



SHADOWED SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic, as many experts and observers have already noted, did not so much generate, but intensify and exacerbate some of the negative trends that existed in society before its appearance. The current situation shows that many half-hidden problems in society have suddenly turned into social pain points, which are no longer possible to ignore even among many other challenges. Among these suddenly exacerbated problems is the phenomenon that has received the name "shadow pandemic". Just like "shadow economy", "shadow education" and other similar phrases, this term contains the meaning of something informal, hidden from society and the state, and in fact, means a sharply increased level of violence against women and girls in a pandemic COVID-19.

According to the UN, even before COVID-19 emerged, domestic violence was one of the most serious human rights violations. For example, in the year before the pandemic, 243 million women and girls (aged 15 to 49) worldwide experienced sexual or physical violence. In the context of COVID-19, when billions of people are isolated in confined spaces, and the aggression of many of them is increasing, the number of violence against women right dramatically increased. Concerns about safety, health, finances, cramped housing conditions, forced isolation with the abuser, and limited mobility are all factors that exacerbate the already stressful emotional and economic turmoil women face in the current situation.

Fumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN-Women, says in her report that violent behavior behind closed doors is not always known to the general public, information on domestic and other forms of violence is underreported, statistics show that less than 40% of women who have experienced violence report a crime. Even fewer women (less than 10%) seek help from the police. The conditions of the pandemic generally make it difficult for some women to helplines. The implementation of unavoidable bureaucratic procedures, including filing an application with the police, a medical examination, investigative actions, then appeal to

the judiciary, to social services, due to the unstable work of these state institutions in a pandemic, also contribute to the impunity of criminals.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that many structures and organizations are already working at the limit of their capabilities due to their switching to the problems of prevention, treatment, patient care, drug supply, vaccination - everything that seems more important, relevant, directly related to the issues of life and death of people. Moreover, in many countries the law is not on the side of women; one in four countries does not have laws protecting women from domestic violence. At the same time, not only young mothers suffer, but also other marginalized groups - single mothers, the elderly, and the disabled. For example, in the UK, the number of homicides related to domestic violence more than doubled in the first two months of quarantine in 2020. In the United States, domestic violence is not only increasing in number, but injury severity is also rising. In India, women's groups have shown that girls are forced into child marriages as access to education and livelihoods has declined significantly.

According to a UN Women report titled "Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During COVID-19", a survey in 13 countries shows that nearly 1 in 2 women has reported violence she has experienced or she knows a woman who has been abused. In addition, one in four women feels less secure at home due to physical violence committed against her (21%) or other women in the same household (19%). It should be borne in mind that UN Women considers violence not only physical harm, such as hitting, beating or rape. Violence also includes constant surveillance, reading of correspondence, control of expenses, allegations of fictitious misconduct, prohibition of communication with friends, relatives, colleagues, verbal abuse and humiliation, damage to property, threats to women or children and blackmail.

The shadow pandemic has not only a social aspect but also an economic one. The global impact of violence against women

during the COVID-19 period was estimated by experts at about \$ 1.5 trillion, but this figure can only grow every day, and it is obvious that this growth will not stop immediately with the end of the pandemic. The direct costs of health care, counseling and other related services, the justice system, child care, and welfare, as well as indirect costs such as lost wages, productivity, and potential, are only a fraction of what society pays for violence against women. Women need economic support, reparations, shelter and helpline services, awareness-raising, psychosocial support, online tools and networks, and funding for women's and grassroots organizations that work to prevent or respond to discrimination and violation of the rights of women and children.

However, gender-based violence is not inevitable. Human rights organizations believe that it can and should be prevented. Ending this violence starts with tackling root causes, changing harmful social norms, and empowering women and girls. This requires adequate funding and support for strong and self-sustaining women's rights movements, in addition to tailor-made law enforcement, justice, health, and social protection strategies to protect vulnerable groups. In addition, employers are also encouraged to provide specific types of support for victims of domestic violence, such as paid leave and security measures; creating a culture in the workplace where survivors can disclose domestic violence and remain safe in their jobs; raising awareness and funding to meet the needs of survivors of domestic violence.

