



**IRRIGATION
STRATEGY
OF SERBIA**

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IRRIGATION STRATEGY FOR SERBIA

Gender aspect of irrigation

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the gender characteristics of agricultural holdings in the republic of Serbia, with particular focus on access to irrigation and measures that incentivize investments into irrigation. This analysis aims to provide the necessary data and information to support the integration of a gender perspective into Irrigation strategy/Programme of the Republic of Serbia for the 2022-2031 period.

The report was prepared on the basis of secondary data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (Farm Structure Survey 2018) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (the Directorate for Agrarian Payments and FADN database). In addition, for a deeper insight into practices that could be discriminatory against women or ethnic minorities, the method of semi-structured interviews with representatives of water users' associations from the city of Leskovac was used.

The report is organized into two chapters, as follows: 1) Gender characteristics of agricultural holdings and their operators, which analyzes the structural characteristics of farms by sex, profile of women holders and gender aspects of irrigation (applied irrigation practices); 2) Access to irrigation and participation in decision-making - This chapter analyzes the legislative framework, access to budget incentives for irrigation and women's participation in political decision-making.

2 GENDER CHARACTERISTICS OF AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS AND THEIR OPERATORS

2.1 Structural characteristics of agricultural holdings by gender

In Serbia, women represent 19.5 percent of farm holders and 15.5 percent of farm managers (Table 1). The share of farms owned by female holders is on the rise (2.2 percentage points in period 2018-2018), while the share of farms managed by women is stagnating (decrease by 0.03 percentage points). The increase in the share of households headed by women is caused by the longer lifespan of women¹, traditional pattern of inheritance, as well as s well as the favoring of women as beneficiaries of rural development policies. However, out of 109,919 women headed holdings, only 86,115 (78.3 percent) are managed by woman. The reason for this is the high average age of women heads of households, but also the fact that households often are only fictitiously registered to women, although the executive role of managers is played by male family members (son, husband, brother).

¹ Life expectancy at birth is 71.4 years for men and 77.2 for women (2020). In 2018, the average age of the Serbian population was 41.4 years with a higher average age for women than men (42.7 versus 40.0).

Table 1 Agricultural holdings in the Republic of Serbia by gender of holders and managers

	Agricultural holdings, total	Share of women in total number of:	
		Farm holders (%)	Farm Managers (%)
Republic of Serbia	562,895	19.5	15.3
Belgrade region	29,949	15.5	13.4
Vojvodina Region	126,189	19.8	14.9
Šumadija and Western Serbia Region	242,224	18.2	14.4
South-East Serbia Region	164,533	22.0	17.1

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, FSS 2018

The gender-disaggregated data available on access to resources in Serbia is limited. According to data from the Republic Geodetic Institute of February 2021, women own 25.6 percent of real estate while also owning 12.8 of of real estate in which there is co-ownership and in which women participate (0.3 percent of real estate is joint property)². Previous research found that when it comes to rural women, the cultural norms and practices are the main reason for women not being owner or co-owners of property, as well as that women often renounce property for the benefit of male heirs (FAO, 2021)³.

Farms managed by woman occupy around 10 percent of agricultural resources (10.8 percent of UAA, 9.9 percent of LSU), and produce 9.5 percent of total standard output (SO). However, these farms are of small size, operating on average only 2.9 ha of UAA and 1.5 LSU, with average SO of 5,377 EUR. Distribution of the number of farms by size classes reveals that the percentage of female managers is the largest in the small farm holders' category, and it declines as the farm size increases. Women account for 19.2 percent of managers of the smallest farms (up to 2 ha), while their share in the category of largest holdings (over 100 ha of UAA) stands at only 5.8 percent. The distribution of farms by economic size also indicates a marked asymmetry – 64percent of farms managed by women have a standard output of less than 4,000 EUR (vs. 48.7 percent of farms managed by man).

