



GENDER AND DIVERSITY **ANALYSIS** OF THE COVID - SARS - 19 IMPACT



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Introduction

The Centre for Research and Policy Making – CRPM notes that “the responses to COVID-19 have the potential to be disastrous for feminism”



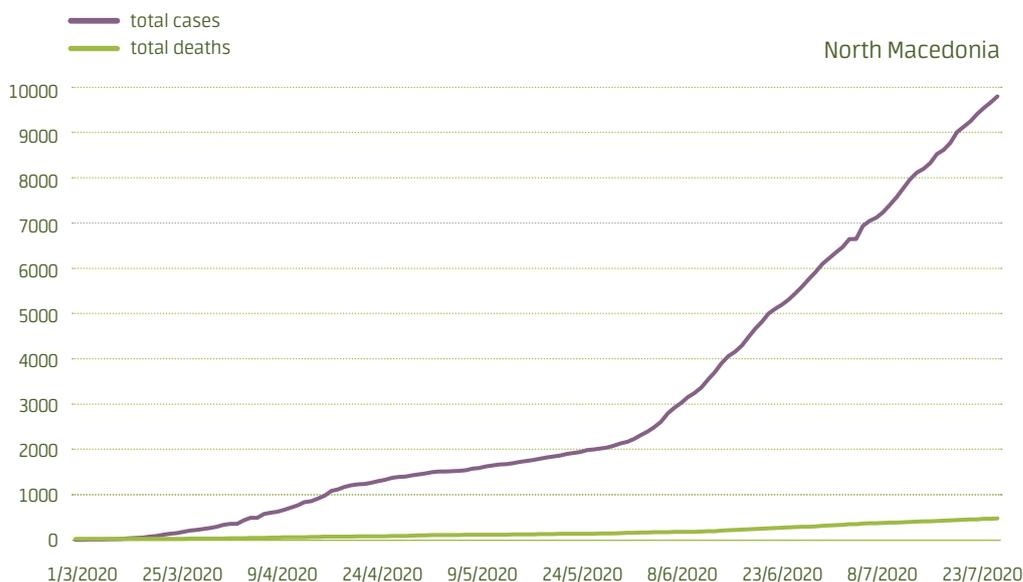
**The Centre for
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The Centre for Research and Policy Making – CRPM notes that “the responses to COVID-19 have the potential to be disastrous for feminism”¹, while Austrian MEP, Evelyn Regner, who chairs the European Parliament Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, told the EUobserver that “the corona crisis is female.” Indeed, “in hospitals, in nursing, at the supermarket checkouts, women fight in the front row against the disease, at the same time, however, closures and layoffs are affecting more female sectors like tourism and retail.”² Across the world, women’s independence will be a silent victim of the pandemic, concludes the Atlantic³. The overall women’s empowerment strive for equal participation in economic, societal and political processes, for equal roles of women and men in the family, in the household and in society, for which we have been advocating and the efforts we have been investing for decades in creating equal opportunities for women and men now are decreasing and can be completely undermined in the course of the crisis.

COVID-19 DYNAMICS

In North Macedonia, the first COVID – SARS - 19 case was registered in February 2020. Since then the country conducted 92,550 tests and detected 9,797 positive COVID-19 cases (status as of 23 July 2020, inclusive).

Graph 1
Total cases and total
deaths – COVID-19 in
North Macedonia,
Source: Our World in Data

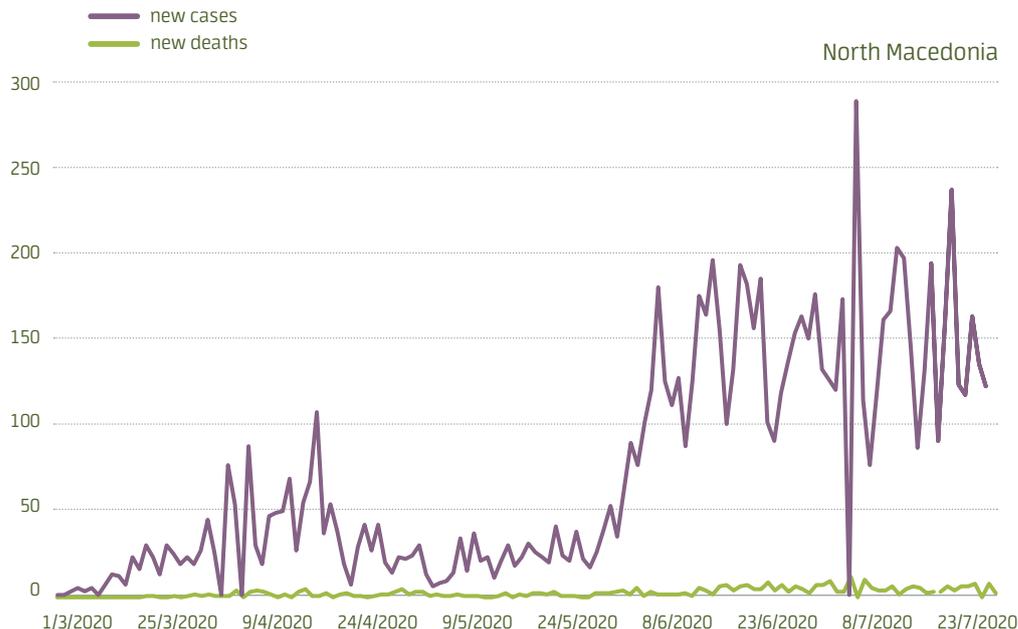


1 CRPM (2020) “Response to COVID-19 and Gender”, available online: <https://cutt.ly/RslhHbx>.

2 <https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/148155>.

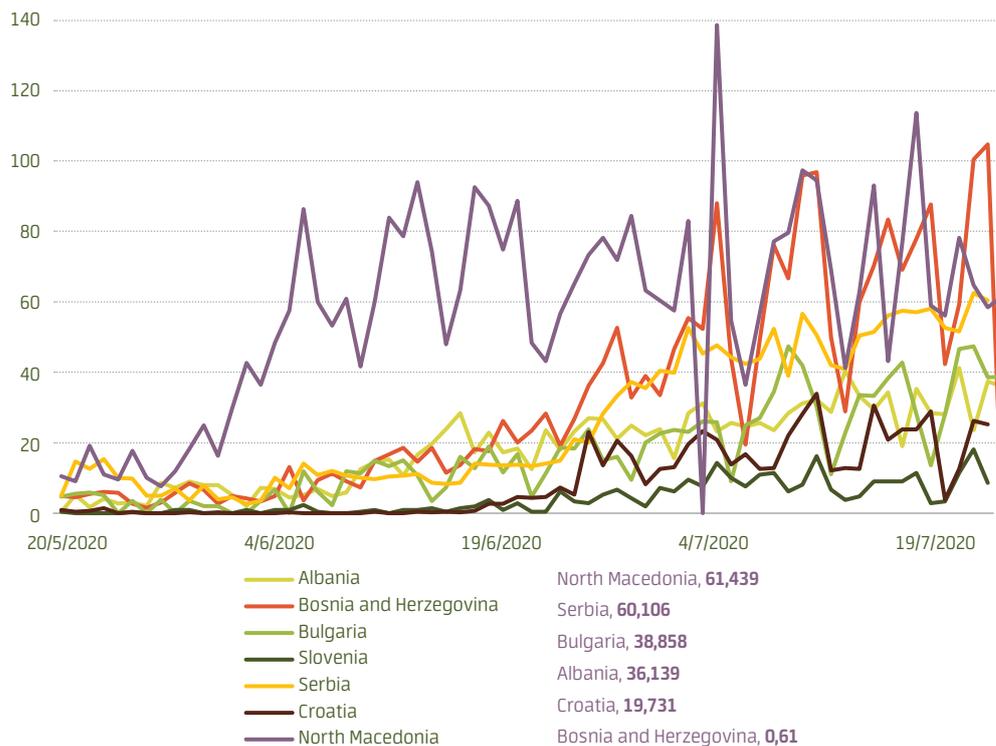
3 <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/>.

Graph 2
Daily new cases and
new deaths – COVID-19
in North Macedonia
Source: Our World in Data

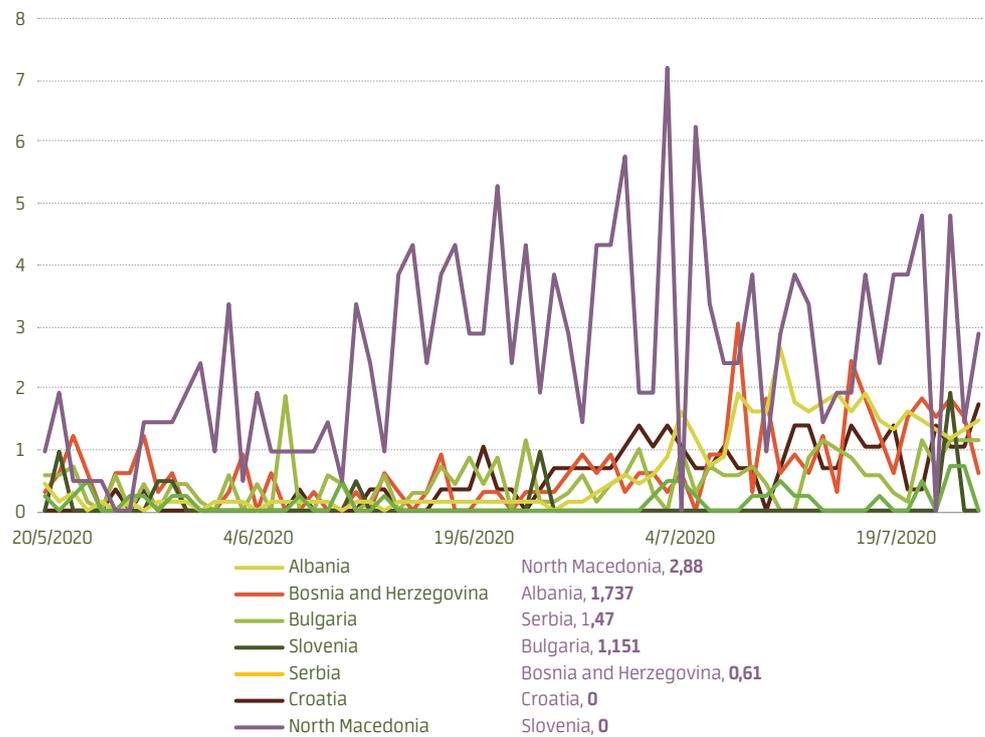


Unfortunately, as Graph 1 and Graph 2 show, the crisis has worsened with a rapid increase in the number of infected cases and deaths in June and July 2020, which corresponds with the stage of lifting the restrictive measures in the country. This conclusion is also supported by the numbers from the Region, where North Macedonia has the second highest number of new cases per million and is first ranked or has the highest number of new deaths per million (Graph 3 and Graph 4).

Graph 3
Daily new cases per
million – COVID-19 in the
Balkan Region
Source: Our World in Data



Graph 4
Daily new deaths per
million – COVID-19 in the
Balkan Region
Source: Our World In Data



The gender structure of the infected, fatalities and the geographic distribution of corona cases is the following: as of 21 July 2020, the country has reported 9,513 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 440 deaths; Out of the total confirmed cases, 4,798 are women, while 4,715 are men; Though the incidence of the virus infection is higher in women, deaths are more evident in men; Out of the 440 reported deaths due to COVID-19, 278 men lost their lives compared to 162 women.⁴ Table 1 shows the top 10 cities segregated by the largest cumulative incidence among women, where Sveti Nikole and Shtip take the top places on the list. The exceedingly high incidence among women in these cities is related to the textile industry, where many women were found to be positive to the virus.

⁴ Institute for Public Health (unpublished data), 21 July 2020.



Table 1
The gender structure of the
infected, fatalities and the
geographic distribution of corona

MUNICIPALITY	TOTAL CASES			INCIDENCE / PER 100,000		MORTALITY		FATALITY	
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Sveti Nikole	159	38	197	1712.255	412.5502	0	0	0,0 %	0,0 %
Shtip	384	248	632	1600.4	1041.929	12.50313	33.61062	0,8 %	3,2 %
Chair	347	414	761	1067.167	1283.442	58.43277	80.60266	5,5 %	6,3 %
Studenichani	90	104	194	1039.501	1210.992	46.20005	46.57662	4,4 %	3,8 %
Lipkovo	135	136	271	993.8163	1009.351	44.16961	74.21701	4,4 %	7,4 %
Karbinci	20	7	27	993.542	350.1751	0	0	0,0 %	0,0 %
Centar	212	179	391	929.9469	791.5101	21.93271	44.21844	2,4 %	5,6 %
Resen	76	67	143	899.8342	799.6181	0	59.67299	0,0 %	7,5 %
Butel	158	182	340	870.5234	1010.886	11.01928	55.54321	1,3 %	5,5 %
Saraj	141	153	294	793.2489	867.6421	61.88467	62.37949	7,8 %	7,2 %

Source: Institute for Public Health, data released upon a request for free access to information filed by the CRPM, July 2020

It has to be emphasized that despite the fact that the under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter referred to as the CRPD), the country has the obligation to keep records of people with disabilities, the state authorities have no records or any information about how many of the citizens infected, and / or recovered are people with disabilities. There are twelve (12) public social institutions for people with disabilities, out of which the largest is the Demir Kapija Special Public Institution (227 residents). There are two rehabilitation facilities – one for physical disabilities in Banja BANSKO and one for intellectual disabilities in Topansko Pole - Skopje. There are also three large psychiatric hospitals: Bardovci, Demir Hisar, and a smaller one in Negorci. In addition to providing services for temporary residents, these hospitals also house a substantial number of long-term residents, and the estimated number of long-term residents is about 700.⁵

Table 2
Number of persons with
disabilities - residents in
public social institutions

INSTITUTION	NO. RESIDENTS UNTIL THE END OF 2018	M	F	AV. AGE
Demir Kapija - Demir Kapija	227	124	97	45
Banja BANSKO - Strumica	63	29	34	41
Topansko Pole - Skopje	35	25	10	23

Under the on-going deinstitutionalization process, currently at the Demir Kapija Special Public Institution the number of people with disabilities over 18 years of age is 187. The present number of people with disabilities at the Banja BANSKO Public Institution is 53 residents.

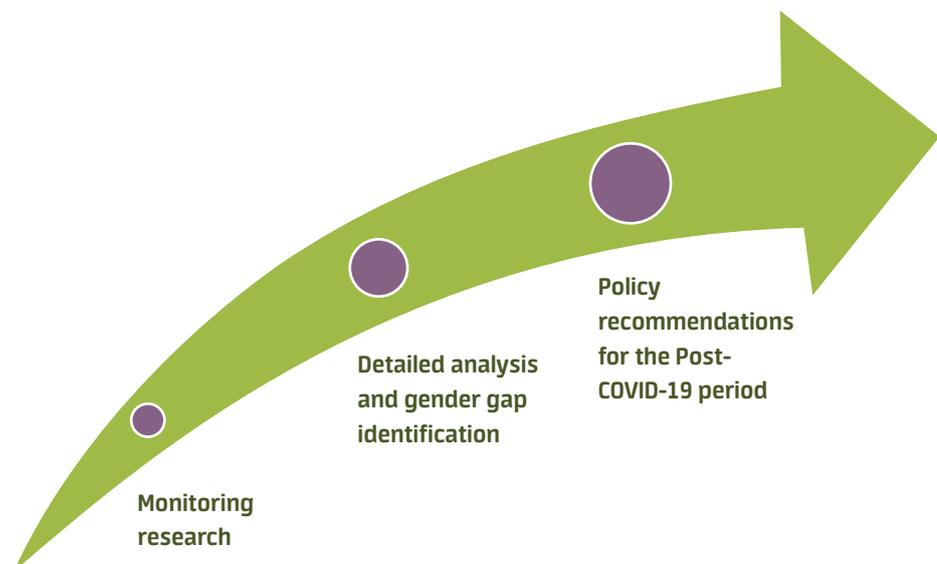
⁵ Shavreski Z. Kochoska E. Country Report on Living independently and being included in the community - Republic of North Macedonia, ANED, Available at: <https://www.disability-europe.net/country/republic-of-north-macedonia>

The lack of information about the health status of people with disabilities, who are institutionalized, specifically information relating to COVID-19, additionally influences the intersectional impact and nature of measures proposed and undertaken by the Government in dealing with the COVID – 19 pandemic.

THEORY OF CHANGE

“The coronavirus related lockdowns have affected everyone, especially vulnerable groups, most notably women, children, people with disabilities, those marginalized and displaced”, said OSCE Ambassador, Clemens Koja, in an interview for MIA, 3 May 2020. In order to determine the effects of the crisis and of the measures employed to deal with it on different groups of the population, not with the aim of assessing, but rather with the aim of learning lessons from this crisis and with a view to proposing future policy developments, the Centre for Research and Policy Making, commissioned by the OSCE Mission to Skopje, developed a monitoring methodology to consider various Government responses to COVID-19, from the gender and diversity (ethnicity, language, disability, age, social status, religion or belief) perspectives. The methodology envisages use of interviews and surveys, as methods for data collection, and triangulation as a method of analysis, while using desktop analysis generated information, primary data sources and statistical data. The time frame for data gathering was from mid-April to mid-July 2020. The monitoring followed a detailed analysis, identification of gender gaps, deriving from measures undertaken to deal with COVID-19 and lessons learned; as well as formulation of possible recommendations for actions to be undertaken in the post-COVID-19 period.

Graph 5
Theory of Change



METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This Gender and Diversity Analysis of the COVID-19 Impact was developed in partnership between the CRPM and the CSOs Radar, Polio Plus, Rural Coalition, and the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. As regards the research activities, the team was also supported by the Monitoring Unit at the OSCE Mission to Skopje. The aim was to reflect upon a multidimensional approach and complexity of issues, as well as upon the intersectionality of age, disability, sexual orientation, rural/urban development, ethnicity with gender and their impact on vulnerability in times of crisis. The methodology of monitoring was phased, reaching out to diverse target groups of 74 women and men of different backgrounds to provide for an intersectional analysis and 60 businesses. The following research methods were applied: desktop review (of previous research findings to get a broader understanding of the impact of the crisis on the economy, labour market, violence, participation and etc.; gathering official statistics and reviewing laws and decrees adopted by the Government in the course of the state of emergency declared on 18 March, 2020, the Central Budget and procurements made as part of the response to the crisis from the gender perspective); face-to-face semi-structured interviews with elderly women and men, rural women and men, women and men with disabilities, single mothers, women-victims of violence and service providers, women in decision-making processes, as well as local response teams and women in the front line; and finally with a view to getting a clear picture of the crisis impact on women's businesses, the CRPM team conducted an online survey with women entrepreneurs and business owners.

The following data collection methods were used for each target group in the primary data collection subset setting:

Table 3
Target Groups and
Methods

SUBGROUP	PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION METHOD	COVERAGE
Women and men aged 65+	Telephone interviews or focus groups	8 women and 4 men
Women and men business owners/entrepreneurs	Survey	60 businesses (38% women and 62% men-owned)
Roma women and men living in settlements	Telephone interviews	9 women and 3 men
Women and men with disabilities (physical, sensory, and psycho-social)	Telephone interviews or focus groups	7 women and 3 men
Rural women and men (including those in informal economy)	Telephone interviews or focus groups	10 women and 6 men
Single mothers with children in kindergartens/schools	Telephone interviews	7 women Request for information of public character sent to kindergartens
Women- victims of violence and service providers to women- victims of violence	Interviews	2 women and 3 women direct service providers
Women in decision-making positions	Interviews	5 women
Women and men in the front line fighting COVID-19	Interviews	7 women and 5 men
Local level response teams	Interviews	11 women and 12 men working in crisis response teams in Kumanovo, Debar, Prilep, Arachinovo, Shuto Orizari ⁶
TOTAL		134 women and men interlocutors

The research method applied due to the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. telephone and on-line interviews rather than face-to-face interviews, has its own limitations as it does not allow researchers to capture in detail the overall experiences, observe reactions and detect objectively the impact the measures had on the everyday life of various groups. Local stakeholders requested to be sent the questionnaire and some also chose to respond in writing. While the total number of interviews is significant and representative, the number of interviews per specific sub-group is small in order to be used for generalization of the situation of all marginalized populations in that specific sub-group. This especially applies to women-victims of violence as the sample of

⁶ The complete list of local officials- interviewees is presented in Annex 2.

interviewed women is exceedingly small. In this respect, the research team did not have any particular problems in detecting victims, as in conducting the research, it cooperated with organizations from the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and therefore access to women-survivors of violence was direct. Hence, a serious challenge was convincing them to talk about their experiences. Two women were interviewed and shared their stories about violence they suffered during the pandemic. Both of them faced rampant psychological violence. Namely, they had endured years of emotional and psychological abuse and failed to report it until the COVID – 19 measures, when the quarantine was enforced. Victims of gender violence were interviewed by psychologists, working in services that offer psycho-social support to violence survivors.

All precautions were put in place to ensure ethical and practical requirements with respect to interviewed target groups. Each group was approached by a CSO that specializes in advocacy for rights of the specific target group. Each interviewee signed a release of statement form and was anonymized, except for appointed and elected officials, who are presented with their names in the Report.

Chapter

1

GENDER ANALYSIS OF MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

The legitimate goal of the Government during the crisis that occurred following the COVID-Sars-19 pandemic was to protect first and foremost the people, their health, and their lives.



States are generally obliged to take adequate measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic

The legitimate goal of the Government during the crisis that occurred following the COVID-Sars-19 pandemic was to protect first and foremost the people, their health, and their lives. Consequently, almost all states, including North Macedonia, adopted legal and policy measures in accordance with national and international law. However, such measures are primarily assessed regarding their compliance with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), the required quality of law legislative measures have or do not have, how precise and clear they are so that any individual could adjust their behaviour to such measures and how proportional they are to the legitimate goal set above.⁷

States are generally obliged to take adequate measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic. All rights, except for the right to life (according to the ECHR), and the interdiction of torture and slavery, freedom of expression and freedom of religious belief (according to Article 54 of the Constitution) can be limited⁸. The Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia explicitly envisages the incorporation of ratified international treaties within the national legal system. Furthermore, Article 8 of the Constitution stipulates that the basic freedoms and rights of the individual and citizen, recognized in international law and set down in the Constitution are a fundamental value of the constitutional order; envisaging further (in paragraph 12 of the same Article) that the respect for the generally accepted norms of international law is also one of the fundamental values of the constitutional order. Despite the fact that it seems that the Constitution mirrors the European Convention for Human Rights in terms of guarantees for human rights and freedoms, at the same time the Constitution sets forth numerous (26) legal limitations of such rights and freedoms. These limitations allow for human rights and freedoms envisaged under the Constitution to be further regulated in detail or limited with other national laws (legislation adopted by the Parliament).⁹

In addition to the ECHR, the country is obliged to undertake actions and measures under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Convention was adopted in 2006, to which even the European Union is a Party, as well as all individual European Union Member-States¹⁰. The CRPD envisages that "States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict,

7 AIRE Centre- Advice for Individual Human Rights (2020): COVID-19 and the effects on human rights.

8 Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, available online: <https://www.sobranie.mk/ustav-narm.nspix>

9 According to Treneska Deskoska, R. 2008 "The constitutional concept of human rights in the Republic of Macedonia" in *European standards for human rights and their implementation in the legal system of Republic of Macedonia* ed. Vlado Kambovski, Renata Treneska Deskoska and Vladimir Ortakovski. Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2008, Skopje, domestic laws (legislation adopted by Parliament) regulate in detail the rights of foreigners (Art. 29 and Art. 31); the right to marriage and family (Art. 40); the right to defend the country (Art. 28) and the right to labour relations (Art. 32); whereas limiting the right to freedom (Art. 12); the right to movement and housing (Art. 26 and 27); the right to freely assemble (Art. 28); the right to property (Art. 30); the right to form a trade union and the right to strike (Articles 37 and 38).

10 The CRPD was acceded on behalf of the European Community under a Council Decision 2010/48/EC of 26.11.2009 and is thus an integral part of the EU legal order prevailing over EU secondary law.

**Article 11 of the
CRPD calls for
international
humanitarian
law to be read
through the
perspective of
human rights-
based approach
to disability**

humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters” (Article 11). Furthermore, Article 11 of the CRPD calls for international humanitarian law to be read through the perspective of human rights-based approach to disability. In pursuance with the CRPD, the approach towards people with disabilities in states of emergency and crisis needs to uphold the principles of dignity and non-discrimination and legal capacity, which are also at the core of the CRPD.¹¹ The state of emergency proclaimed due to the pandemic should not disrupt the fulfilment of obligations deriving from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) issued Guidance for Governments to address the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women’s health; including provision of sexual and reproductive health as essential services; then protection of women and girls from gender-based violence; ensuring equal participation of women in decision-making; ensuring continuous education; provision of socio-economic support to women and adoption of targeted measures for disadvantaged groups of women.¹²

1.1. ANALYSIS OF MEASURES FROM THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

The immediate measures assessed in the analysis introduced in the period from start of the pandemic till end of July 2020, to tackle the spread of the COVID-SARS-19 virus taken in North Macedonia were the following: closure of schools and kindergartens as of 10 March 2020; grouping of more than two family unrelated people was prohibited; practicing two-meter physical distancing in public and wearing a protective face covering in closed and open air public spaces (where there are no conditions for physical distancing); closing hotels, shopping malls, cultural institutions, etc.; state of emergency, declared on 18 March 2020; imposition of a nationwide curfew and restricted movement of individuals over the age of 67 and adolescents under the age of 18, exempting people in need of emergency medical assistance from the curfew and essential workers such as the police, armed forces, health workers, and producers directly engaged in agricultural work.

The aim was to protect the health of women and men over 67 years of age, as the most vulnerable group and restrict the contacts they might have with people younger than 18 years, who at the time were considered as the main asymptomatic spreaders of the virus. However, these measures did not produce the same effect in rural and urban areas, and on women and men. The complete list of measures restricting basic human rights is presented in Annex 1.

The state of emergency was declared on 18 March 2020, under a decision by President Pendarovski. The state of emergency on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia was declared for a period of 30 days, with a view to protecting the

11 All the general principles in Article 3 of the CRPD should be respected as they are all relevant for this area.

12 OHCHR, Human Rights Treaties Branch 28 April 2020, Compilation of statements by human rights treaty bodies in the context of COVID-19 https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/TB/COVID19/Compilation_statements.pdf

**The proclamation
of the state
of emergency
resulted in a
derogation from
the European
Convention for
the Protection of
Human Rights**

population against and dealing with the consequences of the coronavirus COVID-19 spread. The proclamation of the state of emergency resulted in a derogation from the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the constitutional (civil liberties) fundamental human rights, in accordance with Article 15, paragraph 1 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on 2 April 2020, when the country submitted the first notification (6 in total) to the Council of Europe, together with the Decision No. 08-526/2, signed by the President of the Republic of North Macedonia, declaring the state of emergency.¹³

At this juncture, it should be underlined that in its comprehensive Report on the implementation of anti-COVID-19 measures and their effects, the Council of Europe (hereinafter CoE) recommends to member-states to restrict rights and freedoms set forth in the ECHR following an *ex-ante* review of the impact of measures and informing citizens about the expected outcome of measures. Furthermore, the CoE sets an important limitation on the derogation from rights and freedoms: proportionality of the measures. The assessment of proportionality is more difficult to be made as this is a new virus, giving thus grounds for general justification of any measure that would keep people away from each other to allow for stopping the spread of the virus. However, as the European Policy Centre concludes such general-scope measures may disproportionately affect specific groups, such as care recipients, on a variety of grounds. In this context, the Academy for Sciences and Arts notes that the decisions adopted during the pandemic must be necessary and proportional.¹⁴ As of 18 March, 2020 when the first state of emergency was declared, until the end of the state of emergency on 22 June 2020, 250 Government decrees having the force of law were published of which 22 were decrees that limit freedoms (of movement mainly) and 44 were decrees that limit rights.

