



Six Months Later:

Women at the Forefront of COVID-19
Response in Europe and Central Asia

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This publication provides an overview of key results achieved by UN Women in terms of COVID-19 response and recovery in its programme countries and territories in Europe and Central Asia between March and August 2020. The results have been achieved with the generous financial support of the European Union, Governments of Canada, Japan, Kazakhstan, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. We acknowledge the important contributions of and cooperation with the UN Resident Coordinators and UN agencies at the regional and country/territory levels to implement joint initiatives that address gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of COVID-19.

In particular, we would like to thank Governments and their Gender Equality Mechanisms for their immediate response and committed engagement. We would like to acknowledge the strong role and contributions of the UN Women Europe and Central Asia Civil Society Advisory Group, women's organizations and activists from across the region in championing and ensuring that women's voices and solutions are at the forefront of COVID-19 response and recovery.

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INTRODUCTION

On 13 March 2020, the World Health Organization identified Europe as the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. The Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region was among the first to respond, taking far-reaching measures to contain the spread of the virus and to protect public health — entire populations were under lockdown, airports were closed, schools and workplaces were shuttered and people had to cope with the abrupt loss of personal interactions with extended family, friends and community members. Local, national, regional and global assessments of pandemic impacts predict deep recessions, increased tensions and lingering, profound impacts on lives and societies.

Pandemics, like COVID-19, intensify inequalities for women and girls, particularly for those already in a vulnerable or disadvantaged situation such as older persons; migrants, displaced person and refugees; persons with disabilities; LGBTI persons; survivors of gender-based violence; persons belong to national minorities and people in detention and institutions.

Several gendered impacts are emerging from the COVID-19 health pandemic.

- Front-line health workers and health facility service staff are more likely to be exposed to the virus; globally, 70 per cent of workers in the health and social sectors are women.¹
- The enormous stresses women face in balancing their paid and unpaid work roles exacerbates the psychosocial toll of the pandemic, particularly as disruptions to support structures have significantly expanded the burdens of unpaid care work.
- Pandemic-related economic and social stresses, movement restrictions, social isolation measures and the disruption and inaccessibility of protection services are exponentially increasing the incidence of domestic violence.²

- The pandemic's harsh economic impacts threaten to reverse hard-won gains in gender equality, to roll back women's already precarious labour force participation, to hamper women's access to financial and other resources, and to limit women's ability to support themselves and their families.³ More women than men work in the informal economy, often with short-term, part-time and other precarious contracts. Because these jobs are particularly at risk in an economic downturn, women are disproportionately affected by cuts and lay-offs.⁴ The lack of adequate social insurance, pensions and health insurance that typically accompany this type of work deepens women's economic insecurity. Declines in livelihoods increase the prevalence of labour and sexual exploitation, human trafficking, sexual abuse and child marriage. Many women lack access to accurate, official information and public service announcements due to limitations on public spaces, group gatherings and outreach activities.⁵

Since the initial outbreak of the pandemic, putting women and girls at the heart of decision-making in COVID-19 responses and protecting their health

¹ WHO, Gender Equity in the Health Work Force, 2019 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/311314/WHO-HIS-HWF-Gender-WP1-2019.1-eng.pdf?ua=1>; OECD, Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=127_127000-awfnqj8ome&title=Women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-COVID-19-crisis

² United Nations Policy Brief; Care and IRC, Global Rapid Gender Analysis for COVID-19

³ United Nations Policy Brief

⁴ UN Women, Women in Informal Economy, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy>; UN Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women 9 April 2020 Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women>; IASC Gender Alert

⁵ Interim Guidance: Gender Alert for COVID-19 Outbreak (developed by the IASC Reference Group for Gender in Humanitarian Action), 2020 <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/interim-guidance-gender-alert-covid-19-outbreak-developed-iasc>

and well-being has been at the centre of UN Women's work in the ECA region. These principles are at the core of UN Women's efforts to:

- Engage women leaders, activists and gender equality mechanisms in order to delineate their priorities and needs;
- Ensure that these priorities and needs are at the forefront of governments', UN system agencies' and the international community's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Lead rapid data collection efforts in order to understand the scope and differential impacts of the pandemic on women, men, girls and boys;
- Mobilize funding and projects to address increased levels of violence against women and

girls, women's increased unpaid care burdens and the pandemic's disproportionate effects on women entrepreneurs and business owners; and

- Respond to the immediate needs of women and girls at greatest risk of being left behind by the pandemic, including survivors of violence, refugees, asylum seekers and host communities in conflict-affected and humanitarian crisis contexts.

This report provides an overview of the key results achieved by UN Women in the ECA region in terms of COVID-19 response and recovery in 12 countries/territories in the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo⁶, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine).