Violence against women is one of the main obstacles to women's participation in the economic, social, and political spheres. The results of studies by international organizations show that in order to successfully respond to the increase in the number of cases of gender-based violence during a pandemic, it is necessary to joint efforts of legislators, politicians, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, doctors, the media to support and help women who are victims of or are at risk of violence generated by the current pandemic.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Interior Minister of Turkey Suleyman Soyulu and his Hungarian counterpart Sandor Pinter signed an agreement in the capital Budapest according to which Turkey will deploy 50 police officers at Hungary's borders with Serbia and Romania. The police will be serving as part of the efforts to prevent illegal migration, drug smuggling, and cross-border crimes. The document was signed as part of the agreement reached at the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council held in Ankara on November 11, 2021 (Dailysabah.com, 17.12.2021).
- The Leaders of the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and high-ranking EU officials took part in the 6th Eastern Partnership summit. The leaders stressed that their partnership remains firmly based on common fundamental values. Belarus has suspended its participation in the Eastern Partnership but the EU continues to cooperate with the people of Belarus. Following the meeting, the Leaders of the Association Trio (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) issued a statement endorsing long-term policy objectives, promoting the European choice and European aspirations (European Council, 15.12.2021).
- The Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gariashvili held talks with Secretary-General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels. The sides agreed on the need to remain vigilant against Russia's destabilizing activities and to avoid escalation of tensions. Jens Stoltenberg thanked Georgia for contributing to NATO's mission and efforts in Afghanistan and promised that NATO would continue its support for Georgia in developing its defense capabilities with maritime support, joint exercises, and information sharing (Anadolu Agency, 15.12.2021).
- President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev addressed Kazakhstani on the 30th anniversary of Independence Day. The Head of State pointed out that it is also time to redouble and even triple efforts to increase the achievements of independence amid new global and regional challenges. The President believes that Kazakhstan should make efforts in all spheres of socio-economic life and act pragmatically taking into account the fundamental interests of the country (Kazinform, 15.12.2021).
- The President of Russia Vladimir Putin had a meeting with his Mongolian counterpart UkhnaagiinKhurelsukh. The countries intend to bolster economic cooperation, stimulate trade and investment. The heads of state confirmed their readiness to provide comprehensive support to the joint-stock company Ulan-Bator Railway. The countries are going to reinvigorate the implementation of the roadmap for the development of cooperation between Russia, China, and Mongolia and the 2016 program for creating the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor (TASS, 16.12.2021).
- Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev had a meeting with Chinese Ambassador Du Dewen. The sides focused on the cargo transportation issue between Kyrgyzstan and China. Kazakbaev informed about the existing difficulties in the transportation of goods of entrepreneurs of Kyrgyzstan at the seaports of Qingdao and Lianyungang of China, heading to Kyrgyzstan from South Korea and expressed a request to the Chinese side to provide assistance in resolving this situation as soon as possible (Kabar, 14.12.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- In the first 11 months of 2021 investments in the agro-industrial complex of Kazakhstan amounted to \$1.5 billion. This value exceeded the indicator of last year by 40.5%. According to the Minister of Agriculture YerbolKarashukueyev, a pool of investment projects with a total value of \$10.1 billion was created within the Roadmap for the development of the agro-industrial complex for 2021-2025. Almost half or \$4.6 billion investment went to meat production and the construction of greenhouses (Qazaq TV, 14.12.2021).
- The Eurasian Economic Union plans to sign new free trade agreements. The union removed trade barriers with Vietnam, Iran, Serbia, and Singapore. Negotiations are well underway with Egypt, Israel, and India. It is also planned to explore the markets of Indonesia and Mongolia. If trade agreements are signed with these countries, the free trade zone will cover a market with a population of around two billion people, and the gross domestic product will reach \$5 trillion (Qazaq TV, 15.12.2021).
- Azerbaijan together with Turkey and Georgia conducted a business forum. According to the information, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia NatiaTurnava, Minister of Trade of Turkey Mehmet Mush, and Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan MikayilJabbarov participated in the business forum. The signing of a memorandum between the chambers of commerce and industry of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey is expected at the event (Turkic World, 14.12.2021).
- The Turkish city of Konya hosted the Turkey-Tajikistan business forum. A government delegation from Tajikistan headed by the Minister of Industry and New Technologies, Sherali Kabir visited the Turkish city of Konya to participate in the Turkey-Tajikistan business forum. Representatives of more than 150 companies and enterprises of both countries participated in the event. The parties discussed issues related to developing the Turkey-Tajikistan bilateral trade facilitation roadmap designed for 2022-2025 (ASIA-Plus, 15.12.2021).
- The World Bank's Board of Executive Directors approved the provision of \$400 million in financing to Uzbekistan as part of the Development Policy Operation. The purpose of the operation is to help the government implement socio-economic reforms. The expected reforms include liberalization of the wheat market, improvement of the management of public enterprises, and strengthening accountability and oversight of public spending and debt (UzReport, 18.12.2021).
- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kyrgyzstan conducted a business forum. The participants discussed key sectors of mutual interest, including agriculture, food industries, tourism, infrastructure, and trade. The forum remains an important platform for boosting Dubai's non-oil trade with Kyrgyzstan beyond the \$817 million accounted for in 2020. The event concluded with business matching meetings joined by Kyrgyz and UAE companies and a ceremony that saw companies from both sides signing agreements facilitating the supply of products (Kabar, 16.12.2021).

