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

Covid 19 and gender

Rapid analysis of the measures taken and proposed to deal with the impact of the epidemic.
The analysis is time sensitive given the rapid change of the situation.
The findings date since 23/03/2020 and will be timely renewed.

Key points:

- Covid-19 has caused a global crisis in public health systems and has the potential to affect the largest global economic crisis ever. Both affect men and women differently;
- The measures taken so far and / or proposed by the Government target paid and unpaid labor of women, child poverty, the housing status of single parents and their economic survival;
- The government should introduce more criteria in the measures development process and have special financial and non-financial measures to support single parents and self-employed as a result of the crisis.
- Cooperation with the NGO sector to help people with disabilities, elderly, victims of violence and single parents should be urgently prioritized for an effective response to the crisis.

Covid-19 has caused a global crisis in public health systems and has the potential to affect the largest global economic crisis ever. Governments around the globe are taking measures to reduce the spread of the virus so that public health systems do not burden themselves and respond appropriately. However, given the fact that the measures need to be implemented for a longer period of time, and this will affect the way we work, produce, trade, but also the way we live globally, several measures have been defined (economical, public service delivery design , etc.). Our government has also taken some measures.

The crisis has affected all citizens, but inevitably the consequences will affect different people and professions differently. Women are majority of the care providers, including paid care as health care workers, but also unpaid care such as family and household care. This means that the risk of exposure to KOVID-19 is higher for them. Women are taking on their shoulders the burden of closing the schools and kindergartens, as well as the care for older parents (especially in conditions of isolation and limited movement).

This is the Center for Research and Policy Making's contribution in the policy dialogue that is conducted in relation to the measures that have been adopted or proposed to be adopted. Our notes are





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from a gender perspective and aim to reduce the gender gap that measures taken by the Government may produce during the fight against the crisis.

Economic measures

Professions that carry a greater burden

The health and retail sectors (supermarkets, shops), where most women work, carry a much higher burden than others. The burden is even greater for those families with children, because the longer working hours and the extended works in (third) shifts for the doctors on duty, exhaust the family psychologically and physically, and the care for children becomes even more difficult and demanding. Given the role and risk taken by these families for the benefit of all of us, it is recommended that the Government should provide some measures to further facilitate at least the care for the children of these families, by increasing the child allowance for them or some other type of financial compensation.

Child poverty

Some of the proposed measures, which have not yet been adopted, such as a minimum wage for all employees in the public sector, could increase the child poverty. Meeting the needs of large families or single-parent families with more children on one hand and working in a public administration on the other, can be potentially vulnerable and could increase the risk of child poverty. Our suggestion is that the minimum wage leveling cannot be executed

without any criteria and must take these parameters into account.

Self-employed

The self-employed ones are particularly economically disadvantaged. About a fifth of them are women, for whom significant resources have been invested for a long time through programs from the Employment Agency in order to be encouraged to get involved in entrepreneurship activities. Most of their small businesses cannot withstand the economic consequences and special measures are needed to protect these vulnerable small businesses.

Domestic violence

Social isolation policies make women victims of domestic violence particularly vulnerable. In this crisis, it should not be forgotten that isolation at home with an abuser could be devastating for many. Hence, the hot lines published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to provide support to the victims, as well as the safe house that the National Network for Combating Violence in cooperation with the City of Skopje opened, are to be welcomed. Other municipalities should follow this example and immediately use the funds for non-governmental organizations and in partnership with them to provide services and accommodation to victims of violence in order to remove them from the





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homes of abusers. Our recommendation for the Government and the Ministry of Interior during this period is to raise the sensitivity towards reporting domestic and gender-based violence and to act swiftly on such wrongdoings in order to deter the abusers.

Single parents

In these circumstances, more support is needed for single parents, who are usually women. Alongside the psychological burden of the whole situation, these parents now have to care to be good educators while the schools are closed and at the same time to provide food in emergency conditions with long queuing and waiting. Although they are targeted with the economical and remote working measures, these families can be further supported with a higher children's allowance as well as by giving them priority in supermarkets and other business entities, as is the case with the elderly and pregnant; every minute to them seems timeless when their children are left on their own at home.

Services

Pregnant women

Fortunately, it seems that corona virus does not affect the health of pregnant women and the fetus; however, they still suffer, especially psychologically, due to all the uncertainty and clarity. The decision to introduce psychological hot lines should be expanded with a special line for pregnant women, where they will be given

advice on how to take care of their physical and mental health, and will be acquainted in more detailed way about childbirth in crisis. Some of the health institutions and private laboratories limit the right to certain examinations that require a longer stay in the premises of the laboratories, such as checking for hidden blood sugar level. In Skopje, the baby deliveries (labours) are redirected from the State Gynecology Clinic to Cair Gynecology, which could disturb mothers' safety, given that the previous doctor, who has administrated them, can no longer be involved in the birth process. The government must ensure that pregnant women and mothers have adequate conditions for monitoring pregnancy and childbirth; in addition, the measure to introduce priority entry into markets should be extended to health facilities, i.e. laboratories where these women often have to give materials.

Schools and kindergartens closure

Concerning the government measures, at employees with children under the age of 10, one of the parents is free of work, but parents of children who fail to provide proof of attendance at kindergarten or school are not exempt from work. This does not cover parents whose children have previously been cared by older parents (grandparents). This age group is most at risk and should not be in contact with children. These children and families are forced to continue to receive care from their grandparents, endangering their health. Therefore, we recommend this measure to cover those parents





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who cannot provide proof from kindergarten or school too.

However, with this measure exemption is stipulated in regards to the employees in the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defense, the Army of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, the fire territorial units and the Customs Administration. Given that these professions in the country (except in health care facilities) overwhelmingly work men, the measure automatically results in more women staying at home to care for children, even if in the framework of the family there is a different consent and / or desire which of the parent should continue to work. If the crisis lasts for a long time, it could lead to an uneven decline in women's professional development, that in the long run could lead to job losses, worsening of the pay gap and reduction in the number of women in managerial positions. Therefore, an attention should be paid to mitigate this risk.

In addition, the schools and kindergartens closure, remote lecturing has been commenced education, upon duly preparation of the curricula by educational and training staff, but its implementation at home remains to be borne by the parents, i.e. women, if we take into account previously noted.

Housing

The political parties' proposals for exemption from paying rent fee of social (public) housing should be welcomed; our recommendation is that this measure should be accepted as soon as possible. However, the requests for freezing bank loan repayments have not been accepted yet, putting numerous households at risk if losing their income or being reduced if the measure for the minimum wage for the entire public servants is accepted. In such a situation, single parents are most at risk. Moreover, those who rent residential space from private owners, who must continue to pay rent, are also at risk. Therefore, we recommend frizzling of the repayments' installments on loans for the population at once; the Government should also introduce a measure to subsidize some of the rental fees, at least for vulnerable categories of citizens, such as single parents or providing affordable housing until the end of the crisis aiming at avoiding a situation of homeless single mothers.

Gender budget watchdogs

Contact:

Dr. Marija Risteska

risteska@crpm.org.mk or 070533992

M.Sc. Kristijan Aleksoski

aleksoski@crpm.org.mk

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