**OFFICE FOR HUMAN AND MINORITY RIGHTS**

 **Department for Human Rights**

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**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**
Questionnaire of the Working Group against Discrimination against Women and Girls in in connection with the preparation of the thematic report for the 47th session of the Council UN for Human Rights

**THE NOTION / DEFINITION OF CRISIS**

***Answer to Questions 1-3:***

***Legislative framework and definition of crisis***

*The Constitution of The Republic of Serbia* defines and foresees the *State of Emergency* in the following manner: When the survival of the state or its citizens is threatened by a public danger, the National Assembly shall proclaim the state of emergency. The decision on the state of emergency shall be effective 90 days at the most. Upon expiry of this period, the National Assembly may extend the decision on the state of emergency for another 90 days, by the majority votes of the total number of deputies.

During the state of emergency, the National Assembly shall convene without any special call for assembly and it may not be dismissed. When proclaiming the state of emergency, the National Assembly may prescribe the measures which shall provide for derogation from human and minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution. When the National Assembly is not in a position to convene, the decision proclaiming the state of emergency shall be adopted by the President of the Republic together with the President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister, under the same terms as by the National Assembly. When the National Assembly is not in a position to convene, the measures which provide for derogation from human and minority rights may be prescribed by the Government, in a decree, with the President of the Republic as a co-signatory.
Measures providing for derogation from human and minority rights prescribed by the National Assembly or Government shall be effective 90 days at the most, and upon expiry of that period may be extended under the same terms. When the decision on the state of emergency has not been passed by the National Assembly, the National Assembly shall verify it within 48 hours from its passing, that is, as soon as it is in a position to convene. If the National Assembly does not verify this decision, it shall cease to be effective upon the end of the first session of the National Assembly held after the proclamation of the state of emergency. In cases when the measures providing for derogation from human and minority rights have not been prescribed by the National Assembly, the Government shall be obliged to submit the decree on measures providing for derogation from human and minority rights to be verified by the National Assembly within 48 hours from its passing, that is, as soon as the National Assembly is in a position to convene. In other respects, the measures providing for derogation shall cease to be effective 24 hours prior to the beginning of the first session of the National Assembly held after the proclamation of the state of emergency. (Article 200).

Besides, the *Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management* entered into force on 21 November 2018, while the Law on Emergency Situations ceased to apply. This Law defines as follows: emergency action, declaration and management; protection and rescue system of persons, material and cultural goods and environment from natural disasters, technical and technological hazards - accidents and catastrophes, consequences of terrorism, wars and other large scale disasters (hereinafter: natural and other disasters); competences of state agencies, autonomous provinces, local governments and participation of the Serbian Army and Police in protection and rescue activities, rights and obligations of citizens, civil protection organization and activities for the protection, rescue, and elimination of the consequences of natural disasters and other accidents; funding; inspection and supervision, international cooperation and other issues relevant to organization and functioning of the protection and rescue system. Furthermore, in accordance with the Law, the notion of crisis covers a wide range of disasters caused not only by natural environmental factors, but also human factor.

The Law also defines similar terms, such as: disaster, emergency situation, natural disaster, technical & technological accident, etc.

According to the Law, the term *disaster* means a natural disaster or technical & technological accident whose consequences threaten safety, lives and health of a large number of people; while the term *emergency situation* means a situation declared by the competent authority when risks and threats or consequences to population, environment and material and cultural goods are of such scale and intensity that their occurrence or consequences cannot be prevented or eliminated through regular activity of competent authorities.

The provisions of the mentioned Law prescribe the Principle of equality and protection of human rights as follows: Actors involved in the disaster risk reduction and emergency management system particularly take care of achieving the principle of gender equality and especially take care that no decision, measure or action promotes or leads to unfavourable position of women or their unequal participation in the disaster risk reduction and emergency management system. The competent authorities and other actors involved in the implementation of measures and activities related to disaster risk reduction shall consistently take care of the protection of human rights, gender equality and particularly protection of the poor, elderly persons, children, disabled persons, refugees and displaced persons as well as other vulnerable population groups. The measures and activities undertaken for the disaster risk reduction shall be accessible and relate to disabled persons, children, elderly persons and other persons particularly exposed to risk. Furthermore, we would like to note that the mentioned Law recognizes the needs of the vulnerable groups, such as pregnant women and mothers with children, exempting the mentioned population categories from the obligation of performing the protection and rescue tasks.

