



# United Nations

United Nations Global Open Day on  
Women, Peace and  
Security in Kosovo

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## **Towards an Inclusive Recovery:**

Advancing Women's Meaningful Participation  
in Decision-making during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Pristina, 23 June, 2021

## Introduction

On 23 June 2021, UNMIK and UN Women organised the 8th edition the United Nations Global Open Day on Women, Peace and Security in Kosovo, under the theme "Towards and Inclusive Recovery: Advancing women's meaningful participation in decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls have been disproportionately affected, including in the areas of health, economy, education, employment, safety, and social protection. Women have also been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic, including as health workers, caregivers, and innovators. As such, they have privileged insight into the needs and priorities of women, and a wider overview of response and recovery initiatives that effectively incorporate a gender perspective. Despite this clear advantage women in Kosovo are still being excluded from playing meaningful roles in the Government of Kosovo's response to the pandemic.

### **Focus on the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes related to the pandemic and its link to peace and security**

In July 2020, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2532 (2020) recognising the critical role of women in COVID-19 response efforts and calling for "concrete actions to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the development and implementation of an adequate and sustainable response to the pandemic." The 2020 Secretary-General Report on Women, Peace and Security further notes that "the pandemic will have profound implications for international peace and security, including through the further marginalization of women in political decision-making." It also emphasizes the strong link between gender inequality and conflict risk and calls for concrete actions to ensure the "full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the development and implementation of an adequate and sustainable response to the pandemic."

There has been an overall lack of attention to the implications of excluding women from pandemic-related decision making, including its potential impact on security and conflict. Even fewer attention has been given to the inextricable link between the traditional concept of security and the human approach to security, where inclusiveness and equality are the basis for conflict-free and stable societies. Failure to address the security and socio-economic impact that the pandemic has had on women can lead to more conflict-prone societies and destabilize fragile peace.

To emerge from this health crisis without leaving women behind, women's contributions and experiences must be recognised widely and reflected through meaningful participation in decision-making, policy design and implementation at all levels. This event examined the extent of women's participation in pandemic-response decision-making in Kosovo and explored ways in which their participation can be increased.