² Independent report of Network SOS Vojvodina on implementation of priority recommendations from the CEDAW Committee to the Republic of Serbia, for period 2019-2021, March 2021

³ Situation of Rural Women in Serbia, Shadow Report to the Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women regarding the fourth reporting cycle of Serbia, Informal network of women's organisations dealing with the situation of rural women, 2017; FAO. 2021. National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods – Serbia. Budapest. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7068en>

Table 2. Agricultural resources and average farm size in Republic of Serbia by gender of agricultural holding managers

	Share of farms managed by woman (%)			Average farm size					
				UAA (ha)		LSU (number)		SO (€ mil.)	
	UAA	LSU	SO	Male	Femal	Male	Female	Male	Fema.
Republic of Serbia	10.8	9.9	9.5	5.7	2.9	3.3	1.5	9,232	5,377
Belgrade region	10.1	10.0	8.2	4.2	2.6	2.6	1.5	8,612	4,973
Vojvodina Region	9.1	9.9	8.5	10.5	4.3	4.4	1.9	17,572	9,267
Šumadija and Western Serbia Region	10.7	8.8	9.4	4.4	2.4	3.5	1.5	7,226	4,424
South-East Serbia Region	14.3	12.5	12.4	4.3	2.5	2.3	1.1	5,789	4,012

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, FSS 2018

The regional differences in terms of farm size, share in total resources and contribution to standard output are prominent. The region of South-East Serbia is characterized by highest share of female farm owners and managers, which could be attributed to unfavorable demographic profile (higher aging rate and average age of rural population, long lasting out-migration etc.). The average size of farms managed by woman is highest in Vojvodina region, while in South-East region women's farms occupy more resources and produce more output than in other regions.

2.2 Gender profile of farm managers

The age structure of farm managers in Serbia is unfavorable and worsening. The average age of farm holders is 61 years, and over the period 2012-2018 increased by five years, both for men and women. Nevertheless, the average age of women farm holders is higher relative to that of men (65 years and 60 years, respectively) (Table 3). More than 51 percent of female farm managers are aged 65 years and over, while only 1.7 are below 35 years of age. In Vojvodina region the age structure of female farm managers is more evenly distributed among age classes than in other regions. Apart from the influence of regional specific socio-economic and cultural factors, this is also due to division of farms and transfer of ownership to younger farmers and/or women to be eligible for state subsidies.

Table 3. Age structure of female farm managers in the Republic of Serbia

	Average age (years)		Age structure of female farm managers, by age classes (%)				
	Male	Female	≤ 34 y.o.	35-44	45-54	55-64	≥ 65 y.o.
Republic of Serbia	60	65	1.7	5.3	15.0	26.9	51.1
Belgrade region	61	64	2.4	5.4	13.6	27.1	51.4
Vojvodina Region	57	60	3.3	8.1	19.9	29.6	39.1
Šumadija and Western Serbia Region	61	66	1.0	4.4	13.5	25.9	55.3
South-East Serbia Region	62	66	1.3	4.7	13.8	26.2	54.0

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, FSS 2018

Out of a total of 1.337 million persons number of persons carrying out agricultural activities, 561,020 (42%) are women (Table 4). However, the work of the female labor force expressed in full-time equivalent (Annual Working Unit - AWU) is somewhat lower, amounting to 38.4 percent. With respect to legal status, the largest share of women's work consists of the work they perform as members of family holding (75.2 percent).

Table 4. The female workforce and work in agriculture by legal status

	Female work force of family agricultural holdings			% of women	
	Number of persons	AWU		Number of persons	AWU
		Number	%		
Total	562,020	247,860	100.0	42.0	38.4
Farm holders	108,322	44,540	18.0	19.4	16.1
Members of family holdings	449,365	186,340	75.2	59.3	59.2
Family farms - Full-time employees	201	137	0.1	15.9	13.4
Legal entities and entrepreneurs - Full-time employees	4,132	3,643	1.5	22.5	22.3
Family farms - Seasonal and labor contract	-	12,427	5.0	-	35.9
Legal entities and entrepreneurs - Seasonal and labor contract	-	773	0.3	-	38.7