This Law introduces for the first time the *Risk Register* as an interactive electronic geographic and information database for all risks (hazards) of natural disasters and other hazards in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. It is foreseen that the Risk Register operates at the central level within the Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with other state administration bodies; it is also foreseen that the data is supplied by relevant ministries, special organizations, agencies and local self-government units. Also, it is foreseen to allow access to the subject database to all entities that make their own risk assessments or perform some construction and other investment works.

The basic goal of adopting this Law was the need to legally regulate, in a unique manner, the disaster risk reduction and emergency management system as the part of a unified national security system in the Republic of Serbia, by creating legal conditions for the establishment of such a unified and integrated system.

*The Law on Reconstruction Following Natural and Other Hazards* from 2015 regulates the procedure of reconstruction and aid allocation to the citizens and business entities who have sustained pecuniary damages due to natural and other hazards. The right to receive the aid under the same conditions as in case of the citizens of the Republic of Serbia shall be extended to the foreign citizens and stateless persons who have been approved temporary or habitual residence in the Republic of Serbia. Business entities, in accordance with the terms of this Law, shall be companies, entrepreneurs and registered farms which perform their activity by using the resources the majority of which is in private or cooperative ownership. Pecuniary damages, in accordance with the terms of this Law, shall include physical damage or destruction of immovable or movable assets in the territory of the Republic of Serbia owned by the citizens or business entities, as a direct consequence of a natural and other hazard.

The Republic of Serbia also adopted the *National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations* in 2011, which includes the overall system of prevention, mitigation, protection, rescue and reconstruction, with the purpose of protecting life, health and property of citizens, the environment and cultural heritage. The National Strategy defines and determines the national coordinating mechanisms and programme guidelines for reducing disasters caused by natural hazards and the risks of accidents, protection, response and repair of consequences.

*The National Disaster Risk Management Programme* was adopted by the Government on 19 December 2014, as response to catastrophic flood events in May 2014. The National Programme was made with the aim of providing an umbrella framework for the development of an overall natural disaster protection programme and coordination of activities, channelling of funds and implementation of the disaster risk reduction and management system.

According to the *Law on Defence,* the state of emergency is the state of public danger in which the survival of the country and its citizens is endangered, and comes as a consequence of military or non-military challenges, risks and threats to security.

The notion of *crisis* includes all situations foreseen in the *Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management*, therefore natural disasters (of hydrological, meteorological, geological and biological origin caused by natural forces), technical and technological hazards – accidents and disasters caused by hazardous materials and other state of danger, consequences of terrorism, wars and other major disasters.

Natural disasters include pandemics and epidemics caused by infectious diseases, such as COVID-19. In order to be considered a disaster, it is necessary that the consequences of the crisis pose a threat to safety, life and health of a large number of people, material and cultural goods and the environment; and that their occurrence or consequences cannot be prevented nor eliminated through regular activity of competent authorities.

***Institutional mechanisms and priorities for crisis management***

The Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted on 13 March 2020 the Conclusion on the establishment of the *COVID-19 Infectious Disease Crisis Response Team* for the management of the crisis caused by COVID-19. The legal basis for the adoption of the Conclusion on the establishment of the COVID-19 Infectious Disease Crisis Response Team is found in the Law on Government (Articles 33 and 43).

The Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management defines the actors involved in the disaster risk reduction and emergency management system as follows: state authorities, autonomous province authorities and local self-government units, public services, companies and other legal entities and entrepreneurs, civil society organisations, educational institutions and scientific and research organisations, public agencies and other, which in accordance with the law, other general acts, plans, programmes and other documents participate in determining the measures and activities of importance for the disaster risk reduction and emergency management.