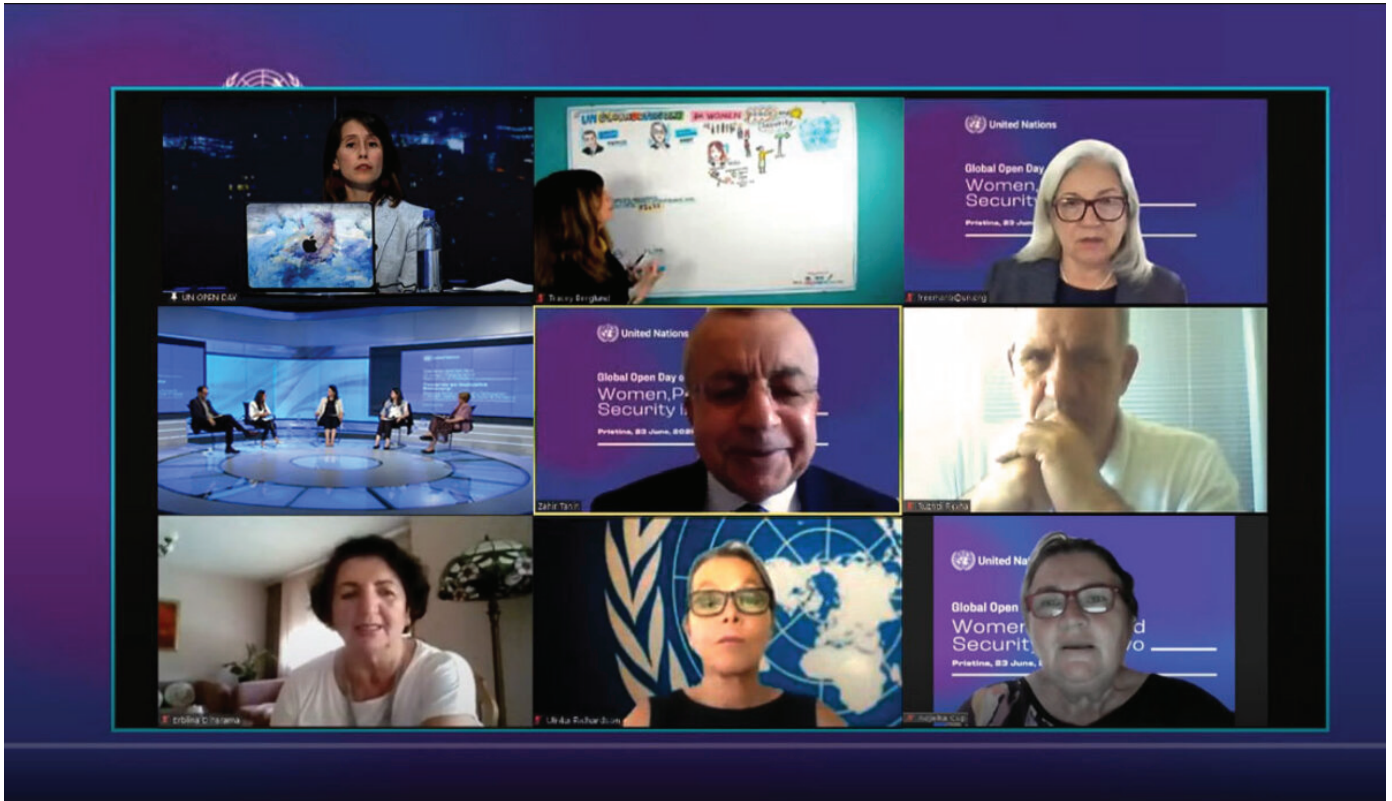
## Women Building Back TOGETHER



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## COVID 19: A CRISIS WITH A WOMAN'S FACE

### Opening Remarks



The event began with a keynote message by the United Nations Special Representative to the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of UNMIK, Zahir Tanin, and was followed by opening remarks from the United Nations Development Coordinator (UNDC) in Kosovo, Ms. Ulrika Richardson.

SRSG and Head of UNMIK, **Zahir Tanin**, highlighted the sudden, unprecedented, and multidimensional impact of the pandemic. He emphasized its disproportionate impact on women and girls including their increased exposure to risks including extreme poverty, food insecurity, economic distress, domestic violence, loss of income because of increased unpaid care work, and reduced access to education and healthcare, including for sexual and reproductive health. Recognising women's central role in response and recovery efforts and their exclusion from pandemic-related decision-making, SRSG Tanin made a call to view the pandemic as an opportunity to commit to building more inclusive societies in which everyone has a voice.

