

Dealing with Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence in the Western Balkans During and Following the COVID- 19 Health Crisis

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Recommendations to the Governments, donors and women's civil society organizations



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Introduction

Most of the Western Balkan governments declared a state of emergency or natural disaster in their respective countries, shortly after the COVID-19 was declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020. By the end of March 2020, all of the Balkan countries had some form of state of emergency, curfew, a list of measures and directions for self-isolation, quarantine measures, as well as various sanctions if these restrictions were not respected.

In the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), the government declared a state of emergency on 18 March 2020 for the entire country in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. During the emergency state, the government of RNM held 70 sessions in which new decisions and measures for dealing with the pandemic have been adopted¹. The adopted measures 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**. In the first month of the emergency state, no increase in the reporting of domestic violence incidents was noticeable. Due to the physical presence of the perpetrators, women were not able to call the help and support lines, or report the violence. Many women were afraid to seek health care and medical help due to the risk of coronavirus infection. Many women do not want to leave the violent environment and be placed in crisis and shelter centers because of fear of coronavirus infection. Women were afraid to report the violence and leave the home for fear of losing their jobs (if employed) after the termination of the government measures, or if they are unemployed, there is the fear of low employment opportunities and achieving economic independence after the end of the state of emergency due to the expected economic crisis. Furthermore, centers for social welfare were functional in part working hours and from home, meaning that they only provided telephone counseling. Except for the notification of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP)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 Serbia, state of emergency was declared on the 15th of March 2020. Institutions reduced their work to a minimum. Ministry of Interior³ and Governmental Coordination Body for Gender Equality⁴ reported on decrease in the number of reports on violence against women received by the state institutions. Ministry of Justice published contact data of women's CSOs support services on their web site ([Iskljuci nasilje](#)). WCSOs experienced increase in the number of calls and messages received, primarily because the relevant institutions were not accessible to them

¹ Government of R. of N. Macedonia, <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/merki>

² Ministry of Labor and social Policy of r. of N. Macedonia, [link](#) in Macedonian

³ More information available in Serbian via [link](#)

⁴ More information available in Serbian via [link](#)

or provided them with contradictory or insufficient information. In two cases reported to WCSOs⁵, women who have tried to report violence to police received a fine for violating curfew (50 euros). In majority of calls women reported to WCSOs various forms of psychological violence, with an increase in economic violence as well – especially not paying child support. Large number of calls to the SOS hotline for psychological-social support and to the free legal aid line referred to problems related to child contacts with the other parent during the state of emergency, and even cases in which one parent kept the child despite the court decision. Those women who had reported violence to relevant institutions believe that they did not receive adequate protection – because the abusers received only verbal warnings. According to survey conducted by SeConS⁶, about 200,000 people in Serbia, or 8% of those employed (including the informally employed and self-employed) lost their jobs during the public health crisis. The same survey confirmed worries of women CSOs expressed at the beginning of the state of emergency⁷, that the greatest burden but also the greatest risk during the Covid-19 crisis was borne by women: they accounted for as many as 86% of employees "on the first line of infection". Increased workload in the household and care for family members also remained with women (in 70% of households), who performed these jobs predominantly even before the crisis.

Montenegro did not declare state of emergency, but introduced curfew on the 31st of March 2020. The Minister of Health formed the National Coordination Body for Infectious Diseases (NKT), in charge of taking appropriate measures and activities to protect Montenegrin citizens from the spread of the new coronavirus epidemic. The initial state measures were controversial in relation to violation of the Law on Personal Data Protection. Namely, Montenegrin Government decided to publish the names of the people who are under medical observation or under the measures of self-isolation and even encouraged citizens to report those who violate self-isolation measures. Such controversial decision has caused reaction of human rights organizations, which requested from the Government to abandon this practice and protect the right to privacy of citizens⁸. The situation caused a high risk of violence against women, as confirmed by increased number of reports to WCSOs in March and April⁹. Police reported the same number of reports as usual. There were other problems related to COVID-19 measures. Many of WCSOs beneficiaries remained out of job and were facing very difficult economic situation. Most of them were not eligible for social support, because they had job till the beginning of Government's antigovernment anti corona measures. Anti-pandemic measures introduced by the Government have led to a reduced workforce also across all economic sectors and caused jobs to be lost. More than 40

⁵ News in Serbian available [here](#)

⁶ More information available in Serbian via [link](#)

⁷ More information available via [link](#)

⁸ NGO Human Rights Action Human Rights Action (HRA) press release on 23/03/2020, at:

<http://www.hraction.org/2020/03/23/government-to-stop-publishing-personal-data-of-citizens-in-isolation/?lang=en>

Moreover, the Belgium's leading current affairs magazine, *Le Vif* published an article with the opinion of of Ms. Cecile de Terwangne, law professor at Namur University in Belgium, who specializes in data protection. She noted that publishing personal data of citizens in isolation is an unnecessary and disproportionate measure, which may have long-term adverse effects on the protection of privacy of Montenegrin citizens (*Le Vif* Article „Coronavirus: Montenegro published the names and addresses of people suspected of being infected“, 07/04/2020, more information available via [link](#)

⁹ More information in Montenegrin available via [link](#)

percent of companies in Montenegro stopped working, 35 percent of companies were partially operating, while 23 percent of them were fully operational, of which 13 percent organized work from home¹⁰. On April 20, 2020, there was over 38,000 unemployed citizens on the records of the Employment Bureau, which is almost three thousand or 8 percent more than on March 31 this year¹¹. The gender segregated data are not available. On May 24, after 28 days in a row without new cases of COVID-19 infection, i.e. two incubation periods, Montenegro became the first "corona free" country in Europe¹². At the beginning of June, the Montenegrin government announced the end of the coronavirus epidemic on its territory, opened its borders to 130 countries with less than 25 active cases per 100,000 population, and lifted most measures taken to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. However, soon after, the second wave of epidemic started, so at the beginning of July the new set of more than 60 measures was introduced¹³, causing the lockdown of entire towns in the north of Montenegro that were severely affected by disease. Again, no specific measures or guidelines were related to emergency support and assistance provided to the most vulnerable groups of women and children, namely survivors of all forms of gender-based violence.

