad*

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*I have a pension. I don't have any extra expenses now, because I can't go out to spend. This is a pure financial gain, hahaha! But my husband, who is an actor, neither performs nor earns, so ... All in all, endless nervousness. Everybody under masks making sure I survive. Nobody asks me what is good for me. I, and I'm certainly not the only one, have experience with that feeling of humiliation, this is not the first, but one in a row. I am locked down with a dog that I love very much and that has its needs. We don't see our grandchildren either. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*My husband died, so I inherited his. But we are 8 in the family and that's all we have. I live with them, what can I do, I don't take my pension, I give it to them. How could I take that from my children? The older grandson works for a private company, he drives, the younger one goes out and works as a musician, there is no secure job, and the son is 61 years old and is not even able to work now. We have land, but*

*it needs to be worked on. He can't do it alone. We're doing what we can. We're struggling. Pensioner from Jelača*

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*Yes, I have a pension and I receive income from some authorship agreements. Nothing important has changed so far. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*Yes, I receive my pension. I spend less now, but I usually have an active life, and now I don't. I have some extra income and that allows me to travel. The pensions are covering the minimum needs. That amount of 4,000 that we received is important for us, of course. But that's not fair. There are people who can't live - there are people who have a pension of 15,000. I think it's high time to make a social card for everyone and give it to those who need it. I don't see a reason why someone who has over 100,000 has to get quick state aid. The whole world targets and it has been difficult for us for 20 years. To determine my income through a giro account. I have no idea that it has been conceived. Nobody thinks, it's a populist move, and it's not humane. I took it from someone's mouth like that. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*My income is enough for me, but I am a modest woman. I have a pension, and I usually have extra income, which I don't have at the moment. In that sense, it's different. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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### Not all women are in the same situation

Older rural women are a particularly vulnerable group. Only 12% of women own houses and only 16% of women own agricultural land. As regards the inheritance of property, more than a third of women (36%) renounce the inheritance that belongs to them by law (as many as 55% of daughters leave their share of inheritance to their brothers, 13% of mothers renounce their inheritance in favour of their sons, and only 2% in favour of their daughters). A larger number of women (23.1% of women and 19.2% of men) own the poorest households. Most women from rural areas are informally engaged as workforce in agriculture (63%), and only 14.8% are permanently employed. As many as 34% of rural women have never been employed, 22% of women are not looking for a job at all, and 33% of women were employed for less than five years. Women spend 5 hours a day performing unpaid domestic work. The largest number of women from rural areas (59.9%) have health insurance through their husbands, 17.8% of them do not have health insurance, and only 9.1% of these women are insured as registered farmers. Rural women have primary education and did not complete secondary school due to family pressure (18.5%), family attitudes according to which women do not need a higher level of education (26%), lack of financial resources (18%) or early marriage and taking care of their families (10%)<sup>251</sup>.

*We have pensions. My pension, after 33 years of work, is 19,000 based on a decision, because we were self-employed. My husband has a disability pension, about 40000. But we rent apartments and make a living from it. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I've had a pension since January. My pension is small, I can't cover all the expenses I have. I have 15000 for 15 years of work. I keep cows, I sell milk, a man comes, takes the milk to the dairy factory. There is a road a little farther, he comes every day, the children take the milk down by car, he pays the money to our account. My husband doesn't have a pension, he uses inhalers and medicines, that's it. He applied for pension in December. Pensioner from Kratovo*

*I have a pension and nothing has changed in that regard. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I receive a pension. My daughter works but not under permanent contract. I'm afraid*

*of what will happen if she is fired. My pension is small. But it's good I have it. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka*

*I have an agricultural pension. I'm very happy. We live from our work, agriculture. Nobody has to give me anything. Pensioner from Surčin*

*I have an agricultural pension. Pensioner from Surčin*

*I have a pension and I also work under temporary service agreement at a faculty in Montenegro. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*Electronically, I receive a pension on my account. I drove to the ATM to withdraw it, to have cash. I usually use a card for shopping. I pay my bills electronically. But they haven't thought about it, that we must have some cash now. I was not (financially) affected by all this, except that I don't go out and I can't go to the*

251 Source: Beker K. Izveštaj o položaju žena na selu u Srbiji, Beograd, 2017.

*city. I don't have any loans, and I normally cover the expenses with my pension. Apart from food and house supplies, I have no other expenses. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*I can live on my pension. I worked in foreign trade, I was an economist and I have a decent pension. I've been retired for 29 years. I'll get everything from the fund, I am very satisfied. My expenses are a bit higher now*

*because my cousin is a military epidemiologist and he tells me what I should buy for immunity. He knows that I like to wander and I usually spend a lot of time in the bus and at various exhibitions. I have my private taxi, my bus at the starting station that I call a private taxi. Now he has advised me to avoid neighbours and buses. But I find a way to entertain myself. Pensioner from Belgrade*

### 9.3.5. Shopping and support

The respondents then shared in the interviews their routine and their skills related to the purchase of food, medicine and everything else they needed. They answered the question of who helped them when they needed help. The conclusion is that **women mainly relied on themselves**. Some went shopping only at the determined time, once a week from 4 to 7 o'clock in the morning. **Relatives, neighbours and friends provided additional help and support to older women. A small number of respondents, only two out of 20, had experience with the support of volunteers in the organisation of local self-government. The respondents living in rural municipalities confirmed that households had received relief parcels from the municipality, while the situation is different in urban areas. In some places, local self-governments distributed parcels to all pensioners, and in other places only to the poorest.**

*I go alone, I sneak out. I didn't ask for anyone's help. There is also a student, a door next to mine, who put a paper saying she was ready to help if someone needed it, but I didn't ask her for help. I have a friend who has a son who brings stuff to her, but she also goes out, even though she had a heart surgery a year ago. She assesses whether the police will be around, and she steals the time. I've heard from a friend that her cousin in Padej, a village that has two streets, was intercepted by a police officer. And now she is punished for walking those 25 meters. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*It's easier for us in the village. First, here people under 70 years of age are allowed to move, and second, we have a lot of stuff in the garden. My brother is the local community president and he was called from the Municipality of Lučani and asked who*

*needed help. He named 4-5 families and they got parcels. The Social Welfare Centre called him. They gave him parcels for 17 families and a list to distribute them in our village and in surrounding villages. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I relied on my children. At the beginning, our daughter asked if we needed anything, and then she got sick. The son was also in quarantine, like us, and now he is on Srebrno jezero (Silver Lake), recovering. Our other daughter always asks what we need, and my husband's sister's daughter brought us something a couple of times. The daughter of an army friend who lives in America also called, and I couldn't help crying. She remembered us! I called the Municipality of Zvezdara for medicine, I asked them to bring it to us, my daughter, who is fragile, doesn't go to pharmacies. I cried again. The first time when two 17-year-old girls*

came to bring us bread and milk. There is a huge number of unemployed in the municipality, but they rely on volunteers, on those children. They were not well organised. We don't have enough people. And what are you doing, I say. Pensioner from Belgrade

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We have one family in the building that can go out. All of us have children. Our children live separately. One daughter is pregnant, and the other has an increased workload and has a small child. We don't want to burden them. They bring us necessary daily stuff when they come, and we do the bigger shopping. And that should have been considered. It's incorrect to burden your family members as long as you can do it yourself. None of the volunteers called me, but there are notifications. My husband is not very healthy, he has had more surgeries, and I am totally fine. Nobody asked me if I could do something. There are many people who do not have the internet connection and do not know what the municipality offers. Each municipality is organised differently, in some of them everyone gets a bag of help, but not here. In our municipality, only those who have a smaller pension. If I needed help, I would turn to young friends who phoned me, rather than to the municipality. There are a lot of people who live alone. There is no one to help them. As a lawyer, I perceived the issue of young volunteers as madness. Children under the age of 15 cannot be volunteers without parental approval, and children under the age of 18 can, but not if their lives are endangered. At first they had no protection. If they don't have it, the question arises also whose life is endangered, because it's not only theirs. When he says my daughter is not an adult, but she volunteers, and they don't have masks and gloves, but I hope they get them! What kind of demagoguery or populism is it? In the state of emergency, the Constitution and the law must be respected even more. Any such irresponsible behaviour leads to the fact that we will have thousands and thousands of

lawsuits for damages and we will completely overburden the judiciary and we will not have the rule of law, and the government will talk about how courts pass judgments against the state, as after the previous state of emergency. Our social infrastructure has not been used. Everyone would agree to help, if a schedule is made. We have an emergency situation and the use of norms from the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management, and it is said that there are established crisis response teams, including for pandemic and epidemic, and it is envisaged how to engage volunteers and civil protection. If it had been done on time, everything would have worked much better. The Crisis Response Team met on 12 and 13 March, and they discussed possible floods, you should see the minutes. In addition, it was evident that this would not happen, because this was the warmest winter, and the possibility of a pandemic or epidemic was not even mentioned. Pensioner from Belgrade

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I have help. My brother, sister and cousin help me. I didn't turn to anyone else for help during the state of emergency because there was no need for it. Pensioner from Novi Sad

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The children bring me groceries, but the most difficult thing for me is limited movement because I usually walked a few kilometres a day. The measures were not particularly hard for me because I worked with students online and managed to do the things I always used to leave for tomorrow. I have a lot of friends with whom I am in constant phone communication. I like to sit with my friends in cafes and I miss that. But what I miss the most are my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We have established regular communication via Skype, so that compensates me a little for their absence. Pensioner from Belgrade

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The volunteers brought things to me. I'm grateful to them. Pensioner from Kragujevac

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*I have good neighbours, I have my nieces and nephews. I can contact them if I need anything. I have regular communication with my friends. The four of us exercise together, each in her own corner. I find some nice music and let it play. Pensioner from Užice*

*I have an acquaintance who brings me bigger things, I have a niece, although I buy everything by myself on Fridays. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*The children bring us what we need once a week. If they can, they come more often. Pensioner from Kruševac*

*A neighbour buys me stuff when she goes to buy for herself. She always asks if I need anything. Pensioner from Smederevo*

*Our daughter buys everything we need. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka*

### 9.3.6. Information

During an epidemic, it is very important that citizens **have clear, accurate and sufficient information about the situation and mandatory or recommended measures** to be able to act in accordance with their duties or good practice in prevention and protection.

It is also essential **that the information received by citizens should be such as to instil confidence, reduce fears, confusion and insecurity, and strengthen the desired response.** Therefore, the respondents answered the question of how they were informed and whether they thought that they had all the necessary information. In their answers **they stressed that it was good that the press conferences, at which the most important statistics and measures were announced, had been held regularly, every day.**

The respondents considered this source as the most important for them. In several interviews, the women pointed out that **they trusted the doctors, and that they did not have a positive reaction to the appearances of politicians.** Some respondents did not trust the doctors either, but sought information **on the Internet, in the foreign media, or from their acquaintances through Viber groups.**

**All attention regarding the efforts to inform citizens was centralised and focused on general guidelines on protection against the new virus. There was a lack of information on the functioning of other aspects of the health care system,** information from the local level, and some respondents **were not able to access health care services related to other symptoms.**

The central addresses **did not pay particular attention to elderly women and men in various conditions that are common in crisis situations,** such as anxiety, depression, loneliness or sadness. The Crisis Response Team did not send any public messages to people with disabilities, or single mothers, girls and boys. **Care for the mental health of citizens was almost completely neglected** and, although there were some volunteer psychological support networks, they were not perceived as part of the Crisis Response Team or the response of the Government.

The respondents **did not like the President's tone of voice,** because he was intimidating, and not just informing citizens, especially at the beginning of the state of emergency. They neither liked the **war-like rhetoric or shifting the blame on citizens,** and **they were very bothered by the accusations of hypocrisy that they heard from the Prime Minister** in her comment about applauding and pot banging. Already humiliated, the respondents felt attacked on that occasion. **A collaborative tone** would have achieved much better results in this group of women.

*I am informed as much as I need to hear. I listen to the press conference every day. In the first days, I was annoyed when the President came and talked about professional matters, or when the Prime Minister said that it was cynicism to applaud in the evening and walk in the streets during the day. I found it commanding and said in a bad tone. Since they stopped coming and left it to the experts, it has been better. I don't have N1 (TV channel) here in the village, only the national programmes. I watch RTS in the evening at 19:30 h, I've kept that habit and I watch online, on the phone, a bit. It tires me to watch more. I believe in that information presented at the press conference. They say that they, in the Crisis Response Team, also have disputes, and that's logical that there are different opinions among them and about them, but all in all, I trust them. The number of deaths per 100,000 is relevant to me and we are doing very well there, I mean relatively well. Sweden is the most interesting for me and in a year time we'll see how it worked. Another thing that I find relevant is how many persons are on ventilators. The maximum number was 140 252 and that seems good again and I believe we have enough ventilators. I completely trust the experts when they say the number of positive people. I believe Kon when he says that there are different methodologies in our country and in some other countries. It is certain that the measures taken could have been milder, but there are certainly a lot of positive things.*

*To me, the way in which the President said that we, senior citizens, were most important to him was hypocritical. Here is how I interpreted that message that we may not go out. I believed that we should not go out, because it's true that the elderly have chronic diseases and that's the reason why we are vulnerable, and they locked*

*us down to prevent the virus to spread among us and ruin the health system. To preserve the system that's not a very good one. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*We follow a little, but not much, I can't, I don't have patience. Here, they gave 4000 to pensioners, and nothing to us. I don't believe that we'll get 100 euros, they say that there's future in the village, there are cows, and we somehow can't do anything. When you have one cow, you get no subsidy. We are in a hilly and mountainous region, there are no conditions for breeding, we do not fulfil any criteria. For example, 10 litres of milk for 25 dinars, so calculate how much it is. Woman without regular income, 66*

*I comply with all the prescribed measures, and I get information about the virus from our doctors and from Google. I go out every day after 6 p.m. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*My N1 (TV channel) is non-stop on. And I'm wrong about that. My husband puts wonderful music on, and I say: "Turn that classical music off, I can't listen to that noise!" My nerves are shattered, I'm binge-watching the news. I'm obsessed. I really have no comment. I often have contact with a friend in Germany, our best man is in Canada, there are also our Greek friends, that's something completely different. My female friends here are enthusiastic about Kon. When I think of his scandals and vaccines... and that tone is awful. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I know where to look for it on the website of the Government or the Ministry, but sometimes I, who have these professional skills, cannot find it. It is well hidden on one of*

our state sites that is not created well. Others watch these press conferences, mental health is definitely compromised. The elderly watch to see the change and try not to look any more. It is very difficult to find sometimes. From the evening, when the official announces it, and it changes three times until it is published in the Official Gazette, there is the same decree at 3, at 4, at 5 o'clock. People pay the fine for being on the bridge at 3:20, but it was changed that day. The tone is unacceptable. It's useless because it's again something that insults dignity, but people have a different attitude towards it. You can hear my friend saying that she cried when everyone yelled at her because she was to blame for what was happening. It's understandable that the state is impotent sometimes. We are probably to blame for everything. It is not explained in our media that there are large demonstrations in Israel because they believe that a lot of omissions have led to an increased epidemic. They believe that the government is trying to shift the blame on citizens. The same thing is happening in Romania. It's not on TV anywhere. That way of addressing people suggests that they're working like dogs. They think at lightning speed. They do everything at lightning speed. Pensioner from Belgrade

Yes, I'm informed about the virus as much as the experts from the country or the world tell us, and they do not have much information at the moment, which is understandable because the virus is new to everyone and experts constantly stress that. I apply protection measures. I don't leave the building in which I live. I respect the ban on movement and close contacts. I think that the measure is necessary, but I have serious objections to how it was devised (especially concerning going out at night for which I don't see any valid justification). I perceive this as a personal humiliation and violation of the dignity of the elderly, and no one is allowed to do that.

I disinfect the apartment. I wash my hands. I wear a face mask when I go shopping at night. The corridors in the building are disinfected by the president of the assembly of tenants (fortunately, he was once an inspector for epidemiological surveillance). I don't wear gloves, I can't get them (pharmacies don't work at the time when I'm allowed to go out shopping), and I won't bother my son and son-in-law to queue endlessly and search for them. It's enough that they supply us with groceries, take away garbage, etc. So far, no one has visited the building where I live to see if those who cannot leave their apartments need something. Pensioner from Novi Sad

I inform myself masochistically by watching the press conference at 3 p.m. and every day I tell myself I won't do it anymore, but I watch it again, and then at 7 p.m., and then the series saved on a USB flash drive. I don't trust anyone anymore. I have no useful information. I only have my friends and colleagues with whom I have worked for 40 years. I called one of them and he said he wouldn't work anymore, and he's younger than me. I wasn't born an optimist. I didn't have a waist at birth, I don't have it today either, and I have no optimism. Maybe this will be like herpes, once you have it, it reactivates with each drop in immunity? It seems that it's one of those fast-mutating, terribly adaptable, but it might also be from laboratory. I don't believe it's a conspiracy, a lot of people died. I'm not informed very well, but I try to be. I get more information from abroad than in Belgrade. People here react in a way that I find more repulsive, there is too much hysteria, fear. Pensioner from Belgrade

Once I was seized by great fear at night, I couldn't sleep. I thought I was going to die, I was suffocating. I didn't want to wake up my children, didn't want to make them worry. I didn't know what to do. It happened to me for the first time. I don't have any sedatives in the

house, so I drank some brandy at 4 a.m. I was dizzy all day. Pensioner from Smederevo

I get information through television, internet and phone. Pensioner from Novi Sad

That's all we talk about all day long. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka

I get informed only through television. Old age and small pension don't allow me an internet course. I know we need a face mask, hand washing and gloves, as they dictate to us. I wash my hands, and the rest as needed, when I go out. Pensioner from Belgrade

Through TV and internet. I'm not on Twitter or Facebook. It's hard for me, because there are changes every other day, it's difficult to follow. My friends sometimes ask me which pharmacies are open. The TV set is constantly on in my

home, to see who is saying what. Pensioner from Novi Sad

I follow on TV. We follow everything non-stop. I don't know anything about what to do here, no one informed us, we only hear it on TV. Pensioner from Kratovo

We watch TV, my dear, we're really scared. However, we see that the situation in our country has been the calmest one, but what will happen in the future? I'm afraid for these children, and I have lived a lot. I'm at the end of my years, it doesn't matter what happens to me. Pensioner from Jelača

Only what I hear from someone else. I can no longer listen to this chattering on television. That's enough. I don't need gloves. I put on a face mask when they come from the health centre to wrap my old man's leg. They come every other day. Pensioner from Surčin

### 9.3.7. Health during the state of emergency

The whole story of the pandemic in Serbia was initially framed as a **story of war “against the invisible enemy”, for “pensioners”, for “our elderly”, for our “mothers and fathers” and for public health.**

Therefore, the respondents answered the questions regarding their own state of health and health care. Most of the interviewed women suffer from some chronic diseases and take their medicine. One respondent complained of psychosomatic symptoms triggered by stress due to the illness of close relatives. One woman could not be treated during the pandemic, although she feels pain due to which she sought medical help before the state of emergency.

The women who do not have health problems are equally afraid of the possibility of getting sick and do not have high expectations from the health care system. They attribute their relatively good health to regular walks, which they have not been allowed to do now. Several respondents had direct negative experiences with health care institutions. Therefore, **although they trust the individual doctors they saw on TV, the respondents do not have much confidence in the health care system as a whole.**

I can produce all the symptoms. I'm coughing - I used to have a pollen allergy, my eyes are burning, now I read it's a symptom, and I have red eyes. I have a cough, only fever is missing. My mental state is bad, my fears have

started. That's awful. I go to bed in the evening and think whether I'll live to see the morning if the suffocation starts now. I'm in the basement, when I lock myself in, I'm afraid to fall asleep, maybe I'll suffocate. I am against Bensedin. If

*I start, then what? I went to a neuropsychiatrist, she didn't even listen to me, she immediately gave me something. I take Relax, it's a natural medicine. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*The hardest thing for me is when my children go somewhere, I'm worried, I'm afraid they will touch someone somewhere, my husband has asthma, so I'm afraid that he may catch it, he's sicker, and I'm a little stronger. I don't even have high blood pressure, my spleen is slightly enlarged, and nothing else. Pensioner from Kratovo*

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*I have no chronic diseases and I did not need medical examinations. I exercise every day. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I regularly check my health once a year and my general state of health. I don't suffer from any disease. I don't take medicine because the doctors that examine me regularly (internist, cardiologist, gynaecologist, pulmonologist, regular breast and thyroid ultrasound) don't recommend it. On their recommendation, I only take vitamin D (Vigantol drops) and selenium during the winter. I had no need for a medical examination during this time. I learned that our chosen doctors were obliged to contact the patients they treated. My chosen doctor didn't do that, nor did my partner's chosen doctor, but my daughter's and son-in-law's chosen doctors did it. Therefore, the practice varies. I would like to give a good example from the Clinical Center of Vojvodina, where my daughter is treated for a rare and chronic disease, because the doctors who treat such patients contacted her immediately to explain how she would receive therapy in the future and sent her a recommendation not to go to work. They did the same with all other patients. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*Ulcerative colitis, it's calm now, but I'm nervous about it. Sometimes, when the condition is calm, the therapy is interrupted.*

*You have to go to a supermarket when you are allowed, but you cannot enter without a mask and gloves. In my neighbourhood we are allowed to buy 5 gloves or 10 gloves in some places. My children gave us 5 pieces. But, you have to use two gloves for going out once (because when you go there, you can't enter without them) and how can you buy them? The children work, there are three of them and then how do you go? It all depends on how one manages. As for the masks, my sister brought plenty of them to us, and we have a few gloves. We wash the rubber gloves I wear when I throw garbage. It is not advisable, but what can I do. It didn't work. Not even now when we have enough masks. We are locked down and we can't run to the pharmacy, we can't get medicine. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I have some health problems that I could not treat now. I returned from the USA via Brussels on 29 February. On 5 March I went to Banjica to have my arm treated and they told me I needed an MRI scan. I had two scans: spine, shoulder, for a huge amount of money. At that time, COVID-19 was already in circulation and I did not receive the therapy I was supposed to receive. It hurts terribly, I want to go crazy, and now I have to iron, because a woman who normally works for us can't come, because there is no public transport, and she is also in the 65+ group. She won't earn income, and I don't function. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I have diabetes. I didn't need anything. And even if I needed anything, there would be no place to go. Only my old man has his leg wrapped every other day. Pensioner from Surčin*

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*Oh, everything hurts, I have a hundred diseases. I take medicine, a handful. My son buys medicine for me, my pension is not enough for everything. He calls me every day to check if I've taken it. Well I tell him, everything hurts, but my head works.*

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*I only take probiotics and something for headache, supplements, vitamin C, zinc and glucosamine. It all costs money. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*I have high blood pressure, but I take medication. I measure it every day. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka*

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*I have high blood pressure, I had a thyroid operation, I have a stomach hernia, and my husband had to have his ears unclogged, it bothers him, but now they have cancelled it. By the way, you have to look for someone to take you there, there is no bus now. I needed to be checked by a gastroenterologist, I'm anaemic, but it all stopped. I don't feel well. Honestly, I'm not afraid, I'm more afraid for my children, one is in Čačak, and the other is in Belgrade. I have grandchildren and a new 2-month-old grandson, we saw him only once. We must not go. I am afraid for them, and we have lived a lot. Woman without regular income, 66*

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*Arthritis bothers me. I want to go crazy when the weather is changing. I take medicine and endure, what can I do. Pensioner from Čačak*

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*I had a gallbladder surgery. What else? As it has to be. Pensioner from Kragujevac*

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*Just before the epidemic, I ended up in hospital, and I was discharged on 16 March, when the state of emergency had already been declared. I was in the Clinic for Infectious Diseases. I was supposed to go to a check-up 10 days later by calling on the phone, but it is impossible to get them, and it was not possible to go there because of this situation. And what kind of phone check-up is that? I couldn't go to the scheduled Doppler of blood vessels either, so I'll do it after the epidemic. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I suffer from chronic diseases, but they are under control. The elderly are always worried about their health, and here we have a clear message about the danger of dying. The measures of isolating the elderly have had an effect, but they were too strict and lasted too long. It could have been different. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I don't have any problems, so I didn't have to go to the doctor during this time, but I heard from my friends about 2-3 cases, in one case it was a 4-year-old child, they were told to take the child to the outpatient unit, although the child had the symptoms like corona. Another friend's husband suffers from lung cancer and she wrote to us: "Pray to God that you stay healthy, the system is a disaster". He was in Kamenica. Another who has cancer had an appointment, but they sent her back from the door. She managed to enter the next day. I have the impression that regular patients are in a worse situation now. It scares me. And I think: "God forbid I have to go." Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*I've been listening to the news on the radio in the morning since 1965. I still listen to it. I love music, it really keeps me going. I listen to the news at 3 p.m. And I write it down in my diary. I respect doctors. I applaud at 8 p.m. I wear a face mask only when my grandson comes. I have some alcohol, but it's clean in my home, I just clean the door handles. I go out at the time when pensioners are allowed to go. I went downstairs immediately at 6. I took a short walk along the shore. There is a raft Souvenir where we usually meet, but now it's gloomy there, there's nothing. I need exactly half an hour to walk there. I walk on the terrace, so I'm in shape. We are on the third floor without an elevator. The stairs saved my heart. I have no health problems. I am a healthy person. Pensioner from Belgrade, 86 years old*

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*This level of movement restriction was certainly useful. I have signed various petitions. The only correct way is that the health care system functions 9 times better than it does. I*

*participated in the education of those doctors and that's a terrible feeling. Pensioner from Belgrade*

### 9.3.8. Attitude towards the measures

Since the respondents generally agreed that the measures of complete ban on movement were excessive and that the same result could have been achieved with somewhat milder measures, they were asked if they understood why the Government had decided to implement these measures. The women believe that the **main purpose of this intervention was to protect the health care system from elderly women and men, and not to protect people**, because if the aim had been to protect people, their overall well-being would have been taken into consideration. Several respondents believe that the choice of measures and the way in which they were announced and implemented **sparked the odium of younger people towards the elderly, deepening the generation gap, instead of encouraging intergenerational solidarity.**

**Some elderly women felt like a prey in the street.** It seemed that everyone had permission to interrogate, insult or prohibit them to do what they came out for. **They also felt as if they had been the virus themselves**, and not a group at an increased risk of complications in case of suffering from other diseases that led to such complications.

The **relaxation of measures** was again **inadequately explained.** The respondents do not understand why it was decided to allow the elderly to go for a walk for one hour three times a week during curfew hours, and not every day. On the other hand, **some women, especially in villages** where the movement ban was less severe and less consistently enforced, **believe that the government has done its best**, tried to alleviate the situation with financial measures, and **that it was impossible to fulfil all the existing needs.** Their **experience is such that women have to rely on themselves and not on the state.**

**The polarisation of the respondents exists in connection with the direct payment of one-off financial assistance in the amount of 4000 dinars to all pensioners and 100 euros to all adult citizens.** For some, 4,000 dinars is a valuable supplement to the household budget for the purchase of food and hygiene products. For others, that assistance is an insulting expression of pre-election populism that does not solve anyone's problem, but reduces the amount directed to those women and men who really have no means of subsistence. Although most respondents welcome every financial injection, including this one, they are **critical out of a sense of social solidarity**, because they believe that there are those who need that help more, but also because they think that **money from the budget, in this case, is used to gain popularity of politicians.** With regard to the costs incurred due to the pandemic, there are no grounds for favouring pensioners by paying them one-off assistance. The pensions they receive are often small, but this assistance does not solve that problem, and the respondents consider that **in this situation pensioners are not a group in the greatest financial need, because they have at least some regular income.**

As regards agricultural households, rural women need help in these circumstances where it is not possible to sell goods and products at green markets.