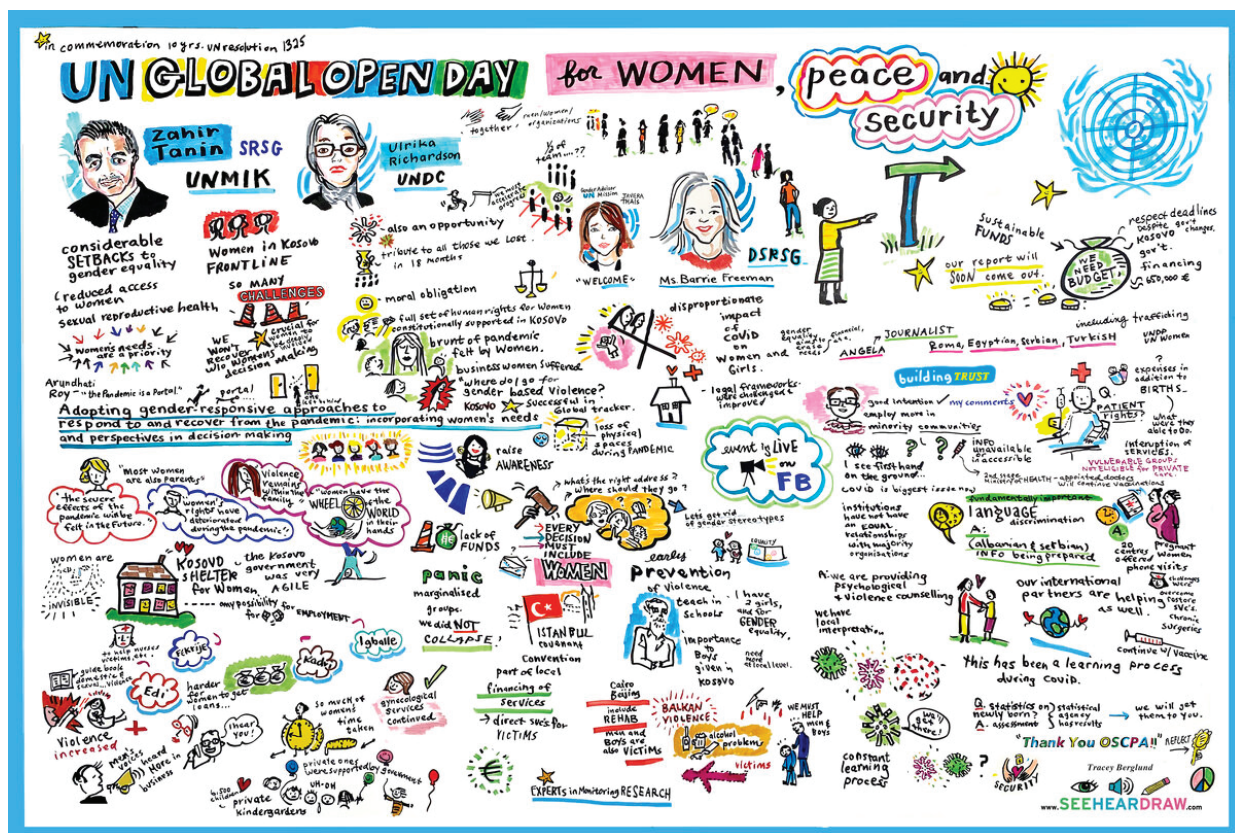
The pandemic has progressively intensified pre-existing interconnected systemic and existential risks, resulting in considerable setbacks to our joint pursuit of for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Zahir Tanin, SRSG and Head of UNMIK

UNDC **Ulrika Richardson**, reflected on the importance of including women in all pandemic-related decision-making for the sake of society, noting that women's right to participate in public and political affairs in an equal standing with men is constitutionally protected in Kosovo. Noting the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on women, Ms. Richardson reflected on women's vulnerable position in the labour force and the economy, as well as the increase in the number of reported cases of domestic violence. She further highlighted how women's traditionally closer role to the household and family enables them to identify community issues that may go unnoticed by men, and how this perspective is key in achieving inclusive solutions.

Decision-makers in Kosovo – women and men – have been conscious of the need for gender-sensitive responses. The need to involve more women in these processes, however, remains unabated.

Ulrika Richardson, UNDC in Kosovo



## Voices from the field

An introductory video featuring three people from across Kosovo discussing women's roles in decision-making was screened prior to the debate, focusing on the gender inclusiveness of the pandemic response, as well as women's involvement in pandemic-related decision-making.



experiences. Speaking about the numerous roles that women play simultaneously in the private and public spheres, she referred to their unique capacity to multitask and make decisions.

Speaking from Pristina, Dr. **Zana Kaçaniku-Deva**, a lead microbiologist at the Kosovo Institute of Public Health, reflected on the importance of bringing women to decision-making roles, noting that they can bring diversity to different perspectives and

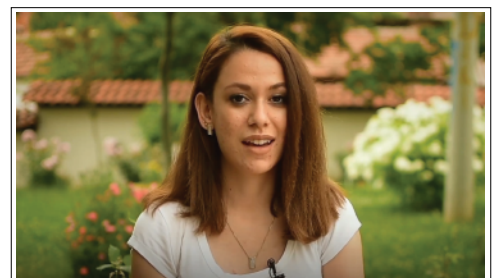
The process of planning and policymaking without investing in gender mainstreaming cannot be done, it is non-negotiable and should be seen as a priority.

Zana Kaçaniku-Deva, Microbiologist



**Marko Milenković**, a Project Manager from the North Mitrovica-based New Social Initiative NGO, noted the absence of women in decision-making positions, especially in political roles. He added that government institutions did not respond adequately to the needs of women during the pandemic and yet continued to exclude women from decision-making processes.

**Sabina Berisha**, a Field Mediator for Antigypsism, highlighted the impact of Kosovo's President. Ms. Vjosa Osmani, in highlighting women's needs and priorities in the highest political levels. She also referred to increased levels of household decision making by women during the pandemic.