IN NUMBERS: UN WOMEN'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THE EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA REGION



Partnerships and engagement with

128

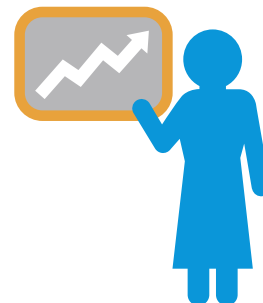
women's organizations to inform and influence COVID-19 decision-making



Collaboration and consultation with Gender Equality Mechanisms from

14

countries/territories



Rapid Gender Assessments conducted in

16

countries/territories across the region in order to understand the impact of the pandemic on women's lives and livelihoods

⁶ All references to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

PUTTING WOMEN'S VOICES AND SOLUTIONS AT THE FOREFRONT OF COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

To identify the effects of the pandemic and the emerging needs of women, UN Women engaged in consultations with partners across the ECA region. The consultations included representatives from governments, women's machineries, civil society organizations (CSOs), violence against women and girls (VAWG) service providers, United Nations agencies, private-sector companies and other development actors. The aims of the consultations included informing decision makers and developing a set of recommendations to ensure that COVID-19 response and recovery efforts will recognize the needs of women and girls and will incorporate women and girls' central role in maximizing the effectiveness of such efforts.

128 Women's Organizations and Activists Engaged in Identifying Challenges and Solutions since the Start of the Pandemic

At the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, women's organizations across the ECA region were well-positioned to identify and conduct outreach to vulnerable groups of women and girls, such as minorities, migrant women, rural women, older persons, people living with disabilities, gender-based violence survivors, expectant and nursing mothers and female single-headed households. To capture their knowledge and experiences, UN Women initiated the Voices of Women's Organizations on COVID-19 series of extensive consultations across the ECA region.⁷ The consultations brought women's views and solutions to the forefront of discussions and decisions on COVID-19 response efforts.

Three sessions were held in early April 2020 in the Central Asia, Eastern Partnership and Western Balkans and Turkey subregions. The 128 participants (from 18 programme countries/territories) included representatives from women's organizations and activists already working on the front lines of COVID-19 response efforts. Each participant brought their own unique perspective gleaned from working with diverse groups of women and girls in their communities. The groups included young and old women, women with disabilities, minority women, women survivors of violence, LGBTIQ+ people, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants.

The consultations yielded resourceful and innovative suggestions that enabled needs-based emergency support and services for women and girls at the greatest risk of being left behind.

⁷ A summary of the consultation findings is available at <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/voices-of-womens-organizations-on-covid-19>

Key findings and recommendations from consultations with women's organizations

- Although women's groups are at the forefront of supporting COVID-19 responses, decision makers have not sufficiently engaged those groups in national planning.
- Women's groups require increased resources to lead and inform COVID-19 interventions.
- Governments can maximize progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and increase the effectiveness of their pandemic responses by giving intersectional attention to the needs of all those left behind.
- Gender-responsive data and statistics are prerequisites for sound policymaking.
- Effective pandemic response efforts will require rapid assessments of the situations and needs of all categories of women.
- Social distancing and confinement have led to increased rates of domestic violence.
- Targeted support to women at risk of violence requires clear instructions and standard operating procedures.
- Promptly and correctly addressing domestic

violence requires guidance and training for courts and police.

- Financial support packages should be rebalanced with measures for women entrepreneurs and small- and micro-sized women-owned enterprises.

Targeted consultations with women's organizations and CSOs helped to put women's views and solutions to the pandemic at the forefront of discussion related to national COVID-19 response and recovery.

- In **Moldova**, during an online round-table session under the title #DemocracyTalks: "Women's leadership in pandemic context: a perspective of women leaders at the local level," –more than 50 women leaders from across the country discussed a gender-focused response to the COVID-19 crisis and shared their experiences in combating immediate and long-term effects of the pandemic at the grass-roots level.
- In **Tajikistan**, consultations with CSOs led to the development of concrete recommendations for the government, development partners and other stakeholders on gender-sensitive COVID-19 response policies, plans and measures.

Leveraging the Expertise of National Gender Equality Mechanisms across the Region

In May 2020, UN Women initiated the Voices of Gender Equality Mechanisms on COVID-19 series of online consultations with gender equality mechanisms. Drawing participants from 14 countries/territories⁸ in the Western Balkans and Turkey, Eastern Partnership and Central Asia subregions, Gender Equality Mechanisms discussed challenges and priorities for the gender dimensions of short- and long-term COVID-19 responses.

Gender equality mechanisms contributed their experiences, lessons learned and insights into prioritizing actions to COVID-19 response and recovery discussions. These perspectives helped to underscore and reconfirm the gaps and achievements in meeting international commitments towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Discussions focused on how joint actions can ensure that every woman and girl in the ECA region will be at the centre of COVID-19 emergency and recovery efforts.

⁸ Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Turkey

“Any effective economic response to the crisis caused by the coronavirus should factor in a gender perspective, understanding the challenges faced by women and incorporating solutions that would aim to reduce the disproportionate gender impacts the crisis may have.”

Sanela Skrijelj, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy, North Macedonia

Key findings and recommendations from consultations with gender equality mechanisms on COVID-19 impacts on women and girls

- Violence against women and girls is a top issue; it is being addressed through newly adapted delivery of services and responses due to the COVID-19 restrictions (e.g. using online tools to report cases of violence against women and men).
- An integrated response and multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration are critical to the success of response and recovery efforts.
- Gender mainstreaming is more important than ever, particularly in making gender-responsive plans and revisiting resource allocations.
- Negative gender stereotypes are exacerbating the crisis and need to be addressed proactively.
- Information and communication technologies are critical tools to the immediate response and to longer-term adaptation to shifting paradigms.
- The burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women needs to be reduced and redistributed.
- Barriers to women’s free movement from informal- to formal-sector employment need to be removed.
- Disaggregated data and statistics and people-centred approaches are critical to effective and efficient response and recovery efforts.
- Regular risk assessments and investments in preparedness are critical to avoiding similar situations in the future.

