



CHAPTER 3

Addressing the Depopulation Challenge from the Family Life Perspective – Is Fertility Rise Possible?

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Is a rise in fertility possible? If so, under what conditions? The history of European societies in the last 50 years indicates that after a general decline, the fertility rate in certain societies has begun to increase.²⁷ In addition, it is clear that there are significant differences in fertility rates between countries. They are lower in countries where family values are stronger (where a high value is placed on family life and children) and higher in cultures that emphasize individualism. Demographers and sociologists have sought to discover the causes of this phenomenon. In short, they conclude, higher fertility is associated with a higher quality of life, which means quality of work, quality of marriage (or partnership), and quality of institutional support for parenthood. As a result, research into the causes of increased fertility implies research into the labour market, married life, the structure and scope of institutional support, in short, the possibility of establishing a balance between different spheres of life and interests.

In this chapter, we will analyse the factors which we assume are associated with the decision to have children. We will try to elucidate the incentives that lead individuals and couples in Serbia to have the desired number of children; which factors influence the decision to have the first, and, especially, every subsequent child. The deterministic set that leads to the decision to give birth is complex and depends

on structural and cultural assumptions, partner dynamics, lifestyles of individuals and partners, their health condition, and more. In this analysis, we will use a theoretical framework which offers a focus on this topic different to those which have dominated domestic literature on the work-family balance. Although it uses demographic indicators²⁸, this chapter is primarily written from a sociological perspective, with the aim of looking at the needs of the family within the domestic context, and presenting the widest possible range of measures that can meet personal and family needs and potentially affect an increase in fertility.

The chapter itself has certain limitations. First, due to insufficient domestic research and analysis we were frequently compelled to rely on theoretical assumptions and research formulated in other societies (and Europe as a whole). We were at pains to ensure that we always used the sources which, in our opinion, were reliable enough to serve as a framework for explaining behaviour in Serbia as they do elsewhere. Secondly, the measures taken in Serbia have not been sufficiently investigated or evaluated, so unfortunately their results are not sufficiently well-known. Our evaluation of the policies discussed below and our suggestions on how they could be improved should therefore be understood as somewhat tentative and open to reassessment in the light of future research.

1 Balancing Work and Parenthood

Numerous studies show that the decision to have children is influenced by factors related to work and employment, institutional support for parents, internal marital dynamics and gender role perceptions (Chart 1). Although there is no absolute consensus on these

factors, especially given the different social contexts in which they were examined, researchers agree that if a rise in the fertility rate is possible in modern societies, it is possible only through a combination of different instruments for the work-family balance.

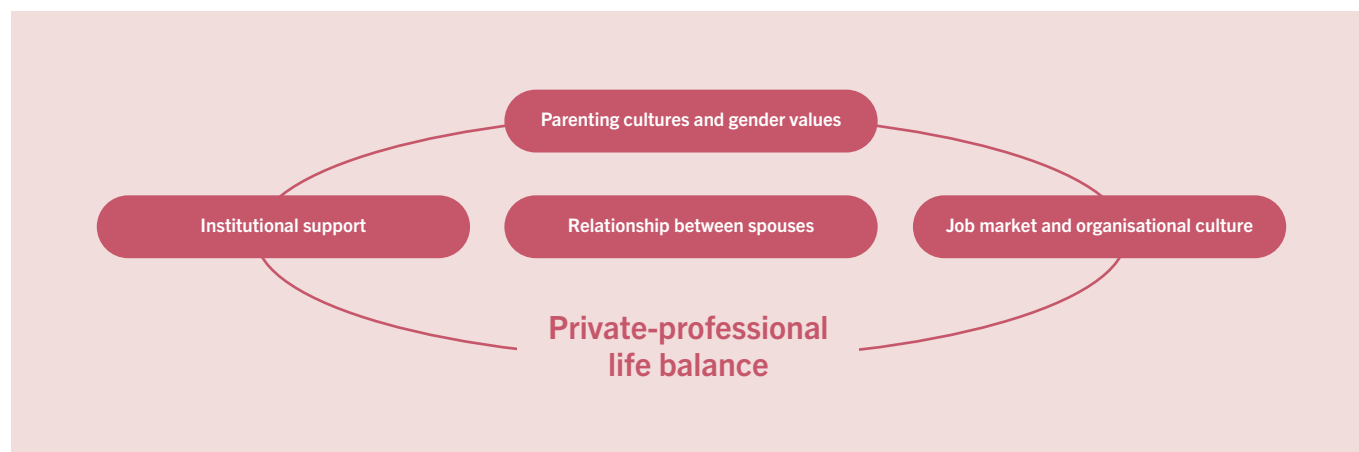


Chart 1. Factors influencing the decision to give birth and private-professional life balance

²⁷ Although the last few years have seen a decline in fertility in most European countries, it is still too early to take a position on this phenomenon, i.e. we are not sure whether it is a new trend or a short-term fluctuation.

²⁸ To review domestic demographic research on this topic, readers should consult Rašević (1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2015, 2017), Rašević, Sedlecki (2016), Rašević, Vasić (2017), Rašević et al., (2017), Rašević, Galjak (2022), Penev, Stanković (2018, 2021), Nikitović (2019) and others.

We have divided the factors influencing the possibility of such a balance into four groups: 1. *The labour market*, which includes employment, unemployment, inactivity, job security (type of contract), income level; and *organisational culture*, which includes types of work arrangements which are (or are not) conducive to balancing work and parenting, values and practices within the work organisation, and the level of exposure to discrimination in employment and work faced by (future) parents; 2. *Institutional support* to parenthood, which includes financial incentives — one-off and continuous payments, and services — parental leave, etc.; 3. *Marital dynamics* consisting of: a) degree of marital satisfaction, b) degree of marital stability, c) harmonisation of gender roles and expectations — division of domestic work and division of parental care; 4. *Dominant gender role values* related to the roles of men and women in the public and private spheres.

1.1 Deciding on giving birth

The choice to have a child is one of the longest-term decisions an individual or couple can make, and therefore implies that the future is, to a degree, predictable; that there is security and harmonisation of marital roles (Thomson, Henz 2005), income security, and security of parental support (institutional and informal). When there is a high degree of freedom in deciding with whom to have children, when and how many, and when there are enough resources available to achieve the optimum for their children, their family and themselves, it is possible that people will have the desired number of children. In Serbia, this decision is largely determined by the familistic norm (Tomanović, et al. 2016).²⁹ Young people affirm that they are exposed to a certain pressure from the environment, parents and friends regarding the time for having a child and the desired number of children. In addition, they feel that they do not have adequate institutional support or sufficient personal resources to facilitate the family transition. Despite this, the majority of the Serbian population highly values family life, marriage and children, and parenthood is a very important part of personal identity (Rašević, 2006; Rašević 1999; Tomanović Ignjatović, 2004; Pešić Jenačković, Marković Krstić, 2021).

The decrease in fertility, which characterised the second half of the 20th century, is associated with delaying childbirth for later years, and is associated with structural and cultural factors. The structure of the labour market is especially important because today we see higher fertility rates in highly developed countries where there are high female employment rates and where jobs are (highly) secure (Thevenon, 2015). Another important factor is the institutional context which can stimulate the establishment of an appropriate work-parenting balance, primarily through a developed and accessible system of preschool institutions and long-term financial support to parents with children.

The direct effects of crisis on the decision to delay and potentially abandon childbirth can be seen in Serbia during the 1990s when social, economic, and political turbulence did not provide a suitable foundation for family planning (Rašević, 2006; Rašević, 2015; Penev, 2010). However, the crisis in our context did not end with changes in 2000, but continued in the same direction, with lower fertility rates and a negative migration balance (Nikitović, et al., 2019; Rašević, Galjak, 2021; Penev, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to develop mechanisms to mitigate or eliminate the effects of social and economic insecurities that have clear effects on the family dynamic.

Although it is generally accepted that there is a considerable gap between the desired, planned and achieved number of children, unfortunately there is not enough domestic research to analyse this relationship more precisely. The available data show that over 90% of young people (15 to 30 years of age) see themselves married and with children (Popadić and Pavlović, 2019). About one in three young people (30%) did not know how many children they would like to have, and those who did, usually stated two (52%), significantly less three (32%), and less than 5% only one child. According to older research conducted on the student population, most young people want to have a child or children, the desired number of children is 2.95, and when it comes to more realistic predictions and plans, that number drops to 2.35, while men have slightly higher expectations compared to women (Kuburović, 2003: 47–48).³⁰ So, as in other research, in Serbia, there is a discrepancy between the desired and actual number of children, indicating that individuals usually do not have as many children as they would have liked.

We get interesting insights based on research with women aged 15 to 49. Almost all women who do not have children want to be mothers in the future. Only one in twenty of them (5%) states that she does not want to have children, 58% expect to have their first child soon, 23% later, 5% are not sure about the time, while 6% are undecided. Women who have one child show different patterns of further family planning, where we can notice the lowering of aspirations towards a smaller number of children. More than one in three (37%) do not want more children and do not plan to expand their family, 33% would like or expect another child soon, 20% a little later, only 0.1% are not sure about the time, while 8% are undecided. With each subsequent child, the desire to have another one decreases, so that as many as 75% of women who have two children do not want to give birth anymore (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2020: 55). The same research shows that there are significant differences in fertility rates in urban and rural areas (1.4 in urban and 1.9 in rural areas), but there are no differences among women in terms of desire to have a second child. Women in urban and rural areas equally (do not) want to give birth after the first child, but nonetheless, the birth of the second child still happens more frequently in rural areas. We can assume that patriarchal patterns in rural areas are more pronounced and that wom-

²⁹ Familism represents the ideology of civil marriage which implies heteronormativity (heterosexuality as a normatively preferred form of marriage), monogamy, clearly divided gender spheres and roles, where the man is in charge of the public sphere (economy and politics) and has the instrumental role of breadwinner (who secures the family materially), and the woman is in charge of the private sphere (household and parental care) and has a primarily expressive role. In Serbia, this norm is more accepted in rural than in urban settings and more often among the less educated compared to those with higher education.

³⁰ Research conducted on the female student population shows that the desired number of children (2.56) is also considerably higher than the one achieved (Vasić, 2012).

en in rural areas are less likely to make the decision on whether to have a subsequent child on their own. It is likely that with the further emancipation and maturation of new generations of women in rural areas, this pressure will ease, which will lead to the convergence of patterns of deciding about childbearing between rural and the urban areas.

The population of Serbia, like most in Europe, is characterised by delayed births. Postponing parenthood brings with it two very likely scenarios — giving up childbirth (due to the inability to find an adequate partner or health risks) or having only one child (Penev, Stanković, 2021). Both scenarios are more likely to increase the educational level of women, as education delays other life transitions and brings higher demands in terms of expectations from one’s own life, parenthood, and what will be provided to the child (Rašević, 2015; Penev, Stanković, 2021; Penev, Stanković 2019). However, in the domestic context, demographers note one significant phenomenon where the fertility rates (in the 2002-2015 period) of women with higher education became higher than of women with secondary education and were approaching women with primary education: This trend corresponds to those in economically developed countries, and is attributed to a better position on the labour market, greater economic independence and the ability of highly educated women to balance work and parental responsibilities than those with secondary education (Rašević, Vasić, 2017; Nikitović et al., 2018).³¹

1.2 Work-family balance

The work-family balance is a useful analytical framework which connects different aspects of family and professional life and indicates in a comprehensive way the degree of harmonisation of different spheres of life. When planning and entering the family setting, couples and individuals face different requirements (normative expectations in different spheres), and the resources (individual, family and institutional) available to them will determine: 1. the decision on having the first child, 2. The decision on having the second and each subsequent child, and 3. the quality of life. We will look at requirements and resources in the two key areas of life — work and family — to which we have added housing and finance (Voydanoff, 2005; Stanojević, et al., 2020).

The labour market should provide parents with optimal earnings, optimal time dedicated to work, and enough time for family responsibilities. This optimum can be achieved through several models: through full-time employment of both parents, through temporary resignation or reduction of working hours of one spouse, through increases in working hours (or through additional jobs) of one (or both) spouses. These possibilities will depend on the situation on the labour market, which, as is the case in Serbia, often implies (compulsory) overtime work, work arrangements which are more insecure (work without a

Parenting transition – demands and resources			
Work	Family	Housing	Finance
Parental transition – requirements and resources			
Employment	Caring for children	Independent household	Financial independence of couples
Overtime	Domestic work	Independent unit within the parental household	Women’s independence
Job (in)security	Spousal requests		Sufficient funds for basic needs
Non-standard work schedule			Sufficient funds for leisure activities
Resources in a particular domain			
Flexible schedule and working hours	Spousal support	Inherited property	Income from work
Parental leave	Relative support	Large enough parents’ unit	Social transfers
Enough time after work	Gender equality values	Enough resources for buying their own apartment	Rent
Work culture sensitised for family responsibilities	Preschool institutions	State subsidies for buying or renting real estate	Parental or kinship care

Table 1. Balancing work and parenting – domains, requirements and resources ** topics which will be specifically addressed in this paper are bolded*

Source: Voydanoff (2005); Stanojević et al. (2020)

³¹ In addition to education, the gradual decline in the universality of marriage (through the growth of divorce rates, single life or widowhood) in the domestic context has not been accompanied by the growth of extramarital affairs and alternative partnerships, which could be legitimate alternatives to marriage. So, support to earlier financial and housing independence of young adults could help their partnering transitions as well (Penev, Stanković, 2021: 17).

contract or under temporary or fixed-term contracts), non-standard shifts and hours, but also conditioning parenting with employment, etc. (Aleksić et al. 2020). The resources which are available to varying degrees in this area are flexible working arrangements, a clear schedule and enough free time, a work culture sensitised towards parenting and legal solutions related to parenting support (especially parental leave and days off available to parents).