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, FSS 2018

The educational profile of female farm managers is to a great extent defined by the age structure. Most of them gained knowledge on agriculture solely through practice (61.8 percent), followed by those with secondary education in other non-agricultural fields (31.3 percent), and the highly-qualified women managers with tertiary education (4.3 percent). Less than 2 percent of female farm managers have colleague or university degree in agriculture and similar fields (3.4 percent for man). In Vojvodina and Belgrade region there is a larger share of women with higher qualifications, where less than 50 percent of women managers rely solely on practical experience, relative to the rest of Serbia, where this share is above 65 percent. In addition, holdings in the Vojvodina region with female managers have the highest share of managers with university degree (6.5 percent; FAO, 2020b).

In addition to educational characteristics, the age structure of farm managers influences the managerial practices, innovation, productivity etc. Only a small number of family holdings (4.5 percent) keep accounting records and 1.8 percent use computers to keep records about the holding. These practices are less common in holdings with women managers, and much more common in family holdings in the Vojvodina region than in the rest of Serbia.

Women's farms represent a low share among farms with other gainful activities (12.5 percent). However, their share is relatively higher (above 20%) among the farms specialized for certain types of primary agricultural production, especially in labour intensive products - farms specialized in flowers and ornamental plants, farms specializing in laying hens, sheep, goats etc.. This suggests that income diversification in primary agricultural production, through specialization in certain niche products, is more typical for households with women manager than on-farm diversification.

The economic performances agricultural holdings, depending on the gender of the holder, reflect the described differences in the structural characteristics of farms managed by women and men. According to the FADN database, women's households are of smaller size, employ more labor input

and achieve lower FNVA's (total and per AWU) (Table 5). Labor productivity on women's farms is lower, but land productivity is higher, which can probably be attributed to a larger share of farms specialized in labor-intensive crops and products.

Table 5. Economic performances of agricultural holdings by gender of farm managers; average 2015-2019

Year	Total labour input (AWU)	Total UAA (ha)	Subsidies on investments (RSD)	Farm net value added - FNVA (000 RSD)	FNVA per AWU (000 RSD)	Labour productivity (000 RSD per AWU)	Land productivity (000 RSD per ha)
Men	2.1	28.5	29,322.3	3,396.1	2,010.6	3,637.7	775.1
Women	2.2	23.4	27,796.3	2,909.2	1,659.0	2,960.8	897.0
All	2.1	28.0	29,170.2	3,347.6	1,975.6	3,570.2	787.3
Base index (2015) (Men=100)	104.2	75.8	16.4	65.3	69.3	68.5	77.5
Base index (2015-2019) (Men=100)	104.7	82.1	94.8	85.7	82.5	81.4	115.7
Base index (2019) (Men=100)	102.9	82.0	131.8	88.0	85.8	86.3	127.6

Source: FADN database of the Republic of Serbia

2.3 Gender aspects of irrigation

The total number of farms that have the possibility of irrigation in the Republic of Serbia is 260,212 (46.1 percent), and the total area that can be irrigated is 437,985 ha (12.1 percent of UAA). However, only 186,231 farms irrigate crops, on an area of 159,587 ha. Among irrigated farms, 14.6 percent are run by women, and they occupy 8.8 percent of irrigated land. The average size of irrigated land per farm managed by women (0.2 ha) is many times lower than farms managed by men (0.9 ha). This difference is especially evident on farms in the region of Vojvodina, where the average size of irrigated areas of farms managed by women is lower than 0.1 ha, while on farms managed by men it is 4.1 ha.

All of the above suggests that irrigation is used less frequently on women's farms, but also that it is used on a smaller part of female holdings.

