

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF MIDDLE-AGED WOMEN IN SERBIA AS RELEVANT GENDER EQUALITY ISSUE

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ABSTRACT: Economic characteristics of the female population are important dimensions of contemporary gender regime. Thus, this paper focuses on disadvantageous characteristics of economic activity pointing to the range and the intensity of economic dependence of women as one of the obstacles to the improvement of their social position and reducing of gender gap. Statistical data show economic inactivity and unemployment of middle-aged women in Serbia. Also, regarding the employed women the economic disadvantages could be discussed. The indicator of this is a gender difference in earnings as a result of a smaller number of women having well-paying jobs. In the base of gender economic differences are characteristics of gender roles, and for this reason a specific “women’s work” is seen as an important segment in the improvement of the economic position of women and reducing of gender-based economic gap.

KEYWORDS: women, gender economic inequality, employment, “women’s work”

One of the central issues of gender regimes in post-industrial societies is the economic activity of female population in comparison with male population. Overcoming gender differences as well as economic independence are very important on path towards achieving gender equality [Commission of the European Communities, 2006], as well as in the Strategy for equality between women and men by 2015 [EU, 2011].

IMPLICATIONS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Gender economic inequalities are on the agenda of policies of developed European countries, even of those that have achieved the highest standards of gender equality. They are the indicator of unequal economic positions and unequal access to sources of livelihood, but also a reflection of gender inequality, based on the asymmetric division of gender roles in the private sphere.

The modern model of gender economic inequalities implies differences in labor market participation, distribution of economic resources and labor division in the private sphere [Babović 2010]. Gender inequality within households produces unequal opportunities for men and women to be economically active and to be engaged outside the family environment. The link between economic characteristics and positions within a family imposes itself as relevant. In this sense, the issues of employment patterns of men and women crystallize with regard to their family arrangements, division of labor within the household, division of responsibilities in raising children, as well as decisions regarding money issues within the household [Ibid: 199]. Hence, it can be said that the gender regime within a family is an important determinant of economic activity, employment and wages, as elements of economic and social status of an individual.

In the countries of the European Union (EU27), almost one quarter of female population aged 25–54 in 2006 was not economically active, which was three times higher share in comparison with male population [Eurostat, 2007]. In about 10% of cases the absence from the labor market was caused by different types of obligations related to the family, although the states differed with respect to its distribution. It was the least frequent among women in the UK, Sweden and Denmark (about 2%), and the most frequent among economically inactive women in Malta (46%).

The possibility of reconciliation between family responsibilities and employment is considered to be one of the factors associated with female employment in the European Union countries. In Denmark, Norway and Sweden, countries where in 2009 nearly 75% of female population aged 20–64 were employed, there is a high share of female part-time employment [European Commission, 2011]. Statistics show that in 2012 in Norway, Sweden and Denmark there were nearly 80% of women aged 25–49 years who had children under three years of age and were employed [UNECE, 2014]. A high employment rate for this group of women was also recorded in Portugal (over 70%), a south European country with the highest economic activity rates of women of working age (about 55%), but also in Belgium. This country had low economic activity (less than 50%), but women with young children accounted for a relatively high employment rate (nearly 70%).

On the other hand, this statistics suggest that family obligations may restrict economic activity of women. Representation of women with young children in the labor market is lower by about 11 percentage points, compared to women without children [European Commission, 2011]. Contrary to this, male population has a higher employment rate of fathers (by more than 8 percentage points) compared to men without children.

Hence the attempts to restrict the negative influence of parenting on the employment of women are limited to reconciliation of these two segments of life using a series of measures. The policy of the European Union considers high quality, availability and affordability of child care services as being vitally important, as well as a favorable framework for employment of women and choice of work [Ibid: 6]. However, despite this, the care of the elderly appears

an increasingly important limiting factor in economic activity of women of working age. In the EU27, with around 30% of economically inactive women, both factors related to family responsibilities were present [Ibid: 7].