Two aspects are key to achieving optimum family functionality: 1. An absolute requirement — enough time to perform all household tasks 2. A relative requirement — harmonisation of expectations (values related to gender division of labour) and performance of household tasks between spouses. Daily tasks which need to be done in the household include housekeeping (preparing food, cleaning and home maintenance), child care (dressing, feeding, preparing food and cleaning up after the child, taking children to kindergarten, school or extracurricular activities, communication with institutions and learning support). Most of these tasks need immediate attention and require daily commitment. The distribution of the schedule dedicated to these obligations may be influenced by traditional norms where (almost) all obligations are assumed by women, and men sometimes help with them, or contemporary models in which the spouses come to mutual agreements and participate in everything equally. Spouses often have the support of their kinship network, somewhat less often the opportunity to pay a nanny and help at home, and they may have more or less available nurseries and preschool institutions. The relative requirement implies the alignment of the values of the spouses related to the gender division of labour and daily practices. If both spouses are satisfied with the involvement of the other spouse, then this optimum is achieved. The optimum may be the result of traditional norms in which both spouses agree that the division of spheres is legitimate, or under the influence of contemporary norms in which both spouses agree that there is no division between male and female tasks. The optimum is disturbed when there is an incompatibility of expectations between the spouses, that is, when one spouse expects a higher degree of in-

volvement of the other in daily duties, which creates dissatisfaction, stress, disagreement and, potentially, conflict.

An independent household or housing autonomy is often seen as an important precondition for parenting, and especially for further family expansion. The opportunity to purchase real estate or rent accommodation with relative ease at affordable prices is a crucial factors that young couples consider before starting a family. The type of housing units available, their size and equipment also influence decisions on childbearing (see Antonić, 2021), and in this way represent a resource which can contribute to the achievement of the desired number of new births. The re- sources which may be available to a couple include personal funds (or creditworthiness), parental financial assistance, inherited real estate, or a parental home (which allows more or less autonomy).

With regard to a couple's financial, and more generally their material autonomy, factors of influence are demands for independence from parents, sufficient income to secure the optimum (or minimum) functioning of the family and the increasingly pronounced demands for financial autonomy of women. The available sources include employment, rental income, social transfers and parental financial support. Institutional long-term cash transfers are especially important, as they provide parents with a significantly higher degree of material security compared to one-off and short-term support measures.

Here we will analyse the aspects which we believe are crucial in establishing balance and which influence the childbearing decision. It is important to point out one significant limitation of this discussion, which is reflected in the dominant focus on the classic family form — the nuclear heterosexual family. We are, of course, aware that the family should not be confined to this limited definition, and that different types of family — such as single-parent, combined (consisting of spouses with children from previous marriages), with same-sex partners/parents — have certain different needs. However, due to the impracticability of covering all the possible permutations, we will try to find answers to some of the questions related to the most common form. Nonetheless, we believe that these issues should be addressed, and work on practical solutions should begin as soon as possible.

2 Position at the Labour Market

Employment and job stability in the labour market are important factors in making a decision on childbearing, but also achieving a desirable lifestyle for the whole family. This factor is proving to be very important among men, but even more so among women. In Europe, women with stable employment are considerably more likely to have a second child than unemployed and inactive women (Greulich et al., 2016). In Central and Eastern European countries, women who are employed, have secure jobs and have enough income to provide an optimum livelihood are more likely to start a family and have more children (Matysak, Vignoli, 2008). This effect is more pronounced in those countries in which there is good support for parenting, particularly the availability of kindergartens, which is usually a condition for women to work at all, and then also to establish a satisfactory work-family balance.

In addition to (secure) employment, among women, a significant factor in family planning is the man's income stability and level. In Germany, it was noticed that among men there is a direct connection between the amount of income and the intention to have the first child, and when a man's income is greater, so is his readiness for the first child. There is also an indirect link between job satisfaction and the intention to have a child, as job satisfaction implies less conflict in relationships, and thus a greater willingness for men to become parents (Berninger et al., 2012).

The situation in Serbia is not much different. Young people state that employment and income certainty, along with independent housing, are key factors in deciding to start a family and have children

(Tomanović, 2012) and these expectations are more prominent with the increase in the young people's level of education (Tomanović, et al., 2016). The transition to adulthood in Serbia usually follows a standardised path, i.e. it implies a clear sequence of life events. For young men, that means finishing school, getting a job, getting married and having children. Independent housing, although it is something that is expected and desired, largely depends on resources, so those who have less resources will start their own family within the family of origin. The transition of young women generally follows the same path, but for those with the lowest education, it means first a family transition and only then possibly a work transition. Almost half of young women (46%) first have a child, and only then get a secure job, while considerably fewer men (29%) follow that path. In both cases, parental transition more often precedes secure employment for those who do not have university education (Tomanović, Stanojević, 2015). Thus, the preferred model of parental transition includes fulfilled preconditions — employment, sufficient income, and possibly an independent housing unit and occurs less frequently in women than men and in the less educated compared to the highly educated.

2.1 Labour market in Serbia

Bearing in mind the effects that the labour market has on achieving the work-family balance, in this chapter we will try to answer the fol-

lowing questions using the available data: To what extent are men and women present on the labour market? How secure are the jobs they have? Which people quit work because of family obligations? How sensitive is the work culture to parental responsibilities? Using the 2019 Labour Force Survey data we will reveal the labour market position of men and women aged 15-45 through the following dimensions: a) employment, b) job security, c) guaranteed labour rights.³²

2.1.1 Employment

Men aged 15 to 29 have higher employment rates, significantly lower inactivity rates due to shorter time spent in the education process and slightly lower unemployment rates compared to women (Chart 2). The relation between the sexes in middle-aged people (30 to 45 years) indicates similar unemployment rates, but significantly higher employment rates for men and higher inactivity rates for women. Less activity in the labour market, with more frequent unemployment among women, indicates a gender gap and persistence of gender spheres divisions, so that work is more often perceived as the primary responsibility of men, and domestic duties and child care as the primary responsibility of women.

Data on the self-perception of their work status among women of the same age demonstrate a different picture, since there are fewer women who consider themselves to be employed (47%),³³ while the situa-

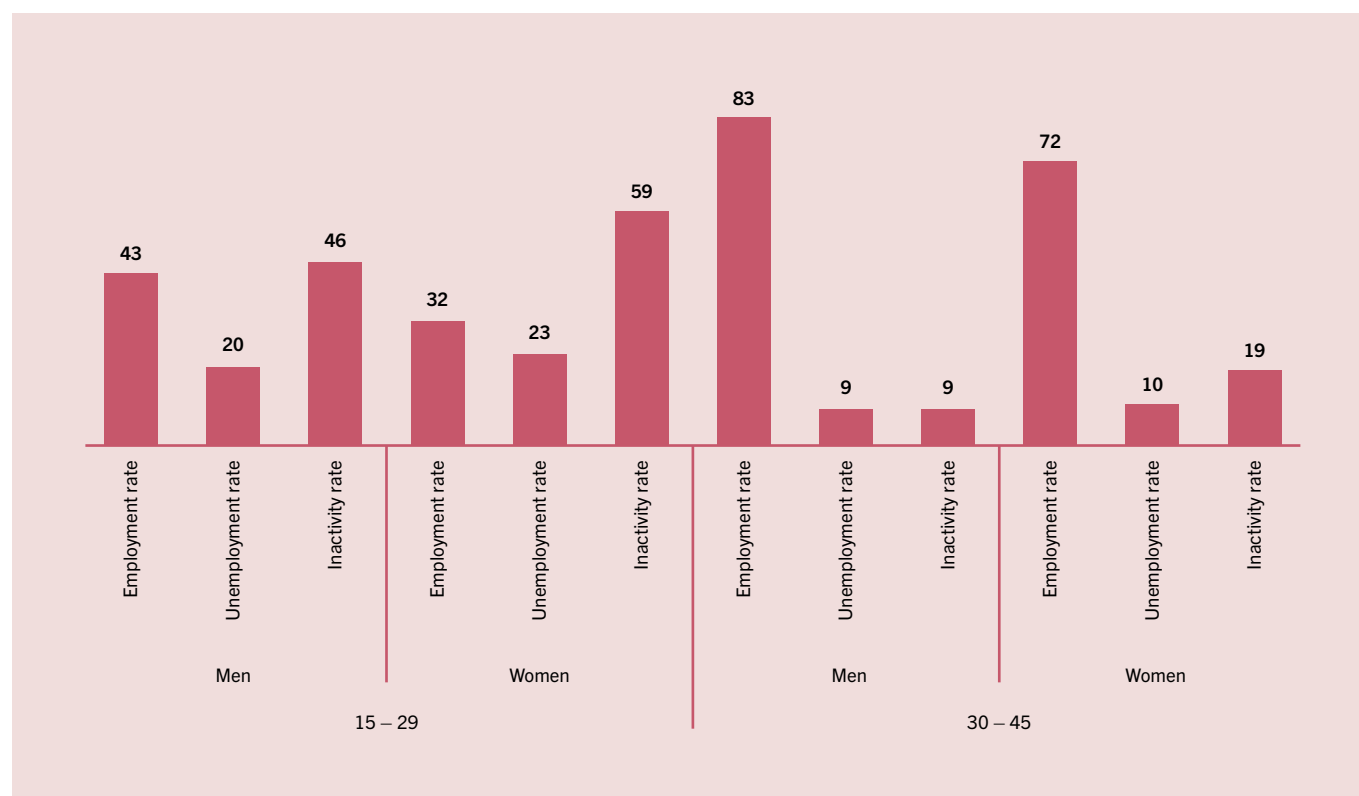


Chart 2. Position on the labour market of women and men aged 15-45

Source: LFS, 2019, author's calculations

³² We choose this age group, considering that the statistics shows that the largest number of women (over 95%) complete the fertile cycle in that period.

³³ As many as 30% of women consider themselves unemployed, while 5% do not work due to family and parental obligations, and the rest are inactive due to education and other reasons (EU-SILC 2018).