As regards the promised amount of 100 euros, the payment of which is planned after this gender analysis, some respondents **are very grateful for that measure**, although a little suspicious until they see the money in the account, **while others are provoked and do not consider it to be a good solution.**

*I feel humiliated and unprotected. I understand that the health care system is being protected, so that the elderly do not use the ventilators that someone younger might have to use, as in Italy. It was a better option to close the elderly, without taking care of them. There will be problems. Out of 1,700,000 pensioners, about 1,200,000 are over 65, which is a huge population. As regards the situation in Serbia, the assessment is good, but the consequences are terrible for the elderly.*

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*Now younger people think: "What do these old people want, why do they have to go out?". There has been a psychosis and odium towards the elderly. Those who violate the measures are younger people. The elderly are a powerless group. What could you do? You can't protest, you have nobody to turn to. That feeling of powerlessness is terrible. I'm very active and dynamic, but we are completely powerless now. Anger came to me, and I decided to break some rules, especially when the believers appeared and no one stopped them, that's discrimination. He can't stay, his rating has dropped and that's why he's been giving in, although the corona hasn't. There will be many lawsuits against the state, I think, and especially when their basic health condition worsens, people will fall into depression. There will be families that will file lawsuits for that, I'm sure. They could, as now, determine the time for walking during the day. The elderly are exhausted due to small pensions, poor nutrition, inability to go to the doctor and on top of that they are locked down. That's killing the entire group of people!*  
Pensioner from Novi Sad

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*There are vital people in this 65+ group who work, and 40% of farmers are over 65 years old. I don't know who the members of that Crisis Response Team are, but we have the Centre for Emergency Situations at the Ministry of Interior, which is not visible. We have a law on how and who should do what. There are only*

*doctors here, and they don't do other types of organisation. We have given all the leverage to politicians and doctors. And that Nedimović person, who is the Minister of Agriculture, goes to the region of Niš to organise Covid centres there. Why? And who is taking care of agriculture? Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*My social life and my dignity, and that's a constitutional right and cannot be limited. Freedom of movement can be restricted, but in a way that does not violate the rights of others or my rights. As soon as curfew was introduced, it was possible to separate the two groups (the elderly and the others). Most people are afraid and would not go out to walk. People 65+ who have diseased hips, or heart, have atrophied. It's tragic and it's humiliating. I felt especially humiliated when the Prime Minister, who is supposed to organise the work, said that it was very bad and hypocritical for the people to applaud the doctors, because she saw some children walking and the like. People are outdoors. That's not the right way. She kills everything that is normal in you and she doesn't even notice that those who respect that are applauding. I don't have a social life, it's like that for everyone and I don't feel threatened in that respect. It's not a problem that I have to be isolated. I am not a sociologist, a psychologist, a doctor, but a lawyer. I would call and ask everyone how long a person needs to walk to have a normal life, what's the optimal time and I would make a normal schedule. The people 65+ had to be given some time. If we look at our list of the largest number of dead and infected people, which shook me up, because I'm in a group that only makes statistics, it's the group from 60 to 65. They should have protected some other people too. Those 4000 dinars, they should have given that amount for face masks and gloves, and not issue some orders not to wear them. I understand that if there is not enough for everyone, no one will wear them, there will be no panic. But, different measures*

*should have been introduced earlier, on time, and not adopt them and then change them. A bunch of my younger friends had a problem knowing when they were allowed or not allowed to go out; the elderly had the same problem. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I understand the Government's intention and I currently feel protected, but I wonder how the life of this group of the population will unfold in the future, considering that the threat of infection will probably not stop - will it be quarantined until the vaccine is made? From my point of view, the decision was not a good one. It caused panic and fear, prevented movement and violated the dignity of people over 65. I think that it was necessary to communicate differently with the population and to explain reasonably and calmly the need for distancing and personal protection, as well as the restrictions that had to be respected in order to be safer as individuals and as a society. The Government has shown distrust in citizens, instilling discipline with threats and treating citizens as immature individuals who cannot understand the threat and adjust their behaviour to that threat. It also turned out that the Government does not understand how different the needs of this group of the population are, so they did not think, for example, about how to help less mobile and immobile people who used home help, etc. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*Those 4,000 were important for me, what can I do, I have to pay electricity and phone bills. They talked about 100 euros on TV, but we'll see if it happens. Well, it's impossible to give everyone as much as they need. We are not alone. I thank them. There were also parcels from the municipality. It's good to know that someone cares about us. Some flour, salt, hygiene products and so on, some soup. They can't give if we don't manage. Pensioner from Jelača*

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*Those 4,000 meant nothing to me. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*It's good when you get something. It hasn't changed my life, but I thank them. Better something than nothing. Pensioner from Čačak*

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*I told my daughter to buy hygiene products and fruits and meat and vegetables for the freezer, to have everything. It helped, of course it did. Pensioner from Smederevo*

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*We said that we would give those 4000 for our grandchildren. They are happy about it, and we have everything we need. Pensioner from Kruševac*

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*When we got those 4000, I burst into tears. Now when we get these 100 euros, I have a plan to buy turquoise sneakers and a watch strap. That's the first thing I noticed in Tempo. I'm used to using Eucerin cream, Vichy, and now I couldn't find it in Tempo, I bought a cheap one for 500 dinars when I was allowed to go out at dawn. I didn't spend those 4000 on bread and milk, but on clothes and make-up. I always went to the hairdresser and I don't need those 4000 for food. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*Those 4000 are such a shame, and I don't think it was even paid; I'm also disgusted with 100 euros. I will receive that amount automatically and it is a humiliation. I am afraid that doctors and politicians are in synergy, like communicating vessels. It's very recent that family experience of surgery and complications after my husband's surgery 2 years ago, and although he had the best treatment possible in our country, that treatment was tragic. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I've received 4000. It's important for me, of course it is. It helps with the household budget. You buy stuff for the house and for hygiene and so on. My son is unemployed, he used to work in shipping. I now support them, I've helped everyone. Now he goes out for a short time on the tractor. It's wonderful that we're getting 100 euros. We shouldn't exaggerate, we should be grateful and satisfied with what we get. It's hard, it's not very easy. We are satisfied with this. The pensioners also received a parcel from the municipality. I got everything, my husband nothing. Pensioner from Kratovo*

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*An additional amount of 4,000 on my small pension is important for me. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*That plotter (swearing) gives just before the election, it doesn't help me at all. He doesn't have to give anything. My old man and I received it. One roll of paper, one soap, a kilo of flour, a kilo of sugar, a litre of oil. Small Mer for dishes, half a litre, and 100 grams of coffee. The minimum. How come they are not ashamed of what they sent us? Hey, they gave me one roll of paper! How come they are not ashamed to give one roll of paper? What will I do with a kilo of flour, use it three days to prepare brown gravy? They bribe others. F... you and your soap. Pensioner from Surčin*

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*Those 4000 didn't mean anything to me. It's not a good move, it should have been given more selectively to those who don't have, to give more to them. I have an aunt who is 88 years old and it means a lot to her, because her pension is 12,000. It didn't mean anything to me, just as 100 euros won't mean anything to me. But well, I'll buy something for myself. I promise myself all sorts of things when this is over. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*The decision had the same effect all over the world and in our country. If we see the results of the neighbouring countries, those*

*that have the capacities similar to ours, we realise that the statistics are the same. First, the elderly who have a health problem always have something else and don't die just from corona. People are not crazy, except for some, and they also know how to take care of themselves, and not only physical health has to be taken care of, but also mental health. If I go out with disturbed feelings that I am not equal, that I am ashamed of being old, then the question is whether it was done in a good way. Germany has good results, and Greece has an application in which you can enter one of the 6 reasons for going out. So, the restriction is somehow limited, it's not imprisonment. This was a lockdown that had nothing to do with the results, every prisoner must be allowed to walk for one hour a day. There was not enough walking. Why is it allowed now? I don't understand the difference, because now we have an increase, not a decrease, which is normal, because more people are tested. Why the reduction after all? And when they say we listen to the experts, I say there are different kinds of experts. Are doctors now the only experts? The whole world is organised, only a couple of countries use this way, there is nothing, you are in prison. Dignity also belongs to mental health, and there is a reason why it is a constitutional category. I don't think there was an intention to discriminate here, that would be terribly difficult to say. Why are we allowed to walk three times a week now? Why not every day? There are no costs, the danger is neither greater nor smaller. Many ideas have now come to my mind regarding the new Constitution. Regarding how the rights have to be elaborated, bearing in mind our mindset. But we do not respect what exists either. We do not have the necessary expertise. Labour relations, for example. Labour law and medical experts should have been engaged. Economy: catastrophic decisions and decrees because whatever changes the law is possible only if a decision is adopted by the Government, because it replaces the Assembly when the*

*state of emergency is declared in this way. You must not restrict the rights through Skype trials because that means changing the law, and you cannot do that. I think it's a lack of expertise,*

*not an evil intent. Now I'm not even sure because everything is happening at such a high speed now. Pensioner from Belgrade*

### 9.3.9. What do women 65+ miss?

Finally, the respondents shared what they missed the most or needed the most.

*Not only myself, but everyone from my generation who lives in the countryside and has one cow, needs to have a subsidy for that one cow as well. 7 dinars extra, if a litre of milk costs 25 dinars, would mean something to us. Now, we have nothing. We need everything: fertilisers and grass, to be able to produce something. The farmer has to take care of everything, when to go to the pharmacy, before it closes. You have no one to rely on. The children help if they can, and if they cannot, the two of us rely on each other. Woman without regular income, 66*

*What could be better for me? Only more money for my family. There are 8 of us who live on my pension of 14,000. We go, we manage with that cattle, we sell it. We're struggling, as usually in the village, you have to sow, to plough, but we need fuel for that. We need fertilisers. Pensioner from Jelača*

*The hardest thing for me is that my children can't come. Freedom of movement. And doing some little things, meeting friends, going to a pedicure, hairdresser, etc. But we won't return to normal soon, according to Kon, whom I trust, not Vučić. This is a great misfortune, I don't know what to say, but that's what we have. This extra half an hour is not a relief to me because it has been reduced to 300 meters and nobody works, nor is it a proper walk. As for the option to go out at 4 in the morning, I don't support it, they turned us into vampires and took away our sleep. I hate getting*

*up early and I don't get up early. Pensioner from Belgrade*

*I miss not being allowed to go to nature, not being locked down, not being addressed by representatives of public authorities the way they address us (or maybe it would be best not to address us at all), not being surrounded by fear of the virus all day... Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*First of all, the Government's attitude towards the elderly and respect for their dignity. This group is not unique in its characteristics and needs, so it is necessary to take various measures to improve the situation of the elderly, such as providing home care service, material support for the poorest, allowing movement and providing protective masks, gloves and disinfectants. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*I don't need any stuff. I have food in the freezer. It just bothers me to be locked down and alone and I wish I could take a walk. I wish I could spend an hour outdoors! I used to go out every morning. I live 10 to 15 minutes away from the city centre, near the Danube. The feeling that you are not allowed to go out is even worse than being locked down. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

*I've become mentally weaker. I used to read a lot earlier. Books saved me after my husband's stroke. I've also been going to psychodrama for 2 years and it's great for me.*

*There is a 50+ club in Stari grad municipality, and they have a psychological workshop. Mira Trkulja held it. The five of us talked, I've learned some things I didn't know before and the process of change started so that you could see every situation from different angles to understand why you feel that way. I was driven by emotions, and you have to use your rational thinking. That started in my case, it's very difficult when you face with everything you did wrong, but all that didn't help me at all. I don't have nerves anymore to read books, I let myself cry. I'm really totally disturbed by all this. Before this, I went to protests all the time. I want all of this to change. I don't have any support in my environment. My friends don't understand me at all. All of them say that it has always been like this. I find it hard not to have support. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*What I miss the most is the activity I had before. I went to Zumba classes, to French classes, I walked with a dog from 7 to 10 km a day. I did something every day. My husband went fishing; I and my friends went to a tavern on Fridays. Now nothing. Now I have found out what I'm like, some of my traits have intensified. I thought I was a cheerful woman, but now I've realised that I am a pessimist. I can't imagine getting on the bus anymore, and I loved traveling on excursions, Stara Planina and such places. Now I can't even imagine sitting in the bus, and someone next to me, I'm pessimistic. I don't think it will ever be the way it used to be. But, if what we are suffering now is for nothing, then everything is in vain. We need to change at least some attitudes. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*Disinfectants, a face mask and gloves. I bought them myself, and I got some from my relatives. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*If only my daughter had a job. Everything else will be as it has to be. Pensioner from Smederevska Palanka*

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*Nothing, we have everything, just to be a little younger. I have everything: clothes, food. If only I was younger. Pensioner from Surčin*

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*What do I miss? What don't I miss?  
Pensioner from Čačak*

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*I manage to communicate, but if I know that a friend of mine works and has obligations, I won't call him so as not to bother him. That's a consequence. All of us have retreated. Reducing your own space. Groups of very eminent individuals of different professions are formed, so we have discussions about what's good and what's not. It's an incredible situation, regarding the average age, society is divided, and that's not good because it's "us" and "them". Normal people and others. I'm reading Dan Brown now. A very rich expert who studies viruses has established that the Earth cannot feed everybody, and therefore he planted the virus in the old Roman aqueduct due to which all the weak, people with diseases and the elderly will die, only 14 or 20 percent of people will survive and the planet Earth will also survive. Is that philosophy OK or do you have to help everyone live? Do we need to do anything to keep people alive? I have now delved into the book, and the book reflects the life. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*What bothers me the most is the ban. I am bothered by discrimination and the ban on movement. Everything else can be endured and a person can manage. I have a son-in-law who has diabetes, who has to walk, and now he is not allowed.*

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*They should allow the possibility of going out every day, not to ban it completely at first, and then allow it three times a week. Imagine, to walk with dogs at 1 o'clock at night. Dogs have greater privileges than humans. That dog owner lobby is loud and pensioners are silent. They are not able to get organised, there is a pensioners union, and on the other hand, the*

*spas that are the property of the Pension Fund are being sold. They ignore us as population. We are only the electorate. I think that those 100 euros will function again, because pensioners are exhausted by savings, poor nutrition and so on. They give us vouchers for spas, but many of us give them to their grandchildren. The state should do everything differently here, but it will not. It has to be invested. Health and education have been ruined, as well as environmental protection. It's that style of manipulation, they rule with fear, first they tighten you a lot, then they relax a little, and then they give you 100 euros. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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*What I miss the most is the presence of my children and grandchildren. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*Now when we can't go out, I say all the time I wish it was cloudy. It's hard for me when the weather is nice. I miss the little things, trifles. The first strawberries, I don't care. But the sun! Smell! The feeling of confinement bothers me, there are also people in prison who are struck by destiny. I dream of a dance festival that didn't even take place. When this passes, people whose opinions are logical should sit down and make the right decisions, because there has been a lot of time for that, and the status of protection should be established and not the status of a convict. I have several friends who turned 65 this month and lost the opportunity to walk, and now they have the feeling that they have died. So that we are not the ones that prevent others from possible life improvements. It was necessary to examine all the elements of*

*that broad category of the elderly and develop measures that would not compromise either their health or dignity. Most officials are in that category of people. There are appeals to stop, but they are not reported about because the media are abused and no one has to order anything to them anymore. They will not say what the military union did and it had a big action and moved a lot of people. They filed requests for assessing the constitutionality of the 4-year reduction of pensions. Little has been said about it, the appearance of that old woman who says that she loves Vučić more than her granddaughter is abnormal. It must be allowed to report on these things, many people in the civil sector who deal with economic issues have objections to 100 euros, but you don't hear it anywhere. Pensioner from Belgrade*

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*I have no worries. I have experienced and lived through all that and remained normal and my brain serves me and my legs serve me, so I have to be satisfied. I didn't tell you that when my husband passed away, my sister and I joined the association Izletnik and travelled all over Serbia. I have 500 pages of diary about it. Pensioner from Belgrade, 86 years old*

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*First of all, the Government's attitude towards the elderly and respect for their dignity. This group is not unique in its characteristics and needs, so it is necessary to take various measures to improve the situation of the elderly, such as providing home care service, material support for the poorest, allowing movement and providing protective masks, gloves and disinfectants. Pensioner from Novi Sad*

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### **If they had asked me - insight of an activist and expert**

Nobody asked me anything in Belgrade, although I have been working with the elderly for a very long time. I gave a lot of media interviews from the village, I had about 20 interviews and appearances. Here is what I realised while working in the counselling centre, where they failed completely: they prohibited geronto-housekeepers to enter the houses of the elderly. They were only allowed to come to the door and make a purchase. Some of these persons can do other things on their own, but they have that help exactly

*because they are not able to maintain personal or general hygiene on their own. We were called by the children of numerous elderly people from abroad, they asked for recommendation, to find someone, because their parents were not able to function on their own.*

*They allowed it only later. There was only one case<sup>253</sup> where a home help beneficiary became infected with the virus brought by her geronto-housekeeper. Absolutely everyone had to get protection. I hear that geronto-housekeepers now have protective materials. There are a number of elderly people who cannot function on their own, especially if they suffer from dementia. The state was unjustifiably restrictive here. The family is still the biggest support for the elderly. They later eased up, but not for private service providers. Younger relatives cannot go during curfew hours to put their older relative to sleep. You leave them to manage on their own, but the state cannot protect them more than their daughter, son, daughter-in-law or son-in-law. Or when there are 80 hours of movement ban. Informal caregivers are sometimes over the age of 65 themselves, and now they are forbidden to go from one point to another during the day. If a relative can demonstrate that a person in his or her care has a diagnosis and where he or she lives, why wouldn't that relative be allowed to visit and support him or her?*

*I'm not sure that 65 years as a limit for everyone is a good idea. For example, I, who have high blood pressure, thyroid condition, etc. cannot be in the same category as someone who is healthy. There are not many young people in the village and among the elderly there are a large number of 70+ people who work. And there are plenty of them in the city who work and miss their work a lot. The pension is small and they do something to supplement the pension. I know a man who works as a night security guard. He doesn't see anyone when he works, but now he is not able to supplement his pension that way. For those who work, it may have been necessary to increase the limit to 70 years.*

*I now run a counselling centre for the elderly and over 80 people have already contacted me. It's not a small number. There are a lot of elderly households 80+ and they go to the field and work, and now they are writing them off. My 64-year-old brother is a young man for everyone in the village. All of that could have been taken into account, if they had consulted with us. Earlier, we conducted a survey of the needs of elderly households in Novi Beograd, and 8% of them, when asked if they took any medication, said: "I don't need any." I was very encouraged by that. Not all seniors are the same. Pensioner and activist from Belgrade*

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*I miss my life. Pensioner from Kruševac*

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*Oh, I just wish to kiss my grandchildren! I really miss them. Pensioner from Smederevo*

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*Well, I don't know. Whatever one does, he or she already does it, you sow and work, if they give those 100 euros, maybe I won't even spend them now, but keep them for later, one has to have some. If I organised myself to produce something, but I didn't, I have a*

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*greenhouse and I sow for myself. If there is more than I need, I sell, if not, I have for myself. I sell onions, potatoes, I take orders, I sell them in the school, my daughter-in-law takes them by car. God forbid we give in, one struggles, grasps at straws! Pensioner from Kratovo*

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## 9.4. Gender gap and conclusions - Women 65+

- One of the **main goals of development in the Republic of Serbia must be to never again deprive its citizens of their liberty without a court decision.** The long-term effects of such **traumatisation of women** are best seen in the interviews conducted with a group of female citizens 65+. This group also includes **the women who have spent many years in their lives in some kind of a lack of freedom**, restriction of movement or deprivation of free will. **The state cannot act as a guardian of senior citizens**, nor should it position itself as someone who takes better care of them than their relatives, or deprive them of the opportunity to make decisions that are in their best interest. **The best solutions will be brought in cooperation with all stakeholders.** In the group of women and men 65+, there is a **huge experience related to crisis management and emergency situations.**
- In regular circumstances, older women living in rural areas often face more difficult economic situations and have poorer access to services than women living in urban areas. However, **the restriction of movement is much more rigorous in urban areas and falls harder on women living in an apartment** than on women living, or staying, in the countryside.
- Women are not only statistically more represented than men in the 65+ group, but they are also more resilient, judging by the life situations of the women in the sample. **Relying on themselves, they often provide support for their large families, or if they live alone, they withdraw not to be a burden to their children who have other worries and obligations. In the reservoirs of their experience, women find the strength to overcome the crisis.** However, one should not be deceived into thinking that these reserves are unlimited. **Additional support** to women in this group is provided by **family, neighbours and friends.**
- **The trust of this group of women in the state's and society's care for them has been undermined.** The women experienced that their lockdown actually served for protecting the health system from them, and not that the state protected them. The most common feeling they mention to describe their experience is **humiliation.** The women felt excluded and frustrated because they had no **freedom and their voice was not heard.** Out of resignation, due to the feeling that they were discriminated against and suffered injustice, some women knowingly and intentionally **violated the ban on movement.**
- There are many differences among women who belong to the group of 65 or over. Some of them are relatively or completely healthy, live physically and mentally active lives, contribute to their family, profession and society in various ways. **A change that fundamentally changes their lifestyle can be a trigger for health problems, depression and loneliness.** This condition can pose a great risk to their well-being, and the process of recovery can take a long time. Others **suffer from multiple chronic diseases, or live in seclusion to such an extent that even the ban on movement has not significantly changed their everyday life.** However, it is important for all women in the 65+ group to have **access to information and health care services.**

- ➔ **Although much was said in public about volunteer support programmes, these programmes did not reach all women in the sample, nor was information about these programmes easily available to the women in this group.**
- ➔ There were not enough **simple and practical solutions** for the purchase of protective equipment for older women during the state of emergency. Distributing one mask and a pair of gloves in front of the supermarkets at dawn did not adequately respond to the vital needs of having protection also when disposing garbage, going to the pharmacy or taking a walk. Also, at the beginning of the state of emergency, the volunteers did not have or did not wear protective equipment. Another thing that was not done is to organise, in cooperation with civil society organisations, **networks of volunteers who would really care about the well-being of people from the neighbourhood or about a certain community**. In addition to the usual “bread and milk”, these volunteers could also bring useful information, as well as monitor the needs of older women and men, especially those living alone. The sample also included a respondent who started a **counselling centre for the elderly** in the village where she was staying during the pandemic. Such initiatives should be responded to by **support, replication and scaling up financed from the budget funds**.
- ➔ **There is no agreement among the respondents regarding the measures of direct one-off financial assistance for pensioners and for all adult citizens.** Financial assistance for pensioners is welcomed by the women with the lowest pensions, and the one-off assistance of 100 euros for all adult citizens is supported also by the women without regular income. Among the women who are **in a somewhat more favourable economic position, the argument of social solidarity prevails**, according to which it would be better to distribute larger amounts to a smaller number of citizens who are in a worse situation than they are.
- ➔ **If they ever used to be focused on a single source of information, older women are no longer like that.** In addition to **TV**, many respondents joined various **Viber and Facebook groups** in which they exchanged information with their contacts, compared the measures implemented in our country with those implemented in other countries in the region. Therefore, they had a **critical attitude towards reality and towards authority**. However, **there is a big difference between women who have access to the internet and those who do not**.
- ➔ **Women miss activity and freedom the most.** In addition, they miss their children and grandchildren, friends and socialising.

## 9.5. Recommendations – Women 65+

- ➔ **Ensure the protection of the dignity of the person of citizens in all situations including emergencies. Respect for the will and protection of dignity are equally important as protection of health.** It is necessary to **strengthen the legal framework and develop procedures that will, better than before, ensure that the rights and**

**freedoms of citizens are respected in both crisis and emergency situations, and that restrictions are carefully weighed and introduced only as necessary, with a clear explanation of which alternative scenarios have been considered.**

- **Empower public authorities to take responsibility for the content and tone of addressing citizens. Their messages can contribute to or harm the health and well-being of citizens.** Public office holders must align their public appearances with the current legal framework that does not allow degradation or insult of citizens. The isolation of the elderly as a group whose movement is banned opens the door for such social dynamics in which everyone can control the elderly.
- **To have a good quality of life, it is important for older women to go out in the fresh air and spend time outdoors, and it is necessary for them to have good quality sleep, which contributes to good health and reduces the risk of depression, relieves inflammation and stress.** Exaggerated, aggressive and threatening messages disrupt sleep and good health. Strengthen collaborative messages, and stop the practice of blaming all citizens for the actions of some individuals.
- **Strengthen the participation of women over the age of 65** in the adoption and implementation of measures that affect them most directly. In order for this to happen, **it is necessary to allow the voice of diversity in this group of women and men to be heard, and to stop the practice of treating this largest social group in the Republic of Serbia as a homogeneous group for which a single solution is designed.** The fact is that the **material, spiritual, cultural and social needs of women and men in this group are diverse and layered and that the response to these needs must take into account all the diversity and richness of these experiences.** One of the experiences that women in this group have is their experience of the **management of previous crises. This fact needs to be taken into account and incorporated into the process of developing new measures.**
- Urgently adopt measures and programmes for **healthy aging, preventive health care and preservation of health for the group 65+.** These measures should be **gender responsive** and tailored for different situations in which older women and men live.
- Strengthen the awareness of public authorities, the media and society as a whole to **accept the fact that older women and men are not a homogeneous group whose needs can be met by a single universal solution.** As in the rest of the population, there are big differences among 65+ individuals and they need to be better known and recognised. It is certainly necessary to elaborate the understanding of their needs beyond the “bread and milk” rhetoric.
- **Prepare older women and men for the digitalisation of public services** to reduce the risk of their exclusion in times of crisis.

## 10. TESTIMONIES OF ROMA WOMEN ABOUT THE PANDEMIC

### 10.1. Introductory notes

As part of the gender analysis, 24 interviews were conducted with Roma women from Serbia, including 6 activists of Roma and women's organisations working with the Roma community, one coordinator for Roma issues and pedagogical assistants who are in daily contact with women from the Roma community and

are very well acquainted with the situation in their households and the needs of Roma men and women.

The interviews covered the following areas: health protection and preventive measures; daily life and distribution of housework, sources of income; child care and schooling; information and needs, and institutional and non-institutional support.

**Table:** Basic Information about the Respondents

Age	Place of residence - region	Family status
62	Vojvodina	Mother of two adults
24	Vojvodina	With parents and brother
20	Vojvodina	With parents
28	Vojvodina	Husband and four children
24	Central Serbia	Husband and one child
45	Central Serbia	Husband and three children
36	Central Serbia	Husband and three children
23	Central Serbia	Husband, brother, mother, brother's wife and four children, younger sisters - a total of 11 members of household
40	Central Serbia	Single mother of five children
28	Central Serbia	Husband and two children, father-in-law and mother-in-law
75	Central Serbia	Alone, but her son and granddaughters ("the ones that are single") live in the house next door
37	South Serbia	With husband and four children
22	South Serbia	With husband and two children
28	South Serbia	With husband and three children and his two children from the first marriage
46	South Serbia	With three daughters, son-in-law and three grandchildren
65	West Serbia	Alone, but her son and daughter-in-law live in the house next door
24	West Serbia	With parents and brother
43	Central Serbia	Single mother of one son

**Activists**

Place	Position
Kragujevac	Activist of a Roma organisation
Kraljevo	Activist of a women's organisation
Valjevo	Activist of a Roma organisation
Valjevo	Pedagogical assistant
Smederevo	Coordinator for Roma issues
Novi Sad	Activist of a Roma organisation

## 10.2. Research findings

### 10.2.1. Everyday life

Everyday life of Roma women during the pandemic is characterised by taking care of children, maintaining home hygiene and shopping for their own household, but also for others (relatives, neighbours). What makes the situation specific for Roma women is the **lack of money** for hygiene products, food, medicine, difficulties in helping children with education due to inadequate conditions and **technical equipment in their households, and the inability to earn income from informal work.**

Most of the respondents, when asked how they coped with the situation, said “as I have to”, “we are in the same situation as everyone else”. The women who have children stressed the work on school tasks with children as the main change compared to the “regular” situation, while others pointed out the impossibility to move, i.e. staying at home, which affected men more than women.

#### 10.2.1.1. Distribution of housework and child care

There is a clear division of housework: women take care of home hygiene, food preparation and children.

Traditional roles are pronounced, especially among older members of the community.

*“It’s a shame for a man to hold a child, to kiss and hug it. Dad has never hugged or kissed us. That’s slowly changing among younger men.”*

*“Usually, the mother is in charge of all activities, including these measures now. In this situation, I am the one taking care of everything in my home and of my dad, and I have a couple of families of older people that I take care of. I am overburdened, because I have to take care of my family, it was very hard for me, because everyone was concerned about food supply. I get a list, long to the floor; what my dad, uncles and aunts, neighbours need, there was a bit of panic. I help my child in studying, he was overwhelmed until we got into the rhythm, no one knew how it would function, following the classes in the morning, a Viber group for one subject, for another subject, the class teacher sends messages; children are still ignorant of this type of communication, so they should send it by e-mail.*

*I spend the morning shopping, after lunch I spend the time with him, and it was very hard for me, now we have somehow got used to it.”*

*“The division of roles is traditional: mother deals with institutions (educational, social and health); she takes care of children; mothers deal with the verification of health cards, take their children to the doctor, but the exercise of rights also goes through mothers.”*

*“Work is divided into male and female. We live in a house, and we also have a farmland where my dad and brother work. I am the only woman in the house, because my mother is ill and I do all the housework.”*

*“Mum cooks, I do other housework. Dad works as a wall painter, he didn’t even stop working during corona.”*

*“I work with children all day long. They study and write as if they were in faculty.”*

*“It’s just that I do the homework with the little one and send it to the teacher via Viber. We’ are in touch with her all day.”*

*“We don’t have electricity and it’s a problem for homework with children.”*

*“Children watch school on television, but it is crowded and noisy and no one knows how to show them. They don’t do their homework well.”*

*“My children don’t go to school. They did go in Germany, they don’t go here. My younger son doesn’t even speak Serbian, only German and Romani.”*

*“I have a decision on working from home and therefore I have to be available non-stop. I make breakfast, lunch, tidy the house, there is one TV, and everyone should watch the lessons; or there is one computer and two pupils. It’s difficult. Especially for Roma women, not all of them are literate; both primary and secondary schools are demanding.”*

In addition to the electricity and internet problems faced by some families, inadequate conditions for studying are also a problem for Roma pupils. Pedagogical assistants who are in daily contact with the families play a significant role in home schooling.

*“The first week it was important to contact all my parents to explain that the children were not on vacation and that they should get off the street, respect curfew and engage in online classes. Everyone is in Viber groups, to be included and then I communicate with the teachers, but in the beginning there were children walking in the street as if they had no obligation. I also have a lot of poor families, so it escalated into their struggle for food. It’s the time of seasonal works, and no one can do anything.”*

*In cases where parents are not educated, we rely on older siblings. In these other families, mothers bear the greatest burden. They have to be engaged in all-day activities, from shopping, breakfast, lunch, dinner, to working with children.”*

*“I have that boy in the final grade of primary school who lives with his mother and stepfather, who is really a good man, but they all live in one room and a younger sister is with developmental disabilities. He doesn’t have adequate conditions to study, to prepare for that final exam, so in agreement with his uncle, I arranged for him to move to his uncle’s place. He has two older sisters there who can work with him a bit.”*

Apart from the increased volume of work with children regarding school obligations, which is also performed by women, a big change in households is that men stay at home more and cannot work, due to the movement ban. The respondents point out that they try to help their husbands, to make their situation easier, while the activists recognise the changed dynamics of everyday life as a risk of violence against women.

*“He has to go to work, when he goes out with a three-wheeler, there is also a bridge so he can’t push so fast, but we try that he comes home on time. I’m afraid, but we have to come to terms with it. I give him a face mask, I give him gloves...”*

*“He’s nervous because he is usually on the move non-stop and likes to wander around.”*

*“I take care of the child more. She’s bored, she’s small. That’s the problem. And it is difficult for my husband, because he is not used to staying in the house, he is usually more at the market. If he is called to do something privately, to take someone to the village; we have more old people in the neighbourhood, so we help them; the husband has a car; I’m not a driver, only my husband is.”*

*“Men worry about not being able to go out to see friends, have a coffee, they usually just go through the house.”*

### 10.2.1.2. Hygiene and measures of protection

#### **“The Coordinator for Roma issues distributed masks to us. Look, the children are playing with them now.”**

Concerning the change compared to the situation before the epidemic, the respondents also mentioned increased hygiene care and compliance with the instructions for preventing the transmission of the virus. They are informed through television and social media (younger respondents).

*“We see on television. Nothing special, that it’s more likely for the elderly to catch it, that we must not go to the elderly, to my mother, to my husband’s mother; we cannot go to see them; my father-in-law and my mother-in-law are older; we don’t go anywhere.”*

*“When there is electricity, we watch television. That it’s a terrible disease. And people say so too.”*

*I was afraid because of the children, I have a 10-month-old baby, but we simply have to come to terms with it.”*

Maintaining household hygiene, but also hygiene of family members, is the obligation of women, and they do it, for themselves, for their children, for their husbands.