## The Panel Discussion



Moderated by the Head of UN Women in Kosovo, Ms. **Vlora Nushi**, the panel discussion placed a strong focus on the impact of the pandemic on women's economic, health, psychological, and social life in Kosovo. The panelists acknowledged the important role played by women in responding to COVID-19 and elaborated on the importance of women's active engagement in decision-making roles during the pandemic's recovery phase.

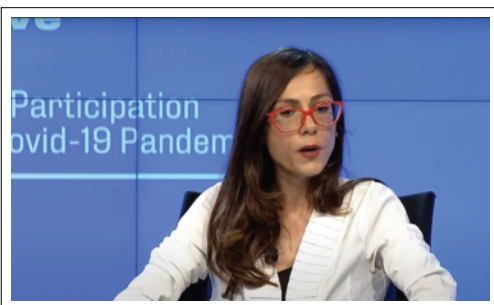
Ms. **Edi Gusia**, Head of the Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, noted that cultural norms have contributed to the disproportionate impact on women's lives. Elaborating on the economic impact of the pandemic, she mentioned that the service sector, which is highly staffed by women, was the first to suffer from the initial lockdown measures. Nonetheless, she highlighted that the Government of Kosovo had allocated considerable budget and set strategic priorities for the advancement of gender equality, specifically focusing on women and girls, which supported integrating gender equality priorities in economic recovery with the support from international agencies. Referring to women's lack of access to services and their hesitation to apply for loans, she stated that women required additional capacity-building support in applying for public calls, filling out forms and following all the required administrative procedures related to services, jobs, finance, bank and trade.

Ms. **Gusia** highlighted the importance of opening a dialogue with international partners and make service provision requirements more flexible during crises. "As an



institution," she noted, "we learned that the legal and financial framework was rather rigid in emergency situations and it may require some additional thinking, and a different plan, on how to act with the legal framework to manage public finances in such situations that affect the lives of all of us."

Ms. **Fekrije Hasani**, Chief Nurse Officer at the Kosovo Ministry of Health, expressed gratitude to all nurses for their significant contribution to alleviating the effects of the pandemic, noting that health workers provided increased services to Gender-based Violence (GBV) survivors during the pandemic. She argued that increased awareness among women helped to raise the number of reported GBV cases during the pandemic. Ms. Hasani pointed out the lack of a manual for health care professionals on how to treat survivors of different forms of GBV, including sexual and domestic violence. Asked about the situation of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, she noted that while there was no separate provision or protocol to treat such cases, health service providers have dealt with such cases.



Ms. **Adelina Berisha**, Program Manager for Addressing GBV at the Kosovo Women's Network, stated that the practice of not recognizing women's contribution has once again been evidenced during the pandemic. Women NGOs and CSOs, have faced various challenges during the pandemic, including lack of funding. She highlighted the important role of

NGOs in reaching out to vulnerable and marginalized communities to offer services that meet their specific needs, adding that the redirection of government, international and local partner funds to respond to the pandemic severely affected their ability to support these communities. She noted that NGOs continue to advocate for the effective and meaningful participation of women in all decision-making processes, as stipulated in the Kosovo Law on Gender Equality, which should also be applicable to the context of the pandemic.

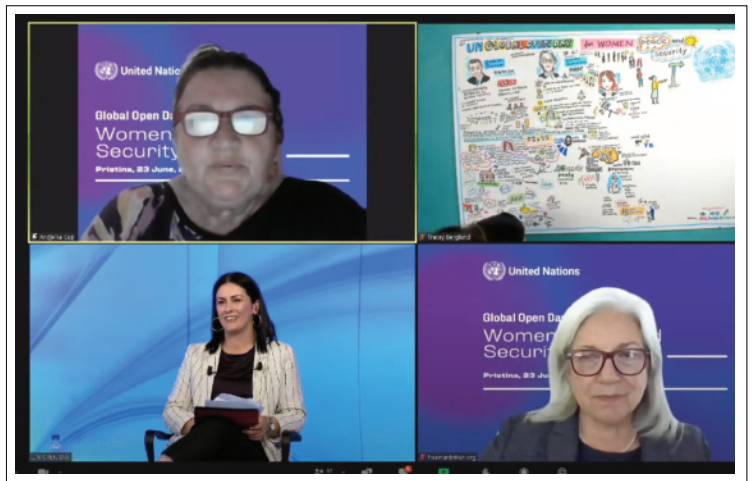
She concluded, "We would like our contribution to be recognized by decision makers and every decision-making process should involve women. Women's interests and needs should not be undermined, and women organizations should be consulted and engaged in all decision making including in local levels."