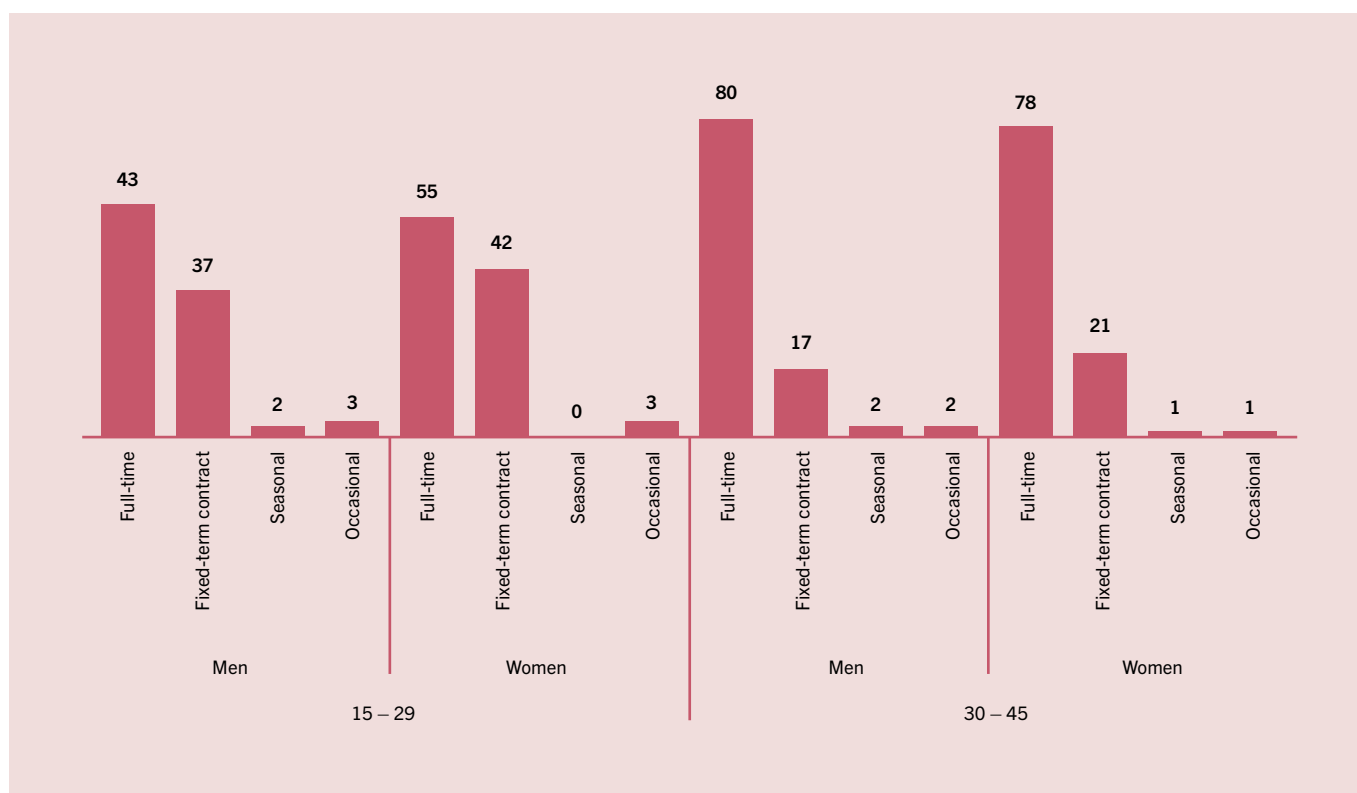


Chart 3. Type of work engagement of women and men aged 15-45 years

Source: LFS, 2019, author's calculations

tion is only slightly better among women with children (58% re-report being employed).³⁴ Comparing personal perceptions to the statistical method of defining employment shows us that, although more women have the opportunity to work and earn, it does not mean that their status in the market is unambiguous, and that in addition to (occasional) earnings they also exercise other employment rights (which will be elaborated on further below).

These data indicate three patterns in the relationship between work and family transition among women. The first, which implies that the work transition takes place before the family one (usually among highly educated women), the second in which a number of women, usually those with lower education, withdraw from the labour market after graduation, that is, they first make the family, and then potentially the work transition, and the third, in which a woman gives up work, usually temporarily, when she becomes pregnant or becomes a mother (Tomanović, et al., 2016).

Women who are inactive in the labour market usually have that status because they take care of children or adults with disabilities (63%), while one in five women state that their choice is for personal and family reasons (ARS, 2019). Even those women who have stopped working often quote the same reasons, with 10% saying they withdrew from the market due to obligations towards children or other family members, and 20% saying it was for personal or family rea-

sons. Highly educated women are far less likely to be inactive and lose or leave their jobs less frequently. However, those who quit work or are not currently looking for work give similar reasons to those of women with lower-level education. Therefore, the direct reasons why women do not enter the labour market or why they are (temporarily) excluded therefrom are related to the inability to balance work and family obligations. A significant aspect of this inability lies in insufficiently flexible work options and an insufficiently sensitised work culture. As we have seen, men are significantly less often inactive, but even then they are much less likely to give family reasons for their position on the labour market.

2.1.2 Job security

The domestic labour market is still dominated by permanent employment contracts (Chart 3). The structure of the type of employment is similar for men and women in both analysed age groups (15 to 29 and 30 to 45 years of age), but a slightly higher number of men take seasonal and temporary jobs, and there are fewer permanent and more temporary jobs among the younger age cohorts. The analysis of trends (Charts A1-A7 in the Annex) shows that unemployment rates have been declining since 2014 and that employment rates have been increasing (inactivity rates are more or less stable). Until 2016, the increase in employment went hand in hand with the increase in the share of part-time work among younger cohorts (15-29

³⁴ Among young mothers, aged 15 to 35, there are twice as many inactive women as non-mothers (29% vs. 17%) (Stanojević, 2018). One third of them (34%) report that they are unemployed, 8% state that they do not work due to family obligations, and the rest are inactive for other reasons. Analyses also show that mothers have a slightly lower level of job satisfaction compared to women who have not given birth, as well as that they are less satisfied with their free time.

		Personal needs	Paid work	Unpaid work		Leisure time	Learning	Travel and other activities
				Total	Child care			
Men with	preschool children 0-6 years old	10 hours 7 minutes	4 hours 54 minutes	3 hours 14 minutes	1 hour 43 minutes	5 hours 32 minutes	0 minutes	12 minutes
	school age children 7-17 years old	10 hours 17 minutes	4 hours 57 minutes	2 hours 13 minutes	35 minutes	6 hours 19 minutes	0 minutes	14 minutes
Women with	preschool children 0-6 years old	9 hours 57 minutes	1 hour 41 minutes	7 hours 45 minutes	3 hours 57 minutes	4 hours 27 minutes	2 minutes	6 minutes
	school age children 7-17 years old	10 hours 17 minutes	3 hours 8 minutes	5 hours 25 minutes	1 hour 13 minutes	5 hours 2 minutes	1 minutes	8 minutes

Table 2. The budget of the time of mothers and fathers with minor children

Database source: Time use survey in RS 2015, author's calculations

years), but since 2016 we have seen a decrease in the share of part-time work and a gradual increase in the share of permanent work. In the period from 2014 to 2020, there were no significant changes according to the type of contract for those aged 30-45. This indicates that the pattern of entry into the labour market has changed, but the later labour transition has not, as 80% of men and women aged 30 to 45 have permanent employment contracts. The position of men in the labour market is improving (in terms of higher share of permanent contracts) in all educational categories, especially those aged 15-29. The situation is somewhat different for women, because although we have seen a small increase in the participation of women aged 15-29 with permanent contracts since 2016, this increase is almost entirely due to women with higher education, while the participation of women with secondary and primary education in the categories of permanent and temporary employment remains almost unchanged. Analyses show us that the position in the labour market is slowly improving, especially for men and highly educated women, but that it is still far from ideal. The reasons for such trends can be seen first in the shortage of labour due to emigration and pressure on employers to offer more stable positions to workers.

Data on the time budget among those active in the labour market show that men spend 7 hours and 56 minutes at work, in work activities, while women spend 7 hours and 14 minutes (SORS, 2015), which indicates relatively small differences among those who are employed, and a relatively balanced workload. However, data on those who are parents give a completely different picture and confirm that parenthood brings with it a patriarchal division of gender roles.

As the data in the table show, men who are fathers spend significantly more time on paid work compared to women who are mothers, and this difference is greater when the children are small. One part of the explanation lies in parental leave taken almost exclusively by mothers, and the other in the temporary withdrawal from the labour market of women when they give birth. As children grow, women return to the labour market, but the difference in engagement still survives in favour of men. Although men spend more time at work, it is women who do far more unpaid household activities that, when children are small, average almost as much as full-time work.

2.1.3 Employment rights

Particular challenges in the market are insufficient regulation of work and inadequate control of working conditions. In such circumstances, a significant number of employees fail to exercise their employment rights, such as the right to pension and health insurance, the right to paid sick leave and paid annual holiday (Chart 4). A significant number of employees do not exercise the right to paid sick leave or paid leave, while the share of those who do not exercise the right to pension and health insurance is somewhat smaller. Men are at a disadvantage compared to women, as are younger workers compared to older ones. The first two indicators suggest that it is due either to informal employment or the inability to exercise the rights arising from the employment contract, while the other two indicators suggest informal employment.

A deeper insight into the labour market indicators shows that, in fact, no form of work guarantees full certainty or predictability and that younger workers and men are at particular risk. A very large number of those who perform occasional and seasonal jobs cannot exercise any of the mentioned rights (Table 1 in the annex). Even a significant number of those who work for a definite or even indefinite period have difficulties in ensuring that they are paid their pension and health contributions, as well as the right to paid sick leave and paid annual holiday.

In any case, the data reveal that a significant number of young and middle-aged people in the labour market do not have the basic security necessary for long-term planning, and in addition, a precarious position in the labour market makes it difficult to harmonise their professional and family life. The very fact that they do not have the opportunity to exercise these rights indicates their low bargaining potential with employers when it comes to other family obligations — days off, parental leave (especially among men), sick leave for children, etc.

Trend analyses show a gradual reduction in non-compliance with workers' rights (Charts A8 and A9 in the Annex) and the risks associated with the extreme uncertainties of employees since 2016. However, there is still a significant number, especially of young people who

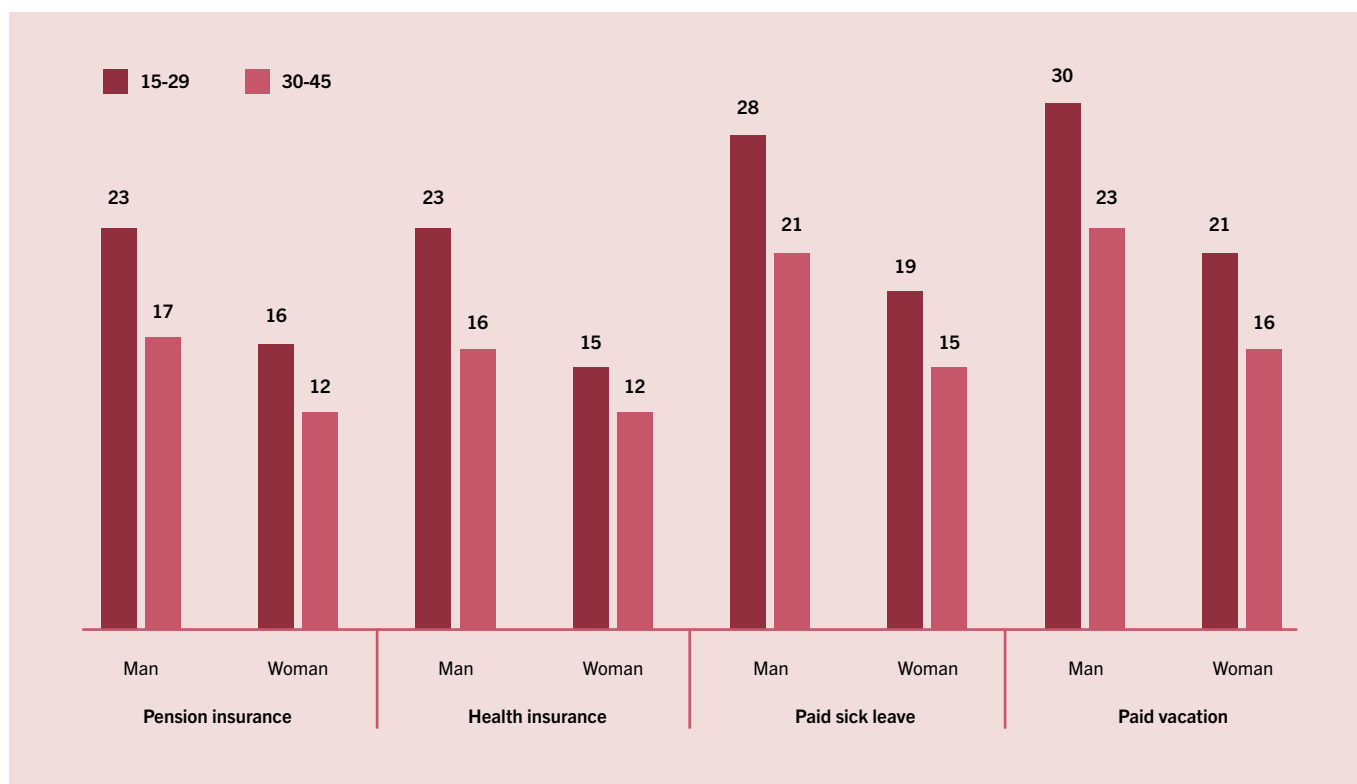


Chart 4. Share of employed people by sex and age who do not exercise the right to ...

Source: LFS, 2019, author's calculations

are just entering the sphere of work, who fail to exercise their rights and achieve the conditions for long-term planning – the kind of planning that requires certainty of income and employment.

2.2 Organisational culture

Organisational culture has two dimensions: values and organisation of work. Values in enterprises can support parental responsibilities, to a greater or lesser extent. They could interpret parental responsibilities in the traditional way, where daily care is primarily the responsibility of women, or in the modern way where men are equally involved, so employers should offer equal treatment to both parents. Organisation of work can be more or less flexible, i.e. where employees can have more or less autonomy over the work schedule and hours.

