

## **Report on progress on the implementation of the agreed conclusions on “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”**

### **1. Normative, legal and policy framework**

The Employment Strategy (2019-2030) adopted in 2019 aims to create equal and inclusive employment opportunities throughout the country for all groups, especially for those with special needs (including youth, women and people with disabilities). At the same time, reducing the unemployment rate to 4% by 2030, reducing the minimum level of unemployment among women and youth, achieving productive employment and decent work for all groups of the population (especially young people, women and people with disabilities) by 2025 are among the main goals of the government.

On March 3, 2020 The Azerbaijan Government approved the Action Plan on the prevention of gender –based sex selection for the period of 2020-2025. This action plan combines a series of important activities and measures to be implemented and to promote the value of girl child.

On July 22, 2020.- new "National Action Plan on fight against human trafficking for 2020-2024" was approved. This new Action Plan have a range of measures and programs ,directed on support services and reintegration of women victims of trafficking .

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs prepared a draft law on amendments to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Guarantees of Gender Equality. The draft law defines concepts such as “gender expertise”, “special measures” and “gender stereotypes”. Special article on “Gender statistic”, new rules on monitoring gender equality, norms on gender expertise of advertisement and mass media were added to the legislation. The draft law is currently under the consideration of the Government.

Besides, draft Action Plan to Increase Women's Employment in the Republic of Azerbaijan has been prepared in cooperation with NGO sector, corresponding UN agencies. The purpose of the draft Action Plan is to increase women's access to the labor market, identify and eliminate gender-based factors that prevent women from building successful careers in the private sector, development the mechanisms to support the involvement of women in new production and services, increase women's entrepreneurship. So this draft document will also provide vocational trainings and additional education for unemployed and job-seeking women. The document is under the consideration of the Government.

Moreover draft of National Action on Elimination of Domestic Violence has been revised by the relevant state agencies and currently is at the Cabinet of Ministers waiting for final approval.

2. A guideline on "Practical Recommendations for the Implementation of Gender Equality Policy in Municipalities" was prepared to ensure gender equality in the local authorities and to improve the mechanism for the protection of women's rights.

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs and German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) jointly organized a three-day training on "Supporting Institutional Capacity Building for Women Entrepreneurs" and "Gender - sensitive budget". The State Committee for Family, Women and Children and the Small and Medium Business Development Agency have started a project to study the achievements in the field of women's entrepreneurship.

International Forum on "Development of Women's Entrepreneurship: Experience, Opportunities and Achievements" June 21, 2019 was dedicated to the development of women's entrepreneurship in rural areas and support and networking of women's entrepreneurship through ICT" and "Creating conditions for the development of entrepreneurship .

Forum "New Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs" was held in October 2019 to discuss following topics: Women in Business: Advantages, Challenges and Opportunities, Women in Tourism Business , Bank support Mechanisms for Women.

The project "Establishment of a Family Support Club in the Community to Support Women's Employment and Micro-Entrepreneurship" in Tovuz was implemented in February 2020 ,The aim of the project is to develop micro-entrepreneurship among rural women, strengthen knowledge and skills in the field of entrepreneurship, increase employment opportunities and establish a community based Family Support Club. Trainings on financial literacy and business skills were held for women.

The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs with United Nations Development Programme technical assistance implemented project "encouraging women's participation in economical and social life in rural and regional areas". A total of 9 Women's Resource Centers were opened within the project, a total of 200 entrepreneurship facilities were opened for women and 82 additional jobs were provided.

### 3. Empowerment of women.

A total of 299 women candidates were running for parliamentary seats in the parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan on February 9, 2020. As a result 21 women were elected and a women was elected as the new speaker of the parliament of Azerbaijan, During the municipal elections in December 2019 a number of elected women increased to 39 %.

For the first time in the history of the organs of the prosecutor's office of independent Azerbaijan, 4 female employees of the prosecutor's office were advanced up and appointed as district prosecutors.

Trainings on "Gender and Leadership" were conducted by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs together with The German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). The purpose of training was to build leadership capacity, as well as

knowledge and skills on public policy in the area of protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens and gender equality in the relevant area.

#### 4\5. Socio-economic measures:

Azerbaijan has set up a Fund to Support the Fight against Corona virus to increase the effectiveness of the taken measures and to ensure material support to the medical workers providing relevant services. The state initially allocated 20 million manat (12 million USD) into the fund.

