Gender responsive policies to achieve SDG5 in the context of COVID 19 pandemic

State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan

27 October 2020
An operational headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers included heads of related state organizations was created on 27 February to prevent the coronavirus pandemic and implement prophylactic and urgent measures.

To ensure access to COVID19 related information for all, the Operational Headquarter has created an informational portal www.koronavirusinfo.az to inform and to educate the population.

Azerbaijan’s Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies and the UNDP launched “Stay Home” (www.evdeqal.az) digital platform a one-stop for all e-services available to citizens in the country during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Regional Medical Divisions (TABIB) in partnership with the UNDP and the local startup company Botbox, launched a WhatsApp bot to answer questions from the public about Coronavirus, and to give prompt, reliable and official information 24 hours a day.

Coronavirus self-checker bot ‘Shefa’ (meaning health and recovery) is on the www.isim.az website to help people make decisions about what to do if they have potential symptoms of COVID-19.
Economy

✓ Adoption and implementation of a comprehensive Action Plan to ensure sustainable development, including reducing the negative impact of the pandemic on the country’s economy and employment.

✓ Direct financial support to 300,000 individual entrepreneurs in the affected sectors of economy (47 million US dollars);

✓ Partial payment of salaries to 300,000 employees in these sectors (127 million US dollars);

✓ Temporary exemptions from taxes, insurance, and customs payments in affected sectors of economy (68 million US dollars);

✓ Issuance of state guarantees and subsidizing interest rates on bank loans to businesses operating in pandemic-affected areas (0.3 billion US dollars);

✓ Subsidizing part of the interest rate on existing bank loans without state guarantees (0.6 billion US dollars);

✓ Exemptions from temporary customs duties for food and medical products necessary for the needs of population;
Presidential Order for mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the country's economy, macroeconomic stability, employment and businesses

✓ 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. Starting from 1 April, the number of families receiving targeted social assistance benefits a total of 330,000 members of 80,000 families.

✓ 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 form Value Added Tax (VAT).

✓ Zero rate of the VAT is applied to the services provided for the prevention of the pandemic.
Social protection

✓ Prevention of unjustified dismissals or reductions in the number of jobs;
✓ Creation of additional 50,000 paid public jobs in 2020;
✓ Provision of a lump-sum payment for 600,000 unemployed persons;
✓ Simplification of the application procedure for a lump-sum payment on the web portal of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection;
✓ Involvement to a self-employment programme;
✓ Expansion of the unemployment insurance coverage to 20,000 persons;
✓ Scholarships for those who have had breaks in vocational training courses;
✓ Extension of the payment of targeted state social assistance to low-income families;
✓ Payment of annual tuition fees from the state budget (24 million US dollars) for students from socially vulnerable families;
✓ Allocation of funds from the state budget to meet the needs of citizens for medical masks (2.7 million US dollars);
✓ Temporary increase of existing discount limits on electricity use (5.9 million US dollars).
✓ During temporary closure of all educational institutions since 2 March broadcasting TV classes on national TV channels, which enables all students to have a continued access to education. All recorded TV programs are also available online on a learning platform of the Ministry of Education;
✓ Weekly broadcasting live interactive sessions in addition to TV classes;
✓ Launch of the National Platform for Tasks for school students aimed at providing feedback and monitoring students’ engagement across the country;
✓ Supporting local teachers, as well as local educational authorities in launching online classes for different student groups and providing trainings for teachers;
✓ Provision of technical support and guidance for all local educational authorities in terms of capacity building for teachers, adjusting content, increasing student motivation. More than 1000 teachers are covered by online trainings on distant education;
✓ Launch of the campaign “Stay at home, create at home” which is a virtual competition (STEAM classes) among school students aiming to keep students motivated, while promoting creativity among them;
✓ Preparation of video content for vocational education by the State Agency on Vocational Education
Internally displaced persons

✓ Awareness-raising activities among the displaced population on how to protect communities against COVID-19;
✓ Full access by IDPs to health services;
✓ Conducting online consultations, using modern ICTs in interaction with the displaced people to address their needs;
✓ Launch by the State Committee on Refugees and IDPs Affairs of the project Virtual reception” which enables displaced persons to interact with the State Committee’s officials in online interactive format.
✓ Provision of food assistance to IDPs. Since the start of the lockdown measures in Azerbaijan, 3387 IDPs have received food assistance;
✓ Provision of food assistance to older persons, lonely people and low-income families in the IDP community. Until now, 444 IDP families have received food assistance.
Older persons and persons with disabilities

✓ Provision of rehabilitation and social services to persons with disabilities at their homes;

✓ Provision of social services for lonely people older than 65 at their homes;

✓ Provision of services in social care facilities for persons who need special care;

✓ Providing 500 persons with disabilities with training and equipment in cooperation with UNDP to start their small businesses.
Women