Domestic organisational culture is not sufficiently sensitised to parental responsibilities, especially the responsibilities of men as *involved parents*. Values which dominate in companies imply a distinct distance of power (hierarchical leadership and decision-making), collectivist values (Mitić et al., 2016; Mojić, 2020) and a relatively low level of acceptance of gender equality (Mojić, 2018). The transition to a market economy has further shifted value orientations towards so-called *male values* which, as positive characteristics of employees, emphasise domination, ambition, results orientation, etc. (Hodges, Budig, 2010). Neo-liberal values which emphasise profit and efficiency have called

into question the socialist legacy aimed at the special protection of women and mothers at work, and with the gradual domination of the economic sector, lowered the general sensitivity of work culture to family obligations. Such work culture relies on the domination of patriarchal and authoritarian value orientations among the general population, which further legitimises the division of gender spheres and inequality of power (Pešić, Stanojević, 2021; Pešić, 2017; Stanojević, 2018).³⁵ On the other hand, the growing presence of male values, with the absence of adequate controls in the labour market, carries with it special risks of discrimination against women who want to give birth, as well as the risk that their job will not be waiting for them after maternity leave (Tomanović, et al., 2016).

The extent to which parents will be able to harmonise work with parenthood depends on the options available to them when organising work: type of employment, freedom of organising their working schedule, work flexibility, etc. If these options are more diverse and allow for a higher degree of individualised organisation of time, it is more likely that balance will be established, and both work tasks and family responsibilities performed better. Giving up the desired number of children in the domestic context is usually a consequence of the inability to harmonise work and parenthood. When both parents are working, they often point out that there is no one to look after the child/children, or that they do not have enough time to devote to their children to the extent they need. Overtime work, or inconvenient working hours and

³⁵ Although it should be added that international companies are slowly introducing the concept of family friendly policies in the domestic context, which promotes a supportive culture and balancing of family and professional life.

shifts do not leave parents enough time for family responsibilities, and reduce their aspirations to have a subsequent child. Respondents list fear of losing their jobs as an important reason for giving up childbearing, which indicates the risks which parents (especially mothers) face if they become pregnant and withdraw from work for some time, but also that for a number of (potential) parents the work-parenting relationship is an either-or relationship, rather than an and-also one. (Bjelobrk, Sagati, 2018: 13; Tomanović, et al., 2016).

Companies, and especially the state administration, are quite conservative when it comes to organisation of work and do not offer sufficiently diverse work arrangements which would help parents (Đukić-Dejanović et al., 2018). Thus, only one in three (33.3%) employers offer the possibility of redistribution of working hours, one in five (21.8%) the possibility of sliding working hours, and one in ten (10%) work from home in normal conditions.³⁶ Most parents work in organisations where there is no possibility to choose a work arrangement according to their needs, and employers are not ready to significantly change their practices in the future. Of all the sectors, the state administration offers the least options to employees, which is a circumstance which does not stimulate other employers, especially private companies, to introduce new work arrangements (Đukić-Dejanović et al., 2018). Bearing in mind that a significant number of workers prefer to work in public companies and state administration due to job security and a higher degree of guaranteed labour rights, it would be important for working hours to be flexible enough to enable better harmonisation of different spheres of life. In this way, the public sector would set new standards and as such be a good practice example for other employers.

Most employees believe that having more options when choosing work arrangements would help balance work and parenting. Sliding working hours are preferred by more than half of employees (54%), slightly less of them prefer redistribution of working hours (43%), and two in five employees (40%) prefer work from home. The biggest gap between the options offered for the organisation of working hours and the employees' needs is in state administration (although the gap is also present with other employers). The importance of this aspect of work is shown by the fact that the level of income is not the only condition when choosing or changing jobs because a large number of women (82%) and men (77%) state that flexible working hours would be a key factor in job change. This attitude is more pronounced with the increase in the educational level of employees, indicating that at a certain level the amount of income, and even job security, are not enough for the workers' satisfaction and organisation of life (Đukić-Dejanović et al., 2018: 37-39).³⁷

In order to avoid the employees' absence due to maternity or parental leave, or to reduce the frequency of leaves to which employees are en-

titled due to a child's illness or family duties, some employers prefer to employ women who do not have children, those who do not plan to give birth in the near future, or those whose children have already grown up. Although these practices of discrimination are clearly sanctioned under the Labour Law, the Law on Prevention of Harassment at Work and the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination, there are still no effective protection mechanisms. In job interviews, there are employers who ask questions about family circumstances and plans, including those about having a child (Đan, Vrbaški, 2019; Tomanović et al., 2016). A number of women lose their jobs during pregnancy, especially women who are informally employed. Research has revealed cases of dismissal after the expiration of parental leave, and also the use of various strategies designed to put women in hopeless situations so that they have little alternative but to quit their jobs (such as transferring them to harder tasks, or putting them on shift work) (Tomanović et al., 2016). The lower a woman's educational level, the more insecure her employment is likely to be, and the higher the chance that she will experience some form of discrimination at work. Due to the very nature of these practices, their prevalence is hard to assess, but awareness of them is high in public discourse.

2.3 Development of infrastructure for raising children

The key mechanism of institutional support to parenting is the system of preschool institutions. OECD country analyses show that when the number of kindergartens and the number of children in them is higher, the fertility rates are higher too (Luci-Greulich and Thevenon, 2013). Parents who have access to preschool institutions do not have to choose between work and parenthood, they can more easily balance private and working time, and they decide to have another child more often. In Serbia, this support is part of the socialist legacy, where the goal was full and full-time employment for women, and socialisation of a part of the functions of raising a child. Although it developed rapidly, this infrastructure never managed to meet all the needs, and the situation is similar today, when we still note insufficient coverage (share) of children in preschool institutions. In 2019, only 17% of children under the age of three went to a nursery or kindergarten. Although the share of children in kindergartens has increased in the last few years (Table 2), it is still significantly lower than the European average of 36%. The coverage of children aged between 3 and 5 is slightly higher (61%). Although the share of children of this age is lower than the European average, during the last decade we have seen an increase in the number of children in kindergartens (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2020).³⁸

³⁶ Companies offer the following options: redistribution of working hours (41.1%), sliding working hours (23.7%) and work from home (11.2%). Financial institutions offer the following: sliding working hours (52.2%), redistribution of working hours (13%) and work from home (17.4%), while local self-governments offer sliding working hours (4.5%), redistribution of working hours (12.1%) and work from home (3%) (Đukić-Dejanović et al., 2018: 36). It should be borne in mind that the research did not include the question of whether all workers have all these options at their disposal and how many of them actually use them, so the share of employees who have the above options and the share of those who use these options is certainly (far) lower.

³⁷ These studies were conducted before the pandemic, which led to a significant restructuring of the work sphere. Unfortunately, we still do not have enough data to give a clear picture of the extent to which these changes will improve work-life balance and for which parents (by labour sector, level of education, region, etc.).

³⁸ The share of children aged 3 to 5 was 50% in 2014 and 44% in 2010 (MICS4, MICS5, MICS6)

year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
coverage	11.1	14	18.1	14.5	13.2	17.2

Table 3. Coverage of children in preschool institutions up to three years of age — % in Serbia

Source: EU-SILC, 2019.

The coverage for this kind of childcare is characterised by significant territorial differences. Among the regions, Belgrade stands out for its significantly better infrastructure than the other three regions, and according to the size of settlements we record a higher share in urban centres (71%) and medium-sized and small towns (76%) compared to villages (45%) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2020)³⁹. The share of children from vulnerable groups is low, considering that only 10% of the poorest and 8% of Roma children attend preschool institutions (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2020).

Insufficient capacities force public preschool institutions to set priorities when enrolling children, formal employment of both parents being one of them. This leads to discrimination if one or both parents are not formally employed because they cannot enrol their child in kindergarten. At the same time, it prevents parents (usually the mother) from looking for a job and starting to work, thus forcing them into a vicious circle of inactivity or unemployment. This is why it is very important to recognise the problem and look for solutions which would be useful to parents who are not working. Bearing in mind that double employment dominates among highly educated parents in urban centres, and that their children use the preschool services to a disproportionately high degree, it is necessary to provide the same access to parents from lower social strata, with lower education, who work under less stable contracts (or work informally) for the purpose of including more women in the labour market and providing the opportunity to harmonise parenting and work.

2.4 Cash transfers

Comparative analyses of OECD countries show that money transfers to parents are a good mechanism for reducing the cost of raising a child and that they are positively related to fertility (D’Addio, Mira d’Ercole, 2005). A positive effect on fertility is observable only when it comes to long-term financial support measures, i.e. benefits which last longer than a year (Luci-Greulich, Thevenon, 2013). In Serbia, relatively small amounts are allocated for these purposes in relation to the European average, regardless whether this is measured as a proportion of GDP or as absolute allocations. Direct transfers to families and children have remained the same, viewed as a percentage of the state budget, although the nominal allocations have increased (Table 4).

Measures of direct financial support available to parents at the national level include the following: 1. parental allowance, 2. child allowance.

Parental allowance is one of the mechanisms of financial support to families with children. This measure is universal, which means that all parents are entitled to it, and the amount and duration depend on the number of children in the family. For the first child, it is a fixed, one-off payment.⁴⁰ For the second child, the parents receive financial support for two years (24 equal monthly instalments of RSD 10,641.29), while for the third and the fourth child they have longer-term financial support, which lasts ten years (the monthly instalment for the third child amounts to RSD 12,769.55 and for the fourth RSD 19,154.33). New, longer-term measures began in 2018, so their effects have not yet been explored.

Child allowance is a measure aimed at parents and families who are financially vulnerable. In order to exercise this right, the family income (per household member) should be below the determined income minimum.⁴¹ An application for this type of financial support is submitted every year, and parents exercise this right until the child reaches 19 years of age. A maximum of four children in a family can receive this type of support at the same time and the measure is con-

Year		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
EURO per capita*	Serbia	43.09	48.07	50.42	50.83	50.98	52.68	56.78	58.26	58.38	60.75	63.86
	European Union – 27 countries	523.01	554.42	555.33	549.55	545.95	551.48	556.83	570.53	595.10	608.38	618.70
GDP share	Serbia	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2
	European Union – 27 countries	2.1	2.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2

Table 4. Cash transfers to family/children: nominal amount at constant prices in 2010, and GDP share.

* (according to constant prices 2010)

Source: EUROSTAT

³⁹ At the same time, there is a noticeable trend of greater inclusion of children in villages, small and medium-sized towns, compared to 2014, indicating a gradual closing of the gap according to the settlement size (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2011; 2015; 2020).

⁴⁰ In 2021, parents received a one-off amount of RSD 106,412.94 for the birth of their first child.

⁴¹ The basic amount per child is RSD 3,192.39 while for children from single-parent families, as well as parents of children with developmental or physical disabilities, this amount has been increased.

ditional upon the children's regular school attendance. Entitlement to child allowance may be extended if the child has a developmental or physical disability.

Of the two mechanisms of financial support to parenting listed above, only one measure is universal and exceeds the time frame of one year—the parental allowance for the second, the third and the fourth child. The effects of this measure are still not visible, given the short period of time since its introduction, as well as the effects of the COVID19 crisis on fertility, which have yet to be considered. The fundamental question is whether, in circumstances in which the key challenge is deciding to have a second child, directing financial support to the third and the fourth child will yield significant results. The Strategy for Encouraging Childbearing has already stated that the introduction of longer financial support to parents for the second child would lower the economic price of parenting and have more positive effects on the decision to have a second child. Given that having a second child in Serbia is a key challenge to increasing fertility (rather than subsequent children), the focus of policies and practical measures should be primarily on parents planning their second child (Strategy, 2018). Extension of the parental allowance to the second child should be considered as part of the current financial allocations.

2.5 Maternity, parental and paternity leave

Parental leave is a measure which guarantees continuity of income during a woman's recovery period and the first months of a baby's life. Although this measure is generally good, research shows that, depending on the social context, a long absence can have negative consequences on the decision to have a second child, and cumulatively on fertility (Hilgeman, Butts, 2009), while in some circumstances it has positive effects (D'Ad- dio, Mira d'Ercole, 2005; Luci, Thevnenon, 2011). The advantage of a longer absence is visible in those societies which do not have a sufficiently developed infrastructure of preschool institutions, and in which a shorter absence would lead to faster exclusion of women from the sphere of work. The positive aspects are also reflected in the security that parents have in the labour market during this period. The risks are reflected in a longer period of absence from work and difficulties in returning to work, an increase in the gender pay gap and reduced opportunities for women to advance in their career compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, when the right to financial compensation during parental leave is related to employment, it is more likely that parenthood will be delayed until the right to the full or optimal amount of compensation during leave is exercised.

Financial compensation during *maternity leave* (which begins at least one month before the due date and lasts until the third month of the child's life), as well as *leave for child care* (lasting up to 365 days), is only available to employed parents, i.e. those who have formally recorded income from work so that the compensation is a salary compensation. The first part of the leave is used by the woman (and only in certain cases by the father), while in the second part of the leave both parents

have an equal right. Compensation for the period during *maternity leave* is the full amount of salary if the mother has worked continuously for 18 months. If the mother has had an intermittent length of service or any form of employment, the amount to be received is obtained by summing up all income in the previous 18 months divided by 18, with the lowest allowance a woman can receive being the minimum wage. During the *leave for child care*, the salary compensation is calculated according to the same principle, with no lower limit of compensation, so the monthly compensation can amount to only a few hundred dinars.⁴² Given the volatile labour market, a significant number of women fail to put together 18 consecutive months of employment and thus earn 100% of their wages, leaving them without sufficient income during their absence.