The unity of action of the actors involved in disaster risk reduction and emergency management at the level of the Republic of Serbia shall be provided through the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The disaster risk reduction and emergency management forces include headquarters for emergency situations, civil protection units, emergency fire & rescue units, 112 Emergency Service, Police, Serbian Army, Serbian Red Cross, Mountain Rescue Service, Serbian Fire Protection Association, Amateur Radio Union of Serbia, commissioners and/or deputy commissioners for civil protection, citizens, citizen associations and organisations whose activity is of special interest for the system development and functioning (Article 13).

When priorities are in question, the most important obligations introduced through this Law relate to the development of the following documents as the basis for priority actions in crisis situations: *Disaster Risk Assessment, Disaster Risk Reduction Plan and Protection and Rescue Plan.*

*Disaster Risk Assessment* identifies the type, character and origin of certain risks for the disaster occurrence, level of endangerment, factors that cause or increase the possible danger level, consequences for the life and health of people, environment, material and cultural goods, provision of public services and business activities, as well as other assumptions of importance for carrying out the usual life, economic and social activities. The respective Disaster Risk Assessment shall be performed and adopted by the Republic, autonomous province, local self-government units, entities of special interest for the protection and rescue activities, except societies, clubs and associations, companies, healthcare institutions, except pharmacies, educational institutions as well as social welfare institutions for the user accommodation facilities.

On the basis of the assessed risks handling in the respective disaster risk assessment, Disaster Risk Reduction Plans shall be adopted at the Republic, autonomous province and local self-government level.

*The Protection and Rescue Plan* of the Republic of Serbia shall be developed by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in cooperation with other ministries, special organisations and other legal entities, and passed by the Government. The Protection and Rescue Plans at the autonomous province and local self-government levels shall be adopted by the competent autonomous province and/or local self-government unit level, upon obtained consent of the Ministry, at the proposal of the competent headquarters for emergency situations. Beside state authorities, the Protection and Rescue Plans shall be adopted by all entities having the obligation to make Disaster Risk Assessments.

The National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations includes the establishment of institutional, organisational and personnel capacities for the implementation of protection in emergencies; provision of well-trained staff; establishing and training of civil protection units (specialised and for special purposes); training of the present fire-protection and rescue units within the Ministry of Interior, business entities and volunteer firefighter societies for performing new tasks; capacity development for the most efficient response in case of disaster, including the elimination of consequences of disasters caused by terrorist attacks; provision of material assistance for support in the implementation of the National Strategy; training citizens for action in emergency situations, etc. Also, one of the priorities of the National Strategy is the inclusion of the Republic of Serbia in the *Community Civil Protection Mechanism*, established by the European Union in the Council Decision 2007/779/ЕC of 8 November 2007.

Serbia became full member of this institution on 16 April 2016, thus enabling and facilitating cooperation with the civil protection services of the European Union in emergencies, i.e. in case of unpreparedness for adequate response due to lack of access to available resources when fire, floods, earthquakes and other emergency situations are in question.

Furthermore, in 2014, *Office for Assistance and Rehabilitation of Flooded Areas* was originally established, and in 2015 pursuant to the Government Decree it became the *Public Investment Management Office.* This Office is engaged in management of reconstruction projects and provision of assistance after natural and other disasters, primarily to projects for the reconstruction of several thousands of preschool, school, healthcare and social welfare institutions. All activities, both in the decision-making and the implementation process, are coordinated with the active participation of the local self-government units.

**CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES**

**Answer to Question 4:**

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia foresees that everyone shall have the right to protection of their mental and physical health. Health care for children, pregnant women, mothers on maternity leave, single parents with children under seven years of age and elderly persons shall be provided from public revenues unless it is provided in some other manner in accordance with the law. According to the Constitution, the municipality shall be responsible for environmental protection, protection against natural and other disasters; protection of cultural goods of importance for the municipality (Article 190).