The country did not derogate from any other Convention of which it is a signatory party. However, due to the non-accessible environment and services following the proclamation of the state of emergency and the restrictions of movement, the country *eo ipso* derogated from Article 14 of CRPD.¹⁵

¹³ The complete list of the notifications sent to Council of Europe can be found here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/webContent/62111354>

¹⁴ V. Kambovski and al: "The analysis of the legal aspects of the state of emergency", Skopje, May 2020.

¹⁵ See CRPD/C/UKR/CO/1, para. 14.

Freedom of Movement

Bans on travel into or out of the country were enforced. For a period of 105 days, the state authorities shut down all air and land border entry points.¹⁶ There were also restrictions on travel within the country (for example from and to Debar, Kumanovo, Berovo), affecting cities that were put in total isolation (quarantine) for a few weeks. On 22 March, 2020, the Government adopted a Decree restricting the movement, in contravention of the UN recommendations on the status of human rights in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic,¹⁷ as well as in contravention of the EU guidelines on comprehensive public policy making that seeks to curb the tendencies toward authoritarian abuse. The said Decree was not proportionate, and it had an intersectional and discriminatory effect on specific social groups: people older than 67 and those younger than 18 years. A curfew was imposed on the territory of the entire country (strictly defined time regime was implemented banning movement from 4 p.m./7 p.m. to 5 a.m.) applying to all citizens, while until 14 May, 2020 restricted regime of movement of individuals over the age of 67 (from 5/10 a.m. to 12 p.m.) and adolescents under the age of 18 (from 1 p.m. to 3/7 p.m.) was applied.¹⁸ The strict lockdown of the entire nation allowing for no exceptions, save for the most severe medical emergencies, could be assessed as neither proportionate nor serving the purpose of countering the pandemic. Moreover, such lockdown was intersectionally blind,¹⁹ as it did not take into consideration the status of the elderly (who had very short window of opportunity to be out of their homes), people receiving a treatment (with prescribed health related routines such as walks, exercises, etc.), people with disabilities, including children with autism whose daily routines were disrupted. Most importantly the approach was entirely gender insensitive because it did not recognize the specific gender roles of women, who take care of the elderly and chronically ill family members and their needs to move during the lockdown to take care of family members, causing fear and frustration on both sides, i.e. those receiving and those providing care. More details on the gender impact of the measures are presented in Chapter 2, while Chapter 3 establishes the ensuing gender gaps.

16 Article 1, Decision amending the Decision on Measures to Prevent the Introduction and Spread of the Coronavirus COVID-19, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 66,16 March 2020 *"All border crossing-points in the Republic of North Macedonia shall be closed for passing of foreign nationals - passengers and vehicles, except for entry and transit of freight vehicles, for representatives of the diplomatic corps, as well as for other persons for whom the Ministry of the Interior shall grant permit upon prior opinion given by the Main Crisis Coordination HQ confirming that there exists special state or economic interest. Such freight vehicles and persons shall enter under special safety conditions in accordance with the protocol of the Ministry of Health."*

17 UN Policy Brief Covid-19 and Human Rights: "We are All in this Together", available at https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf

18 Ruling of the Constitutional Court No. U 60/2020 available at <http://ustavensud.mk/?p=19320>, under which part of the Decision of the Government No.44-2416/1 (amended nine times) restricting the movement of people older than 67 and younger than 18 years of age, was annulled on grounds that it was discriminatory on the ground of age.

19 ISSHS (2020), Katerina Kolozova, The State of Democracy in North Macedonia in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic, available online: <http://www.isshs.edu.mk/the-state-of-democracy-in-north-macedonia-in-the-times-of-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

**The quarantine,
isolation, and
social distancing
became the
new normal in
dealing with the
pandemic**

The non-compliance with the restrictions of movement (curfew) was subject to fines of up to EUR 2,000. The amount of the fine is assessed to be set too high, resulting in difficulties in its enforcement. A ban on public transport, group sports, concerts, and any other type of public gathering in closed and open spaces was also enforced. Furthermore, upon consultations with other countries' Governments, the authorities organized flights and transportation for nationals of North Macedonia, who were caught abroad in this situation. Nationals returning to the country with these flights were obliged to stay in state provided quarantine for 14 days,²⁰ enforced with joint forces of the police and the army. The proportionality of this measure is also questionable, as it is not based on the individual assessment of the health risk nationals returning to North Macedonia pose, as the Protocol for enforcement of the measure did not envisage testing for COVID-Sars-19.

The quarantine, isolation, and social distancing became the new normal in dealing with the pandemic.²¹ All individuals suffering from the coronavirus or individuals suspected of having had contacts with other individuals infected with the coronavirus were subject to strict isolation (quarantine) at home (home isolation) for a 14-day period. Such individuals were obliged to sign a written statement, giving consent to adhere to the measure under full moral, material, and criminal responsibility. The enforcement of the measure of strict isolation (quarantine), was controlled by the Ministry of the Interior. Police officers randomly visited homes of the isolated to check whether concerned individuals complied with the isolation measure.²² In practice, there were cases of violations of the measure, and criminal charges were brought against individuals violating the measure. Furthermore, new financial sanctions for individuals not abiding by the quarantine rules, not wearing face masks, or for gathering in large groups were put into force. These cases were treated as emergency cases before courts of first instance. The proceedings were conducted face to face, by keeping distance and using protective equipment. Court decisions were effective and the imposed fines high. This resulted with 977 proposals for ordering fines against

20 Article 2 paragraph 4, Decree with the Force of Law on the Application of the Law on the Protection of the Population Against Infectious Diseases during a State of Emergency, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 72, 21 March 2020, amended under the Decree Amending and Supplementing the Decree with the Force of Law on the Application of the Law on the Protection of the Population against Infectious Diseases in a State of Emergency, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 76, 24 March 2020 and Decision on enforcement of mandatory state quarantine for nationals of the Republic of North Macedonia returning from abroad by humanitarian flights (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 71/20 *"Nationals entering the country at designated border crossings as provided for by law shall be subject to the measure of strict isolation (quarantine) for the duration of 14 days in facilities as provided."*)

21 Decree with the Force of Law on the Application of the Law on the Protection of the Population Against Infectious Diseases During a State of Emergency, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 72, 21 March 2020. amended under the Decree Amending and Supplementing the Decree with the Force of Law on the Application of the Law on the Protection of the Population Against Infectious Diseases in a State of Emergency, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 76, 24 March 2020.

22 See Article 3 of the above Decree.

The finance management system currently does not offer information on how many of the fines have been paid

1,243 individuals, and 922 court decisions against 1,167 citizens.²³ First instance courts do not keep records or have data disaggregated by sex, to allow for a gender analysis. However, only 7 of the decisions were enforceable. The finance management system currently does not offer information on how many of the fines have been paid.

Exemptions from the restriction of movement were allowed by issuing a permit (permission) to categorized groups of people, such as health workers, businesses that would have more damages by not working.²⁴ Hence, as time passed, the restrictive measures received more and more criticism. *"It is possible that the isolation and the quarantine have contributed to the domination of resistance to and criticism of the restrictive measures. Most of the comments are related to the scope, consistency and categories of people covered by the measures, the reduction of individual rights and liberties and the preference of individual responsibility, instead discipline through punishment."*²⁵ This brought a trend of increasing refusal by citizens suspected of having the virus to accept the decisions for home-isolation issued by the health authorities, which according to Minister of Health Venko Filipche reached its peak in mid-June.²⁶ This is related to the overall trust of citizens in the Government, as a number of studies have confirmed. High levels of trust seem to be a common feature of countries with the most effective coronavirus responses, measured by slow spread and low mortality.²⁷ The stringent response to the virus outbreak measures in North Macedonia can be attributed to the very low of trust in the Government.²⁸

23 First Instance Court Skopje I, response to a request based on the Law on Free Access to Public Information, filed by the CRPM, July 2020.

24 The Ministry of Information Society and Administration through the e-portal - uslugi.gov.mk - issued permissions for employees of institutions engaged in the crisis task forces, the media and the bakeries, funeral services, as well as businesses that have registered third and fourth shift.

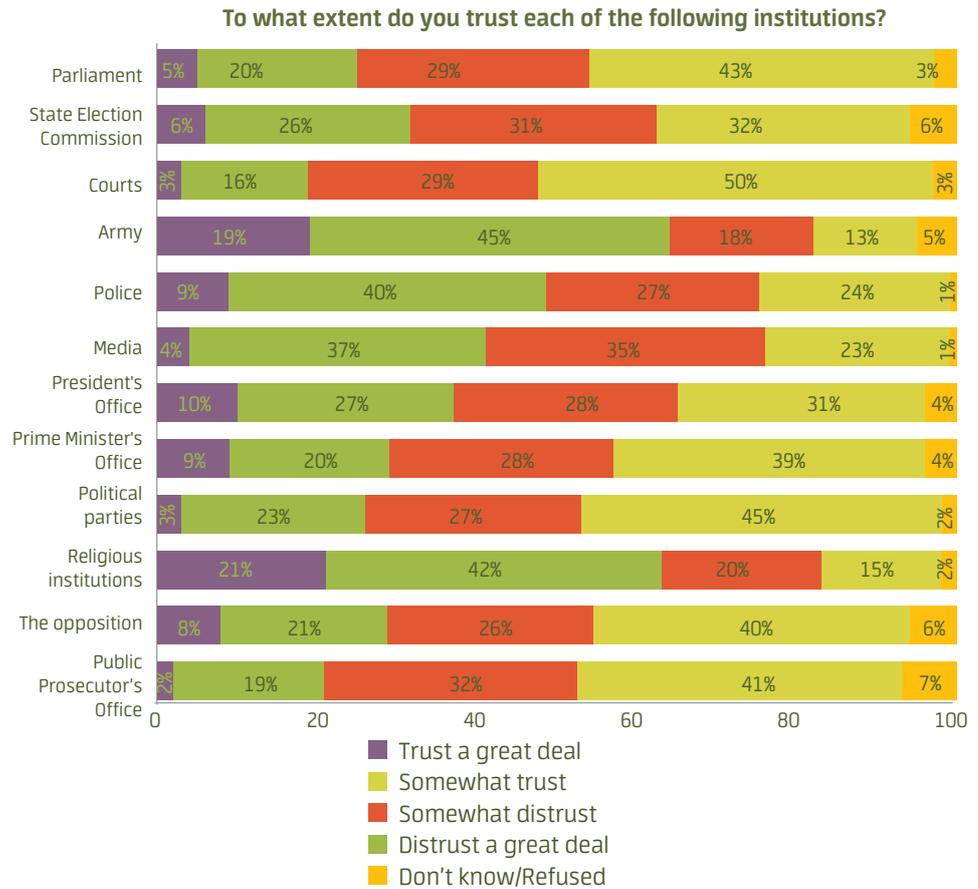
25 ISSHS (2020) Ana Blazheva, Katerina Kolozova Measuring "Authoritarianism from Below" in Macedonian Society in the Context of the COVID-19 Crisis, available online: <http://www.isshs.edu.mk/measuring-authoritarianism-from-below-in-macedonian-society-in-the-context-of-the-covid-19-crisis/>

26 Nova Makedonija "Објавена листата на 138 имиња на лица кои одбиле решение за самоизолација" (A list containing the names of 138 people refusing the decision for self-isolation published) available online: <https://cutt.ly/Ui4Ddds>

27 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/15/secret-success-coronavirus-trust-public-policy/>

28 International Republican Institute (IRI) Centre for Insights in Survey Research of Kosovo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina (BiH), North Macedonia and Serbia poll, published on 28 May 2020.

Graph 6
Trust in Institutions²⁹
Source: IRI (2020), Centre for
Insights in Survey Research



After an organized campaign against the measures undertaken primarily by dog owners and then parents with children with disabilities, the measures were relaxed by allowing exemptions from the ban on movement for these categories of people. It must be noted that the exemption from the measure did not have any effect on people living independently (on their own) or those who live with their elderly parents, due to inaccessible buildings. Essentially, this shows that the process of developing the measures did not follow an impact assessment on vulnerable groups and that the measures were not subject to evaluation in terms of their proportionality and necessity, as required by both the ECHR and the Constitution. However, the exemption from the measures of victims of violence, allowing for their leaving the violent home during the curfew, advocated by the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence has been recognized as beneficial under the research conducted for the purposes of this study (See the section on Violence against Women).

Hence, the limitation of freedom of movement, in conjunction with several other measures taken, such as release from work to provide child care that seriously affected the capacities of institutions, where mostly women work (i.e. social work centres, local services, etc.), limited access to services. Some of these limitations had

²⁹ The survey was conducted on behalf of the International Republican Institute's Centre for Insights and Survey Research by Ipsos Strategic Marketing in the period from 16 to 30 November 2018.

Citizens are guaranteed freedom of association to exercise and protect their political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and convictions

a serious impact on women's health and reproductive rights, which different from the delivery of other services, were not considered urgent and thus not provided (starting with dental healthcare over to abortion).³⁰

Freedom of Assembly

Freedom of assembly or freedom of association, as individual rights, ensure the ability of people to gather in private and/or public and in open or/and closed spaces. Therefore, social physical interaction is inevitable. In accordance with Articles 20 and 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia "*Citizens are guaranteed freedom of association to exercise and protect their political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and convictions....*" "*Citizens have the right to assemble peacefully and to express public protest without prior announcement or a special license. The exercise of this right may be restricted only during a state of emergency or war.*"

A Decree with the Force of Law on the Application of the Law on Public Gatherings during a State of Emergency was adopted,³¹ which banned "gatherings in groups of more than five individuals". This resulted with cancellation of all entertainment and sports events, as well as of the early Parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2020.

Religious Freedoms

Despite the fact that Article 54 of the Constitution stipulates that freedom of expression of religious beliefs is a right that may not be restricted, according to the ECHR this right may be restricted. This is owed to the fact that this right has two distinct aspects: (i) *forum internum*, what is inside of our personality and thought and as such cannot be limited, and what is determined by the constitutional provisions and which cannot be derogated; and (ii) *forum externum*, i.e. the manifestation of one's religious belief, which in accordance with the ECHR case law may be subject to limitations. Considering the supremacy of international law over the national legal system, national authorities may restrict religious rights. Instead, they chose to issue recommendations for not gathering, praying, and performing mass-scale religious rituals. Churches³² remained opened. Hence, religious rituals during the religious holidays of Easter and Bayram took place, possibly leading to increase of the number of infected.

30 Presentation by MD Daniela Markovska, from the Jane Sandanski Polyclinic on health and reproductive rights in times of COVID- 19, organized by the Commission for Equal Opportunities of the Municipality of Gazi Baba.

31 Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 71/20, Article 1 Decision Amending the Decision on Measures to Prevent the Introduction and Spread of coronavirus COVID-19, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 70, 20 March 2020; Decision on Measures to Prevent the Introduction and Spread of Coronavirus COVID-19 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 62/20, 63/20, 64/20, and 66/20).

32 The term "churches" as used in this document means all places and facilities of worship, regardless of the specific religion.

Right to Education

This was not the case with the right to education that was limited since 11 March, 2020 when the Ministry of Education and Science informed the public that the education process in all segments and types would be interrupted in line with the Decree with the Force of Law, which prohibited the face-to-face teaching process and conducting classes in all kindergartens, centres for early child development, day-care child centres, elementary and secondary schools. Conducting classes in higher-education institutions and public scientific institutions was also banned, as well as collective housing in dormitories and other education facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, sport halls, etc. stopped working. Attendance of all extracurricular activities was also restricted.³³ All these activities were transferred online, creating the additional burden of home schooling for parents by requiring that they share teaching responsibilities together with teachers. The national TV broadcaster also prepared an educational program for pupils in primary schools. Teachers and academic staff were moderately prepared for “online” learning, considering that the primary and secondary education systems faced online education for the first time. The absence of support measures for pupils coming from socially underprivileged families that do not have internet or equipment (PC, or a smart phone) to be able to follow education activities was especially criticized. For these students, the right to education was *de facto* suspended. Furthermore, not all parents could support their children with home schooling, as they had work related responsibilities that did not leave any time for them to substitute teachers at schools. The authorities did not provide for a solution for this issue either. Considering the patriarchal model of family, where women are expected to take the burden of unpaid work at home, with children at home, and limited access to education in combination with restricted movement, in some sub-groups the results were girls having experienced mental breakdowns, as evidenced by the analysis in Chapter 2.

Teachers and academic staff were moderately prepared for “online” learning, considering that the primary and secondary education systems faced online education for the first time

The most adapted and prepared for the challenge of online teaching were Universities, which had already been providing online lectures, as part of international collaborations. They transferred lectures on not-specialized on-line platforms for on-line teaching (like ZOOM, MS teams, Google meet, etc.) as a response to the lack of available online learning tools before the virus pandemic. Most of the students’ activities were possible to be completed using online platforms and teaching, but also it should be taken into account that some study programs cannot be completed using the distance learning model (for example, medicine, dentistry, etc.). Moreover, the problem becomes more complex, considering that some of the students defended their diploma thesis or master thesis online, which opened a debate as to whether online courses need to be accredited and whether the diploma can be awarded online, without accreditation for online study program. The quality of the education in times of a pandemic should be assessed in the summer period, and a number of strategic approaches need to be tested as regards the continuation of the education process in the period from

³³ For more details see the Decision on Measures to Prevent the Introduction and Spread of Coronavirus COVID-19; Decree with the Force of Law on the Application of the Law on Primary Education in a State of Emergency, Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 76/20.

**Transferring
education
activities online
has created
an additional
burden for boys
and girls with
disabilities**

September 2020, especially in light of the feasible possibility for a second wave of the pandemic.

Transferring education activities online has created an additional burden for boys and girls with disabilities, considering that with such an online transfer in practice Article 24³⁴ along with Article 5 and Article 3³⁵ of CRPD were derogated. Thus, online education classes broadcast on TV were not adapted and made available in suitable formats for boys and girls with disabilities, having different types of impairments. Furthermore, children with disabilities who were educated in special schools were not targeted with any education measures during the pandemic school period from 10 March to 10 June 2020.

Freedom of Expression

Article 54 of the Constitution stipulates that the freedom of personal conviction, conscience, thought and religious confession may not be restricted even in a situation of emergency. The ECHR has a more flexible interpretation and allows for restrictions of the freedom of expression for the achievement of a certain legitimate goal and when necessary (proportionality test). In this digital age when social media and internet disseminated information are crucial for informing oneself, the freedom of expression and the right to be informed and to inform through dissemination of news and information may be limited.

Article 9 of the CRPD clearly enshrines accessibility as a precondition for persons with disabilities to have unrestricted enjoyment of all their human rights and fundamental freedoms, referring to accessibility to the physical environment, to transportation, as well as to information and communications, including information and communication technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. As underlined by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Articles 9 and 21 intersect in terms of the issue of information and communication, both having a horizontal approach and being part of the so-called hybrid rights. Article 21 envisages that States “shall take all measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice.” Considering that accessibility is a precondition for individuals with disabilities, denial of access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communication, and services open to the general public, including reasonable accommodation would amount to an act of discrimination.³⁶ The Committee highlights that in situations of risk, natural disasters and armed conflict States are obligated³⁷ to make all emergency

³⁴ Regulates the obligation that the right to education will be realized, without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities.

³⁵ Article 5 of CRPD elaborates upon equality and non-discrimination, while non-discrimination is additionally envisaged as one of the general principles regulated under Article 3 of the CRPD.

³⁶ See CRPD/C/11/3 para 20.

³⁷ See CRPD/C/11/3 para 33.

services accessible (Article 9 and Article 21) to persons with disabilities, otherwise their lives cannot be saved or their well-being protected (Article 11). The Committee underscores the duty of States to ensure that all emergency-related information are available in formats accessible to persons with different types of impairments,³⁸ including to deaf persons through sign language, and in the various languages spoken in its territory, including Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions" (Article 21(b)).³⁹ It has also required disability-awareness training for all civil and government staff, rescue and emergency personnel, and for all potential actors involved in emergencies.⁴⁰ To this end, the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated that *"by implementing their obligations under the CRPD and fulfilling the commitments in the Sustainable Development Agenda, States will be able to safeguard the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. In doing so, States should consider the diversity among persons with disabilities, with a particular focus on gender and age, and the situation of persons with disabilities facing deprivation and hardship."*⁴¹

Considering that the exercise of these rights is directly linked to democratic values in a society, there is a thin line between an autocratic regime and the limitations of these rights in the context of achieving proper and genuine information dissemination during the pandemic and control of the narratives, as well as fake news and disinformation proliferation about the virus with the aim of protecting the general health of the population. While some countries consider the incrimination of new crimes related to fake news and disinformation during the pandemic, in North Macedonia, Articles 205 and 206 of the Criminal Code were used as the most appropriate legal tool to fight disinformation about the virus.⁴²

In the period since the pandemic started until 1 July 2020, the Ministry of the Interior filed 24,567 cases of violation of the Decision prescribing wearing protective equipment,⁴³ but the Ministry did not provide the CRPM with sex disaggregated data as requested. Unfortunately, the Ministry did not share the number of cases filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office involving disinformation and fake news related

38 See CRPD/C/SLV/CO/1, para. 26; CRPD/C/DEN/CO/1, para. 31; CRPD/C/MEX/CO/1, para 22(b); CRPD/C/GAB/CO/1, para. 27.

39 See CRPD/C/TKM/CO/1, para. 24; CRPD/C/MNG/CO/1, para. 20; CRPD/C/DEU/CO/1, para. 24; CRPD/C/DOM/CO/1, para. 19; CRPD/C/COK/CO/1, para. 22; CRPD/C/MEX/CO/1, para. 22 (a); and CRPD/C/KEN/CO/1, para. 22 (b).

40 See CRPD/C/AZE/CO/1, para. 25; CRPD/C/MEX/CO/1, para. 22(c); and CRPD/C/DEN/CO/1, p.31.

41 CRPD - Joint Statement: Persons with Disabilities and COVID-19 by the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on behalf of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility (1 April 2020), available online: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/TB/COVID19/Compilation_statements.pdf

42 According to BIRN, the Ministry of the Interior filed ten cases of false news related to the pandemic with the Public Prosecutor's Office, on legal grounds set forth under Articles 205 and 206 of the Criminal Code. See online: <https://prizma.mk/prijavite-za-lazhni-vesti-megu-pravdata-i-tsenzurata/>

43 MOI, response to requests on grounds of the Law on Free Access to Public Information submitted by the CRPM, No. 16-1-2 810, July 2020.

to the virus. The interpretation of Article 205, paragraph 5⁴⁴ might be problematic for effective fight against fake news as it defines responsibility for spreading infectious disease by disseminating untrue information and statements about the appearance of incurable disease. The incurable disease is the section of this article, which is too specific and might affect the effectiveness, i.e. the outcome of cases filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office.

The fines need to be proportional as they must not be dissuasive for journalists to continue their public health function by conveying to citizens virus related information and must not impede democratic development. The civil society also has an especially important role in controlling the narratives and checking and debunking fake news and disinformation. To this end, the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities monitored social media during the state of emergency and reported as follows "the *presence of comments related to conspiracy theories becomes visible during this period, and the number of comments that deny the virus rises too*".⁴⁵ The F2N2 has also debunked several coronavirus disinformation narratives and updates, but their visibility was not sufficient.

However, except for information conveyed at press-conferences, all other information about the virus and about undertaken measures were not disseminated in other media outlets in accessible formats

Despite the obligation under the CRPD, the first press-conferences were done without sign language interpretation. Upon the request by Polio Plus – Movement against Disability – a citizens' disability organization, the Government started conducting all press-conferences with sign language interpretation. However, except for information conveyed at press-conferences, all other information about the virus and about undertaken measures were not disseminated in other media outlets in accessible formats. This challenged the informing of people with disabilities, especially in light of the fact that the specially developed website of the Government for COVID-19 related information was not made accessible for citizens with disabilities, while emergency services did not adapt their numbers and response to calls from people with disabilities.

Right to Privacy

On 13 April 2020,⁴⁶ the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (hereinafter referred to as the MIOA) and the Ministry of Health (hereinafter referred to as the MoH) promoted the STOP KORONA Application,⁴⁷ presenting it to the public and encouraging citizens to become users by downloading it. Thus, application users (citizens at large) would be alerted if they had been in a close proximity to a person that had been

44 Article 205, para. 5 reads as follows: "The one that will endanger the security of another with false threat of transmitting or with dissemination of false statement for the existence of incurable disease will be punished with a fine or imprisonment of six years."

45 ISSHS (2020) Ana Blazheva, Katerina Kolozova Measuring "Authoritarianism from Below" in Macedonian Society in the Context of the COVID-19 Crisis, available online: <http://www.isshs.edu.mk/measuring-authoritarianism-from-below-in-macedonian-society-in-the-context-of-the-covid-19-crisis/>

46 The Republic of North Macedonia was one of the first countries, even among EU Member-States, that started using this tool for detecting newly infected virus hosts.

47 <https://stop.koronavirus.gov.mk/en>. This app was a donation by the Macedonian IT company Nextsence.

infected by COVID -19 in the last 14 days or not; and authorities would have direct access to information about people with whom the infected individual had been in contact, which facilitates defining clusters and isolating them that eventually would lead to stopping the spread of the virus. Health-related data according to the new Law on Data Protection⁴⁸ which is in line with the EU Data Protection Directive 2016/679, are personal data related to the physical and mental health of the individual, including data about health protection and services received. Article 13, para. 9 of this Law regulates processing of health data, especially when such “processing is of public interest and protection of public health, such as protection from serious cross-border health threats and securing high standards and quality and security of health protection.” In this context, the Law also regulates situations, in which personal data protection rules and the right to privacy may be limited when this serves “the general public interest of the country including monetary, budget, tax issues, **public health** and social protection (Article 27, para. 5)”. The problematic aspect of the STOP KORONA Application is located in the profiling.⁴⁹ In this regard, “**profiling**” means all forms of automatic processing of personal data, which consists of use of personal data for assessment of personal aspects of an individual, and specifically for analysis and prediction of the economic situation, health, personal preferences, interests, behaviour, location and movement. Ultimately, all that epidemiologists do with their surveys and what the Korona application helps them do is profiling.