On 16 March 2020, *the Government of Kosovo* imposed restrictions on movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has likely impacted women suffering domestic violence. According to Victim Advocates, the number of such cases reported has remained similar, but police recently have observed increases compared to this time last year. Women's rights organizations working with domestic violence cases fear that the isolation measures coupled with family members' control of victims' movement may be preventing many women from reporting violence or accessing assistance.² As isolation measures subside, many women may be better positioned to report violence they have experienced during this time. The pandemic also clearly has affected women economically, further undermining their independence. The financial crisis, now undeniable, will erode and weaken women's social rights and will worsen make gender inequalities, which could contribute to future vulnerabilities and violence. Meanwhile, state institutions have reduced their work. Centres for social work (CSWs), responsible for supporting persons who have suffered violence, have very limited functions. Women and children in shelters are not receiving many services, including case management and psychological support, due to restrictions on movement. Most shelters lack resources to provide online psychological counselling. They also face challenges due to the lack of experience and technical resources necessary for online counselling. Municipalities have disinfected the shelters and shelters have bought disinfectants and gloves. Local CSOs have provided supplies such as personal protection equipment, food, and clothing to shelters; while larger organizations, such as UN Women, have

¹⁰ Survey conducted by the Union of Employers of Montenegro (MEF), with the technical support of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and in partnership with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), among Montenegrin businessmen to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business in Montenegro, at [link](#)

¹¹ Information from the official page of Employment Bureau of Montenegro, at: <http://www.zzzcg.me/>

¹² More information available in Montenegrin available via [link](#)

¹³ Source: website of Montenegrin Government at: http://www.gov.me/en/homepage/measures_and_recommendations/

provided computers and televisions. Shelter representatives have asked police to test women and children before bringing them to shelters, ensuring the safety of other residents as well as shelter workers. The Agency for Gender Equality has worked with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Internal Affairs to establish a temporary shelter facility for persons suffering violence who are awaiting COVID-19 testing or those affected.

In Albania the epidemic situation in the country was declared on 11 March 2020 (Ministry of Health and Social Protection Order No. 156/2 dated 11 March 2020). On the same day (11 March 2020) the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. The Government of Albania (GoA) declared a “Natural Disaster” on 24 March 2020, the situation created by COVID-19, with the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 243/2020 "On the declaration of the state of natural disaster". The Ministry of Health of Albania monitors and holds daily press conferences on the COVID-19 outbreak and publish the detailed information daily on the Ministry's website. According to the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the first phase of lockdown will cost the economy EUR 16 million in tax revenues.¹⁴ The most affected sectors will be tourism, transport and trade. 50 000 jobs have already been lost due to the crisis.¹⁵ Albania has developed a range of televised courses for primary and secondary students that air on national TV channels. Distance learning is also available via online platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom and Edmodo, and is organized at the school level. Unemployment measures are included in the first economic package, unemployment benefits were doubled during the pandemic. Persons receiving social assistance will receive double the amount during the pandemic. Albania is no exception to this global concern: with the country's prompt and resolute response, restrictive measures to counter the spread of the virus have significantly altered public and social life. In Albania, strict measures to inhibit COVID-19 weigh on disadvantaged groups such as female heads of households and rural women, especially in remote areas. Considering that the governments priority and focus has been oriented in the health system, there have not been politics conflicts between government and opposition party. The priorities and decisions on the laws and policies have changed during this last months. Women are affected by these crises especially the ones from the most vulnerable groups: violated women have to stay the entire time with their perpetrators. The GoA have taken different decisions and regulations during the lock down period, many of them mentioned below at the other sections of this report. The Ministry of Justice in the framework of the measures taken to respond to the health crises has significantly decreased the fund planned to be spend for the free legal aid (around 120.000 Eur)

In Bosnia and Hercegovina, on 17th March 2020, on the proposal of the Ministry of Security, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina decided to declare a state of natural or other disaster in Bosnia and Herzegovina because of the threat of outbreak of infectious disease COVID

¹⁴ More information in Albanian available via [link](#)

¹⁵ Document available in Albanian available via [link](#)

- 19 caused by coronavirus. The Federation BiH (FBiH) Government declared state of natural disaster on 16th of March 2020, and the Republika Srpska (RS) Parliament declared state of emergency on the 28th of March 2020. After this immediate response, both entity governments and the BiH Brčko District authorities held numerous sessions and introduced over 150 measures related to prevention of spread of COVID-19 and dealing with its consequences¹⁶ **with no specific measures or guidelines related to emergency support and assistance provided to the most vulnerable groups of women and children, namely survivors of all forms of gender based violence.** Subjects of protection from violence (police, centers for social work, health centers, judicial institutions, educational institutions) reduced their work during the emergency situation causing many general services to be restricted or unavailable for women and children exposed to violence.

¹⁶ More information in Bosnian available via [link](#)

1. Proposed post-crisis measures and next steps for protection of women and children victims of violence and domestic violence following COVID- 19 health crisis

The specific circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis posed a number of increased risks on violence against women and children, making homes unsafe for those facing DV and left them vulnerable to different forms of violence, sometimes greatly severe and fatal consequences such as: increased number of reported cases of DV, increased number of women and children fleeing DV and in need of sheltering and safe housing, femicides and loss of jobs and incomes mostly for women with need for financial aid and employment. Increased number of cases of DV have been already recorded official government records¹⁷ and in the women's CSOs reports¹⁸ and available studies of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on labor market.¹⁹ The consequences are multiplying because the pandemic isn't ceasing.

Therefore, urgent post-crisis measures and actions are crucial for this particularly vulnerable category of women and children victims of domestic violence. Proposed measures are in line with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, ratified in most of the WB countries, therefore should have been already in place before the pandemic emerged. The following proposed measures and next steps **must be implemented as soon as possible and must be implemented constantly, as permanent and sustainable programs.**

1.1 Measures on information about reporting DV and available services, reported cases and statistics

- **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 in the country where such services and Centers for Social Work are in place.** The responsible ministry/ institution should prepare informative video/ GIF/ message with information which should be broadcasted to all national and local televisions at primetime. All media outlets should publish banners with information on their websites. Informative video and banners must be translated to all languages of the communities in the country, as well as adapted for people with sensory disabilities.
- **Posters and stickers with numbers and directions for reporting domestic violence, should be distributed in post offices, public utility companies, shops, pharmacies, health institutions, restaurants, cafes and other business that are regularly visited**

¹⁷ More information in Macedonian available via [link](#)

¹⁸ AWC report on service provision in Serbia in the first month of the pandemic <https://www.womenngo.org.rs/en/news/1577-press-release-protection-and-support-for-women-victims-of-violence-during-the-first-month-of-the-state-of-emergency>

¹⁹ Summary of the Study of the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the state of emergency in Serbia on employment, working conditions and household tasks available here: <https://www.secons.net/files/SeCons%20Survey,%20Covid%2019%20and%20work.pdf>

by people. These materials should be visibly displayed, including at traffic lights, light poles, bus stops etc. in order to provide information to socially vulnerable families and citizens who don't have access to media and internet.

