



**GENDER  
BUDGET BRIEF**

Newsletter #4

# How much gender responsive were the Covid-19 national recovery measures?

in the framework of the  
Gender Budget Watchdog  
Network in Western Balkans  
and Republic of Moldova



## Impressum

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## Dear Gender Budget Watchdogs,

One year after the Covid 19 crises started the eyes of everyone is on the results, on impact of the crises on economy, work, health, the way we live and organize life. The gender budget watchdog network members focused on the response measures taken by the seven governments in the Western Balkans and Moldova region and their impact on gender equality. In this process of watching the governments implement Covid-19 measures and accounting for their results and impact, the GBWN partners followed unified regional methodology in producing a Fiscal Impact Study on Gender Equality for each country of project implementation. The objective of the Network was to learn from the lessons of implementation of the first policy packages and avoid measures and practices that create gender gaps in the later response to the virus by designing advocacy strategies in the post-Covid-19 period for more responsive to women's needs recovery. The fiscal assessments show gender uneven distribution of public funding, and specific recovery funding planned to benefit businesses, save jobs and rarely directed to social infrastructure like health, education, care systems. While women have been beneficiaries of the fiscal measures targeted to save jobs, they have been mostly affected by other non-fiscal measures related to lockdown practices that disproportionately affected women increasing unpaid care work. The decision of the governments in the WB and Moldova not to expend funding directed to social infrastructure, to health, education, care systems will have effect on limiting equal opportunities for women in the sustainable long-term economic recovery. Therefore, the Gender Budget Watchdog Network will in the future advocate for women specific recovery plans for jobs, growth, resilience and addressing the common regional market agenda where digitalization and green agenda are in the centre.

Those interested to access full text of the studies from all of project countries' please visit our project web site [www.gbwn.net](http://www.gbwn.net). For others that want quick digest we have prepared this Gender Budget Brief, providing overview of the main findings from the Fiscal Impact Study on Gender Equality in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Moldova, Macedonia and Serbia.

Enjoy reading!

**Marija Risteska**

on behalf of the Gender Budget Watchdog Network

## Kosovo

The Kosovo Women's Network KWN study: **"The Pandemic Knows No Gender"?** covers the period of February through October 2020. Key findings include:

- The COVID-19 epidemic has affected both women and men. The risk of contracting the virus seems to be higher for women, given their overrepresentation in health and other essential sectors. However, seemingly more men have had and/or died from COVID-19;
- Men and women have faced economic difficulties. Yet, existing social norms and power relations arguably have placed women in a particularly precarious economic position. Given traditional gender roles, care responsibilities have made women more at risk of job loss, especially single mothers and women



caring for persons with different abilities;

The COVID-19 epidemic has laid bare the failures of the current economic system. It has made visible all of the previously obscured unpaid care and reproductive work that is essential to the functioning of the economy. The epidemic has illustrated that economic benefits do not "trickle down" to benefit everyone. It has exposed the myth of the "invisible hand" and shown the long-term results of the laissez-faire doctrine, which clearly fails to benefit the interests of the vast majority of people; The Ministry of Finance had a contingency reserve, and budget organisations reallocated expenditures to meet needs, generally following official approval processes for reallocations. Justifications for these, however, did not contain a gender perspective. In addition, Kosovo

will draw from external funding sources to address the epidemic, including grants and loans from the European Union and World Bank. These have been informed by minimal gender analysis, or consultations with civil society and gender mechanisms. Additionally, the Operational Plan on Emergency Fiscal Package, among other measures to address the COVID-19 epidemic, do not attend to the different needs of diverse women and men; most measures are gender neutral. Officials generally believed that the crisis affected everyone, and therefore no gender perspective was needed.

The needs of diverse women and men, and an intersectional approach, was not considered in the design of measures, and the particular needs of women of different ages, ethnicities, geographic locations, and abilities were little considered in measures. This could be a result of the fact that the measures were not consulted as the government organised very few public consultations to gather diverse women and men's input regarding measures; nor engaged many civil society organisations for input.