✓ Women-centered programs to address socio-economic impact of COVID-19;
✓ Strengthening the work of 11 Child and Family Support Centres by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs (SCFWCA)
✓ Prevention by the staff of the Child and Family Support Centres of cases of domestic violence during special quarantine period and provision of psychological assistance to the victims. In total, 7000 families from the regions received necessary assistance;
✓ Focus of Women Resource Centres on vulnerable and socially excluded group of women, providing them with necessary support, and launch of local campaigns to help low-income families to cope with the pandemic. During this period, over 300 women from remote parts of the country participated in online business development trainings;
✓ Involving women’s networks, civil society, and women entrepreneurs.
✓ SCFWCA, Women Resource Centres, and UNDP helped 400 rural families by providing food packages. Most content of these packages, including ecopackaging itself, was purchased from women entrepreneurs, which also helped them sustain their small businesses;
✓ Provision of NGOs run crisis centres and shelters with personal protection equipment and necessary medical supplies jointly with international organizations to protect survivors, as well as employees;
✓ Provision of online psychological assistance to women, children and older persons by Child and Family Support Centres and launch of “Online Psychological Assistance” project

Since April 2020. Webinars on “Psychological Problems in the families during the pandemiya and the ways to solve them” has been held / in the framework of this project. 3 300 people have already benefited from the above mentioned project. The Special campaign “From Family to Family” has been launched in order to decreased the impact of the pandemic on livehoods, especially due to economic stress and burdens of social isolation. As part of this campaign 75 families assisted to 600 vulnerable families.
Activities of the Child and Family Support Centers acting under the State Committee for Family Women and Children Affairs during COVID-19

- Development and dissemination of targeted messaging on public health and violence. Special brochures and posters were distributed among the population.
- Visit to the vulnerable families for assessment of their needs. 1500 people have been provided with psychological assistance and medical masks.
- “Call to Families” awareness raising action made phone calls to the families. More than 3300 families got information by the phone.
- Accurate COVID-19 prevention and special informative booklets have been distributed in settlements for internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees, as well as in remote and rural communities (600 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.
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 340 poorest rural families cope with COVID 19. Women Recourse centers focus efforts on vulnerable and socially excluded group of women providing them with necessary support. Centers has to switched to online trainings, Regular virtual individual and group psychotherapy sessions are organised. Centers launched local campaigns to help low income families cope with the pandemic.
As the COVID-19 crisis started, the crisis centers and shelters run by nongovernmental organizations re-structured their model to allocate newcomers without risking others to potential COVID-19 infection. Those services that could be provided on distance has gone into online or distance mode. Volunteers, SCWFCA, Women Resource Centers jointly with international organizations and others regularly provide these centers by personal protection equipment (PPE) and disinfectants.
Volunteering:

In a time of a global pandemic due to the condition of social distancing a new form of online volunteering contribute to society.
2020 the "Year of Volunteers", a specialized volunteer teams were created and the Coordination Center for Azerbaijan Volunteers was established on the initiative of volunteer movements and organizations in order to contribute to prevention the spread of coronavirus and its possible consequences, especially to educate the population and provide social services to people in need. Gender-based violence and violence against children is also one of the priority of their activities.

Special digital communication platform has been created to provide continuous support to the groups of vulnerable families. Through this platform volunteers are in constant touch with this group of population and provide them with various social services.
Special online trainings, webinars and TV programs.
In order to rapidly respond to increased risks of psychological problems and domestic violence amid the “Stay Home” policy, special events have been organized:

- "Psychological problems in families during the pandemic and ways to address them"
- “How to manage mental health and education in self isolation period”
- “Legal aid to the victims of domestic violence “
- Role of social workers in preventing gender based violence during the pandemic.
- “Psychological pressure and problems in the families during the period of COVID 19 and social distancing”
- Access to services for the victims of Domestic Violence during COVID 19"
- “Gender and reproductive health “
- "Internet safety and ways to ensure it“

**TV Programs**
- ‘End to the Violence” TV program
- Corona Virus Info Program on Central National TV channel introduced a number of special issues to discuss and inform on problems on interfamily relation and violence during the period of self isolation
- A number of weekly programs dedicated to “Women’s rights”
**Special campaigns**

• “Legal aid to the victims of domestic violence “

• “Prevention of gender based discrimination and increasing the value of girls in the society”

• "Efficient organization of children's leisure time during “

• Awareness raising campaign to combat gender-based violence in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

• ‘Learning at home ‘campaign to provide guidance and advice for parents to manage the challenge of staying at home

• “Stay at home with your kids” campaign #OvladimlaEvda

• “Stay at home but be active”

• Men engage social media campaign encouraging men to support their spouses via sharing their daily household duties

• “Spending time together with kids under the home quarantine”
Impacts on sexual and reproductive health:
Special attention were given to the issues of reproductive health during the COVID 19 and self isolation. Communication materials for pregnant women and heath 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
- 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.
The impact of COVID-19 on ending gender-based violence

After the UN Secretary-General's calls on governments, following Instructions and recommendations have been worked out:

- Strengthening the activities of the relevant state bodies in the field of prevention of domestic violence;
- Immediate investigation of information and appeals related to domestic violence by law enforcement agencies and local executive authorities and taking preventive measures;
- Strengthening the work of the Special monitoring groups on gender-based violence and violence against children with participation of different state organizations.
- Provision of operative and urgent assistance to the victims of domestic violence by the relevant executive authorities;
THANK YOU FOR ATTENTION!