Serbia has relatively generous parental leave, exclusive right of use, though with rather inflexible options for its use (OECD, 2021).⁴³ Observed through the equivalent of full employment compensation before leave, only a few, mostly post-socialist countries, have a total leave of one year (OECD, 2021). The key reason for the longer absence is the insufficiently developed infrastructure of nurseries, which would enable a relatively quick return of women to work.

Such a long period for calculation affects the postponement of childbearing, i.e. the spouses wait for the woman to have enough service time to enable her to have full or optimal compensation of salary, before deciding to become parents.

The inflexibility of using this measure is reflected in the fact that the leave can be used as a one-off only, and without the possibility of division into several "instalments". In case the parent has to return to work, the remaining part of the leave cannot be used later. The law does not provide options for extending leave with proportionally reduced compensation. Also, the regulations are not sensitive enough for parents who have twins, since the same number of days is available to them regard- less of the number of children born at the same time.

Since 2001, the Labour Law has offered men the opportunity to equally use the child care leave and an additional seven days after the birth of a child, but in no way obliges them to do so, nor is there a special number of days of leave reserved for fathers. Although the Law gives men the right to use parental leave, this measure has never been promoted, nor is it high on the list of priorities of practical policies. There are three reasons why it is important for men to exercise their right to this leave and spend at least a few weeks with their children as primary parents. The first reason is that initial contact and taking responsibility are important for the father's connection with the child and his continuous involvement in the later stages of growing up. The second reason is related to gender relations in the labour market. Withdrawal of men from the sphere of work for a while has an impact on the reduction of the gender asymmetry in the labour market and enables women to catch up with their male colleagues in their career paths. Bearing in mind that women withdraw from the labour market for a while due to child-birth, and that the absence in Serbia is relatively long, this exclusion puts them in an unequal position in career advancement or keeping a job. The third reason is changing the perception of gender roles in the

⁴² The upper limit is set, relatively high, at 5 average salaries, which raises the question of the intention of this measure.

⁴³ Only a few, mostly post-socialist countries, have a total leave of one year (OECD, 2021).

sphere of work. Accepting that fathers can, and should be absent from work when necessary due to family obligations, not just mothers, lowers the pressure on both mothers and fathers at work and contributes to a better work-family balance.

Rare data show that very few men use leave for child care. Due to the expectation that, as a good father and husband, a man should first provide for his family financially, his use of this leave is not met with approval among relatives and friends but also employers. In the labour market, which is still gender selective, men's income is most often primary, and parental leave prevents additional jobs, overtime work and additional earnings (Stanojević, 2018). Employers testify that the use of parental leave by fathers is sporadic and very underrepresented. Only 17% of employers state that in their companies there were cases of some employees taking this leave. This option is least used in public (local) government authorities, and somewhat more in the private financial sector (Đukić-Dejanović et al., 2018).

2.6 Institutional predictability

The predictability of the institutions in charge of social protection and the exercise of parental rights can be a very important factor in family planning. When state policy is efficient and responsible, when it delivers the services it guarantees, when it does not send contradictory messages, then the odds are higher that people will rely on such policies when planning a family. To date the public administration has proven insufficiently inclusive when formulating certain policies, and unwilling to respond unless under pressure from the public and citizens' associations. This generates mistrust in parenting support mechanisms and the perception that, though measures are introduced, they are also abandoned quickly.

The decline in institutional trust and the collapse in institutional predictability were exacerbated by amendments to two key laws — the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children and the Labour Law. Amendments to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children of 2018 introduced a number of positive changes. For example, it was made possible to receive salary compensation during leave on the basis of any income (i.e. any form of contract, which until then had been possible only on the basis of employment); the amount of

parental allowance was increased as was the payment period, the procedures for exercising the right (especially to child allowance) were simplified and speeded up somewhat, and coverage of the costs of preschool institutions for children receiving material assistance was introduced.

However, the Law also introduced a number of problematic regulations. Due to their difficulties in establishing an uninterrupted 18-month stretch in employment, a number of mothers received lower benefits.⁴⁴ This measure was introduced in order to reduce potential abuses of the right to compensation during maternity and parental leave through so-called fictitious employment (Stanić, Matković, 2017). However, the measure proved to be restrictive for a number of users who did not intend to “cheat” the system at a time when state policy was moving in the direction of greater support for the family and pro-natal measures. The law further prevented parents who receive compensation for the care and assistance of another person (children with disabilities) from exercising their right to child allowance. Resentment also came from parents who had relatively high incomes. The law set the upper limit of compensation at three average salaries. After heated public reactions, a lawsuit before the Constitutional Court and protests from organisations dealing with family issues, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans' and Social Affairs announced amendments to the disputed sections of the Law, which were partly addressed in 2021.⁴⁵

The second law, the amendments of which have long been in the pipeline, is the Labour Law. Greater flexibility of work in the EU context implies new legal solutions in the regulation of labour. This is not the case with Serbia. The Labour Law privileges employment. Although other forms of labour are recognised, they are largely unregulated and workers gain hardly any rights from this work guaranteed as resulting from the labour (for example, length of working hours, breaks, paid leave, etc.) (Reljanović, et al., 2016). Bearing in mind that the proportion of indefinite term labour contracts is decreasing, inadequate regulation of other types of employment carries with it risks for many, especially those who belong to vulnerable groups and those who are just entering the labour market — the young. The fact that it is possible to work, be registered as an employee, and be deprived of certain labour rights, undermines trust in institutions.

The healthcare system — attitudes towards mothers

The process of managing pregnancy and the very act of childbirth in public health institutions is deeply stressful and traumatic for a large number of women. Insufficient information to patients during the management of pregnancy and childbirth, unkind staff, poor conditions in hospitals (humidity, heat, the large number of patients in rooms and common areas), the need to give bribes or use connections, are some of the reasons why trauma during the first birth may be part of the equation when considering and making a decision about a subsequent pregnancy (Sekulić, 2016; Stanković, 2014).

⁴⁴ The law also included an unconstitutional solution whereby the exercise of a minimum wage during the period of maternity leave (up to 3 months of the child's life) is affected only if the woman has worked uninterruptedly for 6 months. This solution was part of a lawsuit that resulted in the amendment of the Law in favour of women and an order to retroactively pay for everything that mothers have lost.

⁴⁵ The upper limit of compensation was increased to five average salaries, the number of months included in the calculation of women farmers was reduced to 18, the minimum amount of compensation during maternity leave (but not childcare leave) was established, which cannot be lower than the minimum wage. The unconstitutional interpretation, according to which women who receive compensation for caring for a child with a disability are not entitled to compensation of salary during leave, was removed.

Balancing Work and Parenthood – Private Domain

The childbearing decision is usually made between spouses and depends on the quality of their relationship. Poor relations and dissatisfaction can lead to delaying parenthood, or giving up on (subsequent) pregnancies (Rijken, Liefbroer, 2009). But what does this satisfaction depend on? Among other things, it depends on the degree of *harmonisation of gender roles* – harmonisation in the public and private domain. In archetypal traditional families, the man is expected to be the bread-winner of the family, while the woman is primarily focused on their home and children. If the spouses have expectations which are in line with this norm and if everyone does what is expected of them, the level of satisfaction is high, and potentially the desire to have a subsequent child. At the other end of the continuum are expectations which belong to complete gender egalitarianism, both in the labour market and in the household. If the labour market is gender neutral (there is no gender gap) and if men and women do household work equally, we can talk about a balance between expectations and practices, which leads to a higher degree of satisfaction. Between these two poles there is a whole range of combinations of expectations and practices which can lead to a specific balance or create tension and conflict.

Everyday chores in the household and with the children (cleaning, tidying up, cooking, ironing, etc.) are repetitive and as such they cannot be expected to bring a great degree of satisfaction. Most people would leave them to someone else or, if they have the funds, they would hire

someone to do them. Nonetheless, most of these tasks are performed by women. There are two possible explanations for this fact in the domestic context. The first is based on the idea that there is an unequal amount of power which depends on the individuals' resources (such as income, real estate, education, etc.) (Brines, 1993: 307), so whoever has more power will be able to transfer these tasks to the spouse who has less. The second explanation starts from the fact that, regardless of the amount of resources, men always have power, because it is guaranteed to them by the dominant, patriarchal culture.

Significant gender asymmetry is evident in the division of domestic work in Serbia, because most household maintenance work is performed by women (Chart 5). Among men, there are few who predominantly perform some of the household tasks, and more than two thirds of them never perform those tasks which are traditionally related to the domain of women. Younger, educated men living in urban areas are more willing to be involved in housekeeping (Stanojević, 2018).

The time budget provides us with more precise data – women older than 15 spend on average about four and a half hours in unpaid domestic work, while men spend two hours. Women spend most of their time preparing food, cleaning the household, caring for children and other members of the household, while men work around the house and go grocery shopping. Not only are women more engaged on average, but

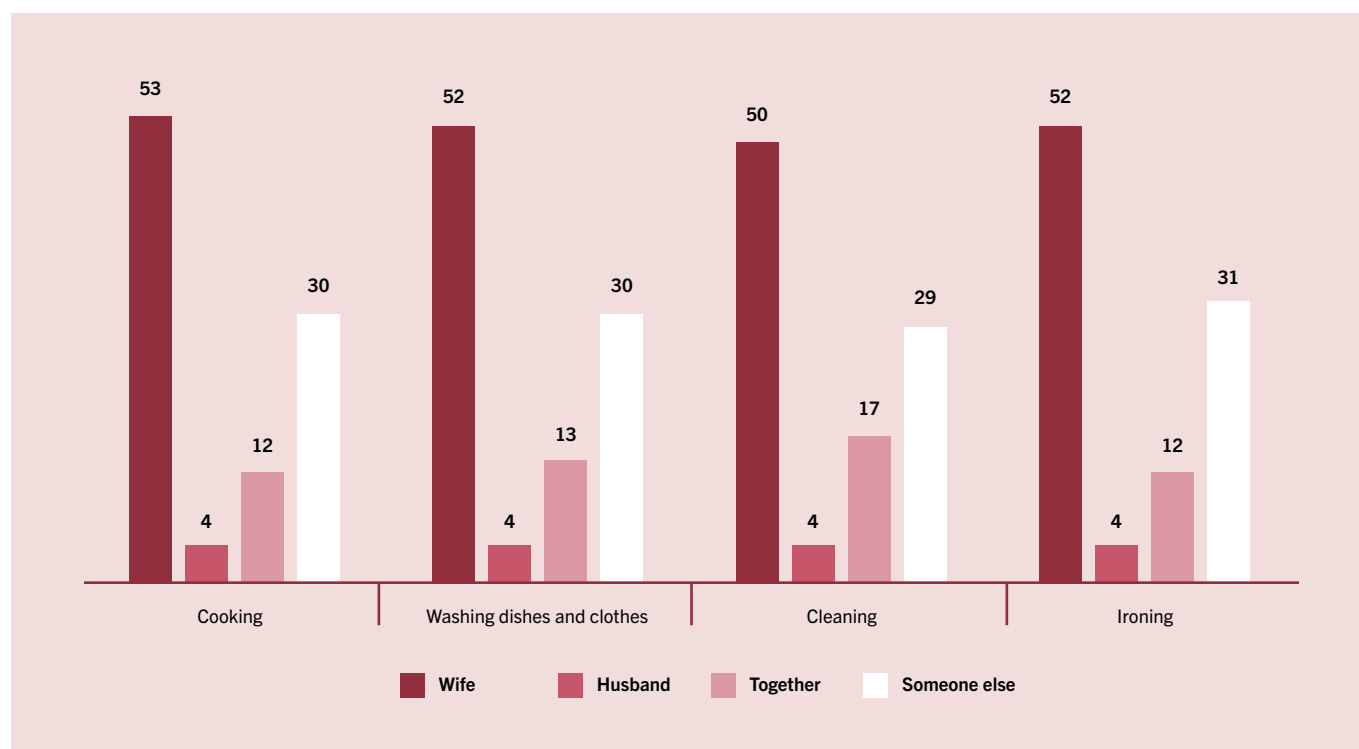


Chart 5. Division of household tasks

Source: ISI FF 2012, author's calculations

90% of women are involved in household activities, while this is the case with 70% of men (SORS, 2015). Although men on average spend more time at work, this difference still does not level out the overall work by sex, but is reflected in an uneven ability to use free time. Men have an average of seven hours of free time, and women a little less than six. From these charts, it is clear that men who are fathers participate significantly less in responsibilities around children and in overall domestic work. Among fathers with preschool children, 39% do not take care of children during the day at all, while this is the case with every tenth mother (11%) (SORS, 2015).