Key recommendations from national gender equality mechanisms to address inequalities exposed and exacerbated by COVID-19:

- Addressing gender-differentiated needs and priorities by prioritizing women's equal representation in all COVID-19 response planning, decision-making, implementation and monitoring; by ensuring efficient gender mainstreaming and application of gender-responsive tools in all plans, legislation, policies, budgets, infrastructure and investments across all sectors; and by aligning national gender equality policies with long-term recovery priorities.
- Strengthening gender-responsive service delivery in a crisis context by investing in universal gender-responsive social protection and care infrastructure; by providing gender-responsive health services and financial assistance to people in vulnerable situations; and by integrating targeted psychosocial support services in crisis response and recovery.
- Closing the digital gender divide by applying new information and communications technology solutions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment; by expanding the equal access and use of information and communications technology; by improving opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs and investors in the new digital economy; and by increasing the number of women and girls in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields.
- Reinforcing partnerships and coordination among stakeholders by ensuring timely crisis-related information-sharing between stakeholders; by improving regional cooperation between gender equality mechanisms to exchange best practices in alleviating the consequences of the crisis; by working with men and boys to address gender stereotypes; and by promoting strong images and recognition of women as heroines in times of crisis and recovery in order to inspire change.

GENERATING DATA AND EVIDENCE TO UNDERSTAND THE SCOPE AND IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

To inform and influence the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts across the ECA region, UN Women worked closely with partners to generate data, information and analysis on how and why gender matters in COVID-19. This data has helped to equip policy- and decision-makers with key information on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and has influenced the actions and interventions of governments, UN system agencies, international organizations and donors.

Rapid Gender Assessments on COVID-19 Impact in Europe and Central Asia⁹

On the heels of the pandemic, UN Women conducted rapid gender assessments across all programme countries/territories in the Europe and Central Asia region to better understand the gendered impacts of COVID-19. The surveys, which were conducted between April and May 2020, revealed a troubling situation — in Central Asia, three out of every five women reported higher concerns of not being able to access health services. A decrease in the paid working hours of women was observed across all countries/territories ranging from 31 per cent in Georgia to 65 per cent in Kosovo. Decreased earnings for women ranged from 15 per cent in North Macedonia to 52 per cent in Turkey. An alarming proportion of women (60 per cent) reported concerns regarding maintaining basic expenses, such as rent and utilities, if restrictive measures continue.

The COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately affected women's mental and emotional health. This could be partially explained by the increased burden of unpaid domestic and care work, compounded by financial distress and general health concerns due to the pandemic. Data gathered in the assessments shows that women's psychological and mental health is being affected at higher rates than that of men, with worryingly high proportions seen among women in Albania (69 per cent),

Kazakhstan (52 per cent), Turkey (54 per cent) and the Republic of Moldova (49 per cent).

The gender assessments exposed the prevalence of a shadow pandemic of violence against women. A considerable number of women (and men) reported having felt/heard of increases in domestic violence and discrimination. It is also concerning that the share of women who did not know where to seek help in cases of domestic violence ranged from around 20 per cent in Turkey to at least 40 per cent in Kyrgyzstan. Overall, the findings revealed that women across the region are experiencing increased vulnerabilities and suffering from a multitude of problems due to COVID-19, with the greatest impact seen among women and girls in vulnerable domestic and economic situations.

The assessments' findings were presented to UN CEDAW Committee members, who discussed the challenges and priorities of the gendered dimensions of COVID-19 short- and long-term responses in the region. UN Women will continue its dialogue with UN Treaty Bodies to jointly monitor progress towards implementing gender equality commitments with information to state parties presenting their national reports on CEDAW implementation in 2020 and 2021 on the differential gender impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on women and men.

⁹ The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's and Men's Lives and Livelihoods in Europe and Central Asia: Preliminary Results from a Rapid Gender Assessment, available at <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/07/the%20impact%20of%20covid19%20on%20womens%20and%20mens%20lives%20and%20livelihoods%20in%20europe%20and%20central%20asia.pdf?la=en&vs=5703>

Results of the Regional Rapid Gender Assessment in Numbers



15
per cent
of women
respondents stated
that they lost
their jobs

41
per cent
of women
respondents faced
reduced paid
working hours



Self-employed
women suffered
the worst
economic
consequences:

25
per cent
lost their jobs and

49
per cent saw
reduced working
hours



Approximately

50
per cent of women reported
a salary decrease



70
per cent
of women spend
more time on at least
one unpaid domestic
work activity



Women in
7
OUT OF
10

countries/territories
will have greater
difficulties in paying
for basic expenses

Increasing Vulnerabilities due to Pandemic-related Domestic Violence in Kyrgyzstan¹⁰



Nura Dzhumaeva now lives in a shelter, and she is hopeful for the future. Photo: AFEW Kyrgyzstan