*“At the beginning, I was wiping everything and was careful, then I got tired.”*

*“I clean, I wash, I painted the walls. That’s how I calm down.”*

*“I watch the news and I comply with everything. I wear this mask, I don’t have any other.”*

*“I’ve accepted the instructions and I know there is no infection if I comply with them.”*

*“I don’t go anywhere without gloves, a face mask, disinfectants. I’m a bit prone to panic, so I stepped up hygiene measures and hygiene in the house.”*

The respondents usually get masks and gloves by themselves.

In Kraljevo, the coordinator for Roma issues distributed masks in Roma settlements.

*“The Coordinator for Roma issues gave us several masks, now the children are playing with them.”*

Apart from the lack of protective equipment, the problem in Roma settlements is inadequate infrastructure, but women and mothers are expected to take care of the hygiene of households and children.

*“There are those who cannot maintain hygiene, who do not have a bathroom; if she is a mother, she will take more care of her children;”*

*I'm trying as much as I can, I don't know about other women."*

In addition to this, the activists mention that a health risk is posed by the overpopulation of Roma settlements and the way of life that makes social distancing impossible - families, although living in separate houses, are actually one household, and individuals rely on each other. If someone in a Roma settlement fell ill, it would be very difficult to apply isolation measures.

*"People in the neighbourhood rely on each other very much. They are in each other's houses. The courtyards are cluttered. It would be chaos if someone got sick. If one got sick, half of the settlement would get sick."*

*"In a Roma settlement in Belgrade, one family was infected, so the Coordinator for Roma issues got engaged, to explain to them that they had to be in self-isolation; to keep them in their houses, to explain that they could somehow get stuff for the mother and her son, and the rest of them should stay at home. We were very afraid because the settlements are crowded and it is difficult to make it strict. I saw the settlements in the south, they are all very close."*

*"The biggest risk is when people come to the house and want to sit."*

Apart from the lack of social distancing and the impossibility of self-isolation (if necessary), Roma women also recognise the collection of recyclable waste materials as a risk for their family members.

Most respondents have a health card. Women who were internally displaced from Kosovo and those who came to Serbia under a readmission agreement do not have it. In the respondents' households, women are entitled to child allowance and social assistance, while men work informally.

## 10.2.2. Health care and treatment

***"Everyone over the age of 30 has some health problems. Women are very sick. Nerves, they say. It is a prejudice that Roma women are cheerful. They are not cheerful, try giving birth to eight children and be cheerful."***

Most of the respondents have a health card, but they did not go to the doctor during the epidemic. The appointments were postponed (vaccination for children, scheduled examinations). Women who suffer from chronic diseases go to the doctor, but some medicines are not available and they lack financial resources.

*"I go to chemotherapy regularly in Zrenjanin, every three weeks to the health care centre. Everything can be bought, but now I have no money. These medicines for immunity are very expensive, and when there is no work, there are no resources. I used to take those medicines before. I'll take them again when this is over."*

In one case, at the beginning of the epidemic, the ambulance did not want to come to the settlement, due to the impossibility of applying protective measures.

*"There were stressful situations. We had a neighbour who had a stroke, the ambulance didn't want to come... This was at the very beginning; now the ambulance has started coming, they came and took a neighbour to the hospital. They have an obligation while you are in the hospital, and how you'll return is up to you. We called the police, so they allowed us to go and pick her up."*

The activists recognise that the inability to be subjected to gynaecological examinations and abortions can also be a risk for Roma women.

### 10.2.3. Economic activities and sources of income

***“It’s hard, we live on social assistance. No one is allowed to work because of possible infection.”***

Most of the respondents are unemployed and receive some form of social assistance: child allowance, allowance for more than three children, social assistance. Men and/or husbands work mostly informally. They are rarely employed, and when they are, they work in the city utility companies. Men’s informal work consists of collecting recyclable waste materials, selling in the market, cleaning attics and basements, and helping with difficult manual labour in households. When women work, they informally help men sell in the market, collect recyclable waste materials or collect wax in cemeteries and melt it into new candles and sell it.

*“I am a housewife and I take care of the house and children. My husband’s contract expired and he was unable to find another job, before the epidemic. We live on social assistance. Very modestly, because when I pay the bills, we barely have anything left for food. Fortunately, we are healthy and I know how to cook and bake so they don’t feel they miss something.”*

*“This little money that I receive is spent for medicine and food, I barely survive a month.”*

*“I have a health card, but what’s the use of it if I can’t go to the doctor. I have high blood pressure, shattered nerves.”*

*“My mother used to beg, all my family worked with buckets. We don’t have even that now. My mother goes to beg a little, but the police chases her out, she’s not allowed.”*

*“I worked at the landfill, separated bottles and cans. We can’t do that now because of the infection.”*

*“Well, there are no jobs, because none of them have a permanent job, and the markets*

*are closed. Now we live only on my pension. I was employed and had a salary, and now I got sick and I need medicine. Half of my pension is spent on bills and other half on medicine.”*

*“I sell at the market the stuff I sew. Now that sale has stopped, and the buyers are not coming because my mother is ill and she is in a risk group, and people are afraid to buy (they don’t know who touched it). I have the goods worth 2,000 euros left that I can’t sell, there are not enough buyers. There is neither the procurement of materials because the borders are closed. Dad used to drive the goods to the market, since I don’t have a driver’s licence, and we sell together. Since the market is occasional, three days a week, my dad helps me. On other days, dad works in the field and takes care of the cattle, and those products are only for our needs.”*

*“The situation is quite difficult, families are quite vulnerable. Those who have never asked me for help are asking now. These are the beneficiaries of material assistance for families, but we later saw that many other families were at risk, those who do not work at the moment, because they worked as market or seasonal workers. Families are rather vulnerable, they come with their heads bowed, please put me on the list.”*

*“They are very busy, they help collect recyclable waste materials, women who are market workers are not beneficiaries of social assistance. Now they can’t earn a few dinars. It’s just hard, especially for those who have children. They do not focus on being safe at all, their priority is to be able to feed those children.”*

### 10.2.4. Support measures

***“There was only one parcel, nothing more. I don’t know who I can turn to. You ask if someone can help us, we are struggling a lot.”***

Reliefs have been announced for pensioners and for employers and entrepreneurs in order to overcome

the consequences of the epidemic and the state of emergency. The one-off payment in the amount of 100 euros to all adult citizens has been announced. No specific measures have been announced or adopted for poor citizens.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs<sup>254</sup> passed a number of acts related to the work of social protection institutions, but no relief or additional assistance for social assistance beneficiaries was envisaged. On 6 May (St. George's Day), the Ministry distributed parcels to Roma families in the territory of the Belgrade Municipality of Čukarica, and another 5050 parcels were announced to be distributed to Roma families in the settlements in Serbia.<sup>255</sup> However, the Social Welfare Centres distributed food parcels at the local level to social assistance beneficiaries, but in some cities the parcels did not reach Roma settlements.

Roma coordinators or representatives of Roma organisations were not involved in the work of crisis response teams in all places.

*"We received a parcel from the Social Welfare Centre with some flour, oil and dried pasta and they organised it badly, they invited us all to the Sloga stadium, so it was crowded. I was angry and I said that we would be infected this way for sure if we hadn't got infected by that moment."*

*"It was hard for us before, but now that we can't find any work and everything has stopped, it's even harder, and we didn't have any help."*

*"All project-related activities have been suspended; this is regarding work, but we do what we can to help somehow, for example to influence some decisions. We have the contacts of the commission, so we are trying to make a list of those who need help the most. We*

*had the first round of the distribution of parcels to the most vulnerable ones, but they did not reach our community. Most of our people are vulnerable and I don't know why they were not a priority. They insist on pensioners, but that was the first round, so I hope it will be better in some other round."*

Most civil society organisations and donors have redirected funds planned for projects and project activities to humanitarian aid. According to the information available to the activists of the civil society organisations, the funds for the local action plans for the improvement of the situation of Roma have also been redirected to the activities related to the suppression of the epidemic.

*"We all felt helpless, support was sought, so the funds were redirected, and that took a long time, and it's still ongoing. All the funds allocated for LAPs have also been redirected, but Roma organisations are not involved in that."*

*"We have this one project for mentors and these activities have now been transferred online, and the funds have been redirected to humanitarian aid."*

*"We received masks and distributed them to those who came to us. We also distributed hygiene parcels. We have covered only 2 settlements in Kragujevac, and there are 13 informal settlements. We work in cooperation with the Red Cross and the Social Welfare Centre and they forward the lists of persons to whom they gave aid, so that more people can be covered. Roma activists are not in the crisis response team, as far as we know. They believe that focus should not be placed only on Roma,*

254 Overview of acts of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/2020-05/Pregled%20akata%20minrzs%20o%20delovanju%20V3.pdf>

255 <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/srb-lat/aktuelnosti/vesti/podeljeni-paketi-pomoci-romskim-porodicama>

*but some settlements are really a priority because of hygienic conditions. HELP helps us, we will get those masks and some parcels from them.”*

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The activities carried out by Roma organisations at the local level, such as support for the enrolment of children in kindergartens, have been suspended.

*“At first we were in shock, the enrolment of children in kindergartens and full-day stay in schools is ongoing, then we stopped, since the institutions stopped working with clients, women could not collect documents.”*

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*“I helped them with enrolling their children in kindergarten. It’s done through e-government. How on earth would my Roma know that? They call me, take a photo of ID card and I do that for them. Registering to e-government for them is like English for me.”*

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*“We didn’t work with beneficiaries, you don’t know how people may react, but we began to work a few days ago, last Wednesday. We are slowly returning to normal.”*

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The activists pointed out the solidarity of the Roma community, but also the impossibility of applying protective measures during the distribution of parcels.

*“I monitor Leskovac, Vranje, the settlements where money is collected and a crisis response team is set up in the settlement. And they go to the market and buy and distribute parcels to everyone. And these are good parcels: eggs, chickens, sausages. So far, they have distributed 1,000 parcels in 340 houses.”*

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*“They distributed parcels here - 250 parcels arrived, they went to distribute them in the settlement. That humanity of ours will cost us our lives.”*

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The respondents recognise the Social Welfare Centre, the Red Cross and local Roma organisations as those to whom they can turn for help.

*“I addressed the Association of Roma. They often call us and ask how we are. They say that they will try to give us some stuff, parcels, disinfectants and hygiene products. They inquire, go out to the field. They called to inform us that their phone was functioning regardless of all the measures.”*

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*“If I needed help, I would certainly address the Social Welfare Centre and the Red Cross. I have no one else to turn to, I just need money at the moment.”*

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### 10.3. Conclusion - Roma women

- According to the testimonies of Roma women, the care of children, including school obligations and the care of hygiene and nutrition of children, is the obligation of mothers.
- Women are holders of the right to social assistance and child allowance, while men are more active in the informal economy. For Roma families, the lack of income from the informal economy (sales on the market, collection of recyclable waste materials, seasonal work in agriculture, etc.) is the most severe consequence of the epidemic and the measures taken.
- A special difficulty in some settlements and households is the lack of technical conditions for the following of classes. Significant support in this process is provided by pedagogical assistants.
- The application of protective measures is difficult, due to insufficient information and lack of hygiene products.
- The assistance provided by the Social Welfare Centre was not available to Roma families in all parts of Serbia. Bearing in mind that most women are registered in the Social Welfare Centres, these databases and communication channels can be used to inform Roma women and distribute hygiene products.
- Roma families, especially those internally displaced from Kosovo or returned to Serbia under readmission agreements, need additional financial assistance because they lack documents and other sources of income.

## 11. WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Persons with disabilities found themselves in additional difficulties during the state of emergency due to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. It is disconcerting that this happened both globally and in Serbia, and therefore additionally calls for responsibility to prevent its reappearance.

*“Globally, persons with disabilities were left out of the system at the beginning of the pandemic. Only later, at the intervention of persons with disabilities themselves, the authorities began to change perceptions and take appropriate measures. It was a matter of disorientation rather than a lack of desire to solve problems. Although there are some things that are still worrying. The fact is that the coronavirus appeared in the residential care facilities for adults with disabilities in Kulina and Blace in a certain number of beneficiaries and employees. In general, this is not much different from the story of the coronavirus entering residential care facilities for the elderly. We are waiting for further information - how the virus spread to these two institutions”, says Damjan Tatić.*

The problems that PWDs normally face, regarding accessibility, availability of health care services and various support services, and/or mobility, have now been further aggravated by fear of respiratory disease since it is life-threatening for some PWDs, as well as fear of deterioration of their primary condition and of not being able to get support for treatment in the conditions of the pandemic.

*“We are usually among the most vulnerable categories of the population, especially those who cannot move and who are normally at great risk of any respiratory infection, such as those suffering from neuromuscular diseases, quadriplegia, various rare diseases, patients on haemodialysis, people with intellectual disabilities”, said Ivanka Jovanović*

from the National Organisation of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS) for Istinomer.

In that sense, many PWDs agreed with the introduction of strict measures, primarily considering that in that way a higher level of protection would be achieved. However, in the organisation of everyday life, various problems, issues and doubts arose, which were resolved too late and only at the request of representatives of PWDs and/or women Members of Parliament. It was shown once again how important it was to take into account the needs of different groups in designing measures for emergency situations. One of the reasons for not proposing measures for PWDs in this “ad hoc” version is the fact that the Crisis Response Team did not include people who were well acquainted with the needs of these people and relevant issues. It also turned out that the health care system itself was not sensitive enough, although we would expect it to be. Hence, the existence of the Association of PWDs, which could quickly articulate needs and issues, proved to be a salvation.

In addition to access to health care and other support services, there was a problem of timely information, movement and obtaining permits, especially in smaller towns and villages, but also a problem of additional loneliness, especially for PWDs who live alone and get help from someone else other than their family.

Everything that happened during the pandemic could be learned from the statements of members of the Association of PWDs, which were covered by the media, from the speech of MP Ljupka Mihajlovska, who is also a PWD, as well as from interviews conducted with PWDs in April. The questions that we asked PWDs concerned everyday life, performing work and purchase, but also what was the most difficult for them and what recommendations they had for the state and/or society.

The key characteristics of the response to COVID-19 pandemic in relation to PWDs are:

### 11.1. Measures that take into account PWDs were adopted late, and some of them were inadequate

In her address to the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, MP Ljupka Mihajlovska<sup>256</sup> referred to the attitude towards persons with disabilities during the state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia and beyond, emphasizing that *“although we are in the 21st century in which human rights have been discussed more than ever before, we face a situation that we, as a human species, will probably never reach that level where everyone’s life is equally important.”* Appreciating the fact that the health system of Serbia did not find itself in a situation like Italy or some other countries, she stressed that *“we have not done everything we could to create measures, to develop adequate measures for responding to emergency situations through institutions and sectors in charge of a certain category citizens. “I would be dishonest to say that no one paid any attention to the population of people with disabilities during this pandemic, but it was definitely not done systematically and in a thoughtful and structured way.”*

“Then, together with the Coalition for Giving and the Serbian Philanthropic Forum, we developed a set of recommendations to the Government. The Government actually adopted most of these recommendations. But those Government decrees came a little late. For example, **the decision allowing children with developmental disabilities and autism to walk outdoors at certain times during curfew hours was adopted as late as on 13 April, while decision on allowing people with**

**disabilities to walk outdoors accompanied by one person was adopted as late as on 20 April. The decree on social protection and residential care institutions was passed on 10 April.**

Vesna Petrović from the **Serbian Union of Autism Associations** says for Istinomer that at one point the biggest problem was related to walking permits for children with autism and adults with autism, “because their condition is such that they have daily routines.”

*“If these routines are disturbed, they can be very upset and anxious, and their parents need to have a lot of patience and strength to return them to a normal family life. It seems to me that reactions could have been faster. However, we did not have any problems in the local self-governments of other cities where we have associations. They reacted much faster than the state itself with decrees”, explains Petrović.*

In an interview for Istinomer, PWD organisations state that the needs and problems of PWDs during the state of emergency were resolved **“day by day”**, in accordance with many issues and dilemmas that existed regarding movement, access to health care and other support services, especially in case of PWDs assisted by personal assistants and/or geronto-housekeepers.

*“Immediately after the introduction of the state of emergency, the Centre for Independent Living of Persons with Disabilities addressed the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Interior, from which we received an approval to issue individual work orders for each personal assistant for each day at work during curfew. In that period, we issued work orders for **15 personal assistants**, which functioned regularly and without any problems”, explains Momčilo Stanojević, Executive Director of the Centre for Independent Living of PDWs Serbia.*

In the meantime, there was a problem with work orders for those persons who are **not** covered by personal

256 PROVISIONAL STENOGRAPHIC NOTES, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, Second Sitting of the National Assembly, 01 No. 06-2/95-20, 1st day of sitting, 6 May 2020, <https://otvoreni.parlament.rs/transkript/7794?page=4#govor-1163300>

assistance, but who **have an agreement on providing assistance** to persons with disabilities.

*“This problem was noticed also by the National Organisation of Persons with Disabilities with which we cooperated, and after the agreement, NOOIS sent a letter to the relevant Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and the Prime Minister to resolve this problem at the level of Serbia, and also addressed the Protector of Citizens and the Commissioner for Protection of Equality asking them to support this request. After that, the Government passed a Decree allowing the issuance of permits for movement during curfew for the purpose of work to those who helped people in need of someone else’s help to satisfy their daily needs, which, of course, in addition to personal assistants, included relatives, friends and other people who helped people with disabilities during curfew”, says Stanojević.*

However, in practice there have been **many problems with the issuance of these permits**, especially in smaller communities.

The respondent from a village near Sombor says ...  
*“The hardest thing for me was the ban on movement on weekends, in addition to being a PWD myself, my mother broke her hip, I couldn’t help her, and a woman who provides her with care and changes her clothes wasn’t able to come. We did not succeed in obtaining a movement permit except for the evening, which we had obtained initially. Mom has to wait all day. And the times when movement was allowed have changed repeatedly. The system failed and the response was not good in any of the cases where more institutions were involved. The biggest problem is for people who needed care. Also, the authorisations to receive someone else’s income also lasted for several days. CZR did not know how to act. It should have been organised somehow differently.”*

*“It was said that the elderly should not go out and help was made available to them, while people with disabilities were forgotten. Given that a large number of people with disabilities could have suffered fatal consequences, after the NOOIS had written to the*

*authorities, they were recognised as vulnerable and in need of special support in the situation of the pandemic. Thus, it was said that some parcels with basic foodstuffs and hygiene products were delivered to senior citizens. After the intervention of NOOIS, the delivery of such parcels to people with disabilities began,”* explains Tatić.

“... As late as in the fifth week, Professor Kon mentioned people with disabilities and informed them, because they literally called me, for fear that some of them would end up at the Fair, because there are no proper conditions at the Fair, because of toilets, and because of everything else.” (MP Ljupka Mihajlovska)

## 11.2. Informing PWDs who use sign language was introduced with a delay and the “Viber Community” group is inadequate

Ljupka Mihajlovska says in her parliamentary speech:  
 “Even before the introduction of the state of emergency, I addressed the Regulatory Body for Electronic Media with a request to recommend to all televisions with national frequency to start informing our fellow citizens who used sign language. That population group didn’t know what it was about, although the COVID story had been present in the news for a month to a modest extent. Two days later, all televisions with national frequency had interpretation, they still have it today. I also thank the REM for its quick reaction and all televisions.”

“Therefore, it was quite a delay. In my sincere opinion, the link that failed the most was the Ministry of Labour, because that Ministry has a department for the protection of persons with disabilities, and that department should have had all these recommendations ready within two days, should have submitted them to the Government and the Government should have adopted them. We have seen only that the department created a

**“Community Viber Group” to allegedly inform people with disabilities about the course of the pandemic and measures, but it is a one-way group**, where only administrators can post information and others can only read. I was a member of that group for three days. I could barely stand it and then I left it because it was not a group for informing citizens, but it was, honestly speaking, a group for promotion, and not even of the SNS, but rather of the President of the Republic. We were constantly receiving in that group the information when the President would speak, where he would speak, in which programme he would appear. That’s fine, but, you know what, people with disabilities are neither simple-minded nor illiterate. We follow the news, we follow the media, so we know when, who and where appears. **I was hoping that it would be a group where people would be informed about specific things: the movement of personal assistants, transportation, the possibility of a personal assistant to visit a person with disability during curfew, because someone needs assistance, for example, with going to bed, toilet, etc. However, this “Community Viber Group” was of no use and many complained about it.** (MP Ljupka Mihajlovska)

The interviewed respondents say that they were informed mainly through TV, at press conferences of the Crisis Response Team, but also through social media. The respondents state that they did not receive any special official information about the situation, access to services and rights, relevant to PWDs.

*“I have been receiving a disability pension for ten years, but I don’t use other services, maybe that’s why I’m not on their radar, but they have me in the system as a pension user, I would expect to receive some information. The information should have reached every person with disabilities. What if the primary disease gets worse? It is necessary to*

*determine what to do if PWDs find themselves in such situations.” (Respondent from Belgrade)*

Citizens’ associations responded better this time also and shared information with their members. One example is the information, guidelines and infographics prepared by the Regional Cerebral Palsy Alliance by joining the World Health Organization’s campaign to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The information on care during the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus and ways of dealing with their own stress or stress of their children has been prepared for people and/or caregivers of people with cerebral palsy, and posted on the association’s website<sup>257</sup>.

### 11.3. Particular challenges in accessing health care services for PWDs

One of the problems during the state of emergency was that many centres for haemodialysis were closed because the hospitals were turned into COVID centres, thus reducing the capacities. *“The infection was spreading there, because a lot of people were concentrated in one place, as well as in the public transport vehicles on the way to the centres. Or it was a problem to wait longer for test results, and they should go to haemodialysis every two or three days. We pointed out all that and asked for help from the competent authorities. At the same time, there is willingness to respond positively to all proposals, especially by medical doctors, and therefore, alternative ways are being sought to organise safe haemodialysis centres”*, notes Ivanka Jovanović from the **National Organisation of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS)**. There is another important topic: what **if** a person with disabilities **gets infected**, and as Jovanović says, they were looking for and found solutions for such situations as well. The decision was made, as she says, that pregnant women, mothers of newborns, persons with

disabilities, persons on haemodialysis and persons with uncontrolled chronic diseases would not be placed in temporary hospitals.

The PWD respondent from Belgrade, who lives alone, during the pandemic took care of her mother, who was released from the hospital in the first days of the state of emergency. Her mother, who lives outside of Belgrade, underwent surgery in Belgrade. The respondent could not provide her mother with postoperative care and support in her place of residence, so she brought her home and describes the situation in which she found herself:

*“The hardest thing for me was to take care of my mother’s recovery, I had to learn to give injections. And then we had a breakdown, a pipe in the wall broke and it was very difficult for us to find a plumber. Stress. These are not regular conditions. The system did not have a response to such situations - I was afraid of what would happen if case of infection. My mom was discharged on 18 March. She has health insurance outside of Belgrade, so the ambulance did not want to take her from the hospital to my address in Belgrade. They can only drive her to the address where she is registered as insured person. She could not use postoperative services. I had to get organised and pay for everything myself.”*

People with autism faced a special challenge: *“It’s usually a problem that our children and people with autism are always users of emergency medicine, precisely because of various problems: they are difficult to examine, you cannot repair their teeth without general anaesthesia, you have to submit a bunch of results and they are afraid of blood taking and examinations... What can be fixed now is the health care system. All our problems have come to the surface. But if we let them fall into oblivion, I don’t know how we can continue”,* says Vesna Petrović.

## 11.4. Loneliness and reduced contacts

Loneliness during the pandemic was also a problem for people with disabilities. Not only for those who live alone, with or without the help of personal assistants, caregivers and geronto-housekeepers, but also for those who live with their family, but could not see other people and/or family members, primarily due to the risk to their own health.

*“I usually go out and see people, but during the pandemic no one came, I really missed that.”* (Respondent from Belgrade)

*“It was difficult for me for Easter that we could not gather as a family. My sister lives close by, we are used to spend time together. But even though we are in the village, people really did not violate the ban.”* (Respondent from a village near Sombor)

### For PWDs, obstacles in performing daily life activities remain after the end of quarantine

“Believe me, for people with disabilities, that quarantine is valid for a lifetime. And I’m wondering what should we bang into to get someone to hear this population? Because, please note, **people with disabilities will not be able to use transportation even when regular lines start, because they cannot get on. Going to cafes and restaurants, therefore, everything that every person misses is missed by people with disabilities, only that people with disabilities will continue to miss them even after the state of emergency has been lifted.**” (MP Ljupka Mihajlovska)

“What can happen now, according to Vesna Petrović, is that each union and association “lists” its needs and that they become guideline for all of us for the future.

*“We did have the state of emergency, but it applied to all citizens. We have to explore what exists among us all the time that we do not see. We have to talk about everything. **We live with that, and it seems***

*to me that we have no say in anything. And it is better for the state to hear us, to provide more help and the work will be done faster. We want to participate, but sometimes it seems like we're pushing ourselves into participation. They just need to call us. The loss of time is most terrible, especially for people with disabilities",* concludes Vesna Petrović.

In response<sup>258</sup> to the MP's speech, Prime Minister Ana Brnabić thanked Ljupka Mihajlovska for helping during the state of emergency and drawing attention to the problems and challenges faced by people with disabilities... **"You are right and I really admit my**

**mistake and I personally take all the responsibility because we remembered a bit late to deal specifically with the topic of people with disabilities, but also vulnerable groups in general, to help and support these people.**Hence, I take the blame for the mistake of addressing the issues of vulnerable population a little later, because, as you say, the situation was the same worldwide, since we focused on the majority population, but I am ready, open, I am here to continue working to improve the situation of persons with disabilities and all other minority groups, whoever they may be, in any field." *(Prime Minister Ana Brnabić)*

## 11.5. Recommendations - Women and Men with Disabilities

- ➔ **Action plans and strategies for emergency situations should contain measures for different categories of PWDs, and the Crisis Response Team should include representatives of the PWD Association as well as experts who are well acquainted with this topic.** PWDs are not a homogeneous group and their needs differ depending on the type of disability, but also depending on age, place of residence and sex. It is important to take this into account. Measures for PWDs need to take into account the reality of the external assistance used by PWDs and provided by personal assistants, geronto-housekeepers or caregivers. In addition, parents and/or guardians of children with disabilities should be seen as part of the overall response to their needs. In this context, the issuance of movement permits should be simplified and without excessive bureaucracy. Also, permits should have been issued for the entire duration of the state of emergency, and not from week to week, which additionally burdened both the services and PWDs.
- ➔ **Information about COVID-19 should have reached every PWD in the Republic of Serbia in a targeted manner.** The crisis response teams could have done this in several ways: by letter (accompanying the pension or other assistance received by PWDs), by sounding out the COVID-19 website, especially bearing in mind that the automatic sounding tool with the help of software is already used by the Government of the Republic of Serbia and that the website of the Government of the Republic of Serbia is sounded. The information on where PWDs could get information should have been repeated daily at the conferences available on television. During the address of the Crisis Response

258 PROVISIONAL STENOGRAPHIC NOTES, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, Second Sitting of the National Assembly, 01 No. 06-2/95-20, 1st day of sitting, 6 May 2020, <https://otvoreniparlament.rs/transkript/7794?page=4#govor-1163300>

Team to journalists and citizens, some time should have been dedicated specially to PWDs. All institutions should have received guidelines on how to organise services and support for PWDs. Easy-to-understand information and guidelines should have been provided in the form of letters, infographics and/or voice information. Statistics on tested, infected, recovered and deceased PWDs should have been made visible in the collected, processed and reported COVID-19 statistics.

- **It is now important to permanently solve all the weaknesses of the health care system that have become more visible in the pandemic, by using an approach that focuses on different needs of PWDs.** This pandemic could be an occasion to open these issues and find better solutions. It is necessary to identify illogical practices that are very harmful to health and then urgently change them. One of them is that in a pandemic it must be possible to use primary health care services outside the place of residence in situations where you happen to be outside your place of residence during a pandemic (and there have been such cases) and you need, for example, wound dressing, check-up, mobile health care service, removal of stitches, etc.
- **PWDs should have been allowed to get various disinfectants and protective equipment faster, easier and cheaper,** due to the increased health risk. This should have been made possible also for people caring for people with disabilities. This type of measures should become an integral part of future emergency plans.
- **During the pandemic, many PWDs relied on a network of solidarity support** provided mostly by friends, and to a much lesser extent by associations and/or institutions. Solidarity has won in these conditions of emergency, but it is important to build support mechanisms that would, in situations like this, activate primarily institutions, associations and citizens through local communities and at the local level, the closest to citizens, so that information and support could reach all those who need them.

## 12. WOMEN SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Domestic and intimate partner violence against women and girls is widespread in Serbia, and restrictions on freedom of movement, mandatory self-isolation and other measures during the state of emergency have further increased the risk of these forms of gender-based violence against women. The women who were exposed to domestic violence before are at even greater risk, as they are forced to spend much more time with their abusers, to whom the ban on movement provides even greater opportunities for violence and demonstration of power. The measures implemented during the state of emergency limited the ability of women to report violence, seek help, run away from home and apply other self-protection strategies commonly used in acute situations of violence, which reinforces their feeling of helplessness. The women's fear of being punished if they violate the ban on movement by leaving home also greatly contributes to that feeling. Women with disabilities, older women, rural women, Roma women and members of other marginalised and multiple discriminated groups of women are in a particularly difficult situation with regard to the possibility of reporting violence.

Hereby we present data on the frequency of domestic and intimate partner violence against women during the state of emergency and point out the key difficulties in reporting and prosecuting cases of domestic and intimate partner violence against women, as well as challenges in providing assistance and support to women victims of violence.