Procurement sometimes occurred under allowable expedited processes. Most such documents are publicly available. Legally permissible affirmative measures towards gender equality were not reflected in procurement, as finance officers generally lacked knowledge about relevant provisions in the laws on Gender Equality and Procurement. On the other hand, regular financial reporting continued, but not all reports are publicly available. These did not contain any gender perspective. Expenditures related to the COVID-19 epidemic will not be audited until 2021; historically, audits have not examined gender impact.

Despite obligations in the Law on Gender Equality, the government has not maintained gender-disaggregated data on target groups or beneficiaries of government measures, nor conducted Gender Impact Assessments or evaluations. Thus, it is difficult to assess the impact measures have had on diverse women and men, or on gender equality. Finally, a review of women's and men's needs, compared to the support provided by government measures, suggests that several needs remain unaddressed.

## Macedonia

The CRPM study: **"Dealing with Covid-19: how does public spending affect gender equality"** showed that in Macedonia there were almost no consultations with women's organizations during the preparation of Covid-19 response measures (82% of CSOs working women's or gender equality issues believe that women were not consulted at all or that such consultations were insignificant). Women have rarely been members of crisis taskforces and consulted in the preparation of measures, not even the Equal Opportunities Coordinator in the Ministries and local governments

Gender was not systematically streamlined in the design of Covid-19 response, either in policies/measures or in the budget, and the least of all, in public procurement. For the most part, there were no consultations with NGOs, thus resulting in the measures not truly reflecting the real situation, the way of life and already identified gender inequalities, nor helping to overcome the latter. Out of 46 analyzed measures, only two were gender-transformative, and only nine were gender-positive measures.

Unless measures specifically include gender criteria, institutions do not keep gender-disaggregated statistics on measure beneficiaries. This restricts the possibility to monitor the measures from a gender perspective, thus restricting the assessment of their impact on gender equality.

On the other hand, public procurement was urgent, with no notice and through a direct negotiation procedure that was non-transparent and a corruption risk. Social criteria for selecting the most favorable economic bid, including gender equality, were not used in the procurement of goods and services to deal with Covid-19; there are no reports or audits of public spending on Covid-19, or its influence on equality, including gender equality.

Measures caused gender inequalities. Women took on the burden of caring for their children and families in the absence of care services. For one in five parents, the father was released from work, while the mothers undertook three-quarters of the total care. In addition, the measures did not help to support the retention of women's economic activity. Out of the 10 most affected sectors, both in terms of unemployment and wages, women are over 50% only in 2 sectors. Although the most affected sectors are predominantly male, layoffs



are more common among women. Women living in border towns were particularly vulnerable. CRPM noted an increasing number of registered unemployed women, while the number of inactive men has grown by 5%. In other words, the crisis is negatively affecting women's employment and men's passivation.

The measures responded to the needs of women who have lost their jobs in both the formal and

informal labor market. The salary subsidy in the amount of 14,500 denars was utilized almost equally by both men and women. As a result of unemployment, women were more frequent beneficiaries of unemployment benefits, and a large number of them who lost their jobs or were part of the informal economy were also enabled a swift entry into the social protection system.

Economic activity stimulation measures such as no interest-bearing credit lines (Covid 1 and 2) and the EIB subsidized interest rate loan, in their design, do not take into account the structure of companies and sectors where traditionally there are either more or fewer women, nor do they have gender criteria embedded in the measures. Commercial banks and the Bank for Reconstruction and Development implementing the measures do not keep records of measure beneficiaries disaggregated by gender.

However, this is not the case with the innovation encouraging support measure for the development of domestic start-up products and services, which provides specific support to micro, small and medium enterprises established and/or run by women and youth, and the interest-free loans measure with a 30% grant component for micro and small enterprises (from the fourth set of economic measures), which also offers a 30% grant for companies that are run or founded by a woman.

