



**"Uluchay" Social-Economic Innovation Center**

**COVID-19 and Women's Rights.**

**Shaki-Zagatala Regional Analysis**

2020

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## **1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, aggravated shortcomings in social, political and economic systems, and deepened the impact of the epidemic (Headquarters, 2020). Since the spread of COVID-19, data and reports received have shown that all forms of violence against women and girls, especially domestic violence, are increased. This is the Shadow Pandemic growing in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis (UN, 2020), and the place of women in working life and in a society rooted in the national mentality is significant in understanding the Shadow Pandemic.

In developing countries, 70% of women's employment is included into the informal economy (Headquarters, 2020). Such a high level of informality undermines the policies of states aimed at reducing the economic impact of the pandemic, blocking layoffs and the like during the current period. As a result, in a number of countries, the first cases of layoffs are observed in the sphere of services, especially, in the retail and tourism sectors, where female workers predominate (Headquarters, 2020).

Financial impediments as a result of layoff, have a significant role in limitations of woman's behavior. Financial instability makes it impossible for women to speak out against violence because of the wellbeing of their children (Conner, 2014). Impracticalities in the activities of family and social support centers due to the pandemic, the public's view of violence against women, or the financial insufficiency of alimony, regulated by law in cases of divorce, have a significant impact on the increase of these violence.

This policy note is developed to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the women's economy and the resulting negative effects on women's rights and gender inequality. According to the policy note, women's financial independence and significant increase of women's rights take center stage. Based on the goals of sustainable development, there suggested to increase women's share and rights in economics.

## **2. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

The home-based work and study structure caused by the COVID-19 pandemic also increases intrafamily responsibilities. The fact that career-building women work from home, help their children with distance learning, and at the same time take care of domesticities, has a negative impact on their effectiveness in working life. Such impacts lead to the loss of sensitive income that women create in the workforce (Headquarters, 2020). Along with this, according to the United Nations Women Committee, 70% of women has an unreported employment and in cases of the simplest crisis, they are more likely to lose their jobs. The first layoffs caused by the pandemic are also important indicators of gender inequality and violations of women's career rights.

The Caucasus region has a high level of self-employment among women, which is associated with being a "family worker" regarding to agriculture (Khitarishvili). This term includes domestic obligations, as well as harvesting of agricultural products and their non-industrial processing. Although the agricultural sector has not faced serious damages, non-industrial processing, i.e. canning of products for winter use, dairy products, compotes, pickles and the like (processed food), was affected by the pandemic. The complete ban on wedding and funeral events, the severance of non-commercial transport links between regions and major cities, have greatly reduced the demand for these products. The unofficial production process and the final processed food obtained without a license could not find a market for sale because they could not go outside the region where they were produced, and production was significantly reduced.

The prohibition on conducting wedding and funeral events, the closure of restaurants and cafes have had a serious impact, as well as on the beauty salon workers, cleaners, and chefs with the high level of unreported unemployment. Taking into account the extension of pandemic, the continuation of unprofitability in these sectors is inevitable. As a result, women's informal working lives have been negatively affected by the pandemic, with job cuts in sectors such as retail and tourism, as well as a decline in the sale of individual labor products. This impact has eliminated women's financial independence.

Money, power and domestic violence come across via different ways (Conner, 2014). According to the ideology prevailing in society, the power within the unit is defined by the income coming to the unit. In other words, money = power. The impact of pandemic both on the career or on the decrease in private income, leads to violation of women's freedom of speech and rights within the family. This violation is considered to be one of the main factors in the increase of violence against women.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Literature on women's entrepreneurship activities offers two factors encouraging women to do business: pulling and pushing factors. Pulling factors include knowledgeable women with creative business ideas and work experience, desiring to be independent. Pushing factors play the role of driving force for financially disadvantaged women who push their businesses because of the need to cater their families (Yuliya Aliyeva, Bayaz Zeynalova, 2016). For women in this category the opportunity to earn money comes only from the sale of personal labor products.

- According to the data of Azerbaijan Statistics Committee dated May, 2020, 11687 of entrepreneurs in Shaki-Zagatala region are women, 43027 – are men.<sup>1</sup> In order to reduce the significant gap in entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs should be provided with soft<sup>2</sup> loans (Woman entrepreneur - I. Safarli).
- In case of necessity, women engaged in production and sale of similar labor products should be gathered in a common center funded by local or foreign agencies, and be open to both local and foreign markets as a licensee.

The balance between professional and private life and the possible long-term effects of the pandemic on women's economic independence should also be considered, as it forces many of them to make difficult choices and to be engaged in unpaid work (housewives) (Women's rights

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<sup>1</sup> Azerbaijan Statistics Committee, 21.04.2020, <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/gender/?lang=az>

<sup>2</sup> Concessions should be made with affirmative action in mind. A credit guarantee fund scheme can be developed in order to reduce costs and increase credit availability. This will also help to reduce the demand for pledge of collateral, which makes commercial loans inaccessible for majority of women who doesn't have any property. For more detailed information, see "Yuliya Aliyeva, Bayaz Zeynalova, 2016", p. 75.

and the COVID-19 pandemic, without date). The loss of financial independence results in increase of domestic violence.

- School textbooks on women's rights need to be redeveloped for a future with healthy rights and minimized inequality.
- Organizations for supporting women's rights should be established to eliminate the negative impact of the pandemic on women's rights. These organizations should work closely with local law enforcement agencies to prevent domestic violence.
- In order to ensure the wellbeing of children in case of divorce, the amount of alimony and the partition of property regulated by law should be recalculated taking heed the violence against women.

Since the 1980's, the negative impact of human capital shortages, income, gender, and similar inequalities on the economy has assumed an importance (Becker, 1993). The fact that the same issues remain on the agenda in 2020 emphasizes the need to work harder to resolve this issue. Ensuring women's place in human capital and their full legal equality is urgently needed for healthy economy and society.

## References

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