Furthermore, the authorities did not provide a rigorous assessment of the compliance of the application with the EU data protection policy and recommendations on how to limit the negative impact of tracing by applications and other technologies to monitor the spread of COVID-19 on fundamental rights, in particular data protection and privacy. The European Commission wants to ensure that all applications abide by the same standards: data protection, privacy, security, and effectiveness.⁵⁰ This specifically refers to the on-going debate as to whether the KORONA stop application requires revealing one’s location. The Ministry of Information Society and Administration at the Stop Korona website provides the information that the application works via Bluetooth, and anonymizes the data of users⁵¹; contrary to this information, according to users’ statements, who had to agree to provide access to traffic and location data if they want to use the application, such data are also shared, i.e. publicly disclosed. “The Ministry said the application does not gather location data, while it is explained nowhere why the application requests access to the phone’s location when installed. Whether the number of the identification signal which your phone sends through Bluetooth will be changed or not is also not revealed.”⁵²

The Ministry said the application does not gather location data, while it is explained nowhere why the application requests access to the phone’s location when installed

48 Law on Data Protection (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia 42/2020) available online: https://dzlp.mk/sites/default/files/u4/zakon_za_zastita_na_licnite_podatoci.pdf

49 Liljana Pecova, https://respublica.edu.mk/mk/blog/covid-19-1-1?fbclid=IwAR3E1xA0ZRgc8Hskha_Rc9LBZfioQjt_YfgpbGfl_U8sRUfl6MUZKSmAM

50 <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-189464?lg=OR&fbclid=IwAR0dUXqudt4qmdqT65hvoZ7RmOLHJ9DzXN0s7yqQ4X3ZcelfK63JOHbobFs>

51 See for details <https://stop.koronavirus.gov.mk/>

52 Kuzevski Mite, Vidi Vaka Interview for PINA <https://pina.mk/3236-mobilni-aplikatsii-za-kovid-19-i-linijata-megu-zashtitata-i-zgolemeniot-nadzor/>

Access to traffic and location data by authorities according to the relevant Macedonian legislation is always subject to judicial authorisation, especially in individual cases and when subject to criminal investigation. Considering that the use of the application was considered to be not just voluntary, but compulsory for people in isolation, this led to debates, in which activists and IT experts raised concerns about the legality of such measures, their purpose and the transparency of the operation. "Institutions may use and promote free software with open code if they want citizens to trust the technological measures they employ to deal with the virus. Public access to the source code of the application so that it can be revised by security experts, robust and well done technical solutions are needed."⁵³ In this regard, users still do not have information as to where their data will be kept and for what purposes would be used, and what protocols are applied without exposing the safety and the privacy of the users. Inevitably, such developments with respect to the said application affected the number of downloads and the actual use of the application for the intended purpose. Despite the fact that the first day was highly successful with 5,000 downloads, the period afterwards cannot be assessed as positive since until 7 May 2020, 55,000 users installed the STOP KORONA application. Sex disaggregated data on users cannot be generated for gender analysis as the application does not gather such data and the CRPM was not able to get data as to how many users have been actively using this application.

In June 2020, adopting a Decree with the force of law, the Government promoted the new domestic payment card for 324,479 citizens of vulnerable categories providing thus financial support amounting to MEUR 28⁵⁴ and stimulating the domestic economy and the production sector. In order to activate the "domestic payment card", users need to enter their National Identification Number on the designated webpage.⁵⁵ Names and surnames of users and their bank are public information,⁵⁶ available on the webpage without being adequately secured, as there is no "consent of the individual concerned", which raises questions about the legality of this action.

Finally, on 26 June 2020, the State Health and Sanitary Inspectorate published a list of names of people infected with COVID-19 and their addresses, i.e. names and addresses of people who refused to receive the decision for quarantine. The publication itself can potentially represent a breach of Article 84 of the Law on Data Protection, even though the website of the Agency lacks information that such breach was established.

53 Sloboden Software, Interview for PINA <https://pina.mk/3236-mobilni-aplikatsii-za-kovid-19-i-linijata-megu-zashtitata-i-zgolemeniot-nadzor/>

54 <https://vlada.mk/node/21691>

55 <https://kupuвамdomasno.gov.mk/mk/>, last visited on 13 June 2020.

56 <https://kupuвамdomasno.gov.mk/mk/listusers>, last visited on 13 June 2020.

1.2. LEGALITY AND LEGITIMACY OF MEASURES

After several weeks of debates among state representatives and health experts, the President declared a state of emergency. According to Article 125 of the Constitution “A state of emergency exists when major natural disasters or epidemics take place”. “The decision on the existence of a situation of an epidemic is a precondition, but not the only precondition, for declaring state of emergency”.⁵⁷ Thus, the President based the declaration of the state of emergency on the proposal and analysis of the situation made by the Government and the declaration of COVID-19 world pandemic by the WHO.⁵⁸ However, by not making a difference between “declaring an epidemic” and “declaring a state of emergency” the President announced the state of emergency automatically, without additional formal consultations with any other relevant domestic institutions (Ministry of Health or Institute for Public Health).⁵⁹ “The decision to declare a state of emergency should have been accompanied with an assessment of the conditions, and not only those of health nature, but also conditions relating to the protective state mechanisms, as well as previously developed assessment and a clear plan of what measures all state institutions need to undertake, in accordance with the principles of proportionality and necessity, with the overall objective of decreasing the negative impact of the health crisis.”⁶⁰

Hence, such assessments and strategy for response to COVID-Sars-19 were not developed, or at least, they were not made public, which was the case with other countries, so that independent monitors could consider them. By announcing the state of emergency, the caretaker Government, took over the legislative powers. The fact that in this process the Government adopted 150 Decrees with the force of law,⁶¹ 73 binding Decisions⁶² and amended or annulled exceptionally large number of Decisions affected the legal security of citizens and business at times of crises, especially by presenting one design of a measure at a press-conference and applying a differently designed measure, having adopted it under a decree, or publishing manners for implementation of measures only a few days before the deadline for application of the measure in question. Considering that the *vacatio legis* period for these acts was noticeably short, most of the Decisions entered into force the same or on the day following their publication in the Official Gazette. In light of the fact that the access to the Official Gazette is not free for all, but one must subscribe, at the beginning of the emergency situation the access to these legal documents was limited⁶³. Therefore,

57 V. Kambovski and al.: “Analysis of the legal aspects of the state of emergency”, Skopje, May 2020.

58 The state of emergency in North Macedonia was declared on 18 March 2020, while the WHO declared the pandemic on 13 March 2020 <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>

59 *Ibid*, p. 6.

60 *Ibid*.

61 <https://myla.org.mk/%d0%b2%d0%be%d0%bd%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d1%81%d1%82%d0%be%d1%98%d0%b1%d0%b0/>

62 <https://vlada.mk/uredbi-covid19>

63 This was changed on 30 March 2020, when the Government adopted a Decision which made the access to the Official Gazette free: Decision No. 44-2638/1.

very promptly the Government started publishing the Decisions on its website, in a special COVID-19 dedicated section on the web site; and civil society organizations such as the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association republished Decisions published in the Official Gazette, which enhanced the access for all without subscription rights. The high volume of legal documents produced at the time of the crisis must be underscored as well.

The system of "checks and balances" was disrupted, and instead of separation of powers citizens got a fusion of the two powers. For the first time in the history of the country, the legislative and the executive powers were fused in one body, the Government, which was entitled to adopt decisions with the force of law. The Government got parliamentary legislative powers instead of being "under parliamentary control."⁶⁴

According to the Constitution, the Constitutional Court has the power to control the constitutionality of laws. This is the only institution that has the judicial power to examine the constitutionality and legality of the Decisions on measures that were adopted by the Government during the state of emergency. Thus far, almost every Decision of the Government to prevent the introduction and spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 and impose protective measures and recommendations has been challenged, under initiatives filed by various parties, petitioning the Constitutional Court to determine the justification and validity of relevant Decisions. In May 2020, the Constitutional Court became highly active and abrogated 6 Decrees with the force of law and terminated the execution of one Government Decision and two Decrees with the force of law, adopted during the state of emergency.⁶⁵

The legal validity of these legal documents, adopted during the state of emergency, should last for the period in which the state of emergency is in force and their legal validity should automatically stop, after the state of emergency has been abolished. It seems that most of these legal documents have extended legal force and their validity will continue until the formation of the new Government. The general opinion is that the legal documents that are *in favorem* for the population, businesses and the Government should not be annulled. They will continue being in force until there are justified reasons for their existence and until they are confirmed or abrogated by the new composition of the Parliament.

Access to justice in general and specifically by vulnerable groups was interrupted in light of the fact that on 17 March 2020, the Judicial Council adopted a Decision on the manner of processing court cases in conditions of increased danger from the spread of the COVID-19 infection, under which all courts were obliged to undertake necessary safety and health measures to decrease the spread of the virus. In terms of litigation procedures, the decision envisages that only necessary cases are to be tried, such as cases regarding provisional measures (people held in custody, etc.), cases which are

The legal validity of these legal documents, adopted during the state of emergency, should last for the period in which the state of emergency is in force and their legal validity should automatically stop, after the state of emergency has been abolished

64 V. Kambovski and al.: "Analysis of the legal aspects of the state of emergency", Skopje, May 2020, p. 24.

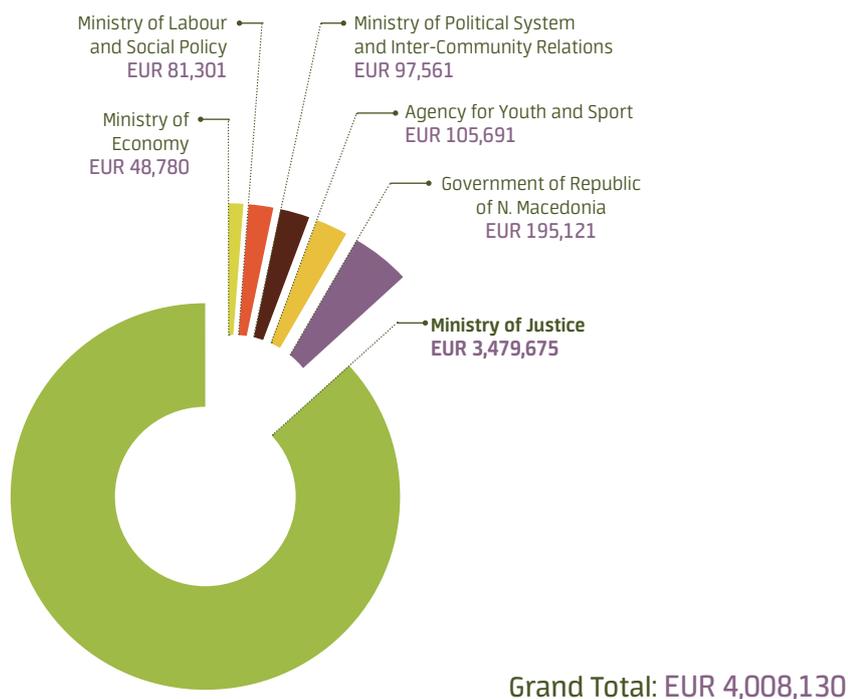
65 The Decisions were related to limiting allowances and salaries, the judiciary and two decisions relating to taxes. The purpose of the Decisions was to prevent discrimination.

in the decision-making stage, then cases that can harm the principle of trial within reasonable time, and cases that are urgent on the basis of a law or are linked with legal preclusive deadlines.⁶⁶ In addition, under the Decree with the force of a law, adopted on 30 March 2020, the Government envisaged that legal and preclusive deadlines for filing a lawsuit in litigation proceedings, proposal for institution of a non-contentious procedure, submitting a request for enforcement, procedure for securing claims, or instituting another court procedure, are frozen until the end of the state of emergency. This has increased the legal insecurity, considering that litigation proceedings were either postponed or not scheduled at all. Videoconferencing, online exchange of data or other forms of dispute resolution, such as mediation were not promoted. Finally, the situation with access to justice created with the measures for the operation of courts, as demonstrated in the section on violence against women, in Chapter 2, also had an effect on the ordering of provisional measures in cases of gender-based violence (GBV).

The regional offices of the Ministry of Justice that provide free legal aid and CSOs providers of free legal aid changed their work regime. The staff of the Ministry of Justice worked in shifts, but citizens were not informed whether the Ministry's staff authorized to work on free legal aid provision were at work on a particular day; whereas, CSOs started receiving applications for free legal aid online. Consequently, the Government decreased the funding for CSOs in general and the CSOs allocated budget of the Ministry of Justice was significantly cut, in particular following the budget restructuring on 9 April 2020, which could affect the delivery of free legal aid in the COVID-19 and in post-COVID-19 period. However, the ensuing effects of such a situation could not be determined at this stage.

Graph 7
Budget Restructuring,
9 April 2020,
allocations for CSOs

Source: Data presented
by the Ministry
of Finance, April 2020



66 <https://cutt.ly/ti4A6D2>

1.3. GENDER AND DIVERSITY ANALYSIS OF MEASURES

The legal assessment of Decrees with the force of law by the Academy of Sciences and Arts states that generally the Decrees are necessary and proportional to the need to deal with the epidemic, but are not necessarily in accordance with the rule of law principle, as a result of the absence of precise and consistent constitutional and legal framework for management of a state of emergency. Hence, the transparency of policy development, the process of drafting of normative documents, as well as their number have received criticism, along with the frequent amendments to the Decrees and their enforcement.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the process of policy development during the crisis lacked an intersectional approach to planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and termination of measures, which creates a “possibility to have disproportionately negative effect on those who are most disadvantaged in society.”⁶⁸ One notable example is the measure restricting the movement, which was discriminatory for two age groups and had negative effects on people with disabilities and those suffering from chronic diseases. In its ruling annulling the discriminatory provisions, the Constitutional Court explained that with the concerned decision the Government applied a selective and different approach in limiting the right to movement on the grounds of age, while the matter at hand was the same – existence of an infectious disease.⁶⁹ Interestingly, the Court based its ruling on the Law on the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the same Law that the Court abrogated (on procedural grounds) later the same day,⁷⁰ leaving citizens without a legal framework for protection against discrimination.

All types of measures introduced in the period from start of the pandemic till end of July 2020, designed to deal with COVID-SARS-19 (relating to health, social, economic issues and those targeting vulnerable groups, etc.) were subject to analysis. Initially, all measures were reviewed and analysed against known gender gaps and gender agenda priorities. Based on this analysis, the following Section assesses the measures as gender negative, gender neutral, gender sensitive, gender positive or gender transformative. The presentation of the gender analysis of measures is a traffic light (see below). The traffic light is a useful example for assessing policies for managing the crisis from the gender perspective. It evaluates the policies at five levels.

67 MANU (2020) (Legal aspects of the emergency situation) Правни аспекти на вонредната состојба by акад. Владо Камбовски, проф. д-р Ана Павловска-Данева, проф. д-р Гордана Лажетиќ, д-р Елена Мујоска - Трпевска, м-р Константин Битраков.

68 EPI (2020) On shaky grounds: human rights and COVID-19 after the derogation from the European Human Rights Convention, available at: <https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ENG-ECHR-MK-COVID19.pdf>

69 Ruling of the Constitutional Court No. U 60/2020 available at <http://ustavensud.mk/?p=19320> under which provisions of the Decision of the Government No. 44-2416/1 (amended nine times) restricting movement referring to people older than 67 and younger than 18 years of age are annulled, as being discriminatory on the grounds of age.

70 Ruling of the Constitutional Court No. U 115/2019-1, available online <http://ustavensud.mk/?p=19246>

Graph 8
**Traffic Lights - Scale of
Contribution to Gender
Equality**

Adapted from the WHO Gender
Responsive Assessment
Scale: criteria for assessing
programmes and policies by
Sanja Nikolin and Aleksandra
Vladisavljević, 2016.

	SCALE ↓	EXPLANATIONS ↓
Gender Negative Interventions 	Gender based inequalities are invested in, strengthened, or sustained with the attainment of programme/project/measure objectives. (Examples: the discontinuation of public transport has a negative effect on women who need to work outside their place of residence during the pandemic);	
Gender Neutral Interventions 	In intervention planning, gender is not taken into account and it is deemed irrelevant for attainment of objectives. (Example: reporting on the number of people who have contracted COVID-19 as proven by tests, number of people on respiratory machines, fatality, deaths, number of violations of the ban on movement and other information without gender disaggregation (i.e. disaggregation by sex, age, municipality and other relevant variables).	
Gender Sensitive Interventions 	Gender is considered an important variable in attaining the intervention objective and data are, at least partially, available disaggregated by sex. (Example: support to the economic resilience of micro and small enterprises)	
Gender Positive Interventions 	Gender is considered to be of key importance in attaining the intervention objectives and gender analysis constitutes one of the main parameters in the planning and decision-making. (Example: measures to address GBV in circumstances of COVID-19, designed in consultation with women's groups)	
Gender Transformative Interventions 	Interventions tackling root causes of the gender gap. The transformation is systemic and sustainable. (Example: gender responsive resource allocation during and after COVID-19 response, gender responsive fiscal policy; initiatives and policies to increase balanced distribution of unpaid work).	

Following the example of many countries in the world, in times when economic activities were slowed down as to confine the spread of the virus, the Government adopted a set of measures to mitigate the effects of the economic and health crisis caused by COVID – 19. However, as many studies have shown, the crisis does not equally affect men and women. Therefore, when designing measures and public polices, policymakers must adopt the gender perspective in order to take into consideration different needs and priorities of both men and women. Additionally, the gender approach in policy

The analysis of measures adopted by the Government of North Macedonia aimed to mitigate the effects of COVID – 19 shows that the gender perspective has been taken into account only sporadically, or better yet only in exceptional cases

design should be accompanied by more participatory methods, which will ensure the involvement of more women and representatives of vulnerable groups in the policy design process.

The analysis of measures adopted by the Government of North Macedonia aimed to mitigate the effects of COVID – 19 shows that the gender perspective has been taken into account only sporadically, or better yet only in exceptional cases. While all measures have a gender dimension and inevitably a different impact on women and men, the assessment presented below shows that the gender perspective is more evident in certain measures than in other measures. Thus, out of 46 analysed measures related to the COVID – 19 crisis (please see Annex 3), that could have a gender-dimension, only 14 of them could be considered as gender-positive, and only 2 of the measures can be said to be gender transformative, which is only 35% of the measures. This means that the majority of measures are gender neutral. According to EIGE gender neutral legislation is *“legislation that is drafted in universal terms, ignoring gender-specific situations and power relations between women and men that underpin sex-and gender-based discrimination, including gender-based violence against women.”*⁷¹ Hence, it is necessary to scrutinize gender-neutral laws that treat women and men alike, in order to evaluate whether they will hinder or accelerate gender equality and eliminate sex- and gender-based discrimination.

Health Protection, Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Care

Under this category, the Government adopted two measures. The first, of the two measures, refers to the emergency procurement of 200 respiratory machines, which aims to strengthen the capacity and readiness of the public health care system to provide services to more patients in case mechanical ventilation is needed in severe cases. There is no real proof that the actual respiratory machines serve women and men from different groups equally and although this is the intention of the policy, in assessing the impact one should determine if all citizens, women and men, and women and men from minority groups, those with disabilities, the elderly, etc. had equal access to respiratory machines procured under this measure.

The second measure in this category refers to the 20% increase of the salaries of medical staff involved in activities countering COVID-19, with the salary increase being applied for a period of two months. From the gender perspective, this measure is a gender-positive intervention if we take into account data according to which in 2019, in the public health care system, as much as 72.33% of employees were women, which includes both women doctors, nurses, pharmacists and laboratory researchers. The percentage of employed female nurses in the public health care system has even higher share in the total number of nursing staff. However, the measure targets only doctors and not the nursing staff and is generally applied to all, while the medical staff most affected by COVID-19 were at the COVID-19 treatment centres: the Clinic for Infectious Diseases, the 8th September City Hospital, the Children's Clinic in Skopje, and

⁷¹ For more gender policy terms please see: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1192>

the infectious disease wards in each of the general hospitals around the country. The measure is assessed as gender-positive intervention because it applies to a targeted group of health professionals, but the limitation of the measure only to doctors is problematic, because nurses carry most of the burden of care for COVID-19 patients and women mostly work as nursing staff in the health care sector. The measure is of limited duration of two months. While the measure is gender positive, it is not transformative. A COVID-19 responsive and transformative measure would include support to work-life balance of medical professionals during the COVID-19 crisis, and would address the stress and fear of nurses and doctors that they are putting their families at risk, being exposed to the virus due to the work they do. For example, measure that would organize medical staff in two-week shifts, where during the working shift state provided accommodation would be ensured, so that staff would not put their families at risk; testing at the beginning and at the end of the shift; and two-week break from work after the work shift has finished to allow for family time free from the fear that they put their families at risk.

Considering the two measures in this category, the analysis has shown that one is gender-positive and the other is gender-neutral.

Health Protection, Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Care	
	1) Emergency procurement of 200 respiratory machines
	2) Two-month 20% increase of salaries of medical staff involved in activities to counter COVID-19

Economic Recovery and Livelihood

Most of the measures adopted by the Government to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus crisis fall within this category, which includes measures related to economic recovery and livelihood of citizens. This is understandable, as it is estimated that the economic consequences of the coronavirus on the world economy in general, including the Macedonian economy, will be far-reaching and profound.

Measures adopted under this category can be further divided into several subcategories.

► Tax Delays and Reductions

Under this subcategory, four measures were adopted to mitigate the coronavirus impact on the economy and on the lives of citizens. These are: 1) suspension of profit tax advance payments for March, April and May 2020; 2) suspension of personal income tax advance payments for March, April and May 2020 for taxpayers who earn their income by engaging in freelance economic activities; 3) abolition of customs duties on medical equipment; 4) securing the customs debt to support the export with a state guarantee in the total value of MEUR 3.

All adopted measures are assessed as gender-neutral because they apply to all citizens equally and do not take into account different needs resulting from gender

All adopted measures are assessed as gender-neutral because they apply to all citizens equally and do not take into account different needs resulting from gender roles

roles, stereotypes or the patriarchal model of family, which determines the gender relations between women and men. However, the impact of the measures will not be gender neutral depending on the share of women and men working in companies that pay the concerned taxes (personal income tax and profit tax). The measure suspending advance payment of personal income tax by freelancers may in particular target women translators, but also men in the IT industry, who are working on internet platforms as the number of such freelancers is significant: 3.41 per 1,000 citizens.⁷² Therefore, this measure is assessed as gender positive. However, without amending the legislative framework on labour relations, ensuring thus a safety net for these new forms of economic activity, the measure cannot become gender transformative. Securing social and health protection specific to the risks associated with this type of work (on computer, in different time zones, on internet and virtually), balance between work and private life as well as the right “to disconnect” is the basis for making this measure gender transformative.

	Tax Delays and Reductions
	1) Suspension of profit tax advance payments for March, April, and May 2020;
	2) Suspension of personal income tax advance payments for March, April and May 2020 for taxpayers who earn their income by engaging in freelance economic activities;
	3) Abolition of customs duties on medical equipment;
	4) Securing the customs debt to support the export with a state guarantee in the total value of MEUR 3

► **Financial Support to Companies and Liquidity Protection**

The Government adopted a total of 11 measures under this subcategory: 1) subsidizing 50% of the cost of social security contributions for April, May and June 2020 (maximum up to 50% of the average salary for January 2020); 2) subsidy of MKD 14,500 per employee for April and May 2020 for all companies; 3) providing loans in the amount of MKD 13.7 million without interest through the Development Bank of North Macedonia for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises from the most affected sectors and 4) providing MEUR 50 loans with a low interest rate of about 1.5% through the Development Bank of North Macedonia and the European Investment Bank for small and medium-sized enterprises, through commercial banks; 5) travel agencies are obliged to issue a voucher for cancelled travel arrangements with a validity until 31 December 2021; 6) interest-free loans for micro and small enterprises through the Development Bank of North Macedonia, in the amount of MEUR 31, including 30% non-refundable funds for those companies that are run or established by women or employ young people, or are export-oriented or introduce innovation and digitalization in their work; 7) taking over part of the credit risk for start-ups and small and micro companies

⁷² https://analyticshelp.io/blog/global-internet-freelance-market-overview-2018/?fbclid=IwAR20CdFA0ZaFUS2RGLSNrHRaMrCNLle7xWsh_QglNingZREphhhE4CINaCg

through commercial banks in the amount of MEUR 10 initial capital for easier access to financial resources; 8) financial support in the amount of MEUR 25 to strengthen the competitiveness of companies to enter new markets and modernize their processes; 9) digital platform for new markets for textile companies with financial support of MEUR 1; 10) support for development of domestic start-up products and services through the Fund for Innovation and Technology Development (FITR) in the amount of MEUR 1.6; 11) co-financing of events and conferences with 50% financial support from the state, up to a maximum of MKD 30,000.

Nine of the above referred to eleven measures are assessed as gender neutral

Nine of the above referred to eleven measures are assessed as gender neutral. Only one measure can be considered as a gender-positive measure (Measure No. 9) because it is directly aimed at helping textile companies get their products exported and thus remain in operation. Textile companies employ mostly women and therefore this measure responds to their needs significantly. Hence, Measure No. 6 on loans to companies established by women or that employ young people and introduce innovation and digitalization in their work is considered gender transformative, as it takes into consideration gender norms, roles and relations for women and men and that these affect access to and control over resources.

Financial Support to Companies and Liquidity Protection	
	1) Subsidizing 50% of the cost of contributions for April, May, and June 2020 (maximum up to 50% of the average salary for January 2020);
	2) Subsidy in the amount of MKD 14,500 per employee for April and May 2020 for all companies;
	3) Providing loans in the amount of MKD 13.7 million without interest through the Development Bank of North Macedonia for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises from the most affected sectors;
	4) Providing MEUR 50 loans with a low interest rate of about 1.5% through the Development Bank of North Macedonia and the European Investment Bank for small and medium-sized enterprises, through commercial banks;
	5) Travel agencies are obliged to issue a voucher for cancelled travel arrangements with a validity until 31 December 2021;
	6) Interest-free loans for micro and small enterprises through the Development Bank of North Macedonia, in the amount of MEUR 31, including 30% non-refundable funds for those companies that are run or established by women or employ young people, are export-oriented or introduce innovation and digitalization in their work;
	7) Taking over part of the credit risk for start-ups and small and micro companies through commercial banks in the amount of MEUR 10 initial capital for easier access to financial resources;
	8) Financial support in the amount of MEUR 25 to strengthen the competitiveness of companies to enter new markets and modernize their processes;
	9) Digital platform for new markets for textile companies with financial support of MEUR 1;



	10) Support for development of domestic start-up products and services through FITR in the amount of MEUR 1.6;
	11) Co-financing of events and conferences with 50% financial support from the state up to a maximum of MKD 30,000.

► Protection of the Living Standard

With a view to protecting the living standard of citizens, the Government adopted a set of 5 measures: 1) freezing the prices of basic products; 2) enabling banks, financial companies and leasing companies to restructure loans; 3) reduction of the interest rate, ban on enforcement and bankruptcy; 4) financial support for athletes in the amount of MKD 14,500 in April and May 2020; 5) cash benefit for all people who lost their jobs in the period from 11 March to 30 April 2020.

