



PROJECT NUMBER
101080161

Report of the Results of WP- 6

Work Package 6



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The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has affected our lives in many ways and manifested itself in many undesirable forms, such as the negative impact of coronavirus on individual lives, it has caused many deaths, the negative impact has also been on the global economy and employment, and on the quality of life in society in the form of restrictions on social rights, such as the right to be protected from poverty and social exclusion, the right to housing and education, and restrictions on medical care. COVID-19 also has effects on the democratic debates and the enjoyment of fundamental rights in the different countries of Europe. The impact was even more pronounced from a gender perspective, because as the United Nations (2020) noted, "from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex". Given the mentioned situation, the European Commission has awarded the project partners with the project HEARD, which focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the democratic debate, the enjoyment of fundamental rights and the work and life of women through a gender perspective.

HEARD focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the democratic debate, the enjoyment of fundamental rights and the work and life of women through a gender perspective. The search for an adequate response to overcome the crisis that occurred during the pandemic of COVID-19 should be a result of the participation of the involvement of various social partners, civil society and decision-making bodies of a given state. By involving partners from 9 different European countries in all the phases of the project we aim to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of respect for the rule of law, democratic values, and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, with special attention to the social rights of citizens and residents of the given state.

The project HEARD consists of 11 Work packages. In this document - the Report of the Results of WP-6 - we summarise the following project results/ deliverables of Work package 6 (WP 6):

1. Event Description Sheet for WP-6 (See Appendix 1),
 2. Report of the Results of WP-6 (See Appendix 2).
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About the deliverables of Work Package 6

Within the WP 6 the in-situ third debate panel on the topic how COVID-19 crisis had affected on the work and life of women through a gender perspective was conducted by 10 project partners in 9 partner countries and with 311 residents and citizens of partner countries **(130 unique eligible participants)** (See Appendix 1).

After the third debate panel the feedback of the participants was processed, the report in English language was prepared (See Appendix 2). During the implementation of the Work Package 6 we faced some challenges. Due to the organizational issues stemming from a change in personnel, one of the partners could not implement the debate panel and prepare the report in the deadlines stated in the application form. We informed the EU Officer about the mentioned problem and together with our partners we found a solution. Thus, we completed the Work Package 6 a little later than how it was foreseen according to the application, but with this delay we made sure that the Work Package 6 was carried out in a high quality and in full form as was foreseen in the project application.

Additionally, an additional physical event »**BE HEARD! A symposium on mental health challenges and future paths**« was held in project partner countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy and Spain) with total of 190 residents and citizens of partner countries **(189 unique eligible participants)**. Project partners from mentioned countries invited the interested public (e.g. citizens and residents of their countries, representatives of non-governmental organisations, etc.) with the aim to present them the results of the CERV HEARD project and get their feedback on the prepared policy recommendations. As we identified mental health as one of the key challenges in handling Covid-19 pandemic, we decided to prepare a separate event to gather people and gain their feedback on mentioned topic.

At the aforementioned event, the project partners presented the CERV HEARD project and explained the objectives and phases of the HEARD project, which focuses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the democratic debate, the perception of human and fundamental rights and on the work and life of women from a gender perspective. We also wanted to encourage citizens and residents of the European Union to participate in the democratic co-creation of the EU by sharing their views on the identified good and weak practises in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and receiving their feedback on the prepared policy recommendations. The event ended with a discussion where participants freely and directly debated with the project partners and shared their views on the presented good and weak practises in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and on the prepared policy recommendations in connection with mental health challenges and also had the opportunity to ask questions. By participating in the mentioned BE HEARD event, participants also had the opportunity to express their views on weak or good practises in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in connection to mental health and on how to better address the challenges of the future pandemic situation to better address mental health challenges.

Appendix 1: Event Description Sheet for WP-6

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET**for WP-6**

PROJECT	
Participant:	01 - FAKULTETA ZA ORGANIZACIJSKE STUDIJE V NOVEM MESTU (FOS) 02 - Associazione InCo-Molfetta APS (InCo) 03 - INSTITUTO ANAPTIXIS EPICHEIRIMATIKOTITAS ASTIKI ETAIREIA (iED) 04 - CBE Sud Luberon Val de Durance (CBE SL VDD) 05 - Comune di Vimercate 06 - FONDATSIA ZA PREDPRIEMACHESTVO, KULTURA I OBRAZOVANIE - Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Culture and Education 07 - NORDIC DIASPORA FORUM (NDF) 08 - AYUNTAMIENTO DE MISLATA 09 - Federação de Associações Juvenis do Distrito de Braga (FAJUB) 10 - CARDET CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LIMITED (CARDET)
PIC number:	01 – 943692340 02 – 922855576 03 – 998069182 04 – 950177275 05 – 905191003 06 – 940414710 07 – 916641562 08 – 897272796 09 – 929027880 10 – 999738552
Project name and acronym:	The impact of COVID-19 crisis on diverse democratic perspectives through gender perspective — HEARD

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	06
Event name:	Debate panel 3: How the COVID-19 has affected on the work and life of women through a gender perspective and Brainstorming panel about final political recommendations; With a focus on mental health (additional event)
Type:	Debate panel

In situ/online:	In-situ
Location:	10 partners conducted event In-situ, additionally, additional events were also conducted in-situ by some of the partners 01 – In-situ in Slovenia, Novo mesto 02 – In-situ in Italy, Molfetta 03 – In-situ in Greece, Larissa 04 – In-situ in France, Pertuis, Aix-en-Provence, Marseille 05 – In-situ in Italy, Vimercate and Italy, Vicenza 06 – In-situ in Bulgaria, Sofia 07 – In-situ in Sweden, Stockholm 08 – In-situ in Spain, Mislata 09 – In-situ in Portugal, Braga 10 – In-situ in Nicosia, Cyprus
Date(s):	01 - 10. 01. 2023 02 - 21. 12. 2022 03 - 24. 01. 2023, 20. 08. 2024 04 - 12. 01. 2023, 26. 09. 2024 05 - 23. 01. 2023, 19. 09. 2024 06 - 24. 01. 2023, 22. 06. 2024 07 - 10. 02. 2023 08 - 14. 02. 2023, 27. 09. 2024 09 - 10. 01. 2023 10 - 05. 02. 2023, 23. 07. 2024, 27. 09. 2024
Website(s) (if any):	https://heard-project.eu/
Participants	
Female:	214
Male:	101
Non-binary:	4
From country 1 [Slovenia]:	42
From country 2 [Italy]:	54
From country 3 [Greece]:	45
From country 4 [France]:	35
From country 5 [Bulgaria]:	33
From country 6 [Sweden]:	30
From country 7 [Spain]:	26
From country 8 [Portugal]:	30

From country 9 [Cyprus]:	17		
From country 10 [Netherlands]:	2		
From country 11 [Hungary]:	2		
From country 12 [Poland]:	3		
Total number of participants:	319	From total number of countries:	12

Description

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

Debate panel 3: How the COVID-19 has affected on the work and life of women through a gender perspective: The third debate panel titled "How the COVID-19 has affected the work and life balance of women" was the third project debate panel in the project HEARD. It was organised and conducted within Work package 6 of the HEARD project in all project countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden) from all project partners. The questions for the third debate panel were prepared based on the results of the state-of-the-art analysis and the results of the quantitative research (survey) about the impact of COVID-19 on the work and life balance of women through a gender perspective, which was conducted in all project partner countries from November 2022 until the March 2023, which are gathered in the report of statistical analysis accordingly to all partner countries jointly and separately (Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden). We identified the similarities and significant differences in all the mentioned partner countries. The debate panel started with the greetings and introduction of the project HEARD, it was continued with the presentation of the topic of the project. We continued the debate panel with presenting the crucial starting points of the results of the survey, which was conducted in all the partner countries, focusing on the statistically significant findings. We also mentioned the findings of the state-of-the art analysis, conducted by the project partner countries. According to mentioned research findings, we formulated 4 themes (Employment challenges, Caregiving Responsibilities, Mental Health and Well-being, Gender gap in workplaces) as well as sub-themes. At the end we also presented the EC satisfaction survey, and all participants were invited and encouraged to fill in the EC survey. Finally, conclusion thoughts followed. Throughout the third debate panel we had engaging discussions and active involvement from the participants. They shared their experiences and views on the identified topics, leading to a productive exchange of ideas and opinions and future recommendations. This interaction resulted in clear and solid conclusions. The key insights and feedback from the discussion were compiled into a report named "Report of the Results of Third Debate Panel."

Brainstorming panel about final political recommendations; With a focus on mental health (additional event): The additional physical event »BE HEARD! A symposium on mental health challenges and future paths« was held in some project partner countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy and Spain). Project partners from mentioned countries invited the interested public (e.g. citizens and residents of their countries, representatives of non-governmental organisations, etc.) with the aim to present them the results of the CERV HEARD project and get their feedback on the prepared policy recommendations. As we identified mental health as one of the key challenges in handling Covid-19 pandemic, we decided to prepare a separate event to gather people and gain their feedback on mentioned topic. At the aforementioned event, the project partners presented the CERV HEARD project and explained the objectives and phases of the HEARD project, which focuses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the democratic debate, the perception of human and fundamental rights and on the work and life of women from a gender perspective. We also wanted to encourage citizens and residents of the European Union to participate in the democratic co-creation of the EU by sharing their views on the identified good and weak practises in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and receiving their feedback on the prepared policy recommendations. The event ended with a discussion where participants freely and directly debated with the project partners and shared their views on the presented good and weak practises in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and on the prepared policy recommendations in connection with mental health challenges and also had the opportunity to ask questions. By participating in the mentioned BE HEARD event, participants also had the opportunity to express their views on weak or good practises in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic in connection to mental health and on how to better address the challenges of the future pandemic situation to better address mental health challenges.

HISTORY OF CHANGES

VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	15.05.2023	Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo mesto
2.0	30. 09. 2024	Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo mesto

Appendix 2: Report of the Results of WP-6



PROJECT NUMBER
101080161

Report of the Results of Third Debate Panel from All Partners

WP6: Debate panel 3



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Methodology

The questions for the debate panels were prepared based on the results of the state-of-the-art analysis and the results of the quantitative research (survey) about the work and life balance of women, which was conducted in all project partner countries from November 2022 until the March 2023, which are gathered in the report of statistical analysis accordingly to all partner countries jointly and separately (so Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden). We identified the similarities and significant differences in all the mentioned partner countries.

With the mixed methodology approach, we managed to extract 4 big themes of debate panels, that we divided in 2 sub-subjects. The first thematic was **Employment challenges**, where the first sub-subject was *Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses*, and the second sub-subject was *Examination of the economic consequences and long-term implications for women's financial stability*. The second thematic was **Caregiving Responsibilities**, where the first sub-subject was *Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities*, and the second sub-subject was *Exploring the challenges faced by women in managing homeschooling and remote learning for their children*. The third thematic was **Mental Health and Well-being**, where the first sub-subject was *Increased stress and burnout among mothers*, and the second sub-subject was *Lack of social support networks*. The fourth thematic was **Gender gap in workplaces**, where the first sub-subject was *Gender gap in workplace during and after covid -19* and the second sub-subject was *Impact of the pandemic on women's employment rates*.

1. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Slovenia by FOS)

In the Table 1 and Table 2 below, we can see the timetables of the Debate panel 3, which was executed on 28th of September 2023 – one was at 16.00 pm (CET) and one at 17.00 pm CET on the Faculty of organisation studies in Novo mesto, Ulica talcev 3, 8000 Novo mesto, Slovenia. The event was organised and executed two times in the same day at different hours, with the purpose of enabling the attendance of as many participants as possible.

Table 1. Timetable of the Debate panel 3 at 16.00 pm (CET)

TIME	TOPIC
16:00	Greetings and introduction Dr Maja Pucelj, Assistant Professor
16:05	Presentation of the HEARD project
16:10	Presentation of the topic and crucial starting points
16:15	Start of the discussion on the topic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
16:25	Start of discussion on the topic: CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES
16:35	Start of discussion - on the topic: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
16:45	Start of discussion - on the topic: GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES
16:55	EC satisfaction survey and conclusion thoughts

Table 2. Timetable of the Debate panel 3 at 17.00 pm (CET)

TIME	TOPIC
17:00	Greetings and introduction Dr Maja Pucelj, Assistant Professor
17:05	Presentation of the HEARD project
17:10	Presentation of the topic and crucial starting points
17:15	Start of the discussion on the topic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
17:25	Start of discussion on the topic: CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

17:35	Start of discussion - on the topic: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
17:45	Start of discussion - on the topic: GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES
18:00	EC satisfaction survey and conclusion thoughts

The panel debate started with the greetings and introduction of the project, continued with the presentation of the topic of the project, we presented also some facts from the covid-19 pandemic period to remind the participants about the challenges and the government reaction during mentioned period. We continued the debate panel with presenting the crucial starting points of the results of the survey, conducted in Slovenia and also in all the partner countries, focusing on the statistically significant findings. We also mentioned the findings of the state-of-the art analysis, conducted by the project partner countries.

According to mentioned research findings, we formulated 4 themes and sub-themes as stated below:

First key thematic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses

2nd sub-subject: Examination of the economic consequences and long-term implications for women's financial stability

a) **Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?**

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- Yes, the epidemic undoubtedly worsened the employment challenges of women, especially those who are in the role of mothers or in the role of guardians of children or elderly people from the point of view, because the competent institutions did not work at that time and these women were consequently additionally burdened and were more difficult competitive at work, as they ran out of time for everything. At the same time, they were also employed in jobs where women are primarily employed, such as education, medicine, etc., which means that they were

doubly burdened in this case if they had someone else at home to take care of or in general in addition to employment, take care of the household.

- They also noticed a marked departure of personnel from crisis sectors to other, less burdensome jobs or to other countries (for example, caregivers from homes for the elderly, who are financially undervalued, nurses, etc., who went into production or trade).
- Potential challenges were also perceived due to the mobility of women, because they are usually less mobile than men, and as a result, the epidemic and confinement made this segment even worse.
- At the same time, they also added that a significant increase in the hours worked in the context of overtime work was detected, which was not a practice before the epidemic and this practically became a habit for employers, which was not reflected in additional financial incentives, but only in greater pressures from employers and deteriorated mutual relations.

b) Did by your opinion women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the covid-19 crisis and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- Participants assumed that women faced a higher rate of job loss because they were employed in sectors that were most affected during covid (eg tourism, etc.).
- But they perceived state support (covid supplement) for newborns, which was higher than in non-epidemic times, parents were exempted from kindergarten fees,... However, there were no special measures for women, there were measures for the general population (waiting at home, etc.), but not directly for women (in addition to the above).
- They also pointed out the forced vaccination, which also manifested itself in many job terminations.

c) What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the work force?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- Primarily psychological consequences due to the stress they were subjected to (taking care of children, the elderly, taking care of the household, etc.).
- If the sectors that were most affected and at the same time employed the most women do not recover properly, according to the participants of the discussion, this may cause greater employment challenges for women.
- The participants also drew attention to the segment of the increase in violence during the epidemic, which could also have an impact on women's employment opportunities and may continue to do so.
- They also drew attention to the age and gender gap in the context of digitization, as women (especially the elderly) find it more difficult to adapt to the demands of digitization (any support must be requested through digital channels, which is an obstacle for many). In this context, they also drew attention to the burdens on people or on the individual, as digitization has contributed to the requirement that you have to read everything/know everything - for example, when you go to the doctor, it is almost expected that you know what is wrong with you... And this assumption it is even more demanding for women who take care of the household and children...

