



# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

**Progress on the Sustainable Development  
Goals in the Republic of Serbia from the  
perspective of the position of women  
in rural areas**

# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals in the Republic of Serbia from the perspective of the position of women in rural areas

**Publisher:**



Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 5 Milana Rakića St

**For Publisher:**

Branko Josipović, Acting Director

**Author:**

Marija Babović, PhD

**Editorial Board:**

Snežana Lakčević

Dragana Đoković Papić

Selena Marković

Vladica Janković

Petar Đorić

Jelena Korićanac and

SDG Monitoring Working Group

**Translation (English):**

Group for Sustainable Development Goals and Socio-economic Indicators

**Technical editing:**

Division for statistical output development and visualization

© Using data of this publication is subject to quoting source.

The production of this publication was supported by the Governments of Switzerland and Germany.  
The publication does not necessarily represent the official standpoints of the Swiss and German Governments



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC**

Sprovedeno od strane:

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

5

5

GENDER EQUALITY

8

1

NO POVERTY

11

3

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

12

4

QUALITY EDUCATION

13

8

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

15

10

REDUCED INEQUALITIES

17

16

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

18





## LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

### Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals in the Republic of Serbia from the perspective of the position of women in rural areas

**Leave No One Behind** is the fundamental principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This principle signifies the unwavering commitment of all nations to eliminate poverty, social exclusion, and discrimination in all its manifestations. It aims to reduce inequalities and various forms of vulnerability that hinder individuals and social groups from participating in development processes, thereby limiting their overall development potential and well-being. This commitment also pertains to the development potential of humanity as a whole<sup>1</sup>.

This principle is grounded in the recognition that certain groups face multiple intertwined factors of disadvantage and inequality, resulting from a combination of various exclusionary elements. These factors collectively contribute to the exclusion of these groups from development processes. The five key exclusion factors are: discrimination (on the basis of some inherited or acquired characteristics); geographical distance or living in an unfavourable geographical area (degraded environment, lack of traffic and communications, underdeveloped economy, technology, services); governance (inadequate laws, policies, non-transparent and unaccountable institutions, absence of democratic participation); socio-economic status (inequalities in access to resources, employment opportunities, poverty, and deprivation), and sensitivity to shocks (conflicts, crises, climate change, and natural disasters)<sup>2</sup>.

This short informative publication, part of the series “Leave no one behind!”, focuses on presenting the status of the achievement of the SDGs in relation to women living in rural areas in the Republic of Serbia. To define rural settlements, official statistics use a typology that distinguishes between “urban” and “other” settlements. This typology is based on the so-called administrative-legal criterion, according to which, by special acts of local self-government units, certain settlements are declared “urban”, while all other settlements are classified as “other”. The category of “other” settlements is used as the closest approximation to the category of rural settlements.

According to the 2022 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings, the share of the population of “other” settlements in the total population of the Republic of Serbia was 38%. In the remainder of the publication, terms such as villages, rural settlements and rural areas, will be used alternately, but they will coincide with the settlement type category “other”.

According to the population estimates of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia for 2023, 1 244 425 women and girls lived in rural settlements in the Republic of Serbia. The female population living in rural settlements accounted for 18.8% of the total population of the Republic of Serbia. The share of the female population in the total population of rural settlements is lower than the share of the female population in urban settlements (Table 1).

<sup>1</sup> <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>

<sup>2</sup> UNSDG (2019) *Leaving No One Behind. A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams*, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Draft-Operational-Guide-on-LNOB-for-UNCTs.pdf>

Table 1. Population estimate by gender and type of settlement, 2023

	Republic of Serbia			Urban settlements			Other (rural) settlements		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
Number	6623183	3402267	3220916	4111236	2157842	1953394	2511947	1244425	1267522
%	100.0	51.4	48.6	100.0	52.5	47.5	100.0	49.5	50.5

Source: Estimates of population, SORS<sup>3</sup>

The rural female population is on average older than the total population of the Republic of Serbia (46.5 years, compared to 43.9 years). It is on average older than the female population living in urban areas (44.6 years), as well as the male population living in rural areas (44.3 years)<sup>4</sup>. The female population of rural areas is also characterized by an above-average aging index<sup>5</sup>: 193.2 compared to 150.5 of the total population of the Republic of Serbia, 162.3 of the female population in urban areas and 158.5 of the male population in rural settlements<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/18010502?languageCode=en-US&displayMode=table><sup>4</sup> <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/180711?languageCode=en-US&displayMode=table><sup>5</sup> Ratio of the elderly population (60 years and over) to the young population (0–19 years) (SORS, *Demographic Yearbook 2023*, page 11, <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2024/Pdf/G202414021.pdf>).<sup>6</sup> SORS, <https://data.stat.gov.rs/Home/Result/180710?languageCode=en-US&displayMode=table>



# WOMEN



Other settlements



Urban settlements

Inactivity rate (15+),  
2024

52.9%

49.2%

Informal employment rate (15+),  
2024

27.1%

5.0%

Proportion of time  
spent on unpaid domestic  
and care work (15+), 2021

19.6%

15.9%

At-risk-of-poverty  
or social exclusion rate  
(EU 2030 strategy), 2023

35.3%

24.3%

Participation rate of youth (15–24)  
in formal and non-formal education  
and training in the previous  
12 months, 2024

67.8%

79.6%

Participation rate of adults (aged 25–64)  
in formal and non-formal education  
and training in the previous  
12 months, 2024