Analysis shows that the resources women possess are not significantly related to the degree of their engagement in household duties. This means that women, regardless of their level of education, employment or income, do domestic work to the same extent. This indicates that value patterns and the patriarchal matrix primarily shape gender roles, and that women's resources, although necessary, are not a sufficient condition for achieving equality in the private sphere (Babović, 2009).

The situation is similar when it comes to everyday parenting responsibilities (Chart 6). Women are significantly more often involved in activities which include preparing food and maintaining hygiene and tidiness of the space in which the child lives. Almost all mothers of children under the age of five state that they were involved in these activities in the previous three days, while only one in five fathers was involved in at least one (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2020). These data confirm the unequal distribution of household tasks, showing that household duties and daily childcare responsibilities are primarily women's responsibilities.

Men are slightly more willing to engage in interactive activities with their children, such as playing, walking, and the like, than is the case with household tasks. More than a third of fathers are involved in almost all the observed activities relevant to the child's early devel-

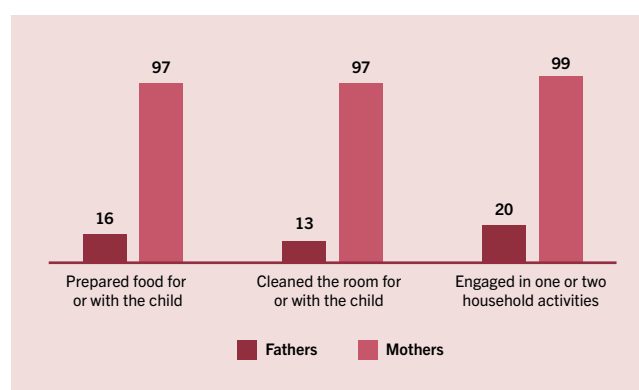


Chart 6. The degree of involvement of parents in daily activities around the child aged 1-5

Source: MICS6, author's calculations

opment (Charts 7 and 8). Fathers more often take the child outside and play and participate in activities that involve "easier" interaction, while less often do they dedicate themselves to activities such as reading, telling stories, singing or drawing, or designed and goal-oriented activities. As a child grows up, the number of activities involving fathers and mothers grows, albeit more for mothers than for fathers, which means that the gap between the spouses grows over the years.

Men are more often involved in parental responsibilities if their wives are employed, if they have their own income, when they are highly educated, and if they live within a nuclear family (without direct kinship support) (Stanojević, 2018). Men are also more involved when spouses rate their relationship very highly. Unlike the division of domestic chores, the division of parental responsibilities is influenced by the resources of the wife, value orientations, and the degree of satisfaction with the relationship. Although men are to some extent

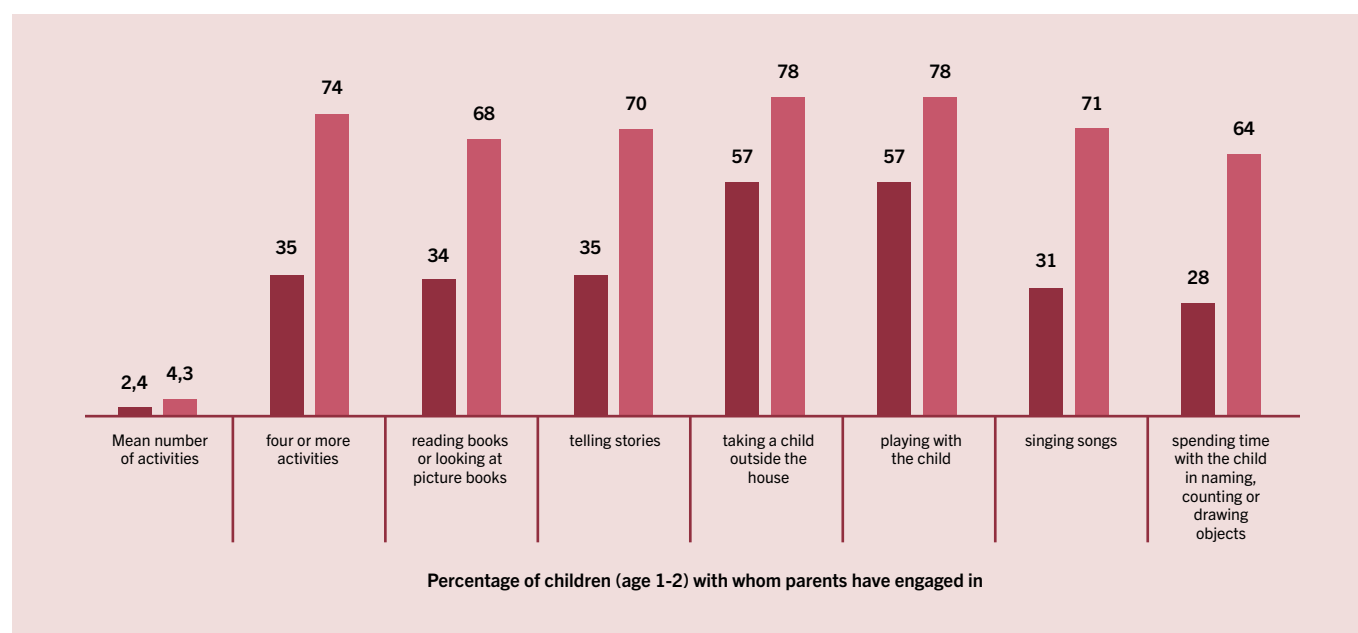


Chart 7. Degree of parental involvement in children's developmental activities, age 1-2

Source: MICS6, author's calculations

involved in parental responsibilities, only a small number of them are ready to fully equate themselves with their wives. The champions of new models of involved parenting (new fatherhood) are men with higher education, men coming from urban zones and those who believe that there should not be differences between men and women in public and domestic spheres.

The above shows us that modernisation changes within the private sphere first occur at the level of parenting practices, so that men are involved to a greater extent in child care and only then in other do-

estic responsibilities. The involvement of men in parenting legitimises their presence in the private sphere, and sets new standards of involvement before new generations, not only in parenting but also in other household responsibilities.⁴⁶ However, the attempt of men to enter the private sphere may be accompanied by the denial of competencies required for parenting by female family members (Stanojević, 2020; Tomanović, et al., 2016). Therefore, the partnership should be free of most stereotypes about gender-specific roles, but also of competition between parents.

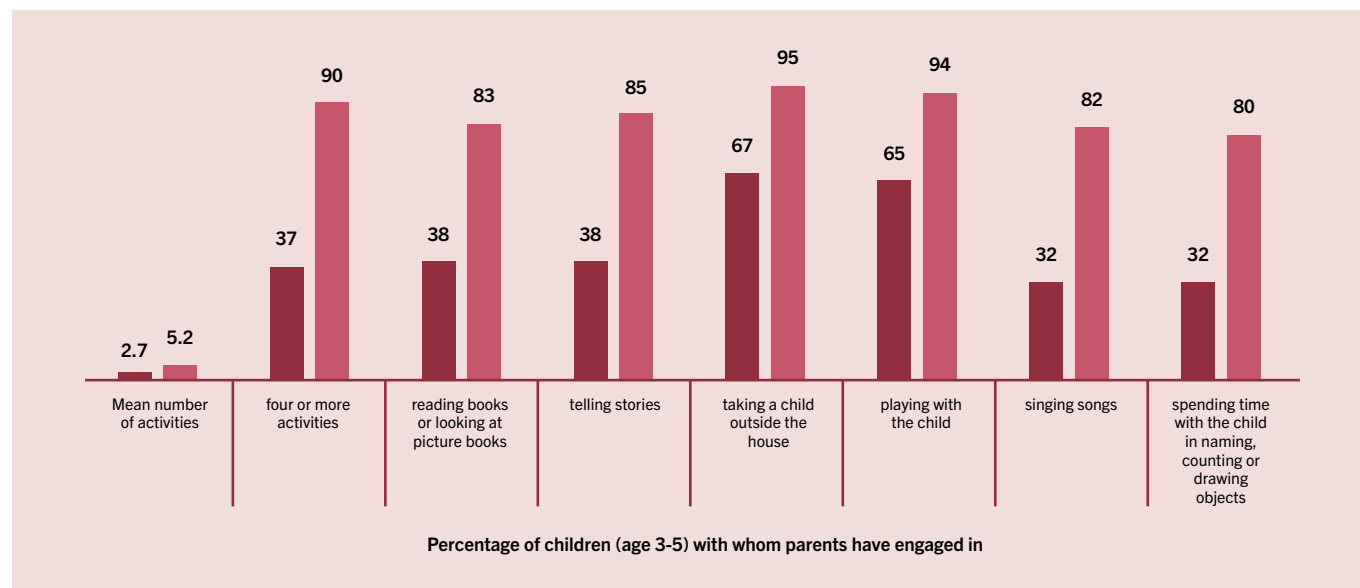


Chart 8. Degree of parental involvement in children's developmental activities, age 3-5

Source: MICS6 author's calculations

4 Dominant Values on Gender Roles

We have already stated that more economically developed European societies, have higher fertility rates and that until recently they have been undergoing something of a certain surge in fertility. One dimension that explains inter-societal differences and (potential) positive trends relates to the predominance of egalitarian gender value orientations (Arpino, et al, 2015, Baizan et al, 2016). The relationship between value orientations and fertile behaviour has historically taken the form of the U curve (Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2012; Arpino et al., 2015; Lap-pegård et al. 2021).

In traditional societies, there is a clear separation of gender spheres and dominance of patriarchal values, all accompanied by high fertility rates. The changes will start with the entry of women into the

formal, monetised labour market, which is followed by the growth of egalitarian gender values in the public sphere. This process leads to a deconstruction of public patriarchy (the perception that women can work as well as men is more and more widespread), but not to a deconstruction of private patriarchy. There is a growing perception that women can do jobs just as well as men, but not that men should be equated with women in the private sphere. Women are doubly burdened with work and domestic responsibilities, which reduces the desire for children and, cumulatively, birth rates (Lappegård et al., 2021).⁴⁷ Over time, men begin to get involved in the private sphere, but due to the lack of clear models, traditional expectations of conjugal roles persist — women expect men to get involved in household

⁴⁶ In fact, we see that men are first involved in easy interaction, then in more demanding developmental interactions, and then in all relations with the child, including tidying up and cooking with and for the child.

⁴⁷ In such circumstances, women are faced with the choice of one of three strategies: *exit*, *raising their voice*, and *suffering* (Gershuny, et al., 2005; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2012). The first implies conflict (divorce, independent living), the second implies negotiating and demanding a more egalitarian division, while the third implies adherence to the traditional norm in new circumstances.



Chart 9. Relationship between patriarchal values and total fertility rates in Europe (EVS, 2018)

Source: WVS, 2018, author's calculations



Chart 10. Relationship between patriarchal values and total fertility rates in Europe (EVS, 2018)

Source: WVS, 2018, author's calculations

tasks and care for children on an equal footing, but also to continue earning more than them, while men may expect their wives to exert most of the control over the household, in addition to work. Conjugal differences in expectations produce further dissatisfaction, lower the childbearing aspirations, and, cumulatively, low fertility rates. Only when balance is achieved at a new level, the level of egalitarian gender values, and balancing of the spouses' expectations with their practices, is there a resurgence in fertility (Lappegård et al., 2021).⁴⁸

An illustration of these theories, as well as the relationship between value orientations and total fertility rate in Serbia and European countries, can be seen in Charts 8-10. In the first two charts, we can see that fertility rates are somewhat higher in societies in which the views that there should be no gender differences in the labour market are more accepted, i.e. that men are not better managers than women. The correlation between the fertility rate and the attitude that preschool children will not suffer if their mothers work is somewhat more pronounced. At the European level, the acceptance of gender-egalitarian value orientations in both the public and private spheres correlates with higher fertility rates. In all models, Serbia ranks with the group of countries which have relatively high scores

on patriarchal indicators and relatively low total fertility rates, which ranks it among countries with a gender expectations conflict.

If we look only at the population of Serbia in the last thirty years (Charts 11-13) we notice that there has been a decline in patriarchal values among both men and women.⁴⁹ The relative relationship between the sexes is more or less constant, and implies a somewhat higher degree of patriarchy among men (more on trends in patriarchal values in Pešić, Stanojević, 2021). When we observe the trends by level of education and by sex, we notice that there is a decline in patriarchy and convergence of values in women of all educational levels, while in men there is a decline in divergence according to educational level. This means that women are not only becoming less patriarchal, they also have more similar views of gender roles, while men, although they are becoming less patriarchal than before, have greater differences in views. Those with higher education are the least patriarchal, those with primary education the most. There was a somewhat greater convergence of attitudes among highly educated women and men, since the difference in the degree of patriarchy was the smallest among them, mostly due to a somewhat faster decline in patriarchy among men. As the educational level of men and women decreases, the degree of differences is higher.