Mr. **Kadri Gashi**, Director of the Centre for Counselling, Social Services and Research elaborated on his experience working with men and boys on the prevention of GBV, noting the impact of the pandemic on the increase of reported cases of domestic violence. He said that the inclusion of men and boys in gender equality initiatives was key to make progress in this area. He concluded "Start with younger generations and early counseling because it helps family and society to have more boys and girls informed concerning the early prevention and negative phenomena."

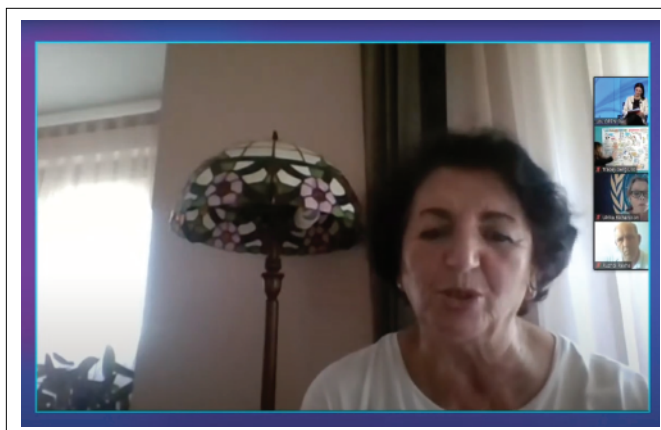
## Questions / audience intakes

Ms. **Andelka Čup**, Editor of the Gračanica Online information portal, raised concerns about the exclusion of non-majority communities, especially women, during the pandemic, noting that Kosovo institutions failed to provide timely access to information in all official languages regarding Covid-19 measures and vaccination procedures in the beginning of the response. Commending the capacity development support in interpretation of information into local languages from the UN and other international organizations, she concluded "Honoring the Law on the Use of Language is the foundation of human rights."



- In response to Ms. Čup's observations, Ms. **Edi Gusia** acknowledged that there were some delays in the dissemination of information during the crisis but noted that the Agency of Gender Equality had published information in different languages, including calls and forms to apply to grants. She added that one of the lessons learned from the handling of the pandemic was the importance of considering the specific needs and priorities of women from different communities. Ms. **Adelina Berisha** noted that more than 160 NGOs representing all communities are part of the Kosovo Women's Network umbrella and committed to continue cooperation with the agencies working with all communities and ethnic groups in Kosovo, as well as ensuring use of local languages, including in disseminating information received from the central institutions.

Ms. **Sakibe Doli**, Director of the Gjakova/Đakovica Shelter, acknowledged the support provided the government and international partners, including the UN, during the pandemic. Referring to the increase in the number of reported cases of domestic violence during the pandemic, she highlighted the need to expand the capacities and services of shelters. She further stated that people must be informed about the Ministry of Justice's actions to deal with the problem of shortage of funds for the operation of shelters.



- Ms. **Edi Gusia** noted that the government has been financing licensed shelters through the Ministry of Work and Social Welfare on an annual basis, adding that there is a separate budget allocation of EUR 650,000. She recognised that there was a need to find a different modality for adequate and sustainable financing of shelters in line with the new government's expressed priorities and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), which has been incorporated in the Kosovo constitution. Furthermore, she elaborated on the importance of direct services to the victims and timely interventions focused on perpetrators to break the cycle of violence.



Mr. **Ruzhdi Rexha**, Director of the Patients' Rights Organization, stated that his work on the protection of the rights of patients included the monitoring of services and activities of medical and health institutions. He questioned the government's decision to stop general medical services in public health facilities, noting the difficulties in accessing

public hospitals and medical care, which oftentimes resulted in patients using high-cost private medical services.

