

## **Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development**

### **The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)- Information provided by Montenegro**

**Question 1:What measures have been taken to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

#### **Response**

Montenegro is fully devoted to the implementation of international and domestic legislation in order to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women. One of the most important achievements in this field is the improvement of anti-discrimination legislation, national action plans and the development of institutional mechanisms for gender equality at the state and local levels.

The Government of Montenegro adopted, in March 2017, the third Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality (APAGE) for the period 2017-2021, which represents the major national strategic document for implementation of gender equality policy.

On the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) in 2020, the Commission on the Status of Women have undertaken a review of progress made in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the basis of national reports. In May 2019, Government of Montenegro adopted the National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was transmitted to the Commission on the Status of Women. The Report considers the progress in the view of laws, policies and strategies; institutional mechanisms for gender equality; transformation of discriminatory norms and gender stereotypes; investment to cover gaps in resources; responsibilities for existing obligations and capacity building, data collection, monitoring and evaluation in the 12 critical points.

Montenegro has developed a Gender Equality Index for the first time in 2019, with the aim to address the existing challenges in assessing the level of achievement set by the Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality for the period 2017-2021 or the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030. With the index value of 55 (out of maximum 100 points), the report calls for stronger leadership for institutional transformation, coupled with adequate financial resources, in order to reduce the inequalities between women and men. The development of a Gender Equality Index for Montenegro demonstrates our commitment to improvement of gender equality and readiness of our Government to define new innovative approaches and strategies in this field.

**Question 2: What actions and investments have been made for financing gender equality and the empowerment of women?**

**Response**

The support to women's entrepreneurship is already defined as one of the key priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in Montenegro. In this context, mechanisms have been created and consistent strategic documents that provide support for economic empowerment of women and women's entrepreneurship adopted.

After the adoption of the Strategy for Development of Women's Entrepreneurship 2015-2020, financial inclusion and access to credits have been improved, including self-employment of women through the programs of the Investment Development Fund of Montenegro, the Employment Agency of Montenegro and local self-government support measures listed above. Various forms of education and training are being carried out, helping potential and existing entrepreneurs to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to improve their business. Mentoring program and specialist training provide support to entrepreneurs in their first years of business and are aimed at improving business operations and acquisition of special entrepreneurial knowledge.

During the 2019 continued the implementation of 11 projects of non-governmental organizations (the total amount of 171.000,00 €, projects started in 2018). The amount of funds allocated to non-governmental organizations in 2019 is 290,000.00 € for a total of 24 non-governmental organizations' projects, which will be implemented during 2020 and 2021. The projects will be focused on the awareness raising campaigns about gender perspective in all areas, political participation, economic empowerment and combat against gender-based violence and discrimination. One of the most successful projects was '' regarding the property issues, and right to property for women.

**Question 3: What steps have been taken to bolster women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development?**

**Response**

Equal participation of women and men at all levels of decision making is another of the basic strategic goals for achieving gender equality in Montenegro.

Under the IPA 2014 project "Support to Anti-Discrimination and Gender Equality Policies" implemented by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, in cooperation with UNDP Office

in Montenegro, with the financial support of the Delegation of the European Union in Montenegro, an intensive process of political strengthening of woman was conducted. This process had the following results:

- Strengthened access to finance and financial services by women;
- Enhanced measures for the development of women's entrepreneurship;
- Improved political rights, and the ability of women to participate in politics and governance processes at all levels;
- Strengthened capacities to deliver an efficient and effective approach in cases of gender-based violence and developed capacities to monitor the implementation of structural reforms.

The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights actively participates in three other programs in cooperation with international organizations:

- “Dialogue for the Future” - This program is jointly implemented by UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO, in partnership with the cabinets of presidents/presidencies and governments in Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Serbia;
- The training program for civil servants and state employees for gender equality;
- Project with the Westminster Foundation, started in September 2019, related to strengthening local mechanisms to prohibit multiple discrimination.

Despite a number of legislative and strategic documents adopted to strengthen the position of women and achieve full gender equality, inequality continues to manifest itself through insufficient political and social participation of women, economic inequality, unequal division of responsibilities in the family, differences in access to property and property rights, thus bringing women in disadvantageous position, including obstacles to starting a business, etc.

