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Gender Budget Watchdog Network in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Republic of Moldova

Policy brief: Covid 19 and gender

(second edition)

Rapid analysis on the measures undertaken to respond to the epidemic from a gender perspective
The analysis is time sensitive and the due to the fast change of circumstances the briefing is a work in progress and was up to date at the time of writing –15/04/2020

Key points:

- Covid 19 has a potential to be disastrous for feminism. The gender stereotype that confines the role of the woman to that of a caretaker of the home and family with the measures undertaken is restored.
- Budgets play a central role in government responses to this virus and its fallout. What we have observed so far is that no gender analysis has been made when designing the response measures.
- The emergency situation makes the decisions of the government, while adopted, not to be scrutinized by legislatures, auditors and the process of spending public money to be monitored in limited way by the public and independent institutions. Therefore, the network demands for the government to provide robust documentation, detailed situation analysis, assessment of the measures proposed, and their impact on women and men as well as what are the costs.
- Government needs to ensure public resources to be rapidly made available to the frontlines through timely purchasing and dissemination of protective equipment so vulnerability of frontline workers such as doctors, nurses, lab technicians (most of which are women) is decreased. The local budgets can be used for this primarily going through rebalance which needs to be based on detailed assessments of measures to address women and men's needs and decrease gender inequality gaps.

CRPM, Radar, ECHO Shtip, Loud textile worker, Rural coalition, Polio Plus movement against handicap, and the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence have contributed to this policy brief.



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The responses to Covid 19 have a potential to be disastrous for feminism. The overall women empowerment strive for equal participation in the economic, societal and political processes, the equal roles for women and men in the family, household and the society we advocated for and the equal opportunities for women and men we invested in for decades are decreasing and can diminish in the course of this crises. The measures adopted as a response to the virus are entrenching the gender stereotype that confines the role of the woman to that of a caretaker of the home and family.

While our Government fights an invisible enemy and care about the deficit in tax revenue unforeseen prior to the pandemic, stopped consumption and stopped earning; women are on the frontline in healthcare and at home where in self-isolation they take the bulk of the (unpaid) work in the household, work from home, home school your children, stockpile your shelves, etc. In addition, they take over the role of educators with the transition to online education which is relying on the pillar of parental learning support. Finally, women also as men have professional work responsibilities from their home (their paid work).

A pandemic magnifies all existing inequalities. Even politicians insist this is not the time to talk about anything other than the immediate crisis, we the organizations from the Gender Budget Watchdog Network with the partner organizations from the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence emphasize the following gender aspects of the crises and demand for the Government, the local self-governments and the international organizations represented in the country what approaches to take in order to decrease the negative impact measures adopted in response to the Covid 19 could have on gender equality.

Budget

The budget plays a central role in government responses to this public health problem. There are two type of measures: (i) designed to strengthening of the health system to provide effective protection from virus spread and treatment of the infected citizens; and (ii) measures that decrease the negative effects on the economy.



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The gender budget watchdog network has observed that no gender analysis has been made when designing the response measures and therefore the budget allocated to respond to Covid 19 is not a gender budget. In comparison, France's proposal for its revised finance law to respond to the virus is a 44-page document and includes four main parts: a report on the economic and budgetary situation and justification for modifications; a detailed presentation of modifications; an analysis by program of the changes; and a performance framework. In addition, the proposal has "yellow pages" that in detail explain the financial impact of the proposed framework on gender equality.

Why such gender analysis and detailed presentation of budget reallocations to address the crises from the virus is needed? Because, the decisions made in emergency situation are public, but with the dissolved Parliament and with the right the government to enact decisions with legal power, the oversight over those decisions and the scrutiny by independent bodies (including the CSO sector) is impossible. Therefore, it is of paramount importance the Government to find a way to consult the public and especially the interested parties in the design of the measures, but also to give robust supporting documents as possible to the measures they propose and budgets they implement.

The gender budget watchdog network demands for the Government when presenting measures and proposes the budget for their implementation to include:

- costs estimates,
- explanations of cuts and re-allocations,
- a description of the planned activities, who is benefiting from the measures and what are the costs.