## Montenegro

The fiscal-gender analysis in **Montenegro** carried out by Women's Action shows that Montenegro lags behind the countries in the region in mainstreaming gender into the budget. The budgetary reform process is ongoing and it is expected to be done by the end of 2021. The analysis of the introduced measures clearly suggests that the economic assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on women and men in Montenegro raises the need to reshape the budget cycle in order to make it more gender sensitive and responsive and efficiently reflect programs and measures that will assure just and needs-based public funds spending. Much more needs to be done in the area of legislation that should allow for the integration of a gender perspective into budgets, and improvements in transparency, increased public

The analysis of the Montenegrin government measures introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that gender approaches to design, implementation and monitoring have been completely absent, and that there is no publicly available data to indi-

cate whether women and men proportionally benefited from the measures. Furthermore, it is not possible to determine whether those who face multiple vulnerabilities, such as women with disabilities, in rural areas, the unemployed, members of minority groups, etc. were specifically excluded from the spectrum of support. The integration of the gender perspective into the content of the measures introduced in connection with the COVID 19 pandemic was lacking too. The representation of women and men designing the measures was not proportional, which led to the creation of gender-blind actions that do not provide a basis for assessing the effectiveness of the addressed needs and problems of both women and men faced. The gender aspect of the measures was not taken during the preparations - there was no consultation with the public, the measures were not based on the analysis of gender disaggregated data, and/or effects on both genders, and they did not take into account the perspectives of both genders. Gender gaps have not been addressed in any of the measures, and gender priorities are not defined. Due to the lack of these, as well as available gender disaggregated data, it was hard to assess if the measure is gender negative, gender neutral, gender sensitive, gender positive or gender transformative. The neutral language, neutral approach and



neutral measures, often bring about detrimental effects to the wellbeing, most often to the detriment of women. Revision of the 2020-2022 Economic Reform Program can be used as an opportunity for introduction of gender responsive budgeting in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as for revision of structural priority measures in accordance with the specific needs of both genders. In the respective study, Women's action recommends several

steps to the Montenegrin government among which:

- Include women and women's organizations at defining the response;
- Conduct in-depth analysis of the gender impact on both women and men and present the figures to the Government, as an evidence-based approach of the need to apply gender analysis and introduce GRB;
- Include the GRB principles in the budgetary reform process to identify gaps, and include the gender perspective in all elements of the budgeting cycle;
- Measure and transform the inequities of unpaid care work into an inclusive care economy;
- Use gender indicators in segregation of duties in budget execution and reporting,
- Ensure that procurement and payment management allow for monitoring of the gender perspective in budget redistribution;
- Include gender perspective in internal audit and financial reporting;
- Check the impact of the budget execution on women and men; and
- Design socio-economic plans specifically for women and girls.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

The **Centre for Civil Society Promotion's** study titled *Gender Responsive Budgeting for a Sustainable COVID-19 Recovery: Gender Fiscal Budget Analysis of COVID-19 Response in Bosnia and Herzegovina* provides an overview of all measures brought by the relevant institutions related to COVID-19 and the mitigation of consequences thereof.

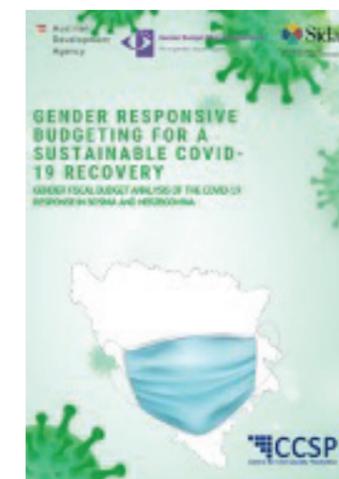
As of the most countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina's COVID-19 response focused on the following priority areas: i) public health measures to contain the spread of infection, ensure access to health services, protect health workers, and

Bosnia and Herzegovina responded quickly and followed global recommendations by introducing measures to prevent, slow down and control virus transmission. In accordance with the respective constitutional provisions, each level of government declared a state of emergency as early as 16 March, which was 11 days after the first case of infection. First decisions were aimed at increasing the capacity of the health system and redirecting health personnel to facilities designated for COVID-19.