### 12.1. Prevalence of domestic and intimate partner violence

There are no data on the number of women exposed to domestic and intimate partner violence during the state of emergency. Public authorities are recording a decrease in the number of reported cases of domestic violence. According to the data presented by the Police Director, the number of reported cases of violence against women decreased by 48.6 percent compared to the previous period.<sup>259</sup> The website of the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade states that the number of committed crimes of domestic violence during the state of emergency has decreased, both compared to the same period last year and the period immediately before the introduction of the state of emergency, based on which it may be wrongly concluded that during the state of emergency, this form of violence was reduced.<sup>260</sup> However, fewer reports of violence are a consequence of women's limited ability to report violence. In fact, bearing in mind that domestic and intimate partner violence against women increases in times of crisis, which is confirmed at the global level, and taking into consideration the risk factors that affect the manifestation of violence, it is certain that during the state of emergency in Serbia, like in other countries,<sup>261</sup> this kind of violence did not decrease, but it increased. This is confirmed by the increase in the number of women seeking help and support from specialised women's organisations.

259 See: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/trpe-nasilje-ali-ne-smeju-da-prijave-strucnjaci-smatraju-da-je-tokom-vanrednog-stanja/99f4g6j> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

260 See: <https://prvo.os.jt.rs/aktuelnosti/saopstenje-2/> (accessed on 4 May 2010)

261 COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, UN Women. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>; <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/women-leaders-virtual-roundtable-on-covid-19-and-the-future-issues-call-to-put-women-and-girls-at-the-centre-of-response-efforts.htm> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

After the initial decrease in the number of calls from women victims of violence, as soon as after the first week of the state of emergency, their number was increasing compared to the previous period. Thus, according to the data of the Autonomous Women's Center, in the first month after the introduction of the state of emergency, three times more women than in the usual circumstances addressed this organisation.<sup>262</sup> The largest number of reported cases of violence is related to psychological violence, but economic violence is also becoming more pronounced and mainly consists of failure to provide maintenance. There are fewer reported cases of physical violence, although their number is increasing every day.<sup>263</sup> The number of calls to the SOS Hotline of the Human Rights Committee is 25% higher than before, and the SOS Hotline in Romani and Serbian (Osvit, Niš) had 50% more calls from women victims of violence in March 2020.<sup>264</sup> The number of the cases of violence reported to the safe houses within which SOS Hotlines operate also increased.<sup>265</sup> The number of calls by women victims of violence to the National SOS Hotline did not increase compared to the period before the introduction of the state of emergency,<sup>266</sup> but this line received fewer calls than specialised women's organisations even before the state of emergency.

During the state of emergency, the media reported on drastic cases of violence: in March, a woman was killed by her husband,<sup>267</sup> in April, a father posted a video of sexual intercourse with his 17-year-old daughter on social media, offering her sexual services for money,<sup>268</sup> and in early May, a man beat his wife so brutally that her spleen had to be removed.<sup>269</sup>

## 12.2. Reporting violence

After the introduction of the state of emergency, no alternative ways of reporting violence were introduced in Serbia to enable women to seek help in a timely manner and without risk to their safety, as some other countries did in an innovative way.<sup>270</sup> According to the lawyer of the Autonomous Women's Center, there were cases in some places in Serbia that women who left their homes running away from domestic violence during the movement ban and asked for help were fined 50,000 dinars, although they explained the reason for violating the movement ban.<sup>271</sup>

262 During the first month of the state of emergency, the Autonomous Women's Center provided 430 services as follows: 148 calls to the SOS Hotline by 127 women, 108 calls to the SOS Hotline for legal assistance by 88 women, 113 exchanged e-mails, Viber, WhatsApp and FB messages, 52 online consultations with 36 women victims of violence and 9 written submissions. See: <https://www.womenngo.org.rs/vesti/1576-saopstenje-za-javnost-zastita-i-podrska-zenama-zrtvama-nasilja-tokom-prvih-mesec-dana-vanrednog-stanja> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

263 Ibid.

264 See: <http://hrcvr.org/predlog-vladi-srbije-za-izmenu-uredbe-o-zabrani-kretanja-i-smestaju-zrtava-nasilja-u-sigurne-kuce/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

265 See: <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-52109681> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

266 The information was presented by the representative of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, at the multisectoral meeting "Violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 epidemic", organised by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and held on 29 April. See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_fVoL4KbcN0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fVoL4KbcN0) (accessed on 4 May 2020)

267 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/uzas-u-nisu-ubio-suprugu-sakrio-telo-pa-se-obesio/8s8b4yq> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

268 <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/hronika/otac-iz-panceva-osumnjicen-da-je-snimao-ses-sa-cerkom-za-video-nudio-2000-dinara-odgovor-devojci-2020-04-22> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

269 See: <https://vojvodina.info.rs/brutalno-nasilje-u-porodici-muz-pretukao-suprugu-doktori-joj-izvadili-slezinu/> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

270 In France, in partnership with local associations, public services and shopping centre managers, transit information points were opened in shopping centres to allow women to seek help in the conditions that guarantee confidentiality and health safety, while being away from abusers. In the Canary Islands in Spain, women can warn pharmacies about the situation in the family with the codeword "Mask-19", which is transmitted to the police. In Cumbria, UK, the police have recruited and trained postal workers and drivers delivering goods to recognise signs of abuse. See: COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-co-videti-vid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>; Promoting and protecting women's rights at national level, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#%2263001324%22:13J> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

271 See: <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a594297/Porast-nasilja-u-vanrednom-stanju-kaznjena-jer-je-izaslada-prijavi-nasilnika.html> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

### Initiatives of women's organisations were not adopted

Regarding the problems related to reporting domestic and intimate partner violence, specialised women's organisations that provide assistance and support to women victims of violence sent a proposal to the Government of the Republic of Serbia on 18 April 18 to supplement the *Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency*<sup>272</sup>, in the part related to the ban on movement, with a provision that would allow women and girls in situations of acute domestic and intimate partner to leave their homes during curfew hours, without being punished for violating the ban on movement regardless of how far away from the place of residence they may be. It was proposed to the Government that officials and competent authorities sent a clear message to victims of violence through their statements that the measure of movement ban did not apply to victims of violence, who were allowed to leave their homes and ask for help, which would also have a preventive effects on perpetrators of violence.<sup>273</sup>

Specialised women's organisations submitted the proposal also to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, who sent to the Government of the Republic of Serbia the *Initiative to amend the Decree on Measures during the State of Emergency for Victims of Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence*,<sup>274</sup> proposing to prescribe an exception to the movement ban for victims of domestic and intimate partner violence allowing them to leave, without a risk of punishment, the apartment, room or dwelling in residential buildings and household (yard) in cases of their direct exposure to violence.

In the *Declaration of women's civil society organisations, gender equality experts after the national consultation for the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic in the Republic of Serbia* of 9 April, an appeal was sent to public authorities to prepare and implement, in consultations with women's organisations, an adequate response to the unresolved issues that complicated the daily lives of women throughout Serbia, including the problems of women in situations of violence, which they could not report due to restrictions on movement, while living with the perpetrator in the same household.<sup>275</sup>

Launching of an initiative for introducing the option of reporting violence and filing lawsuits for violence against women online and using other options to make the protection of victims of violence more effective was announced at the multisectoral meeting "Violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 epidemic", organised by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and held on 29 April.

These recommendations, appeals and initiatives, however, did not have an effect: neither alternative ways of reporting violence were introduced, nor was the proposed amendment to the Decree on Measures During the State of Emergency adopted. It is especially worrying that women who reported domestic and intimate partner violence to the competent institutions consider that they did not receive adequate protection

since the perpetrators were only verbally warned,<sup>276</sup> which was the reason to address specialised organisations.

During the state of emergency, the media published several statements given by representatives of public authorities in which women victims of violence were encouraged to report violence, citizens were called on

272 *Official Gazette of the RS*, nos. 31/2020, 36/2020, 38/2020, 39/2020, 43/2020, 47/2020, 49/2020, 53/2020, 56/2020, 57/2020, 58/2020 and 60/20

273 Available at: <http://hrcvr.org/predlog-vladi-srbije-za-izmenu-uredbe-o-zabrani-kretanja-i-smestaju-zrtava-nasilja-u-sigurne-kuce/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

274 Initiative no. 601/20 of 20 April 2020 Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/inici/d1%98%d0%b0tiv%d0%b0-z%d0%b0-izm%d0%b5nu-ur%d0%b5db%d0%b5-%d0%be-m%d0%b5r%d0%b0m%d0%b0-cir/> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

275 Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/%C5%BEenska-platforma-za-razvoj-srbije-pali%C4%87/deklaracija/3013793202011361> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

276 See: <https://www.womenngo.org.rs/vesti/1576-saopstenje-za-javnost-zastita-i-podrska-zenama-zrtvama-nasilja-tokom-prvih-mesec-dana-vanrednog-stanja> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

to report violence they found out about and the position was expressed that public authorities responded decisively in all cases of violence against women. In her written statement for the media on 16 March, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior stated that police officers performed their regular activities and that the information that had appeared in social media about victims of violence being left to themselves and without the protection of the competent authorities was absolutely inaccurate and malicious, and reminded that the telephone line of the Ministry of Interior to which domestic violence could be reported was open 24 hours.<sup>277</sup> On 24 April, the Deputy Prime Minister and the President of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, in her appearance on a TV show, stated that the biggest problem was that women were afraid to report violence, because most people did not work, meaning that they were at home with the perpetrator, conveying a message to women that they were not alone and that they should report any case of violence.<sup>278</sup> Also, in her address at the multisectoral meeting “Violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 epidemic”, which was published on the Internet, she sent a message to women that they were not alone, that it was necessary to encourage women and society as a whole to report violence and that the state would not tolerate any kind of violence against women and children and that the competent institutions would respond to any report of violence, recommending local self-governments to maintain continuity in the coordination of all competent services and adopt internal procedures for acting during the state of emergency.<sup>279</sup>

According to the information from the website of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, during the state of emergency, the Coordination Body for Gender

Equality, in cooperation with the company Mozart, conducted a campaign “Stop Violence against Women” to raise awareness of violence against women and girls and the need to report it. Over 600 athletes participated.<sup>280</sup>

### 12.3. Prosecution of cases of domestic and intimate partner violence

There were no changes in the manner of prosecuting cases of domestic and intimate partner violence during the state of emergency, although the organisation of the work of judicial bodies has changed.

On 17 March, the Ministry of Justice issued *Recommendations for the work of courts and public prosecutor’s offices during the state of emergency*,<sup>281</sup> which introduced a temporary organisation of work of employees in courts and public prosecutor’s offices, lawyers and other legal professionals handling cases. By this act, the Ministry recommended that the competent courts and public prosecutor’s offices during the state of emergency should prosecute, among other things, criminal cases related to domestic violence and cases where a minor appeared as a defendant or injured party, as well as cases solved in urgent procedure, as required by law, which include misdemeanour and civil proceedings related to domestic violence, as well as proceedings for the enforcement of decisions concerning family relations.

At the request of the Bar Association, which pointed out the uneven application of the Recommendations of the

277 See: <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/popovic-ivkovic-policija-postupa-u-svim-slucajevima-nasilja-u-porodici-bez-obzira-na-vanredne-okolnosti/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

278 “My message to women is that they are not alone and that they should report any case of violence, and that violence should also be reported by any neighbour who sees that violence exists. “Violence is much harder and stronger in this situation, and global data show that it leads to murders more often.” See: <https://www.rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sr/press/vesti/mikhajloviceva-zhene-niste-same-prijavite-nasile> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

279 Available at: <https://www.rodnaravnopravnost.gov.rs/sr/press/vesti/mikhajloviceva-zhene-i-devojchice-nisu-same-ni-u-vreme-epidemije-pozivam-sve-da-prijave> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

280 <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/454089/koordinaciono-telo-i-mocart-pomazu-sigurne-kuce-u-srbiji.php> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

281 Recommendation of the Ministry of Justice on the work of courts and public prosecutor’s offices during the state of emergency proclaimed on 15 March 2020 no. 112-01-557/2020-05 of 17 March 2020 Available at: [https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/PREPORUKE\\_%20ZA%20RAD%20SUDOVA%20I%20JAVNIH%20TU%C5%BDILA%C5%A0TAVA%20I%20VREME%20VANREDNOG%20STANJA.pdf](https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/PREPORUKE_%20ZA%20RAD%20SUDOVA%20I%20JAVNIH%20TU%C5%BDILA%C5%A0TAVA%20I%20VREME%20VANREDNOG%20STANJA.pdf) (accessed on 4 May 2020)

Ministry of Justice, on 18 March, the <sup>282</sup>High Judicial Council issued the *Conclusion* <sup>283</sup>specifying which cases could not be postponed, i.e. in which cases trials had to be scheduled and held. In criminal matters, this group of cases includes, among others, criminal proceedings in which detention was ordered or requested, proceedings related to domestic violence and proceedings against minors, i.e. in which a minor appears as an injured party, related to criminal offences against sexual freedom referred to in Chapter XVII of the Criminal Code. In civil matters, the cases that cannot be delayed

include, among others, proceedings for determining, extending and revoking provisional measures, as well as proceedings for determining measures for protection from domestic violence and enforcement of decisions concerning family relations. The acting of lawyers in these cases is regulated by the Decision on the adoption of instructions on the acting of lawyers during the state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia proclaimed on 15 March 2020, which was adopted on 19 March by the Management Board of the Serbian Bar Association.<sup>284</sup>

### Good practice: lawyers have given priority to cases of domestic violence

The classification of domestic violence cases into the group of court cases that are handled during the state of emergency is a positive and extremely important move, because it enables the competent authorities to take all necessary actions without any delay during the state of emergency.

There are no publicly available data on the number of criminal and misdemeanour cases related to domestic violence, which were initiated before the introduction of the state of emergency and in which trials were held during the state of emergency, or data on the number of newly initiated criminal and misdemeanour proceedings. There is neither data on the number of pronounced urgent protection measures, although some data are available on the websites of some judicial bodies. Thus, the website of the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade states that in the period from 15 March 2020 to 25 April 2020 31 criminal charges were filed for the criminal offence of domestic violence, which is significantly less than in the same period in 2019 and the period before the introduction of the state of emergency, that 3 persons were remanded

in custody and 44 urgent measures were imposed, including 26 urgent measures of temporary restraining order and 18 urgent measures of temporary removal of the perpetrator from the apartment.<sup>285</sup> According to the information presented by the Police Director at the aforementioned multisectoral meeting "Violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 epidemic",<sup>286</sup> in the period 15 March - 17 April, the number of urgent protection measures issued by the police decreased by 13 percent.<sup>287</sup> According to the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office, during March, the number of extended urgent measures decreased by 30% compared to the previous period.<sup>288</sup>

The number of previously initiated civil proceedings for determining measures of protection against domestic

282 Available at: <https://www.paragraf.rs/dnevne-vesti/200320/200320-vest8.html> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

283 Available at: <https://vss.sud.rs/sites/default/files/attachments/%D0%97%D0%B0% D0%BA%D1%99%D1%83%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%BA.pdf> Decision on correction of the Conclusion of 19 March 2020 is available at: <https://vss.sud.rs/sr-lat/soap/C5%A1tenja/obave/C5%A1tenje-o-ispravci-zaklju/C4%8Dka-sa-sednice-vss> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

284 Decision no. 284/2020 of 19 March 2020 Available at: <https://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/odluka% 20o%20usvajanju%20uputstva%20za%20postupanje%20advokata.pdf> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

285 Available at: <https://prvo.os.jt.rs/aktuelnosti/soapstenje-2/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

286 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/trpe-nasilje-ali-ne-smeju-da-prijave-strucnjaci-smatraju-da-je-tokom-vanrednog-stanja/99f4g6j> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

287 See: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/trpe-nasilje-ali-ne-smeju-da-prijave-strucnjaci-smatraju-da-je-tokom-vanrednog-stanja/99f4g6j> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

288 See: <https://prvo.os.jt.rs/aktuelnosti/soapstenje-2/> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

violence in which hearings were held during the state of emergency is unknown, as well as the number of newly initiated proceedings, and there is no data on the number of provisional measures that can be ordered in these civil proceedings.

## 12.4. Assistance and support to women victims of domestic and intimate partner violence

When it comes to providing assistance and support to women victims of domestic violence, during the state of emergency there were no changes in terms of coordinated action of the institutions of the system in providing assistance and support to victims of domestic and intimate partner violence.

No measure was taken to adjust the work of coordination and cooperation groups at the Basic Public Prosecutor's Offices in the new circumstances, and therefore the provisions of the *Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence*,<sup>289</sup> as well as the relevant bylaws, are fully applicable. Unlike in trials in some criminal cases held via Skype, modern ICTs were not used in meetings of coordination and cooperation groups, despite the fact that these groups bring together professionals from various institutions, including representatives of specialised women's organisations and even victims who must have a special permit to move during the ban. Given the aim and purpose of the coordination and cooperation groups meetings, it would be appropriate to hold them online as it would allow the members of these groups to work at full capacity, without health risks.

There are no publicly available data on the activities of coordination and cooperation groups, nor on the

number of developed individual plans for assistance and support to victims of violence. According to the data submitted by the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office to the Autonomous Women's Center, handling its freedom of information request, in March 2020, the number of newly reported cases of domestic violence considered at the meetings of coordination and cooperation groups decreased by half, as a consequence of a 40 percent reduction in the number of coordination and cooperation group meetings, and the end result is a 60 percent reduction in individual protection and support plans. It is worrying that during March, the coordination and cooperation groups at six Basic Public Prosecutor's Offices did not hold a single meeting, and that the coordination and cooperation groups at the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Kragujevac held 12 meetings each.<sup>290</sup> On 28 April, the First Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade published information on its website that in the period from 15 March to 25 April, 19 meetings of the group for coordination and cooperation were held and 181 plans for protection and support were developed.<sup>291</sup> The websites of other public prosecutors' offices do not contain any information on the work of coordination and cooperation groups. Although the groups for coordination and cooperation include the plan of monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of planned and undertaken measures in the individual plan of protection and support of victims,<sup>292</sup> there is no data on whether during the state of emergency the coordination groups monitored the implementation of measures included in the previously adopted individual plans, whether they contacted the victims of violence in order to learn about their safety and the possible need for support in the new circumstances.

➔ The introduction of the state of emergency has opened up a number of challenges regarding

289 *Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 94/2016

290 Data available at: <https://www.womenngo.org.rs/vesti/1576-saopstenje-za-javnost-zastita-i-podrska-zenama-zrtvama-nasilja-tokom-prvih-mesec-dana-vanrednog-stanja> (accessed on 2 May 2020)

291 See: <https://prvo.os.jt.rs/aktuelnosti/saopstenje-2/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

292 Article 31, paragraph 3 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence

the accommodation of victims of violence in safe houses. The Instruction of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs envisages that the admission of new users of accommodation services is done exclusively with medical documentation proving that the person is not infected with SARS-CoV-2.<sup>293</sup> However, the competent health care institutions conduct testing only on the basis of medical criteria (existence of symptoms, contact with an infected person, etc.), so that tests for other purposes and at personal request are not performed, which puts victims of violence in a hopeless situation. On the other hand, having in mind the spatial limitations of safe houses, there are difficulties in terms of self-isolation of safe house users and their children. These problems were pointed out by the Commissioner for Protection of Equality in the Recommendation on Measures sent to the Government of Serbia, handling complaints against the refusal to accommodate victims of violence in safe houses due to the lack of valid confirmation of negative corona virus test.<sup>294</sup> The Recommendation advised the Government to send an instruction to all institutions with statutory competences for handling cases of violence or with the risk of violence, *“regarding their actions in the circumstances of the state of emergency, in order to provide timely protection to victims of violence.”*<sup>295</sup>

According to media reports, by the end of April, only the safe house in Jagodina received new victims of violence, unlike other safe houses.<sup>296</sup> At the multisectoral meeting “Violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 epidemic” held on May 4, organised by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, the

representative of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs stated that since the introduction of the state of emergency there had been no increased admission to safe houses, and that no person could be admitted in the institution without a prior medical test, which had to be waited for 24 hours, after which the victims would be preventively placed in self-isolation for 14 days.

According to the data published on the Council of Europe’s website, provided by Serbia in its report on the measures introduced by the country as a member of the Council of Europe during the crisis to mitigate its impact on women’s rights, during the state of emergency the living conditions in all safe houses in Serbia were improved by the donation of TV sets, accompanying equipment and toys, which were provided by the company Mozart in cooperation with the Coordination Body for Gender Equality. This allows children to follow distance learning, which was organised through broadcasting lessons on TV channels. Eleven safe houses received hygiene and medical products, with the financial support of UN women, and in cooperation with the Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Government of Serbia.<sup>297</sup>

As regards psychological assistance for women victims of domestic and intimate partner violence, it is provided in the counselling centres of social welfare centres by telephone, since in accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs<sup>298</sup> social welfare centre employees work from home, and the centres are obliged to ensure the availability of their services by displaying the contact telephone number in public places and community services. Women victims of violence who received

293 <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/vanredno-stanje/2020.03.12.%20Instrukcija%20003.pdf> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

294 Recommendation of measures no. 560/2020 of 14 April 2020 Available at: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/preporuka-mera-u-vezi-dozvola-za-kretanje-rada-linija-cir/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

295 Ibid.

296 See: <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a594297/Porast-nasilja-u-vanrednom-stanju-kaznjena-je-je-izasla-da-prijavi-nasilnika.html> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

297 See: Promoting and protecting women’s rights at national level, Serbia, available at: [https://www.promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#\["63001324":{33}\]](https://www.promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#[) (4/5/2020)

298 Instruction no. 600-01-2/2020-09 of 16 March 2020 Available at: <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sites/default/files/vanredno-stanje/2020.03.16.%20Instrukcija%20005.pdf> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

some form of financial social assistance before the state of emergency, continued to receive this assistance, although there was a certain delay in its payment, which was resolved in the meantime.<sup>299</sup>

During the state of emergency, all specialised women's organisations continued to provide assistance and support to women victims of violence and recorded an increase in provided services.<sup>300</sup> The organisations in the Network of Women Against Violence have adapted their work to the conditions of the state of emergency and provide services using modern means of communication available for women.<sup>301</sup> This way of work is applied by "... Iz kruga" Vojvodina,<sup>302</sup> VDS Info and Victim Support Service<sup>303</sup> and other organisations.

There is no data on the provision of special economic support to women victims of domestic and intimate

partner violence during the state of emergency, so as regards this type of support, they mainly shared the fate of socially vulnerable groups of population. A number of women victims of violence received material assistance in the form of food and hygiene products thanks to the redirection of available funds from the IPA 2016 project "Instrument for Gender Equality", implemented by the Coordination Body for Gender Equality in cooperation with UN Women. These funds were used to purchase food, sanitary and other materials, which were distributed by the Red Cross to the most vulnerable women in local communities, such as women victims of violence, elderly women, rural women, women with disabilities and Roma women.<sup>304</sup>

299 See: <https://mondo.rs/Info/Ekonomija/a1298699/Posta-hitna-ispalta-ocijalnih-davanja-i-novcanih-naknada.html>

300 See: <https://www.womenngo.org.rs/vesti/1576-saopstenje-za-javnost-zastita-i-podrska-zenama-zrtvama-nasilja-tokom-prvih-mesec-dana-vanrednog-stanja> (accessed on 3 May 2020)

301 See: <https://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/vesti/1031-radno-vreme-i-kontakti-organizacija-mzpn-tokom-izmenjenih-uslova-rada-usled-corona-virusa> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

302 See: <http://www.izkrugavojvodina.org/2020/03/19/nacin-rada-tokom-vanredne-situacije/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

303 See: <http://www.vds.rs/> (accessed on 4 May 2020)

304 See: Promoting and protecting women's rights at national level, Serbia, available at: [https://www.promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#{"63001324": \[33\]}](https://www.promoting-and-protecting-women-s-rights#{) (4/5/2020)

## 12.5. Recommendations - Women survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence

- After the end of the state of emergency, collect and analyse data on the prevalence of certain forms of domestic and intimate partner violence against women, forms of manifestation, risk factors and triggers.
- Record the difficulties faced by women in situations of violence when reporting it and determine the needs of women for psychosocial and economic support and the degree of their fulfilment in the state of emergency, considering the specific circumstances of vulnerable and multiple discriminated groups of women.
- Conduct a comprehensive in-depth analysis of the actions of all actors in the system of protection against domestic violence during the state of emergency (police, public prosecutor's office, court, health care institutions, social protection institutions) in order to identify difficulties and challenges in adapting the way of work and establish cooperation in emergency situations, including cooperation with specialised women's organisations.
- Based on the findings, prepare proposals for innovating and supplementing the existing protocols and instructions, including the instructions on the assessment of risk of violence, and specific rules on how all social actors should act to combat, prevent and protect women from violence in emergencies.
- Strengthen resources and provide appropriate support to the work of specialised women's organisations and improve communication and cooperation of institutions with these organisations.
- Prepare a comprehensive programme for combating, preventing and protecting against domestic violence and violence against women, as an integral part of the gender-responsive programme of social and economic recovery, taking into account the expected increase in all forms of gender-based violence against women after the state of emergency.
- In creating measures to combat, prevent and protect women against violence, respect the starting points and principles of the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which provides a relevant framework for designing and implementing measures in this area.



**PART THREE:  
ECONOMIC  
ASPECTS OF  
THE PANDEMIC,  
PROPOSED  
MEASURES AND  
LIVES OF WOMEN  
ENTREPRENEURS**

## 13. GENDER ASPECTS OF ECONOMIC SITUATION: LABOUR MARKET DURING THE PANDEMIC

The epidemic and the measures taken had different consequences on:

- a) employment, i.e. the possibility of performing paid work and get income;**      **b) volume of unpaid housework and the availability of services.**

Women make up the majority in the health sector where the workload has increased sharply, which has created additional difficulties for many parents working in health care sector regarding the organisation of daily life, child care, especially in single-parent families where women are much more often a parent-guardian and recognised in institutional jargon as single mothers. During the state of emergency, the forced collection of debts, including alimony, was suspended, which is why many single mothers were left to fend for themselves without income and without alimony.

Women make up the majority of employees in service industries, and this sector is particularly affected by the complete cessation of work.

Women are more often the owners of entrepreneurial shops and micro-enterprises in the activities in which a ban or restriction of work first occurred, and they make up the largest number of employees. Moreover, the informal economy is partly present in the sector of tourism, services and trade, and therefore a large number of those who had survived in this way were left without income.

In the stores that sell basic foodstuffs, the volume of work increased due to increased demand as a result of stockpiling, which further burdened a large number of employees in which women make up the majority.

The closure of schools and kindergartens, as well as the recommended cessation of contacts with elderly family members, made it more difficult to organise child care and care for elderly and chronically ill household or family members. The burden of this care most often falls on women.

All-day child care became an additional burden for parents who had to go to work during the epidemic, but also for those who worked from home and cared for preschool children or lower grades primary school children, helping them with school tasks and online lessons. This work was also done mainly by women, and it posed a special challenge for single parents.

Many parents were also afraid that employers may not have an understanding for this situation. It is difficult to assess now whether or to what extent all this will affect the possible loss of jobs and the economic situation.

## 13.1. Labour market and COVID-19 pandemic

The employment rate in Serbia in 2019 was 49%, and the unemployment rate was 10.4%. Men account for the majority of employees, as well as the majority of work-

active population: 62.72% of all men over 15 years of age are active, compared to 47.10% of active women over the age of 15.

**Table:** Employment and Activity of the Population 15+, by Sex in Thousands, 2019<sup>305</sup>

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Active</b>	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Not active</b>
Total	5924.0	3236.9	2901.0	335.9	2687.0
Women	3065.9	1444.1	1284.4	159.7	1621.8
Women %	51.75	44.61	44.27	47.54	60.35
Men	2858.0	1792.8	1616.6	176.2	1065.2
Men %	48.25	55.39	55.73	52.46	39.65

The adopted measures had different effects on different sectors. Healthcare employees were certainly at the highest risk and under the greatest pressure. Globally,

women make up 70% of employees in health care,<sup>306</sup> while in Serbia, 76.75% of employees in the sector of health and social protection are women.

**Table:** Employees by Sector and Sex, Labour Force Survey 2019

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Women %</b>
Sector of services	<b>591.8</b>	<b>736.1</b>	<b>55.43 %</b>
Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles	<b>172.8</b>	<b>213.2</b>	<b>55.23 %</b>
Education	<b>48.0</b>	<b>135.2</b>	<b>73.79%</b>
Health care and social protection	<b>36.5</b>	<b>119.3</b>	<b>76.75%</b>

In the sector of accommodation and food services, which were almost completely discontinued during the epidemic, men and women are almost equally represented. In the service sector in general, women

make up the majority of employees, and most services were not available during the state of emergency, which means that employees in this sector did not work.

305 Republički zavod za statistiku, Anкета o radnoj snazi, 2019. <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2020/Pdf/G20205658.pdf>

306 <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/female-health-workers-drive-global-health>

In the trade sector, which, with certain restrictions (protective equipment, limited number of customers, ban on working for those whose premises are entered from closed spaces, shortened working hours) functioned during the state of emergency, the majority of employees are also women. In the so-called frontline sectors, the majority of employees are women, while in the sectors that are considered essential (utilities, telecommunications, production, distribution and sale of food, etc.), the majority of employees in Serbia are men. However, those at the greatest health risk are employed

in health care and trade, where most employees are women. Women, in addition to making up the majority of health care workers, are most represented as technical and support staff (86% are women), who are at the highest risk of disease. A study of frontline and essential workers during the COVID-19 crisis, conducted by the University of Hamburg<sup>307</sup>, *showed that employees in essential and frontline activities were mostly women and that they had lower-than-average salaries.*

**Table:** Status by Form of Employment and Activity, by Sex, Labour Force Survey 2019

Status	Women	Men
Self-employed with employees	28.9	69.4
Self-employed without employees	173.4	394.5
Employed	982.9	1114.8
Assisting members of household	99.2	37.9

**Twice as many men as women are self-employed, while the difference in the number of women and men among employed workers is significantly smaller. Women make up the majority of helping household members, who, along with the informally employed, belong to one of the most disadvantaged groups in the labour market, precisely because of insecurity that manifests itself in the circumstances of emergency, and because of their invisibility, which results in the absence of support and assistance measures. This is also one example of deepening and strengthening the existing inequalities.**

For health workers, but also for other people who had to go to work during the situation of emergency, the obstacle was the lack of public transport. Public transport in the cities, as well as intercity public transport, was

suspended on 21 March. Data on the number of holders of driving licences show that women use public transport more, i.e. that they depend more on it.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs issued a set of recommendations and decrees during the state of emergency and published a detailed explanation of the rights and obligations of employers and workers<sup>308</sup>. This document presents all the changes introduced by the decrees of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. The Decree on the Organisation of Work of Employers During the State of Emergency (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 31/2020)<sup>309</sup> instructs the employer to organise work from home for all employees, where possible, as well as that employees working from home have the right to earnings as if they worked in a public place. The only difference in income is that

307 <https://econofact.org/essential-and-frontline-workers-in-the-covid-19-crisis> By Francine D. Blau, Josefine Koebe and Pamela A. Meyerhofer, Cornell University and DIW Berlin / Universität Hamburg, April, 2020.