- **Information on reporting, assistance and support for domestic violence and violence against children should be published by all municipalities at the local level, and the municipalities should have active role in providing support to the victims.** Banners with information should be published on municipalities' websites and FB profiles.
- **The relevant ministries or institutions to publish weekly statistics on the number of reported cases of domestic violence, segregated by cities and gender of victims.** Information on reports of domestic violence should be shared on national televisions in prime time, published on government websites, websites and FB profiles of the Ministry of Interior; Ministries of Social Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of education and all municipalities (relevant ministries and institutions). The media should regularly report on the situation of violence against women in times of crisis and in non-crisis conditions.
- **Develop APPs that can be used by victims to report violence.** All countries should develop APPs for urgent reporting when violence occurs. Namely, by clicking a button the victim should be able to inform the police where she is located so she can receive protection. The APPs can also provide information about all available services in the country, contact from organizations that are providing support services for women victims, so as general information about gender-based violence and its forms (positive example from Montenegro).

1.2 Measures on prevention of DV and violence against children

- **Relevant ministries must lead the process of public campaigns and activities for raising awareness against DV and violence against children, including children witnesses of the domestic violence (which has significant immediate and delayed consequences for their development and well-being).** Such public campaigns must be implemented throughout the whole year constantly, not only on special dates related to women's rights and GBV. Campaigns must be planned and conducted in close cooperation with women CSO's. Public awareness raising activities must include all regions of the country, which requires participation of the Governments, ministries and local municipalities. The campaigns should be designed in a way to provide information to all vulnerable groups that are at greater risks, such as: women with disabilities, women from ethnic minorities, women living in rural areas etc.
- **Specific directions in awareness raising campaigns for citizens who are aware that someone's health and life are in danger.** Citizens must be educated and encouraged to report DV and violence against children, and to understand that sometimes the victims cannot report the violence due to fear and insecurities related to severe consequences on their lives, fear of homelessness etc.

- **Safety tips and safety instructions for women and children victims of violence.** The state institutions (Ministry of labour and social policy, Ministry of health and Ministry of interior) in cooperation with women CSO's should develop unified document with safety tips and instructions how to avoid/escape when violent incident occurs. Tips and instructions should be practical and user friendly, easily understandable so that every woman can understand and use. It's not recommendable for these tips and instructions to be publicly shared, so other ways for distribution should be considered (positive example from Albania).

1.3 Measures on protection of women victims of DV and their children

- **National and local institutions must allocate budget funds for establishing and sustainability of specialized services for women victims of GBV and DV and their children.** Governments must implement minimum standards for available specialized services for victims of GBV and DV according to the Istanbul Convention, based on population numbers, number of available beds per shelters and geographic dispersion in every region of the country. Governments and local institutions must allocate budget funds for specialized services for victims of GBV and DV, increase and double them where necessary.
- **Donors should provide urgent funding for specialized support services for women who survived violence in order to enable them to serve increased number of women and children victims.**
- **Urgent provision of specialized accommodation services such as Shelter centers, Crisis Centers with special protection and health protocol for accommodation.** All countries must be able to accommodate every women victim of DV and her children when she asks for help, no matter which part of country she comes from. This means that accommodation services must available in every part of the country. Free of charge and immediate coronavirus tests for shelter users must be insured. While waiting for results, temporary accommodation for shelter users must be ensured by the state.
- **Provision of counseling support through psychosocial support locally.** Municipalities that have counseling centers have to increase staff capacity, and those that do not have such centers need to open counseling centers or to provide funds for transportation to the nearest counseling center in another city;
- **Provision of free legal aid in accordance with the FLA law.** National and local institutions must ensure free, continued and safe access to legal assistance and access to juridical remedies for women and girls at risks or subjected to domestic and sexual violence, harassment and abuse in accordance to the national FLA laws for women victims of DV.
- **Online support.** Women CSO's should develop and implement protocols for safe and secure provision of online support services (psychological counseling, counseling for social rights, legal counseling) to women who survived violence. Donors should assist

women CSO's in providing technical equipment for secure online platforms of service provision (positive example from Serbia).

a) Ministries should provide professionals in relevant institutions with technical equipment and user instructions, safe and secure online platforms to support them in organizing meetings from the safe distance, planning, implementing and monitoring activities regarding reported cases of violence against women. Such measure will increase the resources of the professionals in institutions to respond to increase demand for service provision, safeguarding them in the same time.

b) When using internet (or any other method) for organizing meetings of professionals in institutions as well in CSOs regarding violence against women cases, professionals must protect personal data of women survivors of violence according to the relevant law on personal data protection.

- **National institutions to develop programs for prevention of burn out syndrome for professionals working on violence against women issues, with focus on first liners – crisis intervention teams, professionals from shelter and crisis centers.** The program should include supervision support for professionals that work in state institutions and CSO's service providers.
- **Monitoring of the quality of specialized services for women victims of DV provided by state and non-state service providers.** Establishment of specialized services is not enough, wheatear they are run by the state or non- state service providers. Services which are provided must be in accordance with the minimal standards of the Istanbul Convention and must be available and accessible to all women victims of DV. Regular and constant monitoring of the specialized services is necessary to be conducted throughout the year, especially in the post-crisis period, which will monitor the quality of the provision of services. Women victims need to have information on where to report if the services are not working, didn't provide the necessary help and support or have has any difficulties in receiving the service. Women CSO's should lead the monitoring process and report on regular basis about gaps in provision of support.
- **Mobile intervention teams in every city in the country.** Mobile intervention teams are functioning in the city of Skopje, R. of North Macedonia, and they are available 24/7 for vulnerable citizens under social risks, including victims of DV. These teams are assigned by the local Center for social work and can act upon a call, intervene in the field with police assistance. Mobile intervention team in Skopje works regularly throughout the year, no matter crisis or non-crisis conditions. National and local institutions must establish mobile intervention teams in every city where a Center for social work exists, the teams must be available 24/7 and in good coordination with the police and health institutions. Reports of cases of DV against women and children can be addressed to the mobile interventions team (positive example from North Macedonia).

1.4 Reintegration and rehabilitation services for women victims fleeing DV and their children

- **Financial Aid.** National and local institutions must allocate budget funds to support women victims of violence in the form of financial assistance. Women victims of DV and their children who are fleeing DV and the violent surroundings must be supported with direct financial aid, with available funds intended specifically for women and children victims of violence, i.e. on the basis of being victims of violence, not persons at social risk (positive example from Albania).
- **Safe housing.** National and local institutions must allocate budget funds for assistance and support of women victims of violence in the form safe long-term housing, psychosocial assistance and support and free legal aid. Reintegration services which offer this type of support must be established in every city in country. Houses for open or transit housing, apartment units for victims of DV and other housing opportunities must be available besides shelter and crisis centers. Rehabilitation services in the form of psychosocial counseling, economic empowerment and free legal aid must be available together with housing opportunities, provided by specialized service providers (positive example from North Macedonia).
- **Economic empowerment.** Measures for economic empowerment and employment of women victims of DV. Some governments have in place programs or measure for economic empowerment of women victims of DV, but most of these measures are not created according the specific needs of the victims. Employment agencies must create or adjust created programs and measures for women victims of DV taking in consideration the specific circumstances in which the victims are. These means that victims must be treated like one parent families and have the same benefits and rights. Specifics employment measures should be directed to jobs with only 1 shift in the morning, flexible hours from start of the shift to end of the shift and similar criteria.