All this is essential for independent oversight and tracking expenditures from a gender perspective by civil society organizations which is one of the main pillars of democracy. All, but especially the women due to the gender segregation in professions, are vulnerable during the crises. Hence, it is paramount for the Government to ensure that funding for gender equality is sustained. To this end we as a network are very much disturbed that the 5 million MKD for gender equality in the Budget of the Ministry of social policy and labor has been reallocated as non-productive with the Government's decision from April 9th¹. Prioritizing budget for protective measures, equipment and

¹Decision on redistribution of funds between the budget users of the central government and between the funds (Official Gazette of RNM No. 97/20, from 9th of April, 2020)



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materials is provided through rapid realization of the budget to women and men working as frontline workers in the services that fight against the virus. These are predominantly women, doctors, nurses, laboratory staff, cleaners and etc., as well as those working in shops, pharmacies and etc. The materials needed are masks, gloves, face shields, protective overalls, shoes, disinfection gels, soaps and etc. Some countries in order to rapidly finance these needs have used the local budgets. In a 31 January 2020 budget notice addressed to sub national entities and purchasers, the finance ministry indicated: “Local financial departments should accelerate the disbursement process, allow advance appropriation and fast-track payment to meet the spending needs. The local financial departments at all levels should strengthen the analysis and judgment of the situation of the treasury funds, orderly and standardize the organization of fund dispatch, and if necessary, take measures such as advance allocation and advance payment to prioritize the allocation of funds for epidemic prevention and control”². How spending is prioritized, the budget resources allocated and for will determine how fast and how effective the crises will be halted.

The local government budgets need to be also used to respond to the crises created by the virus and its negative effects especially to the vulnerable citizens. As not all citizens have home, access to water not all can follow the Ministry of health recommendations on prevention from the virus such as washing hands and etc. The local self-governments need to ensure conditions, access to water and basic hygiene for all citizens to be safe from being infected. The long periods of limited movement are affected everyone but especially the extremely poor people among which women and especially marginalized and excluded. The municipalities are closer to these citizens and should be able to ensure basic needs shelter, food and etc. It will be inevitable for the municipalities to re balance the budget. This rebalance needs to be done on basis of detailed assessments, and the measures it will be included need to address needs of women and men and not create bigger gender gaps or inequalities. Finally, the local budgets can be used to prepare the society for life after restrictive measures, inform citizens, provide food and relief materials as well as protective aids (gloves, masks, disinfectants) to citizens, but also prepare businesses especially the small and micro businesses that are woman led and are result

² 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



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of decades long women empowerment programs to adapt to the new way of doing business, as the virus will not go away but will remain worldwide until a vaccine is manufactured.

The local budgets need to include resources for ensuring protection and materials for disinfection of the non-governmental organizations that are delivering local services for example psycho-social support of women victims of family violence or that provide for housing of victims. These services are delivered by women's organizations that answer calls and visit the victim's houses and thus are additionally exposed to the virus. The personal assistants to the people with disability also have a need of protective equipment and training, safety protocols on how to deliver their services during the epidemics.

The crisis tackles everyone, and the consequences of the measures adopted to respond to the crises will impact different people and professions differently. In the gender analysis prepared by CRPM after the first set of measures that have been made by the Government that you can read [here](#), CRPM has already provided recommendations, that the Government adopted³, developed measures that are now implemented. In this analysis we are looking at the second set of measures and provide recommendations from the perspective of several categories of women: women farmers, women in the textile and leather industry, women with disability and women victims of violence.

Economic measures

So far the government has taken numerous measures to deal with the crisis, which have been summarized in the table below. The measures tackle the health care crisis directly, i.e. an urgent

³Open hot lines to support pregnant women, paid maternity leave extended until expiration of emergency measures; a website has been opened for FAQ on the corona virus and pregnancy: <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/najchestite-postavuvani-prashanja-za-koronavirusot-i-rizicite-vobremenosta/>; Families with non-family income will continue to receive child allowance without proof of education for the third and fourth child, for the academic year 2019/2020.