Only one of these measures, the one related to freezing prices of basic products, can be considered gender-sensitive, as it indirectly affects the reduction of social risk for vulnerable women and other categories of citizens who are on the “edge” of survival, in different ways. The other measures apply generally to all citizens and it seems that they do not have a gender dimension in their planning, but the implementation of Measure No. 6 might have impacted more women than men, since the results of the CRPM monitoring show that more women lost their jobs during the state of emergency (See Chapter 2.3); while Measure No. 4 is assessed to have impacted more men than women, since the number of male athletes who benefited from this measure is by far higher than female athletes (82.69% male and 17.31% female).⁷³

Protection of the Living Standard	
	1) Freezing prices of basic products;
	2) Enabling banks, financial companies, and leasing companies to restructure loans;
	3) Reduction of the interest rate, ban on enforcement and bankruptcy;
	4) Financial support to athletes in the amount of MKD 14,500 in April and May 2020;
	5) Cash benefit for all people who lost their jobs from 11 March to 30 April 2020.

► Liquidity of the Central Budget

Two of the three measures may have gender implications: 1) presidents and members of boards of directors and supervisory boards will not receive remuneration; and 3) borrowing from foreign creditors, planned borrowing of MEUR 580. The first measure will have affected male holders of appointed positions, as men are dominantly at managerial positions, especially in boards; while the third measure can also result

⁷³ <https://cutt.ly/xsDmNYr>

**Effective
interventions largely
depend on the
availability of funds**

in gender determined fiscal implications if data is provided on what the borrowing will be used for. A more detailed gender fiscal implication assessment is needed to this end. However, the Constitutional Court annulled the Decision on the first measure, which minimized the COVID-19 response negative effect on men. Measure No. 2 opening of solidarity COVID-19 fund for receiving donations is assessed as a gender-blind measure, but its gender responsiveness can be improved if the resources from the COVID-19 solidarity fund are transparently directed to women and men in need.

Effective interventions largely depend on the availability of funds. Namely, adequate, timely and predictable resources should be put in place in order to give effect to commitments to inclusive emergency preparedness and response. States should refrain from causing harm by promoting practices contrary to the CRPD. Instead, they should consider using a human rights-based approach in the emergency management cycle, which was not done in the case of North Macedonia.

Liquidity of the Central Budget	
	1) Presidents and members of boards of directors and supervisory boards will not receive remuneration;
	2) Opening of solidarity COVID-19 fund for receiving donations;
	3) Borrowing from foreign creditors, planned borrowing in the amount of MEUR 580.

► **Encouragement of Consumption and Revitalization of the Economy**

In this subcategory, the Government adopted six measures: 1) payment card in the amount of MKD 9,000 for buying Macedonian products and services to be given to the unemployed, to low-income citizens and beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum welfare assistance; 2) voucher for domestic tourism in amount of MKD 6,000 and a domestic payment card of MKD 3,000 for citizens with a net salary of less than MKD 15,000; 3) payment card for young people, in the amount of MKD 3,000 for domestic products and services; 4) voucher of MKD 30,000 for co-financing trainings and courses for IT and digital skills for young people; 5) financial support to young people of up to MKD 6,000 to cover tuition fees at the University or accommodation in dormitories; 6) VAT- free weekends for all citizens in certain sales sectors. All measures target women and men who are unemployed, receive low income or are young, seeking to help the most vulnerable groups. Considering that in the unemployed and low paid sub-groups women participate more than men, Measures Nos. 1 and 2 respond to the needs of women. However, in this category, the gender and disability dimension are not taken into account when designing the measures, although seemingly almost all measures are tailored to help people from vulnerable categories. Considering that the gender pay gap is about 18 to 19%, the potential beneficiaries of the first three measures could be women. However, policy makers, probably in order to expand the scope of the measure to all citizens, do not tailor the measure specifically to the needs of vulnerable categories of citizens, women or any other specific category of citizens that would make the measure more inclusive, and fairer.

Encouragement of Consumption and Revitalization of the Economy	
	1) Payment card in amount of MKD 9,000 for buying Macedonian products and services for the unemployed, low-income citizens and beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum welfare assistance;
	2) Voucher for domestic tourism in amount of MKD 6,000 and a domestic payment card in the amount of MKD 3,000 for citizens with a net salary of less than MKD 15,000;
	3) Payment card for young people, in the amount of MKD 3,000 for domestic products and services;
	4) Voucher of MKD 30,000 for co-financing trainings, trainings and courses for IT and digital skills for young people;
	5) Financial support to young people of up to MKD 6,000 to cover tuition fees at the University or accommodation in dormitories;
	6) VAT- free weekends for all citizens in certain sales sectors.

► Support to Agriculture

In the course of the state of emergency, the Government adopted 7 measures to support agriculture in order to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. These measures are: 1) financial support to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that engage in primary production, processors and export of primary and processed agricultural products; 2) payment card subsidizing 50% of green oil for farmers (for 50,000 farmers) in the total amount of MEUR 4.6; 3) stimulating grape processors for the production of new products, such as alcoholic distillates for the production of disinfectants in the total amount of MEUR 3.5 for three years; 4) Public-private partnerships in the viticulture and tobacco sectors; 5) Introduction of long-term lease of pastures and consolidation of agricultural land for greater competitiveness of the Macedonian agriculture; 6) introduction of a Program for financing micro-agriculture companies in the amount of MEUR 3; 7) measures for modernization of agriculture under a World Bank loan of MEUR 50.

Out of all the measures above, only one measure has a gender dimension - Measure No. 4, due to the fact that women producers participate with a significant share in the labour force and tobacco farming and viticulture, both in the production and in processing (30% are women). However, it is necessary to obtain more data about the concluded partnerships in order to make a more detailed analysis of the gender aspects of the implementation of this Measure. As regards all other measures gender neutrality is maintained, which does not necessarily mean that the impact of the implementation of the measure on women and men will not be different and will not create gender inequality. Therefore, fiscal impact assessment from the gender perspective of the enforcement of these measures needs to be conducted in order to determine who accessed the resources and whether women and men benefited equally from the provided measures.

Support to Agriculture	
	1) Financial support to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that engage in primary production, processors, and export of primary and processed agricultural products;
	2) Payment card subsidizing 50% of green oil for farmers (for 50,000 farmers) in the total amount of MEUR 4.6;
	3) Stimulating grape processors for the production of new products, such as alcoholic distillates for the production of disinfectants in the total amount of MEUR 3.5 for three years;
	4) Public-private partnerships in the viticulture and in the tobacco sectors;
	5) Introduction of long-term lease of pastures and consolidation of agricultural land for greater competitiveness of the Macedonian agriculture;
	6) introduction of a Program for financing micro-agriculture companies in the amount of MEUR 3;
	7) Measures for modernization of agriculture under a World Bank loan of MEUR 50.

Social Protection and the Labour Market

The Government adopted four measures under this category: 1) facilitating quick entry into the system by informal workers and others in order to obtain minimum guaranteed welfare assistance, based on the amount of total income of all household members, calculated for the last month, instead for the previous three months; 2) assistance to people with disabilities and the elderly in 27 municipalities to more easily deal with the crisis by including 200 unemployed as service providers; 3) monetary compensation in the amount of 50% of the average monthly net salary of the employee paid in the last 24 months. An unemployed person who has been employed for at least 9 months continuously, or 12 months with a break in the last 18 months, before the termination of employment, has the right to monetary compensation; 4) Maternity leave is extended until the expiration of provisional measures for protection against the spread and prevention of COVID-19.

The analysis of the gender perspective in this category of measures shows that all four measures are gender sensitive because they take into account the different needs of men and women and the inclusion of women in the implementation. The latter is best demonstrated with Measure No. 2, where due to the gender role women play in the society, women are expected to be recruited as service providers. The former perspective, on the other hand, is reflected on Measures Nos. 3 and 4, through special provisions, targeting pregnant women and regulating maternity leave during COVID-19 pandemic. An improvement in terms of the gender dimension could be that such measures are not limited to emergencies and special circumstances but take the gender perspective in regulating these areas also under normal circumstances. It must be noted that those measures did not include the disability dimension, which excludes women and girls with disabilities from the beneficiary group. Finally, considering that

The analysis of the gender perspective in this category of measures shows that all four measures are gender sensitive because they take into account the different needs of men and women and the inclusion of women in the implementation

many women in the informal sector working as cleaners and domestic workers were left jobless on the labour market, the first measure also has the aim of addressing their needs and interests in maintaining themselves on the labour market. Thus, the interviews conducted in the course of the research showed problems with meeting the requirements and the exercise of rights under this measure, especially for Roma women.

Social Protection and Labour Market	
	1) Facilitating the quick entry into the system by informal workers and others in order to obtain minimum guaranteed welfare assistance, based on the total income of all household members, calculated for the last month, instead for the previous three months;
	2) Assistance to people with disabilities and the elderly in 27 municipalities to deal with the crisis more easily, by including 200 unemployed as service providers;
	3) Monetary compensation in the amount of 50% of the average monthly net salary of the employee paid in the last 24 months. An unemployed person who has been employed for at least 9 months continuously, or 12 months with a break in the last 18 months, before the termination of employment, has the right to monetary compensation;
	4) Maternity leave is extended until the expiration of provisional measures for protection against the spread and prevention of COVID-19.

Measures Targeting Vulnerable Groups; Social Solidarity and Social Cohesion

This category consists of two measures: 1) deferral of payment of rent for beneficiaries of socially subsidized housing; Introduction of a cash allowance of MKD 1,000 for household energy costs for April and May 2020; and 2) facilitated access to the right to child allowance and extended deadlines for submitting applications for the exercise of the right to one-off financial allowance for a new born baby, for exercise and extension of the right to parental allowance for a third child, extending the right to a parental allowance for a fourth child.

The analysis of the first measure shows that the intention of the policy is gender neutral, but the impact can acquire a gender dimension depending on who the beneficiaries are. Without specific provisions on support to single mothers, victims of violence and similar, the measure in itself does not offer an explanation of the gender dimension, although it does have an enormous potential for gender sensitization, if aimed at targeting single mothers, large families, vulnerable categories of citizens, as well as women from rural areas especially and women with disabilities. Victims of violence interviewed for the purposes of this study also point to the need for clarification of the economic measures of the Government and the measures intended for people who are at social risk in order to be able to access the benefits prescribed by such measures.

The second measure, which relates to the access to the right to child allowance and extended deadlines for submitting applications for the exercise of this right, can be indeed said to be gender sensitive, i.e. there are elements of a transformative measure, given that it improves the material conditions of vulnerable families, and especially of single mothers.

Measures Targeting Vulnerable Groups; Social Solidarity and Social Cohesion	
	1) Deferral of payment of rent for beneficiaries of socially subsidized housing; Introduction of a cash allowance of MKD 1,000 for household energy costs for April and May 2020;
	2) Facilitated access to the right to child allowance and extended deadlines for submitting applications for the right to one-off financial assistance for a new born baby, for exercise and extension of the right to a parental allowance for a third child, extending the right to a parental allowance for a fourth child.

Partnership with CSOs, Consultations with Stakeholders and Communication with Citizens

Decisions adopted during the state of emergency are public, published regularly on the website of the Government. Information about the situation with COVID-SARS-19 was also made public at daily press-conferences (mostly by the Minister of Health, Venko Filipche) and in daily press-releases issued by the Institute of Public Health, containing statistics related to the virus. However, in terms of the decision-making process, the Government did not engage in wider-encompassing consultations, except with the business sector, with the representatives of which Government officials had a number of meetings. Instead, the Government followed the practice under which decisions were developed, then presented at a press conference, and then adopted. However, after a public outrage and dissatisfaction with adopted decisions, the Government often amended such decisions with a view to addressing immediate criticism. It is of the paramount importance that the Government find a way of consulting the public and especially of involving affected stakeholders in the design of measures, finding also ways of providing as many as possible detailed supporting documents, explaining proposed measures and the intended budgets lines in this respect, thus building upon and enhancing the overall relations between Government institutions and the civil society. This will have a favourable impact on the varying levels of public trust and will in turn help accept and strengthen the sense of individual and social responsibility. If rigorous measures adopted as of the start of the crisis had been combined with wider-scope social collaboration, so that compliance with the measures was delegated to the individual level, then the social cohesion would not have been so jeopardized and declining, especially following the increase of the number of COVID-19 cases, polarizing thus the society along three major lines: political, religious/ethnic and pro-liberalization vs. pro-prohibition.⁷⁴ Finally, this research also shows that there were virtually no consultations with women's CSOs on the development of measures.

⁷⁴ <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/16286.pdf>

As regards men and women with disabilities in this emergency situation, relevant authorities did not engage in any consultations and did not enable the active involvement of organizations of people with disabilities in the development, implementation and monitoring of emergency-related legislation and policies; and did not provide the necessary and unconditional public funding for the independent, full and effective participation of civil society, despite the fact that the country has such an obligation under the CRPD (Article 4.3).⁷⁵

Considering that the Parliament was dissolved, and the caretaker Government had legislative and executive powers, the oversight of decisions and scrutiny by independent bodies (including by CSOs) are especially important. Thus, “the NGO scene has been relatively quiet ever since the beginning of the crisis, and seems more focused on solidarity-based activities rather than performing the traditional watchdog function, especially when the complete debate on a possible shift to authoritarianism and possible misuses of the pandemic for curtailment of civil liberties is of very low intensity in the Macedonian society at present.”⁷⁶ In this context, there was a wave of disappointment following the cuts of budget funds intended for civil society funding on 9 April 2020. This resulted with a concerted appeal by the civil society for revision of the decision that on its part led to a prompt call to CSOs for submission of applications for COVID-19 related projects,⁷⁷ following which 549 applications were submitted and 40 CSOs were awarded grants.⁷⁸ The selection procedure was strongly criticized, considering that the process of selection lasted 48 hours, which cast a dark shadow on the selection process, featuring it as biased.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See CRPD/C/HRV/CO/1, para. 53.

⁷⁶ FES (2020) Democracy and the State of Emergency Political Battles Emerging out of the Corona Crisis in the Western Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/16213.pdf>

⁷⁷ <https://vlada.mk/node/21648>

⁷⁸ <https://www.radiomof.mk/vladata-ja-objavi-rang-listata-so-site-549-nevladini-shto-aplicirale-za-proekti-za-kovid-19/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.radiomof.mk/organizacii-baraat-da-se-ponishti-vladinata-odluka-za-dodeluvanje-sredstva-na-organizacii/>

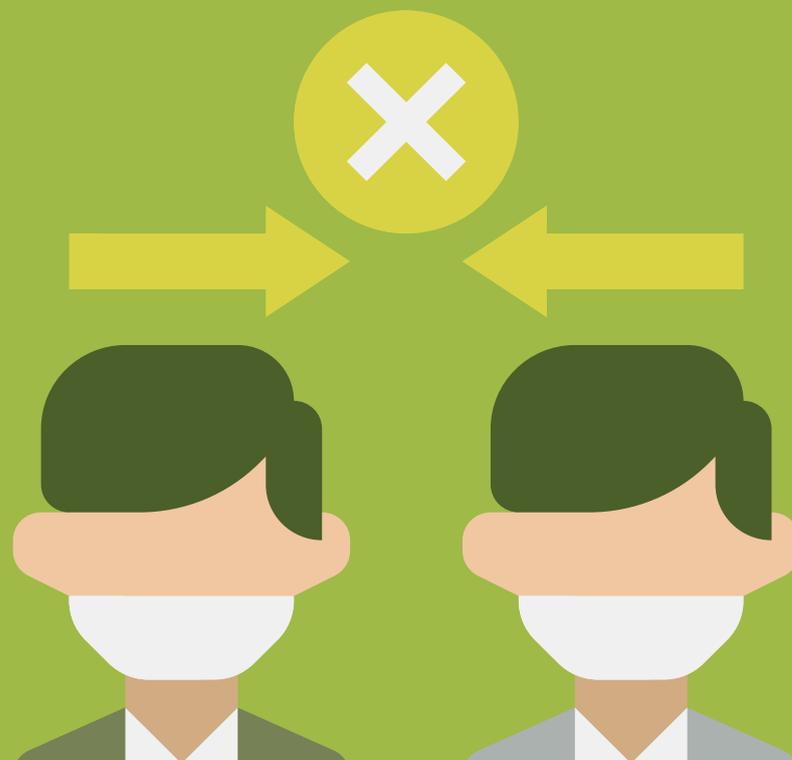


Chapter

2

GENDER AND DIVERSITY ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID – 19 IMPACT

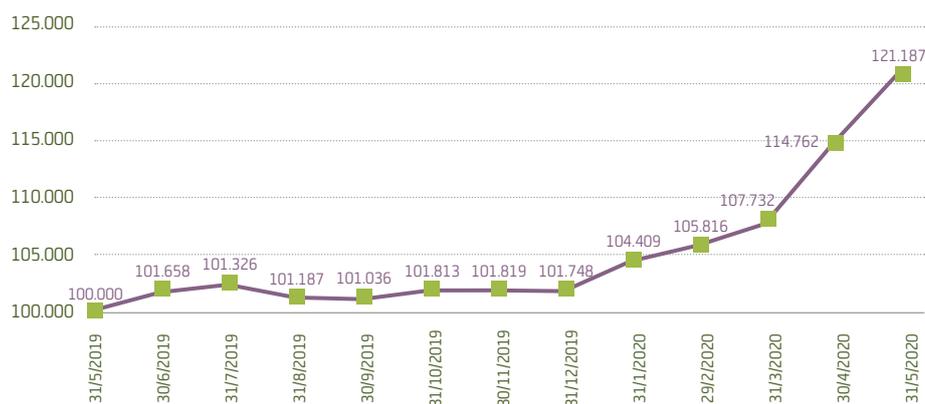
The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus has radically transformed the way people live and work, affecting profoundly their physical and mental well-being



2.1. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus has radically transformed the way people live and work, affecting profoundly their physical and mental well-being. The Eurofound large-scale online survey shows that more than one quarter of respondents across the EU at this stage report losing their job either temporarily (23%) or permanently (5%), with young men being most affected, specifically those living in Romania, Italy, France, Cyprus and Greece, working with reduced hours. The Nordic countries have reported the fewest reductions in working hours.⁸⁰ According to data about registered unemployment, published monthly by the Employment Agency, in North Macedonia the crisis has had significant negative effects on unemployment. As Graph 9 below shows, the number of registered unemployment has taken sharp upward trend, following the start of the crisis. On 31 May 2020, there were 21.11% more registered unemployed individuals, compared to the same month in 2019 (21,127 in absolute numbers), and 14.53% more than the overall unemployment rate on 29 February 2020 just before the crisis started.

Graph 9
Registered
Unemployment, May
2019 - May 2020
Source: Employment Agency
of the Republic of North
Macedonia



Furthermore, the unemployment rate among women has increased more compared to men, which is to be expected considering that traditionally more women work in sectors that were the worst affected by the crisis, such as the non-food retail sector and hospitality. As Graph 10 below shows, on 31 May 2020, the Employment Agency reported 15.12% increase in women's unemployment, compared to the pre-crisis data of 29 February 2020, while unemployment among men was increased by 13.97% in the same period.

⁸⁰ Eurofound, (2020) Living, working and COVID-19,
https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20058en.pdf

Graph 10
Number of Registered
Unemployed People,
comparison between
the situation on 31 May
2020 and 29 February
2020

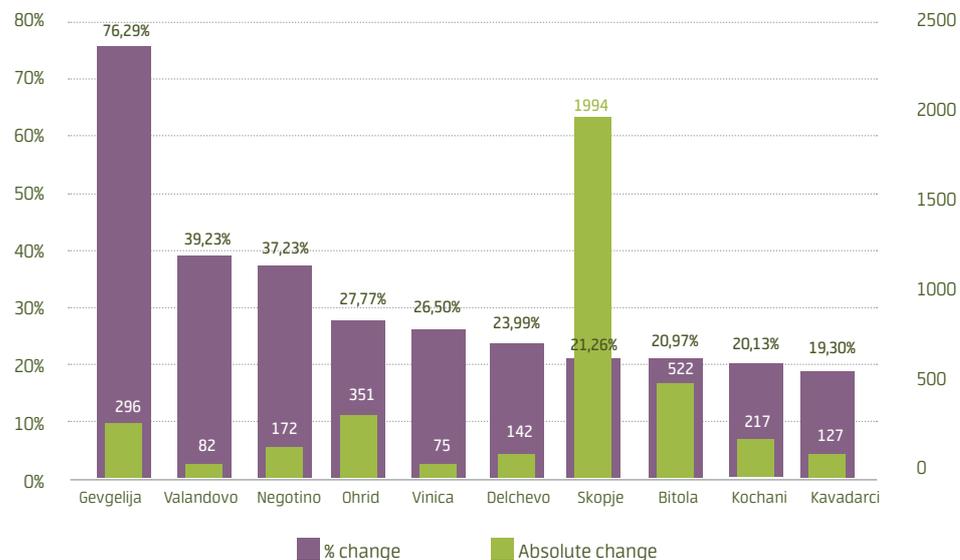
Source: Employment
Agency of the Republic
of North Macedonia



The next graph reveals which top 10 Macedonian cities experienced the highest rise in the number of registered unemployed women, comparing between the situation on 31 May 2020 and on 29 February 2020. Evidently, women in Gevgelija were especially affected by the crisis, a city on the southern border of North Macedonia, famous for its hospitality sector, mainly casinos most frequently visited by guests from Greece.

Graph 11
Changes in the
Number of Registered
Unemployed Women
between 31 May 2020
and 29 February 2020,
segregated by % change,
the highest ranked
10 cities

Source: Employment
Agency of the Republic of North
Macedonia



Women who were not registered as employed but were active on the labour market engaging in informal work, abruptly lost their jobs and their income. Roma women in particular faced the greatest difficulties. They mostly worked as housekeepers, cleaners, or market vendors. Hence, due to the fact that open markets were closed, then with people staying home during the lockdown, maintaining their households by themselves, Roma women- informal workers were left jobless.⁸¹

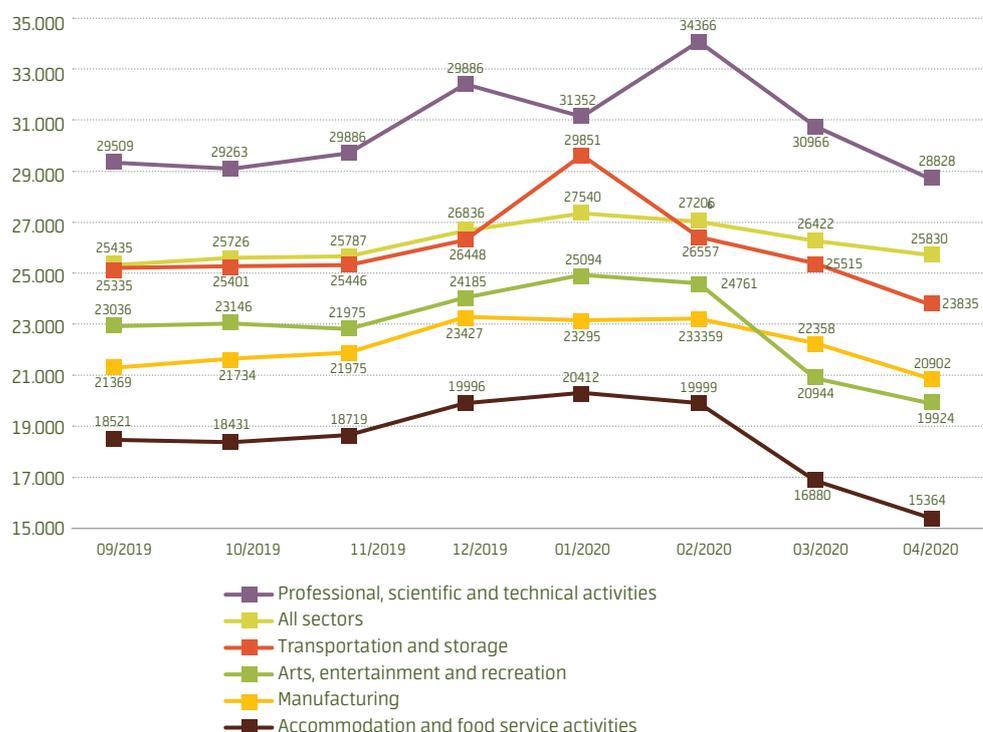
Job losses in combination with reduced working hours and salaries cause financial problems everywhere. In the EU, the Eurofound detected 48 percentage point gap be-

⁸¹ Interview with Fatima Osmanovska, SDSM, President of the Municipal Council of Shuto Orizari, June 2020.

tween the Member-State with the lowest (Denmark at 12%) and the highest (Bulgaria at 60%) proportion, reporting that their financial situation is now worse than three months ago. This can also be seen in North Macedonia, as a result of both salary reductions, job losses, combined with the additional financial burden on vulnerable groups of the population (Roma, the unemployed, single mothers) produced by abiding with health protection recommendations and social distancing. In the context of salaries, Graph 12 below shows that the crisis also negatively affected the trends in the net average salary. Compared to its highest point in February 2020, when it amounted to MKD 27,206, it dropped down to MKD 25,830 in April 2020, which a relative reduction of 5.06%.

Graph 12
Average Net Salary,
September 2019 - April
2020, selected top 5
sectors with the highest
% reduction compared to
February 2020

Source: State Statistical
Office of the Republic
of North Macedonia



However, as it could be expected, some sectors took a greater blow due to the crisis. The entertainment industry and even the civil society experienced slowdown of activities, accompanied with a salary reduction. *"I work in a betting shop and in a CSO; they first reduced my salary, while due to the crisis the implementation of the CSO projects was postponed for 2 months, which affected the payments as well."*⁸² The table below also shows that the top 5 sectors with the highest percentage reduction compared to February 2020, when the crisis first started, are the Hospitality and food service industry, Arts, entertainment and recreation, Professional, scientific and technical activities, Manufacturing and Transportation and storage.