Second key thematic: CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities

2nd sub-subject: Exploring the challenges faced by women in managing homeschooling and remote learning for their children

a) What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- The participants were unanimous that this segment was poorly taken care of, or that they only provided for the possibility of protection for crisis services, which they consider extremely unfair, since the rest of the women worked and had children at home. They agreed that the situation where the economy was open and educational institutions were closed was completely pointless and extremely stressful for women.
- According to the participants, access to health services was really reduced, because as they said, it was a particularly bad situation especially for pregnant women, since many things that were taken for granted before the epidemic were not carried out at all or were not available - examinations were curtailed, partners' access during check-up and delivery was prevented. They also pointed out that access to people who were on their deathbeds was denied, and at the same time they were exposed to daily cases of death in their vicinity, which caused a lot of mental distress for these people during the epidemic, because they believed that they were abandoned by their loved ones, but they could not reach them. This was considered by the participants as the biggest mistake in dealing with the epidemic.
- The loneliness of the elderly during the covid-19 epidemic was also a problem. For the elderly, the contact they lost with their loved ones during the epidemic is important, and many hardships or deaths could also be attributed to loneliness or sadness due to the inability to contact us, which we broke off. The question arose as to whether there is a difference between men and women in this work, but given the greater empathy of women, the latter were probably more affected by this behavior.
- In future epidemic situations, it will be necessary to take better care of children - either to completely close society (including the economy) or to provide adequate child care.
- The participants also pointed out that it is interesting that at that time only men worked and the family was able to survive, but now they both work, but they cannot live normally due to the increase in costs.
- At the same time, they also drew attention to the lack of prevention during the covid-19 epidemic and that it would be interesting to look at the statistics to see if there was an increase in cancer during this time. The consequences of the epidemic are also visible in the significant increase in waiting times for patients.

b) How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- According to the participants, the mentioned period was quite tiring in this context. Pronounced challenges were visible in connection with the education of school-age children, as there were a lot of challenges with this connection due to the unpreparedness of schools for such a sudden transition to a digital educational environment, which was manifested due to insufficient digital literacy, insufficient equipment of schools and families with digital devices (computers or tablets) and IT technology. The challenge was also in the fact that my mother was both a nanny and a teacher.
- They also noticed an increase in burnout among mothers during the mentioned period due to these challenges, as well as other emotional and psychological burdens (also among young people). They also drew attention to the negative connotation of mental problems in Slovenia among the public, which means that the mentioned attitude (stigmatization, access to services, etc.) needs to be culturally changed before future epidemic situations. They also pointed out that they believe that there has been an increase in the use of medication during the covid-19 epidemic.

Third key thematic: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

1st sub-subject: Increased stress and burnout among mothers

a) Were by your opinion the government actions supporting women vitims of domestic violence effective?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- The participants did not perceive any measures for this purpose. At the same time, they drew attention to the passivity of state authorities, because until people are practically murdered, they do not take action, which is a global problem.

- They pointed out that even if a woman who is a victim of violence decides to leave a violent partner, the help centers in Slovenia are overcrowded and it is very difficult to get a place in them. At the same time, it also includes the entire legal process of fighting for the division of property, custody of children, etc.
- The challenge is also indicated in obtaining suitable accommodation - housing, which is present both for single mothers and families in general.

2nd sub-subject: Lack of social support networks

a) Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing by your opinion?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- The mentioned situation was already in a bad state before, and the epidemic only worsened the mentioned situation.
- They also drew attention to the fact that even the implementers of state social support mechanisms themselves did not have support and were often without adequate mental support (e.g. taking away children, etc.).
- At the same time, they added that the funds allocated by the state for aid during covid-19 were so bureaucratically complicated that many people did not succeed or were able to use them, and at the same time they added that they were behind the mentioned measures such conditions that many people had to return the funds or, due to the too strict conditions, did not decide on them at all despite the hardships they were experiencing at that time, so they wondered whether a lot of aid was not directed to inadequate bureaucratic "help" ".
- They were united that the state measures, as they were, were not effective.

b) In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during COVID-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- Mentally, it was extremely tiring, as the woman was alone for everything - her mental health suffered, at the same time, they pointed out the increase in cancer cases among women who gave birth, which is also attributed to the stress during the epidemic.
- There were also pronounced economic pressures (risk of loss of income, etc.).
- The participants were of the same opinion that this time the decisions were made "ad hoc", but that it is necessary to prepare inappropriately better for future epidemic situations in the context of providing user-friendly and understandable and, above all, accessible state social support mechanisms.

c) How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- Access to basic services (shops) as well as to medical care was made difficult. Participants noted that pregnant women received inadequate care compared to non-pregnant women during the epidemic – there was no school for parents, check-ups were cut, partners were not allowed to be present at births, which greatly contributed to an inappropriately worse experience giving birth.
- They noticed a deterioration in the mental health of women during this time.
- They also drew attention to the fact that many children, who are otherwise provided with nutrition at school or kindergarten, were left without adequate nutrition at home due to the poverty of their parents.
- Support for victims of violence was too poor, which was mentioned earlier.

Fourth key thematic: GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES

1st sub-subject: Gender gap in workplace during and after covid -19

2nd sub-subject: Impact of the pandemic on women's employment rates

a) How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- The employment occurred mainly in the health sector, where there were also indications of simultaneous high exploitation of the aforementioned staff.
- Men were much more employable, and this is because the advertised positions were mainly suitable for men and there were much fewer such tenders that would be suitable for women. For example, engineers, agricultural personnel, etc. were employed more, but there were practically no jobs for women and women were practically unemployable.
- Since they were employed in the sectors that were most affected (e.g. tourism), this consequently also affected their unemployability.

b) How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- If employers wanted to fire someone, they first fired mothers who were more absent due to the need to balance professional and private life.
- They pointed out the fact that teachers should relax the goals that students should achieve, because parents are not teachers at home and do not have adequate knowledge, as many people still have low digital literacy (among students, parents and also teachers), at the same time ICT infrastructure was also poor in many places.
- They also added that women burdened themselves because they could not be the best either at work or as mothers, as both roles were too demanding, and they were actually very burdened, as they had to coordinate household, study, and work (many women benefited from reduced working hours, and therefore had to complete a full 8-hour workday in 4 hours). Therefore, the participants were united that burnout was occurring among women. During the epidemic, women made a

significant effort to balance their professional and private lives, but it was extremely tiring.

c) What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

At the debate panel, present participants responded to the topic with the following arguments:

- They highlighted the need to move away from pointless and overly demanding bureaucratic requirements and make epidemic measures aimed at the public more accessible and useful.
- The problem will always be the mentality of the culture - a woman having to do more than a man, having to take care of a household that is worth nothing anyway, a woman always having to prove that she is equal, this will always result in female burnout. As a result, a woman is less valuable from the point of view of capital because she is more burdened in her private life. It is necessary to recognize the role of women in society.
- It is necessary to improve access to healthcare in case of epidemics.
- It is necessary to better address the care and education segment.
- It is necessary to take better care of women who are victims of violence.
- It is also necessary to ensure adequate employability of women.

Key findings

EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

At the debate panel, the participants agreed that the epidemic has undoubtedly worsened the employment conditions of women, especially those who are mothers or guardians of children or the elderly. Due to the temporary suspension of the competent institutions, these women were additionally burdened and made it more difficult to compete in the workplace. Women were also doubly burdened if they were employed in fields that are already strongly female-represented, such as education and medicine. Participants also noted the departure of women from sectors that were hard hit during the pandemic to less demanding jobs or even to other countries. This has affected the displacement of the workforce. Due to restrictions on movement and lower mobility of women, challenges arose as they were limited in finding new employment opportunities compared to men. There was also an increase in overtime work, but without additional financial incentives, which

led to pressure from employers and deterioration of mutual relations. In terms of job losses and layoffs, participants hypothesized that women faced higher rates of job loss because they were employed in the most affected sectors, such as tourism. Regarding state support, the participants noted that there were no special measures for women, apart from general measures for the population. The long-term consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic for women's employment opportunities and gender equality include psychological consequences due to the stress experienced by women during the epidemic. If the sectors most affected do not recover adequately, this could lead to long-term challenges for women's employment. In addition, the increase in violence during the epidemic may have affected women's employment opportunities. At the same time, digitization has also brought certain challenges, as women, especially the elderly, find it more difficult to adapt to the demands of the digital environment, which can affect their employment opportunities and gender equality.

CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

Participants expressed disappointment with state support for child care and access to health services during the epidemic. They felt that state care was limited to care for crisis services, which was seen as unfair as many women were still working and faced difficult childcare challenges as educational institutions were closed. The lack of access to health services was particularly noticeable among pregnant women, who faced restrictions on examinations and childbirth. They also drew attention to the loneliness of elderly people during the epidemic, who were separated from their loved ones, which caused mental distress. Domestic violence increased during the epidemic, further affecting women's employment opportunities. In future epidemic situations, the participants called for a better regulation of child care, while at the same time considering a better coordination of work and private life. They also emphasized the need to change the stigmatization of mental health problems in Slovenia and improve access to mental health, and pointed to the potential increase in the use of drugs for mental health problems during the epidemic. According to the participants, the entire period of the COVID-19 epidemic was extremely stressful for women, especially those with caring responsibilities, with great challenges in educating children and taking care of the household, which also had consequences on their mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The participants expressed disappointment regarding the government's measures to support women victims of domestic violence. They emphasized the passivity of

state authorities and the lack of measures and awareness about this problem. Even if a woman decides to leave an abusive partner, she faces difficulties finding accommodation and legal battles for child custody. Housing problems have proven to be a challenge for single mothers and families in general. Regarding state social support mechanisms during the epidemic, the participants pointed out that the situation was worrying even before the pandemic and that the pandemic only made the situation worse. Some implementers of state measures did not have adequate support and faced bureaucratic obstacles. The resources that were available were often difficult to access and opaque, making their use difficult. They unanimously concluded that state measures were not effective.

The lack of national social support mechanisms affected women's ability to balance professional and family obligations during the epidemic. Women faced a lot of stress, economic pressures and a lack of support, which had a negative impact on their mental health. The absence of state social support mechanisms also affected women's access to health care and basic services. Pregnant women had limited care, partners were not allowed to be present at the birth, and the consequences were noticeable in a poorer birth experience. Access to basic services, including food, was difficult, especially for children from poor families. Support for victims of violence was lacking, which added to the burden on women in crisis situations. Women's mental health was compromised by stress and lack of support. According to the participants, the COVID-19 epidemic has deepened the existing problems and vulnerability of women in society, which requires better preparations and measures for future epidemic situations.

GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES

According to the panelists, the epidemic affected the employment of women, especially those who worked in the sectors most affected, such as tourism. In addition, men were more likely to be employed in jobs that were more suitable for them, while women faced limited employment opportunities. The closure of schools and kindergartens had a strong impact on women, who were forced to balance work from home with childcare and education. This led to increased stress, burnout and lack of support. It was emphasized that school goals should be more flexible in order to facilitate the reconciliation of family and professional obligations.

To better address the needs of women, especially mothers, in future epidemics, participants suggested several measures. This includes a withdrawal from unnecessary bureaucratic requirements in the implementation of epidemic

measures, more accessible and useful information for the public, and better accessibility to health services. In addition, we should pay more attention to the area of care and education, take care of victims of violence and improve the employability of women. It is also important to change the culture that puts women in an unequal position and puts them under too much pressure. The participants added that the COVID-19 epidemic has revealed many vulnerabilities of women in society, which require better preparations and measures for future epidemic situations.

2. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Italy by InCo)

In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetable of the Debate panel 3, which was executed on 11th of September 2023 at 18.00 CET at the Conference Room of "Association InCo - Molfetta APS" in Molfetta (Piazza Municipio snc, Angolo via Morte).

Table 1. Timetable of the Debate panel 3

18.00	Institutional Greetings
18.10	Presentation of the HEARD project
18.15	Presentation of the topic and crucial starting points
18.45	Start of the discussion on the topic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
19.15	Start of discussion on the topic: CAREGIVING RESPONSABILITIES
19.45	Start of discussion - on the topic: MENTAL HEALTH and WELLBEING
20.15	Start of discussion - on the topic: GENDER GAP in WORKPLACES
20.30	Conclusion

The panel debate started with the greetings and introduction of the project, continued with the presentation of the topic of the project, we presented also some facts from the covid-19 pandemic period to remind the participants about the challenges and the government reaction during mentioned period. We continued the debate panel with presenting the crucial starting points of the results of the survey, conducted in Italy and also in all the partner countries, focusing on the statistically significant findings. We also mentioned the findings of the state-of-the art analysis, conducted by the project partner countries.

According to mentioned research findings, we formulated 3 themes and sub-themes as stated below:

First key thematic: Employment Challenges

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses

2nd sub-subject: Examination of the economic consequences and long-term implications for women's financial stability

a) Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?

b) In your opinion women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the covid-19 crisis and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?

c) What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the work force?

CONCLUSIONS:

The disparity in Italy is a result of the preexisting culture and patriarchy. There was no particular support by the government provided especially to women. Confirmed that women were more likely at risk of losing their jobs.

Second key thematic: Caregiving Responsibilities

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities (School closure and women's caregiving)

2nd sub-subject: Exploring the challenges faced by women in managing homeschooling and remote learning for their children (Women and homeschooling challenges)

a) What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

b) How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

CONCLUSIONS:

Absence of supports for women, who had to choose in a difficult situation if working or supporting their family was more important. Women had to sacrifice their personal life and their mental health in order to prioritize work and family.

Third key thematic: Mental Health and Wellbeing

1st sub-subject: Increased stress and burnout

a) Were by your opinion the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

2nd sub-subject: Lack of social support and network

a) Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing by your opinion?

b) In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during COVID-19?

c) How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

CONCLUSIONS:

No particular support has been issued by the government to overcome the difficulties of women during the pandemic. Only few centers were really available to listen the psychological needs of women. The worsened mental health state has influenced the efficiency in work and care of family. Pandemic has indeed worsened the difficulties which were already present in the health state in the Country (depression, anxiety).

Fourth key thematic: Gender Gap in Workplaces

1st sub-subject: Gender gap in workplaces during COVID-19

2nd sub-subject: Impact of the pandemic of women employment rate

a) How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

b) How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

c) What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

The pandemic caused a great loss in all sectors in which women were employed. Very often women have been forced to give up on their career because they had to choose to take care of their families. Often distanced learning and closed schools have forced women to stay-home to take care of their children who could not attend school.

In some cases, it is important to highlight that participants did not have relevant data in their available knowledge to add their opinion on the matter.

3. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Greece by IED)

Below there is a detailed presentation of the agenda and the proceedings of the event and also a reporting of the key takeaways and the conclusions extracted by the discussions with the participants. In Table 1 there is the detailed agenda of the event for Debate panel 3, which was executed on 5th of October 2023 at 10.00 am EET on the premises of JOIST Innovation Park (IED offices are also hosted there) in Valtetsiou & Tripoleos, 41336, Larissa, Greece.

Table 1. Agenda of the Debate panel 3

TIME	TOPIC
10:00	Welcome and introduction
10:05	Presentation of the HEARD project
10:15	Presentation of the results of the primary research and Q&A
10:30	Start of the discussion on the topic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
10:45	Start of discussion on the topic: CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES
11:00	Start of discussion - on the topic: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
11:15	Start of discussion - on the topic: GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES
11:30	EC satisfaction survey and conclusion thoughts

The debate panel started with the presentation of the project “HEARD” and the scope, methodology, context, and conclusions of the primary research that was implemented in the framework of the project. The audience was familiarized with the consortium’s mission and activities and the research findings and conclusions in the participating countries.

Before the starting of the discussion around the agreed by the consortium topics, the moderators provoked a Q&A, to make sure that all information presented regarding the project and its research activities are clear.

Following the topics and agenda agreed by the consortium partners, the moderators initiated discussion around the 4 themes and sub-themes that are presented below:

First key thematic: Employment challenges

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses (Job loss disparities for women's sector)

a) Women in Greece faced higher risks of job and income loss.

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

The initial desk research conducted for Greece has uncovered that in sectors significantly impacted by the pandemic, such as housekeeping, caregiving, sales, hospitality, and tourism, women constitute the majority of the workforce, exceeding 60%. This places them at a heightened risk of job loss and income reduction. Participants collectively acknowledged this fact and highlighted that women working from home often struggle to focus on their jobs due to increased responsibilities related to household and childcare.

However, there were contrasting opinions expressed, with some participants contending that these challenges would exist even in the absence of a pandemic, suggesting that this is not a universal issue but rather a more complex, context-specific phenomenon. Extensive discussion ensued on this topic, particularly concerning how women's job performance could be affected and how this could exacerbate their employability challenges relative to men. Although no specific conclusions were reached, it was widely agreed that challenges do exist, but their nature varies according to the individual circumstances of women.

b) Women decreased the number of working hours and applied for part-time jobs more often compared.