In changed conditions in a crisis or emergency situation, it has been noted that there are no essential differences when provision of sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) and good practices in provision of SRHS are in question:

* providing access to impartial and scientific accurate information, continuous access to medical workers and healthcare service providers, including traditional childbirth, while using personal protective equipment;
* access to medicines, equipment and technology, equal to access during the period of non-crisis/non-emergency situation;
* prevention, prophylaxis for HIV as well as prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs);
* healthcare services related to pregnancy, childbirth, breast feeding, pre-birth and post-birth care;
* safe abortion and family planning;
* monitoring and treating pregnant women during pregnancy and monitoring and treating pathological pregnancies;
* cervical cancer screening – implementation in the same or changed form, depending on the nature of the crisis/emergency situation;
* prevention, monitoring and processing all types of gender-based violence (GBV) and access to healthcare services, psychosocial support and protection of the mental health of victims and survivors;
* application of legal and political measures for the protection against abuse and delay in providing SRHS - confidentiality, recommendations, informed consent, conscientious objection and third-party consent requests, and
* equal availability of SRHS.

In conditions of any crisis/emergency situation, the vulnerable groups shall enjoy an equal volume of services as other population in the Republic of Serbia. The volume of services depends from the type, volume and cause of the crisis/emergency situation.

The Ministry of Health, with the aim of providing equal health protection services and equal availability of healthcare services as well as quality services, developed a SRHS procedure in crisis/emergency situations.

Urgent medical assistance services are provided by Emergency Medical Care Institutes, and in case of crisis/emergency situations by medical teams and all healthcare workers in the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

Financing women’s sexual and reproductive health in the Republic of Serbia shall be performed from the Budget of the Republic of Serbia.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health has continuous cooperation with the civil society organisations.

*The Law on Patient’s Rights* shall be applied in all circumstances, including crisis situations, and every patient has the right to freely choose from among different treatment procedures concerning his/her life and health, including abortion and sterilisation. No medical treatment without the patient’s consent is a as a rule permitted. Every patient has the right to receive timely information necessary in order to make a decision to give or not to give his/her consent to proposed medical treatment. For carrying out abortion and sterilisation, which are invasive procedures, patient’s written consent is necessary, and if the patient is a child and/or women declared legally incapable, written consent of her legal representative is necessary. In accordance with this, whoever carries out an abortion and sterilisation without informed consent of the patient and against her own free will or written consent of her legal representative, shall be punished for the offence of illegal termination of pregnancy (Article 120 of the Criminal Code), which is well known to all healthcare workers.

The Government adopted the *Regulation for Safeguarding and Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health of the Citizens of the Republic of Serbia* on 28 December 2017.

The Ministry of Health carried out before the outbreak of the epidemics the action of free preventive examinations, with the aim of early diagnosis and promotion of prevention as the most efficient way of taking care of own health. These examinations were carried out every last week of the month throughout Serbia, both in local health centres and clinical hospital centres and general hospitals, and access to these services was also allowed to persons who had no health insurance for whatever reason.

Year 2020 was determined in the plan of the Ministry of Health as the time limit for the improvement of availability of healthcare for Roma people through the programme extension and coverage of 50 % of the territory (RSD 88,000,000). Also, through support to the activities of citizens’ associations by increasing the number of supported grants for the fulfilment of the health social determinant results (RSD 15,000,000), and for the improvement of the quality of life and extending the life expectancy goal (RSD 15,000,000).

More than 90 % of Roma men and women exercise the right to compulsory health insurance. Furthermore, the measures enabled to the Health Insurance Fund’s branches to approve these rights to persons belonging to the Roma nationality, who had no personal documents, and on the basis of statements of two witnesses.

In the Republic of Serbia, as an example of good practice, we would like to point to the work of Roma Health Mediators. Their activities include the following: provision of personal documents and health insurance ID cards; citizens of Roma nationality are enabled to choose their own doctor and/or gynaecologist; the mediators influence the increase in percentage of children and adults receiving vaccines as well as the improvement in the control of health of pregnant women and women in labour; the mediators also influence the increase in the number of systematic medical check-ups.

***Partner and domestic violence***

When response to violence during the crisis situation caused by the pandemic, i.e. prevention, investigation and punishment of all types of gender-based violence are in question, the work of MoI remained unchanged. The responsible police officers acted 24/7 in all cases related to family violence, regardless of the extraordinary circumstances, applying all legal provisions, including the provisions of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention (LDVP), in accordance with their competences.

*The Law on Domestic Violence Prevention,* putting a special emphasis on the protection of victims, was adopted on 24 November 2016 and came into force on 1 June 2017. The Government established in July 2017 the *Council for Domestic Violence Suppression* foreseen in the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention, with the aim of improving the coordination of responsible state authorities and institutions.

In the Criminal Investigation Directorate, Crime Suppression Service, on 1 January 2016 the *Division for Domestic Violence Prevention and Suppression* was establishedwith the purpose of monitoring, analysing and coordinating the cases of domestic violence at the level of all 27 police departments.

Police officers in the Ministry of Interior, criminal investigation police and police of general competence, attended in the period from 20 February 2017 to 25 January 2020 specialised training for acquiring knowledge and skills in the domestic violence field. In the mentioned period, total number of 2,007 police officers completed the training programme and got certificates. The training was organised at the Academy of Criminalistic and Police Studies, according to the curriculum of the Judicial Academy, as foreseen in the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention.

The Ministry of Interior adopted in 2018 the *Instruction with guidelines for the prevention and protection against gender-based discrimination and discrimination based on other personality traits* as well as the *Guidelines for the implementation of measures for exercising gender equality in the MoI through the human resources management system*.

In the Operational Centre of the Ministry of Interior a helpline (0800 100 600) was introduced, free of charge and available 24 hours, for reporting domestic violence at the level of the whole Republic of Serbia. It is everyone’s right to report such event anonymously.

Furthermore, in the Ministry of Interior, a Working Group was formed in 2017 with the purpose of analysing the cases of domestic violence, and for the establishment of closer and more intense cooperation of the Ministry of Interior with the specialised women non-governmental organisations providing assistance and services to women in situations of violence.

The provisions of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention stipulate that the acting state authorities shall keep records on reported cases of domestic violence as well as records on imposing and enforcement of measures of protection against domestic violence. The Ministry of Interior developed in 2018 the Unique Information System (UIS) Application: ”Domestic Violence Prevention”, where all actions of police officers according to the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention are recorded. The Application has been applied since 12 February 2018. Such type of keeping records is also important for the analysis of the status in the domestic violence field and planning adequate protection and prevention programmes as well as providing real information for the public in this field; also, it enables comparison and analyses with other countries in the region and Europe (whose legal systems include similar law).

In the Ministry of Interior, on 19 September 2017, *Analytical Group was established with the task of performing analysis, monitoring and reporting on the results of the implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, “Women, Peace and Security”.* The Analytical Group is one of institutional bodies for the implementation of the National Action Plan. The representative of the Emergency Situation Sector actively participate in the work of the mentioned Analytical Group, aimed ad creating effective conditions for the implementation of the gender-based policy within the Ministry of Interior. In such terms, as the mechanisms for gender equality, *contact persons* are designated in all organisational units of the Ministry of Interior, who will present through gender analysis the position and role of the employees through the prism of gender-sensitive roles and divisions, participation in decision-making, availability of professional training and advancement, the possibility of harmonisation of professional and parental roles of employed women; point to domestic violence issues and other forms of gender discrimination. The Working Groups strives to create equally favourable conditions for all employees, encouraging women to participate to a greater extent in the work of the Republic provincial and local headquarters for emergency situations, and recognising specific needs of gender sensitive groups.

