**Overview of urgent measures and steps for protection of women and children victims of domestic violence undertaken by the Government and the competent institutions**

The Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia on 18 March 2020 declared a state of emergency on the entire territory of the country due to the situation with COVID-19 and to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. After the state of emergency was declared, as of 9 April 2020, the Government has held 15 sessions in which new decisions and measures for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in R. North Macedonia are adopted on a daily basis[[1]](#footnote-1). The adopted measures address different aspect and aim to alleviate the health, social and economic crisis which, although a reality for the citizens of RNM, may be deepened as a consequence of the state of emergency.

However, a **particularly vulnerable category that was completely excluded from the measures and the recommendations were the victims of domestic violence, i.e. women and children who are under increased risk of domestic violence**. Except for the notification of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy[[2]](#footnote-2) addressed to victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence which lists the telephone lines for reporting violence, no urgent measure has been imposed or proposed for this particularly vulnerable category of citizens.

In order to provide protection to women and children of domestic violence in this follow-up period of the state of emergency, the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence prepared and on 13.04.2020 sent to the Government of RNM a **Request for issuing urgent measures for protection of women and children of domestic violence during state of emergency.** The document contained an explanation of the current situation, the risk factors for increasing domestic violence, the risk factors for reporting the violence and a list of proposed urgent measures for protection of women and children victims of domestic violence.

Due to the emergency of the situation, on 09.04.2020 the first **Request for amending the decision for prohibition of movement of citizens over the entire territory of the country** which stipulated adoption of two urgent measures, namely: exceptions from sanctioning women victims and their children leaving the home because of a threat and a direct risk of violence, and when domestic violence is reported during curfew, for the perpetrator to be removed from the home and subject to appropriate sanctions (detention, issuance of temporary protective measures, etc.) in order to protect the victim from future violence in her home was sent.

On 14.04.2020, the National Network received a response from the Government of RNM saying that the sent request had been referred for further review and action to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice for the purpose of submitting an appropriate proposal with specific measures to be reviewed at the following meeting of the Main Crisis Coordination Headquarters scheduled for 15.04.2020.

On 29.04.2020, upon invitation by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, a coordinative meeting was held to review the proposed measures and to agree on the steps that need to be undertaken in order to provide appropriate protection of women and children who are exposed to or under risk of violence. At the coordinative meeting, which was attended by a representative of National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and representatives from the Macedonian Anti-Poverty Platform, HERA, Glasen Tekstilec and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, it was agreed that this type of meetings would be held every Monday, Wednesday and Friday in order to report on the omissions by the MLSP’s regional offices and to inform SCOs about the steps undertaken by the MLSP in compliance with the submitted requests.

Apart from the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the National Network was contacted by no other ministry or institution in relation to the submitted requests and the receiver notification from the Main Crisis Coordination Headquarters.

This document contains the proposed urgent measures and the steps undertaken by the competent institutions for the period 14.04.2020-15.05.2020, as well as the follow-up steps that need to be undertaken.