308 <https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/sr/aktuelnosti/vesti/detaljno-objasnjenje-prava-i-obaveza-radnika-i-poslodavaca-u-toku-vanrednog-stanja>

309 <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/uredba-o-organizaciji-rada-poslodavca-za-vreme-vanrednog-stanja.html>

they are not entitled to reimbursement of transportation costs. The Decree lists the measures for occupational safety and health that the employer is obliged to ensure for employees if it is not possible to organise them to work from home.

The Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government issued the Recommendation for organising work in public administrations and state institutions.

The Recommendation states that the employer should primarily keep in mind that persons with diagnosed chronic diseases and persons older than 60 are particularly vulnerable and that parents of children under 12 have special protection, especially if they exercise their parental rights alone or if other parent has a work obligation. These employees have to be allowed to work from home, in accordance with the work plan and schedule that the employer or manager is obliged to determine for each employee.

The employer should allow one parent with a child under 12 to work from home, and if the employer's work process is such that it is impossible to organise such work, it is necessary to organise work in shifts, so that the work schedule of the employed parent does not match with the work schedule of the other parent who also has a work obligation.

The need to organise work from home for employed parents of children under 12, especially in case of single-parent families, is regulated by the Recommendation, and not by a Government decree, which means that employers have more freedom in applying this measure. Bearing in mind that 79% of single-parent families are mothers with children, and that caring for children is mostly the responsibility of mothers (they more often use regular leaves to take care of children, sick leave for child care, work part-time to take care of children, etc.), this option is especially important for women, including full salary for work from home.

If the employer has a reduced volume of work or completely stopped working, employees can be sent to

the so-called "forced annual leave" lasting 45 working days, or even longer in accordance with the Law, during which the employee is entitled to salary compensation in the amount of 60% of the average salary in the previous 12 months, which cannot be less than the minimum salary at the level of the Republic. For now, there is no data on the number of employees, disaggregated by sex, who were sent on forced annual leave.

In cases where the employees are in self-isolation or quarantine, the first 30 days of leave are paid by the employer, and from the 31st day it is paid by the Republic Health Insurance Fund. Salary compensation belongs to the employee according to the Law on Health Insurance, in cases where the employee is temporarily prevented from working due to the prescribed measure of obligatory isolation as a virus carrier or due to the occurrence of infectious diseases in his or her environment.

For employees in the health sector, starting from 1 April 2020, based on the Decree on the supplement to the basic salary of employees in health care institutions and certain employees who perform activities in the field of health, i.e. health protection of the population of the Republic of Serbia and/or treatment and prevention of the spread of COVID-19 epidemics caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 48/2020). Those who fall ill or are in quarantine or self-isolation are not entitled to this 10% supplement nor are they entitled to full salary during sick leave or self-isolation/quarantine.

## 13.2. Inactivity, unemployment and the risk of poverty

In March 2020, 514,119 unemployed people were registered in Serbia, including 281,381 or **54.73% women**. Out of the total number of unemployed people, 66,963 are registered as temporarily incapable or unprepared for work, and 46,141 or 68.9% of them are women<sup>310</sup>.

There were 19,564 newly registered persons with the National Employment Service (NES) in March 2020<sup>311</sup>, including 10,133 women (51.79%) of whom 60% were

looking for a job for the first time. The largest number of women registered with the NES are in the age group 30-34, followed by 35-39 and 25-29.

**Table 4:** Unemployed Persons by Age and Sex, National Employment Service, March 2020<sup>312</sup>

Age group	Total	Women	% Women
15-19	11.621	5.328	45.84
20-24	38.388	20.270	52.80
25-29	53.828	31.322	58.18
30-34	54.996	32.820	59.67
35-39	57.573	33.928	58.93
40-44	59.706	34.320	57.48
45-49	59.616	34.240	57.43
50-54	62.660	35.724	57.01
55-59	66.056	35.325	53.47
60-65	48.614	18.062	37.15

Among the beneficiaries of financial assistance, the share of women is slightly smaller: 48.04% of a total of 34,718 beneficiaries of financial assistance. 2,253 persons, including 1,100 (48.82%) women, were employed full-time through the NES, while slightly fewer persons (45.65%) were engaged under contracts for temporary and occasional jobs.<sup>313</sup>

The reasons for women's labour market inactivity are care for children and other family members, lost hope in finding employment, health reasons, but also informal work, such as cleaning houses, babysitting, working in family agricultural holdings.

**Table:** Work Status of Inactive Persons According to Their Subjective Opinion, by Sex, Labour Force Survey, 2019

Work status	Total	Men	Women	% Women
They work (unpaid work in family business, trainees, paid internship)	2404.0	1342.0	1062.0	44.17%
Unemployed	895.2	486.8	408.4	45.62%

311 Ibid.

312 Statistički bilten NZS [http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/digitalAssets/14/14415\\_statisti\\_ki\\_bilten\\_-\\_mart\\_2020..pdf](http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/digitalAssets/14/14415_statisti_ki_bilten_-_mart_2020..pdf)

313 Statistički bilten NZS, mart 2020. [http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/dokumenti/statisti\\_ki\\_bilteni\\_nsz.cid667](http://www.nsz.gov.rs/live/dokumenti/statisti_ki_bilteni_nsz.cid667)

Pupils/students, obligatory unpaid internship	517.8	246.5	271.2	52.37%
Persons with long-term and permanent disabilities who do not work	61.6	36.2	25.4	41.23%
Housekeepers - persons who perform unpaid household work	374.7	16.3	358.4	74.31%
Volunteer	4.2	1.6	2.6	61.90%
Other	39.1	21.5	17.6	45.01%

According to the Labour Force Survey (2019), women account for 96% of all people who are inactive in the labour market or do not look for a job due to caring for children or adults with disabilities.

The most common source of income for people who are not active in the labour market is their own pension, which is received by more women than men, followed

by the income of other household members, while social assistance takes third place. In all three cases, women make up the majority of users.

Women make up the majority of pensioners in Serbia, primarily because they retire earlier and because the average life expectancy of women is longer and there are more of them in the age group 65+.

**Table:** Sources of Income of Persons Inactive in the Labour Market, by Sex, Labour Force Survey, 2019

Sources of income	Total	Men	Women	Women %
Salary/pension of spouse/parent/other household members - dependent persons without own income	995.6	346.8	648.8	<b>65.16%</b>
Support from relatives/friends	35.1	14.0	21.1	<b>60.11%</b>
Old-age pension	1467.4	606.3	861.1	<b>58.68%</b>
Unemployment insurance benefit	10.4	7.1	3.3	<b>31.71%</b>
Student scholarship	3.4	1.8	1.5	<b>44.11%</b>
Social assistance	97.1	41.0	56.1	<b>57.77%</b>
Occasional jobs/small agricultural production	38.1	26.9	11.2	<b>29.39%</b>
Alimony	3.4	/	2.5	<b>73.52%</b>
Annuity/interest/dividend income	5.9	3.5	2.3	<b>38.98%</b>
Savings	12.8	8.2	4.6	<b>35.93%</b>

Women are the majority of the oldest, pensioners and senior people living alone. Data on average income show that the income of single-member households, single-parent households and households with two or more children is lower than the average in Serbia, i.e. that these categories of population are at higher risk of poverty.<sup>314</sup>

People living alone with children, most of whom are women, are in a particularly unfavourable economic situation. During 2018, 2,151 charges were filed with the court against parents who did not pay child support; 1,506 parents, including 226 women, were convicted.<sup>315</sup>

Taking into account the state of emergency, the National Bank of Serbia introduced moratorium on loans, while enforcements based on court decisions (according to the Law on Enforcement and Security) were suspended during the state of emergency.

The statistical data show that **women make up the majority of dependents in Serbia** (those who depend on the income of others or social assistance), as well as that they are at higher risk of poverty - in single-member and single-parent households. Jobs that women could do informally (such as child care or housework or seasonal work in agriculture, selling own agricultural products) were not possible in the state of emergency.

**The announced payment of 100 euros to all adult citizens, after the end of the state of emergency,**

**is explained by supporting the economy and strengthening consumption,<sup>316</sup> but not as helping informally employed or unemployed people who cannot even look for a job during the state of emergency.**

### 13.3. Unpaid work

There were “funny” statuses circulating on social media, saying that “the coronavirus must have been invented by women because men die more, there is no football, they cannot go to the pubs and have to be at home with their wives, and there is no worse punishment than that”<sup>317</sup>, that a lot has changed for men, and nothing for women - cooking, ironing, cleaning the house, “as usual”. Although such jokes are misogynistic and based on stereotypes, they illustrate the fact that the consequences of the pandemic and isolation measures, due to gender roles and inequalities caused by them, are different in scope and intensity for women and men.

Data from the Republic Statistical Office (RSO) on time use show that women, regardless of their level of education, normally spend 4.5 hours a day on unpaid work, mostly on child care, food preparation and home hygiene, while men spend on average two hours per day on unpaid work, which usually includes shopping, garden work, etc<sup>318</sup>.

314 Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia, 2018 [http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Indeks\\_rodne\\_ravnopravnosti\\_u\\_Republici\\_Srbiji\\_2018\\_eng.pdf](http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Indeks_rodne_ravnopravnosti_u_Republici_Srbiji_2018_eng.pdf)

315 <https://www.021.rs/story/Info/Srbija/229426/Zbog-neplacanja-alimentacije-u-zatvoru-završila-172-roditelja-jos-42-njih-u-kucnom-pritvoru.html>

316 List of all measures to mitigate the effects of the epidemic on the economy is available here: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/456168/za-ublazavanje-posledica-epidemije-na-privredu-51-milijarda-evra.php>

317 <https://mudroljke.org/volish-ovaj-korona-virus-mora-da-su-zene-izmisle-1-samo-muskarci-umiru-2-ukinut-fudbal-3-ne-smijes-ici-u-kafane-4-moras-biti-kuci-sa-zenom-kud-ces-gore-kazne/>

318 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, *Women and Man in the Republic of Serbia*, 2017 <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2017/PdfE/G20176008.pdf>

## The volume of unpaid work for women has increased, for at least five reasons:

### Child care and school obligations

Kindergartens and schools were closed, and grandparents who often take care of children when children do not go to kindergarten were forbidden to move, and taking care of children posed a health risk to the elderly. Radio Television of Serbia (RTS), in cooperation with e-government, organised online classes and television classes for all grades of primary and secondary schools. This measure was prepared and implemented in a very short time, allowing pupils to continue with their daily routine, make progress in knowledge, not miss classes, receive marks and complete the started grades. School obligations, especially for younger children, required a great involvement of parents.

### Caring for elderly family members

Caring for elderly family members, shopping, cooking, etc. Due to the movement ban for persons older than 65, the scope of obligations for younger family members has increased.

### Cooking and preparing food

Women spend most of the time during the day on cooking, according to the Time Use Survey.<sup>319</sup> Meals are not available for children in schools and kindergartens, and household members spend more time at home. Going to restaurants and food deliveries are limited, as are shopping possibilities.

### Hygiene

One of the key measures for the prevention of the transmission of the infectious disease COVID-19 is enhanced hygiene, primarily hand hygiene, but also hygiene of clothes and shoes, households in terms of disinfection of entrance and passage rooms, etc. Maintaining home hygiene is also an activity performed mainly by women.

### Care for children with disabilities or developmental challenges and/or dependent adult household members

According to the RSO, 80% of people who left work to care for children or other household members are women. Caring for household members who are permanently or temporarily unable to meet their needs independently is often the responsibility of women. Bearing in mind that day care centres, even where the service was available, stopped working, a greater burden of care fell on household members, most often mothers.

The state of emergency and the adopted measures not only increased the amount of unpaid work for women, but the ban on movement and the working hours of

shops during the day, as well as the lack of public transport, **significantly changed the women's daily routine and extended their working day.**

## 14. GENDER ASPECTS OF STATE AID INSTRUMENTS FOR ELIMINATION OF ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES ON CITIZENS AND BUSINESSES

### 14.1. Introduction

The risk to health caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus for many citizens was accompanied by fear for everyday existence and fear of losing their jobs and earnings, due to the stagnation of economic activities. Entrepreneurs, understandably, were overwhelmed by the fear of whether they would be able to ensure liquidity for their businesses, keep their employees, pay all due fees, taxes and contributions, rent, utilities, and whether they would be able to collect their receivables.

According to the data of the Serbian Business Registers Agency,<sup>320</sup> there are 131,556 companies, 271,312 entrepreneurs, 33,978 associations and 1,236 tourist agencies in the Republic of Serbia.

In the period 16 March - 11 April 2020, as many as 6,290 entrepreneurs registered a temporary cessation of work, mainly those performing the activities of hairdressing and beauty salons, business and management consultancy, primary education, production of cinematographic works, audio-visual products and television programmes, dental practice, taxi services, restaurants and mobile catering facilities, clothing retail, as well as a significant number of those performing ICT activities. Apart from those performing ICT activities (580), who started with temporary cessation of their work due to tax changes and the Independence Test) even earlier (5,474 ICT

entrepreneurs since 1 January), other entrepreneurs were directly affected by the COVID-19 epidemic.

Many businesses had to **shut down completely** (e.g. hotels, apartments, travel agencies, restaurants, as well as over 30,000 entrepreneurs in tourism where the estimated damage is close to EUR 300 million by May 2020<sup>321</sup>, and also a large number of hairdressing and beauty salons and other services). Some have **reorganised their business in shifts with the use of equipment and/or introduced work from home**. All these **adjustments** to new conditions or use of equipment required **additional engagement and costs, with a loss of income**.

At the moment when the epidemic was declared, followed by the state of emergency, neither citizens, nor businesses or the state could be sure how long that situation may last, and what the consequences and their extent might be. Many countries in Europe announced the measures for helping businesses and, indirectly, citizens.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia presented **very quickly, in less than a month, a plan to eliminate the economic consequences, which deserves to be commended**. The measures were adopted on 10 April 2020,<sup>322</sup> and the implementation started as soon as on 10 May. The speed of reaction has its gender dimension because **women have less capital, less income and poorer access to resources, so any crisis of entrepreneurship affects them faster, and any delay**

320 <https://www.apr.gov.rs/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B0.3.html>

321 <https://mtt.gov.rs/slider/ljajic-procenjena-steta-u-turizmu-za-pet-meseci-blizu-300-miliona-evra/>

322 By adopting a large number of Decrees <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/fp/covid19>

**in response increases the chances of women's businesses shutting down.**

It is also **commendable that the Government expressed the intention to mitigate the negative impact of the crisis on micro and small enterprises**, as well as on other economic entities. Micro and small enterprises are emphasized here because these are enterprises, shops and agencies with the largest number of women owners. For more information on the gender gap that is deepening or not being remedied through regular forms of economic support, see the Gender Analysis of Economic Programmes and Financial Measures in Serbia, in particular: 1. Overview of programmes and measures of the Development Agency of Serbia and analysis of the impact on gender equality and 2. Analysis of the impact on gender equality of programmes and measures of financial support to the MSME sector at the local level. These analyses were conducted by the National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED) with the support of UN Women.

According to their goals, the **new measures of the Government are, to the greatest extent, aimed at preserving the existing employment.** Although the fear that a sudden surge of unemployed people could additionally burden the budget of the Republic of Serbia and cause a crisis in the households of women and men who lost their jobs is understandable, the interest of employers, employees and the state is not fully agreed. From the point of view of the state, everything that can be done to keep employees should be done, which is also the employers' goal, but in some cases preserving the illusion of employment destroys the chances for recovery of the company and in such cases it would be more justifiable to temporarily dismiss employees and re-employ (the same or other persons) as soon as the business is consolidated. In the meantime, the workers who lose their jobs would be entitled to unemployment benefits. Micro-enterprises are reluctant to resort to this measure because they are smaller collectives, it is harder for them to find employees, but they often have

no other choice. The total data on how many people lost their jobs and/or how many workplaces shut down is unknown at this moment, given that the epidemic is still ongoing and the full effects will be determined later. According to the statement of the Director of the National Employment Service from 7 April 2020<sup>323</sup>, most unemployed persons are registered in "large cities, Belgrade, Niš, Novi Sad, and smaller cities such as Užice, Jagodina, Sremska Mitrovica, Kraljevo, Kragujevac." Detailed data disaggregated by sector, municipality and sex are not yet available. Therefore, it is not possible now to assess the contribution of the measures to the preservation of economic stability as a whole, or in individual sectors.

## 14.2. The purpose of gender analysis of economic measures

The measures have been analysed **to determine whether they will cover equally women and men entrepreneurs, i.e. companies owned by women and those owned by men**, who will potentially **benefit the most** from the measures, as well as whether the measures are **gender-responsive**, i.e. whether they recognise the needs of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and sole trade businesses owned by women. Most women entrepreneurs are owners of micro-enterprises in the sector of services. These enterprises and this sector are additionally affected by the crisis, mainly due to the complete ban and sometimes due to the partial ban on performing activities in which they operate in large numbers.

Please be noted that precise data on the share of the so-called women's enterprises in the MSME are not available because there are still no adequate records in the Register of Enterprises and Entrepreneurs at the Business Registers Agency, although improving gender statistics is one of the goals recognised in the Strategy

of Supporting the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises, Entrepreneurship and Competitiveness for the period 2015-2020 with the Action Plan.

**In addition, the aim is to determine whether the measures have taken into account differences in the capacities and needs of the enterprises of different sizes or forms of business, as this is significant from the point of view of gender equality and affects the availability of these measures in practice, as well as coverage of women and men as business owners.**

Gender analysis contains a brief overview of state aid for liquidity and one-time aid for all citizens, but predominantly focuses on the measures directly related to supporting the economy and/or citizens in order to eliminate the economic consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic: Decree on Fiscal Benefits and Direct Aid<sup>324</sup>, Decree on the Establishment of the Programme of

Financial Support to Economic Entities<sup>325</sup> and the Decree on the Establishment of a Guarantee Scheme.<sup>326</sup>

### 14.3. State aid for liquidity

The Decree<sup>327</sup> of 10 April defines that the **state aid for liquidity**<sup>328</sup> of market participants in order to eliminate a serious disturbance in the economy may be granted through the following instruments: **in the form of subsidies, debt cancellation, tax advantages; in the form of subsidised interest rates on loans; in the form of guarantees on loans under favourable terms; in the form of postponement of payments of employment taxes and/or social contributions; in the form of subsidies for salaries of employees in order to avoid layoffs during the COVID-19 epidemic; in the form of short-term export credit insurance.**

Advantages of this measure for businesses	Weaknesses of this measure for businesses	Gender aspects
<p>Speed of adoption;</p> <p>Temporary relief for enterprises from part of their obligations;</p> <p>Leaves funds to enterprises available for business operations;</p> <p>All economic entities (micro, small and medium enterprises, as well as lump-sum entrepreneurs), commercial farmers, and cooperatives are covered.</p>	<p>Priority focus on employees, and less on enterprises;</p> <p>the neglected fact is that employees are not the only factor in preserving business.</p> <p>Enterprises are reluctant to apply for the subsidy of part of earnings because they cannot guarantee the preservation of jobs that do not depend on their good will, but on the overall normalisation of the economy in our country, and also in other countries. It is not excluded that there will be more layoffs after June anyway.</p>	<p>Due to historically less access to capital, finance and other resources, women in entrepreneurship face the shutdown risk under the burden of debt as soon as after one month of crisis. Measures that delay but do not reduce the burden of debt can help some, and only delay the agony of shutdown to others.</p> <p>The distrust in the state, which can be guessed from the interviews, prevents women entrepreneurs from using favourable loans even when they can. It is necessary to work on confidence building.</p>

324 Decree on Fiscal Benefits and Direct Aid to Economic Entities in the Private Sector and Monetary Aid to Citizens Aimed at Reducing Economic Consequences due to COVID-19 (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 54 of 10 April 2020)

325 Decree on the Establishment of a Programme of Financial Support for Economic Entities Aiming to Maintain Liquidity and Working Capital Throughout Economic Difficulties Induced by the COVID-19 Pandemic Caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Virus (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 54 of 10 April 2020, 57 of 16 April 2020)

326 Decree on Establishment of a Guarantee Scheme as a Measure of Support to the Economy to Mitigate the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Caused by the Sars-Cov-2 Virus (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 57 of 16 April 2020)

327 Decree on the Conditions and Criteria of Compliance of State Aid for the Remedy of a Serious Disturbance in the Economy Caused by Epidemic Disease COVID-19, *Official Gazette of RS*, no. 54 of 10 April 2020

328 Liquidity is a financial capacity that allows all due obligations to be settled without difficulty

Advantages of this measure for businesses	Weaknesses of this measure for businesses	Gender aspects
<p>Although associations of citizens are not specifically recognised by the Decree, they could also receive a salary subsidy for permanent employees.</p> <p>Additional measures enable easier access to financing and loans, through lower interest rates, a grace period and longer repayment periods.</p>	<p>With the revised budget of the Republic of Serbia, the funds have not been increased for employment support programmes or various unemployment benefits. The big question is how to respond to the increasing need for various NES services or unemployment benefits.</p> <p>Access to favourable financing through loans depends not only on the conditions under which funds are approved, but also on the expectations of enterprises that they will be able to repay the loan in the future. At this time, it is not possible to estimate how many enterprises will use this opportunity.</p>	<p>There is a lack of support for changing activities where recovery is not possible.</p> <p>Many women entrepreneurs own micro-enterprises, so for them the condition of under 10% layoffs means a complete ban on layoffs in order to use the measure, which is not realistic.</p>

#### Significant weakness of measures from the aspect of gender equality

Although debt write-off is one of the instruments initially envisaged by the Decree of Support to the Economy, the adopted decrees that further elaborate the manner of using the instruments do not envisage the write-off of liabilities. However, for activities that had to be stopped during the state of emergency and that could not generate a single dinar of income during March and April, precisely this instrument, along with salary subsidies, would be of the greatest help. This was also pointed out by the Association of Business Women in its letter to the Ministry of Finance dated 18 March, after consultations with the members owning enterprises.

## 14.4. Non-refundable aid for all citizens

**Measure of non-refundable aid for all citizens:** non-refundable aid in the amount of 100 euros is envisaged to be paid to all adult citizens. This is also the most publicly criticised measure.<sup>329</sup> However, from the

point of view of gender equality, this measure has its advantages that should be considered:

- 1. The reality of a high degree of informal employment in the Republic of Serbia.** There are

329 The Fiscal Council assessed this measure as “economically inefficient, socially unfocused and fiscally irresponsible.”

a large number of citizens who are not permanently employed or self-employed, but fall into the category of those who earn income as seasonal workers, or are engaged in the informal economy, under temporary or occasional employment contracts, authorship agreements, those without income who are not covered by social assistance, or micro farmers who sell their goods in the markets, which were closed. **No other measure contributes to mitigating the shocks of crisis felt by this large group of people whose share in the economy is estimated to range from 20% to 30% of GDP.** Therefore, these funds will actually reach those who are neither covered by the existing support measures nor registered in the system as users of various services.

2. **The funds allocated from the budget for this one-time payment to citizens will be returned to the economy through consumption, which is an indirect additional support to the economy.**
3. **More precise targeting costs money and requires time.** Targeting more precisely of those who really need help was the main request of experts and the public. However, it takes time and requires additional resources. The available records, for example records of social assistance beneficiaries, do not include the group of the poor or just above the poverty line, or those who have lost their income due to the crisis and were not previously poor. In all these groups, women are represented above average. There are, of course, citizens who may not be “desperate” for this kind of help, but that number is smaller than the number of those who are, considering the amount of average salaries in the Republic of Serbia.<sup>330</sup>

From the moment of adoption of this measure until the beginning of May, the way of its implementation changed several times (from being paid automatically to everyone’s account to being paid directly to pensioners

and social assistance beneficiaries, while others citizens should apply for these funds “if they wanted”). Any change and inconsistency in implementation can further impede access for certain groups of women (rural women, women with low level of formal qualifications, Roma women, women with disabilities, etc.) as well as for men from vulnerable categories.

### **Gender aspects of economic situation during the pandemic**

Women make up the majority in the health sector where the workload has increased sharply, which has created additional difficulties for many parents working in health care sector regarding the organisation of daily life, child care, especially in single-parent families where women are much more often a parent-guardian and recognised in institutional jargon as single mothers. During the state of emergency, the forced collection of debts, including alimony, was suspended, which is why many single mothers were left to fend for themselves without income and without alimony.

Women make up the majority of employees in service industries, and this sector is particularly affected by the complete cessation of work.

Women are more often the owners of entrepreneurial shops and micro-enterprises in the activities in which a ban or restriction of work first occurred, and they make up the largest number of employees. Moreover, the informal economy is partly present in the sector of tourism, services and trade, and therefore a large number of those who had survived in this way were left without income.

In the stores that sell basic foodstuffs, the volume of work increased due to increased demand as a result of stockpiling, which further burdened a large number of employees in which women make up the majority.

The closure of schools and kindergartens, as well as the recommended cessation of contacts with elderly family members, made it more difficult to organise child

<sup>330</sup> In February 2020, the average net salary in the public sector was RSD 67,050, and in the private sector RSD 55,401.

care and care for elderly and chronically ill household or family members. The burden of this care most often falls on women.

All-day child care became an additional burden for parents who had to go to work during the epidemic, but also for those who worked from home and cared for preschool children or lower grades primary school

children, helping them with school tasks and online lessons. This work was also done mainly by women, and it posed a special challenge for single parents.

Many parents were also afraid that employers may not have an understanding for this situation. It is difficult to assess now whether or to what extent all this will affect the possible loss of jobs and the economic situation.

## 14.5. Detailed review of measures to eliminate economic consequences

The measures included here are directly related to helping the economy and/or citizens in order to eliminate the economic consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic.

### 14.5.1. Decree on Fiscal Benefits and Direct Aid

**Title of the measure: Decree on Fiscal Benefits and Direct Aid to Economic Entities in the Private Sector and Monetary Aid to Citizens Aimed at Reducing Economic Consequences due to COVID-19<sup>331</sup>**

#### Description of the measure of Fiscal Benefits - Deferral of Liabilities

- Until 4 January 2021, deferral of payment of salary and compensation for salary tax and mandatory social security contributions on salaries (due in the period 1 April - 30 July), taxes and contributions on the personal earnings of entrepreneurs and agricultural entrepreneurs for March, April and May (or April, May and June);
- Deferral of advance payments of tax and contributions on self-employment income for March, April and May for those who did not choose to pay salary, and advance payments of corporate income tax for March, April and May.

**Note: Fiscal benefits could be used only by economic entities who did not reduce the number of employees by more than 10% since 15 March 2020. It has already been mentioned that this restriction has adversely affected women's businesses as most of them have fewer than 10 employees, which means that layoffs were not an option at all, although the uncertainty is high. See more about this in the section Women Entrepreneurs as Interlocutors in the Time of Corona.**

331 (Official Gazette of the RS, no. 54 od 10 April 2020)

Advantages of this measure for businesses:	Disadvantages or risks:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Current aid and relief of part of the liabilities at a moment when it is not entirely clear how long the crisis will last, which delays business decisions for some time;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Postponement of business decisions on reducing or increasing activities and the number of employees can be an additional damage for some economic entities;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Possibility to redirect funds that would be used to pay liabilities to other costs and/or investments or to cover several months of reduced activities;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deferral of liabilities means that in January, when the liabilities become due, greater liquidity will be needed, and businesses do not know whether it will be realistic, especially having in mind the announcement of the next wave of COVID-19;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Payment of the liabilities of lump-sum entrepreneurs, i.e. advance payments of taxes and contributions on self-employment income for March, April and May, is deferred to 4 January, when the payment in 24 instalments will being.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The measure is good for small and medium-sized enterprises and large companies and less favourable for micro-enterprises (which make up more than 95% of the economy), which could not lay off even 1 employee because it is more than 10% since it would automatically deprive them of the right to benefit from this measure.</li> </ul>

#### Measure of Fiscal Benefits - Deferral of Liabilities from the aspect of gender equality:

**The measure is gender-blind**, i.e. it does not take into account the specifics of micro-enterprises, the much higher share of women in the group of owners of enterprises and entrepreneurial shops and agencies, compared to their share in the group of medium-sized enterprises and large companies. The specifics of the activities with a total work ban were also ignored, and the only real help for them is the **write-off of liabilities** for the period when the activity was not performed (March and April).

Women entrepreneurs are more often in service activities, and especially in those activities that are most affected (tourist services, hairdressers, beauticians, etc.).

#### Description of measure 2: Direct Aid from the Budget to Economic Entities in the Private Sector

- Exclusively intended for the payment of salaries and compensation of salaries to employees

**Note: Banks, insurance companies and pension funds are excluded**

**Advantages of this measure for businesses:**

- **For micro, small and medium-sized enterprises**
  - They receive from the budget a non-refundable amount of the minimum salary, to a special account, for each employee (30,000 dinars) which helps enterprises to pay salaries to employees, thus preventing working women and men to be left without income, especially in the activities that were completely suspended.
- **For large companies** - 50% of the minimum salary for each employee, non-refundable

**Disadvantages or risks:**

- Not all activities are equally affected and the measure is uniform. The amount is often higher than 30,000 for the entrepreneurs who have determined their own salary, which means that they are now obliged to pay higher taxes and contributions. No layoffs are allowed while using this measure, which for a micro-enterprise means that **not even one** employee may be laid off, since micro enterprises have up to 10 employees and layoff is allowed only up to 10%.

**Measure of Direct Aid from the Budget to Economic Entities in the Private Sector from the aspect of gender equality:**

**The measure is gender-blind** and may cause higher costs for taxes and contributions for some entrepreneurs if the amount of designated personal salary was less than this minimum amount.