**Question 4: What macroeconomic, labour and social policies have been put in place that promote full and productive employment and decent work for women, in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women’s employment and economic rights and independence?**

### **Response**

In 2019, all active employment policy measures were implemented: adult education and training, public work, training for work with the employer, training for independent work, incentives for entrepreneurship and the program „Stop the Gray Economy“, for 2,248 unemployed persons.

These programs included 1,191 women (53% of the total number of included persons), of which 22 are women of the RE population and 94 women have the status of a person with disabilities.

Through the programs are employed 737 women, of which 15 are women of the RE population and 57 are women with disabilities.

In the vocational rehabilitation program, 325 women were included (64.48% of the total number of included persons). Over 40% of persons with disabilities involved in the Employment projects for persons with disabilities are women with disabilities.

According to the data of the Tax Administration in Montenegro at the end of 2019, there were 6,996 companies in majority owned by women and 2,802 women entrepreneurs.

The Investment and Development Fund of Montenegro continued with three active support programs for women during 2019, namely:

- 1) Credit line for women in business;
- 2) Credit line for women in business UNDP;
- 3) Credit line for women in business - start up.

Based on these credit lines, 25 projects worth EUR 0.8 million were approved.

At the initiative of the Women's Political Network, in 2019, a budget line for women's entrepreneurship was introduced in 16 municipalities in the total amount of EUR 201,000.00, and the municipalities started implementing them by announcing public calls. For the next period, it is planned that these funds will be institutionalized through local budgets in a special position. Nearly 20 women used grants on this basis for the establishment and development of businesses.

In the area of increasing the representation of women in political and public life, the activities were mainly focused on advocating for electoral legislation in 2018 and on developing capacity to support women in 16 political parties gathered around the Women's Political Network (WPN). A comprehensive advocacy strategy aimed at improving the legal framework has resulted in the integration of all amendments offered by the WPN. The adoption of the Law on the Financing of Political Entities and Election Campaigns resulted in more than EUR 500,000.00 in 2020 allocated specifically to women's party forums, which is a great encouragement in this area.

**Question 5: What response and recovery measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken to improve and expand social protection for women (healthcare coverage, unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, maternity benefits, pensions, income support such as cash transfers)?**

**Question 6: What actions have been taken to expand the availability and affordability of care services to address the increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. care subsidies, paid leave)?**

**Response**

The Government of Montenegro, in cooperation with relevant international partners, has taken a number of measures when it comes to combating the consequences of the COVID pandemic.

The National Coordination Body for Infectious Diseases offered 3 packages of economic assistance measures for those areas of business affected by the crisis, then favorable IDF credit lines, subsidies for salaries and tax relieves, as well as some material assistance in the form of food and personal hygiene packages.

The National Coordinating Body also provided paid leave to one of the parents of children under 11 due to the working ban of kindergartens and primary schools.

**Question 7: What action has been taken to increase resources and support for women's and civil society as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**Question 8: What steps have been taken to improve gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts and response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

### **Response**

Government of Montenegro faced various challenges during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. All data showed that the number of reported cases of domestic violence increased during the COVID 19 pandemic. In Montenegro, for the period March - April 2020, the national SOS line registered 20% more calls compared to the same period last year.

Montenegro continuously improve the multidisciplinary, multisectoral and coordinated cooperation of all institutions dealing with protection from violence against women and domestic violence.

The Government of Montenegro, in cooperation with non-governmental organisations dealing with gender-based violence, launched the campaign "Safe at Home" as a first step in combating gender-based violence and providing support to victims of violence during pandemic crisis.

In order to provide further specialized support and services to the victims of domestic violence, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in cooperation with non-governmental partners and UNDP in Montenegro developed the Crisis Action Plan for Specialized Service Providers for Victims of Violence, in accordance with the Istanbul Convention. It defines the functioning of the Shelter and competent services to adequately respond to violence and provide protection for victims during pandemic measures, self-isolation measures and restricted movement.

The Ministry of Interior and the UNDP, developed a digital solution for emergency responses in cases of violence, the mobile phone application "Be Safe". The application allows victims of violence to send a personal request via SMS to national SOS lines, or other trusted individuals/organizations. Their activists will immediately contact the person who tapped the

help button. Professional staff are well trained and educated for acting in emergency situations related to violence, while all the data are safe and confidential.

The Government and UNDP conducted an awareness-raising campaign to address the increase in gender-based violence in crisis situations, as well as to promote services available for the victims.