According to the rapid gender assessment findings in Kyrgyzstan, 32 per cent of respondents (29 per cent of men and 34 per cent of women) had heard of an increase in domestic violence or had experienced it

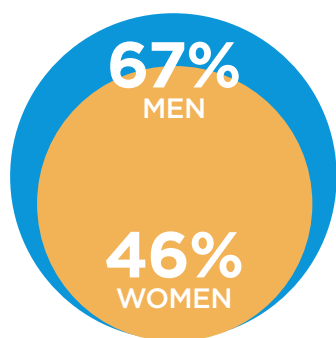
themselves. Among them is Nura Dzhumaeva¹¹, who lives with HIV. Before the quarantine, she was living with her abusive husband in the Jalal-Abad region of southern Kyrgyzstan. Having decided to finally leave him, she took their four children to the capital and moved in with her sister in a rented apartment. Hoping to start a new life, she planned to find a job. But the quarantine foiled her plans. With the help of UN Women, Dzhumaeva stayed in a shelter in Bishkek after the quarantine was lifted, determined to finish what she started. At one point, she considered returning to Jalal-Abad and to her husband, as she was not able to achieve financial independence. But living in the safety of a shelter and having received psychological support, she decided to stay and landed her first job in the capital as a shop assistant.

¹⁰ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/in-kyrgyzstan-pandemic-related-domestic-violence-increases-vulnerabilities>

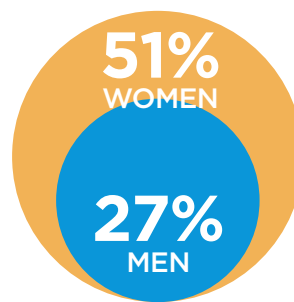
¹¹ Name changed to protect the individual's identity.

DISPROPORTIONATE INCREASE OF UNPAID WORK FOR WOMEN

3/4
of women experience
an increased unpaid
care and domestic
work



Received more help
from their partner



Worked remotely

Source: Rapid gender assessment on socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on women and men in Albania, April 2020

Rapid assessment on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Specialist Services for Victims and Survivors of Violence: A Proposal for Addressing the Needs¹²

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had profound effects on the operations of CSOs delivering specialist services and on women's access to those services. Conducted in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia) and Turkey, the rapid assessment on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Specialist Services for Victims and Survivors of Violence: A Proposal for Addressing

the Needs serves as a snapshot of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a selected group of CSOs and their beneficiaries and provides concrete recommendations to address the gaps exposed by the pandemic. The assessment also showcases the particular needs of women's organizations in offering specialist services and the opportunities for CSOs to start innovating in delivery of these services to fit the new reality.¹³



Above: In Sombor, Serbia, beneficiaries of a women's shelter got together to contribute to the COVID-19 response in their local community by sewing protective face masks. Photo: UN Women/Tamara Savovic

¹² https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field-office-eca/attachments/publications/2020/05/unw_covid-vaw_report_final.pdf?la=en&vs=5317

¹³ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/05/impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-specialist-services-for-victims-and-survivors-of-violence>

INCREASING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RESILIENCE



Above: Women in Georgia are producing protective garments and masks for medical workers. Photo: Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia

During the COVID-19 pandemic, self-employed women and men in the ECA region experienced greater job losses and reductions in working hours than those in other forms of employment. While women may represent a minority of those in self-employment, they were more severely impacted by job loss.

Women's businesses are in an even more precarious position, given that they are more likely to have lost incomes already. Due to their small size and profitability, concentration in sectors that appear to be slow to recover and women's limited access to key financial, material, relational and time resources, women's enterprises will struggle to make the adjustments needed to restart. Women-owned businesses are far less likely to be able to weather economic shocks than those owned and operated by men.

To address these challenges, UN Women provided targeted assistance to 1,884 women entrepreneurs and business owners in eight countries/territories

to improve their resilience and ability to recover from the economic disruptions caused by the pandemic. Programme beneficiaries included the most vulnerable women and girls affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including women and girls with disabilities, women and girls living in rural areas and survivors of violence.

In **Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia**, 200 women benefited from training on sustainable agriculture and marketing for women entrepreneurs. Eight hundred forty-five women and girls from poor and vulnerable households in Kyrgyzstan and Moldova benefited from gender-responsive humanitarian support by UN Women.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, 200 women micro-entrepreneurs received support by UN Women to recover from the economic disruptions created by the COVID-19 crisis.

In **Georgia**, 237 women undertook online trainings in business development within the COVID-19 context. Following training, women entrepreneurs prepared anti-crisis plans and generated new business ideas. UN Women provided 105 business grants to improve women's businesses; six women were awarded with online vocational education grants. UN Women, in partnership with the NGO Taso Foundation, also awarded small grants aimed at improving women's economic

resilience on food production.

In **Kosovo**, in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a special budget code was implemented to help the businesses of women affected by the pandemic. This code is placed within the Ministry of Trade and Industry under the Subsidies and Grants categories.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, 240 women and girls from 12 municipalities gained new confidence and skills through training sessions focused on women's rights and leadership, business planning and financial literacy. UN Women also supported 46 small-scale business for women entrepreneurs in the field of agriculture.