Table 6. Number of farms that irrigate and irrigated area by gender of farm managers

	Total		Female farm managers		Average size of irrigated land, ha	
	Number of farms that irrigate	Irrigated land area, ha	% of farms that irrigate	% of irrigated land area	Man	Women
Republic of Serbia	186,231	159,587	14.6	8.8	0.9	0.2
Belgrade region	7,624	7,883	13.9	7.5	1.1	0.1
Vojvodina Region	20,057	74,705	14.4	5.8	4.1	0.04
Šumadija and Western Serbia Region	90,266	47,414	13.3	11.6	0.5	0.3
South-East Serbia Region	68,284	29,585	16.5	12.5	0.5	0.4

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, FSS 2018

In relation to the physical and economic size of irrigated farms, there are no differences between farms depending on the gender of the manager. In both cases, the distribution of farms is highly consistent with the distribution of total number farms by land size. However, there is a slightly higher share of irrigated farms of size 2-10 ha, in relation to their share in the total number of farms.

The main source of irrigation water for the largest number of farms in Serbia (52.6 percent) is groundwater from on- farm wells. This source of irrigation water is used by 53.2 percent of farms run by men and 49.1 percent of farms run by women. About a quarter of both male and female households use surface water outside the farm, and a slightly higher percentage of women than men use water from artificial watercourses (8.8 and 6.2 percent respectively).

Differences between farms in terms of water sources used for irrigation in relation to the gender of managers are insignificant, and are determined by the structural characteristics of farms, the location of plots and available water sources. This is evidenced by regional differences, which indicate a significantly higher share of female farms that use groundwater for irrigation on farms in Vojvodina and the Belgrade region (68 percent and 82 percent, respectively) compared to the rest of Serbia (about 43 percent). On the other hand, in the region of Šumadija and Western Serbia (26.8 percent of farms) and Eastern and Southern Serbia (35.4), a much larger share of farms use surface water outside the farm than in the northern parts of the country (about 7 percent).

Table 7. Farms that irrigate and irrigated land area by irrigation water sources

Irrigation water sources	Farms that irrigate and irrigated land area				Farms by irrigation water sources (%)	
	Number of farms	Irrigated land area, ha	Out of which female farms (%)		Man	Women
			Number of farms	Irrigated land		
Groundwater on the farm	97,937	71,154	13.6	10.6	53.2	49.1
Surface water on the farm	17,404	15,658	15.5	11.9	9.3	9.9
Off-farm surface water	49,884	61,858	15.0	5.7	26.7	27.6
Water from an artificial watercourse	12,274	3,690	19.4	17.9	6.2	8.8
Other sources	8,732	7,227	14.8	6.8	4.7	4.7
Total	186,231	159,587	14.6	8.8	100.0	100.0

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, FSS 2018

Irrigation methods depend on factors such as type of crop, soil type, topography, water availability labour inputs, costs and benefits. The most commonly used method of irrigation on farms in Serbia is surface irrigation, which is used by 65.8 percent of farms on 41.6 percent of the area. Other irrigation methods are used by a small number of farms (sprinkler irrigation 6.3 percent of farms, 26.6 percent area; drip irrigation 27.9 percent farms, 31.8 percent area).

Differences in applied irrigation methods among male and female farms indicate that a significantly higher number of farms run by women (72.3 percent) use surface irrigation, compared to farms run by men (64.7 percent). This is the case in all regions, but the difference in the share of male and female households that apply this practice is less visible in Vojvodina region (60.7 percent men, 62.6 percent female households). In addition, drip irrigation is more common on women's farms in this region (31 percent of irrigated farms) than in other regions.

Table 8. Farms that irrigate and irrigated land area by irrigation water sources by irrigation methods (Number of farms and areas were calculated several times, as farms used one or more irrigation methods)

Irrigation methods	Farms that irrigate and irrigated land area				Farms by irrigation methods (%)	
	Number of farms	Irrigated land area, ha	Out of which female farms (%)		Man	Women
			Number of farms	Irrigated land		
Surface irrigation	131,609	81,146	15.8	10.5	64.7	72.3
Sprinkler irrigation	12,606	51,847	10.9	4.5	6.6	4.8
Drop by drop (surface drip irrigation)	55,899	62,044	11.8	7.8	28.8	22.9
Total	200,113	195,036	14.4	8.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, FSS 2018