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Taking into account the prevailing mindset in Greek society, which tends to uphold traditional expectations about women assuming primary household responsibilities and playing pivotal caregiving roles for children and the elderly, it's frequently observed that women opt to reduce their working hours or pursue part-time employment. While participants reached a unanimous consensus that this general description accurately characterizes the reality in Greece, they also recognized that exceptions and variations exist, contingent on individual circumstances and the overall status of women.

Moreover, the pandemic was acknowledged as a factor exacerbating these challenges and a formidable obstacle to our efforts in achieving genuine gender equality and fostering a transformation in our societal mindset in Greece.

2nd sub-subject: Examination of the economic consequences and long-term implications for women's financial stability (COVID-19 Impact: Women's Financial Stability)

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents and event participants noted that they have observed a higher frequency of women reducing their working hours compared to men. Typically, this decision is attributed to family-related obligations. Additionally, participants highlighted that employers in Greece often fail to adhere to legal regulations governing reductions in working hours, particularly those related to maternity and other criteria justifying such reductions. This non-compliance frequently forces women into part-time employment.

In many instances, the heightened risk of unemployment and the pervasive bias associated with motherhood exert stronger pressure on women, compelling them to reluctantly opt for part-time work. Collectively, these factors contribute to women earning lower incomes than men and facing a heightened risk of job loss and income instability.

Second key thematic: Caregiving responsibilities

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities (School closure and women's caregiving)

a) Women, who were in the role of mothers/legal guardians, carried most of the burden at home, due to school and childcare facilities being closed during COVID-19/ Greece: 64.5% of the people strongly agree.

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants pointed out that in Greece, women often bear a heavier burden of caregiving responsibilities compared to men, and this trend is deeply ingrained in our cultural mindset, passed down through generations, and reflected in various aspects of life, including family, friends, and the broader social environment. Consequently, as participants shared their experiences and insights, it became evident that during the pandemic, women were increasingly overwhelmed, experiencing higher stress levels, and becoming more distracted from their personal lives, interests, and work due to the escalating caregiving demands.

Numerous perspectives and suggestions emerged during the discussions, summarized as follows:

-Women should recognize that caregiving responsibilities need to be shared among all family members to maintain a balanced life. It's essential not to overextend themselves and to have realistic expectations of productivity.

-If caregiving responsibilities remain disproportionately shouldered by women, this could perpetuate further gender inequalities in the labor market, affecting salaries and access to leadership positions, among other factors.

-Women should be empowered and not face criticism when acknowledging their circumstances and expressing their limitations in assuming additional responsibilities. They should avoid attempting to emulate or compare themselves to women who seem to effortlessly juggle personal and professional life, often promoted through social media, if such comparisons only lead to stress and disappointment.

2nd sub-subject: Exploring the challenges faced by women in managing homeschooling and remote learning for their children (Women and homeschooling challenges)

a) Women decreased the number of working hours due to their caregiving responsibilities.

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

As mentioned also in previous thematic, in many instances, the heightened risk of unemployment and the pervasive bias associated with motherhood exert stronger pressure on women, compelling them to reluctantly opt for part-time work. Also, the fact that employers in Greece often fail to adhere to legal regulations governing reductions in working hours, particularly those related to maternity and other criteria justifying such reductions, frequently forces women into part-time employment. These phenomena exacerbated during the pandemic especially in the cases when women had also caregiving responsibilities. Closing of schools, remote education and the need for further support to children that were adjusting in a new learning framework created additional responsibilities for women that required time and energy that had to be sourced from other activities. So in many cases these needs led to decreasing the working hours.

Third key thematic: Mental Health and Well-being

1st sub-subject: Increased stress and burnout among mothers

a) Mothers have experienced heightened levels of stress and burnout during the COVID- 19 pandemic, juggling increased caregiving responsibilities, remote schooling, home conflicts and limited support systems/ In a lot of countries', citizens strongly agreed that there was increased domestic violence

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Women had higher rates of anxiety, fear, depression, fear of the virus and illness compared to men in Greece. Also, they showed greater adherence to pandemic prevention and containment measures, were vaccinated at a higher rate, which is associated with greater fear of the virus and disease. In addition to all this, during the pandemic period there was an increase in gender-based violence with women as victims and an increase in femicide. All these are facts stemming from official statistics and the primary research. The audience started a discussion on these facts and stressed how important it is to take measures and combat gender-based violence and to support women in all aspects mentioned without feeding the theory about weak gender. Some people mentioned that mental health overwhelming was more likely to happen to women as they were entrusted with more duties and responsibilities related to household and caregiving of children and elderly members of the family.

Concerning domestic violence against women and femicides, primary research indicates a consistent yearly rise in reported incidents during the pandemic, and this trend is persisting into the post-pandemic period. This data underscores the significant impact on Greek society.

During the panel discussion, participants delved into the complex nature of this issue, acknowledging that it often resides in a gray zone. Reporting of such incidents does not always occur, and the true extent of the problem remains unclear. It's uncertain whether the reported increase reflects a genuine rise in incidents, an uptick in reporting due to awareness campaigns, or other factors.

Nevertheless, the majority of participants shared a common belief that violence against women is on the rise, highlighting the challenges that persist despite progress made towards gender equality.

2nd sub-subject: Lack of social support networks

a) Women faced poor social support that led to depression and loneliness during the covid- 19 pandemic.

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

On average the survey respondents disagreed that the government proposed measures and stimulus successfully addressed the needs of women during COVID-19 crisis. Participants of the debate panel were aligned with this view point and highlighted that the main reason that the needs of women are not addressed effectively by the government is the fact that they are not fully acknowledging the existing inequalities, increased burdens etc for the women and we are assuming

that progress towards equality has been achieved and we do not need to continuously monitor the situation. Patterns, mentality and reasons for women to face additional challenges are deeply rooted and there is a need for continuous monitoring and provision for that matter by the state and social services. The lack of robust social support and legislation was cited as placing women in a more vulnerable position, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants contended that these factors contributed to the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women.

Fourth key thematic: Gender gap in workplaces

1st sub-subject: Gender gap in workplace during COVID -19

a) Refers to the disproportionate impact and challenges faced by women in their employment and career progression as a result of the pandemic. 2nd sub-topic: Impact of the pandemic on women's employment rates

b) It refers to the disproportionate negative effect it has had on women's participation in the workforce, resulting in job losses, reduced working hours, and increased caregiving responsibilities.

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants drew attention to the conspicuous disparities in employment rates between men and women, shedding light on the underrepresentation of women in specific industries and professions, coupled with the prevalence of part-time or temporary work for women. Much of the discussion centered on the pressing issue of the gender pay gap, ultimately reaching the consensus that, on average, women in Greece earn less than their male counterparts for comparable work. Furthermore, concerns were expressed regarding the pervasive glass ceiling effect and maternity-related discrimination.

It was widely acknowledged that these disparities, more or less, were exacerbated during and after the pandemic. Women encountered even greater challenges related to employment and work-life balance during this time, more women were unemployed or did not receive the acknowledgement/promotion ect, as the pandemic's unique circumstances placed additional burdens on them. As a final note, participants stressed that addressing these challenges necessitates a collaborative effort between government authorities and corporations. This collaboration should be informed by well-crafted legislation and the promotion of new, progressive patterns that can transform our societal mindset concerning these pressing issues.

4. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in France by CBE Sud Luberon)

We organised the debate on the 2nd November 2023, between 18:50 and 19:30 [CET]. The debate took place at a coworking space, LE 20/35. We started by presenting the projects and the expected results. We explained how the questions were defined. We assured them that their answers were free, and that they could really give their opinion without fear of being judged, as long as it was done with respect for others and everyone's words

Following the topics and agenda agreed by the consortium partners, we discussed around the 4 themes and sub-themes that are presented below:

First key thematic: Employment challenges

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses (Job loss disparities for women's sector)

a) Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?

During the pandemic, people noticed that women occupied major jobs in society, the jobs that they are essential, such as cashiers, nurses, school teachers. All these jobs are mostly occupied by women, but these are jobs that are not really valued in our society, not very well paid. Some participants thought that precisely because these jobs were hard and poorly paid, there would be even fewer people wanting to do them, and it would therefore be women with limited means or professional opportunities who would do them.

b) Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?.

The majority of participants felt that no support had been given to women, particularly those in 'essential' jobs in society, who were therefore more likely to come into contact with the virus. These women had to continue working, with no specific protection and no real pay rise in the face of the risk they were running. One

person pointed out that the applause in the evening to thank the nursing staff could have been extended to all the professions that were forced to carry on in order to keep the company running properly. In addition, the government could have taken action after the end of the lockdown to thank them in concrete terms.

c) What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the work force?

The covid-19 crisis has potentially kept women in jobs with little recognition, low pay and no real decision-making power. The excuse of their essential role created a feeling that women belonged in these positions, and that they were the ones who made society run, and that the 'men' in the upper echelons were useless in these cases. As a result, women were led to believe that they deserved no better, and that the positions they occupied were made for them, "saviours of the nation". In reality, it's women who have suffered the most from this crisis, but that's just a reflection of today's society, before and after Covid-19. In addition, due to a shortage of staff during the pandemic, female-dominated professions were masculinised, penalising women after the pandemic. Some women also had to stop working to look after their children, which led to redundancies.

Second key thematic: Caregiving responsibilities

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities (School closure and women's caregiving)

a) What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

Some schools were still open to allow women who had to go to work, especially nurses and doctors. But, according to the participants, there was not enough services from the government to help women.

b) How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

Women who had to go to work counted on their relatives to take care of their children, when they had relatives. For some of them, especially the ones on the front line and confronted directly to the virus, they don't see their children or family during all the weeks of lockdown. There was no balance according to some

participants, it was work OR personal life, but it was difficult to combine both during the crisis.

Third key thematic: Mental Health and Well-being

1st sub-subject: Increased stress and burnout among mothers

a) Were by your opinion the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

The majority of participants thought that the government did not support women victims of domestic violence.

2nd sub-subject: Lack of social support networks

a) Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing in your opinion?

The opinions were divided : half of the participants thought that the social support networks were not effective, and the other half disagreed or did not have a real answer.

b) How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

Some mothers who did not have relatives or family to count on had to think twice before going to the doctor or shopping because they could not take their children with them. For the women who did not speak French, it was also difficult to access healthcare and essential services.

Fourth key thematic: Gender gap in workplaces

1st sub-subject: Gender gap in workplace during COVID -19

a) How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

For some participants, the pandemic has made many people aware of the excessive feminisation of certain professions. This may have given rise to vocations, but sometimes the situation has put off women who loved their jobs but felt completely abandoned and forgotten by the government.

b) How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

Many women had to stop working during the pandemic to look after their children. This may have had an impact on their income, and on how these women felt about returning to work after the pandemic. They may have been criticised for giving up work for their families, and for being unreliable. This reinforced the idea that women should look after the home before working, and that this was their main role.

c) What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

Some suggestions :

- identify the authors of violences towards women/children and having a service that control the families during lockdown to avoid catastrophes
- raise awareness about the inequalities of wages
- raise awareness about the role of the fathers in the children's care
- more adapted structures for women in distress
- more care structures for children when women can not take care of them, even for some hours

5. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Italy by Vimercate City)

In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetable of the Debate panel 3, which was executed on 16th of September 2023 at 15.45 CET at Auditorium 'Falcone e Borsellino', at the Civic Library of Vimercate.

Table 2. Timetable of the Debate panel 3

TIME	TOPIC
15:45	Institutional Greetings, Riccardo Corti, Gianluca Pinnelli (Municipality of Vimercate) and Nadia Di Iulio, Elena Fuerler (ALDA+)
15:55	Presentation of the HEARD project
16:00	Presentation of the topic and crucial starting points
16:15	Start of the discussion on the topic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
16:30	Start of discussion on the topic: CAREGIVING RESPONSABILITIES
16:45	Start of discussion - on the topic: MENTAL HEALTH and WELLBEING
17:00	Start of discussion - on the topic: GENDER GAP in WORKPLACES
17:00	Conclusion

The panel debate started with the greetings and introduction of the project, continued with the presentation of the topic of the project, we presented also some facts from the covid-19 pandemic period to remind the participants about the challenges and the government reaction during mentioned period. We continued the debate panel with presenting the crucial starting points of the results of the survey, conducted in Italy and also in all the partner countries, focusing on the statistically significant findings. We also mentioned the findings of the state-of-the art analysis, conducted by the project partner countries.

According to mentioned research findings, we formulated 3 themes and sub-themes as stated below:

First key thematic: Employment Challenges

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses and 2nd sub-subject: Examination of the economic consequences and long-term implications for women's financial stability

a) Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?

In Vimercate, fathers discover the role of father. Forced cohabitation with children made them reflect on the enormous difficulties of women, but there is also reconciliation with children. How could we use it well? Less use of the gender issue, more studying the role of fathers as well. This is a problem that goes back before covid. Dismissals and validated resignations: high, especially women, 70% for reconciliation reasons. Even before covid.

After covid: higher number of men who decided to contribute to childcare by being close to their partners.

b) In your opinion women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the covid-19 crisis and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy, women indeed faced higher rates of job losses, layoffs, and reduced working hours compared to men. This gender disparity was driven by several factors. First, women were overrepresented in sectors heavily impacted by lockdowns, such as retail, hospitality, and services, where job losses were substantial. Second, many women held part-time or temporary positions, making them more vulnerable to economic downturns and reductions in working hours. Third, the closure of schools and the increased caregiving responsibilities due to remote learning and the illness of family members disproportionately affected women, pushing some to reduce their working hours or leave their jobs to prioritize caregiving. Moreover, the gender pay gap in Italy, where women generally earn less than men for similar roles, exacerbated the financial strain experienced by women during the pandemic. The Italian government implemented various measures to support women and mitigate the pandemic's adverse effects. One notable initiative was the "Cassa Integrazione Guadagni" (Income Support Scheme), which provided financial aid to workers affected by temporary layoffs or reduced working hours, benefiting many women. Additionally, the government extended parental leave and offered tax incentives to employers to encourage flexibility in work arrangements, enabling parents, especially

mothers, to manage their work and caregiving responsibilities. However, there were criticisms that these measures were not sufficient to address the depth of the gender disparities exacerbated by the pandemic. Many argued for more comprehensive policies addressing the root causes of gender inequality, including affordable childcare and promoting women's leadership in the workplace. The gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment in Italy illuminated pre-existing gender disparities. Government support initiatives provided some relief for women, but a more profound transformation in societal attitudes, workplace policies, and gender equity measures is necessary to ensure a more equitable recovery and resilience in future crises.

c) What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the work force?

Horizontal segregation is a huge issue. Due to an ingrained culture, some jobs are considered women's jobs, which involve help and relationships but are also less paid. Pnnr: emphasis on stems to move masses of talented young people from humanities to science, to emphasise that female talent is there and to enable them to cope when they enter the workplace.

Self-employment: starting employment had been a reconciliation strategy. Mum's time is not accepted, so I become my own business because I know that I can still reconcile family life and work.

The resources are few and ghettoise the female category a bit, they only help a few women to start their own business.

Digitisation: research with cocca universities, unchecked digitisation is pushing girls down a wrong path with social media abuse, creating school drop-outs and other inconveniences due to lack of media management. Organisational flexibility is useful for everyone, not women. Slower work, to find one's place.