3.7%

7.5%

Intimate partner  
violence rate (18-29), 2021

4.2%

5.8%

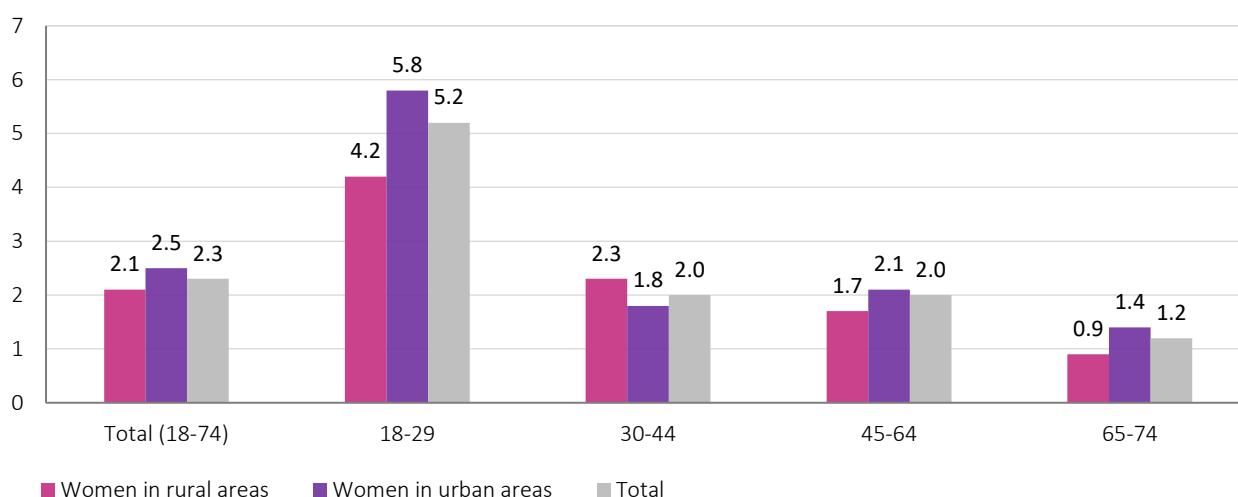




THE INDICATORS OF GOAL 5 ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT SHOW THAT WOMEN LIVING IN RURAL SETTLEMENTS ARE IN DISADVANTAGED POSITION IN NUMEROUS ASPECTS COMPARED TO MEN, BUT ALSO COMPARED TO WOMEN FROM URBAN AREAS: THEY DEVOTE MOST OF THEIR TIME TO UNPAID HOUSEHOLD WORK AND TO FAMILY CARE, MORE OFTEN THAN WOMEN IN URBAN AREAS ENTER INTO CHILDREN'S MARRIAGES AND RARELY INDEPENDENTLY DECIDE ABOUT THEIR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH. MORE FAVORABLE CHARACTERISTICS ARE RECORDED ONLY IN TERMS OF LOWER RATES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE...

Women living in rural areas are less likely than women from urban areas to report having experienced some form of intimate partner violence during the 12 months preceding the Survey on the Safety and Quality of Life of Women<sup>7</sup> (Graph 1). Young women (18–29 years) are more likely to report experiencing some form of intimate partner violence (physical, psychological or sexual) than women of other age groups, both in urban and rural areas.

**Graph 1.** Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 18–74 subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by type of violence, age and type of settlement, 2021 (%) (SDG indicator 5.2.1)



Source: Survey on the Safety and Quality of Life of Women (EU-GBV), SORS

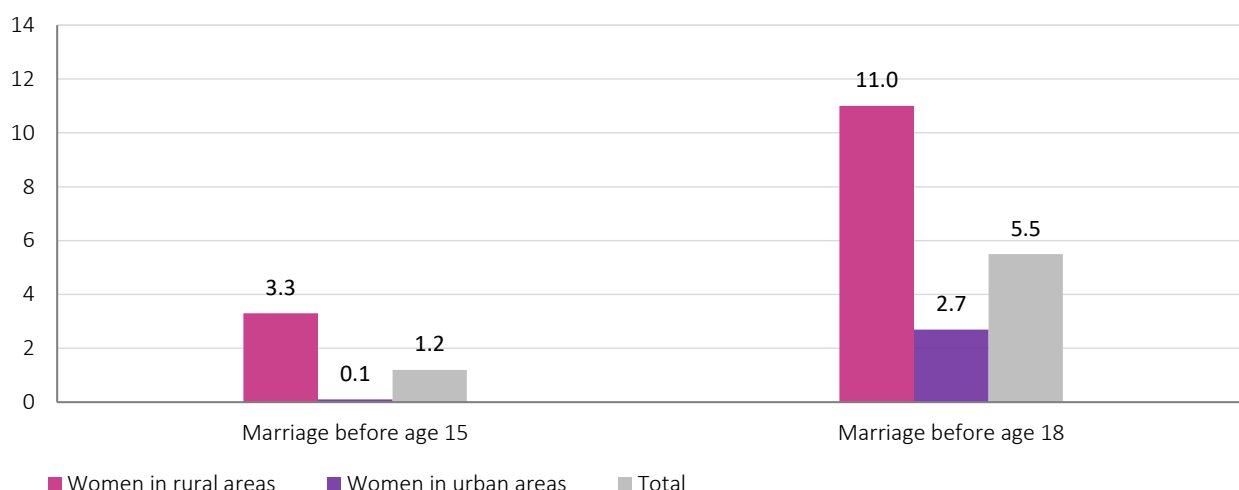
When it comes to the experience of sexual violence perpetrated by a person other than a partner (SDG indicator 5.2.2), among women from urban areas, 0.4% reported experiencing such violence in the past 12 months, while women living in rural areas did not report such experiences. A possible reason for this is greater stigma, fear, and shame, which are the most common reasons for concealing such experiences in rural areas, where a weaker sense of anonymity is inherent in small settlements and communities.

Women from rural areas are significantly more likely to marry before adulthood than women from urban areas. One in nine women living in rural areas married before the age of 18, while among women living in urban settlements, every thirty-seventh woman aged 20–24 did so (Graph 2).

<sup>7</sup> The Survey on the Safety and Quality of Life of Women is the only survey that measures the prevalence of various forms of gender-based violence against women. It provides more comprehensive data on prevalence than administrative data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs or other bodies to which women report cases of violence they have experienced.