82 Interview with a Roma activist, May 2020.

Table 4
Percentage change in
the average net salary-
situation compared
between April 2020 and
February 2020

Source: State Statistical Office
of the Republic
of North Macedonia

SECTOR	CHANGE IN % - SITUATION COMPARED BETWEEN APRIL 2020 AND FEBRUARY 2020
Accommodation and food service activities	-23,18 %
Arts, entertainment, and recreation	-19,53 %
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	-16,11 %
Manufacturing	-10,52 %
Transportation and storage	-10,32 %
All sectors	-5,06 %
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	-4,88 %
Information and communication	-3,63 %
Human health and social work activities	-3,45 %
Construction	-3,37 %
Financial and insurance activities	-2,07 %
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	-1,60 %
Real estate activities	-1,58 %
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	-1,50 %
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	-0,89 %
Education	-0,59 %
Other service activities	-0,13 %
Administrative and support service activities	0,88 %
Electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply	2,36 %
Mining and quarrying	9,48 %

Considering that frontline workers engaged on activities to deal with the virus are the most strained ones, as essential workers who must physically report to their jobs and are most vulnerable to health risks and work longer hours to deliver services, due to the increasing demand and need of such services, these frontline workers demand greater attention and better valorisation of their labour. However, the decision of the Government to award overtime-pay and night shift allowances to security forces (both in the Army and the police), which employ mostly men, while such allowance was not awarded for the entire health care sector (only raise in salaries of doctors was provided, not covering nurses and other staff in the health care sector), which employs

mostly women, generates a new gender gap. While the above referred decision granting allowances is a recognition of the work and contribution also by women in the military and in the police,⁸³ *“the third package of measures that was announced by the Government, to some degree refers to health professionals, but there are still workers who should be included from the most affected facilities, such as infectious disease clinics, public health institutions, as well as other COVID - 19 centres, in terms of salary increase, even though the Government already raised the salaries of health professionals.”*⁸⁴ Despite these efforts, interviews with women working in the front lines in the health care sector, and specifically in laboratories where COVID-19 testing is done, confirm that not only they are not additionally stimulated with any bonuses, but even worse they have not received their regular salaries for three months.⁸⁵

The salary system needs to be rectified and reflect the activities and responsibilities people take on while performing their jobs, as well as the risk they are exposed to of possibly being infected by doing their job. The salary system should not take into consideration only seniority, years of service, and degree of education since people start to feel discriminated. *“I absolutely feel discriminated, only the employees from 2 departments were actively included in the COVID-19 response out of 200 employees in the Institute for Public Health, which resulted in only 30 people showing up to work every day and we, who work in the laboratory and are exposed to the highest risk, work the longest hours. The rest of my colleagues were sent home, resting, and posting pictures on social media, while being paid the same as me.”*⁸⁶

2.2. PERTAINING GENDER ROLES AND THE GENDER SYSTEM

Traditionally, women are in the front lines having domestic and work responsibilities within their families. They are generally seen as the backbone of the family and play multiple roles, such as caregivers in their homes and communities. In North Macedonia, women spend three times more time on household activities compared to men and have less free time. Time-use survey data indicate that the use of time has not improved significantly in the period from 2009 to 2014 (when the survey was last taken). The Gender Equality Index also shows an enormous disadvantage for women in the domain of Time; the country “has the second biggest lag (after the domain of Money) in the dimension of Time, compared to the EU Member-States and the European average (EU-28).”⁸⁷ Women carry the burden of domestic activities, spending three times more (four times more in rural areas) time on such activities compared to men. While women spend one hour less in paid employment compared to men, men still have one

83 Interview with Slavjanka Petrovska, Alternate Minister of the Interior, May 2020.

84 Interview with Jovana Trenchevska, State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, May 2020.

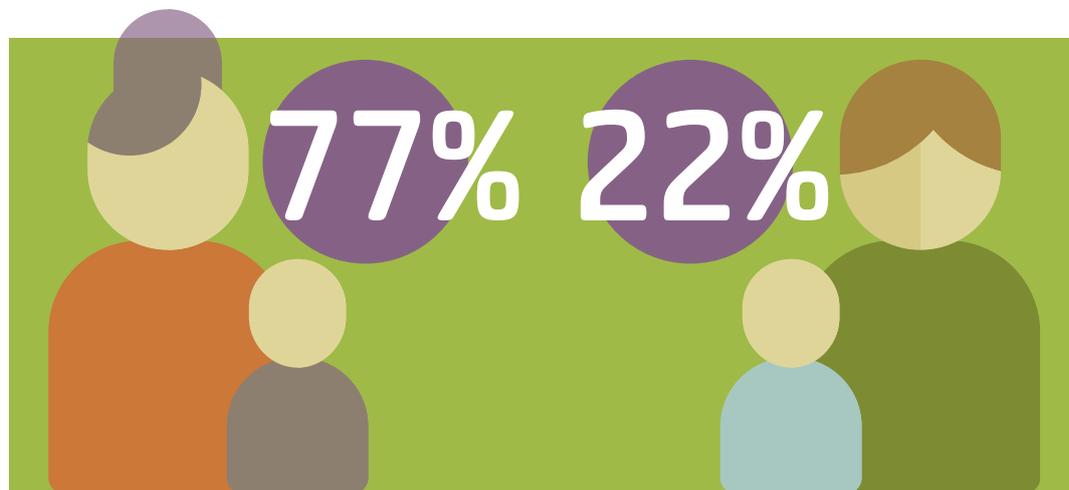
85 Interview with a high ranking official at the Institute for Public Health, May 2020.

86 *Ibid.*

87 Gender Equality Index, available online: https://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/system/files/events-files/gender_equality_index_macedonia_eng.pdf

hour more free time, especially during weekends,⁸⁸ confirming the feminist argument that employed women are required to work a 'second shift' at home. The measures adopted in response to the virus have institutionalized the gender role of women as caretakers at home and in the family and have entrenched the gender stereotype of men being the main breadwinners. Namely, the closure of kindergartens was followed with a measure allowing one of the parents of children younger than ten years to be released from work, which resulted in every fifth parent that got release to be a father, thus forcing mothers to take over three quarters of the total burden of care.⁸⁹ In addition, women on maternity leave were allowed to extend their leave from work during the pandemic, but the decision did not encompass extended parental leave which is also regulated by the Macedonian law on labor relations.

Source: CRPM,
Infographic on the
gender impact of the
measure on release
from work due to
childcare during the
COVID-19 pandemic



The crisis intersects with pre-existing inequalities. Therefore, different groups of women are disproportionately and differently impacted. The fact that time spent by women on domestic activities starkly raises for the group of women aged 25 to 44, while it reduces for men of the same age group paints a picture of a patriarchal family, where the woman almost completely takes over the care for children, but also for other family members. This indicates that traditional gender roles are rather dominant in society and are strengthened, following partnership/marriage and especially after having children. There is a lack of awareness about women's misbalance between household activities and work, which results in challenges for women to freely express their needs and seek support. Women are still expected to take care of the children, cook, and clean the home, while men take care of finances.

Traditional gender roles are strongly held by nearly half of women, especially the ones belonging to non-majority communities.⁹⁰ Findings from interviews with Roma women show that during the lockdown they provided most for their children, handling the

88 Time-use survey 2009, State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia; Time-use Survey 2014/15, State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia.

89 The CRPM sent a free access to information request to 102 kindergartens and received response from 63 of the kindergartens.

90 http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/country/fyr%20macedonia/nat_research_female_labour_market_research.pdf?la=en&vs=936

raise in household chores and time spent on cooking, cleaning and child / elderly care. As some of them highlighted, this was a chance to polish their “cooking skills”. During the lockdown, rural women were burdened with work and household responsibilities, such as cleaning, cooking, taking care of the children, grocery shopping, in addition to working in the fields and producing fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products. In most of the cases, their husbands were going to work. *“My husband did not feel burdened, because he went to work all the time”*. – says a rural woman from Novo Selo, Kumanovo. Due to the restriction of movement for the elderly, their parents could not help them in respect of certain daily activities. *“My husband has been relieved of such obligations for a long time, and my sister sometimes helped me.”*⁹¹

Single mothers were also profoundly strained during the crisis. The entire burden fell on their backs, in terms of taking care of their children's needs, disinfecting, the heaviest burden being supporting their children's education. *“I am completely alone, I have no help, I do not communicate with anyone, I have no opportunities to get help from anyone, neither parents, nor relatives and friends, we are completely isolated. I literally take care of everything, food preparation, home hygiene, hygiene for the children, buying food and products, taking my children for a walk, helping them in their education, playing with the little one, so yes, I do absolutely everything. I try to distribute the responsibilities during the day, but it is extremely hard.”*⁹² Online classes created an additional emotional and mental burden for them. *“I try to help him, but I do not have time to explain to him in detail about each subject. The first several weeks were challenging, because he got confused and thought that if he was at home, he did not have to study”* – says one of the single mothers interviewed. Being a sole caretaker, educator, cleaner and paid worker was tremendously challenging and overwhelming for single mothers. *“The teachers were sending whatever they could find at the moment on the Internet, most of it from unreliable sources, using nonstandard language and obviously without quality control by the Bureau for Development of Education and the State Education Inspectorate.”*⁹³ Online education was problematic for rural women as some of them could not cover the cost for online schooling, as they could not afford a computer, or Internet, nor did they have the knowledge and skills to deliver the same quality education as trained teachers. *“There were a lot of responsibilities and a lot of work with the online classes, I worked with my younger daughter, because the teacher was not very interested in working and sending assignments, so I helped her as much as I could.”*⁹⁴

Unfortunately, the awareness of decision makers that women were the invisible buffer for the care burden ensuing from the lockdown, having thus made their families and society more resilient, is very low, resulting with no specific measures to address this additional burden for women. Even more, interviewed decision makers offer the reassurance that this role of women is expected. *“I don't know about other women.*

91 Interview with a rural woman, May 2020.

92 Interview with a single mother from Skopje, May 2020.

93 Interview with a single mother, May 2020.

94 Interview with a rural woman from Rosoman, May 2020.

*If they are well coordinated, dedicated, professional, they should not face difficulties. The lack of time is a problem, everything else is ongoing, temporary and can be handled”.*⁹⁵ Women’s primary interest and occupation should be their home, children and family. And if they are working instead of taking care of the family, according to policy makers from Debar, women should be additionally compensated. *“A man and a woman cannot have the same salary for the same job. Women should receive more because it compensates their absence from their families”.*⁹⁶

Regrettably, neither local level policy makers, nor central level decision makers, nor the policies and measures adopted and enacted in the period from March to July 2020 did promote shared household responsibilities. The increased presence of men at home could also lead to their taking on an increased share of the unpaid work. Hence, no one has used this unique situation to encourage men and women to redistribute and equally share the burden of unpaid domestic and care work. Instead women are maxing out and burning out. *“I probably suffer the most because I try to compensate for their dissatisfactions and frustrations. I am afraid for my health; I do not have time to take care of myself and I do not know for how long I will be able to endure this. My personal needs are irrelevant”.*⁹⁷

2.3. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a human rights violation, a universal issue, with great impact on victims/survivors, their families, and communities. With the start of the crisis, reports around the world alarmed of the shadow⁹⁸ or the double⁹⁹ pandemic occurring in parallel: increase of domestic violence as a result of measures restricting movement and staying home and for some women, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals, the home is a dangerous place.¹⁰⁰ The perception of domestic violence during the pandemic varies in different communities and among female and male interviewees included in the study. For example, female respondents from the Roma community stated that the quarantine provoked increase in domestic violence, additionally indicating that they know women from their communities who were abused and reported violence. On the other hand, this was not a consideration to which male respondents pointed.

Qualitative evidence on the impact of the COVID – SARS – 19 pandemic on violence against women in North Macedonia, as confirmed by victims and service providers, shows that there is an increase in the number of cases of violence against women. Interviewees from services providing legal advice and psychosocial support and

Qualitative evidence on the impact of the COVID – SARS – 19 pandemic on violence against women in North Macedonia, as confirmed by victims and service providers, shows that there is an increase in the number of cases of violence against women

⁹⁵ Interview with high level policy maker from Prilep, June 2020.

⁹⁶ Interview with high level policy maker from Debar, June 2020.

⁹⁷ Interview with a single mother, May 2020.

⁹⁸ COVID and VAW: The shadow pandemic, available online <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls>

⁹⁹ The double pandemic: domestic violence in time of COVID-19, available online <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/double-pandemic-domestic-violence-age-covid-19>

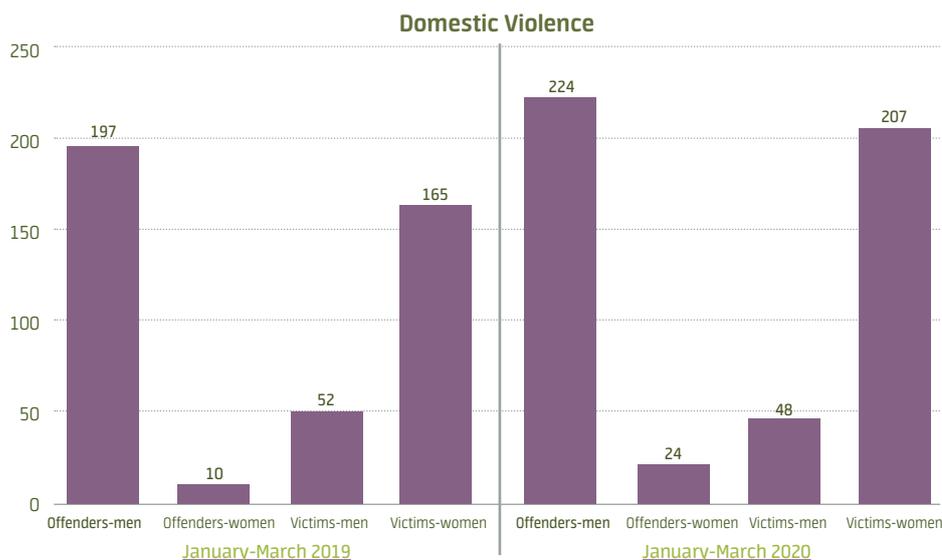
¹⁰⁰ <https://mhc.org.mk/news/za-mnogu-zheni-domot-e-nebezbedno-mesto-dva-sluchai-na-femicid-vo-vreme-na-pandemija/>

counselling have reported an increase in the number of complaints against domestic violence. Many of these cases show the negative effect of the lockdown, especially when previous offenders became again violent during the long lockdown, illustrating that measures to deal with the COVID -19 spread “trapped” victims at home with the perpetrators. The following cases illustrate the gravity of the situation: there were cases in which the husband forced the woman out of their home right before the start of the curfew, which resulted in an enormous stress, both because of the act of violence and the fear of eventual police fine for violating the curfew hours, but mostly from the situation of being homeless.¹⁰¹

*“I had to report him because I did not know what would happen on 6 May. The biggest challenge I faced in reporting the violence was that he threatened to evict me. It is not easy when you have children. He once came, knocked hard and broke the door lock and I did not report him. Then he stole my car and I did not report him again. He came many times and created drama. I think a lot happened this year and a half and I decided to report him now”.*¹⁰²

Quantitative data also confirm the dire situation, in which both the number of domestic violence cases in the three months before the COVID-SARS-19 crisis and the state of emergency increased. *“According to information from the Ministry of the Interior for the period from January to March 2019, the number of crimes related to domestic violence was 207 cases, while this year that number has increased to 241. Out of these cases, 47 victims were men and 207 were women. Furthermore, the number of complaints against domestic violence also increased, last year in the period from January to March there were 780 complaints, while this year that number has increased to 920.”*¹⁰³

Graph 13:
Comparison of VAW
Cases: January – March
2019-2020
Source: Ministry of the
Interior, June 2020



101 Interview with a victim of violence, May 2020.

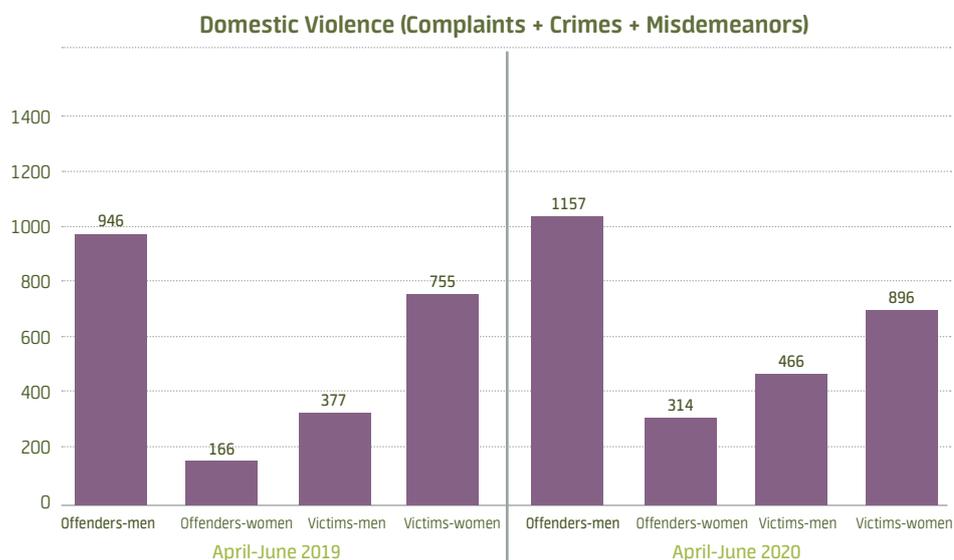
102 Interview with a victim of violence from Pehchevo, who reported her case in May 2020, after having lived in a violent environment for 5 to 6 years.

103 Interview with a service provider for victims of violence against women, May 2020.

Furthermore, during the state of emergency, when movement was restricted and the population was mainly locked in their homes, the number of crimes related to domestic violence increased immensely. In one month only, i.e. from 12 April to 12 May 2020 there were 85 crimes committed mainly in Ohrid, Skopje and in Strumica.¹⁰⁴ The Ministry of the Interior filed charges in 49 cases of violations of the law against 54 offenders, while 373 citizens filed complaints against violence, which increases the number of cases by 44.6%.¹⁰⁵ Regretfully, in this period, there were two cases of femicide in the country, committed by the intimate partners of the women, one in Arachinovo¹⁰⁶ and one in Skopje.¹⁰⁷

The trend of increasing number of cases continues especially in the period of the lockdown, with data of the Ministry of the Interior showing an increase of 20% in the number of cases, compared to the same period last year.

Graph 14:
Comparison of VAW
Cases: April – June
2019-2020
Source: Ministry of the
Interior, July 2020



Victims are not certain whether violence in their homes escalated because of the virus or the quarantine, or simply because "he feels that he needs to constantly harass me."¹⁰⁸

According to the service providers' statements, all types of violence were reported during the pandemic – economic, psychological, and physical. *"I only called the police. It was about psychological abuse, frequent insults against me and my children. I live under constant tension, stress, and fear. I could not stand it anymore and the only solution was to report him."*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ https://www.pravdiko.mk/chulev-prijavite-za-semejno-nasilstvo-za-april-maj-zgolemeni-44-6-otsto-za-razlika-od-lani/?fbclid=IwAR3dTUlo7plvZg44TH3kupR1BKSBm_TdtvrNqVGpsZHniDU68ZAMPZ-iLwY

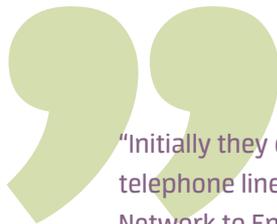
¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ <https://360stepeni.mk/ubistvo-vo-arachinovo-edno-litse-privedeno/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://360stepeni.mk/ojo-27-godishnik-osomnichen-za-ubistvo-do-smrt-pretepal-zhena/?fbclid=IwAR1g3kG2lZ3HaTf7ZkNTIOam3xXXMC1ZgAnR-XBlytm6GCrCpZPqXE77rxQ>

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a victim of violence who reported the case in March 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Victim from Skopje, 42 years old, who reported violence in March 2020, after having lived in a violent environment since 2015.



“Initially they called the numbers of the telephone lines of the Network (National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence), which are posted on our website. I had conversations with them and they were afraid to report the case with the police or the Social Work Centre. They wanted to be advised, but very few of them asked for social workers in order to report the case with them.”

Victims reported domestic violence calling the 192 police telephone number line, as well as via telephone numbers of CSOs providing legal aid and psycho-social support

Victims reported domestic violence calling the 192 police telephone number line, as well as via telephone numbers of CSOs providing legal aid and psycho-social support. However, victims of violence against women, especially in the COVID-SARS-19 crisis period, continued to rely less on services for legal and psycho-social support, opting more for police interventions. Hence, interviews show that victims hesitate to get psychological support due to distrust in institutions and their timely response, the inability to support themselves or their children due to their financial dependence on the abuser, as well as the lack of guaranteed safety and shelter provided by institutions. Both CSOs, victims and social services confirm the immediate reaction by the police in the period of lockdown. *“I am very satisfied with how the police reacted in this situation, because threats stopped immediately afterwards, and I received advices and additional help and support from certain NGOs that deliver services in cases of domestic violence.”*¹¹⁰ The sensitivity of the police in domestic violence cases was especially commended in terms of the treatment, protective equipment they wore and how they behaved in front of the children.

*“I called the police during the curfew and I asked them if they could come, because I really felt threatened, badly. They did not come to my apartment, I gave my statement downstairs, which I liked, so there would not be any additional stress to the children. The police officers wore masks and gloves.”*¹¹¹

However, based on the experiences of some of the interviewees, the response of the police and of social services was assessed as inadequate by CSOs and victims, which is primarily linked to the low capacities and workload of the police, dealing with other issues in this period.

„The police registered the domestic violence case and the complaint and intervened, but in the end, they threatened both the victim and the abuser that they would prose-

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Interview with a victim of violence, who reported the case in May 2020.

cute them. Our organization reacted immediately to such an action and the behaviour was afterwards corrected." – says an interviewee working in legal aid services. In fact, this is not a new finding, indicating that there is still a huge gap between the manner in which the police treat these cases and the room for improvement and strengthening their knowledge and capacities in dealing with cases of violence against women. In this context, a service provider from Strumica states that in this period "only 5 of the perpetrators were charged, all other cases were just registered as complaints."

The greatest problem still remains, and that is the fear of repeated violence, as well as the fear that the children will be taken away from them.

"Although, this may sound cliché, reporting domestic violence is still considered a taboo. In general, there are 49 reports in 30 days, compared to the previous years where annually we had about 100-150 reports on the territory of Strumica. In most of the cases, the victim returns to the abuser. The cliché is that victims are still not aware of the severity of the violence, are afraid, and do not have enough trust in the institutions and somehow the whole process is set back."

During the crisis, victims of domestic violence had access to online and phone psychological support, which operated round-the-clock and was provided by two social workers, a pedagogue, and a psychologist. Victims also had access to free legal aid, but due to the lack of staff at the Ministry of Justice, this service was not entirely available and did not operate at its full capacity. This was to a certain extent the case also with Social Work Centres, considering that sufficient capacities for safe emergency and secure accommodation of women-victims of violence were limited.

"Many of the victims do not want to use a shelter, they want assistance in ensuring security in their own home, where the violence took place. In other words, the victims wanted the offender to be relocated and not the victim, which in principle changes the way of operation when dealing with domestic violence from the perspective of Social Work Centres and the Ministry of the Interior."

The main communication tool used by service providers was social media, mainly Facebook. Other forms of communication during the state of emergency with their clients included face to face meetings, Viber, and phone calls. Interviewees confirm that the majority of victims were provided with timely information about available services. In some cases, a joint approach was applied, such as the Young Lawyers Association, which worked in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and Social Work Centres, in providing free legal aid. The Government promptly reacted to the request by the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for prevention and protection of victims of GBV and domestic violence. Unfortunately, the research did not produce any findings related to violence against women with disabilities or against the LGBTI+ population.

2.4. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE RESPONSE INCLUDING IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

As the COVID-19 pandemic intensified it became clear that if the desired goal is to deliver proper results in ensuring and protecting the health, well-being and equality, then women and girls must be positioned in the front lines or in centre of the response. Thus, while women are in the front lines of the response, as health care workers,¹¹² care givers at home,¹¹³ cleaners and shop assistants, amongst other roles, they constitute the majority of workers with the highest exposure to COVID-19, as all these jobs are 'high risk' job. However, as the Director of the Prilep General Hospital emphasized men had an important role in the front line in dealing with the virus, since most of the essential activities during the pandemic were done by men: such as guards, emergency vehicle drivers, hygienists.¹¹⁴

Women in North Macedonia are not equally involved in decision-making processes. The Parliament is the only place where gender balance is almost achieved due to the gender quota, but with the Parliament dissolved during the pandemic this contributed to women being mainly absent from decision-making processes. This has an immediate impact on people's lives. Countries with more women in leadership positions – in governments, cabinets, legislatures – have delivered COVID-19 responses that take into account the effects of the crisis on women and girls.¹¹⁵ However, such countries are exceptions, rather than the norm. For the purposes of this analysis, several high-ranked women, part of decision-making processes in various sectors, were interviewed in order to elaborate upon the role of women in developing measures to deal with the COVID – 19 pandemic.

Women's leadership and participation ensures more effective, inclusive, and fair policies, plans and budgets to address the pandemic. Therefore, with a view to securing that gender equality concerns are fully mainstreamed in the short-term responses, it is necessary to have more women in leadership positions, women who have developed gender awareness and who can thus promptly introduce the gender perspective in the policy design processes. The research shows that even women in senior positions consider that there were time constraints in conducting a proper gender analysis. *"The focus of the Ministry of the Interior was shifted predominantly on measures dealing with COVID - 19, with an emphasis on the restriction of movement of citizens and the enforcement of the curfew, without specifically looking at the perspectives of women"* - Slavjanka Petrovska, Alternate Deputy Minister of Interior. The adjustment of adopted policy measures to women's needs was pursued in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, but only after the need for adjustment became more than evident (i.e. once women and children, as the most common victims of do-

112 According to State Statistical Office, there are 15,355 women out of the total number of 21,200 people employed in the health care sector.

113 As section 2.1. above shows.

114 Interview conducted in June 2020.

115 <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2020/when-it-comes-to-decision-making--women-must-move-from-the-margi.html>

According to Visar Ganiu, Mayor of the Municipality of Chair, there was gender analysis at the local level with a view to avoiding discrimination

mestic violence, encountered problems in reporting violence in their homes during the curfew). Therefore, *ex-ante* analysis and consideration of gender related issues prior to the adoption of the measure was missing although it is part of the good governance principles, specifically in managing policy and budgets in emergency situations and is recommended by the WHO, specifically with respect to COVID-19 response.¹¹⁶ Thus, while the participation of women in the COVID-19 response was commendable and despite the fact that the Deputy Minister of the Interior, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, the Minister of Labour and Social Policy and the Minister of Finance were all women, the policy design measures did not follow the principles of gender mainstreaming, which requires introduction of gender equality perspectives in all stages of policy making. Quite the contrary, a reactive approach was applied in this context: *"in cooperation with the civil society sector, institutions reacted in a timely manner, so that we could rectify measures that did not properly take into consideration citizens' needs and interests"*. This paints the same picture as in previous disaster preparedness and recovery actions, when women's needs and interests were rarely included, and were developed with little or no sex- or gender-disaggregated data and little input from national gender equality representatives or women's organizations.¹¹⁷ According to Visar Ganiu, Mayor of the Municipality of Chair, there was gender analysis at the local level with a view to avoiding discrimination,¹¹⁸ but such analysis did not necessarily address different needs of women during the pandemic.

According to the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men, all public and private bodies are responsible to adopt measures that enhance gender equality, while the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy coordinates, monitors and analyses the effect of the emergency measures on women. In the state of emergency period, the Ministry depended to the largest extent on technical and financial support from the international community. For example, in cooperation with the UNDP, the OSCE Mission to Skopje and UN WOMEN, the Ministry provided hygiene kits and food packages to victims of domestic violence and single parents, out of which 93% were women, including single fathers. Jovana Trenchevska, a female State Secretary at the Ministry, emphasized that continuous impact assessment of measures is needed. This essentially means assessing whether women participated, i.e. were consulted in the process of developing the measures; then whether women's needs were taken into consideration in the design of the measure and whether women had access and benefited from the enforcement of the measure and resources provided

116 WHO (2020), *How to budget for COVID-19 response? A rapid scan of budgetary mechanisms in highly affected countries*, available at: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/health-financing/how-to-budget-for-covid-19-english.pdf?sfvrsn=356a8077_1

117 UN Women and UNDP, *Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction in Europe and Central Asia: A Workshop Guide for Facilitators*, 2018. However, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), Article 36 (a) (i) notes that "Women's participation is critical for effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programs; and adequate capacity building measures need to be taken to empower women for preparedness, as well as built their capacity for alternative livelihood in post-disaster situations."