⁴⁸ Historically, modernisation has changed the understanding of gender roles. On the one hand, there is a decline in patriarchal values and domination of the mix of traditional and modern values, which leads to a decrease in fertility, because there is a conflict of roles in both sexes (especially in women). Only after a substantial adoption of new value models, i.e. a higher degree of acceptance of gender egalitarian roles, is there a renewed increase in fertility because gender roles are in line with expectations. If this process of modernisation is faster, that is, if the gender value gap in the country decreases faster, the increase in fertility is faster. The effects of gender egalitarian values are present when they are shared by both men and women and when they are widespread in all educational groups of the population. When value diversification occurs, opposite effects on fertility are recorded (Arpino et al., 2015).

⁴⁹ The patriarchy scale consisted of a degree of agreement with four indicators: 1. If one spouse is employed in a marriage, it is more natural for that spouse to be a man, 2. Most household tasks are more inherent in women, 3. It is good that women and men are equal in marriage, but as a rule it is better for a man to have the last word and 4. Public activities are closer to men, and private activities to women. The scale range is between 4 and 20 points.

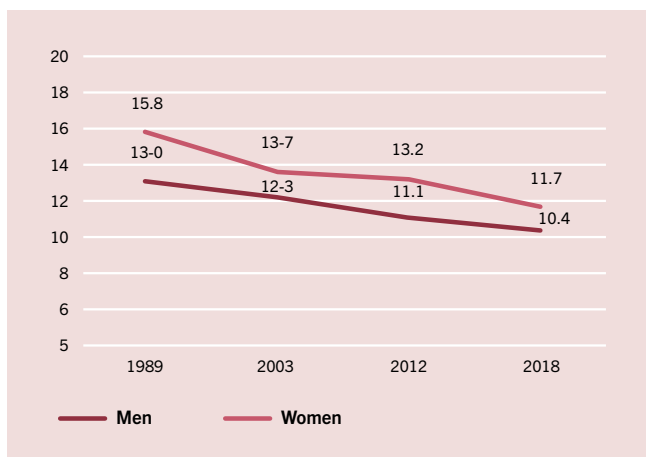


Chart 11. Patriarchal values among men and women (20-45 years) in the 1989-2018 period

Source: ISIFF 1989, 2003, 2012, 2018

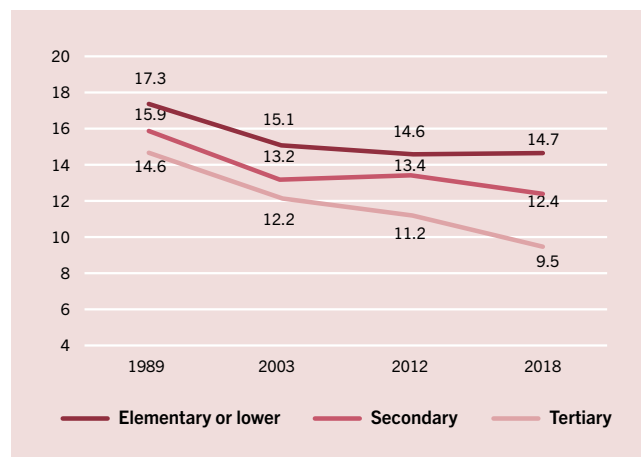


Chart 13. Patriarchal values among men according to education in the 1989-2018 period

Source: ISIFF 1989, 2003, 2012, 2018

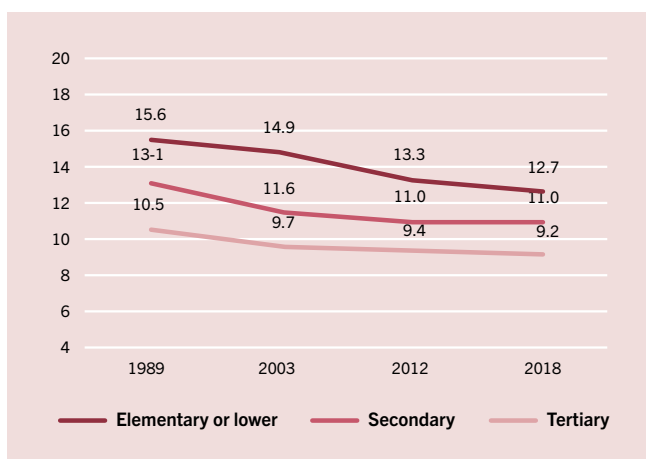
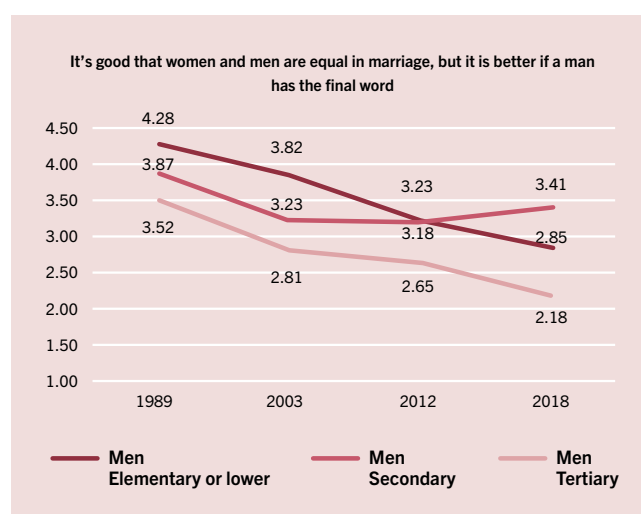
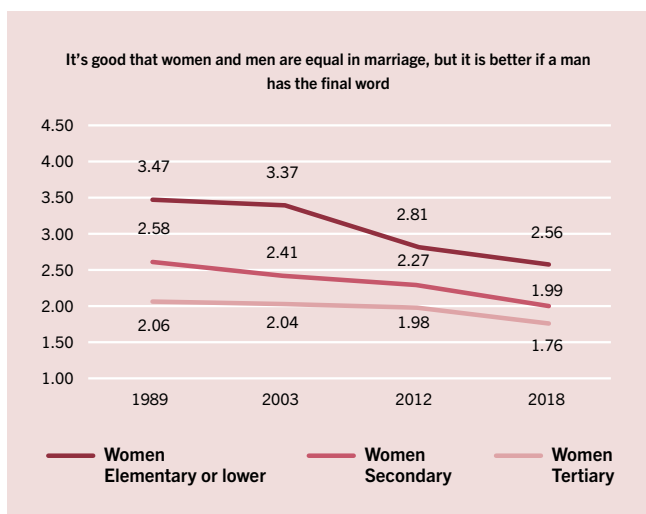


Chart 12. Patriarchal values among women according to education in the 1989-2018 period

Source: ISIFF 1989, 2003, 2012, 2018

The same trend is clearly visible if we look at the attitude which measures the degree of power between spouses. Men with higher education generally do not approve that men should have the final say, and are quite similar in that to highly educated women. The gap is somewhat larger among those with secondary education, and the largest among those with primary education. Therefore, patriarchal ways of perceiving gender roles persist to a certain extent among men, especially those with primary and secondary education, which significantly complicates the harmonisation of gender expectations and the implementation of family practices, since their wives usually have a different view of marriage.

Attitudes about gender roles should be reconstituted towards gender egalitarianism, targeting especially younger men. Public discourse, popular culture and the education system can offer new narratives and patterns of behaviour. However, these changes, at the level of discourse, can have an effect only if they are accompanied by changes in behaviour in the private sphere, i.e. if men really take on some duties in the household and with children, which also requires, in addition to institutional changes, changes in the labour market and the employers' organisational culture.



Charts 14–15. Patriarchal values among women and men in the 1989-2018 period

Source: ISIFF 1989, 2003, 2012, 2018

5 Conclusion and Recommendations For Practical Policies

The analysis carried out so far shows that it is very difficult for spouses in Serbia to harmonise family and professional duties, and that there is still no harmonisation of expectations regarding the division of duties in the private domain.

Serbia does not belong to the group of highly developed countries which have a problem of low fertility, but to developing countries characterised by a mix of traditional and modern values, a mismatch between expectations and practices, which creates challenges in marital coordination and harmonisation with professional obligations. The population is characterised by the existence of significant differences in fertility behaviour between the better educated and urban population and the lower educated and rural population. Analysis indicates that the way to increase fertility is to create conditions for work-family balance, higher levels of women's employment, ensuring employment security for both parents (or income in case of job loss), optimum earnings, available and developed preschool institutions infrastructure, and supporting gender equality in the public and private spheres. It is probable that postponement of the first birth and decisions on whether or not to have a second child are negatively influenced by deficiencies in exactly these areas – insufficient development of institutional mechanisms, a selective labour market, less and less job security, and the gender gap in values. People who are better educated are more sensitive to the mentioned imbalances, leading them to give up more easily, making it less likely they will decide to have a second and a subsequent child if the conditions are not favourable.

The existence of evidently higher levels of fertility among the rural population, as well as among the less educated, indicates that there is a different framework for making these decisions, which is less dependent on the above factors. We assume that their decisions are made under the influence of traditional norms, where having the first child earlier and having more than one child is favoured. At the same time, we can assume that with further urbanisation and expansion, especially of higher education, the second group will continue to decrease, meaning that the challenges faced by the first will become more general.

The gender gap in both employment and earnings still persists. It is characterised by an increased degree of insecurity of all types of employment. More intensive measures are needed to employ women, and reduce the gap in employment, unemployment, and inactivity rates. It is especially important to develop employment measures for those with lower levels of education, i.e. with lower qualifications. The majority in this group are those who have risky work arrangements, and among them the majority are women who are temporarily excluded from the labour market. It is necessary to clearly and legally define all types of work and adapt them to new circumstances where there are fewer permanent contracts, and where new, non-standard types of work are emerging (online workers are just one example). Inspectorates should intensify their measures to monitor employers, and im-

pose fines on those failing to respect labour rights. A fast and secure transition from education to the labour market is a key precondition for gaining financial autonomy for young people, which enables other transitions, especially family ones.

For a large number of employees, organisational culture does not contribute to balancing work and parenthood, for both men and women. Neither men nor women are able to adequately balance professional, parenting, and personal needs. Although there are legal solutions which allow different types of flexible work engagements, they are very rarely used in practice and it is left to companies to decide when, how much and to whom they will make them available. The experience of other countries shows that if businesses are left to decide which forms of flexible work engagements to offer, most of the employees usually have a limited choice. Policies need to be developed towards a broader range of options and greater accessibility. That is why it is necessary for the initiative to come “from above”, from the state institutions, where the promotion of these practices will take place in public administration and public enterprises (places where they are currently least used and where there is the greatest need). The work culture should be sensitised to gender equality, and should especially promote internal policies aimed at family people, especially fathers, who should be encouraged to take parental leave and take over part of the daily parental duties at home.

Institutional support to parenting has shown some progress in terms of a higher degree of involvement of children in preschool institutions, but coverage is still low and there is a rather selective entrance policy in preschool institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to further develop the network of preschool institutions, especially those for children under 3 years of age. It is necessary to detect the real needs of parents (especially those who would choose to work if there was a possibility of employment and the existence of a childcare facility), a more balanced regional development of this network and the involvement of vulnerable groups are needed. Work should be done on solutions which would enable parents who do not work, to enrol their children in kindergarten, because only in that way can they return to the labour market.

Financial measures are short-lived and cover the initial costs of childbirth rather than long-term parenting support (for most parents). Given that increasing fertility depends on the transition towards the second child, the focus of financial measures should be on stimulating the birth of the second child. It is recommended that the measure of parental allowance for the second child be extended, at least to the extent which is now provided for the third and the fourth child.

Parental leave is relatively long, but not flexible enough. The proposal is to make it flexible (at least one part of it), which would mean 1. the possibility of using the leave for childcare in parts until the child starts school, as well as its 2. extension with a proportional reduction of salary compensation (for example, instead of three months, the parent would use

6 months, and instead of 100% they would receive 50% of the salary compensation in the given period). It is recommended that the parents of twins have twice the leave period for childcare (i.e., that this leave be individual for each child).

Men are not stimulated to use leave for childcare, so special mechanisms should be devised to increase the participation of fathers. The recommendations are as follows: 1. obligatory absence of the father from seven days after the birth of the child, 2. “fathers’ quotas” as part of the leave for childcare, which only fathers can use and which cannot be transferred to the mother. It is recommended that the quota be between 14 and 30 days.

A regional and local approach to enabling youth housing independence is needed. The market (purchase and renting) of real estate is quite unregulated, and without the possibility of independence from parents, young people are less likely to enter into partnership and marital waters, and more likely to delay family life, especially in urban areas.