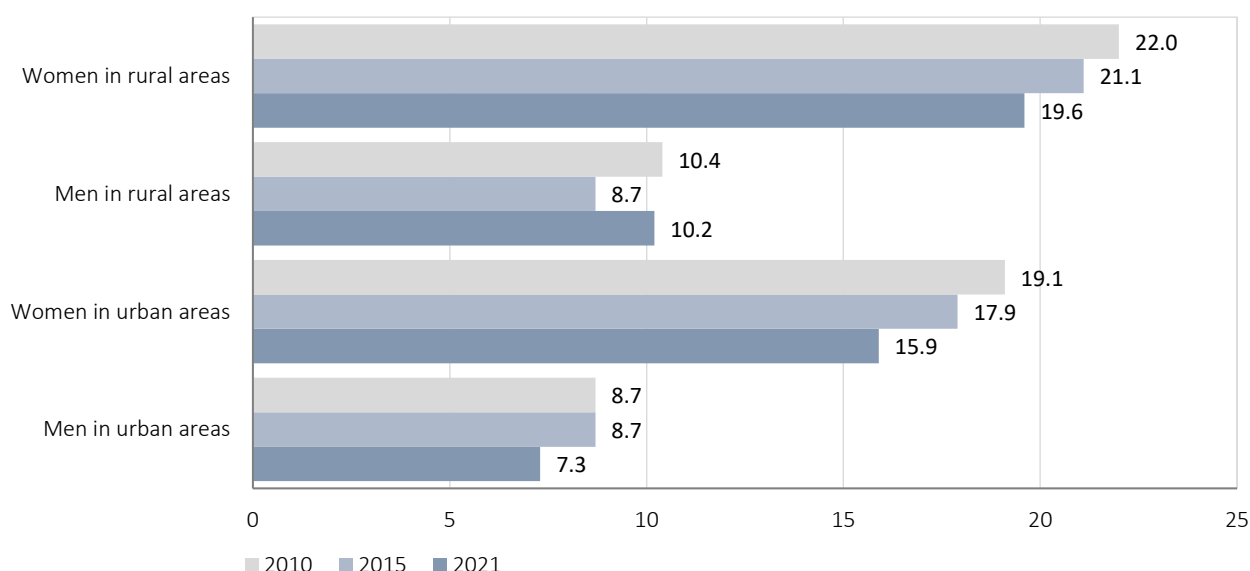
**Graph 2.** Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18, 2019 (%) (SDG indicator 5.3.1)



Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), SORS and UNICEF

Women from rural areas devote a fifth of their time to unpaid household work and family care, more than women in urban areas and significantly more than men from both types of settlements (Graph 3). Time Use Survey data shows that in the period 2010–2021, on average, in the total population of the Republic of Serbia there has been a decrease in the share of time spent on unpaid household work and care for family members, but differences by gender and type of settlement are still very significant.

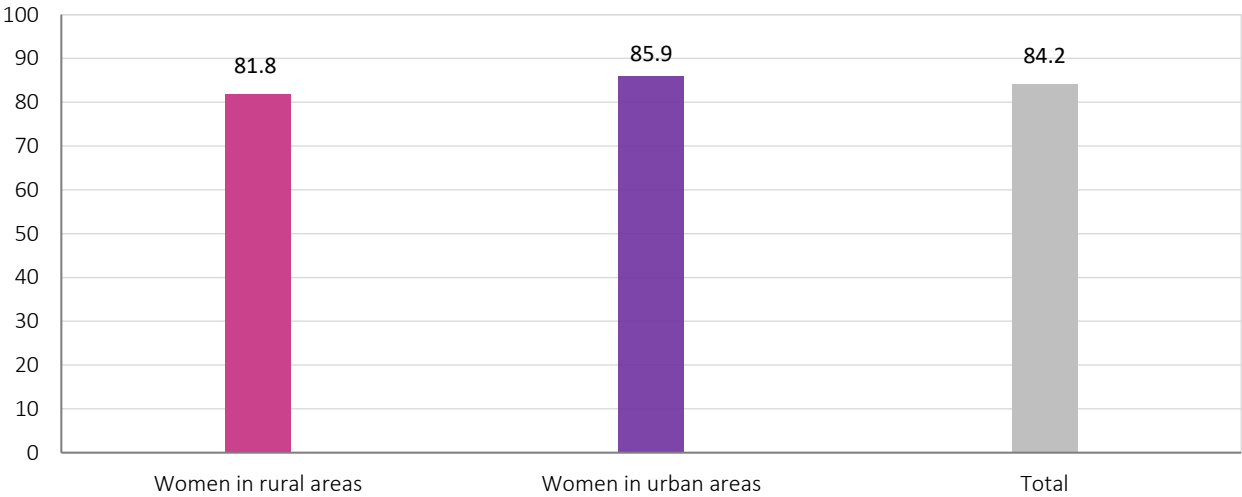
**Graph 3.** Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location (% of total time), 2010–2021 (%) (SDG indicator 5.4.1)



Source: Time Use Survey, SORS

Women living in rural areas, according to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), in a large percentage independently make decisions about their reproductive health and sexual life, although to a somewhat lesser extent, than women living in urban areas (Graph 4).