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procurement of respirators, but also focus on the immediate economic and social consequences from the crises.

Tax delays and reductions	Financial assistance to companies and liquidity protection	Protection of the living standard	Liquidity of the state budget	Social protection	Health care	Child protection
<p>Suspension of profit tax depository payments for March, April and May - https://bit.ly/2VkcReh</p> <p>Suspension of personal income tax depository payments for March, April and May for taxpayers who provide income from self-employment in certain activities - https://bit.ly/3b8NPdO</p> <p>Abolition of customs fees on medical</p>	<p>Subsidizing 50% of the contribution costs for April, May and June (max. Up to 50% of the average salary for January 2020) - https://bit.ly/2Rs6rgQ</p> <p>Subsidizing 14,500 MKD per employee for April and May for all companies - https://bit.ly/3ccKy14</p> <p>Providing loans in the amount of 13.7 million without interest rate through the Macedonian Development Bank for micro, small and medium enterprises from the most affected sectors - https://www.mbdp.</p>	<p>Freezing prices of basic products - https://vlada.mk/node/20544</p> <p>Enabling banks, financial companies and leasing companies to restructure loans - https://bit.ly/3ei5p0D</p> <p>https://bit.ly/2x1fWre</p> <p>https://bit.ly/3a5aFkW</p> <p>Financial support for athletes in the amount of 14,500 MKD for April and May - https://bit.ly/2JV6RIz</p>	<p>All appointed officials will receive a salary of 14,500 MKD in April and May 2020 - https://bit.ly/2JZv5Bi</p> <p>Presidents and members of the boards of directors and supervisors will not receive compensation - https://bit.ly/2Rw43G5</p> <p>Opening COVID-19 solidarity</p>	<p>Deferment of payment of rent for social housing users</p> <p>Introduction of a cash allowance of 1000 MKD for household energy costs for April and May 2020 - https://bit.ly/2V2JnaG</p> <p>Quick entry into the system of informal workers and others in order to receive minimal guaranteed assistance based on the total amount of all income from each household members, calculated from the last month, instead of the current three - https://bit.ly/2V2JnaG</p> <p>Assistance for people with disabilities and the elderly in 27 municipalities to easily deal with the</p>	<p>Interventional procurement of 200 respiratory machines - https://bit.ly/3a3Rt7k</p>	<p>Facilitated access to the right to child allowance and extended deadlines for submitting applications for the right to one-time financial assistance for a newborn, for executing and extending the right to parental allowance for a third child, for extension of the right to parental allowance for a fourth child. - https://bit.ly/3b7kUGQ</p> <p>https://bit.ly/2y8e70W</p>

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<p>equipment https://vlada.mk/node/20686</p>	<p>com.mk/mk/vesti/596-1-2</p> <p>Providing 50 million € loans with a low interest rate of about 1.5% through the Macedonian Development Bank and the European Investment Bank for small and medium enterprises, through commercial banks - https://bit.ly/3ccVIPq</p> <p>Travel agencies are obliged to issue a voucher for canceled arrangements lasting until 31.12.2021 - https://bit.ly/2XubaCo</p>	<p>Reduction of default rate, ban on enforcement and bankruptcy procedures - https://bit.ly/2VzZTOH https://bit.ly/2V2pC32 https://bit.ly/2RtNOJo</p>	<p>donation fund</p> <p>Borrowing from foreign creditors, planned 580 million € - https://vlada.mk/node/20650</p>	<p>crisis by including 200 unemployed as care providers - https://bit.ly/2Xu9jxq</p> <p>Cash compensation in the amount of 50% of the average monthly net salary of the employee for the last 24 months. The right to compensation is entitled to 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 - https://bit.ly/2Xv2qfA</p> <p>Maternity leave is extended until the expiration of the temporary measures for protection against the spread and prevention of COVID-19 - https://bit.ly/2JXEPMn</p>		
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Some of the economic measures were welcomed from citizens and companies, but large number of citizens, companies and interest groups (chambers, etc.) reacted that the measures are overdue, insufficient and / or confusing. Considering that none of the measures were presented in a detailed, it is very difficult to make a gender analysis, especially since there is no information on the scope of the measures, how many people/businesses they will include, nor assessment on who the beneficiaries will be.