3 ACCESS TO IRRIGATION AND PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

3.1 Legal framework

Serbia has a comprehensive constitutional and legal anti-discrimination legal framework. Discrimination is prohibited by the Constitution, stipulating that everybody is equal before the Constitution and the Law and everyone has the right to equal legal protection, without discrimination, that any discrimination is prohibited, indirect or direct, on any grounds and particularly on the grounds of race, sex, nationality, social origin, birth, religion, political or other opinion, property status, culture, language, age, mental or physical disability (Art. 21). The Constitution also stipulates that special measures which the Republic of Serbia may introduce to achieve full equality of individuals or groups of individuals in a substantially unequal position compared to other citizens is not to be deemed discrimination.

The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination⁴ stipulates general prohibition of discrimination on the basis of any personal characteristics. There also are special anti-discrimination laws⁵, as well as anti-discrimination provisions which are included in many laws regulating specific areas of social relations.

Serbia has ratified and accepted many international conventions that guide its national strategic and legal frameworks for gender equality. Over last decade the progress has been made in harmonizing legislation on gender equality with the international and EU standards, and mainstreaming gender equality across all sectors at all levels. Major accomplishments include: introducing gender sensitive budgeting as mandatory for all budget users at all levels; starting the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020 and the accompanied Action Plan, and adoption of the new Law on Gender Equality⁶ which has entered into force on June 1, 2021⁷.

⁴ "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 22/2009 i 52/2021

⁵ Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities¹⁰ and the Gender Equality Law

⁶ "Official Gazette of the RS", No.52 /2021.

In the national legislative framework, gender equality is included in the Constitution (Art. 15) and further addressed in the Law on Gender Equality and the Law Prohibiting Discrimination. In addition to these overarching laws, sectoral laws on employment, work, social protection, family relations, education, health care, access to justice, and other areas also include regulations supporting gender equality.

According to the provisions of the Family Law⁸, men and women are equal in rights to property and property related rights, regardless of their marital status. The property regime that is automatically implemented is joint ownership, but spouses it also may be regulated by a marriage agreement (Art. 188). There is also the assumption that the participation of spouses in the joint ownership is equal (Art. 180). This law stipulates that spouses manage their property jointly and dispose of it together and in agreement (Art. 174). It is considered that regular property management is always taken over by one spouse with consent of the other spouse, while spouses cannot dispose of their own share of joint property or encumber it by legal affairs among the living. However, some of the provisions of this law are unfavorable for the position of women and make (potential) threat to their economic position. Namely, mandatory written consent of the other spouse is not required before each transaction including marital property, and there is not an established system of automatic joint registration of property. Therefore, due to traditional patriarchal power relations, property is predominantly registered to the man's name.

These shortcomings have been partially corrected by the Law on the Registration with the Cadastre of Real Estate and Utilities⁹, which allows spouses to be automatically registered as co-owners on a property acquired during the marriage. It stipulates the obligation of public notaries to ask for written consent of the spouse when certifying any type of agreement related to marital property, with the obligation of the notary to warn spouses of the consequences of giving the written consent. It is expected that this solution will contribute to the gender equality principle, by increasing the number of women registered in the cadastre, since the man's name is most often the only one in purchase agreements, who is then, based on the agreement, registered as owner of the property in the cadastre, while the co-ownership of the woman over the property remains invisible.

The gender dimension of flood protection and rescue activities was recognized by the Gender Equality Council of the Government of the Republic Serbia, which decided that it is necessary to develop gender-sensitive statistics, risk indicators on social and economic consequences, as well as indicators on reconstruction and recovery. In this regard, the Law on Reconstruction Following Natural and Other Hazards¹⁰ was adopted (after the floods that hit Serbia in 2014) to regulate the process of reconstruction and provision of assistance to citizens and businesses that have suffered material damage due to elemental and other disasters. The article 6 stipulates that every citizen shall be entitled to receive the aid in case of a natural and other hazard under the conditions and in line with the procedure laid down by this Law, with the same rights and conditions as other citizens and without any discrimination whatsoever. The article 7 is about principle of gender equality, demanding that the competent authorities shall especially ensure observance of this principle and particularly take care that no decision, measure or action should encourage or result in adverse position of women.

