



## WOMEN IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP - A CONDITION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

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**Summary:** This paper analyzes the systemic security risks that occur in the times of crisis as a disruptive factor for the willingness to change, to adapt through the prism of new visions. A socially safer, more sensitive and more just world is a possible future after the pandemic crisis only if our current vision of the future inevitably contains an embedded gender aspect of transformation. The world we strive for should contain a different picture of gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights that affect men, women, girls and boys in a particular economic situation or social context. The inclusion of women in entrepreneurship is one of the necessary conditions for a better economy coloured by everyday pragmatism, perseverance, struggle and empathy. This is not just the right attitude, it is a smart orientation, as shown by case studies of functioning of the women entrepreneurs from Čačak during the emergency measures.

**Key words:** Security risks, gender aspect, gender analysis, women entrepreneurs.

### 1. INTRODUCTION - THE CONTEXT OF UNCERTAINTY AND HOPE

The changed picture of the world order in recent years, mainly characterized by the crisis, has exposed all discourses and opened many questions about the understanding of security, both in a broader and narrower sense. Today, due to the crisis caused by the virus about which we know very little, the readiness to change, adapt and adopt new concepts, to conquer new strategies, after the formation of new visions, is questionable. It is only well-known that austerity, as we learned in 2008, can be counterproductive and can create more hardship, social marginalization and poverty. That is why fundamental questions of humanism, cooperation, solidarity and the survival of humanity are being asked. All security concepts and systems, threats, risks and challenges that we have had so far are reviewed. How else in the context of the pandemic crisis and pandemic measures to stimulate the economy and finance recovery, how to rehabilitate the public health

sector, how to fight unemployment and poverty, how to use this unfortunate situation to make our country and system socially safer, more sensitive and fairer? Will democracy be in jeopardy and globalization be demonized as the main culprit for the spread of COVID-19?

Maybe that is why this time of crisis is a suitable moment, above all, for the progressive, left, social-democratic forces, to return, to be reactivated, where they stopped, in the protection of just socio-political systems, social justice and solidarity. They should take the lead in launching ambitious and bold recovery plans and thus rehabilitate strategic commitments, for a post-pandemic economic order, at all levels<sup>1</sup>. It can be e.g. shape a fair feminist economy through progressive taxation, gender budgeting, corporate responsibility, progressive public services, social protection, a fair balance between work and private life, the recognition and distribution of unpaid care work<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. GENDER ASPECTS OF PANDEMIC SECURITY RISKS

Globalization creates systemic risks that are intensified in times of crisis such as a pandemic. The general increase in risks that affects women more than men, are a special pandemic hunger, violation of human rights disproportionate to the needs for protection against infection, the position of the elderly and their chances of survival, an increase in violence against women, a noticeable daily increase in workload for women and higher engagement of women in the riskiest jobs. But never before, as the case is now, has the fact that every life does not have the same value been expressed with calm shamelessness, warns the French writer Michel Houellebecq.<sup>3</sup>

The burden of the corona epidemic virus and the measures taken in the state of emergency have been carried out to a much greater extent by women than men. They make up the majority in the sectors that were "at the forefront": health, trade, hygiene, but at the same time, in most cases, they carried a greater burden of housework, unpaid work, one in which they have been present for decades, more than men, and now with additional responsibilities for caring for family members, especially the elderly, children and their school obligations. In 70% of the cases, these jobs are performed by women.<sup>4</sup> Since the lockout of Coronavirus began, the police, women's shelters and NGOs have reported an increase in domestic violence, especially violence against women. The pandemic revealed how serious this human rights violation is and how still this fragmentary, but illustrative fact is that only in

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<sup>1</sup> Juratović J., 2020, 12. May, *EU at a crossroads*, International institute for Middle East and Balkan Studies IFEMES.

<sup>2</sup> About PES Women, <https://www.pes.eu/en/pes-women/>.

<sup>3</sup> Uelbek M., 2020, 7. May, Everything will be the same, just a little worse. *Politics*. Transmitted from French radio *Frans enter*.