**Graph 4.** Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care, 2019 (%) (SDG indicator 5.6.1)



Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), SORS and UNICEF

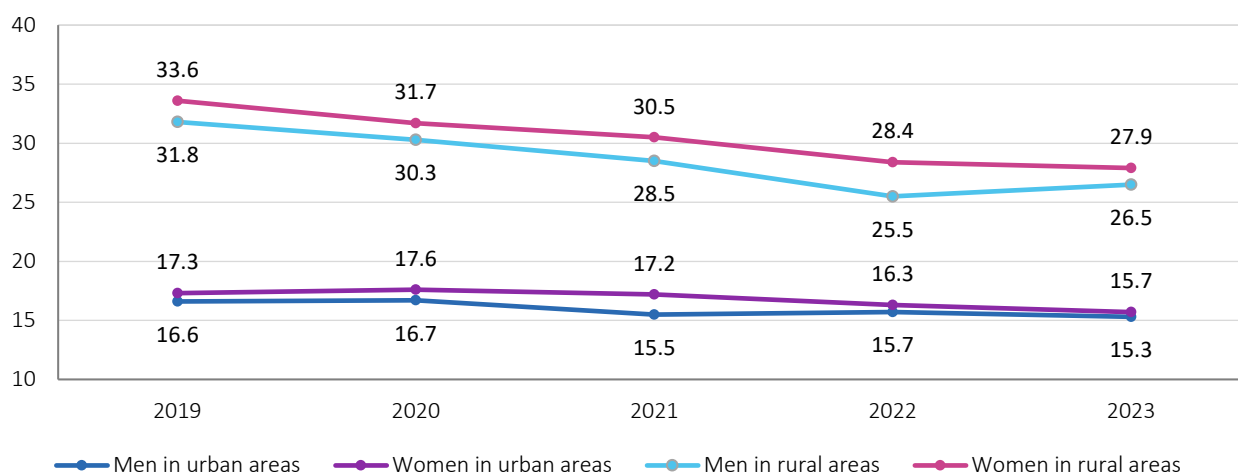




...WOMEN WHO LIVE IN RURAL AREAS ARE AT GREATER RISK OF POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION THAN MEN WHO LIVE IN THE SAME AREAS, AND ESPECIALLY THAN WOMEN AND MEN WHO LIVE IN URBAN AREAS...

Women from rural areas are exposed to the greatest risks of financial poverty, as well as the risks of poverty and social exclusion (Graphs 5 and 6). Although the risk of financial poverty rate among the total population, including women living in rural areas, decreased in the period 2019–2023, the risk of financial poverty rate is continuously highest among women in rural areas (Graph 5).

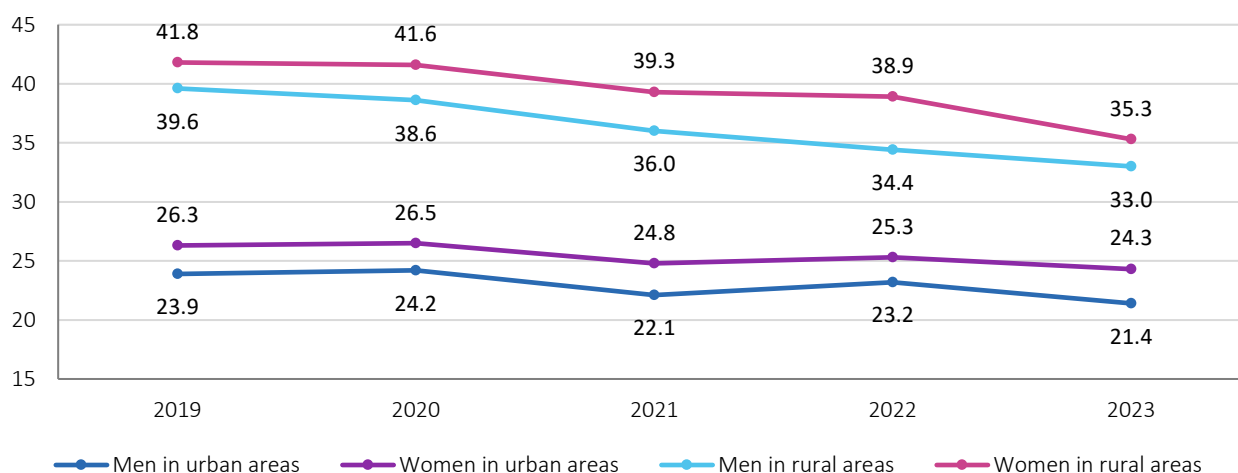
**Graph 5.** At-risk-of-poverty rate, 2019–2023 (%) (SDG indicator 1.2.1)



Source: Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), SORS

The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate, which measures other aspects of poverty in addition to financial poverty (such as material deprivation and work intensity), is also continuously highest among women living in rural areas (Graph 6). As with financial poverty, the differences are particularly large between women and men from urban areas.

**Graph 6.** At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (EU 2030 strategy), 2019–2023 (%) (SDG indicator 1.2.2)



Source: Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), SORS



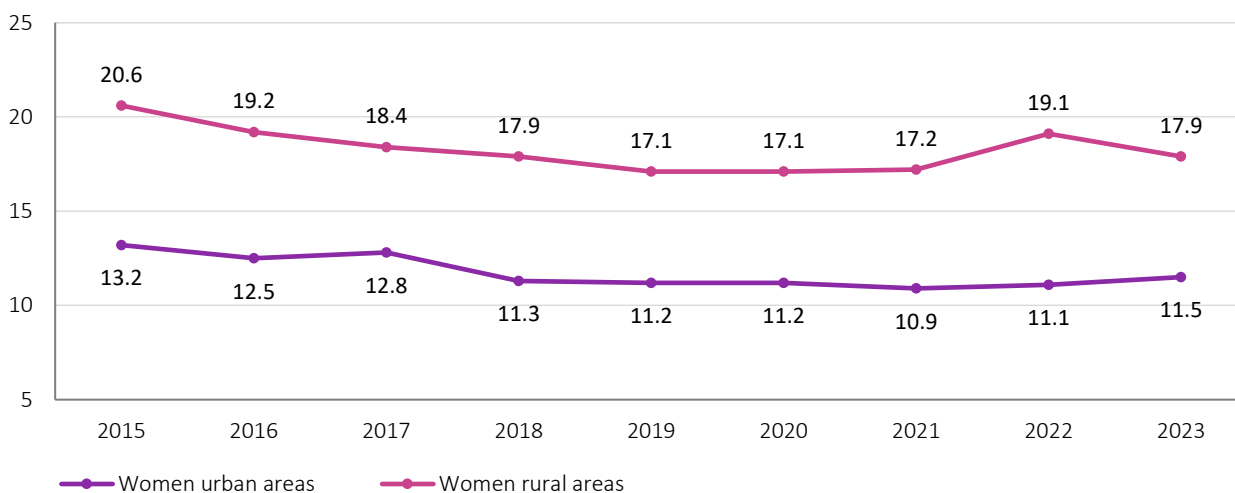
...WOMEN FROM RURAL AREAS ARE LESS LIKELY TO USE MODERN CONTRACEPTION METHODS THAN WOMEN FROM URBAN AREAS, BUT THEY LESS OFTEN HAVE AN UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING. THEY VISIT A DOCTOR SLIGHTLY LESS DURING PREGNANCY, BUT THEY GIVE BIRTH UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF MEDICAL STAFF, JUST LIKE WOMEN FROM URBAN AREAS...