⁷ They include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) and the Optional Protocol to CEDAW (2000); the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953); the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995); UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000); and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (2011).

⁸ "Official Gazette of the RS", No.18/2005, 72/2011 – other law 6/2015

⁹ "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 41/2018

¹⁰ "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 112/15

3.2 Access to investment support from national and local budgets

The Law on Incentives for Agriculture and Rural Development¹¹ regulates the types of incentives, as well as the conditions for exercising the right to incentives in agriculture and rural development. Registration with the Agricultural Holdings Register (AHR) is an eligibility requirement for the access to support from national and local budgets. In 2019, 480 836 holdings were registered with the AHR, and 71.7 percent of these had “active” status. The share of holdings registered to women accounted for 26.4 percent of the total number of registered holdings, and 23.4 percent of the total number of active holdings. In both cases, the share of women is larger than their share in the total number of women holding managers (19.4 percent) in Serbia. These data indicate a tendency among (larger ?) farms to transfer part of the land to women, due to the easier access to subsidies.

The Law on Agriculture and Rural Development defines that the holder of the family agricultural holding is a natural person – agricultural producer or entrepreneur performing agricultural production, who is registered with the Agricultural Holding Registry as holder of the family agricultural holding. According to this law, the member of the family agricultural holding is an adult household member who works continuously or periodically on the holding and who is registered with the Agricultural Holding Registry, as well as a minor holding member, based on parents’ or legal guardian’s statement (Art. 2).

The Rulebook on registration and renewal of registration in the Agricultural Holding Registry¹² stipulates in the case of registration of a family farm, a farmer - a natural person who is the holder of the family farm is entered in the Register and members of the family farm can be registered. In case of death of the holder of the family farm, the remaining registered members of the family farm agree to appoint a temporary holder, until the end of the probate procedure and the implementation of changes in the Real Estate Register and notify the Ministry within 30 days. Members of a family farm who are owners or tenants, i.e. users of land, may by their statement, determine the holder of the family farm (Art. 4).

Legal provisions listed above indicate that there are no gender discrimination in exercising the right to budgetary support for agriculture and rural development. Although there is no special support measures aimed for women in Serbia, some support measures favor female farm holders. Special benefits envisaged for female farms include the following support schemes (FAO, 2021):

1. Incentives for income diversification and improvement of the quality of life in rural areas. There are two types of incentives that envisage more favorable position of female farm holders when applying for investment support:
 - According to Rulebook on incentives for the improvement of economic activities in rural areas through support for non-agricultural activities, applications submitted by women are awarded 15 additional points (out of total 100) when ranking applications for investment support. The measure was designed to boost investment in the rural tourism sector and traditional arts and crafts.
 - Rulebook on incentives for programs for income diversification and improvement of quality of life in rural areas through support to young farmers also envisages extra points for women applicants (5/100 points).
2. Credit support – Special benefits for female farm holders are defined in Rulebook on conditions and manner of exercising the right to credit support, which prescribes a lower interest rate for the repayment of the loan if the farm is registered by female farm holder.

¹¹ "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 10/2013, 142/2014, 103 / 2015, 101/2016.

¹² "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 17/2013, 102/2015, 6/2016, 46/2017, 44/2018 – other law 102/2018 and 6/2019

3. Support for the preparation and implementation of local rural development strategies (LEADER like support) – To ensure that the specific needs of rural women are taken into account in planning local strategies, one of the criteria in the scoring system for assessing the quality of local rural development strategies is whether women were involved in their development (5/100 points). Furthermore, additional points are awarded if women are participating in the Local Partnership. As the percentage of women participating in the Partnership increases, so does the number of points awarded to local rural development strategies.