2. Overview of actions and steps for protection of women and children victims of domestic violence undertaken by the Government and competent intuitions

R. of North Macedonia

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 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 CSOs 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. Here is short overview of the steps undertaken by relevant ministries related to violence against women and domestic violence. (The detailed overview is linked in the references).

- MOI announced that the victims of crimes will not be subject to sanctions if they leave their homes due to violence in the police station. There is no special notification for removal of the perpetrators of domestic violence from the homes.
- MLSP prepared informative videos and flyers on the forms of violence and the existing services for assistance and support from domestic violence;
- With the support of UNDP, 7 municipalities published numbers for reporting domestic violence on their web portals and FB profiles;
- MLSP sent a notification to all municipalities for urgency in dealing with cases of domestic violence;
- A link has been published on www.koronavirus.gov.mk leading to information about existing services for GBV and DV;
- MLSP informed that the Centers for the Care of Victims of Domestic Violence are regularly disinfected and the accommodation of the victims is treated in accordance with the

Guidelines for organizing quarantine for KOVID 19 adopted by a decision of the Government. In addition, the MLSP informed that the accommodation facilities for victims have not been filled, but if that happens, an appropriate solution will be provided.

- The National Network has prepared a special Protocol on Health Care and Safe Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence at Centers for the Victims of Domestic Violence (Shelters) and other centers providing housing services in the event of a health crisis or pandemic. The protocol was submitted to the MLSP for further review and adoption.
- MLSP announced that the Centers for Social Work, at the request of the parent with whom the children do not live, will make changes in the solutions for seeing according to the measures. The MLSP appealed to parents to agree on the sight of children with the parent with whom they do not live, if possible, regardless of the decision, and in accordance with the curfew and restrictions on movement.
- MLSP provided food and hygiene packages for all registered victims of domestic violence, as well as for all single parents at social risk.
- MOI and MLSP published statistics on reported cases of domestic violence for the first quarter of 2020. MLSP sent information to the National Network on the number of newly registered victims of domestic violence divided by months as of 08.05.2020. This statistic has not been made public.
- Apart from the MLSP, no other competent ministry has shared information on reports of violence or messages of encouragement to victims.

Serbia:

The Ministry of Justice published recommendations regarding the work of courts and public prosecutor's offices during the state of emergency including proceedings in domestic violence cases.²⁰

The Ministry of Interior reported on the statistic regarding lower number of the reports of VAW received during the state of emergency and invited women to report violence.

EU Delegation in Serbia announced delivering 100.000 Euros to 14.000 most affected women in Serbia, which was most welcomed by the Autonomous Women's Center. What worries the Autonomous Women's Center is the fact that the decision on who will get the financial aid was entrusted to the Red Cross in Serbia, which does not, and should not have access to any data related to women victims of domestic violence, single mothers, etc.

²⁰ More information available in Serbian language via [link](#)

Montenegro:

Montenegrin government launched campaign in cooperation with Women's Rights Centre (WRC) and several WCSOs – **#Bezbjedna doma (Safe at Home)** referring survivor of violence to WCSOs support services.

The police director, in accordance with WRC recommendations, ordered a more intensive issuing of a police eviction order, and the Supreme State Prosecutor publicly requested increased awareness of the prosecution in the cases of GBV.

The Ministry of Interior launched online app #Sigurna doma (Safe at Home) intended to quick report and referral of violence survivors

The Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality organized a Consultative hearing of Minister of Economy, Minister of the Interior and, Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, on the topic "Gender aspects of measures taken during the COVID-19 virus pandemic".²¹

Kosovo:

Since isolation measures have begun, the Ministry of Health made survivors of domestic violence exempt from curfew if they were seeking help from abuse at home.

Courts have remained open to process protection orders for survivors of domestic violence.

The Agency for Gender Equality has worked with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Internal Affairs to establish a temporary shelter facility for persons suffering violence who are awaiting COVID-19 testing or those affected

UN Women launched an awareness raising/social media campaign, including a TV commercial, called "Report Violence, Save Lives!" Along with prominent members of the CSO community, Albin Kurti (the prime minister at the time) and Vjosa Osmani (Chairwoman of the Assembly of Kosovo) also spoke out against domestic violence. This campaign provided the police and victim advocate's hotline for women experiencing violence.

²¹ More information in Montenegrin available via [link](#)

Albania:

As the responsible state authority regarding the issues of gender equality and domestic violence, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSP) has sent an official letter to the Ministry of Interior and the Albanian State Police, requesting their support to treat very carefully, prioritise and verify all kinds of information that police hear/receive regarding a potential DV incident happening and to facilitate as much as possible the process of DV incidents reporting (through text messages, notification on police webpage or social media page, reporting from neighbours, citizens, etc.)

- The MHSP has sent to **all local co-ordinators against DV in the 61 municipalities** of the country **a letter to remind** them of their key duties and responsibilities regarding the treatment of DV cases with high priority especially now, during the pandemic COVID-19 emergency.
- The MHSP has approved a **“Protocol on the functioning of public and non-public residential centres providing housing services for victims/survivors of domestic violence and for victims/survivors of trafficking in the COVID-19 pandemic situation”**.²² The purpose of this Protocol is to assist service providers (shelters) to function as effectively as possible in accordance with the limitations due to preventive measures.
- **MHSP has approved an “Order for the management of cases involving children in need for protection during the emergency COVID-19”** (Order of the Minister of Health and Social Protection No. 253 dated 10 April 2020). The Council of Ministers Normative Act No. 9 dated 25 March 2020 [“For taking special measures in the field of judicial activity, during the duration of the epidemic caused by COVID-19”](#) foreseen suspension of deadlines for filing lawsuits, complaints as well as for the performance of any procedural action in administrative, civil and criminal process, according to the provisions of this normative act. When deadlines start during the suspension period, they are postponed until the completion of the emergency period of pandemic COVID-19. But this rule does not apply in family cases related to domestic violence, child custody, children’s rights, and adoption process, alimentary and in some other civil and criminal cases.
- **In the frame of economic measures** undertaken from the Government of Albania to support employed people in small businesses, as well as unemployed people, or the ones under the economic aid scheme, as foreseen in the Council of [Ministers Decision No. 254](#) dated 27 March 2020, **482 victims/survivors of domestic violence who have a protection order issued, will benefit from a double payment of economic assistance (for three months, starting from 1 April), as a result of the Protection Order they have.** The double payment will be applied also to people under the economic aid scheme,

²² More information in Albanian available via [link](#)

including women head of families, of whom there are around 6,000 who benefit the economic aid (ref. progression data).