Prepared on 18.05.2020

National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence



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|  | **Urgent measure** | **Government response** | **Conclusions/Future steps** |
| 1. | During curfew, there must be **exceptions from sanctioning women victims and their children leaving the home because of a threat and a direct risk of violence**  (request submitted on 09.04.2020) | The Ministry of Interior published a statement that persons who are trying to report a criminal offence or who need help due to violence committed against them would be exempt from sanctioning.[[3]](#footnote-3) The same information was published on the FB profile of MoI. Apart from MoI, only MLSP shared this information. | The information should be placed as a banner on the websites of MoI, MLSP, MH, МES and the Government of RNM and all municipalities. The Ministry of Interior should address the citizens and share this information and encourage them to report this type of violence. |
| 2. | When domestic violence is reported during curfew, for the perpetrator to be removed from the home and subject to appropriate sanctions (detention, issuance of temporary protective measures, etc.) in order to protect the victim from future violence in her home.  (request submitted on 09.04.2020) | MLSP and MoI act in coordination and undertake specific measures for protection of victims in accordance with the legal competencies for urgent and due action and the Protocol for mutual cooperation of the competent institutions and the association for protection from and prevention of domestic violence. We are also informing that MLSP and MoI are coordinated in their action in cases of domestic violence, including during curfew, with other competent institutions which act in cases of domestic violence. Professionals from the Centers for Social Work have licenses for unrestricted movement during curfew in order for the victims to get the necessary protection and support. We have established communication with the MoI and we have been informed that all police stations would be informed on the procedure for acting in cases of domestic violence.  (response from MLSP from 16.04.2020) | MoI and MLSP to share information about the number of submitted request for issuing temporary measures for protection from domestic violence and the number of issued temporary measures (the information should be segregated by cities, type of submitted/issued measure, gender of the victim). |
| 3. | Violence reporting lines (SOS lines, MoI and CSW, CSOs) and help and support lines to operate through online chats and messages, including SMS messages.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | No response | Urgent development of new and innovative ways for reporting domestic and intimate-partner violence which will also be applicable after the end of the state of emergency.  . |
| 4. | In addition to reporting violence on 192, **the ambulance services (194) and the fire brigade (193) to respond to calls for reporting violence** and to notify the competent police station to act as soon as possible.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | No response whether they have been notified. | To send a response whether the ambulance services (194) and the fire brigade (193) have been notified. |
| 5. | **National and local TV stations, as well as other types of media, should regularly publish the telephone numbers for reporting and assistance in domestic violence and violence against children**, for all cities where such services and Centres for Social Work are in place. The guidelines for protection against COVID 19, as well as Government decisions and measures are broadcast daily. On the same note, the media should broadcast the telephone numbers and services for domestic violence assistance and support, emphasizing the increased risk of violence against women and children in this state of crisis.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | We have received no answer, but a short analysis of media coverage of this issue leads to the conclusion that coverage is minimal. Namely, most of the portals only repost announcements sent by civil society organizations and statements of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy which is the only institution sharing information on the issue. | Follow-up steps: Informative video prepared by MLSP to be broadcast on all national televisions at primetime, at least twice a day.  To establish cooperation and recommend to all national and local media that have websites to publish banners with information for reporting domestic violence.  Regular publishing of information about reporting violence to remain a regular practice even after the end of the state of emergency. |
| 6. | The guidelines for reporting violence and seeking help and support should be published on the website https://koronavirus.gov.mk/ where all data, measures, directions, etc. associated with COVID 19 and the crisis are published.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | The website <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/> features an option **report domestic violence** linked to the numbers of the specialized services for victims of gender based and domestic violence (MLSP website).  No information is published about reported domestic violence on <https://vlada.mk/covid19> | To urgently create a banner with information about how to report domestic violence and to publish it on  <https://vlada.mk/covid19> |
| 7. | Prepare safety guidelines and escape plans that will make it easier for the victims to leave the violent environment and seek help, or protect themselves from future domestic violence if they cannot leave the perpetrator. These guidelines should not be publicly promoted, as they may reach the perpetrators, and a strategy should be devised to ensure that this information reaches the victims who need it most.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | No response. | The National Network has prepared an escape plan and safety advice.  To send the escape plan and the safety advice to all regional centers for social work, the Red Cross branches and the CSOs that provide humanitarian help, as well as to make them accessible to women-victims of violence who will be assessed by professionals as having limited access to reporting and protection from violence. |