Second key thematic: Caregiving Responsibilities

1st sub-subject: Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities (School closure and women's caregiving) and 2nd sub-subject: Exploring the challenges faced by women in managing homeschooling and remote learning for their children (Women and homeschooling challenges)

a) What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

During the pandemic in Italy, various resources and government support systems were deployed to assist women in managing childcare needs and accessing healthcare services. The government initiated emergency financial aid and grants to support families with children, helping alleviate some of the financial burden associated with childcare. Additionally, efforts were made to provide accessible telehealth services, ensuring that women and families could consult healthcare professionals remotely for non-emergency medical concerns. Temporary measures were introduced to offer flexibility at the workplace, allowing parents to balance their professional commitments with childcare responsibilities. Moreover, community organizations and local non-profits played a crucial role by organizing virtual support groups and informational webinars, offering guidance on managing childcare and accessing healthcare during these challenging times. These combined efforts aimed to ease the strain on women, especially mothers, and enhance their ability to care for their families while attending to their health needs.

b) How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy, women with caregiving responsibilities faced an immense challenge in striking a balance between work and personal life. With schools and daycare centers closed, many women were forced to take on the primary caregiving role for children or elderly family members while attempting to fulfill their professional duties from home. This often led to extended work hours, blurring the lines between professional and personal life. Remote work, though providing some flexibility, did not alleviate the strain as women had to navigate household chores, homeschooling, and caregiving, leaving limited time for self-care or personal pursuits. The emotional toll and stress were considerable, impacting mental health and exacerbating gender disparities in the workforce as women grappled with the pressure to maintain productivity amidst caregiving responsibilities.

Third key thematic: Mental Health and Wellbeing

1st sub-subject: Increased stress and burnout

a) Were by your opinion the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

The government actions to support women victims of domestic violence in Italy demonstrated some effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a notable effort to raise awareness of domestic violence through public campaigns and helplines. Additionally, the government allocated funds to support domestic violence shelters and helplines, enhancing the capacity to provide immediate assistance and refuge to survivors. Remote reporting systems were established to allow victims to seek help discreetly, which was a valuable step. However, challenges persisted, such as ensuring the availability of safe spaces for all victims and improving the response mechanisms to address the surge in cases. The holistic approach required both short-term measures and long-term strategies, including improved coordination among various stakeholders, enhanced legal support, and sustained public awareness campaigns, to comprehensively combat domestic violence and ensure the safety and well-being of women.

2nd sub-subject: Lack of social support and network

a) Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing by your opinion?

During the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy, the effectiveness of social support networks was a mixed experience. On one hand, there were concerted efforts to bolster support systems to help vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, those facing financial hardships, and individuals dealing with mental health issues exacerbated by the pandemic. Community organizations, local authorities, and volunteers played a vital role in delivering essential supplies, providing emotional support, and coordinating aid efforts. However, challenges and gaps were evident. Firstly, the sudden and unprecedented nature of the crisis strained existing support systems, leading to delays and inefficiencies in delivering aid. Coordination and communication between various support providers needed improvement to ensure a more streamlined response. Secondly, the effectiveness of support often varied based on geographical location and resource availability. Urban areas tended to have more access to support networks and resources, leaving rural or isolated communities at a disadvantage. The mental health aspect was a significant

concern. While there was an effort to provide telehealth services and online mental health support, the surge in demand overwhelmed the available resources. Access to timely mental health support remained challenging for many, particularly for vulnerable populations dealing with anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. Furthermore, gaps in supporting specific demographics were evident. Women, especially those facing domestic violence, required enhanced support systems. The increase in domestic abuse cases during lockdowns necessitated a more targeted and robust approach to provide immediate assistance and safe spaces for victims. In summary, while Italy made efforts to reinforce social support networks during the pandemic, there were notable gaps in efficiency, equitable distribution of resources, mental health support, and targeted assistance for vulnerable groups. Future preparedness should focus on a more comprehensive and coordinated approach, ensuring timely and equitable support across regions and demographics, along with a specific emphasis on mental health services and support for victims of domestic violence. Additionally, leveraging technology and innovative solutions can improve access and efficiency in delivering aid during crises.

b) In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during COVID-19?

The lack of robust social support networks significantly impacted women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy. With schools and childcare facilities closing, the burden of caregiving and homeschooling fell predominantly on women. The absence of reliable and accessible support systems, such as extended family assistance, babysitters, or community programs, left women struggling to manage the demands of their jobs alongside childcare duties. Many had to reduce their working hours or even leave the workforce, affecting their career progression and economic independence. The lack of affordable and available childcare options placed an immense strain on working mothers, exacerbating the gender gap in employment and underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive social support systems to facilitate women's participation in both the workforce and family responsibilities. Moreover, there is also the mental health aspect which needed and still needs to be addressed to be given the possibility to have an emotional and psychological support and resources

as well as in case of domestic violence (taken up in the concepts of the answer above).

c) How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

The absence of robust social support networks profoundly affected women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic in Italy. Many women, especially those from vulnerable socioeconomic backgrounds, faced barriers in accessing necessary healthcare due to reduced mobility, lack of transportation, or the unavailability of support to accompany them to medical facilities. Moreover, the closure of community centers and support organizations meant limited access to crucial services like mental health support, counseling, or resources for domestic violence victims. The absence of comprehensive support networks made it challenging for women to navigate the complex healthcare system, hindering timely access to medical assistance, necessary check-ups, vaccinations, and other essential healthcare services, thereby amplifying health disparities and underscoring the need for a more inclusive and accessible healthcare infrastructure.

Fourth key thematic: Gender Gap in Workplaces

1st sub-subject: Gender gap in workplaces during COVID-19 and 2nd sub-subject: Impact of the pandemic of women employment rate

a) How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors like education and caregiving in Italy. The sudden closure of schools and childcare facilities disrupted the educational sector, forcing a rapid shift to online learning and placing immense pressure on educators to adapt to new teaching methods. The caregiving sector, predominantly occupied by women, faced increased demand due to the closure of schools and elderly care centers, coupled with heightened health and safety concerns. Key factors contributing to this impact include the essential nature of these sectors, making remote work often unfeasible; inadequate technological infrastructure for effective online education; and

the reliance on physical presence and close interactions in caregiving roles. Additionally, pre-existing gender disparities and undervaluation of these sectors compounded the challenges, revealing the urgent need for investment, technological integration, and improved working conditions in these crucial sectors.

b) How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

The closure of schools and childcare facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy had a profound and disproportionate impact on women's ability to maintain their employment arrangements. As primary caregivers in most families, women faced an unprecedented challenge in balancing work responsibilities with increased childcare demands.

1. **Disproportionate Caregiving Responsibility:** The closure of schools meant that children were at home full-time, requiring constant attention and supervision. This caregiving responsibility overwhelmingly fell on mothers, disrupting their ability to dedicate uninterrupted time to their professional roles.
2. **Reduced Work Hours and Career Setbacks:** Many women were forced to reduce their working hours, take unpaid leaves, or even quit their jobs to manage homeschooling and childcare. This abrupt change disrupted their career trajectories, leading to setbacks in terms of promotions, advancements, and long-term financial stability.
3. **Work-from-Home Challenges:** Working from home, which became the norm during the pandemic, posed unique challenges. Women had to balance attending virtual meetings and meeting work deadlines with assisting their children in remote learning, often resulting in added stress and reduced efficiency in both domains.
4. **Lack of Alternative Care Options:** The closure of schools left parents without alternatives for childcare. Access to grandparents or extended family, often relied upon for support, was limited due to health concerns related to the pandemic. The absence of safe and reliable childcare facilities exacerbated the struggle for working mothers.
5. **Impact on Mental Health:** The pressure of managing increased caregiving responsibilities alongside work significantly impacted the mental health of women. Anxiety, stress, and burnout became prevalent due to the constant juggling of roles without adequate support.
6. **Economic Consequences:** The inability to maintain regular employment arrangements resulted in financial strain for many families, particularly

single-parent households or those dependent on the woman's income. This economic impact has long-term repercussions on families' financial stability and wellbeing.

7. **Calls for Policy Changes:** The closure of schools and its effect on working mothers shed light on the need for comprehensive family support policies. Calls for affordable and accessible childcare, extended parental leave, and flexible work arrangements became more prominent to better support working parents, especially women, in managing their dual roles.

c) What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

To better address the needs of women, especially mothers, during future pandemic situations in Italy, several key suggestions should be considered:

1. **Accessible and Affordable Childcare:** Invest in accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare facilities to support working mothers. Public and private sectors should collaborate to establish daycare centers and flexible childcare options that align with work schedules.
2. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Promote flexible work arrangements, including remote work, flexible hours, and part-time options, to accommodate caregiving responsibilities. Employers should adopt policies that prioritize output and productivity over traditional office hours.
3. **Paid Parental Leave:** Advocate for extended and well-compensated parental leave, allowing both mothers and fathers to take time off to care for their children without jeopardizing their job security or financial stability.
4. **Mental Health Support:** Enhance mental health services and initiatives, including affordable counseling, stress management programs, and mental health hotlines. Special attention should be given to addressing the mental health challenges faced by women due to the increased caregiving burden during crises.
5. **Support for Women-Owned Businesses:** Provide financial and logistical support to women entrepreneurs and small business owners, acknowledging the impact of the pandemic on female-led businesses. Grants, low-interest loans, and tailored business assistance programs can aid in their recovery and growth.

6. **Gender-Responsive Government Policies:** Implement gender-responsive policies that consider the specific needs of women and mothers, addressing issues such as gender pay gaps, workplace discrimination, and career advancement barriers.
7. **Community Support Networks:** Establish community support networks that provide a platform for women to connect, share experiences, and offer assistance. Networking and peer support can prove invaluable in managing challenges and finding solutions collectively.
8. **Accessible Healthcare Services:** Ensure equitable access to healthcare services, especially for maternal and child health. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure and making essential healthcare services affordable and accessible to all is crucial.
9. **Public Awareness and Education:** Launch public awareness campaigns that educate society about the importance of sharing caregiving responsibilities and the value of women's contributions to both the family and the economy.

6. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Bulgaria by FECE)

Debate Panel 3 was executed twice. Table 1 below presents the timetable of the debate on 29 June 2023 at 06:30 p.m. EET in the National Student House, Sofia and Table 2 presents the timetable of the debate on 7 September 2023 at 4:30 p.m. EET in the Bulgarian Red Cross, Varna, Bulgaria.

Table 1. Timetable of the Debate panel 3 on 29 June 2023 in Sofia, Bulgaria

TIME	TOPIC
18:30	Greetings and introduction Mariya Veleva
18:35	Presentation of the HEARD project
18:45	Presentation of the topic and crucial starting points Dr Zornitsa Draganova, Introduction of PhD Ilina Nacheva
19:00	Start of the discussion on the topic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
19:15	Start of discussion on the topic: CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES
19:30	Start of discussion - on the topic: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING and GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES
19:50	EC satisfaction survey and conclusion thoughts

Table 2. Timetable of the Debate panel 3 on 7 September 2023 in Varna, Bulgaria

TIME	TOPIC
16:30	Greetings and introduction Dr Nevena Dobрева
16:35	Presentation of the HEARD project
16:40	Presentation of the topic and crucial starting points Dr Zornitsa Draganova,
16:50	Start of the discussion on the topic: EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
17:00	Start of discussion on the topic: CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES
17:10	Start of discussion - on the topic: MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING and GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES
17:20	EC satisfaction survey and conclusion thoughts

The panel debate started with the greetings and introduction of the project and continued with the presentation of the topic. Dr Zornitsa Draganova presented the findings of the state-of-the-art analysis and some facts from the COVID-19 pandemic to remind the participants about the challenges and the government's reaction during the mentioned period. We continued the debate panel by showing

the crucial starting points of the survey results conducted in Bulgaria and all the partner countries, focusing on the statistically significant findings.

According to the mentioned research findings, we formulated three themes and sub-themes as stated below:

First key theme: Employment challenges

a) Do you think the Covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women, and how did you note these worsening situations?

- Women, in particular, have been greatly affected as they are expected to fulfil multiple social roles simultaneously. They are required to be a mother, a wife, and a professional in their field all at once. This has increased pressure and stress as work demands active presence, while remote work and distance learning for children intertwine with their private lives and family responsibilities.

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

- A participant shared that her older child was upset because they had to go to work while she stayed home. The situation was made worse by the fact that going to the jobcentre meant interacting with a lot of unemployed people during a very stressful time.

b) Did, in your opinion, women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the Covid-19 crisis, and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the Covid-19 pandemic that suffered any consequences during Covid-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

- A participant in the discussion, a mother of two children, one in 6th grade and the other just a year old, said the pandemic was incredibly stressful. Teachers were sending homework via email, she felt very isolated, and even going to the store was a major event. Fortunately, she could receive help from the state, but it was still difficult. She had applied for nursery ten times; by the time her child was accepted, the nursery was closed again due to lockdown restrictions. This led to even more isolation and stress.

c) What long-term effects might the Covid-19 pandemic have on women's employment prospects and gender equality in the workforce?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

- The consequences of the pandemic were felt not just economically but also in terms of mental health. While it's true that working from home in front of the computer makes it easier for employers to monitor employees, it can also lead to burnout and other mental health issues.

Second key thematic: *Caregiving Responsibilities*

- a) What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

- The inability of the government to provide support puts women in a vulnerable situation. The original 60/40 measure did not work, and it was restructured to preserve the workforce, but the support was for employers.

- b) How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

- During the pandemic, a study was conducted in Bulgaria to explore the prevailing conservative attitudes and reinforced psychological stereotypes. Gender role expectations dictate that women are primarily responsible for household tasks and childcare despite both men and women sharing these responsibilities. Men are viewed as the primary providers for the family, while women are expected to take care of the children. Fathers who took on childcare responsibilities during the crisis experienced burnout due to the added stress. Women already having multiple responsibilities experienced heightened stress due to the role reversal caused by the pandemic. These changes in social stereotypes led to increasing tension, violence, and trauma. The process of redefining these stereotypes is slow and rather impossible on fast paste. The high levels of information noise during the pandemic made filtering information difficult.

Third key thematic: Mental Health and Well-being

1st sub-subject: Increased stress and burnout among mothers

- a) Were, in your opinion, the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

- The first lockdown resulted in road closures and a decrease in car crashes, but it also led to a doubling of domestic violence cases. Unfortunately, victims of

domestic violence are often underserved, and there are not enough centres to provide help. Ideally, there should be one centre per 10,000 people, but in Varna, there is only one centre for women and one for children, which is not enough to meet the needs of everyone. Moreover, many victims do not seek help at all.

- A participant shared that she witnessed a case of domestic violence in her building, and although she called the police, they were unable to intervene effectively. This situation highlights the need for a more holistic approach to tackling domestic violence, which should involve creating a better medical culture and addressing the issue of harassment.
- The tension and uncertainty caused by the crisis have led to a permanent deterioration of relationships and an increase in domestic violence. There was a 50% increase in the number of reports during the crisis.

2nd sub-subject: Lack of social support networks

- a) Do you think the social support networks during the Covid-19 pandemic were effective, and if they were not, what was missing in your opinion?
 - In Bulgaria, there is a widespread denial of the mental impact caused by Covid-19 and the resulting crisis. The high-stress levels experienced by supporting psychologists and other professionals led to burnout and forced some to suspend their practice temporarily to recover.
- b) In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during Covid-19?
 - The crisis has highlighted the crucial need for support among parents with young children. The constantly changing situation and lack of established procedures for distance education in the education sector have further complicated matters. As a result, after the pandemic, there has been a surge in compensatory behaviour as people try to cope with the stress caused by the crisis. Many have turned to trips and excursions as a way to escape.
- c) How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?
 - In Bulgaria, e-diaries were used to track the mothers' experiences with children under 12 years old when the pandemic started. The data showed a clash of roles and gender expectations, which caused significant stress. Based on retrospective interviews, the researchers evaluate the beginning of the crisis as the most stressful period. Life during the pandemic was described as "life in a laboratory" and the pandemic itself as "creeping".

Fourth key thematic: Gender gap in workplaces

a) How has the Covid-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving, etc.), and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

- The female population of the earth outnumbers the male population. Women are primarily employed in sectors such as customer service, child care, and elder care, which places a significant mental strain on their husbands. This has also permanently affected the social roles of mothers and caregivers.
- Women were pushed to their limits due to their inability to deal with problems and the lack of support. The state is also perceived as a bully due to imposing restrictions without offering alternatives.

b) How has the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during Covid-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

- Working from home was not an option for some participants in the debate. They could not leave their children with their grandparents because they did not have enough information about the risks. As a result, the husband and wife had to arrange to work at different times and take on the additional responsibilities of being school teachers and homework helpers. It was a very harsh time for them, and they hope they never have to experience anything like it again.

c) What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

- In terms of lessons learned, crisis management and finding coping mechanisms can reduce stress. However, feeling overwhelmed leads to trauma. Restructuring social stereotypes takes time and is a matter of changing attitudes.
- Despite the significant impact of the pandemic, the issue is not being discussed openly, with many people refusing to comment on it. After the official end of the pandemic, people have attempted to ignore what happened and instead focus on spending quality time with friends and family.