Society and Culture

- The UNESCO included traditional Crimean Tatar ornament Ornek in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The process of the nomination was a long-term initiative of the Crimean Tatar NGO "Alem" launched in July 2020. The inscription of Ukraine's nomination "Ornek" on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity was held within the framework of the 16th session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Ukrinform.net, 18.12.2021).
- The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) intends to permanently use the logistics center in Termez to provide assistance to Afghanistan. The issues discussed during the meeting of the UNICEF representative in Uzbekistan Munir Mammadzade with the hokim (governor) of the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan, Tura Bobolov. Recently, the first 40 tons were sent by trucks across the Friendship Bridge to Afghanistan (Avesta.tj, 17.12.2021).
- India and Tajikistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Indian Grant Assistance for the Implementation of Highly Effective Community Development Projects (HICDP). In accordance with this Memorandum, the Ministry of Tajikistan will propose projects, the cost of which does not exceed 16.94 million somoni (about \$ 1.5 million) for the implementation of each project as a grant from the government of India. The projects relate mainly to socio-economic development, education, health, renewable energy, and other sectors (Avesta.tj, 17.12.2021).
- Tajik and Uzbek filmmakers are planning to jointly shoot two films within the framework of the implementation of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the State Institution "Tajikfilm" and the agency of cinematography of Uzbekistan. The preparations for the filming of a joint feature film Nevidimaya zvezda (Invisible Star) directed by MuhabbatSattori are underway. The presentation of the next joint film Kamni i voda (Stones and Water)" based on the script by Tajik director Iskandar Usmonov will take place in Tashkent in Late December 2021 (ASIA-Plus, 15.12.2021).
- Turkish Airlines has been voted as the Best Airline for Business Class for the fifth year in a row by the leading US travel magazine Global Traveler. Turkey's flag carrier also took its sixth win for the Best Airport Staff/Gate Agents in the 18th edition of the GT Tested Reader Survey. Moreover, the Turkish Airlines Corporate Club was chosen as the Best Corporate Program for Business Travelers for the fourth consecutive year (Anadolu Agency, 15.12.2021).
- An event dedicated to the memory of the famous writer, thinker, and politician ChingizAitmatov was held in Ankara. It was timed to the ChingizAitmatov birthday and held in the park of the same name. The event was attended by Ambassador KubanychbekOmuraliev, Mayor of Kechioron Municipality Turgut Altınok, Deputy Secretary-General of TURKSOY Bilal Cakici, diplomats, students, media representatives, and Kyrgyz people living in Turkey (Turkic World, 13.12.2021).