



Opinion and recommendations of NANE Women's Rights Association, PATENT (People Opposing Patriarchy) Association, Hungarian Women's Lobby, EMMA Association and Jól-Lét Foundation on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan submitted by the Hungarian Government to the European Commission

June 2021

General remarks, executive summary

The NGOs that have signed up to this opinion, with decades of experience in promoting gender equality and women's rights, regret that they have not had the opportunity to be directly and meaningfully involved as partners in the drafting process of the Hungarian Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP).

The RRP¹ informs that in relation to the drafting process around 500 actors have been approached directly for partnership and for reviewing the documents, including civil society advocacy organizations, and among them women's organizations. We regret that our organizations have not been approached for this review - although have supported and are supporting EU policy processes by different professional means, including at national level. In addition, we take part in the work of recognized European networks - such as the European Women's Lobby, and the WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe) Network.

Taking into account the deadline of 30 April for the submission of national plans to the European Commission, there was a fairly short time to comment on the draft plan, which was published by the government on 16 April. Our organizations submitted the comments and suggestions to the government in connection with the published draft, but these were apparently not taken into account and included in the Recovery and Resilience Plan submitted to the European Commission.

The following remarks and suggestions contain our main observations and cannot be considered as a complete, detailed analysis of the document.

Overall, our position is that the national recovery and resilience plan suffers from fundamental shortcomings in terms of gender equality and the enforcement of women's rights. The RRP does not include the main problems and challenges related to the subject. There is a lack of reforms and measures planned for the various target groups of women particularly affected by the epidemic. Moreover, several social problems that came to the fore or worsened in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic are not reflected at all in the plan. The gender

¹ See the document in Hungarian (Magyarország Helyreállítási és Ellenállóképességi Terve, 2021) at <https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/helyreallitasi-es-ellenallokepességi-eszkoz-rrf#>

mainstreaming strategy is not applied in the document. We therefore consider it essential to rethink and revise the RRP from the point of view of gender equality and the enforcement of women's rights.

Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility² highlights that „Women have been particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis”. Therefore, the Regulation requires that „Gender equality and equal opportunities for all, and the mainstreaming of those objectives should be taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation and implementation of recovery and resilience plans submitted pursuant to this Regulation”. In addition, in its guide for Member States in preparing their National Recovery and Resilience Plans, the European Commission specifically states that “Member States should outline the most important national challenges in terms of gender equality and equal opportunities for all, including those resulting from or aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis.”³

The RRP unfortunately does not meet the above expectations, moreover, ignores them. With regard to gender equality, it does not name the most important problems and challenges; it fails to show in which areas and how women have been affected by the crisis. Equality between women and men does not appear as a goal and aspect in the sections on the goals of RRP and the most important aims of RRP's components. Although the document contains some related relevant objectives and measures for certain components, reforms and measures targeting specifically women - *in their own right* - appears in only one case. The part of the document containing the comprehensive impact analysis of the RRP does not contain information on the expected impact in terms of gender equality, although decreasing the employment differences between women and men appears as a goal here. In addition, gender mainstreaming as an aspect and method does not follow the document in a consistent and complex way.

The RRP does not refer at all to the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and it also fails to connect and adjust to it.

When presenting the strategic connection of the RRP with existing strategies and goals at the national level, in the case of Component “A” (Demography and public education), the Action Plan “Strengthening the Role of Women in the Family and Society (2021–2030)” appears, in other components however, - where it could also be relevant to reflect and remedy women's disadvantages – it does not appear.

(This “action plan” based on the intent of the decision-makers - as the document itself is not publicly available - is going to completely ignore the issue of the increase in domestic violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan of measures to the action plan does not specify related steps.)

A separate point/part in the RRP is “Gender equality and equal opportunities for all”.⁴ However, this part of the document is less than two pages long. The text contains very limited and rather general information on gender equality in itself, but especially in light of the significant economic and social volume, potential added value and relevance of the EU recovery development package. Only one component refers here to the need to ensure access to certain services without discrimination on basis of sex - which may be relevant in some cases to promote equality, but is by no means sufficient. The RRP states that “Hungary's Recovery and Resilience Plan does not differentiate the target group of developments on the basis of sex or otherwise to a greater extent than necessary, justified and proportionate.” At the same time, on the one hand, it is not clear what the authors of the

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32021R0241&from=EN>

³ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT - GUIDANCE TO MEMBER STATES - RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLANS. PART ½. European Commission, Brussels, 22.1.2021. P. 10. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/guidance-member-states-recovery-and-resilience-plans_en

⁴ RRP, pp. 32-33.

document consider to be "necessary, justified and proportionate differentiation" and how do they come to an evidence-based situation assessment. On the other hand, this approach also raises serious concerns about the RRP's ability to provide a complex, targeted and effective, professional response to discrimination against women in general and the exposure of women in particular to the negative economic and social effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Namely, if a social group is particularly disadvantaged and discriminated against during periods which are not considered to be extraordinary, and this is even increased in exceptional periods, the lack of special attention paid to these groups and the lack of compensatory measures constitutes as discrimination rather than implementation of such measures. We recommend completing or modifying the document in accordance with the above mentioned concerns.