Rural development support schemes available at the sub-national level (by AP Vojvodina and local governments) are also envisage special benefits for women beneficiaries.

Although many studies on gender equality warn of difficult access for women farm owners to available incentives for agriculture and rural development, data from the Directorate for Agrarian Payments suggest a slightly different picture. Namely, according to data from 2019, the average amount of funding per female recipient stood at EUR 3,917.3, which was higher than the average amount approved per male recipient (EUR 3,145.9).

The same is when it comes to incentives for investments in crop irrigation. The investment support received by women's farms exceeds the average amount per farm. It applies also for investment in irrigation (table 9). The data also reveals that percentage of women's farms in total number of applicants, as well as in the number of approved and disbursed funds is higher than their share in total number of farm managers (15.3 percent, table 1)

Table 9. Beneficiaries of support for investment in physical assets of agricultural holdings, by sex of beneficiaries

	Number of approved applications	Approved eligible funds for investment (mil. RSD)	Disbursed funds (mil. RSD)	Average support per farm (RSD)
Total support for investments in physical assets of agricultural holdings	4,956	1,455.9	1,390.2	293,770
of which incentives for investments in the purchase of new machines and equipment for irrigation of plant crops	731	156.6	155.6	214,171
Female farms				
Total support for investments in physical assets of agricultural holdings	1,010	309.7	299.9	306,591
of which incentives for investments in the purchase of new machines and equipment for irrigation of plant crops	165	44.9	44.5	272,227
Share of female farms (%)				
Total support for investments in physical assets of agricultural holdings	20.4	21.3	21.6	
Incentives for investments in the purchase of new machines and equipment for irrigation of plant crops	22.6	28.7	28.6	

Source: Directorate for Agrarian Payments, internal database

3.3 Access to decision making

Many studies on gender issues claim that there is a gender inequality in access and participation of rural women in policy making. However, according to Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia 2021, the domain of power is the one with the largest positive change (9.2 index point value increase between 2016 and 2018, and 18.5 points between 2014 and 2018)¹³, due to the increase in the indices for the sub-domains of political and social power (despite a decrease for the sub-domain of economic power). Regardless the positive developments related to women's participation and visibility in political structures at national level, situation is different at local level, as there are municipalities in Serbia without any women in municipal councils (Beker et al., 2017, Bačanović, 2014).

When it comes to rural women, they are rarely included in defining local policies, do not have knowledge on how to exercise their rights, nor opportunity to initiate change. Considering the small share of women in local community bodies, rural women experience far fewer opportunities to improve their lives in accordance with the needs of the communities in which they live (FAO 2021). However, there are examples of active local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), women's organisations and individuals dealing with women's entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, promotion of various local initiatives and exchange experiences.

There are no gender disaggregated data available on participation and representation of women in planning, development, implementation, monitoring of relevant policies and laws related to agriculture and rural development policies. Nevertheless, the recent evaluation of 22 local strategies for rural development (LSRD) and activities on establishing the Partnership for Territorial Rural Development (i.e. Local Action Groups), has shown that in most cases women are highly represented in partnerships, including in governing bodies.

Interviews with representatives of water users' associations from the territory of the city of Leskovac indicate that women equally participate in all activities of the association, and that there is no discrimination in that regard. Most women in their associations inherited the household from their parents, or it was decided by within the household that the household be registered as a female member. The interviewed representatives state that the members of the association are farm managers, regardless of gender or nationality (Roma). Households run by women do not differ in any way, and how and to what extent women will be involved depends on personal affinities and the distribution of roles within the farm.

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¹³ Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia 2021; https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/system/files/events-files/gender_equality_index_for_serbia_2021.pdf; The domain of power measures the gender gap in participation in political, economic and social power structures. The subdomain related to political power includes indicators that measure the share of women among persons performing ministerial functions in the Government (participation of women in the executive branch), as well as the share of women among members of the National Assembly (participation of women in the legislature). Furthermore, this sub-domain includes an indicator of the representation of women among members of local assemblies.

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