More flexible working hours and a variety of employment options carry certain limitations in terms of the social status of women. In Italy, a country characterized by less developed and less accessible public childcare, part-time jobs have proved to be a good solution in terms of greater employment of women [Del Boca, Pasqua and Pronzato 2005]. However, from the standpoint of employment opportunities for women and harmonization of work and parenting, this advantage has negative implications concerning their economic and broader social status. Comparing the effects of the policies which regard family responsibilities as part of women's everyday life and others which do not, it was observed that in the latter case there is a greater step forward in overcoming the gender earnings gap [Mandel and Semyonov 2005]. Family policies have a limited impact on professional achievements of women and possibility of higher earnings, given the negative effects in terms of representation of women in leadership positions and highly paid jobs. A radical change in gender roles within a family seem to be the only possible solution for overcoming gender inequalities manifested through participation in the labor market, occupational segregation and earnings inequality [Ibid: 965]. This would minimize the price of women's engagement on both sides, and at the same time reduce the time of possible work engagement outside the household.

Although the European Union countries have established the principle that work of equal value should be paid equally both to men and women, gender earnings inequality is evident [EU, 2011]. Average earnings of women are by 17.8% lower than earnings of men. The intensity of the gender gap in wages and the high employment rate of women is what draws attention.

The least prominent inequality in earnings was recorded in Italy, a country with one of the lowest employment rates of women aged 20–64 (less than 50%). The average gross wage per hour is almost 5% lower than the earnings of men. In six countries the gender gap in earnings was between 8% and 10%, being the states with low and medium rates of female employment, as seen in the European context. In 2009, Malta was just close to 40% of women aged 20–64 who were employed, in Romania and Poland this percent was between 56 and 58, in Belgium it was a little more than 60%, and in Portugal it was two-thirds [EU, 2011: 17].

The greatest gender earnings gap was recorded in the Czech Republic. The average salaries of women were 26.2% lower compared to employed men, and female employment rate was 61.4%. A high gap in payments was recorded in Austria and Germany. These are the countries with high employment rate of women (nearly 70% of the female population aged 20–64), but their average gross earnings were one quarter lower than male earnings. By contrast, in Denmark and Sweden, the countries with the highest rates of female employment, the gender pay gap was the lowest. On average, women earned 17.3% less than men.

So, even working women are not without adverse economic characteristics. On aggregate level it is evident that they have lower average gross earnings than men. The reasons for the gender earnings gap can be found in several segments, and in the core of each are gender specificities. It is caused by a segregated labor market in which health, education and administration are typically “female” sectors, and these typically “female” occupations are generally less valued and which results in lower average wages compared to men [EU, 2011: 16]. In addition, gender earnings inequality is a consequence of unequal involvement in the private sphere and the problem of harmonization of family and professional obligations.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF MIDDLE-AGED FEMALE POPULATION OF SERBIA

On the one hand, the process of emancipation during the second half of the 20th century shaped the economic characteristics of female population of Serbia, but on the other hand they are result of barriers and limiting factors related to socio-economic conditions, and also of those that more directly determine the position and role of women [Šobot, 2012]. The influence of the latter is relevant from the perspective of women’s behavior in terms of participation in the labor market and employment opportunities, but also from the perspective of employees and the possibility of performing types of work for which they have necessary knowledge and expertise, as well as the ones yielding greater profit.

Acquisition of secondary and higher education resulted in a change of the socio-professional structure of economically active women. It is manifested in abandonment of agricultural activities and employment in industry sectors and services. A common characteristic of all generations of women born during the second half of the 20th century is their appearance in the labor market, which reflects their clear intention to be employed outside their homes. However, unfavorable economic characteristics are continuously more present among women than among men.