- **A TV spot on key service providers** to be called in case of a DV incident as well as on the citizens obligation to report a case they witness, will be launched at the end of this week, with the support of UN Women;
- **The closure of educational institutions to prevent the spread of COVID-19** was ordered as well (Minister of Health and Social Protection Order No. 135 dated 9 March 2020) followed by a series of orders related to precautionary measures, which are updated periodically, based on the development of the situation in the country.
- The Council of Ministers Decision No. 254 dated 27 March 2020 “For foreseeing the procedures, documentation and the measure of financial aid profitable from workers in small businesses with an annual profit until 14 million ALL, payment of economic aid and the payment for the unemployed people, during the COVID-19 emergency” foresees particular measures such as: *(i) the provision of financial aid for employees/self-employees in the level of the minimum wage, for the interrupted period of businesses activities due to the COVID-19 risk; (ii) double payment for persons under the economic aid scheme; and (iii) double payment for individuals who receive the unemployment payment.* From these provisions all those who are part of these categories will benefit, including women, if they have applied by 10 March 2020. The procedures for receiving these benefits are also described in this decision.²³
- A [specific GIF about the risk of increase in DV incidents or prevalence in the situation of the COVID-19 emergency](#) has been prepared by UN Women Albania and published in social media, as well as a joint message from UN agencies regarding the risk of DV in the COVID-19 emergency.
- Local governmental state and non-state actors are putting efforts to strengthen effective local multi-sectorial institutional response in domestic violence cases in the cases already managed during the COVID-19 situation. Through the UNDP support is provided to 15 municipalities to establish and strengthen co-ordinated referral mechanisms for domestic violence cases, expedited local efforts are taking place on how to best use the specialised support services provided by state and non-state actors for DV and GBV victims/survivors in this emergency situation. Municipalities **are sharing tailored standardised information on safety tips for DV/GBV victims/survivors in the occurrence of violence incidents** and they have reached 55,000 people. Practical and user-friendly information sets are shared by a considerable number of municipalities in their social media channels aiming at maximising community outreach. Five other municipalities supported by the Planning Local Government Project of USAID have also jointed this initiative of sharing standardised information and safety tips for DV victims/survivors through their social media and have reached around 9,584 persons;

²³ More information available via [link](#)

- **Safety instructions for victims/survivors of DV while staying isolated with their abusers** are also prepared and published from UNDP Albania in their social media.
- Regarding the **statistics of Domestic Violence**, data from the Albanian State Police show that the number of cases reported followed with a request for protection orders, or followed according to the specific article of Criminal Code related to DV, or number of cases where a protection order is violated/broken, etc., are lower compared to the same trimester of a year ago (2019).

All acts (such as orders, decisions, regulations, etc.) are periodically updated and can be found in the web-page of [Ministry of Health and Social Protection](#), respectively in section "[New measures introduced to response against COVID-19](#)".

Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Courts throughout the Bosnia and Herzegovina worked under reduced capacities focusing only on emergency cases related to violation of COVID-19 government-imposed measures. Cases of violence against women and domestic violence were not considered as priority, and there is no available information if the courts remained open for processing protection orders for survivors of domestic violence.

Centers for social work were operating in reduced capacities and duty shifts, with no available information about introducing specific guidelines for prioritizing cases of domestic violence.

In April 2020, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of the Bosnia and Herzegovina developed the document titled ***“Emergency and Support Measures for the Most Disadvantaged Categories of Population at the Time of COVID-19 Pandemic”*** that, among other items, addresses providing support and assistance to victims of domestic violence who are or will be placed in the safe houses in BiH. Within this document, the Ministry proposed conducting an information campaign aimed at informing professional and general public and especially victims about available support services and ways of obtaining them, at ensuring that safe houses have enough capacities for adequate response in the public health emergency of epidemic, providing additional SOS lines and staff for SOS lines and ensuring additional accommodation, through institutions of social protection, which will have a possibility of isolation. This section of the document has been developed based on the consultations of the BiH Agency for Gender Equality with the organizations that provide specialized services of assistance and support to the victims of domestic violence, including the Foundation United Women.

3. Women's civil society organizations activities for protection of women and children of domestic violence during COVID-19 crisis

National Network to end violence against women and domestic violence, North Macedonia:

National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence prepared and sent several documents to the Government, relevant ministries and the media, and started providing telephone and online services for women victims of GBV and DV, parents and children.

On the 19.03.2020, National Network published a press release on: **Increased risk of domestic and intimate partner violence during a state of emergency**.²⁴ This press release alerted the public and the Government on the increased risks on domestic violence in the specific situation, and included contact numbers from available services throughout the country for reporting DV and receiving specialized services. More than 15 media, local and national shared the press release on their websites and FB profiles.

Short tips for domestic violence victims on how to protect themselves and how to escape if needed were prepared and shared with all organizations that the Network cooperates with. Decision for not sharing this document publicly was made mostly because of the possibility for perpetrators to read them and prevent victims escape.

Due to the emergency of the situation, on 09.04.2020 a **Request for amending the decision for prohibition of movement of citizens over the entire territory of the country**²⁵ was sent to the Government. This document 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 13.04.2020 a **Request for issuing urgent measures for protection of women and children of domestic violence during state of emergency**²⁶ was sent to the Government of RNM. The document contained an explanation of the current situation, the risk factors for increasing

²⁴ More information in Macedonian available via [link](#)

²⁵ More information in Macedonian available via [link](#)

²⁶ More information in Macedonian available via [link](#)

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.

Additionally, National Network prepared a **Protocol on Health Care and Safe Housing for Victims of Domestic Violence at Centers for the Victims of Domestic Violence (Shelters) and other centers providing housing services in the event of a health crisis or pandemic** which was sent to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy on review. The MLSP acknowledged the need for such document and gave affirmative support for further adoption. However, the Protocol is still in draft version and is not adopted.

On 18.05.2020 an **Overview of urgent measures and steps for protection of women and children victims of domestic violence undertaken by the Government and competent intuitions²⁷** was prepared and published. 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.

In order to provide support and help to women and children victims of DV, National Network established 3 services which provided telephone and online support: counseling and support by social worker, counseling and support by psychologist and counseling and support by legal advisor. These services were established in March 2020.