3-6 Azerbaijan has introduced adapted social protection programs in response to COVID-19. Access to basic subsistence support for all, is a priority for the Government of Azerbaijan during the COVID19 crisis. On 19 March, President of Azerbaijan Republic signed an Order providing for mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the country's economy, macroeconomic stability, employment and businesses. Cabinet of Ministers was allocated funds in the amount of one billion manats to finance the above measures. The order attaches special importance to the issue of employment and social protection of the population. As a result, social protection of hired employees working in the sectors worst affected by the pandemic and the low-income categories of the population were strengthened along with short- and medium-term employment measures. The approved Action Plan envisages a total of 10 programs. They cover 2.5 million people. In general, employment with the preservation of wages of more than 900,000 people working in the public sector and 690,000 people working in non-state companies has been ensured. All government agencies have been instructed not to commit unreasonable layoffs. An appeal was made to entrepreneurs in this regard. The state has paid a significant part of the salaries of more than 300,000 people working in 44,000 business entities. In addition, more than 290,000 representatives of micro-businesses and private entrepreneurs have benefited from state support. The program of compensation for the damages to the entrepreneurs and their employees have started since April 8, 2020 and stipulates the allocation of 215 million manat (126 million USD) to preserve the salaries of the hired workers and 80 million manat (47 million USD) to support the individual entrepreneurs. The state has allocated large financial resources to facilitate the financial situation of about 300,000 representatives of micro-business. Thus, about 600,000 people belonging only to this category are receiving financial support from the state. Public sector wages are paid in full.

A one-off payment of AZN 190 (112 \$) is being made to people who have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic and also people from vulnerable group of population. On the President's instructions, the one-off payment will be provided to 200,000 people and cover April-August. Starting from 1 April, the number of families receiving targeted social assistance has been increased. The program of targeted social assistance benefits a total of 330,000 members of 80,000 families.

Social protection measures also include the creation of 50,000 paid public jobs, the increase of monthly preferential electricity consumption limit for citizens by 100 kilowatts per hour in April and May, allocation of 40 million manat (23 million USD) for the training of students from low-income families and 280 million manat (164 million USD) for the vital passenger transportation.

The government of Azerbaijan also began to implement the credit and guarantee support program which enables businesses to get loans with preferential terms. The economic support program of the government also envisages tax benefits, privileges for businesses

entities. The tax payers engaged in catering activities will have simplified tax reduction and exemption from income tax. The import and sale of the products necessary for food and medical security and the raw materials that used in the production of these products will be temporarily exempt from Value Added Tax (VAT). Zero rate of the VAT is applied to the services provided for the prevention of the pandemic. Tax concessions also include the extension of the deadline of income tax payments of 2019, provision of simplified tax exemptions to the micro-enterprises, the exemption from the property and land taxes until the end of the year, the exemption from the current tax payments for the specific industries, the exemption of the taxpayers from income tax for the relevant amount and period. All efforts and programs, addressing socio-economic impact of COVID 19 include gender lens to target women.

Families hit the hardest by COVID19 are mostly the ones with many children tallying additional burden to women. To mitigate the most pressing needs for vulnerable families, more than 100,000 food and hygiene kits were disseminated across the country, especially to women-headed households, IDPs and refugees and other vulnerable groups. Relevant public bodies, such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of People, Ministry of Agriculture, The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, Executive Bodies, local municipalities have been actively participating in the process.

5. Over 20 state-owned hospitals serve COVID-19 patients in Azerbaijan. One of the largest and most modern hospitals in the country - the New Clinic - was inaugurated shortly after the outbreak of the COVID-19.

According to the Executive Order signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 7 April 2020, six modular hospitals for COVID patients have been constructed within a short period of time in and around capital city Baku as a part of additional measures.

The local production of face masks has been launched in Azerbaijan as the next step to fight the global corona virus pandemic. Along with medical masks, disposable protective clothing, disinfectants, sanitizers, etc. are also produced locally.

To ensure that women and girls have access to COVID-19 public health messages, The State Committee for Family Women and Children Affairs, Family and Children Support Centers and Women resource centers facilitate the development and dissemination of targeted messaging on public health to the different contexts and concerns of population. Regional Centres" staff visited vulnerable families, made phone calls to elderly and lonely people, assessed their wishes and needs, provided them with food, psychological assistance and medical masks. Medical masks are distributed among residents of remote areas by the initiative of the Child and Family Support Centers for free. In addition, special brochures and posters were distributed among the population. In accordance with the "Call to Families" awareness raising action more than 3300 families got information by the phone and special informative booklets were distributed to the 560 families in remote and rural areas. Accurate COVID-19 prevention and medical information were distributed in settlements for internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, as well as in remote and rural communities.