Above: Nona Noniashvili proudly stands in the storeroom of the apple chips company, Enkeni. Nona is a 25-year-old Georgian entrepreneur who decided to build her company's factory in a conflict-affected village along the boundary with South Ossetia in order to help a community in need and empower local women. She managed to keep her business afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic by using online sales and social media promotions. She urges women entrepreneurs not to lose hope and continue to create to overcome the challenges caused by the pandemic. Photo: UN Women/Tara Milutis

Business run by Women Living with HIV and the Production of COVID-19 Protective Gear in Tajikistan¹⁴

When Dilyora Mammadova¹⁵ learned about a joint UN Women- UNAIDS project offering business trainings for 30 women living with HIV in 2019, she jumped at the opportunity. At that time, she had a small sewing workshop; her business proposal was one of four approved for funding. The financial support enabled her to expand production and provide jobs for 10 women living with HIV in her rural hometown.

Due to the high demand for COVID-19 protection masks, Mammadova managed to fill orders to supply more than 23,000 masks within 10 days. “Thanks to UN Women support and guidance, I am very glad that I could fulfil my long-standing dream to have my own business and be independent, as well as to support those poor, unprotected women who are abandoned by their own families,”



Above: Due to the high demand for COVID-19 protection masks, Dilyora Mammadova managed to fill orders by supplying more than 23,000 masks within 10 days. Photo: UN Women/Nigina Makhmudova

she says. “UN Women support is especially important and timely during such difficult and uncertain times.”

¹⁴ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/5/tajik-businesses-run-by-women-living-with-hiv-supply-key-protective-gear>

¹⁵ Name changed to protect the identity of the individual.

ADDRESSING INCREASED UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK DURING THE PANDEMIC



Above: Osman Doğan is a schoolteacher in Bursa, a north-western province of Turkey. He has a 12-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son. Together with his wife and children, they have been locked down at home during the COVID-19 pandemic for almost three months. However, thanks to his engagement as a father and experience as a fatherhood trainer within the Father Support Programme, implemented by Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV), and supported by the EU-UN Women regional programme on ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds,” the family coped with the situation through communication and sharing household responsibilities. Photo: Personal archive.

The pandemic-related closure of schools, day-care facilities for children and older people, recreational facilities and many social and health services meant that many women had to take on extra care responsibilities. According to the UN Women rapid gender assessment, in the ECA region, an average of 70 per cent of women spent more time on unpaid domestic work from April to May 2020 as compared to 59 per cent of men who reported an increase.

The COVID-19 outbreak has increased the visibility of unpaid care and domestic work. In many contexts, it has required more men and boys to shoulder a portion of the burden; this has created an important opportunity to change discriminatory gender norms. Responding to the pandemic presents an opportunity to build back better by recognizing and redistributing care work among women and men. UN Women has reached

out to women, girls, men and boys throughout the region in order to raise awareness on the unequal distribution of unpaid care work and the balance of gender roles at home.

In **Albania**, UN Women published a short video portraying the stories of five women-led rural business. The video sensitized viewers regarding the specific challenges women entrepreneurs are facing as a result of the pandemic.¹⁶

¹⁶ See <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=647642402777518>; and <https://twitter.com/unwomenalbania/status/1282775319557046275>

In **Georgia**, through its Share the Work Facebook campaign, UN Women collected and shared testimonials of women dealing with their multiple workloads during the lockdown.¹⁷

In **Kazakhstan**, UN Women, in cooperation with other UN partners (including UNDP and UNFPA), raised public awareness about gender stereotypes in family relationships and responsibilities through an #EqualPartners press release.

In **Kosovo**, the #HeforSheAtHome campaign, implemented by UN Women in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden, featured 12 men in situations of breaking gender stereotypes and balancing the burden of unpaid care work. The campaign reached around 100,000 people through UN Women social media accounts.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, as part of an effort to build partnerships with non-traditional actors, UN

Women joined with a local animation artist who draws popular satirical cartoons about Kyrgyz society. This collaboration resulted in the co-creation of social ads on the equal distribution of chores and childcare. Both videos released in social media attracted significant attention; one reached over 200K views in one day.

In **Serbia**, UN Women and CSO partners are piloting 12 models that address unpaid care and domestic work linked to the COVID-19 context. CSOs will implement at least three initiatives to redistribute unpaid care work in different localities.

In **Turkey**, UN Women kicked off a global #HeForSheAtHome campaign to encourage men and boys to equally share unpaid care work with women amid mobility restrictions. The campaign, boosted by male influencers, reached around 450,000 users.

COVID-19 and its Impacts on Women Agricultural Producers in Serbia¹⁸



Above: Jelena Ruzic, founder of Women's Association of Kolubara District. Photo courtesy of Women's Association of Kolubara District

Rural women are among the most vulnerable groups in Serbia. The discontinuity of

production caused by COVID-19 and the imposed lockdown will cause long-term harm, especially on women's income. To address this, 122 women drafted an open letter to the Serbian Minister of Agriculture. The letter asked for protection for individual producers; suggested alternatives for public transport and sales; requested the withdrawal of sanctions for movement for farmers as essential services; and sought adequate protection from widespread abuse from buyers. "Although the official response from the Minister has yet to come, we have noticed that some of the measures we suggested have been taken into account, such as the creation of an online platform to connect producers and buyers," stated Jelena Ruzic, founder of the Women's Association of Kolubara District, part of a UN Women-run, EU-funded project.