Regarding informing the victims about available support, National network published on social media on regular basis all available numbers for reporting violence from the centers for social welfare, police stations and CSO's that are service providers. Additionally, national network through social media promote the announcement of MOI that victims of domestic violence can leave the home in police curfew and this information was shared more than 200 shares. Furthermore, 15 municipalities published numbers for reporting domestic violence on their website and FB profiles.

Additionally, a **National helpline for positive parenting²⁸** was established in April 2020. The helpline provides assistance to parents and guardians in our country in the fulfillment of their parental role, and thus to support the proper growth and development of children. Services are provided by telephone operators every day, except national holidays.

²⁷ More information in Macedonian available via [link](#)

²⁸ More information in Macedonian available via [link](#)

Autonomous Women's Centre (AWC), Serbia:

AWC **issued 2 press releases** pointing to the position of women who survived violence and problems they face under the state of emergency measures declared by the government.²⁹ Invited by the Media, AWC activists **appeared in the numerous TV and newspaper interviews.**³⁰

Database of free services for women who survived violence was developed and published on the AWC website³¹ and social media pages. AWC database was further downloaded 639 times and published on the websites of the institutions,³² Media³³. Shared via FB page by numerous CSOs, data base reached over 2300 people. Number of women survivors of violence who contacted AWC, increased.

AWC addressed institutions to issue guidance with regard to children's contact with a parent they do not live with.³⁴ Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy published instructions regarding parents who are seeing child in time specified by the court judgment.³⁵

AWC collected data on Implementation of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence from Ministry of Interior and Republic Public Prosecution Office for March 2020. *Data received by the Autonomous Women's Center from the Republic Public Prosecution Office shows that the number of reviewed newly reported cases of domestic violence at the meetings of the Groups for Coordination and Cooperation was lower by 21.6% compared to February 2020 and 18.4% compared to March last year. The number of held meetings of the Groups for Coordination and Cooperation was also lower, 15.7% compared to February 2020 and 16.8% compared to March 2019. At the same time, 24.4% less individual protection and support plans were created in March 2020 compared to the same month last year. Six basic public prosecutors' offices in Serbia did not hold a single meeting of the Group for Coordination and Cooperation during the month of March 2020 (although a state of emergency was introduced in the second half of the month), and another five had only one meeting (which is below the legal minimum). The decrease previously mentioned doubled in April of 2020 (when the state of emergency was in force for the whole month, and curfews lasted longer than 48 hours): in comparison to April 2019 the number of new reported cases decreased by 62.6 %, the number of produced individualized plans decreased by 66.2 %, while the number of meetings held by the Group for Coordination and Cooperation decreased by 42.2 %.*

²⁹ More information available via [link](#) and [link](#)

³⁰ More information available in Serbian language via [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#)

³¹ More information available via [link](#)

³² More information available in Serbian language via [link](#)

³³ More information available in Serbian language via [link](#)

³⁴ More information available via [link](#)

³⁵ More information available via [link](#)

AWC was invited by the Governmental Coordination Body for Gender Equality to report in front of the representatives of relevant ministries on VAW in the state of emergency. Autonomous Women's Center appealed to all institutions to act in accordance with the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, especially regarding decrease in the number of reviewed newly reported cases of domestic violence and lower number of the meetings of the Groups for Coordination and Cooperation. Ministry of Justice responded quickly by providing technical possibilities to the prosecutors' offices to host online meetings of the Groups for coordination and cooperation.³⁶

In cooperation with Western Balkan WCSOs AWC delivered reports, on the situation in the region regarding VAW in the time of the pandemic, to different interested parties, among them donors. Additional financial opportunities became available to WCSOs in WB region to support women who survived violence in the time of pandemic.

Kosovo Women's Network (KWN), Kosovo:

KWN **prepared and published a social media campaign** with safety information for victims of gender- based violence.

Also, KWN **prepared a recommendation to the government of Kosovo for looking at COVID through a gendered perspective.** The recommendations first outlined the situation of women in Kosovo under the current quarantine measures. It addressed the undue burden of care placed on women in this crisis, the rise in domestic violence, and the effect on the informal economy (which is mostly made up of women). It then outlined specific recommendations for different ministries within the national government, as well as recommendations for the European Union. It also recommended ways for institutions to work together during COVID in order to service victims of gender-based violence.

Throughout this pandemic, KWN has been **keeping in contact with shelters** to make sure they have the necessary items to stay operational and clean.

The Network has also been **gathering data about the current situation** (statistics on reports of DV from the police and protection orders from the courts), and keeping it updated in order to have accurate statistics by the end of quarantine.

Most importantly, KWN has **secured much needed personal protective equipment** and other resources for shelters and service workers.

³⁶ More information available in Serbian language via [link](#)

Women's Rights Centre (WRC), Montenegro:

WRC intensified media activities related to victim protection and women's labor rights, that were particularly hit by the pandemic crisis³⁷. Our media statements have been echoed in the public appearances of the Supreme State Prosecutor and Minister of Interiors, who requested a more efficient response from their respective institutions. Our requests for more efficient prosecution work addressed to the Supreme State Prosecutor have resulted in a clear VDT guideline to all state prosecutors' offices to process cases of violence effectively³⁸.

WRC was part of the national campaign #Bezbjedna doma, launched by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, with the goal to encourage victims to report violence and seek help³⁹. For this purpose, we introduced an additional mobile S.O.S. line and prolonged the working time.⁴⁰ WRC have started the procedure of obtaining a toll-free number at Telekom Montenegro. We supported government efforts in creating visuals and campaign messages and by providing our contacts with an additional mobile number. More information at:

<https://mina.news/crnagora/pokrenuta-kampanja-bezbjednadoma/>
<http://www.mup.gov.me/vijesti/223650/Bezbjedna-doma-da-bi-svaka-kuca-bila-dom.html>
<https://www.dan.co.me/?nivo=3&rubrika=Drustvo&clanak=740446&datum=2020-04-10>

The fact is that staying in the same space with perpetrator for a long time increases the risk of violence, so there has been an increase in the number of reports to WCSOs. National SOS Helpline had an increase in the number of calls of 23 percent, why WRC doubled the interventions in April (103) compared to March 2020⁴¹. Isolation reduced the possibility of social support for victims of violence, their resistance to stress caused by violence, especially when it comes to young children.