At the same time, it was recognized that the health crisis would be followed by a socio-economic crisis and first sets of socio-economic measures were introduced by all governments at the time or immediately after the declaration of the state of emergency.

The epidemiological and public health measures were followed by the sets of socio-economic measures meant to mitigate negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, they were introduced through a regular legal procedure, such as the adoption of the Law to Mitigate Negative Economic Effects of the COVID-19 in the Federation of BiH within 18 days from the declaration of the state of emergency, based on which the FBiH Government passed decisions on allocation of funds to different COVID-19 response programmes. Amendments to the budget for 2020 at all levels of government were adopted in a regular legal procedure and within three to four months from the declaration of the state of emergency, and in the meantime contingency funds (as well as the funds of the donors already actively supporting the projects) were used for emergency or recovery COVID-19 measures.

The disaster/emergency/solidarity funds set up during the 2014 floods were re-activated, such in the Budget of Republika Srpska, the solidarity fund, which was



later renamed the Compensation Fund and the purpose of which was to collect and finance COVID-19 recovery measures. At level of the state institutions, there is no disaster fund. Disaster funds exist in the cantonal budgets, in the form of civil protection units and those funds were used for COVID-19 measures.

At the time of the State of Emergency declaration, the BiH Institutions did not have 2020 Budget adopted, but the Decision on temporary financing was in force.

financing was in force.

As for the use of the COVID-19 funds, from the Information on the implementation on the emergency measures for the most vulnerable population in BiH by the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, it was seen that as early as 1 June, there was already disbursement of BAM 357,964.00 to the most vulnerable population, in the form of humanitarian aid. Those funds were mostly secured from donors funding.

The institutional gender mainstreaming mechanisms in BiH – namely, the Agency for Gender Equality of BiH and the Gender Centres of FBiH and RS, responded timely (March 2020) with their rapid analysis of gender impact of COVID-19 and formulated sets of recommendations in different priority areas for their respective governments. However, the participation of CSOs was minimal. While it was obvious that measures brought by the governments had gender impact, gender analysis and attempts to minimize the gender gap during the pandemic were not a priority.

This research identified a number of issues that would be useful for decision-makers to consider in order to:

- a) adjust response plans to address the gender-specific nature of the pandemic.
- b) identify key priorities to support the most vulnerable groups in COVID-19.

Some of the general recommendations are the following:

- Unpaid domestic and care work needs to be recognized, reduced, and redistributed from the household to the state by an increase of accessible, good quality childcare and social care. Within households, men and women should be enabled to do a 50/50 share of paid work and unpaid work.
- Women's work in care, cleaning, catering, retail, and secretarial roles has been undervalued, underpaid and under protected. Efforts should be made to increase pay in these sectors and improve their conditions of work.
- Include the principles of gender equality in the process of planning and drafting regulations, policies, strategies, and measures, as well as their monitoring, with special attention to vulnerable groups of women and girls. In this regard, it is necessary to ensure equal participation of women in decision-making and equal representation of women, including women's rights organizations, in creating COVID-19 response and recovery strategies at all levels, considering the adoption of targeted measures for vulnerable groups, and promoting inclusive approach in legislative, political, and other measures, to give equal opportunities and opportunities and to protect marginalized groups.
- Information on gender risks of COVID - 19, and measures and activities aimed at protection against coronavirus and control of the COVID - 19 pandemic should be presented in a simple way, understandable and accessible to all persons. According to the specifics of certain vulnerable categories, such as people with visual and hearing impairments, make information available in formats tailored to their specific needs.
- Engage CSOs, including women's organisations, much more than so far in designing and implementing both short-term and long-term (emergency and recovery) COVID-19 addressing measures.
- Collect, classify, and present statistics on measures taken and the effects of measures disaggregated by gender, including other relevant characteristics of members of vulnerable groups (e.g., age, disability, ethnicity, place, and socio-economic status at all levels), recognizing their intersectionality, and make them available on the official website of the government.
- Conduct gender analysis of strategies, policies, programs, and projects in the gender equality priority fields, with the aim of identifying disadvantages, advantages, real needs, and opportunities from the aspect of gender equality.