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Measures for some sectors have been overdue. Although the crisis was progressing rapidly and there was limited time for reaction, "Glasen tekstilec" claims that the measures could have been timelier for some sectors that are dependent on contract manufacturing (i.e. textile and footwear) and hospitality, catering and entertainment which were thoroughly left out of the measures. What is more, absence of law enforcement through the inspection services is asserted as main reason for manipulation of measures by employers against the interest of employees. For example, the hospitality, textile and footwear industries faced the effects much earlier compared to others. Namely, already in March in these sectors there were over 1000 registered layoffs. The Government made the first package of measures including a condition to employers to be eligible for the measures if they keep the number of employees as of 31.03.2020, which is already 20 days after the development of the crisis and announced two weeks before this deadline. "Glasen tekstilec" states that this was used as a prerogative to large number of employers to reduce the number of employees as little as possible before applying for measures that offer assistance to businesses to safe jobs. According to the organization, the workers with fixed contracts are most affected (usually fixed to 1 month and being constantly renewed), but there is also an example where workers are forced to sign a consensual termination of their open-ended employment contract. So far, 465 layoffs from the textile industry and 260 layoffs from the leather and shoe industries have been reported to "Glasen tekstilec".

Although they are aimed at enabling companies' liquidity, in the absence of tangible economic certainty, the measures threaten company's liquidity in the long run. Namely, the measure that refers to subsidizing half of the average salary (in amount of 14,500 MKD gross salary) and subsidizing the social security contributions as alternative to this measure, the time period to which they apply are the months of April and May (for the first) and April, May and June (for the second measure), while an additional condition is required to prove that the company's revenues in April have been reduced by 30% of the monthly average compared to previous year. This means that at best, companies would receive support in May, although the crises has halted revenues for most companies from March 2020. At the same time, they are committed to meet all other conditions, keep the same number of employees until September 2020, although there is no certainty that the economy will return to the state as before the crisis. The measure for subsidizing financial assistance to self-employed persons in the amount of 14,500 MKD also applies only to the period April-May; additionally, they can apply for funds after April 2020, proving that the average monthly income of the business has decreased



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by 30% compared to the previous year. For example, a beauty salon that is completely closed since 18.03.2020, the earliest they can expect financial assistance is after 40-50 days from this date. In comparison, Germany paid off the self-employed and freelancers quickly, within a week, an equal amount of financial aid as they are most vulnerable category in its economy.

The recommendation for work from home (remote work), according to Polio Plus, can be implemented by barely 1% of the employees in the protected companies. If according to the latest data from the Statistical Office we have 15% of persons with disabilities in our country, this measure covers only 2,014 people. Consequently, 702 of them are women with disabilities and only 2 people with disabilities currently work from home, one of whom is a woman with a disability. The rest of these people go to work every day, and their specific condition and needs limit the ability to follow other prevention and protection measures. According to Polio Plus, many people with disabilities have been left without revenues due to the economic situation, which directly exposes them to poverty and no social security, which is a violation of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It should be also noted that only 1% of the disabled community are beneficiaries of cash benefits under the Social Protection Law (disability allowance and third-party care) due to the medical approach in categorizing persons with disabilities. This measure has a particularly negative impact on women who are caregivers to other people and alike their families, have been left without additional family income that they have previously had. In this way, their care which was paid, now became unpaid work.

Some of the women farmers are holders of family agricultural entities and their agribusinesses are currently suffering due to the increased duties in the home such as care for children and the elderly. In times of crisis, women are overwhelmingly caregivers, including paid caregivers such as health workers, but also unpaid ones such as family and household caregivers. Women are also burdened due to the schools and kindergartens closure, simultaneously caring for older parents in times of isolation and limited movement. Women also care for disinfection and hygiene in the homes and are therefore an important link in the prevention system. Having this in mind, "Rural Coalition" believes that additional measures are needed to further support women who manage family agricultural entities, as particularly vulnerable group. This can be done through the Measure number 115.