118 Interview with Visar Ganiu, Mayor of the Municipality of Chair, June 2020.

under such measures. In turn, the impact on women of the measure under which a salary subsidy of MKD 14,500 was provided, is *“currently analysed by UN Women and an expert will determine from which sectors and what is the gender structure of employees in companies that have applied for the subsidy, as well as whether this measure will produce benefits.”* While central level authorities were aware that the gender analysis would result in preserving women’s jobs, including in sales, trade, and the textile sector, local level counterparts interviewed for this analysis had very low level of awareness about the different gender impact of measures they employed. *“Measures are implemented equally, and the impact should not be seen from the gender perspective”.*¹¹⁹

Interestingly, although during the lockdown everyone was home and thus institutions had a captive audience, and access to all information outlets was easy, from one’s living room or the browser on one’s phone, female Government representatives identified informing and outreach as the greatest challenges during this period, especially as regards adopted measures. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy made efforts to increase transparency by organizing press conferences and publishing regulations online (on the official website and on social media). *“We also cooperate with organizations that are working in rural areas, where information outreach is much more difficult.”* There was similar cooperation with other CSOs, representing victims of violence, Roma women, etc.

The Red Cross was in the front line dealing with the virus through its 34 municipal organizational units, working on disease prevention and improving the health and social conditions of citizens.¹²⁰ *“Both men and women equally participated in decision-making processes at the local level, this is my impression from both the municipal task force and the services we deliver as Red Cross”-* said the representative of the Red Cross local organization in Prilep. This perception is a result of the fact that *“four women are actively involved, including myself (the Director of the Hospital), the Director of the Centre for Public Health, the Director of Public Utility Company “Komunalec” and the President of the Red Cross local branch in Prilep. In certain situations, when needed, a doctor-colleague, an epidemiologist from the Centre for Public Health and the Head of the Infectious Disease Ward at the General Hospital were present in the task force of the Municipality that adopted the decisions on how to respond to COVID-19 locally”* stated Olivera Adjioska. In Kumanovo also three women, two from health institutions and one representative from the Ministry of the Interior, were part of the crisis headquarters because they held managerial positions and thus participated in local decision-making processes. This was not the case with the Municipalities of Ara-

¹¹⁹ Olivera Adjioska, Director of the Prilep General Hospital, interview conducted in June 2020.

¹²⁰ Their main activities during the crisis consisted of meeting basic needs, such as food and hygiene products delivery to vulnerable target groups, such as people in need and individuals in self-isolation. They also facilitated the oncology therapy for local patients, who due to the movement limitations were not able to get the therapy in the standard procedure; then a hot line for psychological counselling, psycho-social support and medical advice was available as well, operated by the municipal branch. In terms of specific vulnerable categories, their primary focus was providing help to socially disadvantaged people, victims of domestic violence, single parents, persons with physical disabilities, etc.

chinovo, Chair or Debar, where women did not participate in the decision-making processes at the respective crisis headquarters of the three municipalities. Interviewed municipal representatives interpreted this as follows *“we protect them from becoming infected with the virus, since they are seen as the pillar of society and the family.”*¹²¹ In stark contrast to such a statement, the President of the Commission for Equal Opportunities at the Chair Municipality confirms that women were excluded from the decision-making fora, but for different reasons. *“Some people not only consider that our participation/inclusion is unnecessary, they even believe that women cannot handle the responsibility of leading a crisis management group, which is terrible because that prevents us from playing a greater role than we do at the moment.”*¹²² The municipalities’ crisis management strategies at the local level were aligned with those of the Government regarding the COVID – 19 pandemic, whereas several specific measures were adopted in line with the local context, such as assistance to families with immobile members, citizens in self-isolation, the socially underprivileged families and others. Municipalities also frequently disinfected streets, religious facilities, schools, local businesses.¹²³ The UN Women mapping study of the gender impact of COVID-19 at the local level showed that most of the municipalities (14 out of 20 covered by the survey) have developed gender responsive measures to respond to the virus.¹²⁴ However, only 5 out of the 20 municipalities included in the study relied on equal opportunity coordinators for introducing the gender perspective in the COVID-19 response measures.¹²⁵ In the seven municipalities where the research was conducted for the purposes of this study only one municipality (the Municipality of Karposh specifically) included the Coordinator for Equal Opportunities in the Crisis Task Force. Other women that were contacted outside task forces, especially at the local level were managers of companies that produce and distribute medical protective equipment and that donated protective masks for the municipal services employees, such as suits, disposable coats, hats, shoes, masks, etc.

The primary role of women in the community was raising awareness among the families, advising them about respecting the measures and recommendations issued by health institutions in fighting the virus

The primary role of women in the community was raising awareness among the families, advising them about respecting the measures and recommendations issued by health institutions in fighting the virus. In cooperation with two female doctors, the Municipality of Chair produced videos encouraging people to respect the nationwide measures. These videos were later broadcast on national media outlets, in addition to their dissemination via the official website of the Municipality and the official social media page of the Mayor.

However, the prevailing conclusion of all interlocutors is that *“women should be treated with special measures, their needs prioritized and promoted.”*¹²⁶ The period

121 Interview with Hekuran Duka, Mayor of the Municipality of Debar, June 2020.

122 Bujare Abazi, President of the Commission for Equal Opportunities, Municipality of Chair, June 2020.

123 Interview with Agron Beqiri, Municipality of Arachinovo, conducted June 2020.

124 UNWOMEN (2020) Mapping the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic situation of women at local level.

125 *Ibid.*

126 Interview with Hekuran Duka, Mayor of the Municipality of Debar, June 2020.

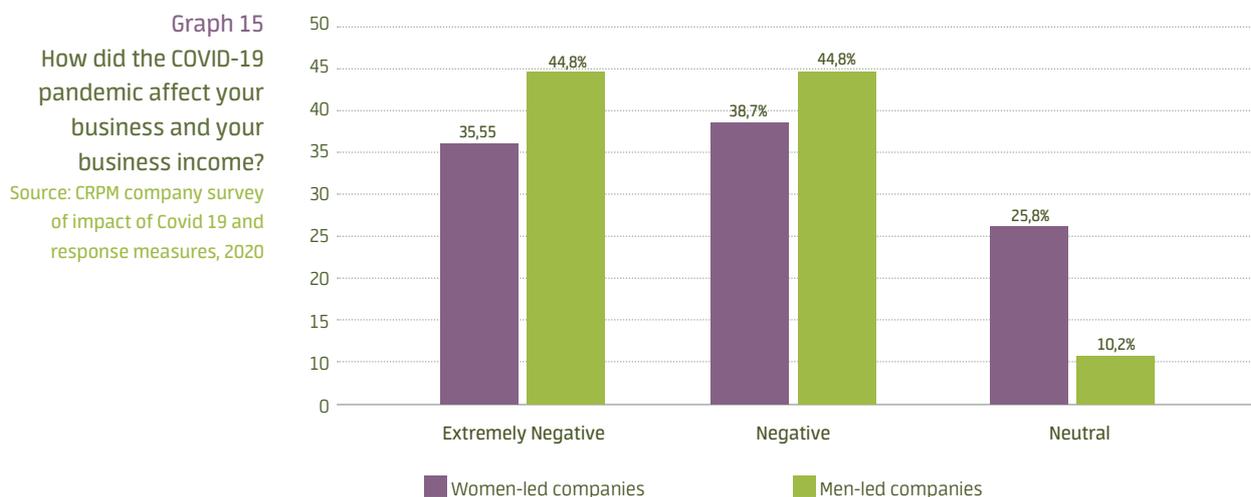
from March to July 2020 showed absence of gender determined approach to policy design, both at the national and at the local level, despite the fact that women on high-ranking positions were involved, and were part of crisis management task forces.

In the Municipality of Arachinovo, in addition to the Mayor, who is a woman, there are four women in the Municipal Council, none of whom participated in the work of the municipal crisis task force. In the Municipality of Chair, although no women were involved in the crisis task force, several women actively participated in the development of a communication strategy to reach citizens and disseminated appeals for people to comply with the measures.

2.5. BUSINESS LIQUIDITY AND SURVIVAL RATE OF WOMEN'S BUSINESSES

In May 2020, the CRPM conducted an online survey, under which answers of 60 representatives of national companies were processed (women and men entrepreneurs). The survey questionnaire related to the needs assessment of companies in terms of better coping with the situation caused by COVID-19 contained 34 questions, structured in three main chapters: A) General and demographic information about the respondent and the company; B) Assessment of the consequences of COVID-19; C) The need for support to national companies. The survey was conducted with the online platform KoBoToolbox. Participation in the survey was anonymous. The following is a gender analysis of the results.

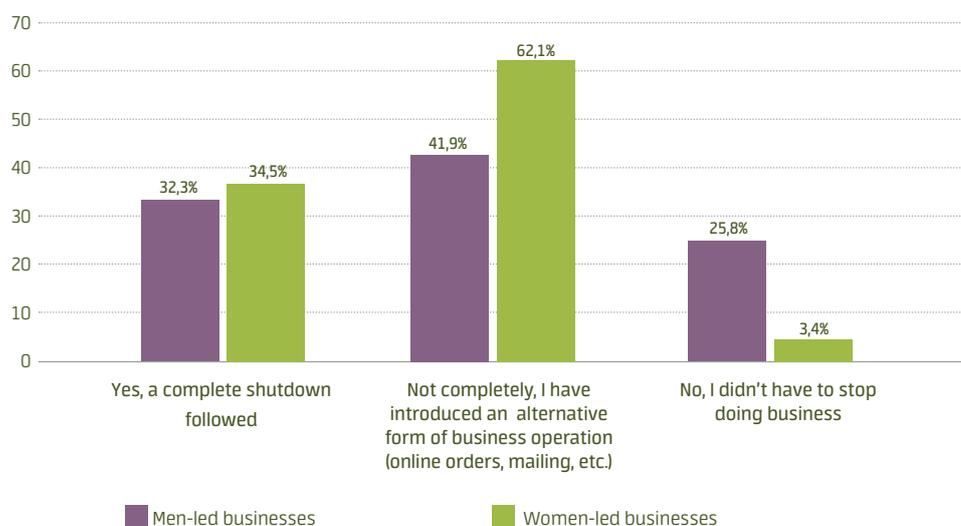
Women-led companies assess the crisis impact less negatively than men led companies. Almost 90% of surveyed companies believe that the emergence of the COVID-19 crisis has a negative impact on their businesses and revenues. Women-led companies are less affected by 15% as compared to men-led companies. The situation is so severe that 33.3% of the respondents announced a complete shutdown, as a result of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Most of the companies have tried to adapt to the new situation; namely, 51.7% of the companies did not completely stop their activities, and introduced alternative forms of business operation, using electronic tools, i.e. online orders, mailing and delivery, etc. Only for 15% of the businesses, the crisis did not cause interruption of their business operations.



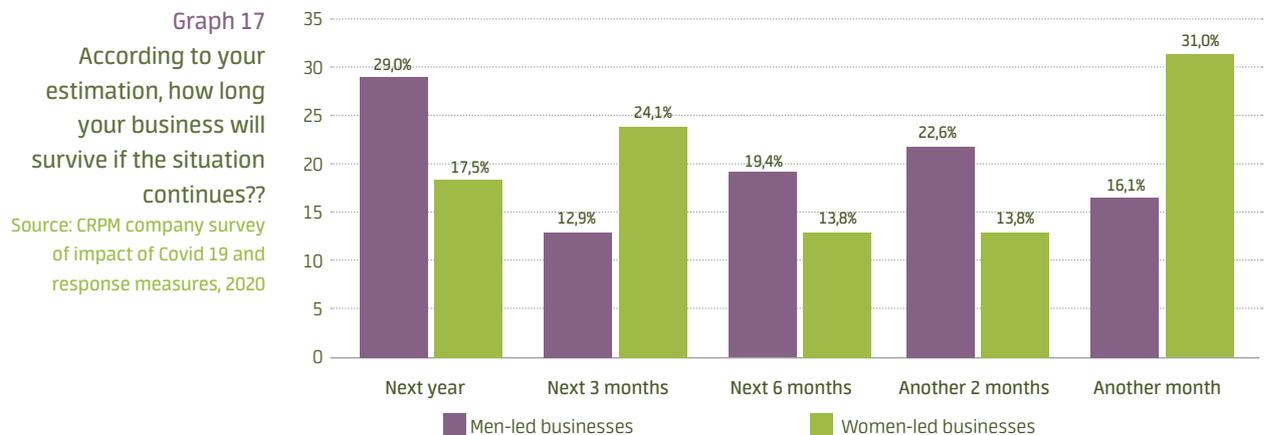
Women-led business adapt faster to the crisis. The CRPM company survey focusing on the impact of COVID-19 and of the response measures showed that businesses run by women, or in which a woman is the founder or part of the company's founding structure, adapted much more quickly to changing economic conditions. Thus, 62.1% of such companies did not close their business operations completely, as a result of the crisis caused by the virus, but introduced new forms of operation, using digital tools and distribution of goods to customers, compared to only 41.9% for companies run by men.

Graph 16
Did your business have to shut down completely due to the crisis by the COVID-19?

Source: CRPM company survey of impact of Covid 19 and response measures, 2020



Women-led businesses are more vulnerable to the crisis. Almost one fourth of the businesses (23.3% of total surveyed businesses) will survive just for another month if the unfavourable situation continues. Over a third of the businesses would survive for another 2 or 3 months. In most of the women-led companies, the opinion prevails that the crisis caused by the virus could be fatal for the business. Namely, almost 45% estimate that if the virus crisis continues, their businesses will not survive for more than 2 months, while only 37.9% of them consider that they will be able to survive the crisis in the next 3 to 6 months. If the situation continues, 17.2 % of the businesses state that they will be able to last another year. As a comparison, 29.0% of men-led business estimate that they could last for another year even if the crisis continues.



Almost half of the women-led businesses (48.3%) fear that they will be forced to close their businesses permanently. In contrast, 38.7% of the men-led companies are of the same opinion. The survival strategy in order to ensure continuity of their business operations is based on reducing costs (68.3%), increasing liquidity by borrowing loans from banks and micro-crediting institutions (53.3%), and a significant part of companies rely on savings and surplus income from previous periods (43.3%). Struggling with their own matured debts, companies plan to delay payments to suppliers (30%). This will inevitably have an impact on the overall economy. This diminishes business operation security and will surely affect the consumption and economic growth in the next 6 to 12 months and ultimately many businesses will remain at risk of default. The current direct Government economic support to companies has been mostly limited to the period from April to June 2020. The Government should act promptly and ensure extension of the support.

Women-led businesses have less confidence that they can overcome the crisis on their own. Almost 90% of companies led by women (89.7%) stated that they were not confident that they could overcome the crisis on their own, while only 10.3% believe that their businesses will survive without any additional support. As for men-led companies, the responses to this question show greater difference with 83.9% of the men-led businesses stating that they are not confident that they can overcome the crisis and 16.1% believing that they will be able to survive the crisis.

In the coming period companies will face the following three most important challenges: 1) reduced or completely suspended demand for products (due to limited or discontinued production operations), 2) the collection of payments and liquidity issues, as well as 3) the emergence of additional unplanned expenses. Additionally, according to businesspersons, the shortage of operating capital will be a significant challenge.

The economic measures to respond to the socio-economic impact of the virus on citizens adopted thus far are categorized as: tax delays and reductions, financial assistance to companies and liquidity protection, protection of the living standard, liquidity of the central budget, social protection, health care and child protection.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/merki/ekonomski-merki>

The volume of the support until June 2020 is estimated at MEUR 550 or 5 to 5.5% of the GDP. The bulk of the direct financial support to companies and citizens is provided under the following measures:

- ▶ Subsidies for employees' salaries in amount of MKD 14,500 per employee for April, May, and June 2020;
- ▶ Subsidy in the amount of 50% of employees' social security contributions;
- ▶ Interest-free or low-interest loans for micro and small enterprises, given through the Development Bank of North Macedonia;
- ▶ Credit risk guarantees for start-ups and small and micro companies;
- ▶ Financial support to boost companies' competitiveness to enter new markets and modernize processes;
- ▶ Support for the development of domestic start-up products and services through the Fund for Innovation and Technological Development;
- ▶ Financial support to farmers;
- ▶ "Buy domestic" payment cards to citizens with low income to boost domestic consumption;
- ▶ "Home is home" vouchers for citizens to stimulate domestic tourism and support the tourism sector;
- ▶ Tax exemption for personal income tax and corporate income for March, April, and May 2020.

In this context, the Government measures are assessed as insufficient to keep employees and maintain liquidity. Most of the respondents (51.7%) said that they would use the minimum salary subsidy measure to keep their employees, but 8% of the companies that stated that they would not use any measures would reduce the number of employees in the following period. Only 25% of surveyed companies assess the measures as favourable, while 31.7% of those that would use the measures believe that the measures are not sufficiently beneficial for retaining employees.

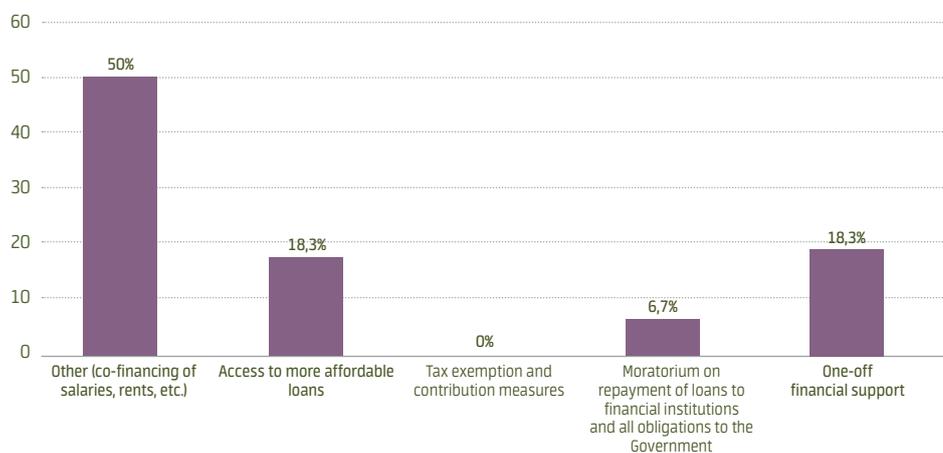
The analysis of the implementation of the measure for subsidizing the salaries shows a gender gap. Namely, out of the top 20 companies that received the largest volume support by the Government to keep their employees, only 2 companies are managed by women.

Source: CRPM infographic on
the COVID-19 impact on the
economy



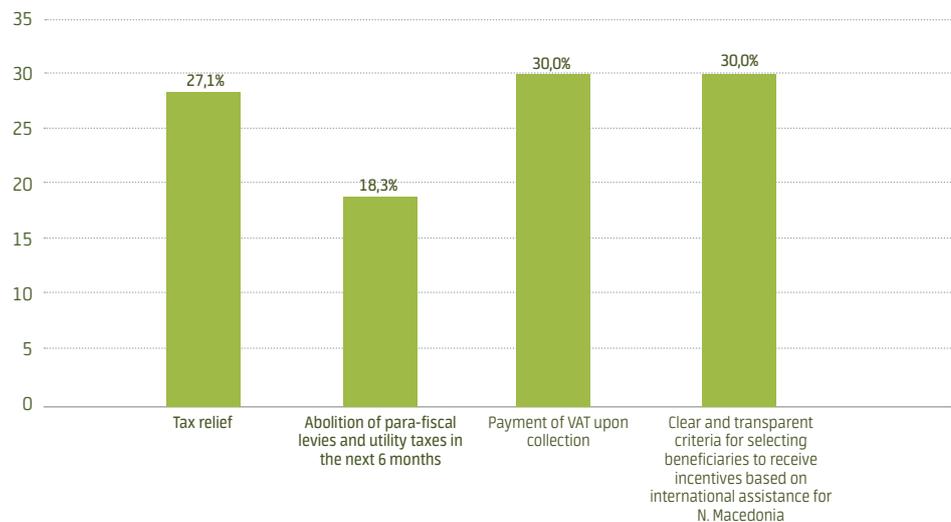
According to 50% of companies, the financial support they need currently should be in form of co-financing salaries, expenses for rents, etc. More than 18% of the companies consider that one-off financial support would be useful, and the same percentage of companies state that they would benefit from support for easier access to more affordable loans. In terms of type of financial support, only 6.7% of companies consider that there should be an opportunity for a moratorium on repayment of loans to financial institutions and all obligations to the Government. Regarding the need for advisory and technical support, according to the respondents, such support is needed for their general business planning, introduction to electronic business, as well as financial advice to overcome this situation.

Graph 18
What type of financial
support do you need
most right now??
Source: CRPM company
survey of impact of Covid 19
and response measures, 2020



In terms of what emergency measures should be undertaken by relevant public institutions in order to help companies to revitalize their business, most respondents believe that this should be: 1) payment of VAT upon collection (30%), clear and transparent criteria for selecting beneficiaries to receive incentives, based on international assistance to North Macedonia (30%), as well as tax relief (21.6%).

Graph 19
What emergency
measures do you think
the relevant institutions
should take to help
revitalize the business?
Source: CRPM company survey
of impact of Covid 19 and
response measures, 2020



2.6. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION

COVID-19 does not discriminate, and nor should the response, if it is to succeed.¹²⁸ In these times of COVID-19 pandemic, isolation, loneliness, and social injustices are increasing. Affecting all segments of the population, the response to the virus outbreak is particularly detrimental to members of social groups that are in the most vulnerable situations: older people, people with disabilities, and minorities. Having lesser financial resources and living in more densely populated areas, these categories face a disproportionately higher health and economic risks than others.

While the profile of victims varies from country to country, there seems to be a common pattern in discriminatory acts occurring during the pandemic: more often than not the target is generally the 'other', i.e. the foreigner, someone belonging to an ethnic or cultural minority, etc.¹²⁹ Furthermore, trends of stigmatizing those affected by the virus and socially excluding them even after they have recovered are persisting. This requires to boost solidarity and to contribute to changing people's attitudes towards those that were infected and who are at risk of discrimination in a specific context.

The elderly, especially those with chronic health conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes are not just struggling with higher health risks but are also likely to be less capable of supporting themselves in isolation. Despite the fact that social distancing is necessary to reduce the spread of the virus, adopting measures for restricted movement of the age group of older than 65 years, the Government has contributed to the sense of being discriminated that spread within this group. However, there was no age-based discrimination in the provision of services for treatment of the elderly, i.e. relevant services were fully provided and in terms of medical treatment they were not perceived to have less value than younger patients under treatment. In fact, the elderly were provided also with support services by vis-

¹²⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25730>

¹²⁹ <https://en.unesco.org/news/covid-19-related-discrimination-and-stigma-global-phenomenon>

iting nurses at the local level, in several municipalities, such as Kochani, Sveti Nikole,¹³⁰ Delchevo, and Centar.¹³¹ People with disabilities were helped in their daily routines by their personal assistants, or by family members. During the lockdown, personal assistants did not follow special protocols, which instigated fear, both among the assistance recipients and the assistants from eventual infection and transmission resulting in decreased intensity of the care. General individual self-care and disruption of services and support have brought challenges for people with disabilities.

All the elderly interviewed for the purposes of this study unanimously confirm that they abide by, follow, and respect all measures and that they take precautions necessary for avoiding COVID-19 infection. The elderly faced financial challenges in complying with recommendations for protection against the virus. Retired women especially who were interviewed underscore the considerable financial burden incurred by the purchase of disinfectants and hygiene products. This is explained by the fact that women traditionally have jobs that are less paid and thus their pensions are lower than those of men. Elderly women have also noticed the market price fluctuations, especially of protective masks. Roma women and men also experienced serious financial burden buying disinfectants and hygiene products. Being less educated and employed in labour intensive sectors, but on exceptionally low paid jobs, and working with reduced hours, which ultimately results in salary cuts, the new requirements for keeping safe from the virus were especially problematic for this population group. Roma women, who are or became unemployed due to the pandemic, continued to rely on the financial support from their close ones, parents, and grandparents. The most disproportionately affected were Roma people without access to running water, living in slums and in densely populated areas. Owing to these factors, large number of interviewees belonging to the Roma community state that they have been tested for COVID-19, as the epidemiological surveys took account of these circumstances.

Due to the noticeably short period of time, when elderly women and men were allowed to move, the markets were crowded, and shopping was extremely challenging for old people. Some of the interviewees, especially the chronically ill, brought up the fact that they were supplied (with food and medicines) by their family members and in some cases by CSOs that were engaged by municipalities to provide assistance to vulnerable groups. When necessary, they usually consulted with their family doctors by phone in order to be issued an electronic prescription. That e-form prescription was directly sent to the digital registry, so the elderly could pick up their required medicines in any pharmacy close to their homes. They found this measure especially effective because it helped them avoid visits to the local dispersed medical facilities / hospitals. On the other hand, the Roma reported buying medicines that were cheaper from the ones their doctor prescribed, due to their worsened financial condition. Other medical services were generally available for them, although some check-ups were "from a window". The access to dental and gynaecological services was reduced. A challenging problem

¹³⁰ UNWOMEN (2020) Mapping the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic situation of women at local level

¹³¹ Interviews with the elderly, May 2020.

The everyday
life of the
elderly changed
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affected women
differently than
men

that was mentioned was the *“the non-operation of the call-centre for psychological support, even though there was an intensive campaign in that period promoting this service”*. Some of the respondents said that they had postponed their check-ups on their own due to the COVID-19 related risks.

The everyday life of the elderly changed considerably but affected women differently than men. Frequent cleaning and maintaining the home hygiene was an additional burden for elderly women, whereas male elderly interviewees mainly complained about the limitations of movement and socializing. *“For women, everything is a bit harder. First of all, shopping, secondly, maintaining hygiene for oneself and for others, because I am a grandmother, I pay more attention to my younger grandchild, this practically demands more work.”*¹³² Elderly interviewees in this study pointed out that the reduced social contact increased their loneliness and undermined their well-being, compared to their situation before the pandemic. The lack of social gatherings with families and friends, along with the isolation was particularly challenging for them. *“My socialization suffered immensely, and was limited to phone calls to relatives, and in some cases Viber video calls.”*¹³³ According to their statements, loneliness is one of the main factors that affected their mental health. They are waiting for full recovery of the situation so they can resume their social life to some extent. People with disabilities (with visual and hearing impairments, as well as persons with physical disability) also reported high-level of social isolation, compared to their interviewed fellow citizens with typical development. They welcomed the decision allowing persons with disability to go out for a walk during the lock down, but some of them have applied other coping strategies. For example, some of the interviewed individuals with visual impairments started practicing yoga as a way of maintaining their physical condition.