## Serbia

On 31st of March, 2021, the Serbian partner Gender knowledge hub presented its fiscal analysis on the Serbian state of affair. The collected data showed that GRB has not been applied in the process of budgeting of the COVID - 19 response. In addition, the ex - ante gender analysis has not been conducted and, firstly because of the state of emergency at the beginning of pandemic (April, 2020), decision making was not transparent and participative.

In the budget rebalances (the first in April, 2020 and the second in November, 2020) the biggest increase was for the Ministry of Economy for nearly 700%, while the biggest cuts were in the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Justice, including the cuts of the budget for legal aid. On the other hand, the funds for the defense are increased as well as subsidies for the traffic, including air transports.



## Rodna analiza budžetiranja odgovora na COVID - 19

u Republici Srbiji

What, in general, makes the institutional response to the pandemic gender blind, is the fact that it targeted mostly, or even exclusively, the economic effects of the crisis and the domain of paid work. There were no specific measures responding to the needs of women in the pandemic, such as additional and tailor-made protection from violence, child care and care for dependent household members, lack of public transport, reduced availability of health services, lack of informal services and care. Measures that have been adopted are:

1. Measures of direct assistance to the economy were: delayed payment of taxes, direct assistance to micro, small and medium enterprises in the amount of 3 minimum wages during the emergency situation, assistance to large enterprises for employees whose work was terminated, support to businesses through the Development Fund and the guarantee scheme of support to businesses via banks. There is no sex disaggregated data about the beneficiaries of the measures and it was not targeted to the most affected sectors. Women are majority of employees in sector of services.

2. Special funds to support agriculture, as defined in two Ordinances, one of which referred to loans, and the other to one-time assistance per square meter of cultivated area, head of cattle or beehive. Women are owners of 19% of registered agricultural households.
3. Payment of 100 EUR to all adult citizens, that reached women including informally employed, poor women, rural women, women with disabilities and other member of various vulnerable groups, but also those who do not need the assistance.
4. Increased salaries for employees in health sector is gender neutral measure, although it is directed at the health sector which employs more women. As obvious from the second Revision, this increase amounted to 21,896,000 dinars, which is an increase of 7.87% on salaries in the health sector planned in the 2020 Budget. In addition, salaries increased in the health system management, sanitary control, administration and management sectors, as well as the Directorate for Biomedicine.

5. Increased salaries for employees in social protection institutions and increased number of employees is also gender neutral measures, since we do not have data about impact on availability of services. The increasing of number of employees was temporary and aimed to women, so it was not gender transformative measure, for instance, increased number of males employed in social protection.

Therefore, adopted measures were gender blind or gender neutral, but mostly gender blind and gender biased – based on existing divisions within the gen-

der regime. Some of the examples were investments in air and road transport and arms on one hand, and the discontinuation of free legal aid on the other, or reduced investments in environmental protection and the competent ministry's budget, budget of the ministry in charge of social affairs and education, which are the sectors that employ the majority of women and which were very important during the pandemic.

Women's organizations were not included in dialogues in the discussion about measures – a practice that needs to be immediately changed.

## Moldova

Keystone Moldova, as a member of the Gender Budget Watchdog Network, is conducting a research to analyze the fiscal policy measures taken by the Government of the Republic of Moldova to address the COVID-19 pandemic from a gender perspective.



Despite the intention of the Government to integrate gender-responsive budgeting in the development of budget programs, currently, the budget planning and budget execution in the Republic of Moldova is not done on the basis of GRB principles. Due to this gap, more time and effort is needed to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data on beneficiaries of the measures adopted by the Government as a response to the COVID-19.

However, we note that the Parliament of Moldova at the proposal of the Government has amended twice the 2020 State Budget and established several targeted fiscal measures to support businesses and vulnerable households, such as expanding unemployment benefits and strengthening existing targeted social assistance, tax relief for sectors affected by state-imposed restrictions, delaying tax payment deadlines, suspending tax audits and other controls, and increasing state budget allocations to the budget emergency and health funds and to a mortgage guarantee program. The total package of support provided by the government was 1.2% of GDP, but the justifications for approval of budgetary reallocations did not contain a gender perspective.