The RRP contains only two pieces of statistical data that are disaggregated by sex. We recommend that the document - both the executive summary and the sections with detailed presentation of each component - be completed with a sex-disaggregation of the referenced statistics wherever relevant. We consider it important that when introducing the situation assessment and challenges, there must be recognition and presentation of the (different) situation of women and men, the problems identified in this field, and the measures reflecting on them should be consistently presented.

The document completely fails to address several issues that have (also) arisen or come to the fore in connection with the coronavirus pandemic and are of particular relevance to women. The RRP actually discusses only two issues that specifically refer to the situation of women. The component of "Demography and public education" mentions as a problem the employment differences/gap between the sexes, and the difficulty of reconciliation between work and family life, that even put more burden on women with small children due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a response the RRF plans the capacity building of the nursery institutions among the reforms, arguing that: "The presence of nursery care helps families with young children to find a balance by parents, basically women, between family and work."⁵ No other related reforms and measures are planned. The component of "Catching-up settlements" (addressing the situation of the most disadvantaged localities) aims - among others - "the activation of women inhabitants, levelling up their skills and qualifications that fit to the labour market needs and conditions, through producing local products".⁶ This aim is not further elaborated and translated into measures, however.

The already additional burden on women of reconciling invisible and unpaid care work and private, family and work responsibilities, including other gainful activities as entrepreneurs, has further increased with the coronavirus pandemic. There is a need for a systemic approach to this problem, which provides an institutional solution to reduce additional burdens, while also aiming for a fair distribution of tasks remaining within the household between women and men. As stated above, in the RRP, this topic appears only in connection with the development of nursery institutions, while the problem affects a much wider group than women with small children, so it would be necessary to identify a wider circle as a target group. This includes, for example, the care and supervision of older children, disabled or elderly family members, or parents having more than one child. Contrary to the provisions of the Regulation, the RRP also does not address the problem of single parents, the vast majority of whom are women, who are particularly disadvantaged, and whose paid work has often become impossible to carry out due to the closure of educational institutions. (As a post-separation example, during the pandemic, women who had already left abusive, unequal relationships repeatedly reported that their former partner with shared parental supervision and custody rights had often abused the agreement in such a way that they did not abide by the original division to take care of the child, nor did they show any flexibility

⁵ RRP, p. 38.

⁶ RRP, p. 97.

that would have made it easier for the mother to work.) We consider it necessary to solve the above-mentioned shortcomings and the extension of the target group.

Among the problems the RRP fails to address it is essential to mention violence against women, and within that, specifically domestic violence and intimate partner violence. International and local experience also confirm that the coronavirus pandemic has further aggravated the already difficult situation of victims of domestic violence. In addition, research data shows an increase in online violence against women during the pandemic. It should also be noted that curfew restrictions and reduced public traffic have further widened the gap between men and women in the free use of public streets and public transport: more deserted streets and the lack of vehicles have further reduced women's sense of security, who face greater risks when using public spaces. Thus, increasing the safety measures of public spaces and public transport also requires attention. In this context, we emphasize that the European Commission's guidance to Member States in preparing their recovery plans specifically invites Member States "to explain how the plan mitigates the social and economic impact of the crisis on women, including in relation to gender-based and domestic violence."⁷ We consider it essential to complete the document with measures addressing violence against women and domestic violence.

The RRP does not target (with a few exceptions) the human resource-based development of professions that are mainly occupied by women and are particularly affected by the pandemic. For example, health care workers, social workers, or workers in small retail businesses did not receive any support with their exposure to the pandemic, they did not get any compensation for their augmented tasks, they did not get any help with their financial difficulties or support with the betterment of their working conditions. We recommend completing the objectives and the list of measures in this regard.

The RRP pays special attention to the issue of digitalization and digital transformation across the document; it also mentions the problem of the digital divide. At the same time, it does not address the problem of the digital divide and gap between the women and men/girls and boys, the related gender stereotypes, the issue of online security, nor does it envisage reforms, interventions or measures on this topic. We recommend correcting this shortcoming.

We consider it important, and we recommend to lay down in the document, that the promotion of gender equality should be a general, horizontal aspect in the implementation of the RRP, putting the equality between women and men at the focus of the allocation and use of resources, as well as of the related monitoring and evaluation system and processes. We also consider it important and recommend the effective support and meaningful involvement of women's rights NGOs in the finalization and in every process in relation to the future implementation of the RRP. It would guarantee that the interests of the widest possible range of women are channeled into the process, and would strengthen that the negative social and economical effects (financial, labor market problems, violence, poverty) of Covid-19 are remedied or mitigated, keeping in mind the overall goal of equality between women and men.

⁷ European Commission Guidance to Member States, *ibid.*, p. 11.