According to the 2011 Census, gender differences regarding economic activity of working-age population is still visible. Economic activity rate of female population aged 20–64 was by one fifth lower than in the male population (54.4% vs. 73.1%). Economic inactivity is rather a characteristic of female population. There are twice as many women (1,035,332) than men (602,937) who were not economically active.

Except in quantity, men and women also differ in the structure of persons who were not economically active. Among economically inactive women aged 20–64 the most numerous are “housewives” (430,214 women) making 41.6%. They are present in all age groups, whereas there is difference in their prevalence (Table 1).

Table 1. *Housewives, by age, and their share in economically inactive women, Serbia 2011*

	Housewives	
	number	in %
20–24	22879	16,8
25–29	38486	48,1
30–34	44242	70,9
35–39	46128	77,6
40–44	47614	77,8
45–49	52679	73,6
50–54	50024	59,8
50–59	12562	56,4
55–59	75046	37,1
60–64	40554	15,8

Source: Population Census, Serbia 2011

Economic inactivity of females aged 20–29 is mostly the consequence of continued education. The decision to enroll in a faculty usually implies the delay of entering the labor market, and this is the only reason why these young women belong to the group of economically inactive persons. Hence the lower shares of “housewives” in these age groups than among women aged 30–59. However, among economically inactive women under 30 years of age there were those who did not attend tertiary education. In addition, the number of “housewives” in the female population aged 30–54 also draws attention.

Economic inactivity is relevant from the perspective of the status of women within the family, from the perspective of opportunities for them to be economically independent, as well as the possibilities to be active in other areas outside their family environment. However, any closer determination is not possible without knowing the reasons for their economic inactivity, as well as the socio-economic status of their families. The fact that they do not participate in the labor market questions their intention to be employed. Given that the majority of these women acquired secondary or tertiary education, it seems reasonable to ask for the reasons of their economic inactivity, despite their constituting a smaller portion of the female population.

During the 1990s, as a consequence of the deep economic crisis, “escape to privacy” became a key feature of the social position of women [Blagojević 1995]. In the time marked by massive job losses and increased unemployment, they focused on day-to-day survival and existence of their families. It was their most important task in conditions of general impoverishment of the population. However, the question is whether non-participation in the labor market in different socio-economic circumstances may explain the “feminine strategy.” Even if it may, the reasons are vague. It is also interesting to what extent gender specificities caused such decision of women.

Results of the Labour Force Survey indicate that economic inactivity, among other things, may be caused by the factors related to the family. In 2013, the need to take care of a family member or other family reasons were present in 18% of economically active women aged 15 years or over [Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2014]. Gender specificity is visible through a significantly greater number of women than men, and through the difference in age structure. LFS from 2010 shows that more than 60% of these women were aged between 25 and 44, and about 60% of men between 55 and 64. More than half of the women said that unavailability of child care services was the reason for their not searching for employment, while men were mostly faced with lack of access to adult care services.

Nevertheless, middle-aged women in Serbia are mostly economically active, which is clearly evidenced in younger generations born after World War II. According to the 2011 census data, the rate of economic activity of females aged 30–49 was between 76% and 70%. However, these were lower percentages than in the male population in which the share of economically active population was between 87% and 85%.