- Ms. **Fekrije Hasani** replied that services for vulnerable populations with chronic diseases and pregnant women remained active in more than 20 family medicine centers. When restriction of movement measures were put in place, she added, these services were unable to make onsite visits, but provided remote counselling, and critical patients were distributed medicines through the family medicine teams.

### Final message from the panelists

Ms. **Edi Gusia** said that government agencies must improve their service delivery based on the lessons learned from the pandemic. She called on international partners to engage on constructive dialogue with the government to support Kosovo people during the crisis, suggesting that flexibility in the delivery of humanitarian assistance was required.

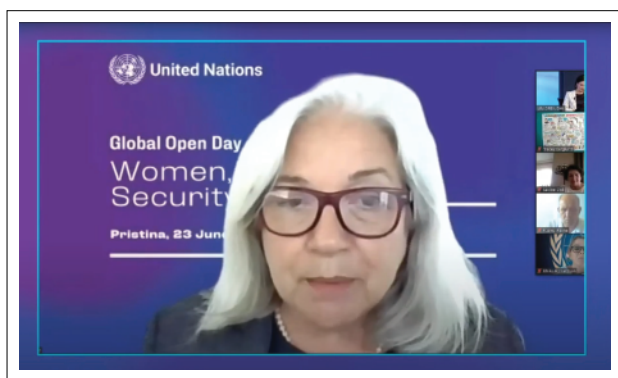
Ms. **Adelina Berisha** reiterated the need to ensure women's participation, in consultation with women's organizations, during the preparation and implementation of policies -not only in the case of the pandemic, but also in all decision-making processes at the central and local levels. She added that raising the voice of women in decision-making processes was more important than fulfilling any representation quota.

Ms. **Fekrije Hasani** highlighted the critical role played by the Ministry of Health and health professionals during the pandemic. She called for the empowerment of health professionals and acknowledged the leadership of women in responding to Covid in Kosovo.

Mr. **Kadri Gashi** underscored the need for additional efforts to work with families at the local level. He highlighted the need to break traditional stereotypes by enhancing women and girls' leadership, as well as their social and economic empowerment.

## Closing Remarks

In her closing remarks, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. **Barrie Freeman**, acknowledged the contribution of all stakeholders to the success



of the event. She reiterated the need to integrate the needs and priorities of women from different communities to building back better from the Covid-19 crisis. She emphasized the importance of advancing women's participation in all pandemic-related response and recovery stages and the need to provide platforms for them to express their needs and priorities. She also asserted that

the inclusion of women in decision-making was not only the right and just thing to do, but also "the smart thing to do," adding that "integrating the needs and priorities of women from all communities, majority and non-majority, will help drive a better recovery and ensure that Kosovo emerges from this crisis more united as a society." She concluded that "Today's session is a call to everyone to work together towards effective responses and an inclusive recovery."

Priorities of women from all communities, majority and non-majority, will help drive a better recovery.

Barrie Freeman - DSRSG, UNMIK

## Key Recommendations

Global Open Day on Women Peace and Security 2021 created a platform for different stakeholders to discuss the various impacts caused by the pandemic on women and girls across Kosovo and formulate a set of recommendations in support of the meaningful participation of women in all decisions related to the response and recovery from the pandemic.

- Central and local institutions should develop concrete plans, strategies and/or programmes to ensure the full engagement and active participation of women and girls, including from non-majority communities, in all kinds of decision-making processes.
- Government institutions and agencies should set specific targets and implement measures to achieve the equal representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, as required by the Law on Gender Equality.
- Efforts should be made by the government to ensure public health information is available in all official languages from the onset of a health crisis.
- Women's leadership and participation should be advanced at the local level by working with the family unit to break the gender stereotypes and promote inter-ethnic cooperation.
- Men and boys should be engaged as partners to end gender-based violence and domestic violence, including in the crisis.
- Legal procedures for financial management should be reviewed to ensure smooth service delivery of humanitarian assistance during crises.
- International organizations should continue to work in close coordination with the government to ensure timely and effective humanitarian response.
- Shelters for victims of domestic violence should be completely financed by the government through a direct budget line.
- Health care professionals should have a standardized manual on protocols of treatment for survivors of different forms of GBV to provide adequate and timely care.