The measure is potentially gender-negative because most women entrepreneurs are among the owners of entrepreneurial shops in service industries, so they will not be able to benefit from the measure if they have laid off even one employee (which is often a responsible action in the situation of activity suspension due to the ban, if the crisis duration is uncertain, and unemployment benefits are available).

**14.5.2. Decree on the Establishment of the Programme of Financial Support to Economic Entities**

**Title of the measure: Decree on the Establishment of a Programme of Financial Support for Economic Entities Aiming to Maintain Liquidity and Working Capital Throughout Economic Difficulties Induced by the COVID-19 Pandemic Caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Virus<sup>332</sup>**

**Description of measure: The Programme consists of the allocation of loans to economic entities for maintaining liquidity and working capital, in order to preserve the stability of the financial and economic system of the Republic of Serbia. The Programme is intended for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and cooperatives that have existed for at least 2 years, and which have achieved business profits. The Programme is implemented by the Government in cooperation with the Development Fund and AOFI (Serbian Export Credit and Insurance Agency) and the funds are provided from the budget of the Republic of Serbia.**

332 (Official Gazette of the RS, no. 54 of 10 April 2020, 57 of 16 April 2020)

**Advantages of this measure for businesses:**

- The interest rate of 1% and the 24-month grace period and repayment in dinars are favourable market conditions and will be of great importance for businesses.

**Disadvantages or risks:**

- Micro-enterprises were put at a disadvantage as they were not allowed to lay off even 1 employee, while other enterprises could lay off up to 10% of employees. Since most enterprises have up to 10 employees, these benefits will again be used by more medium-sized enterprises that have already had easier access to working capital in the market.
- Collaterals are bills of exchange, pledges on equipment and mortgages on real estate. Capital-intensive production companies will again be able to benefit from this measure, although the service sector is the one most affected by the pandemic.

**Measure of Programme of Financial Support to Economic Entities from the aspect of gender equality:**

**The measure is gender-blind and potentially negative, because it can deepen the existing gender gap** in which women-owned enterprises (especially micro-enterprises) have hindered access to finance (there are more of them in services, and in less capital-intensive activities, they have fewer assets) and service activities were particularly affected during the pandemic.

**14.5.3. Decree on Establishment of a Guarantee Scheme**

**Title of the measure: Decree on Establishment of a Guarantee Scheme as a Measure of Support to the Economy to Mitigate the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Caused by the Sars-Cov-2 Virus<sup>333</sup>**

**Description of measure: Provision of funds for issuing guarantees of the Republic of Serbia in accordance with the guarantee scheme for granting loans for financing liquidity and working capital. Bank investment may be up to two billion euros. The programme is intended for banks that grant loans to the SME sector and agricultural holdings.**

333 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 57 of 16 April 2020

**Advantages for businesses:**

- Additional sources of funding with a repayment period of 36 months, and a 12-month grace period

**Disadvantages or risks:**

- The SME sector that has encountered any business difficulties will not be able to use the funds. Restrictions on what funds can be spent on. For example, funds cannot be used to finance liabilities, which is also the reason why enterprises often apply for loans, especially those that operate in the sector of services and are owned by women. The way in which the banks are involved in servicing will also be important, because at the level of rulebooks and procedures for access to loans, additional barriers are set for the so-called women's enterprises.

**Measure of Guarantee Scheme as a Measure of Support to the Economy to Mitigate the Impact of the Pandemic from the aspect of gender equality:**

**The measure is gender-blind and potentially negative because it potentially deepens the gender gap and does not take into account the specifics of micro-enterprises in service industries that are affected by the pandemic. The enterprises that usually have easier access to loans in the market will be able to benefit from the measure.**

**14.5.4. Other measures**

In addition to enterprises and citizens, the Government supported also **farmers**. The **Decree on Financial Support to Agricultural Holdings**<sup>334</sup> was adopted. This Decree provides for a one-time aid in the absolute amount of money<sup>335</sup> per unit of registered area for growing vegetables in protected structures, or per cow, sheep or goat, or per beehive, up to the highest total amount of financial aid in accordance with this Decree. This aid is intended for **registered commercial agricultural holdings. This aid does not cover fruit growers and crop farmers**. Moreover, **holders of non-commercial agricultural holdings could not receive this support. A smaller percentage of women are**

**holders of commercial agricultural holdings (23%) and have smaller estates. There are many larger elderly households where women and men work in agriculture to supplement their pensions, but do not have registered commercial agricultural holdings. Their situation is particularly difficult because they either have no regular income or have small agricultural pensions or reduced pensions.**

The second Decree<sup>336</sup> provides for support to agricultural holdings **through facilitated access to loans** throughout economic difficulties. Access to loans is facilitated through the **instrument of subsidising part of the interest** for the development of livestock farming, which includes the purchase of livestock

334 With the aim of mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 57 of 16 April 2020)

335 25 dinars per square metre of registered area for growing vegetables in protected structures up to a total of 90,000 dinars; 3,000 dinars per cow up to a total of 30,000 dinars; 500 dinars per sheep or goat up to a total of 20,000 dinars; 800 dinars per beehive up to a total of 20,000 dinars.

336 Decree on Financial Support to Agricultural Holdings Through Facilitated Access to Loans Throughout Economic Difficulties Induced by the COVID-19 Pandemic Caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Virus (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 57 of 16 April 2020)

and the livestock insurance premium prescribed by this Decree; development of crop farming, fruit growing, viticulture, vegetable growing and floriculture; investments in agricultural machinery and equipment; purchase of animal feed; investments in certain types of machinery and equipment used in crop production; and liquidity. This measure provides **additional benefits for holders of agricultural holdings who are not older than 40, as well as for women**. The Decree also envisages a number of special conditions depending on the type of production<sup>337</sup>, which refer to the duration of repayment. However, one of the conditions for getting a loan is that collaterals may not be cash deposits or

guarantees of the Republic of Serbia based on the programme of mitigating the consequences induced by the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which is one of the ways to support the economy in accordance with the Decree<sup>338</sup>. **The use of guarantee schemes has proven to be an effective instrument to help those who face difficulties in accessing loans due to the impossibility of providing other type of collateral, which is very often the case with women and young people who are property owners less frequently. Therefore, farmers will not be able to use these benefits.**

#### Proposal of the Association of Business Women to the Ministry of Finance of 18 March 2020

In accordance with the already applied experiences of these countries, but also our specific business opportunities, we want to give our contribution in designing measures that will help us, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, to somehow overcome this period. We support the measures proposed by the National Bank of Serbia and congratulate for a quick response, and we agree with all the measures proposed by NALED. Based on consultations with the Management and Supervisory Board of the Association of Business Women of Serbia, the Public Advocacy Committee of the Association of Business Women of Serbia and its members, we propose the following measures as the most urgent ones:

- 1) Suspension of the payment of taxes and contributions for employees for a period of at least 3 months;
- 2) Subsidies for employees' salaries during the state of emergency (example of Denmark: the state subsidises three quarters of the monthly salaries of employees in the private sector while employers undertake not to lay off employees due to business losses caused by the coronavirus pandemic);
- 3) Reduction of VAT liability by 50% during the state of emergency and after that settling the outstanding debt by paying in 12-month instalments;
- 4) Prohibition of forced collection of receivables during the state of emergency. The proposed measures will enable us to stay on the verge of survival and not to shut down our businesses. Otherwise, the majority of us will be forced to close businesses after more than 20 years of operation and thus unwillingly generate unemployment of 4,000 individuals currently employed in 300 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, members of the Association of Business Women of Serbia.

337 Article 4 of the Decree on Financial Support to Agricultural Holdings Through Facilitated Access to Loans Throughout Economic Difficulties Induced by the COVID-19 Pandemic Caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Virus

338 Decree on Establishment of a Guarantee Scheme as a Measure of Support to the Economy to Mitigate the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Caused by the Sars-Cov-2 Virus (*Official Gazette of the RS*, no. 57 of 16 April 2020)

## 14.6. Recommendations related to economic measures

- Even in the conditions where the measures are adopted quickly, it is necessary that they **respond better to the different sectors in which enterprises** operate as well as that the size of enterprises is taken into account in order to help them more adequately. It **requires better and gender-disaggregated data**. **Gender statistics** are mandatory under the Law on Gender Equality<sup>339</sup>, but they are not applied in company registers, so it is not possible to easily see the situation and business of women-owned enterprises through annual reports on the situation in SMEs. This problem has existed for a long time and has often been pointed out through various gender analyses<sup>340</sup>.
- It is necessary to include **gender expertise in the body that makes decisions on economic measures**, for example through the involvement of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, in order to integrate gender mainstreaming in all phases: assessment of economic effects, designing measures to support the elimination of negative economic consequences and further support for the development of MSMEs after the end of the pandemic. In this way, the basic goal of the measures, which is to eliminate the negative consequences of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, will be achieved more efficiently.
- **It is necessary to make a gender-responsive analysis of particularly affected business activities**, and then to activate for them more adequate (and envisaged by the Decree) instruments such as non-refundable aid to enterprises.
  - The objective consequences are different for *those who could not perform the activity at all, those who could perform it on a reduced scale, and those who did not feel significant differences*. Help is appreciated by all enterprises, but equal treatment of the unequal (in terms of size, activity and access to funds) deepens the already documented gender gap.
  - **Micro-enterprises** are particularly affected, and they are the majority in all sectors. If they had laid off **one** employee, these enterprises could not use the support, while small, medium-sized and large ones were allowed to lay off up to 10% of employees. **In prescribing the criterion for micro-enterprises with up to 10 employees, the number of employees should be determined instead of their percentage.**
- In the future planning of measures for the following crisis situations, it is necessary to **fill the gap in the support for eliminating negative economic consequences of the crisis for women and men who earn their regular income with reduced labour rights and in the grey economy, and who are now completely without income**: seasonal workers, professionals and freelancers who are hired through authorship agreements,

339 Official Gazette of the RS, no. 104/2009

340 For example: Nikolin, S., Vladislavljević, A., Vasiljević, D., Bogosavljević Čikić I., Anđelković, M., Jovanović, V., Rodna analiza ekonomskih programa i finansijskih mera u Srbiji, Pregled programa i mera Razvojne agencije Srbije i analiza uticaja na rodnu ravnopravnost, NALED uz podršku UN Women, Beograd, oktobar 2019.

or some other form of contracting, and who receive income after the work is completed, but could not finish the job due to the pandemic (these are often people engaged, for example, in education, or as part of short-term projects), farmers who sell fresh produce in the markets and are left without goods and without income, with the exception of a small number of those who are close to larger cities and supply citizens through direct delivery, but it also took a long time to organise. **One-off measures for those engaged under other contracts would help significantly** a large number of active participants in the economy, so it is important to **incorporate these aspects into future planning of responses to similar situations of emergency**. The current assistance has mostly been focused on those with the status of employees and enterprises, and to some extent on farmers. The share of women in this group is significant, so this measure would greatly mitigate the impoverishment of women who work but do not have the status of an employee.

- There is an urgent need to intensify work **on improving the status and economic situation of women in the informal economy**. It is necessary to better understand the type and scope of support that can permanently and effectively contribute to the inclusion of these women in regular economic flows.
- **The adopted measures require a large allocation from the budget and additional loans, so it is necessary to reach a social consensus on the most efficient use of these public funds**. Both women and men must participate in this consensus. **There is no information that any advocates of a gender-responsive approach participated in the economic part of the Crisis Response Team, in accordance with the regulatory and strategic framework in the Republic of Serbia and the Law on Budget System, which introduced the obligation of gender-responsive budgeting.**
- **It is necessary to adopt measures always, even in a crisis, in consultation and cooperation with professional and other relevant associations**. As regards the gender impact of the measures, it is certainly important to engage the Association of Business Women and the Women's Platform for the Development of Serbia, as well as other organisations dealing with the economic empowerment of women from different groups.
- **It is necessary that the economy of care should be covered by measures for economic recovery**. A large number of citizens are engaged in the **care of the elderly and the sick or household maintenance, and women make up the majority in that group**. During the epidemic, informal service providers as well as private sector service providers in the economy of care were left without any income. This is expected to put a lot of pressure on the measures offered by the National Employment Service. Therefore, it is necessary to **increase the amount of funds for active employment and self-employment measures, as well as to increase funds for measures that facilitate the transition from the informal economy to regular flows**. In the long run, it is necessary to **create measures that can help reduce the vulnerability of this large group of women**.
- Additional measures for women's enterprises should address the additional barriers encountered by women in entrepreneurship, especially in times of the public health

crisis that has triggered the economic crisis. For example, it is necessary to allow debt write-offs to **support the liquidity of enterprises owned by single mothers in the sector of services and other women facing accumulated liabilities due to alimony arrears, their own or their child's illness and other shocks that have prevented regular business operations, leaving the burden of obligations entirely to women entrepreneurs.**

- ➔ Establish “soft” support for women that perform the economic activities that have no future or no longer have a market. Such **programmes of transition from one activity to another** should take into account the experience and knowledge previously acquired by women entrepreneurs and facilitate the transfer of that knowledge into new entrepreneurial waters, with additional technical support and assistance in linking the elements of a new business idea.
- ➔ The crisis caused by the pandemic has once again pointed to the need for measures to recognise the problem of unpaid work. It is necessary to support innovative solutions for a fair and balanced distribution of unpaid work. Measures should be adopted to support the distribution of unpaid work and to establish a balance between the professional and private spheres.

## 15. WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AS INTERLOCUTORS IN THE TIME OF CORONA

### 15.1. Introduction and purpose of interviews with women entrepreneurs

The individual interviews with 20 women entrepreneurs were conducted by phone in the period from 18 April to 1 May 2020. The sample consisted of women from different sectors and places of residence, from villages and cities, of different ages. They were all successful in their work before the crisis. The respondents were reached through snowball sampling, which means that the initial group consisted of known women entrepreneurs who recruited further respondents from among their acquaintances. All women in the sample are micro-entrepreneurs except 2 who have small enterprises.

The goal of the interview was to gather primary data on the status, experiences, problems and possible chances recognised by women entrepreneurs during the coronavirus pandemic. The interviews were also an opportunity to talk about the ways in which women entrepreneurs faced crisis situations, how they planned their business and what problems they encountered in maintaining or developing their businesses. Finally, the interlocutors talked about the importance of economic measures adopted by the Government for their business and stated to which extent these measures satisfied their needs.

The interviewed women entrepreneurs were from Belgrade, Jasko, Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Kladovo, Novi Sad, Nova Varoš, Novi Pazar and Prijepolje and their age ranged from 26 to 63 years. These women entrepreneurs operate mainly in the service sector (travel agency, children's playroom, kindergarten and children's club, counselling and event organisation, consulting, hairdressing salon, beauty salon, law office,

dental practice, house cleaning), and three interlocutors are owners of enterprises for production of textiles, work and protective clothing and production of sheet metal accessories. Six interlocutors are single mothers, 15 have children, one is pregnant, three do not have any children. Together, the interviewed women have 230 years of entrepreneurial experience. The table shows the basic data about the interviewed women entrepreneurs.

No.	Age	Sector	Running this business for	Town/ place	Number of employees	Children	Living with
1	40	Owner of tourist agency	11 years	Kragujevac	3	None	Husband
2	32	Owner of beauty salon	4 years	Prijepolje	2	1 daughter	Single mother, now living with her child, mother, sister and sister's children
3	62	House cleaning	30 years	Belgrade	0	2 daughters	Daughter, now other daughter and son-in-law live with them
4	51	Owner of consulting company	13 years	Belgrade	4	None	Alone, but now with her mother
5	52	Owner of enterprise for production of work clothing and protective equipment	17 years	Nova Varoš	16	4 children	Husband
6	26	Owner of children's playroom	1 year	Prijepolje	3	None	Husband
7	35	Owner of jeans production enterprise	5 years	Novi Pazar	3	3 children	Husband and children
8	50	Owner of tourist agency	15 years	Belgrade	6	2 daughters	Husband, now also with daughters
9	30	Attorney-at-law	6 years	Prijepolje	1	1	Husband and child
10	38	Owner of enterprise for counselling and organising events	4 years	Jazak	2	1 baby boy	Grandmother and son
11	27	Owner of dental practice	1 year	Prijepolje	1	Pregnant	Husband
12	50	Owner of hairdressing salon	20 years	Belgrade	8	2 children: son and daughter	Single mother, living with her children
13	63	Owner of kindergarten and children's club	26 years	Belgrade	14	2 children: son and daughter	Husband
14	38	Owner of hairdressing salon	2 years	Novi Sad	2	1 daughter	Single mother, with daughter and mother
15	35	Owner of enterprise for production of sheet metal accessories	15 years	Kraljevo	3	1 son	Husband and son

No.	Age	Sector	Running this business for	Town/place	Number of employees	Children	Living with
16	52	Owner of grocery store	21 years	Kladovo	2	2 children: son and daughter	Husband and children, parents-in-law are on the lower floor of the same house
17	40	Owner of graphic enterprise	7 years	Kladovo	5	2 daughters	Husband
18	59	Owner of consulting company	15 years	Kragujevac	3	1 son	Husband
19	28	Owner of agricultural holding	5 years	Sefkerin	0	None	Alone in Belgrade, and in Sefkerin with her mother, father and brother
20	43	Owner of grocery store	12 years		2	2 sons	Husband and children

## 15.2. Findings of interviews with women entrepreneurs

### 15.2.1. The first couple of weeks - focus on household members and the new normal

The onset of the pandemic and the imposition of the state of emergency led to a sudden cessation of business operations in most of the sectors in which the interviewed women worked. Asked how their life changed since the introduction of the state of emergency, the majority of respondents said that they **finally had enough sleep**, that they did not remember the last time they had so much time for their children or for the house. In their usual everyday life, they are **overwhelmed** with obligations at work and home **from morning to night**. Housework is usually done along the way, routinely, without satisfaction, as an obligation and excessive burden.

At the very beginning of the epidemic and the introduction of the state of emergency, this machinery that consumes the lives of women entrepreneurs conveniently stopped, and therefore most of the interlocutors say that the **first two or three weeks of staying at home were extremely pleasant for them**. They say that during that period **they felt the need to be with their family, to reset**. The household members **gathered around some joint activities, watched movies and series together, played games, played with the children, studied together with the children, cooked, read**.

*I really enjoyed it. I have been working for four years and I have used maybe 5-6 days of annual leave. I've come to a phase where I'm fed with work, although I love my job. This was just like a break for me, and then let's start again, at full steam. It will be tough regarding money. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

*I don't know what to tell you, somehow this state of emergency was convenient for*

me, because I work a lot, and now I work more at home and less at workplace, I am more dedicated to my children, house cleaning and cooking. It's somehow good for us maybe. I'm a bit sorry for the elderly. How do they endure so closed all day? As for me, I have to run less and I manage to do everything. Although, it was only at the beginning, and now I started running again. Honestly, I'm a little worried about finances, but I'm optimistic, I guess things will get going gradually. Owner of textile production enterprise

I feel rested, I liked to stop because I haven't rested like this since I was a child. Now I begin to miss my job. Owner of dental practice, Prijepolje

There is a lot of accumulated work that can be done now. There's work to be done about that clean-up. I've also managed to rest. I enjoyed it very much the first week. Attorney-at-law from Prijepolje

I'm not doing anything now. It's my first time on vacation this long. I got lazy. My daughter has also been on vacation for two weeks already, and we were worried about her going to work, because she is employed in a public utility company. The other daughter lives abroad, but now she is here, with her husband, stuck with us. It's difficult for me physically, mentally and economically to be dependent on children now, for the first time in my life. They are wonderful and want to help, and you don't even have anything to continue your life, even a miserable one. My children buy cigarettes for me, and they complain about my smoking. That's why I smoke less now. Not a pack and a half, but a little more than half a pack. Woman who cleans houses, Belgrade

I live in a house and we have a yard. It's a problem to be locked down, but we went for a walk. We've got closer to our children. We rested, I don't know when I've rested like this

over the last 20 years. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade

My daughter is 16 years old, I am divorced. I enjoyed the first two weeks with my daughter. I listened to her classes via Skype. And then it became harder for me after two weeks because I started to worry. She is on Skype all morning because of school, and in the afternoon they like to socialise virtually, she says it's not a change for her. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad

During that period, the enjoyment in the moments of intimacy was interrupted by **fears for parents and chronically ill household members, as well as fear of disease.** These fears are **more pronounced among single mothers and women living with parents who belong to the group of 65+.** Support is provided by **friends, and less often by household members.**

I suffer from chronic diseases, but they are under control. I've had tuberculosis, I take hormones, I have medication for my thyroid gland and so on, I have all sorts of things. I'm afraid for myself. I know what it means to be disabled. I'm afraid for my mum too. She suffers from many chronic diseases. I'm aware, because I was very ill, I know that the consequences remain even after you survive the corona, the consequences may be serious, and no one is talking about that now. Owner of consulting company from Belgrade

First I told myself: "OK, I'll get over it!" I just slept for ten days. Obviously, I was too tired and I didn't even know it. But I'm now in the phase of sleeplessness, because I've started to worry. Although I'm looking forward to getting back to normal, I do worry. I have a lot of fears. I'm such a person who sees hope, but it will be difficult because I don't accept as justifiable that someone gives me a voucher and I don't know whether I will be alive

*in a year's time. I think about my clients all the time. I read an article on the website Women in Adria about 4 states of leader in the time of corona. I realised that I was in the third state, and that's depression. The work stopped in one day. Maybe I worked just one more day. There is a high level of uncertainty. There are no official announcements, vouchers have been mentioned, this is how it was done in Croatia, Germany, and our Ministry of Tourism is silent, they are concerned about whether there's yeast, and we...Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

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*I'm already 50 years old and I don't faint right away. I was a little scared, I had panic attacks during the first two weeks. I have two children, I am a single mother, horrified by the idea of ending up in the hospital, I hope it won't happen and won't die if I get sick. Hairdresser from Belgrade*

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*I share my worries with my friends, they support me. Various Zooms, house parties, I'm not alone, there are a lot of people in my life. What helped me the most? Meditation, a friend referred me to an Indian guy, I inhaled and exhaled as he says, and I had symptoms of choking with panic at the time. I'm not a fanatic about the house, every time I enter the house, I wipe with Domestos and alcohol, and I've also sprayed the building with chlorine. I clean the house as usual, after entering I take all the clothes off and wash them. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

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*Everything else is the same. Regular obligations, in addition to my work, I have a child in the second grade, I have a husband, of course I work more, our tasks are divided, and I take care of food. I don't worry about work. I think everything will return to normal. Attorney-at-law, Prijepolje*

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*I live with my husband and I have no obligations. I clean fanatically, I'm in a panic,*

*we wipe the handles, floors, disinfect shoes. My parents are young and they take care of themselves. I don't have that extra worry. My mum still works in kindergarten and she visits us sometimes. Owner of children's playroom from Prijepolje*

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*I wonder at myself that for the first time in my life I'm just resting, but it bothers me somehow, because I don't have reserves for such a long vacation. The situation is terrible. I feel that I can still work for quite a while, and I don't contribute, not only financially but also in terms of circulating and then talking about it when I come back, learning something in these houses I go to, I'm getting dumber at home. You get dumber when you're at home. Woman entrepreneur in the informal economy*

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*I regularly do everything in the house by myself. This is not different for me, I clean anyway. I work a bit more on disinfection now because I'm afraid wherever I go, so when I come back, I pay a little more attention to clean everything thoroughly. Owner of textile production enterprise from Novi Pazar*

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*My mum is 70 years old. I have to do all the shopping for the house, no one visits us because of her. I wipe everything with alcohol when I come home from shopping. Shopping is regular, only wiping everything is annoyance. I only wish to get back to work! Apart from being afraid at first, everything else was fine for me. I think that curfew has no purpose. I enjoyed everything, I read books, stayed with my child, realised how valuable it was to see your friends, to hug. I will appreciate that more from now on. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*It was frustrating at first, but now we got used to struggling. You just don't know what happens if you get sick. We are an open firm, we have to pay debts. You think of what you'll do if you get sick. Owner of tourist agency, Belgrade*

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*I miss traveling with my son. He used to travel a lot with me, to be in the car, and now he stays at home, but there is always someone who takes good care of him. He doesn't complain. He wishes to see me when we don't see each other all day. I'm really exhausted. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*It was hard for me the first two weeks because my habits changed abruptly, but after one month I got used to it, although I can't wait for it to pass. Owner of agricultural holding operating online, Sefkerin*

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### 15.2.2. Women entrepreneur's day in the time of corona

When asked what her day looks like now, one interlocutor, a single mother of a 10-month-old, says:

*In the last 72 hours I slept 4 hours to be able to pack everything. There was a great demand because of Easter. I get up at 7 at the latest, then I help my family in the production (of cheese). I prepare my baby, the aunt or the grandma takes care of him, I come back to feed him, I communicate with customers all the time by phone or through social media, I pack products in the afternoon, when he falls asleep, I make tables of who ordered what, I do finances at night and then twice a week I go to Belgrade, then I get up early in the morning, I pack everything and I'm in the car until curfew, I hurry home not to be late. The grandma can do a lot of housework, and I do the laundry - I spread and collect it, I cook for the baby, while the grandma cooks for me and her, I vacuum. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*We are in contact with the parents every day, and in the evening I send homework to the children. That's how we started from 23 March. We do that every day, and the educators developed an online programme. We work as hard as we can. We have Viber*

*groups. We exchange information. It's not easy for parents. Especially for those who have to work from home. A child often comes to ask them something when they sit down to work. It's a distraction. You can't focus, and the work is multiplied 4 to 5 times because you need more time to do it. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade*

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For many, **the pace slowed down a bit** compared to the pre-pandemic era, because they do not move physically, but the **pressure remained**. **Many women entrepreneurs try to maintain the illusion of normality or to recognise the advantages of this crisis situation:**

*I work from home, get up, dress like when I go to work and work. Strategic things or personal things, but I work, it varies, it doesn't differ much compared to before, but I certainly work less. I am in constant contact with the employees, I paid them a salary. It's uncertain whether we'll receive that aid in the amount of the minimum salary for three months. I'm waiting for the accountant to let me know. It will be as late as on 15 April. I'm supposed to receive aid, but I had to have cash to give salaries to employees. Owner of consulting company, Belgrade*

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*I have additional time to tidy up the closets and read. I sit on the terrace and read. I used to do it at night, and now I'm on the terrace, I have no time limits, there's sunshine. I work in the house, I cook and so on. I used to do all of this before along the way. I think it's more on me now. Before, everybody did what they could, and now I can do everything, but I'm not tired. I don't rush to work. There is no rushing to the bank as soon as the working hours begin. The administration functions somehow, and the banks are working short hours. I also have my dad who doesn't live with me, he is older and*

can't go out, so I go shopping for him twice a week. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac

I used to get up at 6. Now I get up until 8. They all sleep, I take a shower, take care of myself, make the beds, drink coffee, and then we are together. I have no obligations, only if want to do something. All my daughters work. We live, have fun, talk, the four of us make jokes. And the phone works a lot. I go to bed late, my eyes turn red. Woman who cleans houses

I get up normally. I read e-mails. I have people that I bring back from abroad, for example a woman from Frankfurt, so I deal with that. A woman from Australia wants to return, but the procedure doesn't suit her, because she is over 70 years old. You have to ask for various permits, which takes time, and she doesn't agree with the dates offered. Her daughter sees that there are free seats on the flight, but those flights do not land on our airport like planes with civilians. And so. I have contacts with my colleagues from the association of travel agencies. We all face the same problem, we were denigrated by the consumer association Efektiva, saying that we must not use the money of the travel agency's customers, so now we have to publish a denial on Bizlife. Owner of tourist agency, Kragujevac

I sleep a little longer now than usual. I find customers online, I do it in the evening when the children fall asleep. I'm a modeler, I do that in the evening. I stay longer, and in the morning I sleep a little longer, which is until 8 - 8:30 a.m. Owner of textile production enterprise from Novi Pazar

My husband drives a truck, he stayed here for 20 days and now he has left for Belgrade. It happens very rarely that all of us find time for the family. And now, no one moved for 20 days, it's a little hard for the children in the house, but it was nice that we were all there. The older one goes to school, but she does everything

independently, while the two boys are smaller, so they need help.

I get up around 8, the child has classes and the grandma works with her more. I do my training, I give breakfast to the children, we walk a bit in front of the house, we watch movies. I have one child, but my sister with two children is also here. My child is 8 years old. There are classes and homework all day long, and I always have a little something to do. This is the complete opposite of my everyday life. I'm usually in the salon all day, I come home exhausted. Now I manage to do everything. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje

I work all day, I'm too tired and too busy. I have no time to think. Owner of enterprise for production of work clothing and protective equipment from Novi Varoš

I have a bunch of extra tasks at home that I haven't completed. I miss a different routine. I miss going, being in my work environment. I moved the office to my home and I don't like it. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade

### 15.2.3. Restriction of movement

When asked if they lack the freedom of movement, **some women entrepreneurs say that they can easily bear the curfew** and that **they manage to buy everything they need at the time when it is allowed**, while **others are very bothered by the restriction on the freedom of movement**. Nevertheless, the interviewed women entrepreneurs **complied with the rules and were regularly informed** about the existing rules.