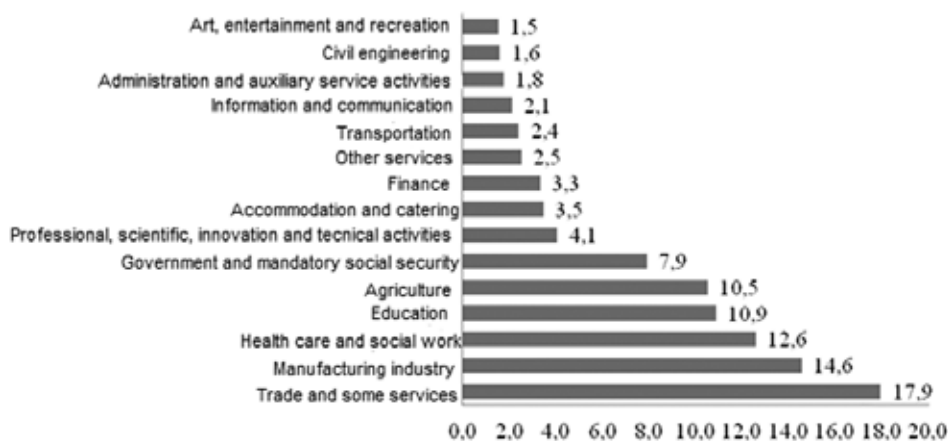
Economically active women are also faced with certain disadvantages. Due to difficulties in finding a job that often results in a long-term and very long-term unemployment, women belong to vulnerable groups in the labor market [Krstić *et al.* 2010]. According to the LFS in 2013 a quarter of females aged 15–64 were unemployed. About 45% of unemployed women were aged between 25 and 40, and one fifth had a tertiary education. The specificity of female unemployment, compared to men's, is somewhat higher percentage of people belonging to 30–49 age group as well as a higher share of persons with tertiary education. In addition to this, women were looking for their first employment slightly more often than men. Unlike men, among women who were employed, the need to care for family members (child or adult) was the most common reason for termination of employment.

Statistics indicate differentiated employment structure of women, given the number of children [SORS, 2011]. According to the 2010 LFS results, women aged 25–49 with one child had the highest employment rate (60%), while women without children were more often employed (58%) compared to those with three children (55%). By contrast, men with children had a higher rate of employment than those without children, whereas this difference was not negligible. Less than two-thirds of men without children were employed, while the employment rates of those with children ranged between 79% and 82%. The greatest difference between men and women was related to the employment of those having three or more children.

It seems that for women parenting and the number of children have limiting effect on their employment, while for men this is not the case. Higher employment rates for men with children compared to those who have not become parents can be explained by distribution of models in which a man has a greater responsibility in terms of providing a standard of living. Hence they most usually decide to become parents when they have a job.

Considering the characteristics of the employed female population there is an obvious orientation towards certain sectors and occupations, which became regularity during the second half of the 20th century. According to the 2011 Census data, women made up more than three-quarters of employees in health and social care, somewhat more than 70% in education, and nearly two-thirds in the financial sector. However, these are not the activities in which they were most usually employed (Graph 1).

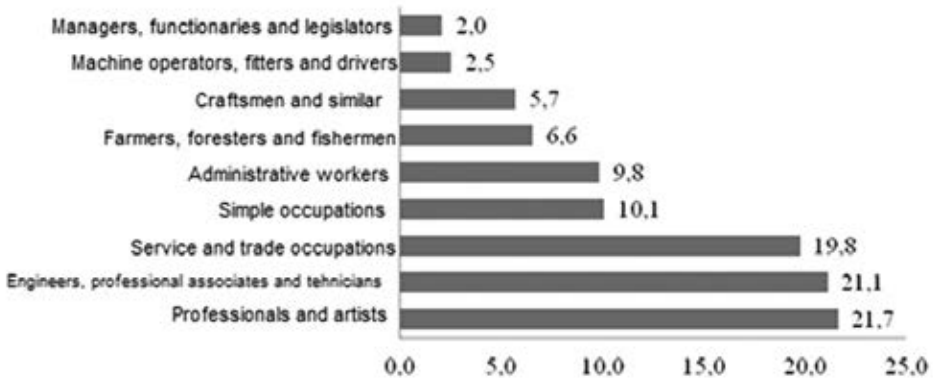
Women in Serbia were mostly employed in trade and industry, followed by healthcare and social work. The share of employees in agriculture and education was equal. They are almost two times more employed in civil service than in science or innovation and technological activities.



Graph 1. *Employed women by sectors (in %), Serbia, 2011*

Gender profiling of occupations was characterized by orientation towards certain vocational schools and groups of faculties, a model that has marked the education of all generations of women born during the second half of the 20th century. According to the 2002 Census data, employed women were most often employed as associate professionals and technicians. They were more often employed as professionals, service and sales workers than clerks. Women were employed in these professions more often than men, and the difference was most pronounced in terms of professionals, technicians and administrative staff.

Results of the 2011 Census show some movements, but without significant changes. The three most common occupational groups are more evenly represented, but a distinctive characteristic of the employed women is not disturbed (Graph 2). The acquisition of tertiary education resulted in expansion of the number of professionals and other occupations with this level of qualification.



Graph 2. Employed women aged 25–64 by occupation (in %), Serbia, 2011

However, working women were still rarely seen as managers or decision makers. They were ten times less represented than women of the three most common occupational groups, and five times less than women who were clerks and those who performed some simple jobs. Representation of managers and officials among employed men was only slightly higher (2.8%), but the gender gap becomes more apparent regarding the fact that the number of employed women with these occupations was almost 40% less than the number man (18,306 to 29,991).

Economically more unfavorable position of women, compared to men, is also visible in the gender pay gap. During the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, the average earnings of women in Serbia were lower in most sectors, including those characterized by the most intense feminization [SORS, 2008; SORS, 2011]. Statistics show that in 2007 women employed in health and social work, on average, earned 87% of the average earnings of men, while in education this percentage was 92%, and in the financial sector it was 83%.

Average earnings of women were lower than the overall average earnings, and in 2010 this difference was slightly expanded. The only two activities with slightly higher average salaries of the female population in 2007 were civil engineering and real estate business. However, the gender difference changed in 2010. Earnings in civil engineering were uniform, while men had higher earnings in the real estate business. Average earnings of women employed in administration, in services, as well as professional, scientific and innovative sectors were slightly higher than the overall average earnings.

Women of all educational levels had lower average earnings than men, and the difference was more pronounced among employees with high levels of education. Average earnings of women with faculty degrees amounted to 83% of average earnings of men, and in persons with secondary education this percentage was 88%.

In Serbia there were no prominent gender differences in the length of working hours [SORS, 2011]. According to the Labour Force Survey in 2010

the overwhelming majority of employees of both genders worked for more than 40 hours during a normal work week. Still, working women had this number of working hours in slightly fewer cases than men (87% women and 90% men).

Women worked shorter than full working hours more often than men due to family reasons of various kinds. Nearly 5% of women had a shorter working time because of child care or adult family member care, and a little less than a quarter of them due to some other family or personal reasons which were not related to education or disease [SORS, 2014 – ARS, 2013].

There is no difference between men and women in the predominant form of employment, but there is a difference in the representation of self-employment. According to the LFS, the number of self-employed women in 2010 was more than two and a half times less than the number of men (161,182 to 422,094). Encouraging women to use this modality of employment could have a positive impact not only on reducing unemployment, but on strengthening their economic position. Beside the factors related to socio-economic conditions, the development of entrepreneurship among women also implies a break with gender stereotypes and prejudice in all segments of life.

Women in Serbia have maintained the continuity of relatively high rates of economic activity and the model in which employment is a “normal standard”, which resulted in the acceptance of the concept of employment of both men and women [Blagojević-Hjusun 2013]. In such an established cultural pattern, unemployment is seen as a social problem defined by systemic barriers. In addition, difficulties in finding employment and low earnings aggravate a more radical change of the model in which a man is responsible for the living standard of the family which puts a lot of pressure on him.

Unfavorable economic characteristics of female population of Serbia are caused by both structural barriers and gender specificities. Economic conditions certainly cause difficulties in creating environment for improvement of economic position of female population. However, what is significant in this regard is the awareness of gender equality as of equal conditions for both men and women to be committed to their profession and professional advancement. The conditions for this are equal commitment and equal share of responsibilities within a family as well as institutional support to the establishment of substantive equality.

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Certain unfavorable features of the economic activity of the female population of Serbia are more pronounced than in male population, and it is not a characteristic only of Serbian society. Economic gender differences are consequence of asymmetric division of roles, which implies inequality within the private sphere and unequal opportunities for expressing oneself in other areas. Employment and profession are some of them.

From the perspective of an individual, it is important to create conditions that provide opportunities for both men and women to realize their potentials and achieve their ambitions. In addition, we can talk about the benefits from the position of the family and the society as a whole. Employment of women

and higher earnings are important contributions to standard of living, expanding the opportunities for better living conditions. From the perspective of the society, economic gender equalities mean achievement of goals and fundamental principles of equality and fairness, and utilization of female labor resources, knowledge, expertise and professionalism, which is indeed a relevant framework for development.

Indicators of economic gender inequalities are present both in Serbia and in the European Union. Women have a lower rate of economic activity and higher unemployment rate in comparison with men. They are mainly employed in health care, education, trade and services. Also, they are under-represented in managerial positions and jobs that imply higher earnings. The need to take care of children or an adult member of the family is not a common reason for economic inactivity or unemployment of women, but it is an obstacle that women face more often than men. Family responsibilities affect women workers, slowing or limiting their professional career, career advancement and the possibility to perform better-paid jobs.

Improved economic characteristics of women, as the challenge to gender regimes of both “center” and “semi-periphery”, mean greater social security and more favorable economic position, not only of women, but also of their families. Ultimately, better economic characteristics mean better social status of women. However, this is not possible without creating the conditions for an untroubled dedication to work and professional accomplishments, which implies greater equality in terms of family responsibilities.

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ОРИГИНАЛНИ НАУЧНИ РАД

ЕКОНОМСКА АКТИВНОСТ СРЕДОВЕЧНИХ ЖЕНА У СРБИЈИ КАО РЕЛЕВАНТНО ПИТАЊЕ РОДНЕ ЈЕДНАКОСТИ

АНКИЦА ШОБОТ

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РЕЗИМЕ: Економска активност женског становништва Србије одликује се одређеним неповољним карактеристикама, које су израженије него у мушкој популацији. Ово није само особеност српског друштва, већ је одлика родних режима који се темеље на асиметричној подели улога, која имплицира неравноправност унутар приватне сфере и неједнаке шансе за реализацију у осталим областима, међу којима су запосленост и професија. То су важни сегменти са становишта појединца и могућности реализације сопствених потенцијала, афинитета, аспирација и амбиција, али и са становништа породице и друштва у целини. Запосленост жене и веће зараде представљају важну потпору животном стандарду породице и проширују

могућности за квалитетније услове живота. Из угла друштва, поред тога што родне економске једнакости значе оствареност циљева и темељних принципа једнакости и праведности, искоришћеност женских радних потенцијала, знања, стручности и професионализма треба посматрати као релевантан оквир развоја.

Нижа стопа економске активности, већа незапосленост, претежна запосленост жена у здравству, образовању, трговини и услугама, мања заступљеност на менаџерским позицијама и у пословима који имплицирају веће зараде су питања са којима се суочавају и развијене европске државе. Потреба да се брине о деци или неком одраслом члану породице нису чест разлог економске неактивности или незапослености, али јесу препрека са којом се чешће суочавају жене него мушкарци. Породичне обавезе посматране у још ширем смислу утичу на могућност запосленог женског становништва да постигне радну ефикасност, да реализује своју професију и да напредује у послу.

Побољшање економских карактеристика женске популације, као изазов родних режима и „центра” и „полупериферије”, значи бољу позицију и већу социјалну сигурност. Међутим, оно је тешко оствариво без уважавања специфичности женских позиција и без стварања услова за неометану укљученост и посвећеност послу и професионалним постигнућима.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: жене, родне економске неједнакости, запосленост, „женски послови”