**Good practices, mitigating practices used as well as challenges faced by Albania to ensure effective enjoyment of human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

 *Social Protection*

1. In the framework of the measures taken to prevent the COVID-19, as well as pursuant to law no. 15/2016 *On the prevention and control of infections and infectious diseases*, has been approved the Decision no. 236, dated 19.03.2020 "On taking measures to provide housing assistance to the needy in the conditions of the epidemic caused by COVID-19", which provides housing assistance, including the delivery of payments benefited from the social protection and social security program, the delivery of food and non-food products and reimbursable medicines, while defining the categories in need (beneficiaries of NE, PWDs, work invalids and pensioners) who benefit from these programs, as well as the homeless and those who have lost their homes due to the earthquake.

The Central Commission for Providing Assistance has been set up, which verifies the lists, makes the relevant adjustments, and confirms them to the district prefects, mayors, the State Social Service and the Social Insurance Institute. Lists were compiled within 3 days of the entry into force of the decision and are updated weekly. After their confirmation, the district prefects and mayors set up civil defense commissions with their staff and volunteers to deliver food and non-food products to the needy, where the Armed Forces were also engaged, which coordinates the work with these commissions. Sending monthly payments, from the social protection and social security program, to the apartment, is performed by the postal service.

2. Decision no. 254, dated 27.3.2020 of the Council of Ministers “On determining the procedures, documentation and the measure of obtaining financial assistance for employees in business entities with annual income up to 14 million ALL, economic assistance and payment of income from unemployment during the period of natural disaster, declared as a consequence of COVID-19”, was approved and foreseen:

(i) to provide financial assistance to employees/self-employed, at the level of the minimum wage, for the period after the cessation of economic activity / labor relations due to the state of the epidemic caused by COVID19

(ii) to provide an additional payment to individuals and families who benefit from the payment of economic assistance (2 times of the payment);

 (iii) to provide an additional payment to individuals who benefit from the payment of unemployment benefits (2 times the unemployment benefit). Economic Aid and unemployment payment was benefit from existing beneficiaries of these programs and those who have applied by March 10, 2020. The decision also provides for the procedures for obtaining these benefits.

With the decision no. 341, dated 23.4.2020 “On some additions and changes to the decision no. 305, dated 16.4.2020, of the Council of Ministers,” On determining the procedures, documentation and the measure of obtaining financial assistance for its current employees and laid-off employees as a result of COVID - 19 was approved to provide financial assistance of 16,000 (sixteen thousand) ALL, for applicants for economic assistance, who are applicants from July 2019 to April 2020, who have not received economic assistance and, currently, do not even benefit from the fund 6 percent allocated to municipalities, except in cases that have been excluded from the economic assistance scheme, according to article 15, of law no. 57/2019, "On Social Assistance in the Republic of Albania".

3. At the same time, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, within the measures taken to prevent and limit the spread of this epidemic to the masses, has approved the following Orders:

• Order no. 157, dated 10.03.2020 “On taking measures to prevent infection by COVID-19 of the beneficiaries of social care services” amended by Order no. 227, dated 02.04.2020, until the end of the epidemic situation caused by COVID 2019 infection.

This order provides for the prohibition of visits to public and non-public residential social care institutions of family members, friends and relatives of the beneficiaries, in order to prevent their infection by COVID-19. The staff serving in the institution is determined according to an agreed schedule between them and the head of the institution, avoiding any kind of contact outside the institution. Hygienic and sanitary measures have been increased. Contacts have been established with local health care units to monitor the health situation of the beneficiaries. In any case, it is planned to follow the Protocols Approved by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the Institute of Public Health.

• Order no. 226, dated 02.04.2020 "On the suspension of the functioning of the evaluation commissions of persons with disabilities and work disability" which abolishes Order no. 158, dated 11.03.2020. According to this Order, the functioning of the first and Superior Medical Commission for Determining Blindness, is suspended, which assesses persons with disabilities and Work Invalids, the functioning of the MCDB, which evaluates the blind people, is suspended, as well as the suspension of the Multidisciplinary Commission of Disability Assessment where the bio-psycho-social assessment of disability reform is being implemented. This suspension will last until the end of the epidemic situation caused by the COVID 2019 infection. Payments to existing beneficiaries whose term of office expires during this period will continue to be granted on the basis of these decisions until the revaluation is made after the reactivation of the commissions.

• Order no. 213, dated 31.03.2020 “On taking measures to prevent COVID-2019 infection of applicants for economic assistance” which provides that exclusively during the natural disaster situation applications for economic assistance will be made electronically or through the postal service. It is envisaged that the beneficiary families will not be penalized for failing to complete the 3-month declarations at the administrative units and that family visits will not be carried out for applicants and beneficiaries of economic assistance, to verify the socio-economic situation by the social administrator. The order provides that social administrators maintain contacts electronically or by telephone to assist citizens in completing the application for economic assistance.

• Instruction no. 253, dated 10.04.2020 "On the management of cases of children in need of protection, during the period of natural disaster due to the epidemic caused by covid-19", aims to determine the concrete procedures and actions of child protection structures, for the management of cases of children in need of protection, during the period of natural disaster due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

Child Protection structures, during this period, support, raise awareness; inform children and their families about the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, for preventive measures, signs and symptoms to identify the disease, referral routes to health structures, emergency numbers and how to access the services provided, in the territory where they live.

• Order no. 254, dated 10.04.2020 “Protocol on the operation of public and non-public residential centers that provide housing services (shelters) for victims of domestic violence and trafficking in the pandemic situation of COVID19”, aims to assist providers of this service to function as effectively as possible in accordance with restrictions due to preventive measures. Implementation of the "COVID-19 Emergency Protocol for shelters" helps shelter staff provides the necessary services to victims of domestic violence and trafficking without compromising their health and their lives or the lives of victims benefiting the service, family members and the community as a whole.