I haven't left my home at all since 16 March. They don't let me go out. I love staying at home. I don't want to make them worry, so I'm sitting here. I don't feel like I miss walking a lot, I feel my veins when the weather changes,

*my legs hurt and now I have time to rest them. I have no such a possibility when I work, but now, as soon as it hurts a little, I apply cold water and Avaricon, I sit down. I walk in the apartment. I clean the windows. My best exercise is on ladders, up and down. Woman entrepreneur in the informal economy (house cleaning)*

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*I almost didn't go out for the first three weeks, but now I go out, because I can't stay indoors anymore. I take a walk, I go shopping, I sit in the sun, I don't have contact with people, a mask and gloves, not moving bothers me. Owner of consulting company from Belgrade*

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*I walk in the garden, which is a big one, and I don't like to walk in the street now. I go out only when I have to. I feel somehow unnatural when I put on a mask and gloves and I try to stay out as short as possible. I'm bothered with those queues also, I buy in smaller shops, it's more expensive, but at least I don't have to wait. We eat as before, but the difference is that it is a fresh lunch, it is not heated as usual. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

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*I'm at home and I go out only when I have to do the shopping. Owner of dental practice, Prijepolje*

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*I didn't move at all because of my mum. Just shopping and walking with my daughter. I haven't had a coffee with anyone in over a month. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*Only the curfew is a problem for me. I applied for a permit to move during the curfew, but I didn't get an answer. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*I didn't go out for 5 days again, only to the shops, I go to my workplace shortly to see what's going on there. I miss meeting people, we only see each other online. Owner of children's playroom from Prijepolje*

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*The only biggest concern is related to our parents, my parents are close by, we went to see them, and my father-in-law suffers from cancer and no one goes there to protect him. Owner of textile production enterprise, Novi Pazar*

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*I go out, I walk around the neighbourhood. I'm not used to sitting. I go to kindergarten and back on foot. Everything is meaningless to me. We thought we had gone through everything, from bombing, wars and everything else. Now we have an invisible enemy waiting for us around every corner. It's really uncomfortable. I do all normal things, but I can't think only about it. I go out as much as I have to - to the market, to the shop. I wear a mask and gloves, I comply with everything. My husband and I go out. Inactivity bothers me. What bothers me the most is curfew, the fact that I can't go out whenever I want to. The feeling that you are not free to go out when it's convenient for you. Knowing how undisciplined we are, there may be a reason for that, but I think that people have become very aware now. I certainly won't go to walk and hang out with 10 people. There is pressure from all sides and the virus is threatening, and now it's the curfew, somehow it's all too much. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade*

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*I get up, I take orders right away. We have now began to receive online orders during the state of emergency. A blogger put us in a Facebook group and now that's our main way of selling. I use Google sheets to write down orders, make a post in the Facebook group, then check if everything is packed and follow our delivery schedule. We make a tight schedule so that in 4 or 5 hours we finish everything in Belgrade. We have to return by 6 p.m., and we are 30 minutes away from Belgrade. Sometimes there is a lot of traffic on the road before the curfew, especially when it's a weekend-long ban on movement. I went to do deliveries regularly,*

*but I'll do it only once again tomorrow, and then my mother will take it over, because I can't manage to do everything. Owner of agricultural holding, Belgrade*

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#### 15.2.4. After the onset: a struggle with expenses, without income

After focusing on the basic functioning in the new circumstances, on the establishment of logistics related to disinfection and shopping during the first two or three weeks, the **women entrepreneurs began to worry intensively about their jobs again**. The reason for that is a **difficult financial situation caused by the accumulation of expenses at home and at work and a lack of opportunities to ensure the inflow of funds to the account or earnings**. The most important relief, **the reduction of the amount of rent for business premises, or the deferred payment of this amount, was negotiated by the women entrepreneurs with the owners of the premises where they performed their activities**. The women entrepreneurs who **own their business premises** had the biggest advantage because they were not burdened with this expense.

*I'm not paying rent now, but I'll have to pay it later, the landlord says: "When the business starts." Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

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*I have the business premises in Novi Sad. This is my friend's apartment, she has agreed that we share only the expenses, so now I don't pay the rent. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*I have my own premises. I don't pay any rent. I pay taxes and contributions, but these amounts are not big. This is my 6th year of work, so I've developed my business, I don't know how those who are at the beginning will survive. My husband works in a public enterprise. His salary brings us stability. Attorney-at-law, Prijepolje*

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*My husband works occasionally, and the landlady allowed us not to pay rent for the apartment during the state of emergency. Owner of children's playroom from Prijepolje*

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*I am more optimistic, although I'm afraid also. I still believe that everything will be ok. I have no consequences concerning debts. I paid everything I was supposed to. I had the funds. The premises are mine. I paid for everything. Both for material and for duties. I only owe for the previous month. It's not terrible. Owner of dental practice, Prijepolje*

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*We didn't work until Monday, 27 April. Now it's slowly returning to normal. I was scared, I had all the symptoms. I'm not scared now, and I don't think we're going to get back to normal completely. On the other hand, we hairdressers start quickly, the landlady helped me a lot, because we won't have to pay for one month. She lives in Sweden. She says it's a big crisis, you don't have to pay rent for one month. And everything is normal concerning materials. We always pay in cash, they send it to us by mail. We pay by cash on delivery. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*It's very difficult for me to bear all this, and I am not entitled to state aid. As soon as kindergartens were closed, we had to stop as well. Taxes and contributions are big, we are a lot in delay, and our rent has not been postponed or reduced. I'll be aware about the level of damage when this is over. The question is whether I'll continue to work because the costs will accumulate. We're not doing anything, we're home now. We worry. Owner of children's playroom from Prijepolje*

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*We have our premises, and we don't have funds for salaries. We need from 5,000 to 10,000 euros for expenses for 3 or 4 months. In March, we already owed 4,000 euros, and we have to pay taxes and the internet. I have to pay the bank guarantees. And what happens*

*next? Lay offs, and then, if necessary, retraining for another activity if it doesn't start. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

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*When three weeks of complete madness have passed, then you start looking for content. Then you realise that the state works for itself, not for people. Because they said they would help enterprises. And then, when they passed the decree, they didn't give anything more and you realise that they are protecting themselves, and not us who don't work. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

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*Now I'm afraid little less, when I see that not everyone dies from it. I see that you need to have some luck. The factor of luck solves the situation here. I just wonder if my 16-year-old son is in the right place. My daughter studies for a master's degree in Barcelona, but she is back now, and my son plays games and watches Netflix non-stop. He's in a sport school, but there's no much to do now, I wonder what his grades will be, I really don't know what to hope for regarding school, I don't know. He usually trains five times a week, and now he's at home all the time, that's hell. Owner of hairdressing salon, Belgrade*

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*I don't have any debts now, taxes and contributions have been deferred, we are waiting for salaries from the state. In February, I paid for everything, phones and the internet. Now only rent needs to be paid. The owner has 3 shops. Usually, the lawyer negotiates the rent, and the landlord is also a lawyer, but he is fair and he will help us, I believe. If the landlord doesn't write off the rent, he will reduce it drastically, because I've been here for 12 years. We don't have any local measures in Kragujevac, no one has stopped anything, but I guess they will reschedule the payment of communal tax on business signs. We don't have that information now. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

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*Honestly, I am in action non-stop and I produce cheese because my event organising business has stopped since January. I have organised now small producers and others to do home deliveries. I don't watch TV, I don't read the news and I know only which measures I have to comply with. I only feel the financial consequences, because I can't do business. Cheese is a family business. Today I've talked to a colleague about how there is no chance to resume the regular work for 3 to 4 months, everything was focused on organising events and we will have to move most things online. However, we can't do everything, the biggest event gathers 300 producers and 4000 visitors, it can never be done online. We shared a special energy as a big family. That was the biggest and most profitable for me. Honestly, this affected me a lot. What we're doing now is more to avoid storing the produce. People will like home delivery. 90% of them react very nicely, and there are some 5 to 7% of customers who order and then become obnoxious. There is a problem with some people, for example, when I ask them to come down in front of the building because I don't go to their doorstep. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*I have now slowly started working again. Nobody asks for anything, and I started working, so I hope to sell, I started working to be able to pay the salaries. Owner of textile production enterprise from Novi Pazar*

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*I've really struggled. My mother was ill two years ago, she suffered from cancer and therefore I didn't want to come into contact with people because of her. Now I have to order supplies. I've started to work slowly, people ask me about waxing, so I'll save some money and then order the cream, I can't buy in bulk now, but one by one. The suppliers are correct, although I'm not in debt with them, they will also have problems with collection, for sure. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

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Personally, I am not in favour of re-opening kindergartens on 11 May. It's not just about hygienic conditions, it's normal and all measures are implemented, except that I need Biocid to disinfect my kindergarten, but I don't know whether the parents will pick up the virus somewhere when they go to work. They should go to work first, and only then should the children go to kindergarten. But not many can do that. Fortunately, in this unfortunate situation, many of them use the opportunity of staying with their children during the state of emergency. We'll get organised until then, and we'll be there for those who need it, but in general, we plan to resume work on 18 May, which means that we have 7 days for preparation and not everyone will come right away. During the state of emergency, the parents don't pay to us in private kindergartens when their children don't come. Normally, we have a much lower price than the price of state kindergartens and a wide scale of payment, depending on whether it's the 1st, 2nd or 3rd child from a family. Our only condition was that the same amount was paid, whether they attended or not. Now we can't put that burden on the parents. The city has stopped reimbursing the parents, which is not right considering the way of financing the parents in state kindergartens. The City pays 80% for every child who goes to a state kindergarten, and only the educators received the full salary, and we were not able to give ours the full amount. The system of financing children is similar in both private and state kindergartens. The parent pays for the kindergarten, and the City reimburses up to 80% of the price paid. It's now suspended, it will continue when the state of emergency is lifted, but we have to endure until that happens. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade

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### 15.2.5. Liquidity and the importance of savings - Rely on yourself

**The most difficult question for women entrepreneurs is how to provide liquidity.** Those that have liquidity rely mainly on their own **savings**.

*I have some saved money and I received payments from some clients. I currently have liquidity, but that's because of belt tightening. I don't know what it will be like when I use up my savings. I don't know whether to take a loan, which is favourable as far as I understand. Some clients said they would tell me in June what their plan was and in what situation they were. I first pay to the state everything on time. I don't take the risk to develop and that's a luck now. I struggle with expenses regularly and now I think I haven't paid only for my personal bank card because I haven't gone to the bank and now I have to pay some interest even though they said we wouldn't have to. There is always something behind everything they say. We don't have the information until the end, so we don't know how to get organised. Every time you have to conduct a special investigation to know what's your situation, but even when you think you know, it changes. Consultant from Belgrade*

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*Now I live on the savings, I haven't been charged anything, but I do have some savings. Attorney-at-law, Prijepolje*

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*Well, it's a small town, women take care of themselves. After my salon, 5 more opened, and before that there were only two. It will be tough regarding money. I am a single mother, I quickly spend everything I earn, cosmetic products are very expensive, and I can't charge much, I focus on quantity rather than on more expensive treatments. I have no savings. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

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Of course, there are (rare) **examples of improved business in the situation of crisis** because the enterprises produce exactly what is most in demand:

*Our liquidity is excellent. Our goods are in demand and everyone pays immediately. Owner of enterprise for production of work clothing and protective equipment from Novi Varoš*

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*We focus primarily on healthy and home-made nutrition. The fact that we switched to online sales during the state of emergency is a big plus for us. That wouldn't have happened if this crisis had not occurred. We have very good experiences in the Facebook group. Some nice people. We will continue to work in this way. Asparagus required big investments. It's not produced very easily. It would be better without the state of emergency, so that we can find workers easier. Now we have to do more work ourselves. The good side of it is that we are liquid when distribution starts because we do business with cash. Owner of agricultural holding from Sefkerin*

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### 15.2.6. Other problems in business operations

Asked what problems they have in business operations in normal circumstances and what problems they have now, the women entrepreneurs say that **absolutely the biggest problem now is how to maintain liquidity. Supply of materials is a problem for production, and the impossibility of contact with clients burdens the sector of services.** The crisis aggravates also the problems inherited from the so-called more normal times, such as **market distortions by political and party influences, debt accumulation due to inadequate access to the sources of finance for liquidity and growth of micro and small enterprises, predictability of collection that is closely related to the rule of law and the existence of clear and predictable rules. Problems in business operations force women entrepreneurs to implement three basic strategies: 1) giving up and withdrawing, 2)**

**taking risks that may compromise their own health and performing the type of work that others will not do or work so much that it may damage their health and 3) changing the activity, which implies the additional depletion of financial and emotional resources.**

*Only liquidity, I don't have other problems. I have the nicest job in the world. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade*

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*We had problems in business. It's a small town, we had only two playrooms in the town. I'm a teacher and now I'll either continue with the playroom or I'll look for a job somewhere. I don't know what will happen. Owner of children's playroom from Prijepolje*

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*The problem for me is to pay back all the debts I have. Two rents, electricity, contributions, all that. And I care about my employee. That girl didn't even ask me for a salary because she sees that we don't work, but when I receive the payment, of course I will pay her, then I have to pay 200 euros for rent, and 12,000 dinars for heating, then contributions, electricity around 5,000-6,000 dinars, the internet, cosmetic products. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

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*In business, finding clients is my biggest problem, because everything is politically divided, and there is no developed market in terms of fair competition. I have a small capacity for all those competitions that you need to apply for, and which are mostly rigged, but you never know for sure, so you should apply, because you have to get a job somehow. I have strategic clients. I am worried about how my clients will deal with us, consultants. Some have halved my budget. I have 100% collection, but my budgets are reduced. We are extending the contract in July, and we'll see what happens. Liquidity is a big problem for me. Owner of consulting company, Belgrade*

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*What worries me the most is when the work will continue. What will the ministry or the government decide? When will they issue an official statement saying when travelling will be allowed? It was on the JUTA website that everything would be stopped until 15 May, and then it would be seen what next. The money should be returned by 15 May through consent or vouchers. It's the amount paid by a person and can be used within one year in the same agency. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

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*We shared the remaining work and we work from home, I deal with the finances, there are some outstanding payments, there is a little bit of activity, I took over the finances, and the others are sellers, one works at the cash register, one deals with tourism. Individual trips, we only have cancellations there, but that also needs to be processed, airline tickets are on "stand by". Nobody returns money, that is, it is returned rarely. Some hotel reservations have the right to a refund, but we are not the organiser, but the intermediary. Airlines recommend to put the tickets on "stand by" and use them later. If a refund was asked, some returned money. Customers are not so upset when it is a matter of force majeure. When we start working, anxiety and agitation will appear. There were rare cases when people asked a refund urgently, and said they would hire a lawyer. I said it's okay, hire, let's just see what will happen in the state of emergency. I have to prepare the workers for that. The whole story is that now these measures do not suit our agencies and that a subsequent package of measures is needed and it will be recommended to use that money in the future and that the money will be returned only in two years, which only shows that insurance companies will not be responsible, although the agencies have given huge amounts of money for insurance, and now the insurance companies will not be paying. There is an insurance policy for each trip and*

*a lot of money is given for the policies. We've become intermediaries and we are no longer the organiser precisely because the insurance cost 5,000 to 6,000 euros a year. And now here's the insured situation, but nothing. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

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*Procurement for production is a bit of a problem for me now, because now it's done on call, so everything has slowed down. Shopping for the house is not a problem, because the market is on the first floor and I am on the second floor. Owner of textile production enterprise, Novi Pazar*

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*I have no problems. You earn as much as you work. I've been doing this for 20 years. I'm fine with everything now. Only when there is work. We are sisters and nothing is a problem, we agree about things. When there is money, both of us have it, if there is less, we know which one of us needs it. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*The biggest problem in business is payment collection, but there are definitely problems now and I can't compare. I see the new problem now and that's the lack of contact with the clients. We don't even have the opportunity to communicate a lot online, because we are not allowed to advertise, due to the nature of activity. I am in contact with the clients I already represent, but these are normal regular contacts. Attorney-at-law from Prijepolje*

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*What I'm doing now is completely different from what I normally do, that's a service, and this is production. The biggest problem when I do my service business is with the lease of large premises and the amount of rent, for example in Novi Sad. That event that I am organising is important for the City of Novi Sad and everyone helps, but one director of the space I am renting is very negative and that's a problem now. In these conditions, the problem now is that we don't manage to deliver everything because*

*we can't find anyone to work, people are afraid of the virus. Maybe I'm foolish for not feeling overwhelmed, but I'm not panicking, I thought a couple of times what if it happened to me, but I'm strong, I'm fine, I would beat the virus. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*I hope that I will be opening slowly from 15 May, so that two or three of us have a couple of customers, I don't think we will be able to do it in full scale. I don't know what we'll do if the virus comes back. L'Oreal is great, I usually pay for the goods in a month, and now I owe 500,000. Nobody is chasing me. They are great, we are all in this together now. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

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### 15.2.7. Employees with a minimum salary, and a great burden for women entrepreneurs

The women entrepreneurs in the sample employ a total of 80 people. They resort to different strategies when it comes to the burden of paying salaries during the period in which there is no income. Some women entrepreneurs guarantee their **employees the minimum salary during the crisis**, even though they **had to borrow in order to pay** even that amount. Other women entrepreneurs are **waiting for the state aid in order to pay their employees the minimum salary** because they say that **they are not able to take that burden on themselves**. Finally, one woman entrepreneur in the sample says that if there is no work, **lay offs are the healthiest mechanism for the business owner but also for the employees**, because in that case they will receive **unemployment benefits, which they will not have if the illusion of employment is maintained**, which is the aim of government measures, according to her. The measures adopted by the Government, which envisage that all entrepreneurs and owners of micro and small enterprises will be paid the amount of 30,000 dinars, responded to the need of most interviewed women entrepreneurs. It is important to note that at the time of data collection, the implementation of these measures has not started.

*I didn't fire anyone, they have been with me for a very long time, from 20 years to 2 years, the ones who came the most recently. They are all part of the family. My mindset does not allow such a thing, that's the last thing I would do. I said that I would pay them 2 minimum salaries, and after that whatever will be, will be. I paid for March, I borrowed money, the founder's loan for liquidity. The state will not help me, but now I will have to pay contributions for March, and then we should apply by April 24 and then the state will pay us that some time, and we will pay those contributions some time next year. What will people do until the 15th? Everyone is silent around me and waiting like everyone else. I am the first one who has no reserves for 7 workers. But I had the opportunity to borrow; workers today depend on their bosses and how they experience all this. Some employees of other bosses had to immediately sign the termination of contract by mutual consent. Then some will get cash, and others will not, and it's not convenient for me at this moment, but I believe that it's a good decision. I do not pay the full amount of salary to my workers. Only the minimum, and I need about 350,000 dinars, and imagine if they were really registered for 60,000! It wouldn't be possible for that number of workers. They work for me 7 hours a day. Because I like my workers to be happy and satisfied. We have brought the work to the maximum, let's think about the quality of life now. I would never let them down. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade, 8 employees*

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*I have 14 employees and I haven't fired anyone, and I hope that I will not get into such situation. In these 26 years of work, we faced similar situations and overcame them. Just to normalise all the elements. It would be terrible for me to fire someone. We agreed to pay the minimum salary because the ban started on 16 March. We did not earn anything in April and May. Fortunately, we had some reserves, and I will take this from the state as well. I feed 14*

families, including 4 single mothers. It's not a small thing at all. But with the support of my husband and all the household members, we manage somehow, it's not the first time. We agreed to try everything, not to give up. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade

Luckily, I grew up conservatively and I saved money to always have reserves so that my firm can survive for 6 months without a single client. That's how I do it. Owner of consulting company, Belgrade

I am not thinking about reducing the number of employees, but everything is uncertain. I know people will request the money they paid. Many people paid for May. I don't know if their money will be returned. Everyone defends saying that they rented what they rented. On 18 May I had an arrangement for Cyprus. I asked a colleague what to do because the agency keeps a part of the payment according to the general travel conditions, and they will keep the whole amount for airplane tickets if I cancel, and if I don't cancel, I have to wait for the airline to cancel the flight and only then can I return money to people. The agencies send me a procedural letter answering that they cannot say anything in the state of emergency. There may be vouchers. However, people paid with a discount, so they will not be able to get what they initially paid for. If you paid 10 days in Greece with an early payment discount, when they return it to you, it will be for 3 days. You cannot get the same thing you paid for. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac

The government measures will mean something to me because of my employee, and I am still receiving maternity allowance. I registered a firm and worked in a public company at the same time, and in 2017 I stopped working there, and 6 months from that period was also calculated, so now I have 33,000 dinars a month, which is good more

or less. So the measures are important to me because of my employee, because it would be very difficult for me if I couldn't pay her anything and she had to leave. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak

In the sample, two women entrepreneurs fired one worker each, while one woman entrepreneur, who works in the informal economy, found herself in an unfavourable situation because she was registered as unemployed with the National Employment Service, but remained completely without income.

We fired one employee. As a result, we lost the right to state aid for salaries because we reduced the number of workers. That one left on 15 March, so it has turned out that we don't have this right. We had to hire a new one to be eligible, and we didn't know that. In fact, it turns out that the employers with less than 10 employees must not fire or lose anyone, because that immediately reduces the total number by more than 10%. It doesn't make sense. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade

### 15.2.8. Survival strategies

Regardless of the sector, the main survival strategy chosen by the interlocutors is the **strategy of using their own resources**. In the short term, they use the reserves if they have them. The reserves are mainly created by belt-tightening and savings, and are used for the survival of an enterprise or entrepreneurial shop or agency. However, it is even more common that there are no reserves and that, **as soon as at the end of the first month of the crisis, significant debts emerge as a burden** that has to be dealt with in the future. **Borrowing is informal** through own networks of friendly contacts. There is generally a very clear commitment to **pay debts through additional work over a longer period of time**. **Most of the respondents have already given up their annual leaves, and this is not the first time**. Therefore, women in entrepreneurship **will rest even less than before, will take less care**

**of their health and well-being and will not make the necessary interruptions in their work** in order to renew their energy. **The struggle for survival in the market is based on depleting women's own resources and compromising their own health and well-being. Each subsequent shock will sink most of the observed businesses and tens of thousands of similar enterprises, agencies and shops.** Women entrepreneurs choose not to think too much about the future, but focus all their energy on the present moment when the business wakes up. They are trying to translate that positive energy, reflected in the almost mythical self-encouraging exclamation "just let us work and we'll manage somehow", into good business. Although **there is no rational solution, giving up is not an option.** However, it would be good to have a response regarding the **much-needed access to additional finances, both for liquidity under acceptable conditions and for growth, but also for changing activities where there is no chance of recovery.**

*I'm working now, so everything is normal.  
Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*I'm being positive and I cannot escape from anything. Whatever will be, will be. What we women can endure, eeeeh. Owner of beauty salon, Prijepolje*

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*I'll manage somehow. I don't expect it to go smoothly or quickly. From what I see, my customers are mainly not nervous and trust me. People really believe me. I always have old customers, and the old ones bring new ones and that's the best. That word-of-mouth advertisement and recommendations are really valuable. That's why it's very important for me not to let them down. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

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*Now we have one customer at the time, our salon is big - 100 sqm, my sister and I can work at the same time. Customers come only when they have an appointment. It's good now.*

*I like to work. I know exactly which women are usually late, so I call them to ask them not to be late. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*The firm doesn't work. There were a lot of adjustments for all of us in the house. It's fine now. There is uncertainty in terms of health, and as regards business, whatever will be, will be. We are not bound by these state measures that are slave-owning. Because, in tourism, you can't keep the workers until the end of the crisis, and taxes are an incredible burden if you don't work, or work very little. There is no work, we'll see how we'll get by with plane tickets. Who will pay for those moves. I am an optimist about air traffic, but not about tourism. The firm may have to shift to something else. I look at it this way, we are traders and that's what we do. We'll find something else to trade. I am relaxed and I'm not under pressure. Our children are abroad, but now all four of us are together, because our daughters study abroad, so they are usually not here. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

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*I'll have to start working soon, it can't be like this anymore. I have the supplies, I ordered everything. And that's a burden for me. Owner of dental practice, Prijepolje*

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*I do some shopping. I go to the salon, I do one or two customers for my mental health, I am alone in the salon with the customer. I wear gloves and a mask and she wears them too. I'm more afraid of queues in the shop than of my customers. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

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A small number of interviewed women entrepreneurs are considering alternative business ideas because they see that the recovery in their sector will not happen fast enough for them to survive or live well enough from that business. For example, both interviewed owners of travel agencies in Belgrade and Kragujevac say:

*I'm trying to do additional work now. For years, I have been trying to get a machine for printing on T-shirts and mugs, but I have not succeeded so far. Now I will try to apply in the Ana and Vlade Divac Foundation. I'm trying everywhere, so we'll see where I succeed. I also worked on a project with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, I am constantly looking for additional work, both because of my income and to complement the current business. I have an agency with two rooms. I could do the printing in one room, that's compatible. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

*I am an optimist about air traffic, but not about tourism. The firm may have to shift to something else. I look at it this way, we are traders and that's what we do. We'll find something else to trade. I am relaxed and I'm not under pressure. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

### 15.2.9. The future is uncertain

Although they know that the strategy of surviving is more work for less money, the women entrepreneurs worry about whether that will be enough. Everything is uncertain and the interlocutors have a feeling that the future cannot be planned at this moment. **The concern is great and will leave a mark if no additional relief is introduced. Women entrepreneurs prefer to know the facts, whatever they may be, than to be given a picture of happiness that they know is not realistic.**

*I am a huge pessimist because the consequences are on a global level, and we usually experience them later, and first we pretend that it doesn't affect us. Each of us will have a problem at some point and we will experience huge consequences both because of the world crisis and because of the lack of development. It has only just begun, and the crisis is yet to develop. I feel like everything is uncertain, I have to think about the survival of business, and I don't have all the indicators of*

*how it could be. My clients have already cut my budget, they have halved it, and I work with these firms that will all be in trouble. There is a great uncertainty. Owner of consulting company from Belgrade*

*The lack of work, then life, then friends. I'm optimistic fifty percent and other fifty I'm not. I'm afraid it will start again in the autumn and there will be the second wave. Let's wait for June, July, but if it's not reduced at all, I'm afraid it will happen again. I'm horrified with the possibility of not standing in the way of this virus. Unemployment is hard for me and I'm afraid for my children. I'm not afraid for myself, but for my children. I reckon, it doesn't matter that much, if it happens to me, it has happened. I'm not afraid that I'm going to get sick. I'm afraid for my children. Woman entrepreneur in the informal economy, Belgrade*

*I am an optimist because I am a service provider, I am not a manufacturer. The woman will come and have her hair done and pay, because the women who come to me are not in a bad financial situation and want to spend that money. I'll repay what I borrow. I don't plan to raise prices when this passes, I would be ashamed. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

*When the state of emergency is lifted, I'd like to start working, but I'm afraid that those I work for are afraid and will not want me to come. They all need me for sure, but will they want me to come from the bus where it's still risky? The question is to which extent the situation is ok. Woman entrepreneur in the informal economy*

*I am generally optimistic and I believe that everything will return to normal, but not before September. If I hadn't found an alternative and hadn't done two jobs, I don't know how I would live. I support all my family members, they depend on me, my grandmother and my son.*

*Owner of event organisation agency who now distributes cheese, Jazak*

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*Some people have already started calling, I hope we'll start working soon. Owner of dental practice, Prijepolje*

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*When I start working, I'll start repaying money. It's my place, that business space, so it's not a big amount, I'll pay retroactively, I feel safe in that respect. I will pay for the supplies that have not been paid, I have to pay that first, then the bills and slowly on. There's no profit this year, but that's the way it is. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

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*We paid everything regularly. We're going to work hard now and we'll make up for it. We will also ask for the state aid, it will be important for us to cover the costs, because we are lump-sum entrepreneurs. As soon as I get money, I'll pay the taxes. We will not ask to pay from January 2021. We don't pay anything in instalments and deferred, we pay everything immediately when we have, when we don't have, we don't pay. We already have that double payment of bills and contributions. That burdens me. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*Before the crisis, I covered the expenses, and now my daughter pays the rent, the apartment, the electricity, and the other daughter pays for the food, and I pay nothing. We have an apartment loan. We also have to repay the debt to our daughter. The two of us would manage somehow, but it's better that she (the other daughter) is here too. Woman entrepreneur in the informal economy*

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*Now I have to pay 30,000, maybe I will not delay the payment of contributions, but maybe I'll have to. Owner of dental practice, Prijepolje*

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*They want to prolong the refund, and the state wants to oblige the agency to keep the*

*workers, and every case will be a problem. Like the German model: you have the right to take a trip within two years, and if you don't, only then will your money be returned. When the SAT agency went bankrupt two years ago, DDOR had to pay 600,000 euros of indemnification for the medium-sized agency. Then they set such prices, they asked us for 800,000 dinars for one year. Now it costs about 500,000 RSD to get policies for organisers worth 200,000-400,000 euros. At least two policies per agency must be paid because many people bought travel packages in December and the policy is required until December, which means that we need two policies. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

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*I already have an agreed payment of taxes and contributions in instalments from the previous period. Those 300,000 dinars of debt, plus regular payments, are huge for me. This is probably the end. Owner of enterprise for production of sheet metal accessories, Kraljevo*

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### 15.2.10. What needs to happen for women entrepreneurs to get rich?

This question surprised all the entrepreneurs quite a bit. This is, in part, due to the fact that entrepreneurship, and **particularly women's entrepreneurship in Serbia, is discussed in terms of self-employment, necessity and a lack of growth compared to the initial situation.** The big ones are big, and the small ones are small forever. At the same time, **the question about wealth encouraged women entrepreneurs to think about success, to dream.** Two women entrepreneurs later called to say that this question had moved them and encouraged them to make plans.