¹⁷ See <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/harnessing-the-power-of-social-media-covid-19>

¹⁸ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/in-the-words-of-jelena-ruzic> (April 28, 2020)

Women from Vulnerable Settings Using their Skills to Support and Keep their Communities Safe During COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan¹⁹



Above: A business owner from Kyrgyzstan, Muslima Sobirova has found joy in sewing. Photo: Dildora Khamidova/UN Women

“Recently, I learned that the project would give young women from our community sewing machines, accessories and fabrics. Basically, everything we need to start a small private business,” said Muslima Sobirova, business owner and part of the Communities Resilient to Violent Ideologies project implemented by UN Women and funded by the Peacebuilding Fund. “When the pandemic began, there was a shortage of masks and equipment.” Now, with the sewing machine from UN Women, she and some other women are planning to make fabric masks and other protective gear for community members.

¹⁹ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/8/women-in-kyrgyzstan-gain-skills-and-help-their-communities-reel-from-the-pandemic>

SUPPORTING GOVERNMENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN ADDRESSING INCREASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



Above: Xhemile Behluli, sergeant and domestic violence section supervisor within the Kosovo Police. Besides her dedication to a life free from violence for women across Kosovo, she is also committed to achieving gender equality within the Kosovo Police, as part of UN Women's regional programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds," funded by the European Union, to ensure all of her colleagues are treated equally. Photo: UN Women

In the ECA region, nearly 67,000 women — including service providers and members of women's organizations — have been directly supported to better respond to the increased prevalence of VAWG that stemmed from COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and impacts.

During the pandemic, UN Women supported women's organizations' provision of continuous essential services for violence survivors. Supported services included the expansion of shelters and the provision of help lines, psychosocial counselling and legal assistance in eight countries/territories.²⁰

Under the Implementing Norms, Changing Minds regional ending violence against women programme, 24 partner agreements (with a

total budget of \$1.3 million) have been rolled out to address the challenges COVID-19 poses for women and girls. Informed by the findings and recommendations of the Voices of Women's Organizations consultations, programme activities were reshaped to address COVID-19 impacts. These activities supported service providers and beneficiaries in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Many more women now know how to seek

²⁰ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine.

support and report violence in the face of quarantine restrictions. This is the result of communications initiatives in the **Western Balkans**, including:

- In **Albania**, a nationwide SMS campaign reached around 30,000 people by the end of July 2020. The campaign provided information about reporting violence against women and the availability of public and non-profit psychosocial, legal and other support options for women and girl survivors of violence. UN Women provided online awareness-raising and self-defence courses to 87 women and girls. Participants were provided with knowledge and skills to avoid, resist and respond to incidents of VAWG. Notably, UN Women, together with the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, conducted a mapping of services for survivors of VAWG. The mapping included standard operating procedures on the functioning of referral mechanisms, the availability of services during confinement and resources for women from marginalized groups.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, information sessions were held in Roma communities on violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 crisis and on meeting the basic needs of communities severely affected by restrictions imposed by government authorities.
- In **Serbia**, a mobile application is being developed that will enable women to silently alert SOS helpline services in situations of violence. Although the application is being created as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is a permanent alternative solution for SOS helpline services and will continue to be used and promoted in the post-crisis period. Further, a traditional and social media campaign is raising awareness about the rights of women, including vulnerable groups of women, in times of crises/post-crises. The campaign aims to reverse the increasingly patriarchal discourse that occurred during the crisis.



Above: Mubera Hodžić-Lemeš is a social worker and manager of a safe house operating within the Foundation of Local Democracy in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). During the pandemic, she was at the forefront of the response to the crisis, to which safe houses also had to adapt. Photo: Private archive.

UN Women has engaged in partnerships to provide better coordination, monitoring, guidance and counselling in response to VAWG related to COVID-19. This includes:

- In **Kyrgyzstan**, UN Women and rural-based activists developed an online survey community monitoring tool for remote data collection on domestic violence and early/child marriage practices. The tool was piloted in 16 communities and will be replicated and scaled up to other areas later in the year. Moreover, UN Women launched a series of live chats “Village Activist is Speaking” via the UN Kyrgyzstan Instagram page. In live broadcasts, activists from different regions of the country shared their experiences on how they built harmonious non-violent relationships within families.
- In **Tajikistan**, 300 women and girls at risk of physical and psychological violence accessed and benefited from psychological and legal counselling support from the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative’s integrated referral system. UN Women, with the Red Crescent Society, implemented a project to improve sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) referral systems and coordination among services providers in six target districts. 120 Red Crescent Society national volunteers have been involved in the outreach to women and girl survivors of — or at risk of — SGBV. Outreach efforts include COVID-19 prevention messages and promoted safe behaviours (such as social distancing, use of masks, etc.) to curb the spread of COVID-19.
- In **Turkey**, more than 50,000 women now have access to My Safety Plan, an easy to use guideline for women on what to do in case of violence. My Safety Plan is available in three languages and in print, visual, audio and sign language formats, thus making it accessible to refugee women and women with disabilities.