Key findings

EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

The debate panel participants agreed that the government's measures and actions in response to the pandemic caused challenges for the caregiving sector and families with children. By restricting access to caregiving centres, schools and nurseries and limiting freedom of work, the government failed to provide alternatives, resulting in anxiety and stress among all people.

CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

In the debate, participants highlighted the difficulties of balancing work and personal life, especially for caregivers in Bulgaria. Despite men and women helping each other, the reinforced psychological stereotypes in Bulgaria continue to cause high-stress levels.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The imposition of restrictions without offering alternatives was the main topic of discussion regarding the gender gap in workplaces. Participants emphasised the social stereotypes and conservative beliefs affecting the work environment when it comes to caregiving.

GENDER GAP IN WORKPLACES

The imposition of restrictions without offering alternatives was the main topic of discussion regarding the gender gap in workplaces. Participants emphasised the social stereotypes and conservative beliefs affecting the work environment when it comes to caregiving.

7. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Sweden by NDF)

In the table below, we can see the timetable of Debate panel 3, which was executed 11th October, 2023; 13:00-16:00 in Stockholm Sweden.

Table 1. Timetable of the Debate panel 3

TIME	TOPIC
13:00pm	Registration and Welcome
13:30pm	Introduction to the Debate Panel
14:00pm	Opening Statements by Panellists
14:30pm	Questions from Moderator
15:00pm	Cross-Examination between Panellists
15:30pm	Moderator's Remarks and Thank You
16:00pm	Conclusion and Networking

The core of the panel discussion revolved around the presentation of the project's central topic. We emphasised the relevance and importance of the chosen subject matter, underscoring how it directly impacts not only Sweden but also our partner countries. The intent was to set the stage for a substantive and informed conversation.

Throughout the panel debate, our objective was to encourage an open and constructive exchange of ideas and perspectives. By structuring the discussion in this manner, we sought to ensure that the participants gained a deeper understanding of the project, its context, and the research that underpinned it, ultimately fostering a more informed and engaging debate.

According to mentioned research findings, we formulated 3 themes and sub-themes as stated below:

Employment challenges

1st sub-subject : Job loss disparities for women's sector

- Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?

- Participants believed that women, particularly those in low-wage jobs or part-time positions, were disproportionately affected. Many lost their jobs or had to reduce their hours due to lockdowns and school closures. This not only resulted in immediate economic hardships but also set back their career trajectories. The gender pay gap widened as women had to take on more caregiving responsibilities, which limited their ability to focus on their jobs or seek new opportunities.
- While other participants acknowledged that women adapted and even thrived in remote work settings. The pandemic accelerated digitalization, and many women found new opportunities in online businesses and remote work. So, it's not accurate to paint a uniform picture of worsening employment challenges for all women.

Did in your opinion women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the covid-19 crisis and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?

- Participants noted that it is crucial to emphasize, however, that not all governments made adequate measures to solve this issue. Some countries struggled to provide adequate assistance, leaving many women without crucial assistance during this trying period.
- Other participants pointed out that while there was variable levels of government support for women during the COVID-19 pandemic, the gender gap in job losses and reduced working hours was obvious due to factors such as industry representation and caregiving obligations. It emphasizes the importance of having more comprehensive and equitable measures in place to overcome such gaps in future crises.

- Examination of the economic consequences and long-term implications for women's

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the workforce?

Participants indicated that setbacks can exacerbate the gender wage gap, reduce the presence of women in senior positions, and perpetuate misconceptions about women's responsibilities in society. To achieve gender equality in the workplace, we must face these difficulties head on and explore policies such as cheap childcare, flexible work schedules, and attempts to challenge old gender conventions.

Others noted that while the COVID-19 epidemic posed problems to gender equality in the workplace, it also generated chances for good change. More can be achieved by a fair and inclusive workforce in the long run by embracing remote work, rewarding key people, and introducing supportive legislation.

Therefore, the pandemic undoubtedly presented obstacles for women in the workplace, it is critical to avoid creating a one-sided image. Long-term consequences on women's work opportunities and gender equality are varied and multifaceted, and we must proceed with caution when making broad forecasts about the future.

Caregiving Responsibilities

1st sub-Topic : School closure and women's caregiving

Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

1. Proponents of Government Support for Women-numerous countries introduced financial aid packages that included childcare subsidies, allowing many women to continue working while their children were at home due to school closures.
2. Advocate for Accessible Healthcare Services-Many governments increased funding for healthcare facilities, expanded telehealth options, and ensured that women could access essential medical services without putting their health at risk.
3. Concerns About Insufficient Support-it's important to acknowledge the shortcomings in government support. Not all countries provided adequate childcare

support, leaving many women to bear the burden of caregiving while trying to work from home.

4. Emphasis on Mental Health Support-Government support should have included mental health services, counseling, and resources specifically tailored to women dealing with increased stress, anxiety, and isolation.

5. Inclusivity in Support Programs-Governments needed to consider the diverse needs of women, including those who are single mothers, LGBTQ+ individuals, or women with disabilities.

2nd sub-topic :Women and homeschooling challenges

Exploring the challenges faced by women in managing homeschooling and remote learning for their children

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

Proponents of Work-Life Balance Support-Participants noted the remote work arrangements were a lifeline for many women. Flexible schedules and the ability to work from home allowed them to better manage their responsibilities.

Emphasizing Challenges Faced-Participants noted that remote work was not as feasible for all professions, and women in essential roles often had to leave their families to work, leading to emotional strain.

The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life was a significant issue as women found themselves constantly on call, unable to switch off from either work or caregiving duties,with the closure of schools and daycare centers added immense pressure. Highlighting Resilience and Adaptation-Other participants acknowledged the remarkable resilience and adaptation of women during the pandemic as many found innovative solutions to balance work and personal life.

It is however critical to realize the multidimensional nature of this issue. During the epidemic, women with caring obligations faced major problems, but they also displayed incredible courage and resourcefulness in managing work and personal life. We must learn from these experiences in order to establish a more equal and supportive work environment for everybody.

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

Were in your opinion the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

Participants were keen to note that governments around the world introduced legislation, established helplines, and funded shelters and support services. These initiatives are commendable and have undoubtedly helped countless women escape abusive situations. However, the effectiveness of these actions is not uniform. It varies from one region to another and is influenced by a range of factors. Here are a few points to consider:

Government attempts to increase awareness about domestic abuse have had a significant influence in many cases. School, workplace, and community programs can help to shift social attitudes and encourage victims to seek help. However, if these initiatives lack resources or societal standards remain strongly established, their usefulness may be restricted.

Legal Framework: A major part of government action is legislation aimed at protecting victims and penalizing abusers. However, the execution of these rules might be inconsistent, resulting in cases when abusers are not effectively prosecuted. Furthermore, vulnerable women frequently have restricted access to legal aid.

Support Services: Victims benefit greatly from shelters, hotlines, and counseling services. However, the availability and quality of these services might vary greatly by region. Shelters that are overcrowded and have large waiting lists can limit their usefulness.

Economic Assistance: Financial independence is critical for women attempting to leave abusive marriages.

Government programs such as financial assistance, career training, and childcare assistance can be quite beneficial. These programs, however, require ongoing financing and accessibility.

Cultural and Societal Factors: Domestic violence remains strongly rooted in some societies, making it difficult for government interventions alone to achieve major change. Changing deeply entrenched ideas and traditions necessitates a diverse approach that includes religious and community leaders.

To summarize, while governments have taken significant steps to assist women victims of domestic violence, the success of these initiatives varies greatly depending on local context, resources, and cultural variables. To establish a more

comprehensive and effective response to this serious issue, it is critical to regularly analyze and improve these programs, devote adequate resources, and collaborate with civil society organizations. Domestic abuse is a complicated and deeply ingrained issue that demands a continuous, multi-pronged effort on the part of governments, communities, and people.

Mental Health and Well-being

Increased stress and burnout among mothers.

Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing in your opinion?

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

Participants noted that social networks created both formal and informal that offered emotional support, access to essential resources, and information dissemination. Without them, the pandemic's impact would have been much more devastating.

One of the key strengths of these networks was their adaptability, in changing circumstances and needs of the people, whether it was organizing online support groups, delivering groceries to the vulnerable, or offering mental health services remotely.

Criticizing the social support networks participants pointed out that they were not as effective as they could have been, there was a lack of consistency and coordination in the response. Different regions and organizations had varying levels of support, leaving some communities underserved.

Additionally, there was a digital divide that became more pronounced during the pandemic. Not everyone had access to the internet or the necessary digital skills to benefit from online support networks. This exclusion was a significant problem, especially for older individuals and those in rural areas.

In agreement participants highlighted that the pandemic exposed pre-existing disparities in access to healthcare and resources, which need to be addressed at a systemic level to create a more resilient society for future crises. In essence, while social support networks were effective to some extent, there's room for improvement in terms of coordination, inclusivity, and long-term preparedness.

Lack of social support networks.

In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to

balance work and family responsibilities during COVID-19?

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

During discussions, participants acknowledged that the absence of adequate social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic had a disproportionate impact on women's ability to manage their work and family responsibilities. They identified several key challenges that women faced in this context.

Firstly, women often had to rely heavily on extended family members, friends, or daycare facilities to assist with childcare due to the lack of a reliable support system. This reliance resulted in increased stress and anxiety for women, leading to higher rates of depression. The absence of opportunities for social interaction and emotional support left women feeling isolated and overwhelmed, ultimately hindering their work performance.

The closure of schools and daycare centers aggravated the problem. Women were obliged to manage homeschooling and child care alongside their professional duties when their children were at home full-time, which sometimes resulted in long work hours, including evenings and weekends.

As a result, many women experienced burnout and were forced to reduce their work hours or quit their jobs entirely. The discussions also focused on how the epidemic exacerbated gender gaps in housework and childcare. Women continued to shoulder the bulk of these obligations, and the pandemic's lack of external support compounded this strain. Addressing these problems required not only establishing work-life balance, but also breaking engrained gender norms and cultural expectations reinforced by the pandemic.

Participants argued for policies that help women in the workplace, such as flexible work arrangements, paid family leave, and affordable childcare choices, to solve these complex concerns.

They also emphasized the importance of a broader societal adjustment in thinking to acknowledge and reward the unpaid labor that women usually perform at home. This acknowledgement is critical for fostering a more equal and supportive environment in which women may excel in both their careers and caring roles.

Finally, while the pandemic showed the weaknesses of social support networks, it also provided a chance for change. It spurred debates on gender roles, employment flexibility, and the importance of family support networks. By proactively addressing these concerns, society may work toward a more balanced and equal future for women, both at work and at home.

How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

Participants noted the lack of social support networks during the epidemic increased already existing gaps in women's access to healthcare and essential services. To address this issue, measures that build community support structures and provide targeted aid to women, particularly those suffering economic and social challenges, must be prioritized. While others pointed out that the lack of social support networks posed obstacles, it is critical to highlight the adaptation of healthcare institutions and the support mechanisms put in place during the epidemic. Women's access to healthcare and vital services is not only influenced by social support networks, and efforts to improve access should use a holistic strategy that incorporates healthcare system resilience and government assistance.

Gender gap in work places

Gender gap in workplace during and after covid -19

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

Participants noted that the pandemic had an undeniable influence on historically dominated employment areas including education and caregiving. In education, the rapid change placed a tremendous load on teachers who were already facing issues such as poor pay and insufficient resources.

Furthermore, many teachers were forced to take on extra responsibilities, such as tech assistance and debugging, which increased their workload. The pandemic has brought to light long-standing concerns in the school system, including the need for greater educator remuneration, professional development, and resources.

While other participants said the epidemic did offer obstacles for educators, some participants pointed out that it also provided opportunity for educational innovation. Teachers were compelled to adapt and learn new skills that would help them in the long run. The shift to online schooling also provided additional flexibility, which some professors appreciated. Furthermore, several teachers showed remarkable tenacity and inventiveness in keeping students engaged.

Impact of the pandemic on women's employment rates.

How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

The closure of schools and childcare facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic undeniably had a significant and detrimental impact on women's ability to maintain their employment arrangements. As highlighted by Participants, many women had to shoulder the burden of caregiving and education for their children, often leading to reduced working hours or job loss. This disproportionate impact exacerbated existing gender inequalities in the workforce, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive policies and support structures. The call for affordable childcare, paid family leave, and flexible work arrangements underscores the importance of addressing these issues to ensure women's economic stability and career prospects in the future. On the other hand, participants in disagreement argued that while challenges did exist, some women managed to adapt by embracing remote work and taking advantage of flexible employer policies. It reminded us that school closures were necessary to curb the spread of the virus, highlighting the complexity of the situation. These participants emphasize the importance of recognizing that the impact varied among individuals and that systemic solutions, like rebuilding childcare infrastructure, should be considered carefully to balance the needs of working mothers with broader societal goals. In conclusion, the debate surrounding the closure of schools and childcare facilities during COVID-19 highlights the need for a nuanced approach that addresses both the challenges and opportunities it presented for women in the workforce.

What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

The following arguments were used by participants in the discussion to answer to the topic:

The discussion emphasized the importance of taking a comprehensive strategy to meeting the needs of women, particularly mothers, in future pandemic circumstances. It is clear that a multifaceted strategy is required to build a more resilient and supportive society. This strategy includes strengthening social safety nets through income support and job security, investing in affordable and accessible childcare services, improving maternal healthcare access through telemedicine, bridging the digital divide for equitable education, combating gender-based

violence through support systems and awareness campaigns, and encouraging women's participation in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, developing strong social support networks within communities can help women manage difficult times. By focusing on these areas, we may better equip women to face future crises and contribute to a more fair and resilient society as a whole.

Key findings

EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

In conclusion, the findings from the debate on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment reveal a complex and multifaceted reality. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that women, especially those in low-wage or part-time positions, bore a disproportionate burden during the pandemic. They faced job losses and reduced working hours due to lockdowns and school closures, leading to immediate economic hardships and setbacks in their career paths. The widening gender pay gap further highlighted the unequal impact, as women took on increased caregiving responsibilities, limiting their ability to focus on their careers or explore new opportunities.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all women experienced a worsening of their employment situation. Many adapted and even thrived in remote work settings, taking advantage of the accelerated digitalization brought on by the pandemic. This diversity of experiences underscores the need to avoid painting a uniform picture of employment challenges for all women.

In light of these findings, it is evident that comprehensive and equitable measures must be put in place to address and mitigate such disparities in future crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the urgent need for proactive policies that support women in the workforce, particularly those in vulnerable positions, ensuring that they are not disproportionately affected during times of crisis.

CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

While many governments made admirable efforts to address women's childcare needs and access to healthcare services throughout the epidemic, there is always space for improvement. Governments should continue to emphasize and enhance support services for women, recognizing the variety of issues they encounter. This benefits not only women, but also society as a whole by encouraging gender equality and economic recovery. In conclusion, the findings of this study shed light

on the complex dynamics surrounding the concept of work-life balance, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Proponents of work-life balance support the notion that remote work arrangements provided a lifeline for many women, offering them flexibility and the ability to better manage their responsibilities. However, it's important to acknowledge the challenges faced, with remote work not being feasible for all professions and essential workers experiencing emotional strain due to their inability to work from home.

The blurring of boundaries between work and personal life emerged as a significant issue, exacerbated by the closure of schools and daycare centers, which added immense pressure on women. Nevertheless, the study also highlighted the remarkable resilience and adaptation of women during the pandemic, as many of them found innovative solutions to balance their work and personal life.

Ultimately, it is crucial to recognize the multidimensional nature of this issue. Women with caregiving obligations faced significant challenges, but they also displayed incredible courage and resourcefulness in managing their work and personal life. As we move forward, it is imperative that we learn from these experiences and use them as a foundation to establish a more equal and supportive work environment for everyone, ensuring that work-life balance is not a privilege but a fundamental right for all individuals.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The findings from participants shed light on the role that social support networks played during the pandemic. These networks emerged as crucial lifelines, providing emotional support, essential resources, and vital information to individuals and communities. Their adaptability in addressing changing needs and circumstances demonstrated their resilience in times of crisis. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the shortcomings that were highlighted. The lack of consistency and coordination in the response, along with regional disparities in support, raised concerns about the effectiveness of these networks. Moreover, the digital divide exacerbated inequalities, leaving some segments of the population without access to these valuable resources.

The pandemic laid bare existing disparities in healthcare access and resource distribution, underscoring the need for systemic reforms to build a more resilient society for future crises. While social support networks proved their worth, the findings suggest a pressing need for improved coordination, inclusivity, and long-term preparedness to ensure that no one is left behind in times of adversity. In essence, the pandemic has provided valuable lessons on the strengths and

weaknesses of our social support systems, offering an opportunity for us to build a more equitable and responsive future.

LACK OF SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS.

The discussions highlighted the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, particularly in terms of their ability to balance work and family responsibilities. The absence of adequate social support networks exposed numerous challenges that women faced, ranging from increased stress and anxiety to burnout and a widening of gender gaps in household responsibilities. The pandemic not only revealed these vulnerabilities but also created an opportunity for change. Participants emphasized the need for policies that support women in the workplace, such as flexible work arrangements, paid family leave, and affordable childcare options. Additionally, there was a call to challenge deeply ingrained gender norms and cultural expectations that were reinforced by the pandemic, recognizing the unpaid labor that women often undertake at home.

In moving forward, it is crucial for society to actively address these issues, fostering a more equal and supportive environment where women can thrive in both their careers and caregiving roles. The pandemic has sparked important discussions about gender roles, employment flexibility, and the significance of family support networks. By taking proactive steps to address these concerns, we can work towards a more balanced and equitable future for women, both in the workplace and at home.

GENDER GAP IN WORK PLACES

It is essential to recognize the systemic inequalities that were exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly the disproportionate burden on women in terms of caregiving and education.

This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policies and support structures, including affordable childcare, paid family leave, and flexible work arrangements, to ensure women's economic stability and career prospects in the future. Ultimately, the key takeaway from this debate is the importance of a nuanced approach that acknowledges both the challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic's impact on historically dominated employment areas. By addressing these issues comprehensively and considering the varying impact on individuals, we can work towards a more equitable and resilient workforce in the post-pandemic world.

8. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Spain by Ayto. Mislata)

In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetable of the Debate panel 3, which was executed on 6th of June 2023 at 12.30 pm CET at “Centro Social La Fábrica” of Mislata.

Table 3. Timetable of the Debate panel 3

TIME	TOPIC
12:30	Presentation of the topic and crucial starting points
12:40	Start of the discussion on the topic.
13:30	Conclusion

The roundtable brought forth the central theme, stressing the significance and pertinence of the selected subject matter. It underlined its direct impact not only within Spain but also in our partner countries. Our goal was to create an extensive and informed framework to encourage further discussion and debate. We aimed to foster an open and constructive exchange of ideas and views throughout the roundtable. By structuring the discussion in this manner, we ensured that participants attained a comprehensive grasp of the pertinent topics. The project, its context, and the underlying research foster an engaging and well-informed dialogue.

According to mentioned research findings, we formulated 4 themes and 8 sub-themes as stated below:

First key thematic: Employment challenges

1st sub-topic: Analysis of the sectors and industries predominantly employing women affected by job losses (Job loss disparities for women's sector)

2nd sub-topic: Examination of the economic consequences and long-term implications for women's financial stability (COVID-19 Impact: Women's Financial Stability)

d) Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?

- Women saw their employment situation worsen as a result of Covid-19. In Spain, female employment is centred on sectors such as: cleaning, care, the food handling industry, education, health, the textile industry, ... consequently, all of them were affected by the pandemic.
- This worsening of the situation was reflected in the consequent abandonment of jobs, not so much at the height of the pandemic, but in the ensuing economic crisis.
- In addition, many companies opted for teleworking with the consequent double workload for women, as in addition to their paid work, they had to attend to the needs of reconciliation, co-responsibility and care for their families and dependents.

e) Did by your opinion women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the covid-19 crisis and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?

- Restrictions on access to housing caused domestic workers to lose their jobs, as well as carers of dependents, the elderly and/or minors. All these jobs are totally feminised.

f) What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the work force?

- In the long term, the pandemic has made teleworking a more common or accepted option for companies.
- From a gender perspective, teleworking has always been seen as an employment measure that facilitates the reconciliation of work, personal and family life. However, the reality in times of the pandemic showed that only women were able to reconcile work and family life, and that they were responsible both for their working hours through teleworking and for the care, attention, leisure and education of their dependents, in many cases not sharing this double burden with their partners.

2nd thematic: Caregiving Responsibilities

1st sub-topic: Analysis of the impact of school closures on women's caregiving responsibilities (School closure and women's caregiving)

2nd sub-topic: Exploring the challenges faced by women in managing homeschooling and remote learning for their children (Women and homeschooling challenges)

a) What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

- While women made use of the resources available to them on a personal basis, no specific support system was articulated at the government level during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to health services.

b) How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

- Each woman did her best, making use of her personal management and organisational skills in order to be able to reconcile.

3rd thematic: Mental Health and Well-being

1st sub-topic: Increased stress and burnout among mothers

a) Were by your opinion the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

- To a certain extent, some of the needs of women victims of gender-based violence were met. Their psychological needs were monitored by telephone, and follow-ups were carried out through the specific services for victims of gender violence such as ATENPRO, but in many cases the women lived with their abusers without the possibility of escaping from this difficult situation, even with the added difficulty of being able to report them due to the existing restrictions on movement.

2nd sub-topic: Lack of social support networks

a) Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing by your opinion?

- Some social networks, such as groups of feminist associations were supporting women during the pandemic, and regular telephone calls were also organised through the municipal social services, which were effective, although in order to improve social support, the lack of knowledge of certain groups about new technologies was detected, in order to access information or virtual contacts.

b) In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during COVID-19?

- The lack of social support under normal conditions already hinders women's real possibilities of reconciling work and family life, and if we add to this a pandemic situation such as the one experienced during Covid-19, the negative consequences of combining family and work responsibilities are even greater.

c) How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

- For the older adult female population, access to health care has been made much more difficult during the pandemic because of their inability to be autonomous in accessing it.

4th thematic: Gender gap in workplaces

1st sub-topic: Gender gap in workplace during Covid -19

2nd sub-topic: Impact of the pandemic on women's employment rates

a) How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

- During the first months of the pandemic, the education sector developed its work activity through teleworking, with a significant impact on access to technological resources and the knowledge necessary for their use.
- In the health care sector, they remained active as essential services, being at the forefront of the fight against Covid-19, having a very important impact on their mental health, due to the stress and anxiety experienced in the workplace.

b) How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

- Women have maintained the work, care and educational burdens resulting from the closure of schools and day-care centres, at the expense of their personal and care time, with the double working day having the greatest impact. In teleworking jobs, it was difficult to set limits on hours, roles and tasks. In education and care, they also found it difficult to reconcile school and work demands.

c) What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

- Consideration should be given to providing work-life balance resources for pandemic situations, as the work-life balance measures we know and use routinely do not match the restrictions that were in place at the time of Covid-19.

9. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Portugal by FAJUB)

The Debate panel 3 was executed on 14th of July 2023 at Fajub, Braga, Portugal

Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?

The general belief was that the covid-19 pandemic had a higher impact on the female population in terms of employment challenges, as it pushed them more towards assuming the traditional roles of caregivers, in a much more significant percentage than men. As the pandemic forced people to stay at home and take care of their families, although we strive to believe we live in a modern society, where gender equality is no longer a utopian concept, based on the testimonials of my friends and other family members, it was more than obvious that most of the women who had to stay home were forced to dedicate more time to being a caregiver, while at home. Which on other plans reduced the resources (time, energy, involvement) they would normally try to invest in dedicating themselves to their career and professional development. Also, in some areas, women were associated with a far more fragile category of population, deepening the gap between their eligibility for getting back in the “real world” after the pandemic, compared to the male population.

Did in your opinion women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the covid-19 crisis and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?

- The majority consider women dealt with far more disparities in terms of their professional trajectory, so to say. It is strongly related to that ancestral belief that the primary caregivers are women, hence the first ones to stay home and care for the sick and for the family are them. And it is a mentality that persists in both female and male representatives, as mothers will certainly not think twice when it comes to choosing to be with their children, for example. As nurseries and education centers were closing down, the pressure of providing education and taking care of the youngest members of the family falls, in more than 80% of the cases, I'm sure, on the shoulders of the women in the family. Whether we talk about families where women are the only providers or households where the male figure is the main income source and the female is the carer, in both cases, we can observe

how the pandemic would not provide the ideal set for planning for the future, thinking about career growth or skill development, while there are a series of overwhelming responsibilities associated with having to care for 1 (or more) infant 24/7. As for the governmental support, it mostly aimed at helping all categories of population that were severely impacted, from financial support to access to medical services. The goal was not to differentiate among family members, but to help those who suffered most, whether they were men or women. So, flexibility towards remote work, financial aid, these were the typical programs implemented by the government that were aimed at women as well, but not exclusively.

What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the workforce?

- On the long run, employment prospects for women and gender equality will reflect the impact of the covid-19 pandemic in many areas. For example, the disparities in terms of long-term stable income and career development, especially for women that were working in hospitality, retail or services, as many faced a lot of setbacks. The caregiving burden will still persist and make it difficult for woman to readjust to longer working hours, returning to a full-time office schedule or even finding a new job. The mental health aspect is also another heavy topic, as for many women, the pandemic was a synonym for burnout, increased stress and very often they would not have specialized help to cope with it properly, which of course will impact their ability to perform at their workplace at their best and further on hinge their professional evolution. Career interruptions or reduced working hours come also strongly connected with the gender pay gap, translating as lower wages for the female population working its way to return to the labor market after the pandemic. One positive aspect could be, however, the increased flexibility towards remote work and added attention towards the mental health and general health. In other words, women can now also have more freedom of movement as to when it comes to their working venue and ideally, they will be able to require support at their workplace in order to prioritize their health on all plans.

What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

- The government addressed the concern of women in need of childcare support and access to healthcare services by stimulating an increasing flexibility towards working hours, including them on the list of prioritized categories of population when it came to receiving medical assistance and also providing additional financial aids. These measures aimed to support both employers and employees, as to give them the financial means needed to compensate the absence from work and allow them to focus more on caring for their families.

How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

- The balance work-personal life came with quite some costs for women with caregiving responsibilities. While the pandemic provided them with more time to reconnect with their families, feel more present in the lives of their children, it took a toll on their work-related skills and competitiveness. And in many cases, it meant a lot of psychological pressure that they had to face day by day. Fortunate cases would be the ones that managed to keep the balance and enjoy this stage. Less fortunate would be the women from lower-income categories, that would face a lot of pressure and could not afford the luxury to take a break and relax, leading to burnouts.

Were in your opinion the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

- The topic of domestic violence is one that requires a lot of attention and efforts and resources, regardless of the time of the year or historical period. But during a period such as the pandemic, with the lockdown forcing victims to be at all times inside the house with their abusers, the necessity of effective measures becomes even more stringent. The majority consider the measures available to have been enough. While an emergency line available for victims of domestic violence is more than welcomed to have, it does not solve much. Merely because victims will often need a lot of time to gather up the courage to call and talk about their situation and ask for help, in times of “peace”, so to say. While the pandemic had them literally living under the same roof with their aggressor at all times, it was highly unlikely that this would be a trigger or a favorable context for them to look for help. This issue requires a long term strategy of educating the population, from educating victims to stand up for themselves, neighbors or people in the close circle of friends to look out for potential abusers and support their friends/family in need, as well as to prevent the passage of such rituals/traditions/misconceptions regarding the “right to be violent with your loved ones” from generation to generation.

Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing in your opinion?

- The social support networks played a huge role in the way people felt impacted by the pandemic. The COVID-19 lockdown especially put to test the patience, the empathy, the sense of entrepreneurship and consciousness. And the rate of success of any initiative from the social support network depended a lot on the location, resources available, community involvement and government support. Up to some degree, the pandemic merely amplified the disparities existing already in society. So to speak, all the virtual resources put out there were still

aimed at the categories of population that have access to electricity, internet and hardware devices to explore them. The poor, disadvantaged or isolated communities depended up to a great extent on the initiatives of local NGOs or communities, which again, can vary greatly from one country to another, from one region to another. What could have been done better would be allocating far more resources to support local initiatives that reach out for those who are in remote locations, those with no family members, stimulate volunteering spirit, outside of the critical periods, such as a pandemic. Our level of empathy as a society should be trained to increase in times of “peace”, so as to remain on a neutral level at least when we face a crisis (and not fight as if it’s the end of the world for toilet paper), as an average example.

In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during COVID-19?

- A strong social support network provides a safe environment for women to share their struggles, concerns, find solutions together and contributes to an overall better mental health. Its absence will have the opposite effects, so as to make women feel overwhelmed, burned-out, isolated and less inclined to communicate, to empathize, to trust and pass on values related to the importance of belonging to a community to their children. As for the work-family life balance, a social support network creates a context for sharing and feeling identified, sense of belonging and brainstorming for solutions, genuine support which can all at once impact that balance and help maintain it. If a woman feels alone in her day-to-day struggle, she will underperform, reach a burnout faster, reduce her social skills to a bare minimum and face a long-term risk of anxiety, depression, with consequences on her physical health as well. Belonging to a community of like-minded individuals, feeling her needs are seen and addressed by a support network will provide a woman (and not only her) the emotional and psychological resources to analyze her concerns, look out for solutions, empathize with those around, care more about the world she lives in and prioritize her mental health as well, not just the general health and well-being of her close family members.

How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

- In general, a lack of a social support network in any given region might have led to a decrease in the level of trust and reliability in the health services sector. As women felt neglected or that the health services were not trustworthy, they turned their back to medical assistance and relied more on traditional methods to relieve their illnesses. This can be of great impact when it comes to managing the spread of a virus, as it can propagate extremely fast within communities that do not “believe” in modern medicine for example. In remote villages or isolated communities but not only, it should be a key strategy to ensure people will rely on the

social support network and come ask for help when dealing with a crisis, in order to prevent large-scale contamination or increased mortality.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

- The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly highlighted the major disparities existing among all categories of actors involved in the traditionally dominated employment sectors. From revealing the differences of tech skills and resources accessible to aggravating challenging mental health conditions, the pandemic brought us face to face with a reality that we not only had to recognize, but strive to model in order to keep things going. It pushed us far more than outside of our comfort zone, often brought us on the verge of a meltdown, but also gave space for innovation and creativity, as the final goal became to make sure we all can get through this together. When it comes to these sectors specifically, COVID-19 certainly forced an upgrade, enlargening perspectives and making us realize how crucial it is to adapt and evolve, in order to maintain the course of activities rolling. The factors shaping this new reality are connected of course to the government regulations that set the framework, the resource allocation including access to tech, alongside the gender norms and expectations.

How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

- The closure of schools and childcare facilities brought a significant increase of psychological pressure on women that would normally struggle to maintain their employment arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, preserving a job during the pandemic became a challenge for any active citizen, as many job categories entered a risk trajectory, being either on the verge of extinction or having to adapt to a remote version in order to survive. In such conditions, the level of stress is already significant, while the responsibility of caring for a child and his education added on top of that only translates as more stress. Compromises being made for the sake of keeping a job will suffer great transformation once the best interests of your children are at stake. Women struggled a lot more during the pandemic, merely because they could no longer split the responsibility of raising and educating their children and had to take it all back on their shoulders, which in return left them with little to no time to care for their own careers and interests.

What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

- Clearly a more secure system of caregiving centers would allow them to maintain their focus on the work-life balance. In addition, long-term education programs aiming to improve mental health should be a key element in ensuring women will be able to handle a lot more stress in a better, healthier way. Investing in local communities, in creating strong bonds, social support networks, meant to increase group cohesion spirit, as this will alleviate the stress in critical moments better. Improved medical services strategies, to ensure all women/mothers feel safe and comfortable to reach out for help.

10. Report for the Debate panel 3 (WP 6) in the project HEARD (conducted in Cyprus by CARDET)

The Debate panel 3 was executed on 11th of October 2023 at 19.30 pm EEST on the Headquarters of ARDET, in 29 Lykavitou, Engomi, Nicosia, Cyprus.

The panel debate started with the greetings and introduction of the project, continued with the presentation of the topic of the project, we continued the debate panel with presenting the crucial starting points of the results of the survey.

According to mentioned research findings, we formulated 4 themes and sub-themes as stated below:

First key thematic: Employment challenges

1st sub-subject: Job loss disparities for women's sector and 2nd sub-subject: Women's Financial Stability

Do you think that the covid-19 pandemic worsened existing employment challenges for women and how did you note these worsening situations?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants reported that women's employment challenges worsened during COVID-19 and mentioned the multiple identities that women have in society as employers/employees/mothers/caregivers, etc. These identities make it more difficult for women to work or be at work without facing challenges.

Did by your opinion women face higher rates of job losses, layoffs or reduced working hours compared to men during the covid-19 crisis and if so, what were the main factors contributing to this disparity? Was there any government support given to women during the covid-19 pandemic that suffered any kind of consequences during covid-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants reported that many women lost their jobs or in some cases their wages were reduced during the pandemic. Many women also experienced difficulties in returning to the labour market. Participants could not mention any support given by the government to women during COVID-19.

What long-term effects might the covid-19 pandemic have on women employment prospects and gender equality in the work force?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE: Participants mentioned that COVID-19 and the different roles of women can have an impact on the employment of women.

2nd thematic: Caregiving Responsibilities

1st sub-subject: School closure and Women's caregiving

What resources and government support systems were available for women during the pandemic to address childcare needs and access to healthcare services?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants could not mention any resource or support system.

2nd sub-subject: Women and Homeschooling Challenges

How did women with caregiving responsibilities balance work and personal life during the pandemic?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants reported that women who were working and had the role of caregiver had a new unpaid job, which was mainly observed among women. Women spent 62 hours per week caring for their children compared to men's 36 hours. Also, women spent 23 hours on domestic tasks compared to 15 hours for men.

3rd thematic: Mental Health and Wellbeing

1st sub-subject: Increased stress and burnout among mothers

Were by your opinion the government actions supporting women victims of domestic violence effective?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants reported that during the pandemic organisations such as SPAVO in Cyprus, funded by the government, helped women by providing spots on how to contact them (via chat) and protect themselves. However, during the pandemic the numbers were double and funding was limited. As a result it was difficult to help all survivors of domestic violence.

2nd sub-subject: Lack of social support networks

Do you think that the social support networks during the COVID-19 pandemic were effective and if they were not, what was missing by your opinion?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants mentioned that the social support network was not effective.

In what ways has the lack of social support networks affected women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities during COVID-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants said that the role of women did not change during the pandemic. They did the same things as before, but now they could not separate their work and personal lives as easily and this contributed to their exhaustion and overwhelm.

How has the absence of social support networks influenced women's access to healthcare and essential services during the pandemic?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

The participants did not indicate anything.

4th thematic: Gender Gap in Workplaces

1st sub-subject: Gender gap in workplace during COVID-19 and 2nd sub-subject: Impact of the pandemic on women's employment rates

How has the COVID-19 pandemic specifically impacted traditionally dominated employment sectors (educational, caregiving etc.) and what are the key factors contributing to this impact?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants reported that these sectors are female-dominated and during the pandemic continue to be female-dominated.

How have the closure of schools and childcare facilities impacted women's availability to maintain their employment arrangements during COVID-19?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants reported the difficulty for women to maintain their employment arrangements and childcare due to the unknown situation that they and the children face.

What are the suggestions for future pandemic situations to better address the needs of women, especially mothers?

POINT OF VIEW OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE DEBATE:

Participants suggested that:

- The government provides assistance to women/mothers.
- Better organisation of the school online education system.

Meet the partnership



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Faculty of organisation studies



Ajuntament
de Mislata



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PROJECT NUMBER
101080161

**Report of A
Symposium on
Mental Health
Challenges and
Future
Directions (WP6
– additionally)**

1. Report for the additional event for WP6: A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions - Cyprus

A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions was conducted on two dates on 23rd of July 2024, at 09:30 at Bank of Cyprus headquarters. In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetables of the additional events for WP6.

Table 1. Timetable of the additional event for WP6 on 23rd July 2024

TIME	TOPIC
09:15 – 09:30	Registration
09:30 – 09:40	Presentation of the HEARD project
09:40 – 09:50	Identification of mental health challenges and future directions
09:50 – 10:05	Data and best practices from partner countries
10:05 – 10:20	Discussion on the topic and recommendations
10:20-10:30	Closing the event

Table 2. Timetable of the additional event for WP6 on 27th September 2024

TIME	TOPIC
13:45 – 14:00	Registration
14:00 – 14:10	Presentation of the HEARD project
14:10 – 14:20	Identification of mental health challenges and future directions
14:20 – 14:35	Data and best practices from partner countries
14:35 – 14:50	Discussion on the topic and recommendations
14:50 – 15:00	Closing the event

CARDET presented the HEARD project, the consortium. Afterwards, in the form of dialogue, the participants outlined the main mental health challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic related to the lack on reliable information in the beginning of the pandemic.

Some key results from the discussion

1. Political recommendations:

Fostering Interdisciplinary, Cross-Sector, and Global Collaboration for Strategic Pandemic Preparedness

Feedback:

The participants expressed the importance of mental health strategies during future pandemics.

2. Political recommendations:

Enhancing Adaptive Governance and Promoting Ethical Communication to Safeguard Human Rights and Prevent Discrimination in Crisis Management

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

3. Political recommendations:

Building Resilient Structures Against Domestic Violence

Feedback:

Mental health aspect should be considered with experts to support domestic violence survivors with more helplines and support even after a long time. But also considered the non-direct victims of domestic violence.

4. Political recommendations:

Balancing Public Safety, Human Rights, and Economic Safeguarding for Vulnerable Populations in Crisis Response Strategies

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

5. Political recommendations:

Strengthening Inclusive and Resilient Health Systems to Ensure Equitable Access and Safeguard Human Rights During Crises

Feedback:

Mental health for everyone should include asylum seekers and refugees but also LGBT+ individuals.

6. Political recommendations:

Strengthening Social Security and Essential Services to Build Resilience During Crises

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

7. Political recommendations:

Implementing Proportionate and Time-Limited Movement Restrictions for Effective Pandemic Management

Feedback:

The participants shared the effect on mental health and increased of domestic violence based on the limitation of movement and discuss the difficulty in decision making.

8. Political recommendations:

Strengthening Support and Innovation for Artists and Cultural Institutions

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

9. Political recommendations:

Implementing Proactive Mental Health Support and Crisis Preparedness in Education Systems

Feedback:

Activities for both teachers and students to help with mental health and experts (psychologists or therapists) support students through discussions.

10. Political recommendations:

Enhancing Mental Health Systems and Promoting Fair, Stigma-Free Support Through Equitable Resource Allocation and Integrated Crisis Management Strategies

Feedback:

Resources or workshops to decrease the stigmatisation and understanding of mental health in society.

11. Political recommendations:

Enhancing Workforce Resilience by Supporting Remote Work, Promoting Work-Life Balance, and Strengthening Workers' Rights and Advocacy

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

12. Political recommendations:

Strengthen Childcare Systems and Support for Working Parents

Feedback:

The facilities to support parents must be cost-effective and support all parents such as single mothers/fathers, asylum seekers/refugees etc.

13. Political recommendations:

Foster Community Support Networks for Women

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

14. Political recommendations:

Foster Community Support Networks for Women

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

15. Political recommendations:

Promote Awareness and Advocate for Equitable Distribution of Caregiving and Domestic Responsibilities

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

16. Political recommendations:

Implement a Comprehensive Gender-Inclusive Recovery Plan

Feedback:

In the plan can be added the LGBT community aspect and the support that government can provide.

17. Political recommendations:

Enhance Support for Single Parents, Especially Women

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

18. Political recommendations:

Ensuring Compassionate Care and Visitation Rights During Pandemics to Protect Mental Well-being

Feedback:

Agreed with presented political recommendations.

2. Report for the additional event for WP6: A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions – France

A Virtual Symposium on A Virtual Symposium on Women's Rights Challenges and Future Directions was conducted on the 26th of September 2024 from 18:00 to 20:00 CET, on the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, seminar room, Marseille, France. In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetables of the additional event for WP3.

Table 2. Timetable of the additional event for WP6 at 26th September 2024.

TIME	TOPIC
18:00 – 18:05	Welcome, presentation of the topics and CBE
18:05 – 18:25	Presentation of the project and partners
18:25 – 19:00	Good and weak practices during the Covid-19 regarding the partners countries and France
19:00 – 19:25	Policy recommendations
19:25 – 19:55	Discussion about other recommendations which could be done in case of a future pandemic situation
19:55 – 20:00	Feedback of the event and thanks

When everyone arrived, we were able to present the schedule of the evening, the CBE, the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre that hosted us for the occasion and finally the project. We then gave a short presentation of our partners.

Then we started the discussion by first sharing what mental health meant to participants during and after COVID-19.

Some people shared personal experiences with us, often about family examples (elderly or teenagers) and we felt that this was a sensitive topic.

We then followed the presentation and the event schedule.

1. Good practices in navigating covid-19 pandemic in connection to mental health overview from our partners countries and France.

Participants were particularly impressed by the good practices in Greece regarding mental health during the Covid-19 crisis (online counselling, helpline for health workers, mental health support for refugees and migrants...), as well as those of Portugal (public awareness campaign, telehealth...), when they felt that little had

been done in France on this issue. They said that they thought some good practices should be applied in France if the situation required it.

Most of them told us that they felt abandoned and that our policies have lost interest in mental health by focusing on economic health.

2. Weak practices in navigating covid-19 pandemic in connection to mental health overview from our partners countries and France.

When we presented the weak practices during COVID-19, most of the participants expressed their discord.

They believe that the impact of not taking into account youth mental health is still having a great impact today.

People are suspicious of each other and the social link has never really been restored.

As in the Human Rights event, they came back to the fact that families were not allowed to have **a funeral worthy** of their elders, which has led to **significant trauma and dissension in families**.

About the **mental health of young people**, a teacher told us that she was alarmed to see her young students left on their own during the lockdown, some of them in homes where they did not feel safe (abusive parents, noisy brothers and sisters...). Faced with the inaction of public authorities, she organized a hotline on her own phone to listen when they need to talk.

Medical staff were also very impacted during this period and even after.

Those who did not want to get vaccinated were dismissed and considered as dangerous after working day and night at the height of the pandemic.

Some of them did not wish to return to work in the medical sector having been traumatized by the vaccination requirement but also by the little means that was put into place to help them do their job properly during the pandemic.

Vaccination was another important point in the debate.

Some people felt disrespected in their own choice and this has impacted their confidence in themselves and the government.

The discussions were quite heated at that time. Some thought that vaccination was for nothing but to divide society and families, while others thought it was irresponsible not to get vaccinated.

Much anxiety has been shared on both sides.

3. *Political recommendations*

Most of the recommendations raised during the project received a positive response from participants. The most popular were :

Identified political recommendations were:

- Protecting Marginalized Communities During Health Crises (homeless, migrants, unaccompanied minors, violented women and children...)
- Health Policies for Universal Access to Psychological Support
- Strengthening Mental Health Support Systems
- Supporting Women's Mental Health and Career Growth During Pandemics

Other political recommendations proposed were :

- **Setting up a crisis unit** involving psychological support, especially for young people, focusing on the trauma of social rupture. Indeed, some young people since Covid-19 have a pessimistic vision of the world and society. The use of anxiolytics has exploded in youth, as well as suicide rates. What they have experienced can be compared to the trauma of an attack or a war and little has been put in place for them. And as an extension of the topic, a campaign on the dangerousness of drugs.
- **Keep outdoor sports venues available** for people. Sport is a well-known to be good against anxiety and most people need sport to keep their mental health.
- **Set up meeting rooms** where the **elderly** would be both safe for their health and in contact with their loved ones. Many elderly people have been left to die during the confinement because of a lack of social links with their loved ones.
- **Less anxiety-provoking communication campaign.** Public authorities must alert the population in case of danger. But during the covid-19 period, policy publications were very anxious. People need to be informed but the campaigns of guilt and mistrust of each other have been devastating.
- **Better management of the post-covid**, to avoid that the situation of isolation and mistrust of others continues.
- **Access to culture, libraries, cinemas and theatres** because people need them as sport. Watching a movie at home does not have the same impact on mental health as sharing it with others

4. *Feedback and conclusion*

While the topic of mental health has not been considered to its proper extent by politicians, people have a very violent memory of it and this trauma continues. Some of them say they no longer go to others, others that their children or teenagers are less curious and cheerful, more pessimistic and anxious.

Other people also said that they missed isolation and were worried about how quick we could learn to live without others.

Overall, the resent people to the debate were very happy to be able to exchange on this subject that is rarely considered and yet, in their opinion, a public health problem that should be taken into account by policy.

3. Report for the additional event for WP6: A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions - Bulgaria

A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions was conducted on 22 June 2024, at 11:00 CET at Art Saloon of the Bulgarian National Radio - Varna. In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetables of the additional event for WP6.

Table 3. Timetable of the additional event for WP6 on 22 June 2024

TIME	TOPIC
11:00 – 11:10	Registration
11:10 – 11:20	Presentation of the HEARD project
11:20 – 11:40	Identification of mental health challenges and future directions
11:40 – 12:00	Data and best practices from partner countries
12:00 – 12:30	Discussion on the topic and recommendations
12:30 – 12:40	Closing the event

The moderator of the event was Nevena Dobрева, PhD – culturologist and the chair of Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Culture and Education. The event gathered 30 participants in total – mainly medical experts, representatives of Bulgarian Red Cross and social service providers, and citizens. Nevena Dobрева presented the HEARD project, the consortium and the financial support provided by EACEA.

In the form of dialogue, the participants outlined the main mental health challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic related to the lack on reliable information in the beginning of the pandemic, the need to switch to digital consulting and meetings (especially for social service providers), the neglect of the mental health as an issue related to the long period of Covid-19, etc.

Later, Nevena Dobрева presented key data and best practices from the partner countries (extracted from the project monograph). The participants discussed the available data and initiatives carried out in Bulgaria.

The event finished with a fruitful discussion on the recommendations related to the mental health. In general, the recommendations were perceived well by the audience.

Some key results from the discussion

Key thematic: Transparency and democratic engagement

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Supporting Mental Health in Times of Crisis** - Foster community spirit, promote physical activity, and advocate for healthy coping mechanisms as essential tools to combat mental health challenges during pandemic.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participants expressed their willingness for the establishment of a common standard for preserving mental health during future pandemics. Hence, the mechanisms and essential tools to be available at the beginning of future pandemic. Also, these mechanisms and tools should be addressed from one side to experts (caregivers, psychologists, etc.) but also to target citizens directly.

Key thematic: Limited movement

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Promoting Inclusive Healthcare Policies for Effective Crisis Response** - Improving public access to healthcare, especially during epidemics, with a focus on inclusiveness and effective delivery during crises. In order to ensure access to healthcare, policies should be promoted to establish access to healthcare for all people and ensure that vulnerable groups are considered. This may include online consultations for vulnerable groups and people living in rural areas. It is important to ensure that the protection of the individual is a priority and that during online consultations it may be difficult for people to express themselves and their full medical history in cases where they are not living by themselves.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

This action for online consultations is quite applicable for mental health experts who are working with vulnerable groups and people living in rural areas. The participant in the event suggested to apply this recommendation also with a focus on mental health.

Key thematic: Limited rights

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Building Resilient Structures Against Domestic Violence** - A comprehensive strategy to combat domestic violence should be implemented by strengthening legal and social support structures to provide holistic assistance to victims. This includes strengthening law enforcement measures, expanding the availability of support centers, and addressing the social norms that perpetuate the acceptance of domestic violence.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The topic is quite important for the Bulgarian context. The topic of domestic violence was not covered at all during the pandemic. The participants suggested more support centers giving temporary shelter to victims and a special code of conduct in such of pandemic situation – when potential victims are obliged to stay at home with the abuser (as this was the case during the Covid-19 crisis).