This situation definitely makes it difficult also to report violence, especially if we know that abusers control the victims and often take away their cellphone to prevent them from calling for help. In addition, because of movement restrictions, many victims believe they have to stay home even in the event of an immediate emergency. That is why, at this point, the role of police is crucial, which is why we sent a set of urgent recommendations to the police director and the minister of internal affairs, particularly related to their obligation to issue emergency eviction order. This measure was crucial for the protection of victims and the prevention of further violence, and due to the fact that the courts operate in a limited capacity, dealing only with urgent cases, which are dominated by cases for breach of provisional measures against COVID-19, but not for domestic violence, which remains in the background. The police director issued the directive according to our recommendation on police eviction order.

³⁷ More information in Montenegrin available [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), [link](#) and [link](#)

³⁸ More information in Montenegrin available via [link](#)

³⁹ More information in Montenegrin available via [link](#), [link](#), [link](#), and [link](#)

⁴⁰ More information in Montenegrin available via [link](#)

⁴¹ More information in Montenegrin available via [link](#)

WRC sent recommendations for acting of the institutions in protecting victims of GBV during COVID-19 pandemic

WRC delivered report on the situation in the region regarding VAW in the time of the pandemic, to different interested parties, among them donors.

WRC participated in the Consultative hearing of Minister of Economy, Minister of the Interior and, Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, on the topic "Gender aspects of measures taken during the COVID-19 virus pandemic".⁴² The Hearing took place in the Parliament of Montenegro and Was organized by the Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality. WRC representative raised issues related to position of women in the context of pandemic and share findings on particular difficulties faced by women violence survivors, the necessity of financial support and social housing for those who face the risk of poverty.

During the lockdown WRC provided food and hygiene packages for 10 beneficiaries who are victims of domestic violence and single mothers at social risk.

WRC joined forces with Red Cross, WRC joined forces with the Red Cross, providing legal representation for victims of violence from marginalized groups with whom the Red Cross came in contact during the distribution of humanitarian aid.

In May 27, WRC **organized the meeting with the Deputy Minister of labor and Social Welfare, Mr Goran Kusevija**, where we discussed possibilities for providing financial support and social housing to VAW survivors. The idea was well received by the Ministry representative, but we were advised to start such initiative with the Capital City.

Gender Alliance for Development Centre (GADC), Albanian Women's Empowerment Network (AWEN), Albania:

Albanian Women's Empowerment Network (AWEN), its members and the Gender Alliance for Development Centre (GADC) jointly and/or as independent organizations have organized many activities and monitoring processes during the closure due to pandemic situation created by COVID-19.

AWEN member organizations **have noticed a very significant increase in the number of cases that have requested assistance during the quarantine period**, compared to January and February 2020 or the same period in the previous year. **Requests for assistance** are mainly related to the steps that can be taken if violence is repeated or increased during isolation, confirmation of the Immediate Protection Order (short term) and issuance of a Protection Order

⁴² More information in Montenegrin available via [link](#)

(long term), extension of the Protection Order, denunciation of cases of violence, need for psychological support and counseling on how to keep the violent situation under control, counseling related to aggravated mental health due to isolation and fear of episodes of violence, etc.

According to AWEN, the percentage of denunciations/ reporting to the police does not reflect the real situation of domestic violence in the country during the isolation, as many victims of violence have not sought for help because of various reasons, such as: lack of access to information due to isolation; the victim and the abuser live in the same apartment and her movements were closely monitored by the abuser; restrictions of the movement of citizens in general and fear of administrative and penal sanctions; lack of an alternative shelter, etc. Despite the isolation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, AWEN member organizations (10 organizations working mainly in 8 regions of the country (Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Vlora, Durrës, Saranda, Pogradec, Peshkopi), some of them with national coverage of services for Victims of Violence and Trafficking, have continued their activity and provision of services for victims of domestic violence and victims/potential victims of trafficking and their children. During this period, the organizations have made available to the public the contact numbers of specialists (psychologists, lawyers, social worker) who have provided the relevant services by phone during working hours and week days, some of them during 24 hours/ 7 days. In addition to distance psychological and legal counseling, representation in courts for issuance of protection orders, as well as psychological support in police stations for victims of violence, etc. has been available. Cases have been continuously referred to the relevant local administrative units, while many women victims of domestic violence facing economic difficulties have been assisted with food packages. The most important activities and organizations acting against GBV and DV are mentioned below:

AWEN **provided recommendations to the MHSP** to urgently prepare and share with all relevant stakeholder an emergency protocol for shelters and community which was partly accepted.

GADC **monitored for two months the activity of Coordinated Community Response (CCR)** against gender-based violence and DV, during COVID-19, **in 11 municipalities**. The reports are in Albanian language in the following [link](#). An overall report with findings and recommendations is under preparation and it will be launched in mid-June with data and information about the prevalence of DV and the level of response from the CCRs in local level. A set of recommendations are included and will be submitted to the GoA and The Albanian Parliament also. GADC findings due to monitoring are as follows

- Coordinated Community Response (CCR) and the Referral mechanisms at the local level address a small number of cases of domestic violence, compared to the reports at the CSOs and Police stations. Their response is no longer coordinated by all

- members Referral mechanisms, as most of them do not participate and do not prioritize domestic violence in their work.
- The local coordinator or employee of gender equality in Municipality level is overburdened with other jobs in the municipality, this shows a very low level of awareness of the mayors in matters related to domestic violence.
 - Municipalities continue not to invest in awareness campaigns and materials against gender-based violence and domestic violence, thus not following their legal obligations deriving from the Law on measures and domestic violence and the National Strategy against DV and its action plan (2016 – 2020). Everything remains in the hands of donors or non-governmental organizations.
 - Frequent shifts of local coordinators or gender equality workers create gaps for months in the coordinated organization of response to violence and handling of cases. These employees, even when they start working, remain waiting for months to receive the relevant training.

The National Counselling Line for Women and Girls, received a **triple number of phone calls** compared to a year ago **395 phone calls for March 2020 and 726 phone calls during 2000 calls for the period of April – June 2020**.

The association “Woman, Peace and Security” has continued to provide services to victims of domestic violence, in Durres municipality, based on the project Social Center for Women and Girls” supported by AWE/SIDA. **During the Covid-19 pandemic (March 9-April 30), the organization distributed 20 awareness posts on the social network Facebook.** According to the reports of this organization the number of women who report DV raised up during Covid -19. **9 protection orders issued within one day in Durrës District.**⁴³

“Women's Forum Elbasan” is acting in the municipality of Elbasan. **During the period of 4 months January-June this organization has received 442 calls to support the cases of women and girls** in need and with a history of violence. (Note that these calls are recorded at the county level).

National Center for the Treatment of Victims of Domestic Violence (QKTVDH) have been accommodated new residents near QKTVDH during the period of COVID-19 pandemic, where they have received the relevant services. In March, 1 new case (1 woman without children) was accommodated, referred by the Kamza police station. In April, 2 new cases were accommodated (1 unaccompanied minor girl, a victim of sexual violence, referred by the **Lilium Center**- Crisis management center for cases of sexual violence⁴⁴ and 1 woman from Kosovo referred by the Kamza police station.