From the perspective of CSOs that participated in the online survey, the Government engaged only few civil society organizations for input regarding measures to address Covid-19 challenges and the consultations took place post-factum. The majority of CSOs consider that the Government addressed only partially the different needs of women and men and that the gender inequality increased during the pandemic. Some organizations mentioned that the vulnerable group “were missed” at the beginning of the crisis and that the Government adjusted the measures to target this group only lately.

## Albania

On May 11, 2021, the Gender Alliance for Development Centre, organized online meeting presenting the research, conducted by Gender Alliance for Development Centre (GADC) on the impact that the spread of Covid-19 had in the life of women and the fiscal policy measures taken by the Government of Albania (GoA) in response to the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic, brought a significant challenge for women and men in Albania as for the entire world. Due to the new nature of the virus, the disease it causes, the Government of Albania (GoA) needed to frequently review the state budget in order to reflect its updated readiness regarding the situation. Different measures have been taken to reduce the spreading of the virus, impacting in this way the Albania's economy and the lives of its citizen. However, these measures unfortunately have not quite reflected gender sensitiveness.

Women and men are affected differently, and as such, the existing inequalities for women and girls, discrimination of other marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty will prevail and is something to be considered. As a result of closures and isolation measures, women have had more family responsibilities, such as caring for children and elderly<sup>2</sup>.

Increased responsibilities have had negative impacts on women's physical and mental well-being.<sup>3</sup> In Albania, research suggests that unpaid work and the burden of housework contributes to physical, psychological, and emotional stress among women.<sup>4</sup> Job loss and unemployment resulting from isolation measures can negatively impact women and their return to the labour market.<sup>5</sup> During the lockdown, domestic violence has increased, and women have struggled to access assistance due to isolation at home with abusers.<sup>6</sup>

Measures taken by the Government, in rare cases were gender sensitive. The survey shows that Food Aid packages and sanitizing products, were delivered to the women in the family. Activities where employees, are mostly women, were put at greater risk because they were not closed.

- The Government response was timely and distri-

bution of funds was very effective. A problem was the financial aid for the informal workers. Albanian government used the budget reserves, budget reallocation, rapid facilities and increased debt in the domestic market.

- Public consultations were few, especially related to the business support, but none of them was gender sensitive.
- Regular financial reporting continued, but not all reports are publicly available. These did not contain any gender perspective.
- Even before the Covid-19, domestic violence in Albania, is an existing phenomenon, but during the lockdown, there was an increase of domestic violence.
- In order to face the pandemic Covid-19, a lot of legal changes were approved under emergency and for this reason, many needs of women, were not addressed.
- Another important finding identified by the study relates to the level of transparency both in the design phase and in the implementation of measures undertaken by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The almost absent transparency with the public in general, and with civil society organizations in particular, has had an impact on the drafting of non-coherent measures and policies and consequently has affected the effectiveness of implementing these measures and policies.
- Mostly the policies undertaken have not been focused on strengthening gender equality by causing increased gender inequality. Also, the policies and measures taken are characterized by a significant level of centralism during the drafting, lacking the opinion of the most affected and marginalized social groups from the gender perspective.

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA and UN Women, *The COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak: Emerging Issues for Women and Girls and Gender-Sensitive Recommendations*. For further information, please see the next chapter.

<sup>3</sup> International Growth Center, *COVID-19 and the impact on women*, 28 April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Gender Alliance for Development Centre. May 2020. *Gender perspective on the socio-economic risks in the time of coronavirus in Albania*. Retrieved from [https://www.gadc.org.al/media/files/upload/Report\\_Women,%20Labour%20and%20COVID-19\\_GADC.pdf](https://www.gadc.org.al/media/files/upload/Report_Women,%20Labour%20and%20COVID-19_GADC.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid