

Press release: **Women Help Not Only Women; The Gender Dimension of COVID-19**

*The current pandemic of COVID-19 has affected society as a whole. But it does not equally affect women and men. On the contrary, it further exacerbates existing inequalities and severely hits those already vulnerable and disadvantaged. Women with young children are more likely to work on a trade license or non-employment contract and are therefore directly threatened by a loss of income. Women are also more likely to work in health care and in services that we now need more than ever, making them more vulnerable to infection. **The global pandemic needs to be addressed urgently, but with sensitive consideration of the various impacts of the crisis and protective measures regarding the lives of women and men, the Czech Women's Lobby appeals.***

A particularly vulnerable group are single women, small entrepreneurs, and women employed under work-type contracts. This type of work allows them to combine work with family care, but now they are at risk of losing their income. *"We are approached by parents who experience social insecurity, are afraid of losing their jobs, and find themselves without income. The current situation causes stress for many and is a great burden on partnerships. Parents have to work from home while caring for their children. Or, on the other hand, they cannot work and lose their income. Those who work only under the "agreement on work activity" - most often mothers of small children - will not be entitled to the nursing benefit. They have paid their taxes like everyone else, but they are excluded from state support. Solo mothers are in the worst position,"* describes Eliška Kodyšová, director of **Aperio - the Society for Healthy Parenting** (Aperio – společnost pro zdravé rodičovství), an NGO that offers free legal and psychological [counseling for parents over the phone and online](#).

The NGO **Women Inc.** (Ženy s.r.o) that supports female entrepreneurs agrees. The women who turn to them are afraid and many have lost business orders. Some have cancelled their trade licenses and closed their businesses. Women Inc. offer [free advertising to entrepreneurs](#) in times of emergency to keep their businesses online at least. *"We are also mediating the demand for services and products, such as looking for seamstresses for sewing protective masks. The average price is 25 crowns per veil which will help women who are completely jobless and thus without income,"* adds Eva Čejková Vašková from Women Inc.

Rosa - Women's Center (Rosa - centrum pro ženy), which helps victims of domestic violence, also perceives the situation as particularly burdensome for its clients. The restriction of walking and movement takes it for granted that home is a safe place. In connection with stress or excessive alcohol consumption, the current situation can lead to an escalation of violent behavior from a partner. Moreover, due to quarantine and social isolation, many victims are imprisoned in their households and have very limited opportunities to seek help. Zdena Prokopová from Rosa - Women's Center asks anyone who feels threatened or knows about someone who needs help to, *"not hesitate to consult our organization on the [telephone line](#) or via the newly*

developed [Bright Sky application](#)." Services for victims of domestic and sexual violence are now also provided online by [Acorus](#) or [proFem](#) - **Center for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence** (proFem - centrum pro oběti domácího a sexuálního násilí).

Pregnant women and women in labor also face complications in connection with protective measures. The new regulation bans the presence of fathers at birth. From the psychological and health point of view, however, the presence of a close person is an important part of safe delivery. "We have sent [an open letter to Roman Prymula](#) (director of Czech COVID-19 response activities), Prime Minister Andrej Babiš and Minister of Health Adam Vojtěch asking them to follow the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendation on the COVID-19 pandemic and abolish the measure limiting the presence of fathers in childbirth," says Ivana Antalová from the **Czech Women's Lobby**, a network of 38 women's organizations. The representatives of the **Czech Union of Midwives** (UNIPA - unie porodních asistentek), the **Czech Doula Association** (Česká asociace dul), the **Birth House "u Čápa"** (Porodní dům u Čápa) and **Aperio - the Society for Healthy Parenting** (Aperio - společnost pro zdravé rodičovství), also asked our representatives to lift the ban. "If the father can visit the mother and child immediately after giving birth, then the measure does not make sense," adds Antalová. [Czech Union of Midwives](#) has set up a volunteer phone line where pregnant women and new parents can turn to midwives for help during an epidemic crisis. They can also consult any doula free of charge through the telephone and online consultancy of the [Czech Doula Association](#).

In the **Czech Women's Union** (Český svaz žen), members across the region have mobilized to help as they can. "Our members were mainly involved in sewing masks and distributing them to everyone in need - from individuals to hospitals to senior homes, often in cooperation with their communities," commented Jana Chržová, chairwoman of the Czech Women's Union.

The current state of emergency likely impacts seniors the most. They can contact the **Beauty of Help Foundation** (Nadace Krása pomoci), which provides them with food, cosmetics and pharmacy products. They also help with paying bills. Female pensioners are more at risk of poverty because of lower earnings during their productive lifetime, which makes the situation even more difficult for some of them. "We often hear that they are scared or unsure of how the quarantine constraints develop. So we keep them informed about the news, soothe them, and support them. They can also talk to our psychologist," says Taťána Gregor Brzobohatá, the founder of Beauty of Help Foundation.

Long-term research shows that women in the Czech Republic receive on average 20% less than men. It is important to draw attention to this right now, when women are doing much-needed work, particularly in regards to under-paid care. "Women's work has the same value and is absolutely indispensable for our society at the present time," adds Lenka Šťastná, **President of Business & Professional Women CR**, which is organizing the 11th annual [Equal Pay Day](#) conference online and free of charge this year.

The **Czech Women's Lobby** (Česká ženská lobby) follows the day-to-day developments in connection with the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, as well as the decisions that the government makes. *“We appreciate all the steps and fully support them. However, it is important that the measures themselves take into account the gender dimension and that this lens is also used to find appropriate solutions to the current crisis. If we manage to learn from the current situation, we can come out stronger,”* says Hana Stelzerová, director of the Czech Women's Lobby. *“Civil society organizations are doing a great job in times of crisis, just as they did before. It is wonderful how we can connect, cooperate and coordinate assistance. The current crisis shows how important these organizations are,”* she adds.

Full information on the services of the Czech Women's Lobby network in connection with Covid-19 can be found [here](#).

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