In order to support citizens, psychologists from the Child and Family Support Centre provided psychological assistance online to 303. 109 of them were children and 56 were elderly people.

The special project "Online psychological Assistance" has been launched since April 2020. Two webinars on "Psychological Problems in the families during the pandemiya and the



ways to solve them" were held in the framework of this project. 3 245 people have already benefited from the above mentioned project.

The Special campaign "From Family to Family" has been launched in order to decrease the impact of the pandemic on livelihoods, especially due to economic stress and burdens of social isolation. As part of this campaign 75 families assisted to 594 vulnerable families.

With the aim of studying the situation of families during the special quarantine regime in the country with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, 441 surveys were conducted by 11 Child and Family support centers.

Impacts on women's sexual and reproductive health:

Special attention was given to the issues of reproductive health during the COVID 19 and self isolation. Communication materials for pregnant women and health workers on COVID 19 response, developed in the partnership of UNFPA with Azerbaijan Association for supporting development of Gynecology and Perinatology and Scientific Research Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Materials have been distributed among prenatal centers and antenatal clinics.

- Materials on Reproductive and Sexual health in the period of COVID 19
- "Maternal and new born health in times of COVID 19
- Hand book for pregnant women and lactating mothers on COVID19

6. The Child and Family Support Centers in cooperation with the State Customs Committee and "ASAN "State Agency of Public service's Volunteers have implemented a number of measures to assist single, elderly, women and bedridden people, as well as, persons of high risk age (65+) with limited access to leave home.

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During #stayhome campaign UNFPA and "Uchuncu Bahar" Public Union provides a series of online activities such as webinars and peer-to-peer discussions for the elderly using the power of social media in the framework of the project on promoting the idea of active ageing among elderly population in Azerbaijan. Along with it, a number of videos and animations have been produced and shared on social networks to support old persons with effectively organizing their leisure time as well as protecting themselves against COVID-19. By the special resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers, employees caring for a minor (up to 7 years old), the elderly and persons in need of medical care should be taken in account when determining employees who are considered necessary to be employed in the workplace during the period of COVID 19.

Measures for Internally displaced persons

- Special awareness-raising activities are being held among the displaced population on how to protect communities against COVID-19;
- Full access by IDPs to health services are provided
- Since the start of the lockdown measures in Azerbaijan, 3387 IDPs have received food assistance;

#### **Measures for older persons and persons with disabilities**

- Rehabilitation and social services to persons with disabilities at their homes have been provided;
- Social services for lonely people older than 65 have been provided at their homes;
- 500 persons with disabilities with training and equipment in cooperation with UNDP to start their small businesses.

#### **Measures for migrants**

- Such Electronic services as extension of temporary staying, permission for temporary and permanent residence, work permission, etc. have been provided.;
- Consultations through 24 hours call centre, "Online guide", and mobile application MIGAZ; are available for migrants
- Food assistance have been provided to persons with refugee status and to persons who have applied for refugee status in Azerbaijan.

7. The use of women's networks and civil society has given positive results. For example, as a part of the mission to protect the most vulnerable communities, The State Committee for Family Women and Children Affairs, Women Resource centers and UNDP helped procure and deliver packages of the month's worth of food to help 340 poorest rural families cope with COVID 19. Most contents of these packages ,including the eco-packaging itself ,was purchased from women entrepreneurs, achieving the dual purpose of helping the poorest while also helping women entrepreneurs sustain their small businesses.

Women Recourse centers focus efforts on vulnerable and socially excluded group of women providing them with necessary support. During this period, centers has to switched to online trainings, Over 100 women from remote parts of the country have been participating in inline business development trainings, including risk analyses and sales. Jointly with UNDP women Recourse Centers organize regular virtual individual and group psychotherapy sessions. Centers launched local campaigns to help low income families cope with the pandemic. Provide a safe space for over 3000 rural women to share idea. On April 2, 2020, the Council on State Support to Non-Governmental Organizations under the auspices of the Republic of Azerbaijan held a video conference with the participation of government agencies and NGOs dedicated to the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. More than 500 participants joined the video conference. It was suggested implementation of the projects on support of low-income families and providing them with access to the Internet and social networks (especially for children to join online classes), projects on psychological assistance to families, and raising awareness on coronavirus pandemic.