Women of reproductive age (15–49 years) living in rural areas are less likely to use modern contraceptive methods than women in urban areas (SDG indicator 3.7.1). According to the findings of the 2019 MICS survey, 24.4% of women of this age from urban areas, who are married or in union, use some method of modern contraception, while this is the case for 16.9% of women from rural areas. However, among women living in rural areas, the proportion of women with an unmet need for family planning is lower than among women living in urban areas (7.5%, compared to 9.7%)<sup>8</sup>.

A slightly lower percentage of women from rural areas make prenatal visits to a doctor (SDG indicator 3.8.1). Among women from urban areas who gave birth in the two years preceding the 2019 MICS survey, 97.7% had four or more prenatal visits to a doctor, while 94.9% of women from rural areas did the same<sup>9</sup>.

The birth rate among adolescent girls (aged 15–19) is consistently higher among adolescent girls living in rural areas than among their peers living in urban areas (Graph 7).

**Graph 7.** Adolescent birth rate (aged 15–19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group, 2015–2023 (SDG indicator 3.7.2)



Source: Vital statistics, SORS

According to the same source, almost all women who gave birth in the two years preceding the survey had their delivery attended by trained health workers (SDG indicator 3.1.2). In this regard, there are no differences between women living in urban and those living in rural areas.

<sup>8</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), SORS and UNICEF, 2019, page 107, <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/16056/file/MICS%206%20Istra%C5%BEivanje%20vi%C5%A1estrukih%20pokazatelja%20za%202019.%20godinu.pdf>

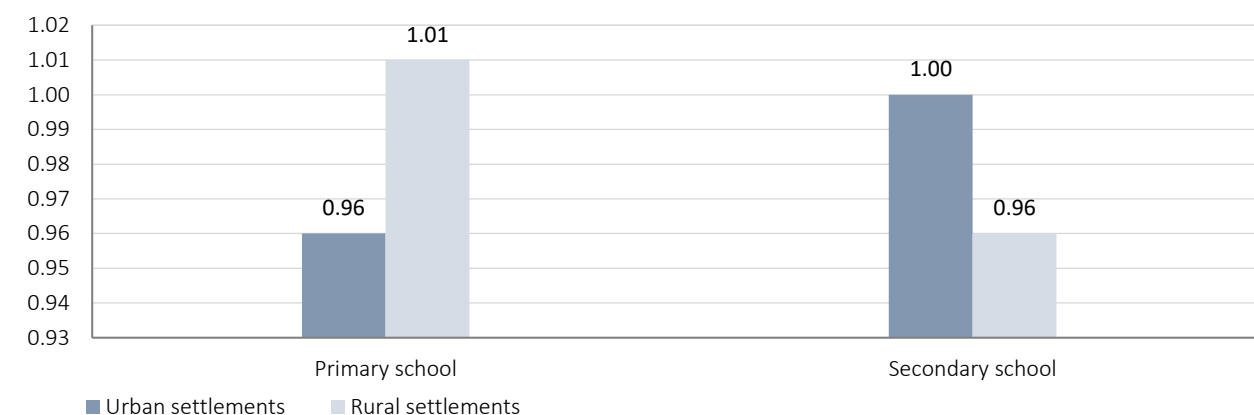
<sup>9</sup> SORS, MICS – SORS and UNICEF, 2019, page 141



...GIRLS FROM RURAL AREAS ATTEND PRIMARY EDUCATION AT THE SAME RATE AS BOYS, BUT THEIR PARTICIPATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IS SOMEWHAT LESS. YOUNG AND ADULT WOMEN FROM RURAL AREAS PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATION AND TRAINING AT A HIGHER PROPORTION THAN THEIR MALE PEERS FROM THE SAME AREAS, BUT AT A SMALLER PROPORTION THAN YOUNG AND ADULTS WHO LIVE IN URBAN AREAS...

Gender differences in primary education attendance are not significant in rural areas, but at the secondary education level, the gender parity index registers a slight underrepresentation of girls compared to boys (Graph 8).

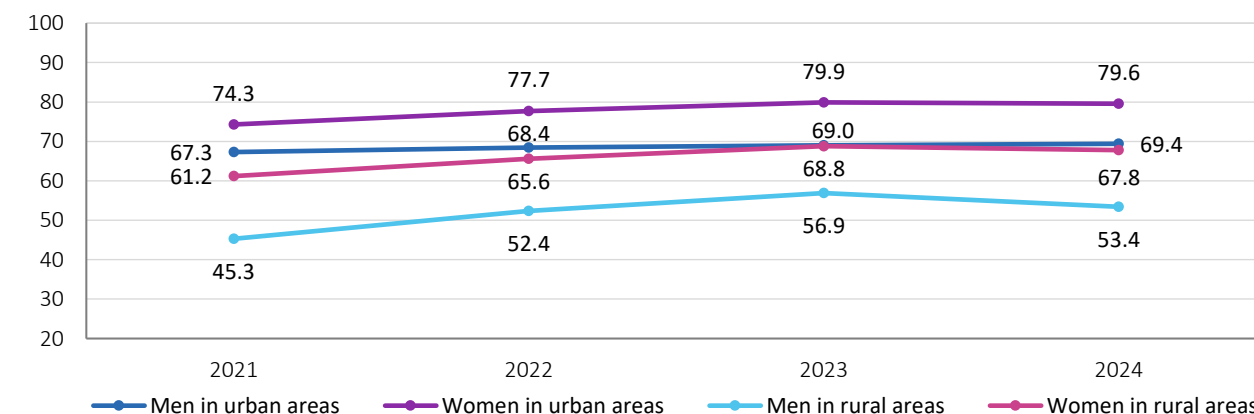
**Graph 8.** Parity indices women/men for primary and secondary school, 2019 (SDG indicator 4.5.1)



Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), SORS and UNICEF<sup>10</sup>

Gender differences in educational participation among young people (aged 15–24) are very significant, as are differences between young people living in urban and rural areas. Young women living in rural areas (aged 15–24) participate in formal and non-formal education and training at a significantly lower rate than their peers living in urban areas, and at a significantly higher rate than young men from their areas (Graph 9).

**Graph 9.** Participation rate of youth (15–24) in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, 2021–2024 (%) (SDG indicator 4.3.1)

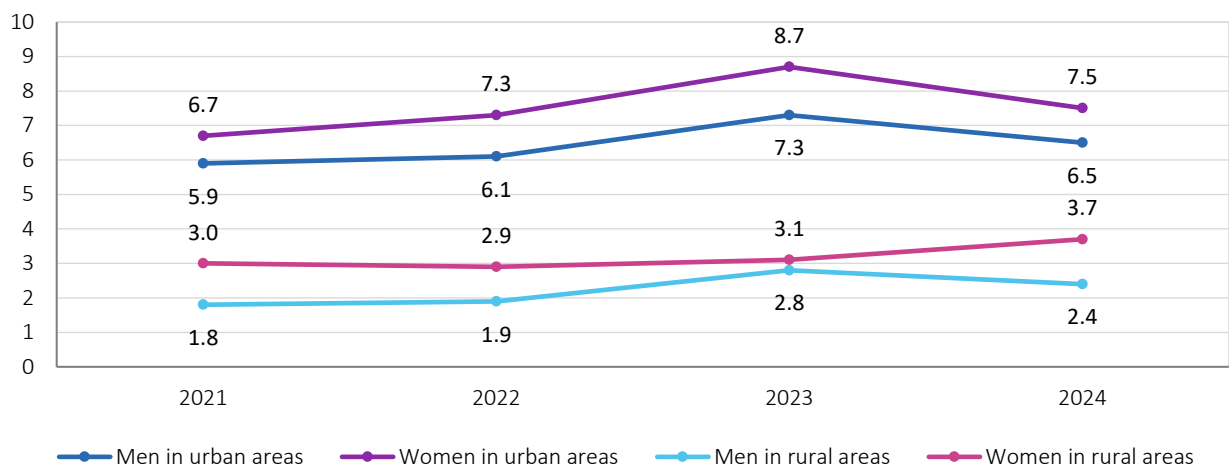


Source: Labor Force Survey, SORS

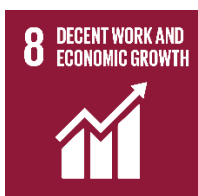
<sup>10</sup> SORS, MICS - SORS and UNICEF, 2019, page 303

Adult women from rural areas (aged 25–64) are very little involved in formal or non-formal education and training, but still in a slightly higher percentage than men from the same areas. In contrast to young women from rural areas, who are more similar to men from urban areas in terms of their level of participation in education (Graph 8), adult women in rural areas are closer to men from the same areas, which indicates a generally low involvement of the rural population in education after the period of youth (Graph 10).

**Graph 10.** Participation rate of adults (aged 25–64) in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, 2021–2024 (%) (SDG indicator 4.3.1)



Source: Labor Force Survey, SORS



...WOMEN FROM RURAL AREAS ARE IN THE MOST DISADVANTAGED POSITION ON THE LABOR MARKET - THEY ARE THE LEAST ACTIVE AND EMPLOYED, AND AMONG THE EMPLOYEES, THE HIGHEST SHARE IS INFORMALLY EMPLOYED, DUE TO THE HIGH RATE OF INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE. AMONG RURAL YOUNG WOMEN, THE LARGEST SHARE IS THOSE WHO ARE NOT INVOLVED IN EDUCATION OR THE LABOR MARKET...

Basic labor market indicators show the most disadvantaged position of women from rural areas, both in comparison to men from the same areas, and in comparison to women and men from urban areas (Table 2). More than half of rural women are inactive, which is partly influenced by their age structure, characterized by a high participation of older women. Of particular concern is the position of young women in rural areas (15–24), among whom as many as 70.3% are inactive, significantly more than young men in the same areas (52.5%). That it is more difficult for young women in rural areas to find a job can be seen from the higher unemployment rate – 23.3% compared to 20.1%, what is this rate for young men from rural areas<sup>11</sup>.