<sup>4</sup> Stevanović M. N., 2020, 15. May, The burden of the epidemic was borne by women, *Today*.

the first week of the pandemic measures in Serbia, 31% of women who experienced violence lost their jobs, in the second week 55%, and in the fourth week, 92% were left without any income, according to the research by the "Athens" NGO<sup>5</sup>.

We find a gender analysis of pandemic risks in the Feminist Manifesto,<sup>6</sup> which points out that those women are among the most vulnerable groups - especially those in low-paid professions. Women with young children or other domestic and caring responsibilities experience social insecurity, have lower-incomes, are more likely to be employed in part-time, low-paid precarious work, and are the first to be threatened with a loss of income. Women are also more likely to work in health, social work and other services that are now considered "necessary", making them more exposed and vulnerable to infections.

The Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues, in its publication on gender analysis of the pandemic, also points out that gender-disaggregated data on how COVID-19 affects women are lacking at the outset. Most of the evidence is anecdotal and extends from medical/biological explanations of male social roles and exposures such as more intense travel or more male sports. However, women are, without doubts, predominant in the health sector and the care economy (up to 70%), as well as in the informal economy, tourism, service industries such as catering, shops, and pharmaceutical industry<sup>7</sup>.

### 3. WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SERBIA

Women entrepreneurs and owners of micro-enterprises in Serbia, as in other parts of the region, face a great threat from the cessation of money circulation, while the demand for goods and services decreases to disappearance, due to mandatory and/or recommended measures of social distancing. There has been a sharp decline in demand for products and services, especially from women-dominated sectors such as catering, services, trade, factory work and tourism, which are heavily dependent on social interaction<sup>8</sup>.

UN Women, in partnership with NALED, have conducted gender analyses,<sup>9</sup> in seven different areas of business in Serbia within the project "Key Steps to

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<sup>5</sup> Hrnjak J. from NGO "Atina" - Women's social entrepreneurship is the right recipe for overcoming the consequences of this, but also all other crises.

<sup>6</sup> They were written by members of the European feminist working groups Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, who live and work throughout Europe: in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Great Britain and Ukraine.

<sup>7</sup> CEE Gender Network, Newsletter, 2020, 2st Quarter, Applying Gender Lens.

<sup>8</sup> UN Women, 2020, Putting Women at the Forefront of COVID-19 Response in Europe and Central Asia.

<sup>9</sup> Gender analysis is a critical re-examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities, and rights affect men, women, girls, and boys in a particular situation or context. Gender analysis examines the relationships between women and men and their access to resources as well as the control and constraints they face with

Gender Equality"<sup>10</sup>. Here we use excerpts from the three of such recent analyses: Gender Analysis of Small and Medium Enterprise Support Programs at the Local Level, Gender Analysis of Entrepreneurship Support Programs, and Gender Analysis of the Innovation Fund Program.

### **3.1 Gender analysis of entrepreneurship support programs - unintentional indirect discrimination<sup>11</sup>**

A gender analysis of the entrepreneurship support program reveals that part of the companies owned by women that are the beneficiaries of business subsidies, in terms of the number of grant beneficiaries and the amount of funds received, are far below the level of their total participation in the economy. This means that the analyzed programs, taken together, further reduce the share of women in the economy. The key driver of this "unintentional/indirect discrimination" is the focus of the subsidy program on production, processing and export activities - sectors in which women's participation is traditionally below average. Gender impact on application evaluation criteria needs to be considered. It is specially necessary to make as much information about the implementation of the program as possible available to the public. This can result in an increased number of high-quality applications, as well as an increased participation of female candidates. It is also necessary to consider the benefits of continuity in the implementation of the programs, before a decision is made to introduce new programs and terminate the existing ones.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.2 Gender analysis of small and medium enterprise support programs at the local level<sup>13</sup>**

Gender differences in the economy are recognized and addressed to some extent in the local government programs, often in self-employment, agriculture, tourism, and partly in support programs for the existing firms. The emphasis is placed on the need to use gender-responsive budgeting as a means of addressing women's economic inequalities in the local self-government budget programs. Local self-governments recognize the need to support socially excluded self-employment groups, including Roma, rural women, young people who are not employed and people with disabilities. These calls are usually planned as part of

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each other. The main goal of gender analysis is to ensure that injustices and gender-based inequalities are not exacerbated by interventions, and that, where possible, greater equality and fairness in gender relations are promoted.

<sup>10</sup> UN Women, 2020, Voices of Women's Organizations on COVID-19: April 2020 Sub-regional Consultations.

<sup>11</sup> UN Women-Naled, 2020, Key Steps to Gender Equality, Gender Analysis of Entrepreneurship Support Programs.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> UN Women - Naled, 2020, Key steps towards gender equality, Gender analysis of support programs for small and medium enterprises at the local level.

local employment action plans, which are done in cooperation with the National Employment Service and are co-financed by the Government of Serbia. Although these self-employment programs are sometimes specifically targeted at vulnerable groups, application requirements, evaluation criteria and contracting procedures are such that they can result in the exclusion of an entire group of women, thus creating an additional barrier in the evaluation and contracting process.

An important aspect for local governments is the recognition of women's contribution to the local economy, by providing support to women entrepreneurs and local business owners, establishing links with women's organizations and supporting programs that offer technical assistance/business services to women entrepreneurs. Access to gender-sensitive data needs to be improved to monitor access to local-level resources offered through public calls. Also, an increased understanding and knowledge about gender gaps in the economy are needed, as well as the tools for introducing a gender perspective into the mainstream, among local government employees.

### **3.3 Gender analysis of the Innovation Fund program<sup>14</sup>**

The approach is built on universality and neglects the real effect of the program on women and men, and as a result, mini and co-financing grants<sup>15</sup> are gender blind. At the same time, the participation of women-owned companies is worryingly low in both programs and literally does not exist in the co-financing grants program. These programs disqualify smallholdings, on the grounds that applicants must be legal entities. In practice, this represents the disqualification of one part of the micro-business with above-average participation of women as their owners. The Fund should prioritize the engagement, encouragement and support of women-owned firms. Approaches to programs should be harmonized, relying on the legal authority to introduce special measures, which will benefit the under-represented sex.

## **4. CASE STUDIES**

The case study relies on the applied comparative longitudinal case analysis of a pilot sample of successful women entrepreneurs from Čačak, a city that is considered a favourable business environment for private entrepreneurship. The first data were obtained in the focus group, which was held in Čačak on February 18, 2018. The second analysis of the same sample was done in April and May 2020, during and after the end of the declared state of emergency.

The pilot sample consists of Slavica Ilić (Unique Embroidery Art Workshop), Jelena Arsenijević (Independent service shop UNIELEKTRO, specialized service shop for electric motor repairs and maintenance of electrical

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<sup>14</sup> UN Women - Naled, 2020, Key steps towards gender equality, Gender analysis of the Innovation Fund program.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

devices), Dušica Živković (Trade shop ELLE 2019), Mirjana Marković (OAZA bookstore-gallery- paper mill), Zorica Selaković (Cake and cake making workshop DESSERT), Vesna Milošević (Preschool GIMNAZION), Jelena Borišić (Transport company KING TRANS) and Mila Borišić (Hairdressing parlour MILA).

Some of them didn't stop the work, nor reduced the activities, e.g. Jelena and Zaga (service) and Jelena (transport). But Zorica (cakes), Vesna (kindergarten) Slavica (embroidery), Mila (hairdresser), Mirjana (bookstore) had a big reduction in the volume of work and even a total temporary standstill. None of them planned to stop business activities, and despite the difficulties during the state of emergency, work stoppage or reduced workload, they did not fire their workers. They positively assessed the measures taken by the Government, in particular, securing the minimum wage, postponing the loan and allocating 100 euros. Those who did not work, made an inventory, generally tidied up the rooms and warehouses (Mirjana bookstore), arranged and disinfected the premises, furniture, toys, devices in the yard, yards (Vesna kindergarten).