According to the information obtained from the Ministry of Interior, during the state of emergency which lasted from 15 March to 7 May 2020, there was a decline in the number of reports of violence against women and decline in the number of the measures imposed. Namely, compared to the same period of the last year, 29.83% less criminal charges were brought, i.e. 494 criminal charges for domestic violence under Article 194 of the Criminal Code; 4.81 % less emergency measures were imposed to the perpetrator, i.e. 3,717 measures; while 15.33 % less of these measures were prolonged, i.e. 2,148 measures imposed. Decline in the number of violated emergency measures imposed to perpetrators by 9.55 % was recorded, i.e. 284 emergency measures in 2020 were violated compared to 314 measures in 2019. When imposing of the temporary restraining orders to perpetrators to contact the victims of violence and approach her, a declining trend by 12.49 % was recorded, i.e. 2,424 of these measures were imposed. However, an increase has been established in the number of imposed temporary measures of removal perpetrators from the family home by 13.92 % , i.e. in 2019: 1.135 measures were imposed compared to 1,293 in 2020.

When psychosocial support to victims and survivors are in question,according to the data of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, which supports the work of the National SOS hotline, there has been no increase in the number of calls on the national SOS hotlines since the beginning of the crisis.

Specialised non-governmental organisations supporting the SOS hotline at the local level established that there has been an increase in the number of calls on the SOS hotline during the state of emergency, on average approximately by 30 %. They believe that it will come to subsequent increase in cases of violence because women did not feel safe enough to report violence in the presence of the bully, i.e. during isolation. In the Autonomous Women’s Centre, a specialised NGOs working with women victims of violence, for example, emphasise that they received 6 times more calls for help than usual. The calls at first related to psychological and economic violence, but then an increase in the number of reported physical violence followed.

***Female genital mutilation and forced marriage***

With the aim of harmonisation of the national legislation with the standards set in the Istanbul Convention, the Criminal Code was amended in 2016. New criminal offences were introduced, such as: Stalking, Forced marriage, Female genital mutilation and Sexual harassment. Foreseen sanctions for a certain number of criminal offences from the group of offences against sexual freedom became tougher; also, it is stipulated that the prosecution is to be undertaken *ex officio*, at the initiative of the Public Prosecutor.

*As regards the criminal offence relating to the female genital mutilation, we would like to note that there is no such practice in Serbia.*

We would also like to point to the fact that the incrimination of the criminal offence of forced marriage includes minor persons as well, and not only the adults. Although a child more than 16 years old can marry with the court permission, according to the applicable regulations, if the marriage permission has been provided under use of force and the very marriage has been forced, it is a criminal offence. On the other hand, it is important to emphasise that establishing an extramarital union with a minor is also incriminated, regardless of the fact whether it has been established by force or not, since a minor is in question. For this criminal offence, imprisonment up to three years is threatened, and the parents, adoptive parents and guardians who enable to the minor to live in an extramarital union with an adult person or if they force the minor to do so, shall be punished with the same sanction. In the Republic of Serbia, for this criminal offence, for example, during 2017, 60 persons were indicted and 53 persons convicted, which proves that the competent authorities react in the cases of establishing extramarital unions with minors.

*Draft Law amending the Family Law,* currently underway, excludes the possibility of marriage with minors who are 16 years old with the previous court permission. A provision was introduced that the marriage is null if it has been concluded with a person younger than 18.

In February 2019, *National Coalition to End Child Marriage* was established, with the aim to contribute through oriented and coordinated action of relevant actors prevent child marriages in Serbia, Particularly when Roma population is in question. The Coalition consists of the representatives of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, Office for Human and Minority Rights, National Assembly Committees for human and minority rights, gender equality and children's rights, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit, Office for the inclusion of Roma from Nišavski, Jablanički and Južnobanatski Districts. Part of this coalition are also the representatives of the Ombudsman, Commissioner for Gender Equality of the City f Belgrade, Civil society associations: Bibija, Ternipe, Praxis, Indigo, Novi Bečej Roma Association, Republic Institute for Social Protection and UNICEF.