*Gender Equality & domestic violence*

Since the beginning of the emergency period, Government of Albania and particularly MoHSP have been very careful on providing a gender sensitive response to COVID situation, by undertaking specific measures targeting most vulnerable groups of women in need.

Priorities:

* Including the most vulnerable groups of women as beneficiaries from the economic measures package of Government of Albania.
* Ensuring the needed legal protection to all women and family members abused/violated.
* Providing immediate and effective multi-sectorial treatment of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence’ cases.
* Ensuring the continuity of specialist support services for women, children and family members in risk or victims/survivors of violence.
* Regular monitoring of situation related to VAW&DV

*Some of the key actions to mention on this direction are:*

- Women with an issued protection order, women head of families and the women under economic aid scheme were amongst the first groups included in the economic measures’ package prepared from our government, to benefit the double payment of what they usually get.

- The non-suspension of the work in judiciary, for family cases related to domestic violence, child custody, children’s rights and adoption process, alimentary and in some other civil and criminal cases, was followed also by the improvement of the Criminal Code, particularly on the article 130/a “Domestic Violence”. The amendments consist on tightening of penalties for abusers and are in line with the recommendations of the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW Convention which require from States Parties to take all legislative measures to punish perpetrators and eliminate violence against women.

Different measures are taken to ensure an increase of coordination, promotion of effective collaboration and immediate response for cases’ managements despite all restrictions and precautionary measures.

2. Immediate measures are undertaken to create an enabling environment for ensuring the continuity of specialist support services for women, children and family members in risk or victims/survivors of violence. Specific protocols and regulations are prepared and approved in order for these services to provide protection, support and professional treatment to cases happened during COVID emergency. The protocol for functioning of all specialized temporary and long-term shelters aproved by the Order no. 254 / dated 10.04.2020, of the Minister of Health and Social Protection; Instruction of the Minister of Health and Social Protection No. 253, date 10.04.2020 for cases’ management of children in need for protection; the protocol for domestic violence cases’ management from members of the Coordinated Referral Mechanisms at local level, etc., are some of good tools produced during this situation.

3. A rapid need assessment of the specialist support services providing sheltering (short-term or long-term) for victims/survivors of violence against women and domestic violence is prepared from the specific Sector for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality in the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, focused on identifying: their needs for protective and hygienic materials for their staff and beneficiaries; their capacities and potentials to create the isolation room inside the shelter spaces; their need for a possible training on the new protocol of their functioning in the COVID-19 emergency; their need for training and capacity building activities, etc.

4. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection in cooperation with UNDP, within the joint program "Let's end violence against women and girls", during the period April-May organized three cycles of online training with local coordinators for protocols for MCC members. and about Covid 19. About 44 local coordinators have been trained.

5. LILIUM Center- the center for managing cases of sexual violence was set up and started functioning on December 4, 2018, near the premises of University Hospital Center “Mother Teresa”, as an obligation arising from the recent changes that the Law No. 9669/2006, amended by Law no. .47 / 2018 and recommendations given by the Istanbul Convention Monitoring Expert Group in 2016.

A publication has been prepared by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection supported by UNDP, within the Joint Program "End Violence against Women in Albania", which is addresses to all professionals who identify, report, treat, refer to and up to the reintegration of survivors / survivors of sexual violence.

 *Roma and Egyptian minorities*

The Government of Albania due to the pandemic situation has taken series of measures to help the most vulnerable including Roma communities.

- The Ministry of Health and Social Protection has proposed to the Parliamentary Commission to discuss extension of pandemic measures by the end of June 2020.

- The Government of Albania will provide initial protection measures for families that do not benefit from the social protection programs and informal workers.

- The Council of Ministers (DCM) on 27 of March approved a measure that will finance Roma families and additional payment from the Economic Aid, for the above mention social groups and those who were targeted by the earthquake.

- The interest rate caused by electricity payment delays are absolved for all.

- The Ministry of Defense in collaboration with the municipalities has distributed food packages to families for three different categories: beneficiaries of economic aid, people that have lost properties and housing during the earthquake and people without property and housing.

- There are regular disinfection and sanitary measures taken at the Roma communities.

- The Government of Albania decided to support Roma families with 129 EUR or (16000 Lek) that were not part of Economic Aid scheme because of not fulfilling technical conditions to benefit while applying from July 2019 –April 2020

- The Government of Albania is planning include the Roma and Egyptian families to the recovery plane and priority for social protection for the period 2020-2025.

- The Ministry of Defense in collaboration with the municipalities had deliver food packages to families and vulnerable groups.

- The Government of Albania is coordinating work with SCO’s in the field of child protection how to manage the cases and create standard for home services for all vulnerable groups.

- The Government of Albania has opened a free green line for calls available to offer medical and psychological support to people in need and isolated during the crises.

 *Children*

Specific protocols and guidelines have been prepared and adopted in order for these services to provide professional protection, support and treatment for cases occurring during COVID emergencies.

There is a very important document related to this purpose:

Instruction No. 253, dated 10.04.2020, of the Minister of Health and Social Protection "On the management of cases of children in need of protection, during the period of natural disaster due to the epidemic caused by Covid-19".

The purpose of this instruction is to determine the concrete procedures and actions of child protection structures, for the management of cases of children in need of protection, during the period of natural disaster due to the epidemic caused by COVID-19.

Child Protection Structures support, raise awareness, inform children and their families about the situation created by the COVID-19 epidemic, preventive measures, signs and symptoms to identify the disease, referral routes to health facilities, numbers of emergency and how to access the services provided, in the territory where they live.