As the main challenges, during the state of emergency, reduced workload, complete cessation of activities for about a month, from March 23 to May 4 and fear of illness (because everyone has families to return to, respect for measures by customers) are identified by Slavica (embroidery); Jelena Arsenijević and mother Zaga (service for maintenance of electrical devices) only had an increased scope of work, and apart from the application of security measures, such as the curfew, there were no changes in business except the increased quantity of work; Dušica (a shop in the centre of the city), took over the job from the retired owner, and the job was difficult, because now she had to do all the work herself; Mirjana (bookstore) the volume of work was reduced, which was the biggest problem because educational institutions were closed, and the turnover was reduced by 60%. The owner is also in the 65+ category, so the daughter and her husband took over the job. They closed the second store because it was not economical. All measures, such as: curfew, distance and number of customers in the bookstore were respected. Apart from that, there were no other problems; Zorica (cakes)<sup>16</sup> had a lack of work, because her activity is related to celebrations, and gathering is forbidden. The work was not interrupted completely, but it was a "death from work". Until gathering is allowed and students return, there is a problem; Vesna (kindergarten)'s main problem is the complete interruption of work from the declaration of the state of emergency on March 16 to May 13, two weeks when all the workers were on vacation. Jelena's (transport of goods) main problem was the new protection measures and procedures at the borders; Mila's (hair salon) problem was that it was forbidden to work in salons, and there was work to be done. The work was interrupted from April 16 to May 13, and then it was done occasionally and by making appointments.

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<sup>16</sup> Pašajlić S., 2020, March 20, When there are no weddings and festivities, Zorica prepares cakes for volunteers, *RTS Vesti*.

Expectations after the end of the state of emergency, ways to return to normal? Slavica (embroidery) says that everything is slowly returning to normal, although without many customers, but she used the interruption for new models that she will apply, she purchased goods, planned further steps; Jelena and mother Zaga (service) said that everything was the same for them. They continue to serve both people and the state, as they said; Dušica (trade shop) says that everything is slowly returning to normal and that she is already thinking about moving; Mirjana (bookstore) is back in business, but the expectations still cannot be met until schools and colleges open, where the main clientele comes from; Zorica (cakes) says that she will return to normal 100% only when gatherings are possible again. Now she works in a pastry shop, preparing cakes and pastries for shops, but that is still not the case. According to her assessment, the recovery will follow by the end of the year. She did not fire any employees. They used vacations, unpaid leave, sick leave, etc.; Vesna (kindergarten) says that work has begun, but that it is still not in the capacity as before these events; Jelena (transport) is grateful that she has had a job all the time, and that, of course, precautionary measures are applied; Mila (hair salon) ties her return to normal to the construction of a building in which she will have a new salon, and „regular customers“ do not allow her to stop working.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurs are aware that it will be difficult after the crisis, probably harder than before, because the ways of overcoming the consequences are unknown to everyone. They are all afraid of that uncertainty. But, on the other hand, people in Serbia have always been living "from the beginning", and also, this will probably be one such story of new beginnings. As stated in the research on the work of women entrepreneurs, perhaps the cooperation of women and their mutual support is a winning combination. In addition, entrepreneurship has the ability to transform in accordance with the needs of jobs and services dictated by the market, because less capital is at stake, and thus fewer risks and losses, fewer employees (usually relatives and friends) facilitates good communication and recomposition of the work program in such and similar situations, perhaps in some new crises. These small companies do not have a gathered accumulation and in a situation when they have additional costs, and reduced turnover, their profitability is endangered. Therefore, the role of the state must not be negligible, flat and politically abused, but must have an incentive character to return to the "normal track". However, such crises have actually shown the importance of small business and their main asset - transformation. Because every crisis can also be a new opportunity.

Maintaining opportunities for women in business and all sectors of society is a condition for quality assurance - a long-term strategic need. It is not just the right attitude, it is the smart orientation. Erika Kvapilova, UN Representative for Women in Georgia, further emphasized the role of women's business: "The principles of women's empowerment offer business guidelines to encourage

women's advancement in the workplace, in the market and in the community. When women are economically empowered and earn an income, they can then return to their families and communities, which is good for all of us, for the whole society. Women's business can bring a lot to these efforts".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> UN Women News, 2019, 16. June, Adjara hosts the Women's Economic Empowerment Forum in Batumi, Georgia.