Furthermore,
there was
stigmatization
of the Roma
population during
the pandemic, in
bank services

Social exclusion on the basis of age, as well as religious affiliation was underlined by elderly women. The fact that health authorities imposed a long quarantine for the Easter holiday, which prevented them from attending Easter mass prompted the sense of being discriminated against, compared to Muslims, who according to the interviewees were not held in long quarantines during Ramazan Bayram, when the media reported numerous violations of the curfew. For the Roma it was particularly discriminating that the e-learning for their school-aged children was not adapted to the resources and knowledge they had to support them. The criticism of the e-learning comes mostly from Roma parents in the capital, while the positive assessments come from those living in smaller towns. Furthermore, there was stigmatization of the Roma population during the pandemic, in bank services, impolite behaviour from supermarket assistants / security officers, etc. A male respondent from Skopje even described this stigmatization as a result of the predominant perception of Roma as “spreaders” of the virus. Some of the respondents also felt that the Roma community was neglected when it comes to the measures against COVID-19. *“We are not given a chance, there is no answer from the Municipality of Chair regarding our financial needs. I would say*

132 Interview with an elderly woman, May 2020.

133 Interview with an elderly man, May 2020.

that they are not responsive at all, not only to the Roma people, but to everyone."¹³⁴ The risks of infection with COVID-19 for people with disabilities were compounded by other issues, which warrant specific action: being excluded from receiving health related information and mainstream health provision, living in a world where accessibility is often limited and where barriers to goods and services are a challenge, and being disproportionately more likely to live in an institutional settings. Depending on the types of disabilities, people with disabilities faced different barriers, challenges, and problems. For example, people with hearing impairments experienced challenges communicating as masks were not inclusive (with a transparent window), which resulted with difficulties in understanding the sales staff when shopping. In cases of people with visual impairments, wearing gloves was difficult because it limited their touch sensitivity, which is crucial in terms of moving and making their daily routine. Finally, people with physical disabilities, faced the long-standing problem of bad street infrastructure and parked cars on sidewalks. This was even more noticeable compared to the situation before the COVID-19 outbreak, bearing in mind that the movement was limited, and people were not on the streets to help them. Therefore, most of these individuals with physical disabilities relied on family members or personal assistants. In addition to poor infrastructure for people with physical disabilities and the obstacles while moving in a wheelchair, for people with hearing impairments the impossibility to withdraw cash from ATMs, because of the lack of integrated sound option and system was a serious problem. They highlighted the improved awareness among the general public about their situation providing examples such as being given priority in banks and shop queues. Rural people, both women and men, felt discriminated at another level. *"I feel a little discriminated because we did not enjoy the same rights as the people from the city, i.e. constant disinfection and all protection measures were taken in the cities, while nothing similar happened in the villages. Also, the online sales and delivery of products worked flawlessly in the city, but in the countryside that service was not available due to higher costs, greater fear and so on.*"¹³⁵

134 Interview with a Roma woman from Skopje, May 2020.

135 Interview with a rural woman, May 2020.

Chapter

3

GENDER GAPS CREATED BY THE COVID – 19 RESPONSE

The pandemic had the potential of transforming gender relations and family life forever.



3.1. GENDER RELATIONS IN THE FAMILY AFTER COVID - 19

The pandemic had the potential of transforming gender relations and family life forever. With the fast spreading of the coronavirus pandemic many gender inequalities have already been intensified, considering that existing discriminatory and harmful norms continue or worsen in the face of change. This applies to increase of unpaid care work for women at home, violence against women, gender pay gap, because women suffer the most from being laid off, economic dependence, because with the new forms of work and lesser women's participation in the science, technology, engineering, mathematics sector their employability is at stake. As children are at home, hiring support for domestic chores is not an option, this being an option not all families can afford. Those that work full-time from home, have such long hours that prevent them from supporting their children as educators, especially since the concept of distance learning foresees greater role of parents, as organizers of schooling taking the burden of explaining the didactical content and controlling the quality of learning results. Some parents lack not only time, but also knowledge and skills to organize and help their children with distance learning. An additional factor that shaped family relations in the COVID-19 period is internet access and having sufficient number of computers for all family members, since both work and school were online. Furthermore, the lockdown, especially if it is enforced on certain groups (the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.) instigates the sense of discrimination. The lockdown and quarantine life led to close and continual interaction with family members. Such interaction can either strengthen the ties between family members or can create an additional emotional burden for them. All this causes "enormous amounts of frustration" in the family.



We started getting on each other's nerves,
we are not used to spending so much time
together, indoors.

The situation was stressful for all, but in particular for the urban population that had to stay home in their small apartments, compared to the rural population who enjoyed greater freedom, because the restrictions on movement did not apply to them and allowed them to work in the fields. *"It was stressful for us when we saw on TV that the number of dead, infected, etc. increased, and we tried to overcome it by spending time in the yard, in the village, in the fields."*¹³⁶ According to the statements of interviewees, the "stay at home" message made everyone spend more time together than they expected or even wanted to. *"Our habits have changed. Coffee later in the morning, shopping at an accelerated pace, and increased time spent for care for children and their schoolwork."*¹³⁷ The majority of interviewees experienced favourable influence in

¹³⁶ Interview with a rural man, May 2020.

¹³⁷ Interview with a mother with disability, May 2020.

terms of more family time, they embraced this time as an opportunity to spend quality family time together and bonded significantly more than before. *"I started valuing the time spent with my parents, especially with my youngest brother, in order to understand what he is doing - he records videos for YouTube."*¹³⁸ .

Nonetheless, social distancing was challenging for all of them, because it resulted in isolation from relatives and friends for long period of time. *"It was very depressing and difficult to stand, especially during the quarantine on weekends. We used to spend time on the Internet, watched television... We became more patient."*¹³⁹ Issues like depression and alienation emerged. However, services for treatment of such issues were offered in a limited manner. The Ministry of Health issued recommendations on mental health, but no specific measure was developed or implemented to address these needs, neither through primary or secondary health care or through school psychologists for school-aged children. *"Two months have passed since we have seen relatives from our extended family, we missed them and had a hard time with this situation since we are very close with each other. My parents live in the city, my brother, and my sister-in-law as well, so literally no one was able to come and see me for two months"*.¹⁴⁰



In our case it was the other way around. We spent our time mostly separated, due to the curfew. My children and my husband were taking care of the sheep in Probishtip, I was responsible for the home production of milk and cheese in Gostivar.

However, the lockdown had a negative impact on rural men and women and people with disabilities mostly. The rural population reported increased tensions in their homes and even experienced depression, primarily due the congestion in their production, while people with disabilities needed to be separate from family members in order to keep safe during the pandemic. *"My husband sleeps in a separate room because he is at a greater risk of getting infected. We take walks alone, when possible. The family is the most important thing. We can only rely on ourselves and our own capacities. We need to be careful, because the virus not only affects us, but also our surroundings."*¹⁴¹

138 Interview with a young Roma woman, May 2020.

139 Interview with a woman with a disability, May 2020.

140 Interview with a rural woman, May 2020.

141 Interview with a woman, married to a man with disability, May 2020.

3.2. GENDER AND THE FUTURE OF WORK AFTER COVID-19

*“Part of the employees were assigned to work from home, some of them rotated for days.”*¹⁴² Women and men with disabilities in several cases, were released from work due to their health and physical condition, and were enabled to work from home. The COVID - 19 pandemic dramatically changed the way people live and work. Part time work, work in shifts, teleworking, work via internet and from home are the forms that were imposed immediately on employees with the start of the crisis. Many offices, companies and institutions started to transform their organizational set-up. In this way, the longstanding request of women’s organizations pursued for many years to enable workers to better combine their jobs with care responsibilities has been addressed, by allowing teleworking and work from home. Of course, this is not possible for all jobs, but at least some of the jobs in companies could be done from home.

Unfortunately, in most of the institutions in the public sector work from home was interpreted as release from work duties, owing to the lack of procedures to manage the work process from home, control and hold accountable the employees. In the private sector where the work from home occurred for the first time, employees faced challenges to organize their home situation to create the right space and time to carry out their job effectively. Support to these employees on how to learn to reorganize themselves was not offered. This increased the level of frustration and dissatisfaction with the quality of life, especially among women. *“In the new normal, I work from early morning until late at night, with breaks to cook, clean, feed the family, disinfect, then I get some more e-mails after 9 o'clock and my work continues until I drop tired. The online work gives me headaches, nausea and feeling of being exhausted. There is no clear line when my work stops, and my family life begins. The balancing of work and family life should be reconsidered.”*¹⁴³ While this “new normal” in working has an impact on all people, employees with care provision responsibilities are disproportionately affected, *particularly women as they represent the vast majority of individuals, who still shoulder the main burden when it comes to responsibilities for provision of care for children, elderly parents or relatives.* Therefore, the Gender Section and the Department of Human Resources at the OSCE provided some recommendations to employers.¹⁴⁴

These new modes of work change the standard relationship between employees and employers into unconventional forms of work, which do not depend on the physical presence of the worker at his/her workplace.¹⁴⁵ The non-standard forms of employment are not regulated, which increases uncertainty above all for workers,

142 Interview with Atina Murgasanska, SDSM, President of the Municipal Council of Kumanovo, June 2020.

143 Interview with a mother of two employed in the private sector, May 2020.

144 OSCE (2020) Remote Working: Gender-Sensitive Tips for Managers, available online: <https://jobs.osce.org/resources/document/infographics-remote-working-gender-sensitive-tips-managers?fbclid=IwAR11EHwpLTpDvyC9LMkctJ-QQLI1wfZwp0--8ytMqb9sjs0h1n229YZusw>

145 Eurofound (2015), New forms of employment, Publication Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, page 4.

due to lack of adequate or regulated working conditions, as well as due to reduced or suppressed rights to social and health protection.¹⁴⁶ The traditional employment contract and the Law on Labour Relations, which regulates employment, do not contain provisions on teleworking. According to the consulting firm Global Workplace Analytics, two years from now up to 30 percent of workers could be working from home multiple days per week. According to the Law on Labour Relations, the company must define the working hours and introduce electronic registration of workers. The new circumstances require legislative amendments that will allow for introduction of an electronic system of recording of employees working from home, record-keeping of office hours and facilitating the company to prepare a work-from home order. Mental and physical health needs of employees are also changing, as they suffer from burnout faster than any other category of workers. Therefore, employers need to provide additional recreation and entertainment opportunities, that are COVID-19 proofed, so that workers improve their well-being, manage stress, and balance their work and life. The virus will decrease the number of jobs for which employees are hired under full-time employment contracts, and the trends of decreasing of part-time work observed in 2017, and 2016 is expected to change in 2020.¹⁴⁷ Considering that women were more numerous in the group of laid off employees, they will be more affected by the new forms of work that will be emerging. They will be looking for work on online platforms and thus the Government will have to develop policies for enhancing digital skills, retraining programs for new digital jobs that will be emerging and rethinking social protection and labour rights, in order to provide a safety net addressing their specific needs relating to the gender role as a worker, care giver, teacher, provider, cleaner. *“There is going to be an increase of online work, but it won’t all be of good quality and with enough protection, especially not in times of shock,”* said Anna Thomas, director of the Institute for the Future of Work. The German Government is already working on a new legal framework for labour relations, adapting it to the new normal that emerged following the virus.¹⁴⁸

The coronavirus crisis has divided workers into two classes: those who can work from home, and those forced to risk infection

The coronavirus crisis has divided workers into two classes: those who can work from home, and those forced to risk infection. The opportunity to work from home has been unevenly distributed, with higher paid workers being the most likely to benefit from this possibility, while the lowest paid workers had to show up for work. More vulnerable groups experienced reduced income, non-compliance with protection measures in their workplace, as well as extension of working hours. *“There is not enough distance between the employees, and they are not wearing protective masks. Currently, they work full-time, there is even a night shift”.* Women and men in the front line fighting the COVID – 19 virus faced unprecedented pressure, especially in the health care sector.

146 International Labour Organisation, Work in the future, ILO centenary initiatives, 3, Series of informative notes, page 4.

147 For new forms of work in North Macedonia please refer to CRPM (2018) Adaptation of industrial relations to new forms of work, available online: <http://www.crpm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EN-Prilagoduvanje-na-industriskite-odnosi-kon-novite-oblici-na-vrabetuvanje-5-FINAL-OK.pdf>

148 <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/heil-plant-bis-herbst-gesetz-fuer-recht-auf-homeoffice-a-06af277e-75f4-4a59-8963-0070d6c507bb>

A significant portion of these type of workers could not work remotely. They reported experiencing the utmost exposure to the virus, since their job requires contact with other people. They worked overtime, did 24-hour shifts, and reported having reduced private life. The amount of work they did on daily basis in the front lines was overwhelming. *“I basically have no private life. At 08:00 a.m. at the latest, I arrive at the workplace where I work on the diagnosis of COVID-19 until late in the evening. My working day is longer than twelve hours. My working hours usually end at 11-12 p.m. Although there were 2-3 days when we finished earlier, at about 8 p.m.”*¹⁴⁹ Without enhanced and appropriate labour inspection, the emergency situation seems ideal for labour exploitation.



“There was no need for all-day work, and we split into teams to be more efficient. 24-hour shifts, subsequently two-day breaks, and two weeks on call. We examined patients every day. – pulmonologist”.

“I go to work at about 6.45 a.m., and my working hours end at about 4 p.m. I am also available after the working hours for additional information. – pharmacist”.

“At first, we worked part-time, then we worked until 3 p.m., an hour before the curfew. I did not work night shifts, some pharmacies from all over the country worked such shifts. – pharmacist”.

“The curfew was an additional task, beside our normal working hours. We used to stop and control the identity of every third driver, now we control every fifth driver in order to reduce the physical contact – police officer”.

“Working hours are completely reorganized. We are for two weeks on duty (24 hours, then two days off), one week we are free, and one week I am on call. – cardiologist”.

The unemployed were unable to find a job during the crisis, which left many families with only one member generating income. *“Only my father works at the moment. He works in the welding industry, and his salary was reduced due to part-time working regime.”*¹⁵⁰ In some sectors, the work volume increased, but not the working hours. *“The working hours for the workers were not increased, but the management team worked overtime. The conversion of the production was our choice because we wanted to contribute to dealing with the lack of protective masks.”*¹⁵¹

149 Interview with high-ranking official at the Institute for Public Health, May 2020.

150 Interview with a Roma girl, May 2020.

151 Interview with an owner of a textile factory, May 2020.

Considerate view of the burden of the new normal, breaks that allow for balancing life and work duties, trust that their workers are able and willing to do a good job from home without the controlling presence of their bosses and new labour regulations, defining novel industrial relations, under which the digital proletariat will receive social and health protection according to their needs and interests are some of the issues on the to do list of the Macedonian Government in the post-COVID-19 period.

3.3. GENDER AND SOCIETY AFTER COVID-19

Social life was disrupted due to the “lockdown” and has changed with physical distancing and protective mask wearing protocols. The entertainment and hospitality sectors were closed, affecting social life immensely. Technology and particularly social media became the main socialization vehicle, as visiting friends and relatives, meetings and gatherings are not recommended. The COVID - 19 outbreak affected all segments of the population, especially the older people, people with disabilities, the Roma community and single mothers that rely on friends and family for support, since schools and kindergartens are not working. Interviewees in this research confirm in their statements the immense changes in their social lives, all of them missing social gatherings with families and relatives, with isolation being particularly challenging for them. *“The social life suffered the most because we couldn't leave our homes. I have a girlfriend, our relationship was impacted too, because we don't live close by.”*¹⁵² But then again, this situation increased online socialization. *“Everything has changed, especially the communication with relatives and friends. We communicated via Skype. We also made friendly contacts with people we had not heard from in a long time, which was a nice feeling. Some of them have been living abroad. I used Viber video calls to see my sister who lives in Canada.”*¹⁵³ Interviewees reported socializing with their family members and friends virtually during the coronavirus pandemic, through applications such as Skype, Viber, Messenger. Digital technologies offer enormous potential benefits for everyone, particularly for the elderly, which were the least included in such tools. Thus, older people reported socializing “over the phone”, and rarely used online tools for communication, such as Viber. The reason for facing barriers like these, might be their lack of skills and knowledge. *“We used to go out, see each other, now we contact over the phone. We have no physical contact with anyone, only when we are visited by our daughters.”*¹⁵⁴ *“A 360-degree turn in life. From social distance to not being able to see your loved ones if you do not live together.”*¹⁵⁵ This suggests that radical shifts in social activities have happened, resulting in significant changes in people's behaviour. *“I miss visits and drinking coffee with my friends, I don't want to feel so lonely.”*¹⁵⁶ Measures taken to deal with the virus did not affect everyone equally.

152 Interview with a young Roma man, May 2020.

153 Interview with a woman with disability, May 2020.

154 Interview with an elderly woman, May 2020.

155 Interview with a woman with disability, May 2020.

156 Interview with an elderly woman, May 2020.

Lockdowns and recommendations not to spend time in closed spaces, but to go outdoors, have affected how people spend their time. Use of parks became the choice of inhabitants of cities and non-residential destinations became attractive in the country. In this context, the level of development of municipalities and the availability of green areas in the proximity of people's homes become important, as not all urban green spaces are distributed equally in cities. The poorer neighbourhoods, with more population density lack quality green spaces and require pro-active spatial planning and design, as well as leaders who will make this a priority. Some places (such as Skopje and Ohrid) are considering major expansions of the walking and cycling infrastructure, creating thus space for street-level commerce, maintaining safe distances among people, and making streets safer and cleaner. In this respect, municipalities need to take in consideration the gender perspective in designing public spaces, so that they are safe, easily accessible to women (and various subgroups, i.e. women with disabilities), as well as beneficial for them by responding to their needs and interests.

Therefore, measures dealing with the virus should avoid instigating social inequality, although evidence suggests that such trends are already underway. The greater flexibility to work from home among the high-income jobs creates a social gap, compared to low-income workers who have less secure employment and cannot do their jobs from home, exposing themselves to higher risk of infection by necessity, not by choice. All this highlights societal, income and health inequalities that need to be taken into consideration, while the focus is to be placed on addressing such gaps and inequalities during the COVID-19 recovery and normalization process.

Economic data about the first two quarters are rather grim for North Macedonia. The country has the strongest economic slowdown in the Western Balkan Region. The recent EU Candidate Countries' & Potential Candidates' Economic Quarterly Report¹⁵⁷ shows that the economic contraction was 0.2% y-o-y in the first quarter, down from 3.4% in the fourth quarter in 2019. The Report notes that the high-frequency indicators show that even sharper drop is to be expected in the second quarter. Namely, the industrial production index was down by 30% in April and May 2020 in average, compared to the same period last year, mostly due to the slowdown in the manufacturing sector. The lower production results in lower purchasing power and consequently lower product sales that eventually pressures the economy into fully-fledged recession. Thus, in April and May 2020, retail contracted by 16% in average compared to the same period in 2019. Capital goods production dropped by 26.4% in the first five months of 2020, which sets the basis for contraction in investment activities. The economic effects on public finances left a marked dent with a fall of 8.3% in revenues, in the first 5 months of the year, compared to 2019 and a rise in total expenditures by 7.9%.

As more people lose their jobs, and the evidence shows that women are more vulnerable than men in this respect, a new strategy is needed. Economists have advocated for "anti-wartime" economy,¹⁵⁸ which is based on massive scaling back of

157 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/tp042_en.pdf

158 James Meadway <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/03/the-anti-wartime-economy>

production in a way that does not mean loss of livelihood, and contracting stakeholder capitalism, where stakeholders in society are valued so that they can contribute to the societal success. Thus, businesses need to bring their skills and assets to help invest in a better society, with shorter supply chains and less outside dependence. In order to reduce gender gaps in economy, businesses will need to enhance women's digital skills and train them for new forms of work.

This is related to the availability of services that have been substituted, since the pandemic started, with unpaid care work by women. Women's economic activity is linked to the availability of health, social and childcare services. Working remotely increases the risk of isolation, as well as alcohol dependency, smoking too much, and bad backs because of poor ergonomic posture. Innovating services to address these new realities and risks should also be on the top of the agenda, because they are related to the overall health of society, but inevitably are directly linked to gender equality, because women take on the burden of all social, health and economic factors at home. The above analysis shows that the relevant state authorities need to redesign the social net for the new normal in the COVID-19 featured economy, family, and society. Employers must also accept that they too have to protect their workers in order to survive and thrive. This should be a long-term change in attitude in the historic public vs private debate.¹⁵⁹

**For young people
in education, the
pandemic is likely
to cause new
inequalities**

For young people in education, the pandemic is likely to cause new inequalities. Currently, 82.1% of citizens with school-aged children have adequate means for online education, while 10% said they did not have any means for this type of learning.¹⁶⁰ In the absence of digital tools, digital contents and without adequate support (psychological and contextual), the school year for teachers, students and parents ended with a feeling that this solution was a failure.¹⁶¹ Many students in poorer communities may be left without education and owing to the prevailing gender stereotypes girls will be made to pick up the share of unpaid care work at home, which is not the case with boys. The consequences of these education inequalities, especially for girls and young women, will disadvantage them on labour markets and will further exacerbate their inequality.

TV and the Internet have been their main sources of information regarding protection measures. Many of the interviewed relied on sources such as the World Health Organization and foreign news channels on the Internet. Furthermore, not all information was adapted to the needs of people with disabilities. *"Concerning people with intellectual disabilities, in my opinion, they are the most affected category, because they may not understand the information, they may not know what that restriction of movement means, they do not know what a curfew is, and therefore I think not all categories are covered. Some people with disabilities do not have access to information in an appropriate way".*¹⁶² The hopes for a COVID-19 vaccine are the

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.zurich.com/en/knowledge/topics/global-risks/societal-risks-in-post-covid-19-era>

¹⁶⁰ <https://bit.ly/3fP42H9>

¹⁶¹ <https://bit.ly/2ZPPnpP>

¹⁶² Interview with a woman with disability, May 2020.

The hopes for a COVID-19 vaccine are the highest among people older than 65 years, because they are the most annoyed by the new normality, whereas only a small number of the elderly are ready to adapt and find new ways of maintaining social life

highest among people older than 65 years, because they are the most annoyed by the new normality, whereas only a small number of the elderly are ready to adapt and find new ways of maintaining social life. The new normal brought one positive outcome according to Roma respondents, who consider that due to measures limiting movement people enjoy “less pollution”. Satellite readings of air quality by the European Space Agency, Sentinel 5P, confirm this perception, by registering decreases in pollution, compared to previous years in cities around the world.¹⁶³

Consequently, one might say that the COVID-19 virus and the pandemic it caused can be an important factor for social change. A key task for all is to demand that emerging social forms are grounded on ethics that values care, life, democracy, and gender equality.

3.4. GENDER AND DECISION-MAKING IN THE POST-COVID-19 RECOVERY

The research established a certain level of inclusion of the gender perspective in the work of municipal task forces managing the crisis and the state of emergency, which ranges from moderate to non-existing. At the central level, the gender budget watchdog network has observed that no gender analysis has been made when designing the response measures and if introduced, gender sensitization is a result of a reaction by citizens and the civil society. It is only in a small number of cases that the gender-based approach has included consulting with local women and women’s associations, before the adoption of measures and developing gender-specific measures or gender analysis.

The research demonstrates that not only participation of women is needed in task forces, which develop and implement response measures, but also awareness and knowledge about gender equality implications, as well as capacity for gender analysis that will establish the impact of policies and budgets on gender inequality. Such awareness was missing, and the lack of gender analysis was attributed to lack of time, in the rapid response to the crises. The summer period which has been more relaxed should therefore be used for impact assessments of the three first packages of measures and evidence gathering that will inform policy makers after the elections and especially in the post-COVID-19 period. In general, at the local level there was evident lack of awareness about how virus protection policies can affect men and women differently, accompanied with very low levels of engagement of the gender mechanism in the inclusion of gender perspective in the municipal response. Furthermore, an issue that emerged was also the lack of access to information and transparency on behalf of the municipal authorities about the composition and work of the crisis groups, which was not caused by the gender composition, being based instead on political affiliation. Responding to the virus goes beyond political, ethnic, and religious belonging and must be all-encompassing, so that the response can be based on adequate information and effectively deliver benefits for all. In this context,

¹⁶³ https://www.esa.int/Applications/Observing_the_Earth/Copernicus/Sentinel-5P/Coronavirus_lockdown_leading_to_drop_in_pollution_across_Europe

introducing the gender perspective in this process through participation of women (as members of task forces, then through consultations with women's groups, inclusion of equal opportunities coordinators) in the process and gender and diversity analysis of the measures impact would improve effectiveness of policies and measures, and it would reduce gender gaps. A focus on marginalized and vulnerable women such as single mothers, women with disabilities, women survivors of violence and women belonging to ethnic minorities and rural women is also missing. Such focus will allow for measures to deliver not only gender equality results, but would also help enhance gender equity, because it contributes to identifying areas where disadvantaged sub-groups of women should be supported more than other groups.

Against the background of constitutional and other legal provisions governing the adoption of decrees with the power of laws, it is of the utmost importance that such measures be adopted in a transparent procedure, and following a wide-encompassing process, which relies on evidence based policy making, which includes impact assessment on women and vulnerable groups, as well as on normative content that will not derogate from the commitments enshrined in international conventions. The number of decisions and their frequent amendments also resulted in challenges for businesses and citizens, while calling into question legal security.

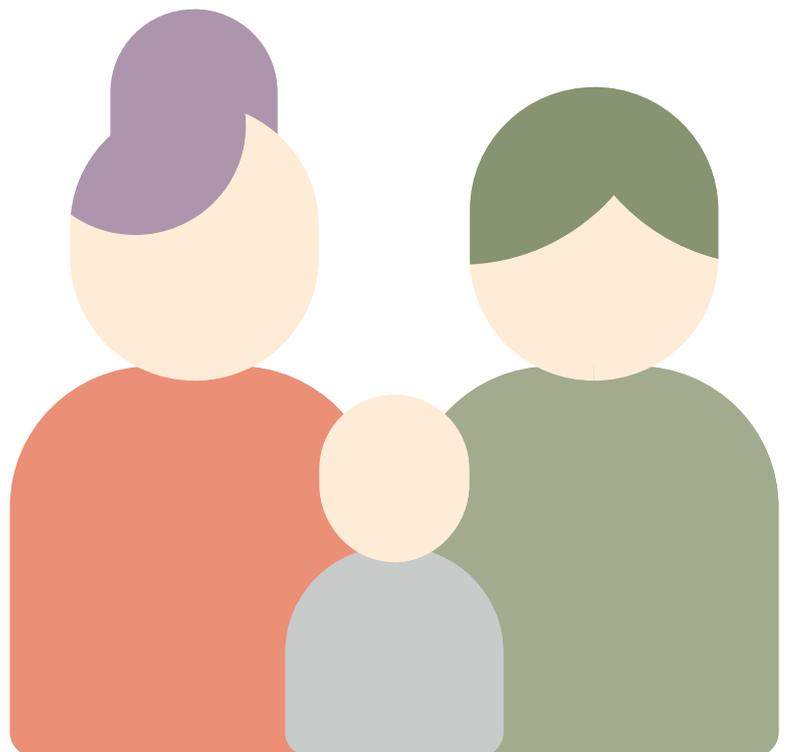
Finally, the implementation of measures dealing with the virus gain even more on their importance now than in the period before the virus, because their implementation or non-implementation can put health of women and men at risk and create gender gaps. The best illustration for this is: (i) the spread of the virus in textile companies in Shtip and Sveti Nikole, as a result of not following protection protocols;¹⁶⁴ and (ii) the measures for economic recovery do not reach the end beneficiaries (the employees), considering that salaries lower than the ones for which the Government supported the companies were paid.¹⁶⁵ The implementation will create additional inequalities, and therefore the intention of the policy does not suffice. Instead, the Government should strengthen the inspectorates and the monitoring and evaluation capacities, now more than ever. In this regard, the following is of essential importance: consistent implementation, inter-institutional coordination, and prompt justice through judicial review of the legality of the implementation of measures in response to the virus.