| 8. | Pharmacists and supermarket staff should have information about how to report violence (numbers, emails, services) which they can share with victims if they are alone  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | MLSP prepared flyers and distributed them to crisis headquarters in the municipalities.  There is no information whether they have already been distributed at local level-to pharmacies, shops, medical institutions, etc. | To follow whether they will be timely distributed to all places as planned. |
| 9. | Specialized services for protection of victims of domestic violence that provide accommodation should be disinfected on regular basis in order to prevent the transmission of the virus.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | We have received verbal information at a coordinative meeting from the Additional Deputy-Minister of Labor and Social Policy Sanela Shkrijelj that the Centers for sheltering victims of domestic violence are subject to regular disinfection.  (held on 29.04.2020) | Follow-up: Informing the public about the existence and the role of specialized services in providing protection of women-victims and their children. |
| 10. | The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in cooperation with the Ministry of Health to develop protocols for safe accommodation of women victims of violence and their children, in accordance with the recommendations for protection against COVID 19.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | Verbal notification by the Additional Deputy-Minister of Labor and Social Policy Sanela Shkrijelj that they are following the Government recommendations and the Guidelines for organizing quarantine for COVID 19 for persons returning from abroad in organized groups following the decision of the Government for a quarantine  (coordinative meeting held on 29.04.2020) | The National Network prepared a special **Protocol for health protection and safe accommodation of women-victims of domestic violence in the Centers for sheltering victims of domestic violence (shelters) and other centers that provide housing services in conditions of health crisis and pandemic** sent to the MLSP on 07.05.2020.  Follow-up steps: Finalizing and adopting the protocol. |
| 11. | The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy to publish numbers for reporting domestic violence that will be open 24/7 for every town that has a Center for Social Work  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | MLSP sent written information to all municipalities on the territory of RNM about the manner and the need for urgent action and the availability of services for victims of domestic violence, with included contacts of all existing services.  (Initial information was set to the Network on 16.04.2020, and this information was confirmed at the coordinative meeting with MLSP and the Vice Prime Minister held on 29.04.2020).  Flyers prepared with numbers and distributed in regions. | To inform the public that these numbers are functional 24/7.  To inform which of these numbers provide assistance and support in the Albanian language.  To follow the actions of the centers for social work in reported cases of domestic violence. |
| 12. | The telephone numbers for reporting, assistance and support for domestic violence and violence against children to be published by all municipalities at the local level, and the municipalities to take active participation in providing support to the victims.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | Online session held with 15 municipalities with support from UNDP. The banners prepared by the National Network with info about specialized services for reporting domestic violence distributed to all municipalities though the Association of the Units of Local Self-Government.  Until now, 7 municipalities published numbers for reporting domestic violence on their website and FB profiles. | Ongoing monitoring whether the banners are published on the municipalities’ websites and FB profiles. |
| 13. | The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to publish weekly statistics on the number of reported cases of domestic violence, segregated by cities and gender of victims  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | Regarding the statistics of reported cases of domestic violence, we are informing that currently the number of newly recorded victims of domestic violence in the first quarter of 2020 is 329 victims of domestic violence, compared to the 400 victims recorded in the first quarter of 2019.  Response sent from MLSP on 16.04.2020)  Additionally, the MLSP sent information about the number of newly recorded victims of domestic violence segregated by months, as at 08.05.2020). | MLSP and MoI do not share publicly information on weekly basis (as at 15.05.2020).  A follow-up step: To share statistics for April as soon as possible and compare it to the same month of 2019 in order to follow the increase in the number of reports.  Starting from next week, to publish weekly statistics every Friday including the number of reports, gender and town where the violence occurred by both ministries. |