- In **Kazakhstan**, UN Women and UNFPA Kazakhstan developed recommendations based on best international practices for providing immediate support to survivors of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendations have been disseminated widely among partners, including national law enforcement bodies, Members of Parliament and CSOs.
- In **Kosovo**, the Security and Gender Group established the subgroup on gender-based violence, which will be chaired by the Agency for Gender Equality and co-chaired by Kosovo Women’s Network. The subgroup will further coordinate preventative measures and protections related to gender-based violence. The UN Women “Report Violence, Save Lives!” campaign against domestic violence in the COVID-19 crisis in Kosovo reached over 1 million people.
- In **Moldova**, UN Women, in partnership with the Women’s Law Centre and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection, finalized the elaboration of the inter-sectoral mechanisms and coordinated responses for ending violence against women. In partnership with the Association for Liberty and Equality of Gender and the National Coalition Life without Violence, UN Women organized mentoring sessions on essential services engaging CSOs and women survivors of violence.

Stakeholders from the **Western Balkans and Turkey** were provided with a set of guidelines to better support women and girl survivors of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and in other times of crisis.²¹ The guidelines, developed by the Civil Society Strengthening Platform,²² a platform led by WAVE Network, were launched along with nine videos²³ on promoting women’s support services that victims of violence can access during the pandemic.

²¹ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/guidelines-to-better-support-women-and-girls-covid-19>

²² <https://cssplatform.org/>

²³ <https://cssplatform.org/cssp-news-partners-release-videos-on-where-how-to-find-help>

Activists in Kazakhstan Support Survivors and Urge Stronger Penalties for Aggressors²⁴

“Previously, when we counselled survivors of domestic violence, we urged them to report to the police and most women followed our recommendations,” says Dina Smailova, leader of the NeMolchi (Don’t Keep Silent) movement. “Now, just two out of 10 women would report to the police because they are living in isolation, and sometimes in large families, with their husband’s parents and other relatives in one house.” During lockdown, courts do not work, claims are not accepted, abusers are not isolated and women have to continue living with their abusers, she explained. “The fact that domestic violence is not a criminal offence in Kazakhstan is hurting women. If, for example, violation of a protection order by the aggressor



Dina Smailova holds a bouquet wrapped in paper with the phrase “Don’t keep silent.” The money from the sales of these bouquets were donated to her fund. Photo: Almat Mukhamedzhanov

immediately becomes a criminal offence with a longer sentence, I think that would make a difference,” she said.

Women’s Organizations, now First Responders in Bosnia & Herzegovina²⁵



Above: Meliha Sendic, Director, Centre of Women’s Rights. Photo courtesy of Meliha Sendic.

In March, two hours after the COVID-19 curfew in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a woman fled her abusive ex-husband with her children; they stood outside in T-shirts and slippers until a neighbour let them in. She called the police, but they said they wouldn’t detain her abuser

or issue a restraining order. Her next call was to the Centre of Women’s Rights, funded by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which immediately connected her with a lawyer and a therapist. “If we didn’t intervene and provide the woman with guidance, this report of violence could have gone off the radar because of the insensitivity and ignorance of the police officer. It could have ended in a fatal outcome,” says Meliha Sendic, President of the Centre of Women’s Rights, adding that COVID-19 has exposed long-standing problems they’ve decried for years. The Centre is running a free phone line for legal aid and psychological support for survivors of violence and providing online legal support and immediate assistance via Viber or other messenger applications.

²⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/from-where-i-stand-dina-smailova-on-covid-19>

²⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/5/feature-womens-organizations-provide-vital-services-as-violence-against-women-spikes>

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY



Above: UN Women in Kazakhstan organized the delivery of 1,500 kits of essential items in the form of hygiene products, masks, gloves and disinfectants to women and girls affected by the flood in the Maktaaral district of the Turkestan region. Photo courtesy of The Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Maktaaral District

Notwithstanding having to reorganize their work under emergency conditions, a significant number of women's organizations across the region have managed to ensure a level of continuity in support.

The organizations continue to draw on their expertise and support in reaching the most marginalized and vulnerable people through initiatives that range from disseminating information to providing direct assistance (including delivery of food, goods and hygiene supplies as well as legal and psychological assistance for survivors of gender-based violence).

- In **Albania**, UN Women provided technical expertise to the Ministry of Defence to monitor the distribution of COVID-19 assistance from a gender perspective.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UN Women conducted and presented a situational assessment and developed a response plan for 'safe houses' and their capacity to respond to the pandemic to the national government. UN Women provided all eight safe houses with personal protective equipment packages and \$5,000 to meet their immediate — and growing — emergency needs. Furthermore, UN Women reprogrammed funds to support civil society efforts to respond to the crisis and to address cases of sexual violence in line with the Istanbul Convention.