**CRISIS EXPERIENCE**

**Answers to questions 5-9:**

Although it happened a little more than five years ago, we cannot but mention that in mid-May 2014 the Republic of Serbia was struck by floods caused by several days of heavy precipitation. Twenty-nine municipalities were flooded partly or completely. A great number of residential and business buildings were flooded and more than 30,000 citizens evacuated from the flooded areas. The Government of the Republic of Serbia declared an emergency situation pursuant to the then applicable Law on Emergency Situations due to the occurrence of natural disaster - flood. The floods caused damage to Serbia assessed to amount to 1 billion and 532 million euros. Fifty-one persons lost their lives in the floods, of whom 24 persons drowned.

It is important to note that in the crisis situation caused by flood in 2014, the then Council for Gender Equality recognized the significance of the gender dimension in the protection against floods and rescue activities. The Council held an extraordinary session dedicated to the flooding issue on 29 May 2014. The Council concluded and recommended at its session that it is necessary to develop the gender sensitive statistics, indicators of the flood threat and socioeconomic consequences, but also the indicators of reconstruction and recovery. A special recommendation related to the provision of protection of women and girls as well as providing equality in the distribution of assistance among women and men.

The gender analysis of the influence of floods developed after the floods by the *Mission of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe,* in cooperation with theCentres for promoting and applying the Convention of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), on the availability of information, participation of public in decision-making and the right to legal protection when the issues concerning the environment are in question, showed that women were not represented in planning the emergency response nor in the decision-making process.

The research carried out within the analysis showed that the population was not ready for an emergency situation and had no information whatsoever how to act properly in emergencies, which caused that women, due to traditionally assumed biological characteristics and determined gender roles in the society, felt more “helpless” and relied to a much greater extent on the available professional and organised support.

In the segment of possibility of evacuation and inability to meet needs during the accommodation in collective centres and in the period of reconstruction, the research showed that the most vulnerable categories of women, namely pregnant women, single mothers, elderly women and disabled women, were particularly threatened.

*The Public Investment Management Office* uses in its work the experiences from the reconstruction after floods, observing the highest standards of transparency. The Office was established in 2015 and fully took over the responsibilities of the Office for Assistance and Rehabilitation of Flooded Areas established as response to catastrophic floods in 2014. The Office manages the reconstruction projects and provides assistance after natural and other disasters, primarily through projects of reconstruction of several thousands of preschool, school, healthcare and social welfare institutions. The Office coordinates its activities, both in the decision-making process and in the process of implementation, with active participation of the local self-government units.

In the Human Development Report for Serbia 2016, Social Capital: The Invisible Face of Resilience”, it was established that in 2016 the women’s civil society organisations were supported to introduce the principle of gender equality into the disaster risk reduction systems in 20 Serbian municipalities. In Kraljevo, for example, Department of Civil Protection of the local self-government (which is also the member of the Headquarter for Emergency Situations) and the women’s association “Fenomena“ coordinated training and certification of 30 women selected by the civil protection commissioners in the three most vulnerable communities. The women participants in the workshop were trained to organise the provision of civil protection services at the local level. Furthermore, in this city, a Volunteer Female Firefighters Association with 21 female members was established, which is a precedent in Serbia. According to the representatives of “Fenomena”, the involvement of women in the system contributed to the mobilisation and increased engagement of the whole local community on matters of disaster risk protection.

The Republic Institute for Social Protection classifies data on the cases of domestic violence registered in centres for social work, according to: gender, age, bully/victim of domestic violence relationship, geographic location (urban/rural population). Besides, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Justice keep registers of their own on the number of reported, i.e. processed cases of domestic violence, while the Republic Statistical Office carries out periodical research on domestic violence, with special focus on the violence against women including a significantly higher number of factors.

The biggest problem spotted during the pandemics is the lack of capacities for accommodation, isolation and taking care of women and girls victims of violence during testing for COVID-19; namely, if they are infected by the virus, there are not enough isolation blocks in the present safe houses and shelters for the victims of domestic and partner violence.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, at the proposal of the Occupational Safety and Health Directorate, on the basis of the Law on Safety and Health at Work, amended on 6 May 2020 the Act on the risk assessment, bearing in mind that the Act on the risk assessment was adopted before COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. on 17 August 2017.