| 14. | Regarding visitation schedules of parents who do not live with their children in families where domestic violence has previously been reported and where temporary protection measures have been imposed, and where there are no conditions for mutual agreement, the visitation dynamics should be changed in order to reduce the contact of the perpetrator with the victim, prevent future violence, and protection of the children and the parent they live with.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | As regards the manner of regulating contacts of children with the parent they do not live with in families where domestic violence has been reported, we are informing that the Center for Social Work, the only competent body for regulating relations between children and parents, through their professional teams that act in the specific cases will reassess the visitation conditions, will determine whether there are risks in establishing contacts between children and the parent they do not live with and will decide on the protection of the children in accordance with the recommendations regarding the condition with the Corona virus. In compliance with the Law on Family, both parents are obligated to duly execute their parental rights and obligations and ensure protection of the health of their children. In accordance with the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the professional team from the Center might temporarily limit or prohibit personal and direct contacts of the child with the parent he/she doesn’t not live with in case of domestic violence.  (response sent by MLSP on 16.04.2020) | To provide information with a number of submitted requests for changes in visitation regulation decisions and the number of approved/changed requests with listed grounds (reasons) for submitting the request. |
| 15. | The state to allocate funds for child support payments, in cases when it cannot be collected from the other parent due to unemployment.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | In cooperation with partner organizations, MLSP provided support in the form of food and personal hygiene packages for all registered women-victims of domestic violence, including the especially vulnerable categories of women. The packages will be urgently distributed to users through the Centers for Social Work.  (response received on 16.04.2020, confirmed at the coordinative meeting held on 04.05.2020 that the packages have been distributed)  Information submitted about the number of distributed humanitarian packages segregated by number of single mothers/victims of domestic violence, town and contents of the package.  (the information was submitted via e-mail on 08.05.2020) | Follow-up steps: The state to allocate long-term support to these two vulnerable categories (also after the end of the state of emergency) |
| 16. | Making of posters and sticker with numbers and directions for reporting domestic violence, distributed in shops and pharmacies and visibly displayed, including at traffic lights, light poles, bus stops  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is working on a campaign for reporting domestic violence in the state of emergency with COVID-19 and the same, in cooperation with the Government Public Relations Department, will be distributed through the social media and the public broadcasting service. Within the campaign, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is preparing information flyers and an informative video with the basic information for reporting domestic violence i.e. the existing services where victims can ask for help, and the same will be distributed at locations that are most visited in this period, such as pharmacies and markets.  (response from MLSP on 16.04.2020, at the coordinative meeting held on 03.05.2020 confirmed information that the flyers have been prepared and distributed to the Crisis Headquarters in the municipalities). The video was promoted on 05.05.2020 on the website of MLSP and the Government of RNM. The information for the flyers is point 8. | Follow-up steps:  Regular broadcasting of the video on all national TV stations in primetime twice a day;  Translation of the video in all languages of the communities;  Sharing of the video on the website and FB profiles of all institutions regardless of their primary area.  The prepared flyers with information about reports to be distributed through humanitarian packages which are provided to socially-vulnerable families. |
| 17. | Measures for increasing the awareness of citizens’ who are aware that someone’s health and life is endangered to report the violence, especially through pointing out the limited possibilities of the victims to do the same.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | 05.05.2020 – MLSP with support from OSCE prepared a video about the forms of violence and its reporting to institutions.  The video was published on the FB pages of MLSP and the Government of RNM. | Apart from the MLSP, no other ministry has shared information about domestic violence. Even on the FB profiles of the relevant ministers (apart from the ones of the Additional Deputy Minister Sanela Shkrijelj and the Deputy Prime Minister Carovska), there is no information about reporting and protection of victims of DV.  The Minister of Interior, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Justice and the Prime Minister to give video statements as soon as possible to encourage victims to report, as well as to provide information about available support service. In their addresses, they need to call on the other citizens to report if they have knowledge and to remind them that reporting is everyone’s responsibility. |
| 18. | In case of filling up the sheltering capacities for victims of domestic violence, or in towns where there are no shelter centres, temporary accommodation of victims in hotels following the same principle that applies to accommodation of persons in state quarantine.  (request submitted on 13.04.2020) | Verbal notification of the Additional Deputy Minister Sanela Shkrijelj and the technicaldeputyPrime Minister Mila Carovska that currently the capacities are not filled up and when that happens, appropriate solutions will be found and no victims of domestic violence in need of accommodation will be rejected.  (coordinative meeting held on 29.04.2020) | To follow the filling in of the capacities of the Centers for sheltering women and children victims of gender based violence. |

1. <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/merki> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://mtsp.gov.mk/pocetna-ns_article-zrtvite-na-semejno-nasilstvo-covid19.nspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/11716?fbclid=IwAR22dRPTvDTbXfoyH_G93_i2vY21o4tz0qHkt-1l3qy7-U8A14EZgBFnWK0> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)