The central budget is the most important instrument, extensively used in the COVID-19 response, but the central budget restructuring in April 2020 did not follow principles of participation, consultation, gender impact analysis and was not accompanied with a report on the economic and budgetary situation and justification for the restructuring; a detailed presentation of changes; an analysis by budget programmes subject to budgetary changes; and a performance framework. This has limited the gender impact assessment of adopted measures in this analysis, and is creating room for

164 Glasen tekstilec, Request to the Government to protect textile workers, available online: <https://cutt.ly/TsLWb6o>

165 SSM, Let's stop the financial misuse of the support to employees during the crisis, <http://www.ssm.org.mk/mk/da-ja-sprechime-zloupotrebata-na-finansiskata-pomosh-za-rabotnicite-pogodeni-od-zdravstveno>

misinformation, dissemination of fake news about the measures and about the role of the Government in dealing with the virus, and ultimately it will have an impact on the trust in the Government and in institutions. Finally, such transparency and justification of the decisions are of paramount significance in times when the Parliament is dissolved and the Government exercises the right to adopt decrees with the force of laws, which in their part will enable oversight over the decisions and scrutiny by independent bodies (including by CSOs).¹⁶⁶



166 CRPM (2020) Gender and COVID-19, available online: <https://cutt.ly/RslhHbx>

Chapter

4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEASURES IN THE POST-COVID-19 PERIOD

Recovery periods after crises can provide an opportunity to 'do things differently' and to build more equitable systems and societies



Recovery periods after crises can provide an opportunity to 'do things differently' and to build more equitable systems and societies.¹⁶⁷ Ensuring advancement of gender equality and preventing backsliding will require understanding gender gaps that the response to the crisis has created, as well as of the inequitable gender norms that prevailed in the Macedonian society, prior to the virus. Therefore, studies such as this one monitoring the impact on different groups, as well as cross-sectoral social and gender impact assessments that identify the strengths and weaknesses are the key policy design tools.

The study has already established that the response to the pandemic has had a disproportionately negative effect on women in all sectors and age groups. Women are more likely than men to be working in sectors that have shut down during the pandemic. Mothers are almost 70 per cent more likely than fathers to have taken the role of the main care giver, following the closure of schools and kindergartens. Women's businesses are most vulnerable, because they have the least savings to be used as a survival strategy, when financial measures to increase liquidity, meet payments of creditors and adapt to the new stay-at-home-economy are missing. This causes inequality in the family and in the economy and can contribute to increasing inequality in society overall.

If not properly addressed under a specific policy, the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic may also increase inequality, exclusion, and discrimination. Women and groups such as the Roma, single mothers, people with disabilities, rural women are the most vulnerable groups.

ECONOMY RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government should help economic operators to continue working under the new conditions, but gender criteria should be applied. 76.6% of the respondents estimate that their business will not survive in the next 1 to 6 months if this situation continues to affect their business, and women's businesses are more vulnerable. This shows that

- The economy needs to reopen, even if the virus is not entirely gone, and that the Government should take the lead by introducing and enforcing rules for safe working conditions in the new reality, for business women and men, but also for workers, fully aware that women are working on jobs most exposed to the virus;
- Labour inspectorates' capacities should be strengthened, and the legislation should be updated to cover new working models under the stay-at-home economy, with a view to ensuring that both employers' and employees' rights are protected. The evidence from the textile sector where women mostly work confirms the importance of prompt interventions by labour inspectorates to help reduce the virus spread and protect workers' health; .

¹⁶⁷ UN Secretary General, António Guterres, "The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis must lead to a different economy", March 2020.

- Advice in areas such as general planning, setting up online operations and financial planning is welcomed. In this regard, the Government could help by establishing online knowledge hub and information centre offering advice and guidelines for businesses that are planning to transform and/or face difficulties. Mentorship schemes between businesswomen need to be considered in this respect, in order to facilitate the exchange of experiences and provide mutual support.

2. The plan of many companies to postpone payment of liabilities (30% of respondents), suggests that liquidity crisis is in the making. Women-led businesses have the least savings and struggle most and thus require special attention. Companies will become reluctant to trade relying on credits and will start seeking payments in advance, which will affect liquidity, suffocate trade, and may prompt a wave of defaults.

- In order to maintain liquidity, a Government credit and default guarantee scheme is needed. Women own only 27.27 % of registered property¹⁶⁸ and will be less eligible for credit. Specific guarantee fund for women entrepreneurs therefore will be necessary to be established;
- Insurance of trade credit protects companies against the risk of non-payment by their clients. Just for comparison, rich European countries such as France and the UK have offered credit guarantees of up to 15% of the GDP, which will correspond close to EUR 2 billion in North Macedonia. The latest, i.e. the third package of economic relief measures of the Government envisages credit guarantees, but only for start-up, micro and small companies and the guarantees are limited to MEUR 10, which may prove insufficient. Gender specific criteria need to be applied to the award of guarantees;
- Changing the VAT payment system allowing for payment upon collection, instead of payment upon issuance of invoice, which will significantly affect liquidity. 30% of respondents have stated that the Government should introduce payment of VAT upon collection as a new emergency measure.

3. The survival strategy is based on managing own time and resources, decrease of costs, being heavily dependent on own and company savings. In this context, women's businesses are the most vulnerable as they have the least savings and thus must be specifically targeted with financial measures that will increase their liquidity, enabling them to meet payments to creditors and adapt to the new stay-at-home-economy.

- The introduction of gender criteria in the financial support measures and non-financial support will allow for women's businesses to survive and to further maintain the investments in the economic empowerment of women made in previous years;

¹⁶⁸ http://www.katastar.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/rodova_ednakvost/izvestai/Tabela_so_broj_i_procent_na_zapisani_prava_po_pol_i_po_katastarsko_oddelenie_2019.pdf

- Development of measures that specifically target micro and small enterprises, as well as those that work exclusively on the national market will also be of benefit for women led companies, taking into consideration that the CRPM survey shows that 78% of women entrepreneurs work on the domestic market, as opposed to men entrepreneurs who work on foreign markets as well;
- For women-led businesses it is also important to devise non-financial support measures, such as support groups where women will meet and exchange experiences, encourage each other and cooperate towards building a resilience to the crisis.

LABOUR MARKET

1. Develop measures to support workers in the informal and in the digital sector.

- **Informal workers were almost entirely left out from the measures**, considering that the majority of them are women that provide help in homes (babysitters, cleaners, handy workers, nurses, etc.), or work in the fields, etc. There is a large number of Roma women in this subgroup, as well as single mothers and other vulnerable groups. They need to be promptly covered by the social protection system. The crisis should be used to register and formalize their invisible labour;
- **With the expansion of freelance work in the gig economy following the crisis and without regulation of the digital space the informality in this sector will also increase.** Considering that women participate less in this sector, the lack of a safety net will continue to be the reason for low women's participation in the gig economy, and thus contribute to bigger pay gap between women and men. Specific measures to respond to needs of informal workers and decrease future informality are needed. This is important for both the economy and the workers. Competitiveness of the companies is also at risk if the digital marketplace is left without regulation. Women and men employed on platforms and working from home on the Internet on the other hand require a safety net;
- **Improvement of the legal framework to encompass the new forms of work will facilitate the adaptation to the new normality in the economy.** Different health and social protection packages need to be adopted for this particular group, that are now missing, and are not regulated with the Law on Labour Relations. While the Government has provided support under measures for training young people in digital skills, an especially important legal framework for work and sale on the Internet is missing;
- **Building digital skills and support pre-qualifications of women for new digital professions.** Women participate less in STEM and thus will not access digital jobs with the same scope as men. Additional support will be needed, because the economic activity during and after the COVID-19 period will be digital.

2. Supporting frontline workers and designing better benefits and labour protection for low paid employees.

- Correct the salary system to reflect the activities and responsibilities people have on their jobs, number of hours they work on the job and from home, as well as the risk they take to be infected by doing the job. Most of these workers are low-paid women;
- Ensure monitoring and enforcement of measures for protection against the virus in businesses, which employ low-paid employees. In this context, the priority is to have enforced inspections and partnership with the employers.

3. In developing employment measures match people's competences with the needs of vulnerable groups.

- The future active employment measures must support the stakeholder capitalism, which is based on solidarity and ethics, as its main values. Families and people living in the same neighbourhood should rely on services provided by their neighbours. This will also contribute to society's success and shorter supply chains which inevitably will impact on decrease of living costs and poverty.

SOCIAL COHESION

1. Support community solidarity.

- Encourage employment and social inclusion by supporting community provision of computer assistance; school support through volunteer teachers for kindergartens and elementary schools; language lessons; psychological support, etc. Service provision should be extended to rural areas because rural women and men feel discriminated.

2. Counter prejudices.

- Prejudices against COVID-19 infected women and men must be deconstructed. Most affected belong to vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities, especially the Roma, as confirmed by this study. This will improve access by disadvantaged groups to basic services. In this context, restriction of the movement of the elderly should not be applied again, because such restrictions were found to be discriminatory; despite the good intentions of the policy, it produced the sense of discrimination.

3. Reform and amend the legal framework to comply with the CRPD.

- Government measures for COVID – 19 need to be aligned with the standards set forth in the UN CRPD and they must adopt an inter-sectional approach, as well as the reasonable accommodation concept. The universal design concept connected with the principles of accessibility and reasonable accommodation should guide all policies and measures.

4. Improve information sharing in order that it be adapted to the needs of women and men with disabilities.

- The state provided information in sign language during the COVID-19 related press- conference, albeit not as of the beginning of the crisis, rectifying the situation later and continually providing sign language interpretation until the end of the state of emergency. However, the Government needs to ensure that all emergency-related information and general virus related information is available in formats accessible to people with different types of impairments, including for deaf people through sign language, and in the various languages used in the country, including Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of the choice of people with disabilities in official interactions in accordance with Article 21(b) of the CRPD. All civil servants and government staff, part of emergency task forces, and all actors potentially involved in dealing with emergencies and tackling the virus must undergo required disability-awareness training.

5. Monitor and report on COVID-19 with sex and disability disaggregated data.

- In addition to existing data and information considering the number of COVID-19 affected people, sex disaggregated data stopped to be disseminated in late June, while there is no information at all about people with disabilities. Consequently, there is an urgent need for the Government to start collecting data about the number of people with disabilities, disaggregated by age, type of disability, ethnicity, gender, etc. Courts, public prosecutor's offices and institutions implementing the measures (Ministries (of economy, health, labour and social policy, information society and administration), Agencies (for sport and youth, tourism, employment) and the Development Bank of the Republic of North Macedonia), which the Government deployed in responding to the COVID-19 crisis do not keep gender disaggregated data, which additionally limits the impact assessment analysis from the gender perspective. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should send specific recommendations to these stakeholders to align their data systems with the requirements arising from the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men.

6. The state, municipalities and relevant stakeholders should ensure active participation of and coordination with people with disabilities and their representative organizations, including women, men, boys, and girls with disabilities, at all levels.

- It is necessary to develop guidelines for treatment of disability in emergency situations, intended for various stakeholders, including for people with disabilities, working in different areas (health, education, social security). It is furthermore necessary to conduct a more comprehensive research of discriminatory practices in the course of the state of emergency in the COVID – 19 crisis, while ensuring treatment of people with disabilities compliant with the CRPD principles.

7. Improve the design of the distance learning concept in order to reduce gender gaps and to prevent creating inequalities.

- The crisis has left the education system paralyzed, with no clear vision how to manage the education process during the crisis. This poses a risk for children, who are without means for home schooling, especially those from vulnerable groups such as Roma girls, who thus potentially lose access to education and miss out future opportunities. It is urgently necessary to develop a Strategy that would focus on vulnerable groups.

8. Improve communication with citizens, i.e. public education about necessary protection measures against the virus spread.

- Large part of the public still does not believe in the adopted measures or even that the virus exists, while refusing to wear masks. An indeed important component in the fight against the virus is introduction of proper education campaigns that will inform the public about the facts vs myths related to the virus. A gendered approach in awareness raising is also needed.

VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve the effectiveness of awareness raising and informing victims with a view to reporting violence.

- Despite the fact that the responsiveness of the police and the Social Work Centres is commendable, continued increasing of the responsiveness is needed, as well as improved effectiveness in providing early information and awareness raising, encouraging thus victims to report violence. Efforts in this regard need to be pursued under more systematized inter-sectoral cooperation that will have an impact on the results in tackling both the still present distrust and hesitation in reporting violence. Expand and replicate in municipalities where not applied, effective outreach practices and encourage the public at large and specifically victims to report violence through prompt access to information such as online content, flyers, or billboards about reporting procedures.

2. Shift ways how cases of violence against women are reported.

- Adapting and revising the models and ways of reporting cases of violence during the pandemic should be also considered, especially bearing in mind that the quarantine puts limitations on the opportunities to access internet or pick up the phone, while all members of the household, including the perpetrator, are more or less under one roof. Therefore, a shift in the ways of reporting violence is needed, as well as introducing the possibility of reporting through proxies.

3. Work against biases and prejudices against reporting.

- The COVID-19 pandemic generated lessons and best practices from reported cases of violence against women and how institutions and civil society responded. Relevant stakeholders and primarily the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy should take advantage of the lessons learned to deconstruct remaining prejudices and tackle biases against reporting.

4. Build a robust network of shelters and services for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

- The prompt establishment of shelters for victims of domestic violence and other services (such as psycho-social support, legal support, economic empowerment, etc.) for women victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence needs to be supported in every region. The trends of increasing number of cases of violence against women, due to the lockdowns makes the alignment of the Criminal Code with the Istanbul Convention a priority.

5. Change the procedure for dealing with domestic violence by dislocating the perpetrator from the home of the victim and not the other way around.

DECISION-MAKING

1. Start the development of a new or make a complete overhaul of the legal framework applicable to the state of emergency.

- The COVID-19 pandemic revealed gaps in the Constitution, both in terms of format and content, as well as issues relating to the validity of Government Decrees having the force of law beyond the state of emergency. These issues need to be clarified, as well as the procedures and scope of the Decrees. The reform should encompass the Law on Government, the Law on Organization and Functioning of Bodies of the State Administration, Law on Crisis Management, Law on Protection and Rescue, Law on Internal Affairs, Law on the Police, Law on the Parliament.

2. The process of policy development needs to be improved, especially under the current circumstances.

- Instead of adopting one-page normative documents and putting them into force, affecting thus thousands of citizens and costing millions of euros, with ambiguous articles open to various interpretations, every policy designed by the Government and/or Parliament needs to be transparent, based on gender analysis and should be accompanied with a reasoning or justification, estimation of the costs and benefits and expected effects. Given that the gender perspective ensures more targeted, fair, and effective policies, the Government should pay more attention to the gender perspective, when creating policies and adopting measures. By mainstreaming the gender perspective as an integral part of the policy design process, the impact of the measure at hand on all other subgroups of women can be assessed (women with disabilities, the elderly, single mothers, women belonging to ethnic minorities, rural women, etc.)

3. More women need to be included in the decision-making processes at every level in order to ensure that gender equality concerns are addressed.

- Women need to become members of emergency task forces and be consulted when measures are developed through consultations with women's groups/ organizations, and by including equal opportunities coordinators in the

policy development. The Government and municipalities need to establish better cooperation with the civil society sector, which can convey the voices of vulnerable groups in the decision-making process, but also contribute with years of experience and expertise on the social and economic aspects of the fight against the virus.

4. Strengthen inspectorates and monitoring and evaluation capacities to prevent gender gaps from being created, by implementing policy measures with gender positive or even transformative goal.

- The implementation of measures in response to the virus is of even greater importance now than in the period before the virus, because the manner of implementation or the non-implementation can put the health of women and men at risk and create gender gaps. Strengthening the inspectorates and the monitoring and evaluation capacities is necessary now more than ever.

5. Enable and conduct fiscal gender impact assessment of budget resources.

- Adopt restructured budget, accompanied with a report on the economic and budgetary situation and reasoning/justification for the modifications; then a detailed presentation of modifications; an analysis by budget lines where changes are made; and a performance framework.
- In order not to create new gender gaps it is necessary to continuously monitor and assess the gender fiscal impact of the public resources used to tackle COVID-19. Those measures and public finances that create gender inequality should be revised and changed with new measures and budgets that will improve gender equality in the country.

ANNEXES



ANNEX 1

LIST OF GOVERNMENT DECREES LIMITING RIGHTS OR FREEDOMS

RIGHT TO ASSEMBLY

Number of Decree

“Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia” No. 71/20

Decision No. 44-2147/1, dated 6 April 2020;

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 92/2020 dated 6 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2147/8 dated 13 April 2020

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 100/2020 dated 13 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2147/9 dated 22 April 2020;

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 107/2020 dated 22 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2394/1 dated 20 March 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 71/2020 dated 20 March 2020

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Number of Decree

„Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 71/20

Decision No. 44-2147 dated 12 March 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 62/20

Decision No. 44-2416/3 dated 24 March 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 72/20, 74/20, 76/20 and 78/20

Decision No. 44-2416/4 dated 25 March 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 78/20

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 89/20 dated 3 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2416/6 dated 6 April 2020 (entered into force on 8 April 2020),

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 92/20 dated 6 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2416/1 dated 13 April 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 100/20 dated 13 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2416/8 dated 18 April 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 105/20 dated 21 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2416/1 dated 28 April 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 111/20 dated 28 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2416/11 dated 8 May 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 119/20 dated 8 May 2020

Decision No. 44-2416/12 dated 14 May 2020,

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 125/20 dated 15 May 2020

Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 130/20 dated 19 May 2020

Decision No. 44-2416/14 dated 22 May 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 134/20 dated 22 May 2020

Decision No. 44-2406/1 dated 20 March 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 71/2020 dated 20 March 2020

Decision No. 44-2415/1 dated 21 March 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 72, dated 21 March 2020

Decision No. 44-2449/1 dated 23 March 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 76/20 dated 24 March 2020

Decision No. 44-3093/1 dated 13 April 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 100/20 dated 13 April 2020

Decision No. 44-2828/1 dated 2 April 2020
Decision No. 44-2818/1 dated 3 April 2020

Decision No. 44-3324/1 dated 22 April 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 107/20 dated 22 April 2020

Decision No. 44-3703/1 dated 5 May 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 118/20 dated 7 May 2020

Decision No. 44- 3322/1 dated 22 April 2020,
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 107/20 dated 22 April 2020

RIGHT TO PUBLIC HEALTH

Number of Decree

“OFFICIAL GAZETTE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA” NO. 72/20, 76/20 DATED 20 AND 24 MARCH 2020

DECISION NO. 44-2917/1 DATED 7 APRIL 2020
OFFICIAL GAZETTE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA NO. 94/20 DATED 7 APRIL 2020

DECISION NO. 44-2449/2 DATED 9 APRIL 2020
OFFICIAL GAZETTE OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA NO. 97/20 DATED 9 APRIL 2020

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Number of Decree

Decision No. 44-2445/1 dated 23 March 2020
Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 76/20 dated 24 March 2020

Decision No. 44-2446/1 dated 23 March 2020

Decision No. 44-2447/1 dated 23 March 2020

ANNEX 2 LIST OF INTERVIEWED LOCAL LEVEL RESPONSE TEAMS

NAME AND SURNAME	MUNICIPALITY
Agron Beqiri	Municipality of Arachinovo
Bujare Abazi, Councillor	Municipality of Chair
Taner Haxhimustafa, Councillor	Municipality of Chair
Vesna Dameska, Councillor	Municipality of Chair
Visar Ganiu, Mayor	Municipality of Chair
Maja Filipceva: Contact person and member of the crisis HQ, Advisor at the Sector for Development and Deputy Coordinator for equal opportunities of women and men	Municipality of Karposh
Marija Kocoska, Secretary of the municipal organisation of the Red Cross in the Municipality of Karposh	
Stefan Bogoev, Mayor	Municipality of Karposh
Adelina Ademi, Councillor	Municipality of Kumanovo
Atina Murgasanska, Councillor	Municipality of Kumanovo
Fati Ebibi, HQ Protection and Rescue	Municipality of Kumanovo
Saso Stosevski, Councillor	Municipality of Kumanovo
Erdjan Demir, branch leader of VMRO-DPMNE	Municipality of Shuto Orizari
Fatima Osmanovska, President of the Municipal Council	Municipality of Shuto Orizari
Ferat Asan, SDSM branch leader	Municipality of Shuto Orizari
Tanja Krstikj, volunteer, and member of the crisis headquarters	Municipality of Shuto Orizari
Ilija Jovanovski, Mayor (signed declaration on anonymity)	Municipality of Prilep
Olivera Adzioska, Prilep General Hospital	Municipality of Prilep
Katerina Kochoska, Red Cross local organization (declaration of anonymity signed)	Municipality of Prilep
Hekuran Duka, Mayor	Municipality of Debar
Femija Ajrovski, local centre for crisis management	Municipality of Debar
Isni Telqiu, Red Cross local organization	Municipality of Debar

ANNEX 3

TABLE OF MEASURES ANALYSED FROM THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

AREA

Health Protection, Sexual and Reproductive Rights and Care

- 1) Emergency procurement of 200 respiratory machines;
- 2) Two-month 20% increase of salaries of medical staff involved in activities to counter COVID-19.

Economic Recovery and Livelihood

Tax Delays and Reductions

- 1) Suspension of profit tax advance payments for March, April, and May 2020;
- 2) Suspension of personal income tax advance payment for March, April and May 2020 for taxpayers who earn their income by engaging in freelance economic activity;
- 3) Abolition of customs duties on medical equipment;
- 4) Securing the customs debt to support the export with a state guarantee in the total value of MEUR 3

Financial Support for Companies and Liquidity Protection

- 1) Subsidizing 50% of the cost of contributions for April, May, and June 2020 (maximum up to 50% of the average salary for January 2020);
- 2) Subsidy of MKD 14,500 per employee for April and May 2020, for all companies;
- 3) Provision of loans in the amount of MKD 13.7 million, without interest through the Development Bank of North Macedonia for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises from the most affected sectors;
- 4) Providing MEUR 50 loans with a low interest rate of about 1.5% through the Development Bank of North Macedonia and the European Investment Bank for small and medium-sized enterprises, through commercial banks;
- 5) Travel agencies are obliged to issue a voucher for cancelled travel arrangements with a validity period until 31 December 2021;
- 6) Interest-free loans for micro and small enterprises through the Development Bank of North Macedonia, in the amount of MEUR 31, including 30% non-refundable funds for companies that are run or established by women or employ young people, are export-oriented or introduce innovation and digitalization in their work
- 7) Taking over part of the credit risk for start-ups and small and micro companies through commercial banks in the amount of MEUR 10 initial capital for easier access to financial resources;
- 8) Financial support in the amount of MEUR 25 to strengthen the competitiveness of companies to enter new markets and modernize their processes;
- 9) Digital platform for new markets for textile companies with financial support of MEUR 1;
- 10) Support for the development of domestic start-up products and services through FITR, in the amount of MEUR 1.6;

11) Co-financing of events and conferences with 50% financial support from the state of up to a maximum amount of MKD 30,000.

Protection of the Living Standard

- 1) Freezing prices of basic products;
 - 2) Enabling banks, financial companies, and leasing companies to restructure loans;
 - 3) Reduction of the interest rate, ban on enforcement and bankruptcy;
 - 4) Financial support to athletes in the amount of MKD 14,500 in April and May 2020;
 - 5) Cash benefit for all people who lost their jobs from March 11 to April 30, 2020.
-

Liquidity of the Central Budget

- 1) Presidents and members of the boards of directors and supervisory boards will not receive remuneration;
 - 2) Opening of solidarity COVID-19 fund for receiving donations;
 - 3) Borrowing from foreign creditors, planned borrowing of MEUR 580, having a gender dimension.
-

Encouragement of Consumption and Revitalization of the Economy

- 1) Payment card in amount of MKD 9,000 for buying Macedonian products and services, intended for the unemployed, low-income citizens and beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum welfare assistance;
 - 2) Voucher for domestic tourism in amount of MKD 6,000 and a domestic payment card of MKD 3,000 for citizens with a net salary of less than MKD 15,000;
 - 3) Payment card for young people, in the amount of MKD 3,000 for domestic products and services;
 - 4) Voucher of MKD 30,000 for co-financing of trainings, trainings and courses for IT and digital skills for young people;
 - 5) Financial support to young people of up to MKD 6,000 to cover tuition fees at the University or accommodation in dormitories;
 - 6) VAT- free weekends for all citizens in certain sales sectors
-

Support to Agriculture

- 1) Financial support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that perform primary production, processors, and export of primary and processed agricultural products;
 - 2) Payment card subsidizing 50% of green oil for farmers (for 50,000 farmers) in the total amount of MEUR 4.6
-

- 3) Stimulating grape processors for the production of new products such as alcoholic distillates for the production of disinfectants in the total amount of MEUR 3.5, for three years;
- 4) Public-private partnerships in the viticulture and tobacco sectors;
- 5) Introduction of long-term lease of pastures and consolidation of agricultural land for greater competitiveness of Macedonian agriculture;
- 6) Introduction of a Program for financing micro-agricultural companies in the amount of MEUR 3;
- 7) Measures for modernization of agriculture under a World Bank loan of MEUR 50.

Social Protection and the Labour Market

- 1) Facilitating the prompt entry of informal workers and others into the system in order to acquire minimum guaranteed welfare assistance, based on the total amount of all income of all household members, calculated for the last month, instead for the previous three
- 2) Assistance for people with disabilities and the elderly in 27 municipalities to deal with the crisis more easily by including 200 unemployed as service providers;
- 3) Monetary compensation in the amount of 50% of the average monthly net salary of the employee paid in the last 24 months. An unemployed individual, who has been employed for at least 9 months continuously, or 12 months with a break in the last 18 months, before the termination of employment, has the right to monetary compensation;
- 4) Maternity leave is extended until the expiration of provisional measures for protection against the spread and prevention of COVID-19.

Measures Targeting Vulnerable Groups; Social Solidarity and Social Cohesion

- 1) Deferral of payment of rent for beneficiaries of socially subsidized housing; Introduction of a cash allowance of MKD 1,000 for household energy costs for April and May 2020;
- 2) Facilitated access to the right to child allowance and extended deadlines for submission of applications for the exercise of the right to one-off financial assistance for a new born baby, for exercise and extension of the right to a parental allowance for a third child, extending the right to a parental allowance for a fourth child.



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