In March 2020, in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, first cases of COVID-19 infection were recorded. On 15 March 2020, by the Decision of the President of the Republic, President of the National Assembly and the Prime Minister, state of emergency in the whole territory of the Republic of Serbia, due to epidemic of corona virus (COVID-19) infectious disease was declared. The National Assembly, on its session held on 6 May 2020, passed the Decision on the abolition of the state of emergency.

Due to the epidemic, emergency situation is proclaimed in the territory of 54 local self-government units – in the entire territory of 15 cities: Prokuplje, Valjevo, Kruševac, Kraljevo, Beograd, Šabac, Čačak, Kragujevac, Novi Pazar, Vranje, Užice, Loznica, Leskovac, Smederevo and Zaječar, and 39 municipalities: Koceljeva, Trstenik, Vladimirci, Aleksandrovac, Prijepolje, Nova Varoš, Brus, Arilje, Tutin, Raška, Ivanjica, Požega, Lučani, Vladičin Han, Priboj, Bogatić, Vrbas, Kuršumlija, Surdulica, Bajina Bašta, Ljubovija, Mali Zvornik, Krupanj, Bosilegrad, Bujanovac, Knjaževac, Sokobanja, Ruma, Kosjerić, Preševo, Vrnjačka Banja, Kladovo, Blace, Trgovište, Ljig, Beočin, Bela Palanka, Bač and Temerin.

Responses to emergency situations are financed from the Budget, although help from foreign and domestic donors is also welcome. For example, after the declaration of the state of emergency, the Coordination Body for Gender Equality made a decision in cooperation with the UN Women and with the support of the EU Delegation to Serbia, to re-allocate part of the funds dedicated to the IPA 2016 Project, “Key Steps Toward Gender Equality”, in the amount of USD 120 thousand, to the mobile, volunteer and emergency units, with the aim of providing support to the most vulnerable women at the local level. More than 14 thousand women from 50 municipalities and cities were provided useful information on acting during a crisis situation, hygiene packages and food.

The private sector joined the response to crisis as well. With the help of the Mozzart Company, TV sets and equipment were donated to all safe houses in Serbia (total number of 13), with the aim to enable children, who are accommodated as victims in safe houses and who have to attend online classes because the schools are closed, to fulfil their school learning obligations. Also, DexyCo Company donated toys and board games for children accommodated in shelters.

Furthermore, the civil sector also contributed to the adequate crisis response. In cooperation with the B92 Fund, a non-governmental organisation implementing non-profit projects, the necessary disinfectants were provided for all safe houses in Serbia.

**CRISIS PREPAREDNESS, RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE**

**Answer to Questions 10-12**

Provisions of the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management *foresee the development of the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction* (Article 12). Until the adoption of the mentioned document, the *National Programme for the Natural Disaster Risk Management* is in force and is valid till the end of the current year 2020. Furthermore, the Law regulates the *National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction*. The main players of the National Platform are the *Republic Headquarters for Emergency Situations* and the representatives of the academic community, local self-government and civil society organisations as well as other actors in the disaster risk reduction system. It is a platform for considering and defining issues of the utmost importance for the disaster risk reduction and emergency management; enabling exchange of opinions, knowledge, innovations and experiences in the disaster risk reduction field; proposing measures and activities in the disaster risk reduction and emergency management policy; considering development strategies, plans and programmes of interest for the disaster risk reduction and emergency management; and strengthening mechanisms of cooperation and coordination at the national and international level (Article 14).

As regards the support to states in their efforts to combat the crisis, provided by the international Human Rights Mechanisms, we believe that of importance and help would be already known common instruments: Resolutions and General Recommendations adopted by the UN treaty bodies. Also, the distribution of all information and feedback, acquired by international mechanisms during the pandemic as well as examples of good practice.