



Overview of the situation in Albania created due to COVID-19

The current outbreak of COVID-19, presents a significant challenge for Albania as for the entire world. Due to the new nature of the virus, the disease it causes, the Albanian Government needed to frequently review in order to reflect its updated readiness regarding the situation. The longevity of this situation is not known yet, but what is a certainty is the fact that unless a vaccine to fight is produced, social distancing seems to be the only alternative to keep track of the virus and keep it under control.

Different measures have been taken to reduce the spreading of the virus, impacting in this way the Albania's economy and the lives of its citizens but these measures unfortunately have not quite reflected gender sensitiveness. We are well aware of the fact that from this situation women and men are affected differently, and as such, the existing inequalities for women and girls, discrimination of other marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty will prevail and is something to be considered. Below are some aspects that affect the lives of women and girls during this period:

Domestic Violence

According to our legislation, 'domestic violence' is any act of violence of one person against another, which can be physical, moral, psychological, sexual, social, economic violation, exercised between family members who are or have been in a family relationship¹. In Albania the rate of women suffering from Domestic Violence is relatively high and for these women, such mandatory lockdown trapped them in their homes with their abusers, isolated them from the people and the resources that could help them. However, for the moment we are speaking, no growth has been marked compared to that of a year ago in the number of domestic abuse cases in several municipalities (referring to the lock down period due to COVID-19). This is a conclusion from the monitoring of the referral mechanisms in 11 municipalities of Albania, that GADC has been doing, supported by UN Women Albania, under the framework of the project: "Building capacities of CSOs to monitor the implementation of activities related to reduction of gender-based violence and domestic violence of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020, under the Regional Program "Ending Violence against Women: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds".

In order to be sure and convey to the government our concern about the safety of women and girls targeted at domestic violence, a letter initiated by a group of civil society organizations, was sent on the findings of the monitoring and related recommendations that the government should

¹Law No. 9669, date 18.12.2006 "For measures against violence in family relationships"



take as steps to protect the safety of life for women and girls at risk, victims of domestic violence, by taking inter-institutional measures at the central level.

Providing direct services to victims

This is a challenge that many NGO in Albania are facing. Women are not left alone, psychologist and social workers are attending them, but still when it comes to provide them safe houses this is very difficult. Shelters have decided not to allow anyone move in and out of the building without being previously checked up whether they are positive or not to COVID-19. Regarding this, women's NGOs have tried to communicate with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MoHSP) and asked them to prepare a guideline on how shelters should operate in this situation.

Important services lacking in this period are:

- Shelters (state and NGOs) have set restrictions that relate to the situation created by COVID-19, as well as to the security standards and protocols they apply. The standards are intended to protect the health of women and children accommodated in shelters. On the other hand, all those women and children who are at risk of extreme domestic violence have no access to shelter and is very difficult for them to report the domestic abuse.
- Failure to comply with immediate protection orders for women.
- Lack of access to members of the referral mechanism against domestic abuse.

School and nursery closures

Albania's government decided to close the schools and nurseries as per March 9, 2020 and proceed with online teaching/learning so that children would keep pace, but the effect it has had on women is quite suffocating as it fully impedes them to work. It will negatively affect them since they still bear much of the responsibility for childcare. For some who can work from home the impact is less severe, but still the stress is present as it is not easy working, doing the housework and maintaining harmony and joy in the needed levels while a toddler needs mom's full attention. On the other hand, this closure led to a very dramatic situation in those women. Especially women workers in certain companies remained without their monthly salary with the hope that the government will recompense the business they order to be closed.

Rural Women

Women in rural areas are suffering from poverty and lack of attention. They are in charge of housework, gardening and raising and caring for the domestic animals, as well as taking care of



their children and/ or elderly. The closure by Covid-19 has removed the opportunity for them to go out and sell their products. Even the closure of restaurants has made many products from rural areas no longer sold. The Albanian government has not presented any plans so far regarding rural areas and their products.

On the other hand, aiming to keep the situation under control and helping the economy, the government revised this year's budget to provide some of the funding it needs to implement the 7-point financial plan to tackle the situation created by the corona virus. All decisions of the Albanian government regarding the financial measures taken in connection with the COVID 19 pandemic are available on the official website.²The most important government's Normative Act on the amendments to the 2020 state budget entered into force on March 20, 2020.

Some of the most important measures are listed below

- An amount of 2.5 billion lek, or 25 million dollars is earmarked for the MOSP, medical equipment and for the health personnel support.
- 10 billion lek, or 100 million dollars will be provided through a sovereign guarantee instrument to private companies facing objective in paying their employees' salaries.
- 6.5 billion lek, or 65 million dollars will be made available to cover immediate needs:
 - the neediest social categories;
 - small business;
 - potential layoffs due to the war
- 2 billion lek, or 20 million dollars will be made available to the Ministry of Defense to cover the ongoing humanitarian operation.
- 1 billion lek, or 10 million dollars will be set aside as the Council of Ministers' contingency fund to cover possible unforeseen future emergencies.
- Also, the Government of Albania permanently will write off late payment interest charges on outstanding unpaid electricity bills for domestic and small business customers, a move with an estimated financial effect of 15 billion lek, or 150 million dollars, benefiting as many as 211 024 consumers.
- Will reschedule in the second half of 2020 and onwards the profit tax on all business with an annual turnover of up to 2-14 million lek, or 20, 000 to 140, 000 dollars.
- Will postpone submission of the business balance sheets for a period up to June 1 this year.

As it is obvious all the measures are gender neutral. We are not sure if women will profit equally from these benefits. In most cases women are less paid employees in every business. The amount of money they are receiving is the equal to the minimum salary almost 210 USD. It is not clear if

²<https://qbz.gov.al/>



they will receive it for a month or two. This amount is really very small having into consideration the prices of the goods and the uncertainty of the situation. From the other side there is a large category that is working in informal sectors that does not profit at all from the government measures.

Since our country suffer from the gender disaggregated data, it is very difficult to understand the impact of the conditions imposed by COVID-19.

In the following days an even more detailed review and statistics of the categories of beneficiaries of this assistance are expected, as the application for the benefit of both the population and the business is made online at the tax website.³

Gender Alliance for Development Centre will continue monitoring on the matter, identify the gaps and come with recommendations.

Prepared by

Mirela Arqimandriti
The Gender Alliance for Development Centre

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³<https://www.tatime.gov.al/c/6/447/449/procedurat-tatimore>