Although according to the Statistical Office, about 100,000 people are part of the informal economy and third of them are women, the government has set a minimum guaranteed allowance for April and May for families without income, but not for informal workers as such.



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This does not prevent informal labor, neither provides a minimum remuneration for their survival, especially in times of endangered public health due to Covid 19.

Table 2: Informal economy	2016	2017	2018
Men	90071	88749	94880
Women	43706	45536	45945
Men	67.3%	66.1%	67.4%
Women	32.7%	33.9%	32.6%

Source: Statistical office, 2019

Social exclusion

Covid 19 prevention and protection measures are not adjusted for some of the disabled due to the fact that additional circumstances for their full observance are not provided, which exposes them to a higher risk of the virus compared to other citizens. Given that the virus stays on the surfaces (including asphalt) for several hours and it is recommended not to wear same shoes (or use wheelchairs) exposed externally at home, it should be known that some people with disabilities have only one single pair of shoes that are used both indoors and outdoors. People in wheelchairs are also exposed at higher risk as well as those who live with them in their home.

Apart from the sign language translation during Government's press conferences, the information broadcasted by the media as well as the news editions are in inaccessible formats, leaving again many disabled people excluded from getting informed about the prevention and protection for their health, including the coping measures adopted and presented by the relevant authorities. It is recommended that press conferences should include captions (subtitles); newsrooms should present captioned abstracts and information from the press conferences because not all people with disabilities understand and use the sign language.



The measures for remote work (from home) and issuance of certificates by the kindergartens do not include women farmers and women family workers who perform unpaid work. With kindergartens closure, their survival is at stake because caring for children affects their (albeit unpaid) work. This especially applies to women living in rural areas that are engaged in agricultural, assuring in that way breadwinning. The Rural Coalition believes that they should enter the system of registered farmers quickly in order to be systematically supported.

Table 3: Unpaid family workers	2017			2018		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Total	740648	450261	290387	759054	458505	300549
Employed	564964	331327	233637	579668	337403	242265
Employer	33239	25769	7470	32290	24563	7727
Self employed	95475	77948	17527	101002	80640	20363
Unpaid family worker	46970	15217	31753	46094	15900	30194
Total	100	60.8	39.2	100	60.4	39.6
Employed	100	58.6	41.4	100	58.2	41.8
Employer	100	77.5	22.5	100	76.1	23.9
Self employed	100	81.6	18.4	100	79.8	20.2
Unpaid family worker	100	32.4	67.6	100	34.5	65.5

Source: Statistical office, 2019

A special vulnerable category that is completely left out of the measures and recommendations are victims of domestic violence, i.e. women and children who are at exposed high risk of domestic violence. Apart from the notification of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy addressed to the victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence, which includes hot lines for reporting violence, no urgent measures have been introduced or proposed for this special category of vulnerable citizens



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Exceptions from the limited movement measure

We are not all alike, we do not have same needs and that is why it is necessary for some of us to be excluded from the limited movement measure or the so-called "curfew". Namely, the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence demanded women victims and their children who leave their homes due to threats or immediate risk of violence should not be sanctioned for violating the measure.

Curfew and staying at home measures should also stipulate exceptions for perpetrators of domestic violence as they must be removed from the home and detained or placed in another location. The Ministry of interiors needs to respond to this need urgently.⁴

During the extended curfew, the medical care providers and the patronage services continuously need to deliver the service to the disabled people who have other additional health problems. Parents of people with disabilities who are older should be allowed an exception to the restricted movement measure because they are not able in just two hours to provide the necessary supplies, as well as to make the necessary medical rehabilitation for the disabled ones in their families.

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⁴https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/11716?fbclid=IwAR15GR8cXSWvx8s4ldP08zNIMTqu_ezXcaXb4nuTmjavgwWVgI0K1enV2sM



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