⁴³More information available via [link](#)

⁴⁴ More information available via [link](#)

The Association "I Woman Pogradec", operates in the municipality of Pogradec, East Albania. **During the period of pandemic from 17 new cases identified**, this association has provided psychological support for 9 of the victims of domestic violence. Some cases have been referred to the AWEN network and other organizations as needed. One case was referred to the Kosovo Women's Network after the referral came from Kosovo and the other cases were discussed with the Local Coordinators against DV in the municipality and/or Administrators of Administrative Units to support them with economic aid. For the period March-April 2020, the association "I Woman" has provided psychological and legal advice by phone and social networks and the What's up platform. **This organization has conducted a total of 138 counseling sessions for the period January – June 2020 for more than 100 persons, out of which 89 women.**

The association "Jona" operates in the municipality of Saranda, South Albania. **In March and April, the organization received 29 phone calls, calls from women / girls who, influenced by the fear of quarantining with the perpetrator, asked for help and were offered psychological counseling and assisted 17 girls and women through a package of services.** Also, the economic needs referred to by these calls, for food or other assistance, have been conveyed by the organization near the municipality of Saranda.

The Centre "Woman to Woman", operates in Shkodra, North Albania. **Since January 2020, the organization "Woman to Woman" has received a total of 210 calls.** All keywords have been domestic violence. According to the need presented by the callers, the organization **has referred psychosocial counseling for 236 cases and legal counseling for 66 cases.**

"Vatra" Centre, operates in Vlora district, for all those girls and women seeking counseling and assistance in the community, "Vatra" Center located in Vlora has made publicly available the contact numbers of its specialists (psychologist, lawyer, social worker) who have provided relevant services by phone 24 hours / day. As of March 11, 55 women and girls' victims of domestic violence called "Vatra" Centre Legal Clinic contact number to seek help and raise their concerns. Mostly, the reasons of these phone calls were as follows:

- To ask for financial assistance, as a consequence of the lockdown situation.
- To request information regarding their civil / penal case (cases on which they have been provided with legal assistance before the period of isolation).
- To report violence.

For 62 girls and women, victims of domestic violence, Vatra's specialists have provided direct support, such as:

- Representation in court and gaining the protection orders;
- Psychological support at the Police Station for victims of violence;
- Legal advice by telephone;
- Psychological counselling through telephone;

- 45 beneficiaries (66 members of their families, including 37 children), during April, victims of domestic violence who are facing economic difficulties were supported with food packages and hygienic-sanitary items for women

In order not to escalate domestic violence in isolation, the councillors for abusive men continued to provide counselling services for abusive men and boys. As of March 11, **10 boys and men perpetrators have been supported by psycho-social counselling** over the phone. The service is focused on managing aggression, strengthening self-control, improving relationships within the family, etc. **22 cases have requested economic assistance from the “Vatra” Centre.** After having assessed their needs, they were referred for support to the Directorate of Social Services in the municipality of Vlora. Regarding those cases which presented urgent needs, they were referred to the relevant institutions.

Overall, according to the **data gathered by AWEN, about 534 cases of domestic violence and trafficking have been supported by nine AWEN member organizations,** through provision of hundreds of psychological and legal counseling sessions and/or concrete legal assistances. The highest increase in requests for assistance and support was observed in the region of Dibra (125%) Elbasan (100%), Shkodra (76%), the area of Pogradec (58%) and Durrës (50%).

Foundation United Women (FUW), Bosnia and Hercegovina:

The Foundation United Women prepared and sent several documents to the governmental institutions, relevant ministries and the media, and continued with providing online legal and psychosocial counseling, SOS helpline, and the Safe House assistance for women and children exposed to gender based violence and domestic violence. These activities were conducted independently and in coordination with other women’s CSOs through networks.

On 23rd of March, 2020, **FUW prepared the Public Statement**, and called for systemic measures during COVID-19 pandemic to include availability of assistance and protection for women⁴⁵

On 30th March, 2020, in coordination with the Foundation Lara from Bijeljina and Citizens’ Association Buducnost from Modrica **prepared and sent Request for Guidelines for Work of the Safe Houses in Emergency Situation to the RS Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sport**⁴⁶

On 4th of April 2020, FUW and partner organizations that run safe houses in the Republika Srpska, received Instruction for Work of the Safe Houses in the State of Emergency in the Republika Srpska from the RS Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sport, with instruction to continue with isolation

⁴⁵ More information in Bosnian available via [link](#)

⁴⁶ More information in Bosnian available via [link](#)

of current beneficiaries in the safe houses and complete reduction of contacts with persons outside of the safe houses, as well as to comply with the general measures enforced with the Emergency Headquarters;

On 14th of April, 2020, FUW in coordination with the Foundation Lara from Bijeljina and Citizens' Association Buducnost from Modrica **prepared and sent Request for Guidelines for Work of the Safe Houses in Emergency Situation to the RS Headquarter for Emergency Situations**, with requests to ensure condition for emergency isolation of women and children in need for receiving shelter prior to their sheltering to the safe houses, received no response;

On 15th April, 2020, **FUW requested from the RS Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sport to consider urgent financial support to women survivors of violence**, and incorporating women survivors of violence when determining priority categories for measures to repair damages caused by COVID-19, and received no response.

On 26th of March, 2020, **FUW contributed to the Request for Information about Measures Taken to Assist Marginalized Social Groups**, sent by the Women's Network of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Fadil Novalic⁴⁷, Prime Minister of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Radovan Viskovic⁴⁸, Prime Minister of the Republika Srpska PM of the Republika Srpska replied that gender is not a priority in the country at the moment.

At the end of March 2020, **FUW prepared and sent Requests for Information on Number of Reported Cases of Domestic Violence to Ministry of Interior Affairs, District Public Prosecutor's Office of Banja Luka, and the Center for Social Work in Banja Luka region**. They responded with the information that no increase in cases of domestic violence was recorded during the immediate period after COVID-19 outbreak.

During the period March – May 2020, **FUW was engaged in fundraising for emergency response funds to help the most vulnerable categories of women in wide Banja Luka region** during COVID -19 crisis through covering rent, medicine, food, and other basic living expenses. In May 2020, FUW received contribution of the Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina, in amount of 40.000 USD which enabled emergency assistance and support to the most marginalized and vulnerable categories of women, including survivors of violence in wide region of Banja Luka, and assistance during the immediate period after loosening the measures by the government.

⁴⁷ More information in Bosnian available via [link](#)

⁴⁸ More information in Bosnian available via [link](#)