- In **Georgia**, UN Women is engaging with women entrepreneurs in the production of masks that meet the standards of the national Center for Disease Control and Public Health. In addition, UN Women, together with the Georgian Farmers' Association, conducted a rapid assessment of the needs of women-led small businesses and supported their efforts to add their agricultural products to a popular e-commerce platform (www.Soplidan.ge).
- In **Kazakhstan**, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Commission for Women and Family Affairs, UN Women supplied hygiene products, masks, gloves and disinfectants to 1,500 women and girls in the disaster-affected Turkestan region.
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, UN Women provided hygiene kits to 700 women and girls living in the most vulnerable regions.
- In **Moldova**, with support from the Government of Sweden, UN Women and UNFPA, UN Women delivered essential products to 250 women survivors of violence in assistance centres across the country. Moreover, UN Women provided personal protection equipment to 3,279 social workers in the 36 territorial social assistance structures.
- In **North Macedonia**, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, UN Women provided 1,860 packages of long-lasting food and hygiene products to 368 female-headed households and to 329 registered survivors of domestic violence.
- In **Turkey**, to address protection needs during the pandemic, UN Women collaborated with civil society organizations to support women refugees' production of 252,000 protective face masks. The production is taking place via the SADA Women's Cooperative,²⁶ operated by Afghan, Syrian and Turkish women.



Tatjana Stojsic Petkovic is a psychologist, laughter yoga leader, activist for the rights of women with disabilities and provider of psychological workshops and individual support to women with disabilities in the NGO '...iz kruga - Vojvodina' (...Out of Circle-Vojvodina) from Serbia. With the support of the EU-UN Women programme "Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds," Ms. Stojsic Petkovic is a frontline worker, providing psychological support to women with disabilities in times of self-isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasizes the need for adequate support systems for women with disabilities and vulnerable women. Photo courtesy of Tatjana Stojsic Petkovic

²⁶<https://sadacoop.com/>

UN Women supported a series of targeted interventions focused on helping women and girls in conflict, crisis or humanitarian settings cope with the combined challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis and their contextual vulnerabilities. Interventions include:

- In **Georgia**, UN Women signed an agreement with the UK Conflict, Stability and Security Fund to respond to the immediate needs of conflict-affected women caused by the COVID-19 outbreak in Georgia, including Abkhazia.
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, in partnership with women activists and local authorities, UN Women organized a series of public consultations to identify challenges and opportunities at the community level. These challenges and opportunities will be considered in the process of local development planning and budgeting for crisis preparedness.
- In **Turkey**, UN Women, in partnership with the Foundation for the Support of Women's Work, is supporting the Women and Child Centre in Gaziantep. Launched in 2019, the Centre is an exemplary community-based and woman-led peer support and referral system that works

with community leaders to run the Home-to-Home Solidarity Programme. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the Solidarity Programme provided support to women at home via telephone and the Internet. In addition, the Solidarity Programme has enabled UN Women to reach around 1,400 vulnerable women by phone to raise their awareness of COVID-19 and how to limit infection risks.

- In **Ukraine**, UN Women mobilized 1,930 grass-roots women's organizations from 29 communities in conflict-affected areas in Eastern Ukraine. The organizations formed peer-support groups via social media platforms to create safe virtual spaces for women at risk and survivors of domestic violence. In addition, around 100 domestic violence survivors from the conflict-affected Luhansk region accessed knowledge and information on their rights, existing protection mechanisms and available support services via three interactive webinars provided by UN Women and the Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health. In addition, more men were made aware of VAWG in the context of COVID-19 stay-at-home policies.

Turkish and Syrian Women Manifest Solidarity to Respond to COVID-19²⁷



Above: Through the “Home-to-Home Solidarity Programme,” women community leaders reach vulnerable Turkish and Syrian women whose mobility dramatically decreased because of COVID-19. Photo: UN Women/Tayfun Yilmaz

“Through phone calls, we learn about women’s problems and needs and refer them to the relevant institutions that can help. Later, we call them up again to see if their problems have been resolved and their needs met. Otherwise, we work more on

their cases,” says Nigar Erdem, who is among 19 Turkish and Syrian women community leaders who have been trained in leadership, gender, need assessments and available public services to help and empower vulnerable Syrian and Turkish women in their communities. These phone calls are part of the Home-to-Home Solidarity Programme, jointly run by UN Women and the Foundation for the Support of Women’s Work. Started at the Foundation’s Women and Child Centre in Gaziantep (Turkey), the Solidarity Programme supports vulnerable Syrian and Turkish women to access health care, legal assistance, psychosocial and livelihood support. This project is supported through the UN Women regional programme, “Strengthening the Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey,” funded by EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis.

²⁷ <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/turkish-and-syrian-women-manifest-solidarity>

Annex: Overview of Funding Partners Supporting UN Women's COVID-19 Response in the ECA Region

COVID-19 Resource Distribution by Funding Partners

FUNDING PARTNER	TOTAL RESOURCES
Government of Sweden	\$1,563,256
European Commission	\$1,319,463
Regular resources to UN Women	\$1,159,028
Government of Japan	\$834,155
Government of Canada	\$364,602
MPTF-UN COVID-19 Response Rcvy	\$319,090
Government of Norway	\$214,000
Kazakhstan	\$176,769
Government of Switzerland	\$103,500
Government of United Kingdom	\$65,399
UN Women	\$41,704
MPTF-Spotlight Initiative Fund	\$38,750
Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTFO)	\$25,500
UNAIDS	\$21,296
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	\$7,250



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