*I have several business ideas and, if I implement them all, I will get rich. I will also try to take a loan. A team building centre on Fruška gora is my idea. In the old family house, where we have a farm and animals, I want to develop*

*agritruiism so that foreigners can make their own cheese. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*I've been trying to get rich for 26 years, but I can't. We, the providers of all services, are aware that we live by the standards of the European average, but that our salaries are very low. We are small and micro enterprises in my sector and we love our job. My greatest satisfaction is when I see my girls and boys who meet me in the city and say: "It was the most beautiful time for me while we were in kindergarten." They say: "We forgot about that period, and now we suddenly remember how happy we were." Or now those who used to come bring their children. My daughter is also in that business. She is about to graduate in psychology, she'll be dealing with the problems and needs of the family. As a society, we had to skip all those stages from a traditional family in order to become the Millennials who work all day long. Parents need help. Every second child has a speech disorder. I am a very rich woman because I am here for them and we grow with them. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade*

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*Maybe one day. I lack large working capital. I have to invest a lot to make money. I know how to do this: I am a supplier and a driver and a modeler and I prepare codes and declarations. In terms of work, I've done it all. Owner of textile production enterprise from Novi Pazar*

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*What should happen for me to get rich? I should go to another country. But I don't fantasize about it. I had phases when I didn't have anything and when I had a lot. I fled Mostar. At the time when I had a lot, I was married and I was the unhappiest. I only need to have peace in my head, and then it's easy. Owner of hairdressing salon from Novi Sad*

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*I don't know what it means to get rich in Serbia. I don't have a problem, I have my reserves, but there is no logic in spending everything I've earned. A lot of people organise trips on their own, agencies are dropping out slowly. Now it's a matter of economic logic. What if the business should exist, I am optimistic about air traffic, but we will not all survive there either. Greece may work, but not before September or October. Individual trips, everyone is afraid to go before the autumn. I've rested now. Because of work. You don't know where the wind will blow from. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

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*It's not possible to get rich here, you can have a good life, that's it. I don't even pay for the education of my child who studies for a master's degree, but the grandfather does, and I can pay another child's English classes and sports, and that's it. I took a loan to buy an apartment, I live like an average person, I buy books, I go to the theatre, etc. I would have to have more salons to earn more, and then I would lose my main focus, and that's spending 7 hours a day here and enjoying it. Those who do hair implants can make money, but you can't get rich with this kind of service. I don't know if I'll go to the seaside this year. If we work in June, it may be something modest, a few days. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

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*If I were in a bigger city and I could charge for my service, I would be richer. Serbia is poor, we are similar here, somewhere you get paid a little more. For example, the same treatment with the same product in Germany costs 250 euros, in Belgrade 50 euros, and I charge 3000 dinars. They also have reliefs in Germany. Okay, life is more expensive there, but a small place definitely holds me back. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

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*I don't know, I've never thought about getting rich. Owner of agricultural holding, Sefkerin*

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*We already had a pretty good business, this only increased the trade. Owner of enterprise for production of work clothing and protective equipment*

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*The state should value skilled work. Owner of enterprise for production of sheet metal accessories, Kraljevo*

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### **15.2.11. The economic measures are not bad, but doubts about their implementation prevail and there is a lack of trust in the state.**

The interlocutors were all informed about the measures taken by the Government to alleviate the burden of negative economic consequences on micro and small enterprises in Serbia. Different women entrepreneurs, depending on the sector, the number of employees and the assessment of trends, see the importance of these measures differently. The respondents agree about the **measure of paying the minimum salary for three months for each employee.**

The interviewed women generally think that the **measures to support micro and small enterprises are good and that, at least in part, they respond to their needs.** However, women entrepreneurs do not believe that these measures will be implemented in the way they were announced. When it comes to the measure of deferring the payment of liabilities until January 2021, most women entrepreneurs will **try to settle their obligations as soon as possible.** They say that this is not a relief that really reduces their burden, because they do not expect to have additional income in 2021 from which they would pay arrears and regular duties. Women entrepreneurs generally think in the way they traditionally manage the household budget: **first they pay their liabilities and then they use the remaining amount.** Experience teaches women entrepreneurs that significant economic operators do the exact opposite and that **in our country the big ones do better**

**because they are late with payments, and they get away with it.**

In general, the interviewed women entrepreneurs **do not trust the state much.** They claim that the **measures start to be implemented relatively late** and believe that they will be implemented **inconsistently and selectively.** **When it comes to loans,** they are afraid that the rules **will be changed during the implementation.** Therefore, most of the respondents **will not even apply for a loan, although they think that the stated conditions are very favourable.**

*I will apply for any measures I can use, at least to get something from the state. It's great if I can pay contributions later, but I will try to pay them as soon as possible. I don't trust them with that. First they were late, and we will be left to ourselves, and someone will benefit from that, I've just borrowed money and paid salaries, and now I also have to pay contributions. First, they should've done it on time, so that we didn't have to do everything ourselves, for the benefit of those who work for us. Now there is a possibility, but you can't use it. It's always like that in our country, it's like when you pay electricity or utility bills on time, and the one who doesn't pay for 5 years in the end pays less than you or doesn't pay anything. They treat again the same way those who are conscientious. They get the worst of it. They should've said right away: "Don't fire workers, it will be compensated, you will be rewarded!" so that we know. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

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*I find that these measures are completely appropriate, they will mean a lot to entrepreneurs, at least to those who have workers, and my parents have 5 workers. I don't think they'll take these loans, and neither will I. Owner of dental practice from Prijepolje*

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*Coincidentally, the man who was supposed to register our workers forgot to do*

so, because we temporarily closed the firm, we told him to register the firm on 1 April and he says he forgot to register the workers and did it only on 13 April. That's why we will not get any state aid, though it would mean a lot to us. Moratorium on contributions, we can't use that either. The playroom is not so profitable, now we have about 3000 or 4000 euros of debts, so if we take a loan, we would repay the debts with debts, I don't know if it pays off. Our contributions are enormous. Owner of children's playroom from Prijepolje

That salary from the state will be important for me, my accountant asked for it, and I will also take a loan for working capital. One hundred euros will also be important for me. Our country is small and the measures are good. They did the right thing. It will help us a lot, both to citizens and businesses. There are families that find it helpful and I don't know how they could tell who needs it and who doesn't, I think it's good like this. Maybe, after all, those who already receive social assistance should get more. I don't know how it should be done for businesses, everything has stopped really. I don't know how we will get out, but I am an optimist. Owner of textile production enterprise from Novi Pazar

As regards the economic measures, we'll start the next year with a debt, because we'll have additional instalments for taxes and contributions from this year, and it's still uncertain who'll survive this year. As far as the measures are concerned, it's good for me that we receive those salaries. That's important. It's not good for me that they didn't write off taxes and contributions, so now we have to find a way to pay them. Then, the VAT has to be paid regularly on 15th. And nothing happened with our request for paying upon collection to make it easier for us. I am constantly on Zoom with my colleagues, we exchange opinions all the time. It would be ideal for us if they had

written off the debt for taxes and contributions. They were very late with giving these salaries. It should have been in April for March. What are we waiting for? It's very arguable. I think we are powerless. We pay a very large amount of taxes and contributions. We want higher pensions, but we pay high amounts of duties. What's the point of it? For example these loans, they request a guarantor who is permanently employed in a public enterprise! Although there are bills of exchange and all other guarantees?! That's what I have to say about affordable loans! You push the private sector because it's a good source of income for you. It's really from the bank of information. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac

The measures are important also as moral support. We are using that measure of the salary of 30,000. We will not use loans, nor will we use the moratorium on the payment of taxes and contributions. Owner of enterprise for production of work clothing and protective equipment from Novi Varoš

I think that it's quite good that the state has adopted the measures concerning taxes and salaries. However, my problem is liquidity, and as regards loans, I do not trust the state. I'm not sure that the conditions will not change in a year. I have a huge distrust in the state. It's meaningless to give one hundred euros to everyone, and now it's even more meaningless that we have to apply, ask for it. And that's why I don't trust them at all. Even when they adopt something good, I don't trust that they will implement it. I think that 4000 dinars is a populist measure for pensioners. And this is a scandal that leads to absolute distrust. So if you act hastily, you don't know how it will affect you. We'll feel it strongly like we felt everything when the crisis was global. I will apply for 100 euros, and I'll give them to whomever I want. If I manage to apply through the call centre, which I also doubt. I don't trust them at all. I want to

*deal with the state as little as possible. Owner of consulting company from Belgrade*

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*Nothing of theirs means anything to me, I've never received anything from the state and I don't need anything, I don't expect anything. I don't believe any of that will be paid. The accountant told me that if I had one bank account, 3 salaries would be automatically approved, but I don't know how, if the salary is not fixed, when I'll receive it. I don't believe it at all. One hundred euros irritates me more than it means something to me. I don't understand that, we have socially disadvantaged families who struggle to make ends meet. Why don't we give them more? The loans seem to be favourable, but I will not take them because the nature of my business is such that there is no equipment, so there is no need. Attorney-at-law, Prijepolje*

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*I want to ask for the minimum salary of 30,000 for both my employee and myself. The contributions for her are 12,000, I have to give her the salary, and I'm nowhere. I didn't want to put the firm on stand by. Loans - no. I'm already repaying a loan. When I got divorced, I gave everything back to my ex-husband, I didn't want anything from him. I left the premises owned by him, I went back to my parents. And now I have a loan. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

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*It's walking the razor's edge. You take it, but you get into a debt crisis. This is not predictable. If I take a loan, I will not postpone the payment of taxes and contributions, because it would be my third duty. Perhaps the best thing is to get this amount of 30,000 per employee as supplement, plus a loan, so that everything works properly. I had to pay the full amount of rent for the space, and it's 4000 euros a month and now I have current payments and arrears. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade*

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Women entrepreneurs think that the **measures related to pensioners (one-off financial assistance of 4000 dinars) and adult citizens (dinar equivalent of 100 euros paid once to all those who apply) are populist** and that **it would be better to use this money for supporting the most vulnerable groups or those already receiving social assistance.** However, women entrepreneurs will apply for these funds because they think that **politicians will benefit from the adoption of these measures anyway, so it is better for citizens to use them.**

### 15.2.12. Lacking support

*Taxes and contributions for three months should be written off. VAT should be paid upon collection. These travel vouchers for cancelled trips are not feasible. It would help if we returned the paid money to people, because that's the only way we can maintain trust. You offer them refund or voucher. If they wanted to travel in May, they might choose to go in August or September if they could get the same thing. I believe that from the second half of June, it will be possible to go. I'm also confused by the information that some hotels will not open this year. I've been working well and for a long time. People recommend me and know me. They all have this single phone number of mine. There are a lot of us, travel agencies, the percentage of commissions that large organisers give to agencies is decreasing. They give direct discounts to customers, the market is unfair. If you call them directly, they give you a 10% lower price, and that 10% is our commission, and there is no chance that it will change. A big selection should be made and people seek their fortune. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

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*The Government did not think about me. I'm registered with the Employment Service, I'm not employed. They say nothing about the unemployed. How do they calculate them, in*

firms or from the Employment Service? We won't get anything. Supposedly those 100 euros. We won't even see that. That's stupid. Where did he get it from? I don't even know if that will mean much to me. What does it mean to me to take 100 if I've lost 1000? Woman entrepreneur in the informal economy from Belgrade

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In March, Yuta asked what it asked, and they asked for taxes not to be paid, to help with grant injections. How will we earn to repay the loan? We don't even know what our activity will be. We have to come up with a new idea. We won't get a deferral of contributions if the firm doesn't work, it's throwing dust in our eyes because three months will pass quickly, and you have to keep the workers until the end of October. Imagine 20 people and taxes and contributions for the minimum salary are 18000. So how do you make money if you don't work? If you reduce the number of workers after all, you have to return all the money, and how can you do that, you gave it to the workers, and you have to return everything with interest, and you will also be punished. And if the worker quits unilaterally or by mutual agreement, you have to find another one. If you give the job to another, the firms with up to 10 workers can't fire anyone. Therefore, the small ones have no room for downsizing, not even one person. We have our own premises and that's a great thing. You have some expenses, and when you reduce the number of workers, you will manage somehow, and when the business starts to grow, you will hire workers. It's also fairer to people. If they go to the National Employment Service from June, let the state give them money for 6 months. And they say don't lay off, only if you have to, they say let it be by agreement, and then the state doesn't pay the worker anything. So they protect themselves, not the workers. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade

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If I were in their shoes, I would support what's healthy in the economy. You see how many people make a living from that business, what the chances are for development, and I wouldn't give the same to everyone. It seems to me that it should be targeted. I would help more to whoever has a chance. And I would, of course, support consultants because they can contribute to the development of society, really. Now the main thing is to think and follow what's happening and be flexible and adaptable. I wouldn't give everything from real sources because of populism. I would help the healthy part of the economy. The market needs to be uncorked. To give the small ones a better chance to grow. For example, this loan is a good thing. But it is for liquidity, not for development. Something like that could also be for development, so that I can buy premises, for example, that would help me. Owner of consulting company from Belgrade

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Just to be allowed not to pay heating or electricity bills. So that I get rid of contributions, at least those bills that are due already, I'm in the red in any case. But I'm very realistic. If I closed now, where would I be and what would I do? The loan instalment is 158 euros. Alimony is 100 euros. And now, I have to work for half a year to repay all that. I didn't go on vacation last year, and I won't go this one either. It simply won't happen. And 100 euros will be important for me. It's for buying some groceries twice, but every dinar helps. It's not convenient for me to ask for the deferral of contributions to 2021. I already owe the rent, maybe I will have to ask if I fail to pull myself out, but there is no chance that I will pay it all at once. I would pay it in 3 or 4 months when everything is back to normal. But will it happen? Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje

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We, as professionals, have indicated what would be ideal for us. We gave a clear calculation, but we didn't find understanding.

*Private preschool institutions said that the City should continue to pay the minimum refunds, and that we should commit to giving salaries to employees and paying contributions during the crisis. If 80% of the refund is around 20,000 dinars, we would be already returning 63% of that amount to the state, there would be no delays, there would be no debts, there would be no need for these 30,000 dinars per employee. We would all be at zero, but there would be no debt, there would be no loan, there would be no closure. Many firms will be closed. We consult among ourselves regularly, people are on the edge. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade*

### 15.2.13. Crisis as a chance?

Women entrepreneurs answered the question whether there was something useful and good in the crisis for them personally or for society.

*I am thinking now, and I will make an assessment in the next two weeks to see if I can take a loan and see how it goes and then go into development. I've decided to go further, to succeed, I will take some risks. Owner of consulting company from Belgrade*

*We are all in contact, this is not social but physical distancing for me, because we are more networked now than before. I really liked being alone and clearing up a lot of things. There are also benefits from this misfortune, let us only be healthy. Owner of tourist agency from Kragujevac*

*If it weren't for the crisis, the families certainly wouldn't have become closer. We are all at home all the time. I visit my parents. They live close by. I don't see my friends. I miss them, but it will all pass. I don't know if I'll be able to go on vacation, and I am pregnant. I went to check-ups regularly to the public health care institution without any problems. I went twice*

*during this state of emergency. Owner of dental practice from Prijepolje*

*I have a lot of ideas and I think about other things when I'm not thinking about whether someone will help me. I feel free because I don't expect anything from the state. Owner of tourist agency from Belgrade*

*Nothing has crystallised for me yet, my work is pretty well run and I am well organised. I have 25 sqm of space, and 7 workers and myself, we all work, maximum capacity utilization. I am thinking of expanding, the amount of work will be the same, and maybe the quality of my life and life of my workers will be worse. My goal is to work as little as possible, and to have the same income. We've just implemented well our philosophy and now we have to deal with survival again. Owner of hairdressing salon from Belgrade*

*As far as my firm is concerned, the only thing is that online sales are a bit more developed. Girls buy online. I learned that also by myself, but it can be better and it would help me to know that, although I manage as much as I can. I'm 37 years old and the firm has been operating since 2014. Before that, I was a clothes modeler. I told myself if I worked there for others 8 hours, here I can work 24 hours. I work all the time. Owner of textile production enterprise from Novi Pazar*

*There is a lot of good for me and my family. My brother made a series of bad financial moves that I took over. He reorganised, he started working and we all work better. I only miss love. Love is a disaster, nothing for a very long time. Some lunatics appear all the time, I don't know if I radiate to attract them, but there are only some jerks on Facebook. By the way, people have lost their emotions completely, but are now slowly returning mentally to normality in this crisis. Now they seem to be a bit better, everything was*

*instant, just running, working. Owner of event organisation agency, Jazak*

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*I'm always an optimist. We have to live with the situation we find ourselves in. Business can't die. We'll treat a bit differently both ourselves and others when all of this is over. We'll comply with the rule more and we won't bring our children if they are snotty. Employers will have a bit more understanding for mothers with children. I guess they see that if things are out of control the results are bad. I believe that every profession must give its best. Owner of kindergarten and children's club, Belgrade*

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*I saw the initiative as nice, and it has nothing to do with this crisis, or it has a little bit, because now it makes even more sense for textbooks to be free next year, that's what I support. Perhaps they don't have to be free, but they may be electronic, because I see that children really like it. It turned out that everything could work electronically. We don't have to go in person, services can be digital. It would be good to keep it that way. Attorney-at-law, Prijepolje*

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*It's good that I spend plenty of time with my husband, because normally we don't really see each other. I've dedicated myself to scientific research, I'm more rested, and I used to work 10 to 12 hours a day. If we got help from the state - it would be great, but we didn't. This help would really mean a lot to everyone and it is very well thought out, but not everyone can get it. They should give relief also to us who deregistered workers and they should have understanding for a day or two of delay. Rental relief would mean a lot to me. We pay a lot for heating, and if the payment could be deferred for at least two months, that would help me.*

*We'll wait to see what happens with the application and if they approve it, maybe we'll continue to work and if not, I don't know what we'll do. My husband and I decided to make a baby now during the state of emergency. Owner of children's playroom from Prijepolje*

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*I was with my child, I needed that time at home. I've recovered mentally. I'd like to work now, but there's not that much work and now I begin to worry about how I'll manage financially. I didn't call the customers. They know me and know my quality, and I don't want to annoy these women. If they have money, they will contact me. Owner of beauty salon from Prijepolje*

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*We now want to send asparagus also by courier service, but the comments about that service are bad. People say that they don't pay attention to the goods, and that they have increased prices a lot. It's good that we have adjusted in business, and privately we have seen that it's possible to live even when you slow down a bit. I have a really tight schedule, so I liked it. Owner of agricultural holding, Sefkerin*

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*Every ugly situation since 1994, since we exist, has brought something good. For example, a little more responsibility towards our own health, because we really lacked that. If nothing else, we started thinking about it. That's one of the biggest benefits. My husband and I realised that we have too much energy, despite our mature age, to be satisfied with crumbs. Owner of kindergarten and children's club from Belgrade*

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### 15.3. Conclusions - Women Entrepreneurs

- All interviewed women entrepreneurs who are of different ages, work in different sectors, come from different cities, have different living conditions and family statuses, share one **common female entrepreneurial experience from the time before the pandemic: they are exhausted, overburdened, overworked and overstressed.** That is why the slowdown, and even the complete standstill that occurred due to the state of emergency, is welcomed by women entrepreneurs. For the **first time in years, they had enough sleep, they rested and slowed down.**
- During that period of standstill that lasted for about two weeks, the **women entrepreneurs blocked their fears related to business and fully focused on caring for family, home, health and organising living in the state of emergency.** Additional housework was not difficult for them during that period. The organisation of purchasing masks and gloves, disinfectants and food was not perceived as too much stress. They recall that **for the first time in several years, they had time to have a family lunch, to help children with their school obligations, to watch movies together, to read.**
- However, after the two-week period during which their business was in the background, they **shifted their attention to the financial status of the family, to business and to the liabilities that began to come due, despite the lack of income.** A small number of interlocutors had **savings and reserves that helped them bridge the crisis.** Where these reserves exist, they are very limited, and their main **purpose was to give the women entrepreneurs a sense of security, to reduce vulnerability to uncertainty and shocks in the market.** In parallel with the spending of savings, the **concern and anxiety of women entrepreneurs are growing.** In addition to savings, the women entrepreneurs relied on **loans from friends and acquaintances.**
- After the first 45 days of the state of emergency, most of the interviewed women entrepreneurs **find themselves in debt.** These debts have accumulated due to **unpaid rents for business premises, salaries and contributions for employees, procurement of materials, and monthly loan repayment instalments in some cases.** Debts that continue to accumulate while business stagnates seriously compromise the **liquidity of interviewed women entrepreneurs,** due to which some of them are thinking about **whether to continue working.** However, most respondents will try to continue investing their efforts, partly because they believe that the **belt-tightening strategy in combination with intensified work will yield results over time,** and partly because they have no choice **since any shift requires capital.**
- **The main resources of women entrepreneurs are their own time and work.** The basic **survival strategy is to invest extra work, and to reduce costs** in order to repay debts as soon as possible. A smaller number of women entrepreneurs **think about changing their business model or changing their business activity.**
- Additional tasks related to hygiene maintenance, disinfection and washing are distributed differently in different households. Most often, **these tasks are done by the women**

**entrepreneurs themselves**, sometimes their **mothers or daughters** help them and **less often their husbands**. **The sons were never mentioned as participants in housework.**

## 15.4. Recommendations - Women Entrepreneurs

- The Government's economic **measures are not designed in a way to accurately target gender-based differences in the situations in which women and men entrepreneurs find themselves**. However, due to the fact that the **measures are partly intended for micro and small enterprises, they include a large number of women's enterprises and women entrepreneurs**, but **they do not sufficiently mitigate the damage that has occurred in their business**.
- **The economic measures targeted at micro and small enterprises are a valid attempt to address the chronic liquidity problem** that further affects women's enterprises and women entrepreneurs that have less capital and often operate in the services sector particularly affected by the pandemic. However, these measures, unfortunately, **will not be sufficient to prevent the collapse of enterprises, agencies and shops owned by women**. Additional targeted measures will be needed to neutralise the negative impact of the shrinking market and accumulated liabilities. The only quick and healthy measure is to write off debts for taxes and contributions, **especially for those activities that were banned, and where it was not possible to shift to work from home** as in some other sectors.
- **In addition to survival, it is important to ensure the growth of women's enterprises, agencies and shops**. There are women's businesses on a sound financial footing, but they still do not have appropriate access to finance and soft growth support programmes. It is important that such programmes and **loans for business development under the conditions that the market can withstand** should be offered as soon as possible. One of the ways in which enterprises in the service sector can grow the fastest is lending for the **purchase of their own business premises, with guarantees that women entrepreneurs can provide**. In this way, vulnerability to market shocks is reduced and business stability is ensured. In addition to financing growth, new skills, knowledge and support for growth are needed. **The expansion to online business and services should certainly be supported for a larger number of women's enterprises and women entrepreneurs**.
- **The women entrepreneurs who want or are forced to change their activity** also need support because their current business activity is dying out. **The re-start programme** should combine support for the development of new business ideas based on a review of trends with motivational support for women entrepreneurs who feel bad because, despite hard work, their business is stagnant or regressing. Second chance programmes for entrepreneurs are generally lacking in our country, and now the demand for such programmes will grow further due to the consequences of the pandemic.

- **Payment of VAT upon collection** would significantly facilitate business for a large number of entrepreneurs who have difficulties with collection and liquidity.
- **Sectoral assistance should be developed in cooperation with associations of entrepreneurs working in the sector, as well as in cooperation with experts in various fields, including gender equality.** It is necessary to develop instruments that could be activated immediately in some new or similar situations in the future, with support packages varying from sector to sector, based on this experience from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The state **missed the chance to organise, during the state of emergency, a campaign for a fair distribution of unpaid housework.** Although health protection measures were, of course, a priority during the state of emergency, it lasted long enough to be used as a time of greater openness of the population to the messages conveyed by public authorities. In a broader sense, the fair distribution of housework also contributes to the health of the population. The period after the state of emergency should certainly be used for active work on **preserving the health of women in entrepreneurship, because they are exposed to great stress, insecurity and a huge amount of work.**
- **Support measures that will really sustainably reduce the informal economy are of great importance.** The informal economy accounts for a large percentage of GDP. **Entrepreneurs in the informal economy are particularly affected, but they are not covered by the measures.** The 100-euro aid will not appropriately respond to this problem. Due to the significant share of the informal economy, it is important that this group of economic operators should not be deprived of the chances of recovery.

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## 17. APPENDICES

### 17.1. Appendix I - Healthcare workers

In all categories of employees, according to the 2016 data, women predominate in the health care sector: medical doctors (approximately 63%), pharmacists (about 97%), associates with secondary education (about 87%), technical staff (approximately 61%).<sup>341</sup>

Information about the **number of infected health workers** presented at press conferences of the Crisis Response Team: 1 April: about *10% of the infected*; 8 April: 260 positive cases out of 2323 tested; 11 April: 441 positive cases including 258 with severe clinical picture; 13 April: about *15% of the infected*; 14 April: 533 positive cases out of 4936 tested; 15 April: 557 positive cases (*11.43% of the infected*), 360 hospitalised, 2 on ventilators; 16 April: 593 positive cases out of 6070 tested, 382 hospitalised, 5 died; 17 April: 616 positive cases out of 6567 tested; 18 April: 640 positive cases; 21 April: 652 positive cases (*9.52% of the infected*), 430 hospitalised; 22 April: 622 positive cases out of 7114 tested (*8.42% of the infected*), 420 hospitalised; 26 April: 545 positive cases (*about 6% of the infected*). The data were not presented at each of the conferences, nor were they communicated using uniform criteria, as can be seen above, which means that these data are only illustrative.

### 17.2. Appendix II - Women over 65 years of age

Women account for 51.3% of the Republic of Serbia's population. They prevail in the category of **middle-aged and old population**. The aging index has increased significantly (women 1.4 and men 1.1), which shows that the population is in a deep aging process. There are more women in single households (60%). Among the elderly households whose holders are older than 65, there are as many as 3/4 of female households. The percentage of women who said they lived in households where they "barely make ends meet" is 1.2% higher than the percentage of men who said the same thing. In the category of widow/widower, there are 3.4% more women than men. In residential care facilities for adults and the elderly, more than 60% of beneficiaries are women. The average old-age pension for women is 23,000 and for men 29,000. The average disability pension for women is 21,000 and for men 25,000. The rate of severe material deprivation is higher among elderly women - 23.6% than among elderly men - 17.4%. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for female pensioners is 16.9%, and 13.3% for male pensioners. Among the informally employed over 65 years of age, more than 80% are women.<sup>342</sup>

Older **rural women** are a particularly vulnerable group in the population of women over 65 years of age. Only 12% of women own houses and only 16% of women own agricultural land. As regards the inheritance of property, more than a third of women (36%) renounce the inheritance that belongs to them by law (as many

<sup>341</sup> Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, *Women and Man in the Republic of Serbia*, 2017, pp. 27-41

<sup>342</sup> Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, *Women and Man in the Republic of Serbia*, Belgrade, 2017

as 55% of daughters leave their share of inheritance to their brothers, 13% of mothers renounce their inheritance in favour of their sons, and only 2% in favour of their daughters). A larger number of women (23.1% of women and 19.2% of men) own the poorest households. Most women from rural areas are informally engaged as workforce in agriculture (63%), and only 14.8% are permanently employed. As many as 34% of rural women have never been employed, 22% of women are not looking for a job at all, and 33% of women were employed for less than five years. Women spend 5 hours a day performing unpaid domestic work. The largest number of women from rural areas (59.9%) have health insurance through their husbands, 17.8% of them do not have health insurance, and only 9.1% of these women are insured as registered farmers. Rural women have primary education and did not complete secondary school due to family pressure (18.5%), family attitudes according to which women do not need a higher level of education (26%), lack of financial resources (18%) or early marriage and taking care of their families (10%)<sup>343</sup>.

Data on the **elderly and other persons placed in social protection institutions of various types**. The total number of social protection institutions founded by the Republic of Serbia and the AP Vojvodina is 74, with the capacity for 14,512 beneficiaries. These include 57 institutions for adults and the elderly (9 residential care homes attached to social welfare centres, 23 gerontology centres, 8 residential care homes for adults and the elderly, 3 residential care institutions for people with disabilities and 14 residential care institutions for people with mental and intellectual disabilities)

and 17 residential care homes for children and youth (10 residential care homes for children and youth without parental care, 3 institutions for education of children and youth and 4 institutions for children and youth with disabilities). The total number of private providers of social protection services for residential care of adults and the elderly in Serbia is 229 with the capacity of 8,617 beneficiaries.<sup>344</sup>

**COVID-19 in social protection institutions** - data presented at press conferences of the Crisis Response Team: 13 April: 256 tested persons, 140 infected beneficiaries and 4 infected employees; 14 March: 208 infected beneficiaries and 30 infected employees; 15 April: 243 infected beneficiaries and 33 infected employees; 16 April: 271 infected beneficiaries and 53 infected employees (15 institutions); 17 April: 312 infected beneficiaries and 72 infected employees; 18 April: 342 infected beneficiaries and 72 infected employees (Gerontology Centre Niš and other 17 institutions); 19 April: 369 beneficiaries and 83 employees<sup>345</sup>; 21 April: 489 infected beneficiaries and 98 infected employees; 22 April: 493 infected beneficiaries and 111 infected employees; 25 April: 531 infected beneficiaries and 131 infected employees (30 institutions), 55 recovered beneficiaries and 10 recovered employees; 26 April: 561 infected beneficiaries and 149 infected employees; 27 April: 540 infected beneficiaries and 149 infected employees (30 institutions), 75 recovered beneficiaries and 24 recovered employees; 28 April<sup>346</sup>; 29 April: 570 infected beneficiaries and 100 infected employees.

343 Source: Beker K. Izveštaj o položaju žena na selu u Srbiji, Beograd, 2017.

344 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/srbija/3180418-444-korisnika-i-98-zaposlenih-pozitivno-u-ustanovama-socijalne-zastite-i-domovima-ovo-je-spisak> (accessed on 28 April 2020)

345 Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/ministarstvo-prisustvo-korona-virusa-potvrdeno-u-18-ustanova-socijalne-zastite-i/6s9rzdj> (accessed on 28 April 2020)

346 Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs states that the presence of COVID-19 virus was confirmed in the Centres for Gerontology in Niš, Kruševac, Knjaževac, Mataruška Banja, as well as in the Gerontology Centre "Jelenac" in Aleksinac, and the Organisational Unit in Tešica. COVID-19 was confirmed in the Social Welfare Centre in the City of Belgrade, Novi Beograd Department; Residential Care Home for the Elderly in Smederevo; the Residential Care Unit for Adults and the Elderly in Novi Pazar; Residential Care Home for Children and Youth "Duško Radović" in Niš; Institution for Children and Youth "Sremčica" in Belgrade; Shelter for Children in Belgrade; and Shelter for Adults and the Elderly in Belgrade. Coronavirus was confirmed also in the Centre for Family Accommodation and Adaptation in Niš; Centre for Protection of Infants, Children and Youth in Belgrade; Residential Care Home for Persons with Developmental Disabilities Blace-Trbunje; Residential Care Home for Adults with Disabilities in Belgrade; Residential Care Home for Adults with Disabilities in Doljevac; and Residential Care Home for Persons with Mental Disabilities OTTHON, Stara Moravica. The presence of COVID-19 virus was confirmed in the Residential Care Facility for Adults and the Elderly in Kulina, as well as in the Residential Care Homes for Adults and the Elderly "Stara pruga" in Umca, "Radost" in Negotin, "MeliorVita" in Zemun, "Doživeti stotu" in Zemun, "Elite Home Star" in Progar, "Eskulap centar" in Niš, "Nana" in Belgrade, "Nada" in Belgrade, "Sveti Trifun" in Železnik and "Sunčev breg" in Belgrade; 29 April: 570 infected beneficiaries and 100 employees.