It is necessary to harmonise all state and public policies which deal with the issue of depopulation and support for the family. Strong inter-sectoral cooperation is a key precondition for harmonising priorities, goals and activities. In formulating new measures, special attention should be paid to the civil sector and parents’ associations. Communication with the population should be clear, without contradictory messages.

When it comes to gender roles, it is evident that there is a gap between expectations and practice with the spouses. A huge part of domestic work and most parental responsibilities are performed by women, which is a potential source of dissatisfaction. Men should be encouraged to become more involved in the private domain. One way of doing this is the “fathers’ quotas” as part of parental leave, which would enable men to form an initial relationship with the child, and legitimise their presence in the domestic sphere as competent parents.

Dominant values on the gender roles of men and women in the public and private spheres exhibit a mix of traditional and modern values which could lead to some confusion about what male and female roles are, and consequently to disagreements between spouses. Models of egalitarian and complementary parenting should be supported and promoted in public. Egalitarian parenting means that both women and men can be equally good parents, intimately involved in all aspects of their children’s lives. Complementary means that the spouses will agree as to which arrangement suits them best and that all arrangements are equally legitimate if the spouses see that model as the most functional. All options are legitimate, from fathers who stay at home to take care of children while mothers work (or women who stay at home), to double careers (both spouses) in which parents engage in parenting with the support of a nanny. Popular culture can offer new models, and public institutions and the civil sector can educate and support (potential) parents.

6 Dimensions and Indicators of Orientation Towards Family Needs

As one of the practical policy measures that can improve support to families and raise awareness of the importance of practical policies aimed at families at all levels of society, we have prepared a series of dimensions intended to offer guidance for evaluating the work of institutions and companies from the perspective of children, parents and families. They will help gauge the extent to which these institutions and the policies enacted through them serve the needs of families and, as such constitute a useful mechanism to address issues connected to population dynamics.

These dimensions are preliminary, and in order to fully be put to use, it is necessary to perform testing through specially designed research. These measures should be translated into concrete indicators that would accurately measure how “family-friendly” companies and public administration and institutions are. The choice of dimensions stems from the theoretical framework of harmonising family and business obligations.

6.1 Companies and public administration

1. Flexible Working Hours

- Redistribution of hours
- Flexible working hours

- Part-time work
- Work from home
- Work from home in case of a child’s illness
- % of workers who have the opportunity to choose work arrangements
- % of women who have the opportunity to choose work arrangements

2. Free Days for Parents

- Number of days above the legal minimum when a child is ill
- Number of days when the child starts school
- Number of days above the legal minimum for mothers after parental leave
- Number of days above the legal minimum for fathers after the birth of a child
- % of men who take days off after entering into a marriage
- % of men who use days off after the birth of a child
- % of men who use part of the leave for child care

3. Financial Allowances for Parents

- Continuous (6 months and more)
- One-off

4. Work Conditions

- Participation of employees with permanent contracts

- The pay gap between men and women
- Participation of women in management positions
- Is the minimum wage higher than the average consumer basket?
- Has it happened in the previous 5 years that a parent (mother or father) who returned from parental leave against his/her will was fired, got a lower position in the company, that his/her number of hours was reduced?
- All the benefits that the work organisation offers to working parents are part of the contract they sign with them.

5. Organisation of Work in the Service of Parenthood

- Breastfeeding break
- Designated place for breastfeeding
- Designated place for changing the child
- Children can visit (under certain and safe conditions) their parents at work

6. Kindergartens

- Day care centre within the workplace
- Kindergarten in the immediate vicinity of the workplace
- The work organisation has cooperation with public preschool institutions

7. Work in the Service of Parents

- Is there a survey for employees on job satisfaction and opportunities to reconcile work and parenthood?
- Is there counselling of (future) parents with HR/human resources on ways to reconcile work and parenthood?
- Is there a protocol and procedures that sanction sexual harassment at work and discrimination among employees?

6.2 Municipalities

- The capacities of preschool institutions cover at least 95% of the needs of the population in the current year. Of the number of applications, at least 95% of children are enrolled.
- Preschool education institutions monitor the work arrangements of parents — work in the second shift.
- Primary school capacities cover at least 95% of the needs for an extended stay of children in the current year.
- The municipality ensures the existence of parental benches for changing and feeding children in public areas and/or in public facilities
- The municipality provides financial or some other form of compensation for having a child.
- The municipality has a plan to address depopulation/population policy.
- The municipality finances or co-finances textbooks, teaching aids and children's nutrition in primary school.
- The municipality provides counselling and legal support services to parents.
- The municipality has special activities aimed at employing women.
- Transport network is adequate — organised transport for employees (parents).
- The municipality organises workshops, forums, and parenting schools.

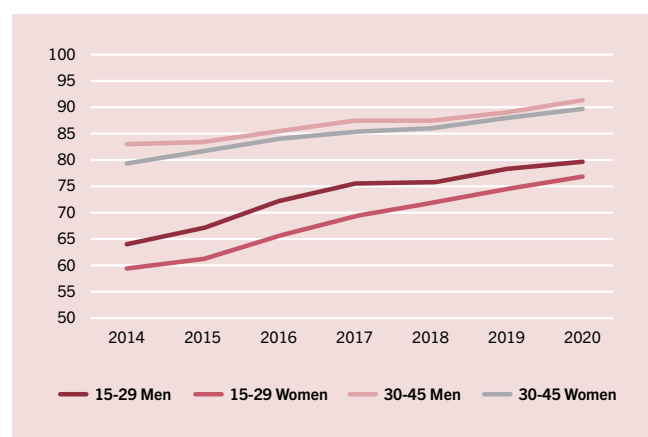
7 Annex

Sex			Pension insurance	Health insurance	Paid sick leave	Paid vacation
Male	15 to 29	Full-time	6.8	6.8	8.8	9.1
		Fixed-term contract	10.5	12.5	20.2	22.7
		Seasonal	60.6	60.6	84.2	84.2
		Occasional	87.4	87.4	87.4	87.4
	30 to 45	Full-time	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.7
		Fixed-term contract	2.8	3.5	9.2	11.5
		Seasonal	78.1	78.1	81.0	81.0
		Occasional	71.5	76.2	94.5	94.5

Female	15 to 29	Full-time	4.4	4.4	5.3	5.7
		Fixed-term contract	7.6	7.6	12.4	13.9
		Seasonally	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
		Occasionally	71.4	71.4	93.7	93.7
	30 to 45	Full-time	1.2	1.2	1.5	1.6
		Fixed-term contract	5.0	4.6	11.1	11.6
		Seasonal	89.0	89.0	89.0	89.0
		Occasional	86.3	86.3	100.0	100.0

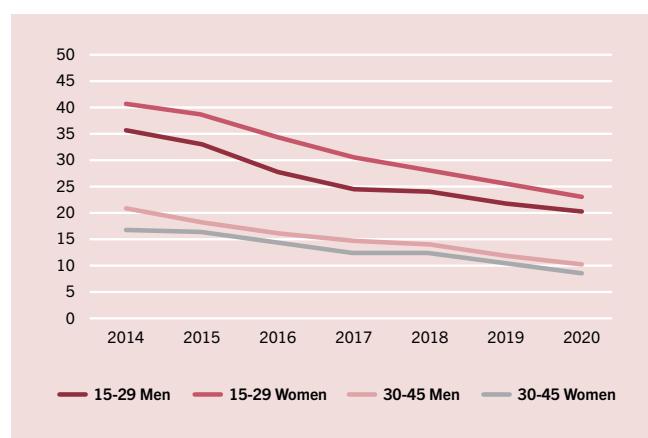
Table A1. Share of employed persons by sex, age and type of employment who do not exercise the right to ...

Source: LFS, 2019, author's calculations



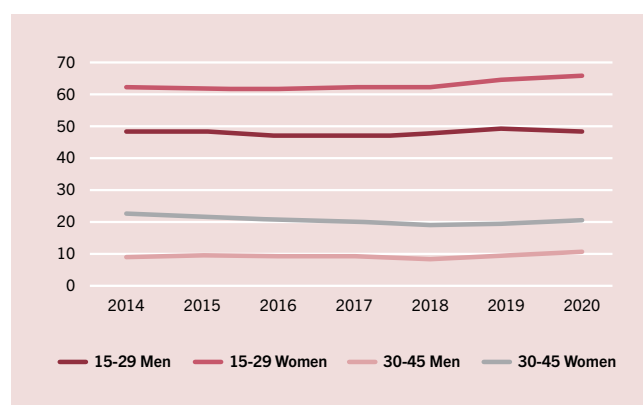
Graph A1. Employment rates of men and women 2014-2020

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



Graph A2. Unemployment rates of men and women 2014-2020

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



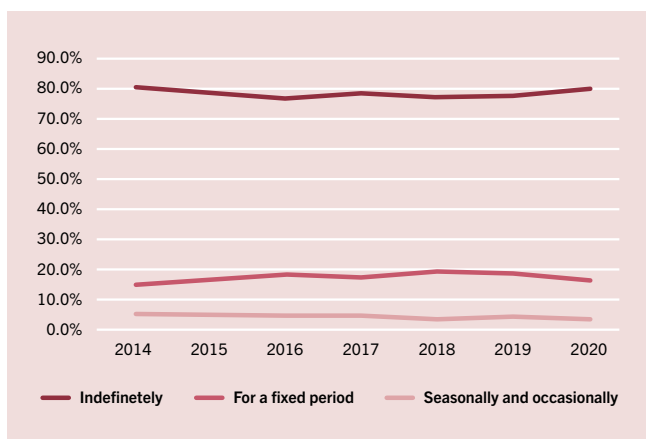
Graph A3. Inactivity rates of men and women 2014-2020

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



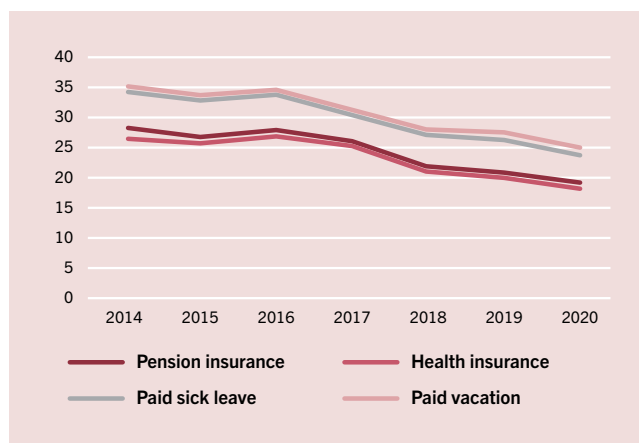
Graph A4. Type of contract at work — men 15-29

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



Graph A5. Type of contract at work — men 30-45

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



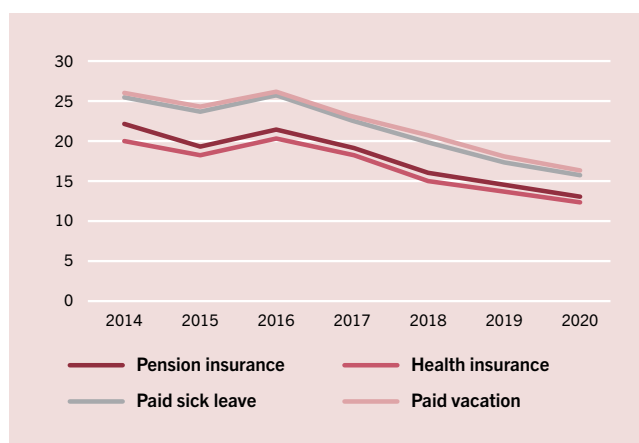
Graph A8. Share of men age 15-45 who do not exercise the right to ...

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



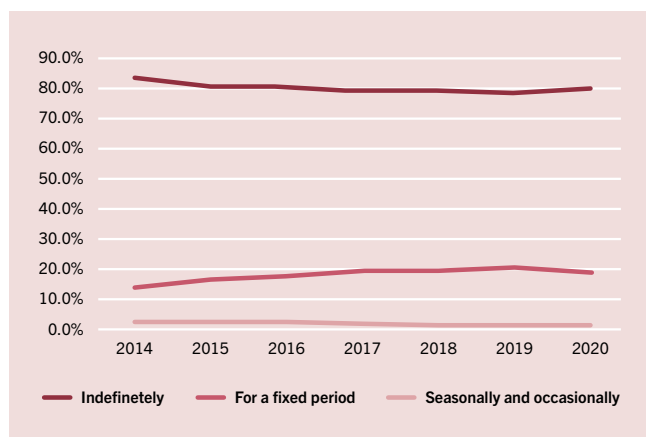
Graph A6. Type of contract at work — women 15-29

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



Graph A9. Share of women age 15-45 who do not exercise the right to...

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations



Graph A7. Type of contract at work — women 30-45

Source: LFS, 2014-2020, author's calculations