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Strengthening Support for Healthcare Workers to Prevent Stigmatization** - The stigmatization of healthcare workers during the pandemic should be limited. To achieve this, measures should be taken to consolidate the mental health and well-being of healthcare workers through the provision of mental health support services, minimizing stigma and developing a safe environment.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participant agreed that this is quite important in the case of mental health workers and experts. The mental health services and licensed professionals should be promoted by the authorities in the case of future pandemics.

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Supporting Mental Well-being** - Mental health services should be well-funded, accessible, and positioned as a fundamental component of the overall healthcare system. Provide timely and accurate updates about the pandemic, preventive steps, and mental health resources to alleviate public anxiety and fear.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

According to the participants, in Bulgaria, we need to do a lot of effort to reach this recommendation. Hence, this recommendation is particularly important and the

authorities should start implementing it (in order to be ready in future pandemic situations).

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Encouraging Conversations to Diminish Mental Health Stigma** - Open conversations should be encouraged to diminish the stigma related to mental health, ensuring individuals feel comfortable seeking assistance when required.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participants were skeptical about this recommendation. They found it vague because it is unclear who shall start this conversation, who should be responsible and what it means to have conversations (in the context).

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Enhancing Access to Mental Health Care** - Telemedicine platforms, crisis phones and online therapy options should be strengthened for immediate help and counselling. Tailored mental health initiatives should be implemented for higher-risk groups, such as frontline workers, the elderly and people struggling with economic problems.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participants agreed about the mental health initiatives for higher-risk groups mentioned. However, they were not sure who the first sentence in the recommendation is connected to the second one. Why only online services should be provided to people who are on the frontlines.

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Proactive Mental Health Policies for Effective Crisis Management** - Inclusion of mental health in pandemic response plans, advocacy for accessible mental health services and the importance of open communication to mitigate stigma. Early intervention, public awareness campaigns and a proactive approach to public health policy are vital to effectively address mental health challenges in future crises.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

This is a good recommendation according to the participants but it is unclear who should be responsible for advocacy for accessible mental health services – professionals, authorities, policymakers, etc.

Key thematic: Psychological dimension

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Building a Network for Mental Health Best Practices** - Facilitate the exchange of best practices, resources, and expertise between countries. Best practices can be combined with different practices from different countries to inform and guide mental health workers and governments on best practices in mental health.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

This is happening on the level of professionals and medical institutions. The participants suggested this recommendation to address policymakers, politician and public authorities.

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Health Policies for Universal Access to Psychological Support** - Importance of ensuring equal and fair access to psychological help to everybody in need. Health care policies and procedures that ensure that vulnerable groups also have access to psychological care through out different media.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participant agreed with this recommendation.

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Strengthening Mental Health Support Systems** - Mental health support systems should be developed to ensure adequate mental health support for those in need and to promote public awareness and destigmatization of mental health issues. Mental health should be as much a priority in crisis planning as physical health to ensure an appropriate response.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participant agreed with this recommendation.

Key thematic: Mental Health Support

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Supporting Women's Mental Health and Career Growth During Pandemics**
 - Governments should invest in mental health services. By providing different forms of governmental and organisational support to families to cope with the consequences of pandemic. Additionally, by providing different governmental and organisational support for career development for women during the pandemic.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participant agreed with this recommendation.

Identified political recommendations were:

- **Integrating Mental Health in Public Health Initiatives** - Mental health support should be integrated into public health responses, focusing on vulnerable groups including women and frontline workers.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

The participant agreed with this recommendation.

4. Report for the additional event for WP6: A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions - Spain

A Virtual Symposium on A Virtual Symposium on Women's Rights Challenges and Future Directions was conducted on 27. 09. 2024 in Mislata. In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetables of the additional event for WP-6.

Table 4. Timetable of the additional event for WP-6 at (add when)

TIME	TOPIC
12:00	Welcome and presentation of the project and participating countries
12:15 – 12:50	Presentation of good and weak practices to confront the covid-19 pandemic in relation with mental health.
12:50 – 13:10	Description of policy recommendations identified.
13:10 – 13:25	Discussion on the suitability of the political recommendations
13:25 – 13:30	Final reflections on the event.

1st subtheme: Attention given to the needs of professionals who provided essential services.

The policy recommendations identified were:

- The solid collaboration between governments and experts from different sectors.

The opinion on the aforementioned recommendations by the participants was:

In the event of a pandemic, attend not only to essential services, but also to the extent that it is considered necessary to pay attention to the rest of the services so that they are not relegated and without any attention.

2nd subtheme: promote ethical communication

The policy recommendations identified were:

- measures that promote ethical communication practices.

The opinion on the aforementioned recommendations by the participants was:

Adapt communication to the needs of each of the most vulnerable groups: older people, children, people with disabilities, migrants, etc.

3rd subtheme: building resilient structures against domestic violence

The policy recommendations identified were:

- introduce integrated social and health initiatives in the housing sectors among others.

The opinion on the aforementioned recommendations by the participants was:
Convert the housing solutions generated during the pandemic into permanent resources, as this is a recurring problem for all vulnerable groups.

4th subtheme: Balancing public safety, human rights and economic protection of the vulnerable population

The policy recommendations identified were:

- establish early financial aid packages.

The opinion on the aforementioned recommendations by the participants was:
Reinforcement of the personnel who manage the aid so as not to collapse the management of these resources in times of crisis.
Surveillance and intervention by governments in case of abuse in the prices of essential materials during the pandemic.

5th subtopic: Movement restrictions that are proportionate and limited in time

The policy recommendations identified were:

- apply clear movement restrictions of limited duration.

The opinion on the aforementioned recommendations by the participants was:
Reinforcement of the personnel who manage the aid so as not to collapse the management of these resources in times of crisis.
Take into consideration the specific needs of single-parent families, with physical and mental health problems, minors, seniors,...

6th subtheme: proactive support for mental health in educational systems

The policy recommendations identified were:

- integrate the subject of mental health into education.

The opinion on the aforementioned recommendations by the participants was:

It oscillates between all teachers having transversal training in mental health, subjects being taught that integrate knowledge about mental health for students and professionals from the social field being incorporated into educational centers, such as social educators who implement various protocols around mental health of students and teachers.

7th subtheme: improve support for single parents, especially women.

The policy recommendations identified were:

- accessible and affordable child care services.

The opinion on the aforementioned recommendations by the participants was: Regulate free childhood education from 0 to 3 years old, in all types of centers (public and subsidized) and in all concepts offered (tuition, monthly payment, complementary services)

UPDATED POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the results of the in person symposium, the following adjustments to the project's political recommendations should be prepared.
(merge the political recommendations – especially the new ones)

In the event of a pandemic, attend not only to essential services, but also to the extent that it is considered necessary to pay attention to the rest of the services so that they are not relegated and without any attention.

Adapt communication to the needs of each of the most vulnerable groups: older people, children, people with disabilities, migrants, etc.

Convert the housing solutions generated during the pandemic into permanent resources, as this is a recurring problem for all vulnerable groups.

Surveillance and intervention by governments in case of abuse in the prices of essential materials during the pandemic.

Take into consideration the specific needs of single-parent families, with physical and mental health problems, minors, seniors,...

It oscillates between all teachers having transversal training in mental health, subjects being taught that integrate knowledge about mental health for students and professionals from the social field being incorporated into educational centers, such as social educators who implement various protocols around mental health of students and teachers.

Regulate free childhood education from 0 to 3 years old, in all types of centers (public and subsidized) and in all concepts offered (tuition, monthly payment, complementary services).

5. Report for the additional event for WP6: A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions – Italy

A Virtual Symposium on A Virtual Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions was conducted on September 19th at the Istituto Culturale di Scienze Sociali Nicolò Rezzara, in Vicenza. In the Table 1 below, we can see the timetables of the additional event for WP6.

Table 5. Timetable of the additional event for WP6.

TIME	TOPIC
17.30	Welcome, presentation of the topics and CBE
17.45	Presentation of the project and partners
18.00	Good and weak practices during the Covid-19 regarding the partners countries and France
18.30	Policy recommendations
19.00	Discussion about other recommendations which could be done in case of a future pandemic situation
19.30	Feedback of the event and thanks

The event started at 17.30. After a brief introduction by Giovanni Luigi Fontana (Olympic Academy), Chiara Xausa from University of Bologna presented the feminist literature as a topic through lectures, books and articles. Furthermore, Valeria Fantini presented ALDA's European project on environment where gender issues were tackled. Within the gender framework, the project HEARD was also presented since the impact of Covid-19 is faced also from a gender perspective. With this regard, the good and weak practices followed by the political recommendation on mental health were presented to the audience.

The audience agreed that the political recommendations already identified. Therefore:

- Ethical Guidelines for Fair Resource Allocation During Health Crises
- Building a Network for Mental Health Best Practices
- Protecting Marginalised Communities During Health Crises
- Health Policies for Universal Access to Psychological Support
- Strengthening Mental Health Support System

In addition, the audience commented the difficult situation of women during the pandemics. Therefore, women should be included as a subject of attention when discussing mental health political recommendations.

Opinion regarding mentioned recommendations from the participants' side was:

UPDATED POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the results of the virtual symposium, the following adjustments to the project's political recommendations should be prepared.

(merge the political recommendations – especially the new ones)

- Strengthening Mental Health Support System with a focus on women's situation

6. Report for the additional event for WP6: A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions - Greece

A Symposium on Mental Health Challenges and Future Directions was held on August 20th, 2024, as part of Work Package 6 (WP6) of HEARD project. The event was conducted in situ at JOIST Innovation Park in Larissa, Greece, focusing on discussing and refining political recommendations regarding mental health challenges, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees. The panel brought together stakeholders, experts, workers, students, policymakers and the general public to discuss best practices and outline future directions for mental health policy.

The event attracted a total of 45 participants, including representatives from health and social sectors, advocacy groups, and mental health experts, engaging in a comprehensive dialogue on the importance of strategic pandemic preparedness and mental health support.

Table 6. Timetable of the additional event

TIME	TOPIC
10:00 – 10:05	Welcome, presentation of the topics
10:05 – 10:20	Presentation of the project and partners
10:20 – 10:50	Identification of Mental Health Challenges and Best Practices from Partner Countries
10:50 – 11:50	Open Discussion on Political Recommendations
11:50 – 12:00	Feedback of the event and closing remarks

The event opened with an introduction to the HEARD project, focusing on its objectives and partners. The presentation emphasized the importance of addressing the mental health needs of migrants and refugees, who face unique challenges in accessing care and support. The project's achievements in developing training modules for agricultural skills were outlined, as well as its connection to mental health resilience, given the pressures these populations endure.

Identification of Mental Health Challenges and Best Practices

A detailed examination of mental health challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic was presented, based on experiences from partner countries. The discussion focused on key issues that have been identified in the partner countries, such as:

- **Lack of reliable information during the initial stages of the pandemic**, leading to widespread anxiety and confusion, particularly among vulnerable populations.
- **Increased incidence of domestic violence**, exacerbated by lockdowns and movement restrictions, with inadequate support for survivors.
- **Mental health stigma**, which remained a barrier to accessing psychological services, particularly among marginalized groups like asylum seekers, refugees, and the LGBT+ community.

For Greece, the identification of weak practices in navigating COVID-19 pandemic in connection to mental health's rights is presented below:

IDENTIFICATION OF WEAK PRACTICES	DESCRIPTION OF IDENTIFIED WEAK PRACTICES
Limited access to Mental Health Services in many Rural Areas	While mobile mental health units were introduced, their coverage was often insufficient to meet the needs of all rural areas, leaving some regions underserved while for many areas there were difficulties accessing telehealth services due to poor internet connectivity and lack of digital literacy. (Greek Ministry of Health Reports)
Healthcare workers overwhelmed by insufficient staffing	Many healthcare workers reported high levels of burnout and stress while the demand for mental health services often exceeded the available resources.
Challenges in providing multilingual mental health support for refugees	Despite the presence of multilingual services, some refugees faced language barriers that limited their ability to access appropriate mental health care. There were instances where the mental health services provided did not fully address the cultural context of refugees, potentially reducing their effectiveness.
Delayed Implementation of telehealth services	Although telehealth was introduced, the implementation was sometimes slow, leading to delays in accessing mental health services.

Some key best practices identified by all partner countries included:

- **Portugal's public health initiatives**, where safe spaces like pharmacies were utilized for reporting domestic violence.
- **Innovative online platforms in Sweden and France**, which provided mental health consultations and support during the pandemic.

For Greece, the identification of good practices in navigating COVID-19 pandemic in connection to mental health's rights is presented below:

Part I

IDENTIFICATION OF GOOD PRACTICES	DESCRIPTION OF IDENTIFIED GOOD PRACTICES
24/7 Mental Health Helplines for citizens and for healthcare workers	Greece launched nationwide psychological support helplines (e.g., "10306") that operated around the clock, providing free mental health services during the pandemic.
Psychological support programs in Hospitals for the staff and peer-support groups and networks	Many Greek hospitals set up in-house psychological support services during the pandemic. In addition to formal counseling programs, many hospitals and healthcare institutions in Greece established informal peer-to-peer support networks to foster emotional resilience and solidarity among healthcare workers.
Online counseling and teletherapy	The government and private organizations promoted telemedicine, including online mental health consultations, to ensure access to psychological support.
Public health campaigns	The Greek government and media platforms implemented awareness campaigns, emphasizing the importance of mental health and sharing tips on coping mechanisms. An example was the campaign "We Stay Safe" focusing on informing citizens about the importance of mental health and safe practices as lockdown measures were gradually lifted.

Part II

IDENTIFICATION OF GOOD PRACTICES	DESCRIPTION OF IDENTIFIED GOOD PRACTICES
Expansion of Community Mental Health Units through Law 4662/2020	This law established the legal framework for national emergency response mechanisms , including health services related to public health crises such as the pandemic. The law authorized the Ministry of Health to take rapid action in expanding healthcare services, including mental health care, to respond to emerging needs during the pandemic.
Targeted support for families	Family counseling through the 10306 Helpline (Ministry of Health), online counseling programs for families (The Smile of the Child) and initiatives by NGOs
Mental Health Support for refugees and migrants	Mental Health Programs by NGOs and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Cultural mediators for Mental Health Services, National Health System (ESY) Integration for Refugees

Discussion on Political Recommendations

The presentation led into a robust debate regarding political recommendations on how to better prepare for and manage mental health crises in the future.

Key recommendations discussed included:

Cross-sector collaboration for strategic pandemic preparedness: Participants emphasized the importance of fostering interdisciplinary cooperation among health, social services, and governmental sectors.

Resilience against domestic violence: Stronger legal frameworks and continuous support services were identified as crucial in supporting survivors, including better access to mental health services post-crisis.

Inclusive mental health systems: Participants highlighted the need to extend mental health services to all vulnerable populations, including refugees and asylum seekers, and to ensure LGBT+ individuals are supported without fear of stigma.

Work-Life balance and support for working parents: The discussion focused on enhancing policies for teleworking and ensuring cost-effective support systems for single parents and migrant workers.

Proactive mental health support in education systems: Incorporating mental health discussions in schools was deemed essential, with suggestions for workshops led by psychologists and mental health professionals.

Refinement of Recommendations and Feedback

Following the discussion, participants provided feedback to refine the political recommendations, emphasizing the importance of mental health systems that are inclusive, stigma-free, and adaptive to the needs of various communities.

Key feedback points included:

Strengthening mental health systems for all: Mental health services should prioritize equity, ensuring that underserved groups like migrants, refugees, and LGBT+ individuals have access to necessary support.

Support for domestic violence victims: Continuous mental health support should extend beyond the immediate crisis, providing survivors with long-term resources and safe environments.

Support networks for single parents and vulnerable populations: The need for community-based mental health networks was highlighted, especially for single parents, women, and marginalized individuals who faced disproportionate hardships during the pandemic.

- Promoting ethical communication in crisis management: Ensuring that governments provide accurate, transparent, and timely information to avoid misinformation and build public trust was a recurring theme.

Meet the partnership.



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