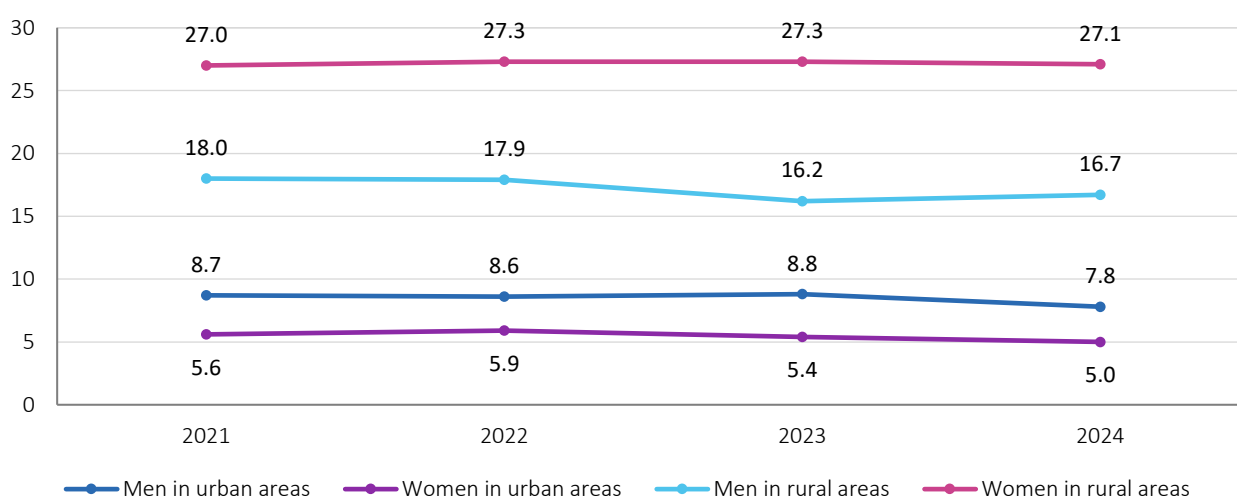
**Table 2.** Basic labor market indicators for the population aged 15 and over, by gender and type of settlement, 2024 (%)

Population contingents	%			
	Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate	Inactivity rate
Republic of Serbia – Total	56.2	51.4	8.6	43.8
Women in rural areas	47.1	43.0	8.7	52.9
Women in urban areas	50.8	46.2	8.9	49.2
Men in rural areas	64.0	58.8	8.2	36.0
Men in urban areas	63.1	57.8	8.5	36.9

Source: Labor Force Survey, SORS

Employment characteristics are also not favorable for women from rural areas. They record the highest rate of informal employment, which is associated with the absence of social rights based on work (Graph 11).

**Graph 11.** Proportion of informal employment in total employment, 2021–2024 (%) (SDG indicator 8.3.1)

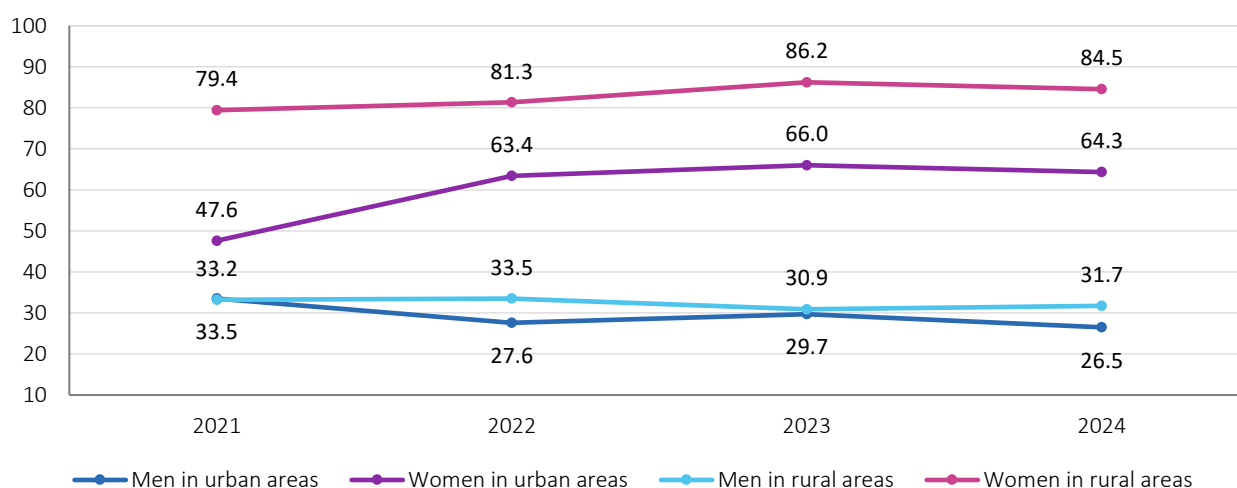


Source: Labor Force Survey, SORS

<sup>11</sup> SORS, LFS 2024

This high share of informal employment in total employment among rural women is mainly a consequence of informal engagement in agriculture. In 2023, women accounted for 22.8% of heads of family agricultural holdings, while among family members performing agricultural activities on the holding, they accounted for 58.7%<sup>12</sup>.

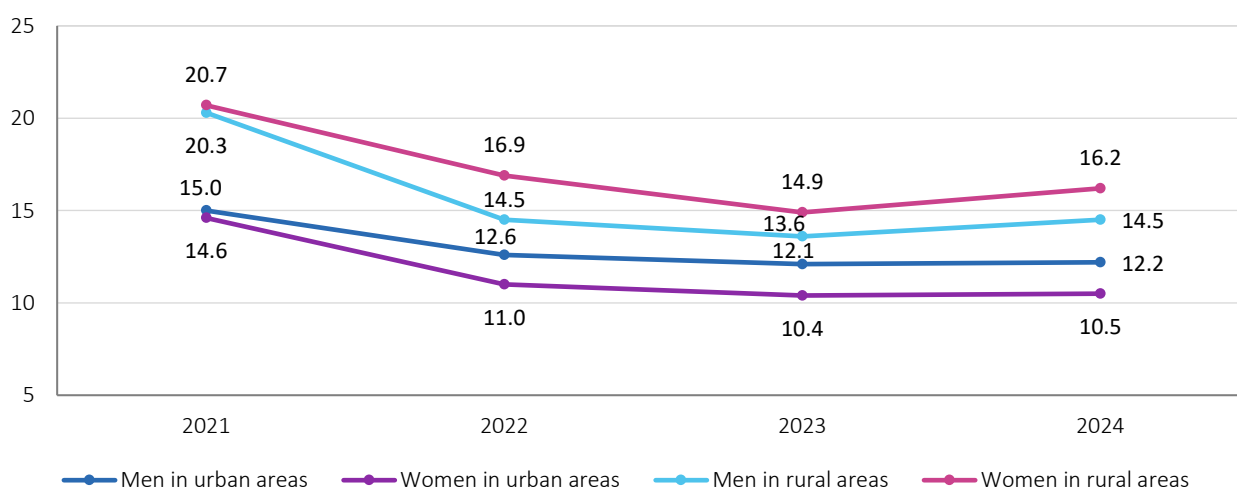
**Graph 12.** Share of informal employment in agricultural employment, 2021–2024 (%)



Source: Labor Force Survey, SORS

Among persons who are neither in education, training nor in the labor market, the largest share is recorded by young women in rural areas (Graph 13).

**Graph 13.** Proportion of youth (aged 15–24) not in education, employment or training, 2021–2024 (%) (SDG indicator 8.6.1)



Source: Labor Force Survey, SORS

When it comes to the prevalence of child labor (SDG indicator 8.7.1), in the age group of children aged 15–17, a child labor rate of 2.5% is registered only among girls from urban areas, while this phenomenon is not recorded among girls living in rural areas, nor among boys from urban and rural areas<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Source: SORS, Agricultural Census 2023

<sup>13</sup> SORS, MICS – SORS and UNICEF, 2019

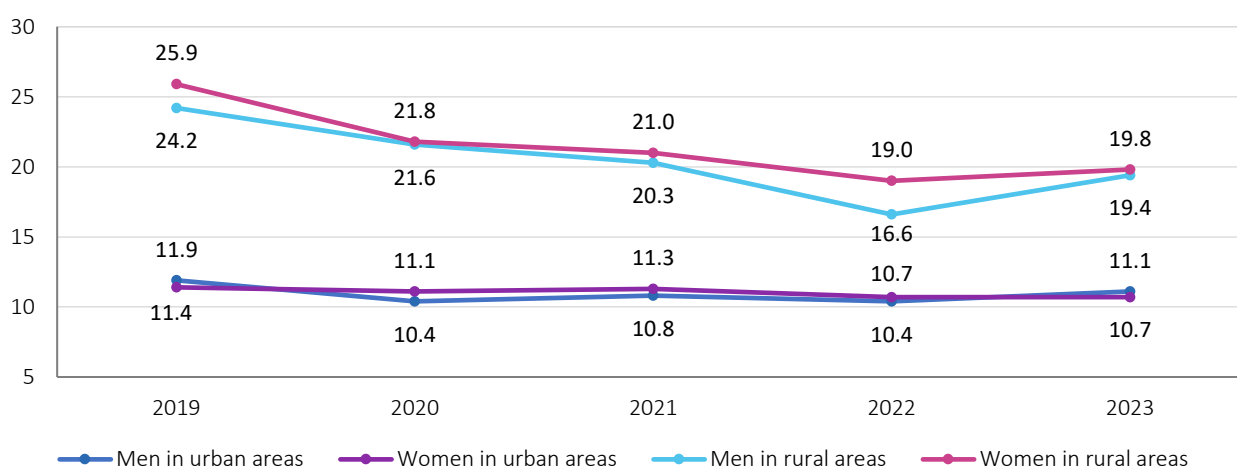




...INDICATORS OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY ALSO INDICATE THE DISADVANTAGED POSITION OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS, BOTH IN RELATION TO MEN FROM THE SAME AREAS, AND IN RELATION TO THE URBAN POPULATION. ON THE OTHER HAND, WOMEN FROM RURAL AREAS FEEL LESS DISCRIMINATED THAN WOMEN FROM URBAN AREAS...

Indicators of economic inequalities indicate that among women from rural areas, the highest share of persons whose disposable income is lower than 50% of the median equivalized income, which defines the financial poverty risk line (Graph 14). Although in 2023 there was almost equalization with men from rural areas in this regard, the difference is continuously present in the period 2019–2023. In this regard, the differences between women from rural areas and the urban population of both sexes are particularly significant.

**Graph 14.** Proportion of people with a disposable income below 50% of median equivalized income, 2019–2023 (%) (SDG indicator 10.2.1)



Source: Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), SORS

Women from rural areas, in a smaller percentage than women from urban areas believe that they were discriminated against on any basis (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Proportion of women aged 15–49 reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law, 2019 (%) (SDG indicator 10.3.1 (16.b.1))

Grounds of discrimination	Women in urban areas	Women in rural areas
On any basis – Total	8.1	4.8
Ethnic or migrant background	1.8	1.0
Gender affiliation	4.3	2.0
Sexual orientation	0.5	0.0
Age	2.4	0.8
Religious affiliation	0.9	0.4
Disability	0.5	0.4
Other reasons	2.4	1.6

Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), SORS and UNICEF



... A SLIGHTLY HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO LIVE IN RURAL AREAS FEEL SAFE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES THAN WOMEN WHO LIVE IN URBAN AREAS.

Although in both urban and rural areas a significant majority of women feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark, the percentage of women who feel safe is slightly higher among women living in rural areas than among women living in urban areas (this data is not available for the male population). The difference is particularly pronounced in terms of the share of women who feel “very safe” (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Proportion of women aged 15–49 that feel safe walking alone around the area they live after dark, 2019 (%) (SDG indicator 16.1.4)

Feeling of security	Women in urban areas	Women in rural areas
They feel very safe	23.9	31.6
They feel safe	62.9	57.1
They feel unsafe	11.6	10.8
They feel very unsafe	1.0	0.4
They never walk alone after dark	0.6	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), SORS and UNICEF



# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND!

**Progress on the Sustainable Development  
Goals in the Republic of Serbia from the  
perspective of the position of women  
in rural areas**



Република Србија – Републички завод за статистику  
Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia