

# KAZAKHSTAN



**National  
Monitoring  
Report**

October 2020 –  
January 2021

THE TOKYO DEMOCRACY FORUM



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The period from 01 October 2020 through 31 January 2021 could be characterized as stable in Kazakhstan in terms of COVID-19 spread in comparison with previous months. The wearing of face masks and social distancing became mandatory nationwide in all public spaces, including inside vehicles.

People were allowed to move and visit public places under certain conditions such as the fixed number of visitors in one place, the electronic order prior to visiting state institutions, and the ban on gatherings and meetings of large number of people.

As in many countries, democracy was dealt a major blow in 2020. It basically was connected with the COVID-19 pandemic, and restrictions introduced by the states. According to *Democracy Index 2020*, issued by *Economist Intelligence Unit* at the beginning of February 2021, Kazakhstan was ranked as “authoritarian regime”, neighboring with such countries as Zimbabwe, Congo, Cambodia, and Ruanda [1]. In Kazakhstan the timeline in focus was highly tense and intensive due to the Parliamentary elections run on 10 January 2021. The government used COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to restrict civil society activities related to the elections observation, political situation analysis, and distribution of objective and impartial information



COVID-19,  
Civic Space  
and  
Democracy  
in  
Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's Parliamentary elections have been described by the European Parliament "...as a missed opportunity to demonstrate the efficient implementation of political reforms and its modernisation process since the last elections..." [2]. According to the preliminary findings of the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the legal framework in Kazakhstan is not yet conducive to holding elections in line with international standards [3]. The state's control over the Internet increased drastically during this time period. The Kazakh authorities repeatedly shut down the internet and forced citizens to install a 'national security certificate'.

As independent human rights defenders and civil society leaders reported they felt pressure and even faced intimidation during pre-election time and elections aimed at silencing them. As they said they were persecuted through unjustified tax inspections in order to distract their attention from the elections work.

At the same time Kazakhstan made a significant progress in the area of the abolition of death penalty. On 02 January 2021, Kazakhstan ratified the *Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, becoming the 88th party.

The death penalty is an inhuman and cruel punishment, which fails to deter criminal behaviour. This Protocol aims at making irreversible the abolition of the death penalty, already enshrined in Constitution of Kazakhstan in 2007.

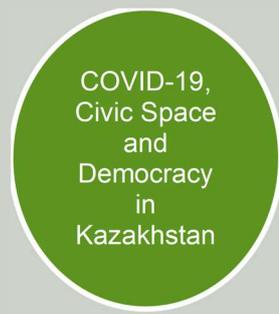
The planned vaccination of state officers who are at the frontline of COVID-19 spread is scheduled starting from February 2021.

The present report is based on the findings of the Kathmandu Democracy Forum held in November 2020, and focused on updates between October 2020 and January 2021 on human rights and democracy and the civil society response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to democracy in Kazakhstan. The national monitoring report covers the government and civil society response to the COVID-19 in terms of the SDGs, human rights and democracy from the civil society perspective.

The report contains five main sections. The first section includes an overview of data and trends on COVID-19 pandemic in Kazakhstan. The second one analyzes and elaborates on the state

of democracy and civic space in the country – how the pandemic has affected fundamental rights, democracy and civic space and SDGs. In addition, it analyzes the state of the socially vulnerable groups affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The Section 3 explores major policies, activities and programs implemented by the state, CSOs and other stakeholders as a measure to address the COVID-19 crisis. The fourth section focuses on challenges and assessment about COVID-19 and civic space.

At the conclusion the report proposes action plans, suggestions and recommendations on how to advance SDGs and human rights standards into the recovery programs and strategies developed by the state, international organizations, development cooperation agencies and other relevant stakeholders.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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■ Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC)

<https://www.janic.org/en/>

*JANIC is a network of civil society organizations (CSOs) promoting to solve global issues. We unite and support over 100 organizations to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice by maximizing strengths of our members. Established in 1987 by leaders of Japanese NGOs, JANIC has provided multiple capacity building trainings to Japanese NGOs, promoted partnerships with private sectors, labor unions and local governments, as well as advocating to the government and international organization on key development issues such as SDGs, human rights-based approaches, development effectiveness, disaster risk reduction, and safety and security of NGOs. JANIC is a steering committee of Asia Development Alliance (ADA) and a member organization of Forus, CIVICUS, CPDE, and A4SD.*

■ The Civil Society Development Association 'ARGO'

<http://argonet.org/>

*ARGO is a nonprofit organization, planning and administering national, regional and international socio-economic development programs. ARGO unites CSO resource centers throughout Kazakhstan. Priority regions for ARGO are Central Asia, CIS countries and South Asia. ARGO is a nationwide association, uniting CSOs that provide services to public organizations and communities in Kazakhstan.*

■ Shyrak Association of Women with Disabilities

[www.shyrak.kz](http://www.shyrak.kz)

*Shyrak was established in 2001 and now unites nearly 3,000 women with disabilities of various categories living in Kazakhstan. The organization's mission is to protect the rights and promote the interests of women and men with disabilities and help to create a society of equal opportunities. The organization's activities cover more than 50 projects across four strategic areas. These include encouraging greater involvement of women and men with disabilities through their education and social inclusion, consolidating the efforts of similar organizations in Kazakhstan and Central Asia, promoting the interests of women and men with disabilities in all advisory bodies and changing the attitudes within the country's population.*

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CPI - Corruption Perception Index

KZT - Kazakh tenge (currency)

MIPD - Ministry of Information and Public Development

MPH - Minister of Public Health RK

MLSP - Ministry of Labor and Social Protection

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

SMEs - Small and Medium enterprises

UN - United Nations

WHO -World Health Organization

## BRIEF COUNTRY PROFILE



Size: 2,724,900 km<sup>2</sup> (1.8 %, 9<sup>th</sup>/234)

Population: 18,776,707 million  
(1.21 %, 64<sup>th</sup>/235)

Capital: Nur-Sultan

Name of the National President:  
KASSYM-JOMART K.TOKAYEV

Name of the Prime Minister: Askar Mamin

## RATIFICATION STATUS OF MAIN HUMAN RIGHTS TREATIES

### RATIFIED (14 OUT OF 18):

- *Convention on the Rights of the Child (1994): CRC OP AC (armed conflict) (2003) and CRC OP SC (sales of children) (2001)*
- *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1998): CEDAW OP (2001)*
- *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1998)*
- *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1998): CAT OP (2008)*
- *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2006)*
- *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2006): CCPR OP1 (complaint) (2009) and CCPR OP2 (death penalty) (2021)*
- *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (2009)*
- *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015)*

### NOT RATIFIED (4):

- *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.*
- *Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.*
- *CRC-OP-IC - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.*
- *CRPD-OP - Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.*

# NATIONAL SDGs

**17**  
NATIONAL SDGs  
**169**  
NATIONAL TARGETS  
**297**  
NATIONAL INDICATORS



**12 NATIONAL TARGETS**  
**28 NATIONAL INDICATORS**



**12 NATIONAL TARGETS**  
**28 NATIONAL INDICATORS**

**Following** the results of the work on SDG nationalization nationalized list of 17 goals, 169 targets and 297 indicators (with an additional 76 national indicators, 35 of which were proposed additionally) was approved [10]

## MAJOR WEBSITE ADDRESSES ABOUT NATIONAL COVID-19, SDGS, AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### SDGs

VNR Report 2019

[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23946KAZAKHSTAN\\_DNO\\_eng\\_4.Juli19.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23946KAZAKHSTAN_DNO_eng_4.Juli19.pdf)

Presentation of VNR Report 2019

[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28857VNR\\_PPT\\_Presentation\\_for\\_Madiyev\\_14.Juli19.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28857VNR_PPT_Presentation_for_Madiyev_14.Juli19.pdf)

Opening Statement: First Kazakhstan Forum On Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

<https://www.unescap.org/speeches/opening-statement-first-kazakhstan-forum-achieving-sustainable-development-goals>

SDG Issues and VNR Review by the Economic Research Institute

<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/4.%20Kazakhstan.pdf>

Strategy 2050:

Perspectives and Realization of SDGs in Kazakhstan (*in Russian*)

<https://strategy2050.kz/ru/news/53576/>

SDG Publications of Kazakhstan available at UNDP Kazakhstan website:

<https://www.in.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/library.html>

Nationalization of SDGs

Roadmap on SDGs

Gender Issues in SDGs, etc. (*in Russian*)

[http://economy.kz/ru/Celi\\_ustojchivogo\\_razvitija/Prezentacii\\_CUR/](http://economy.kz/ru/Celi_ustojchivogo_razvitija/Prezentacii_CUR/)

Kazakhstan Systematic Country Diagnostic by World Bank Group

<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/664531525455037169/pdf/KAZ-SCD-April-2018-FINAL-eng-with-IDU-05012018.pdf>

United Nations

<https://kazakhstan.un.org/en/sdgs>

<https://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/kazakhstan>

UN Entities in Kazakhstan (all agencies)

<https://kazakhstan.un.org/en/about/un-entities-in-country>

UN ESCAP – Sub-regional Office for North and Central Asia

<https://www.unescap.org/subregional-office/north-central-asia>

UNDP in Kazakhstan

<https://www.kz.undp.org/>

UN Office of the High Commissioner

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/enacaregion/pages/kzindex.aspx>

Short Educational Videos about SDGs in Kazakhstan

<https://www.youtube.com/user/UNDPKAZ/videos>

Enabling innovative ecological education towards the country's sustainable development.

<https://www.kz.undp.org/content/kazakhstan/en/home/projects/sdu/ecological-education.html>

## **Human Rights**

Nationwide Human Rights NGO (Bureau on Human Rights)

<https://bureau.kz/en/>

UN Office of High-Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) – Kazakhstan

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/ENACARegion/Pages/KZIndex.aspx>

Human Rights Commissioner (national)

<https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/ombudsman?lang=en>

International IDEA – Kazakhstan

<https://www.idea.int/gsod-indices/profile/covid19/kazakhstan>

CIVICUS Civic Space Monitoring

<https://monitor.civicus.org/country/kazakhstan/>

Democracy Index - The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

<https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>

Rule of Law Index

[https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP-ROLI-2020-Online\\_0.pdf](https://worldjusticeproject.org/sites/default/files/documents/WJP-ROLI-2020-Online_0.pdf)

Freedom House – Political rights and civil liberties “Not Free”

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-world/2020>

World Freedom Index

<https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/cato-human-freedomindex-update-3-country-profiles.pdf>

## **COVID-19**

<https://www.coronavirus2020.kz/>

<https://anti-corona.kz>

COVID-19 map (national)

<https://egov.kz/cms/en/articles/koronavirus>

WHO COVID-19 – Kazakhstan

<https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/kz>

## I. DATA AND TRENDS ABOUT COVID-19 IN KAZAKHSTAN

In March 2020 the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak had severe health effects and affected people’s daily life around the world, and in Kazakhstan as well.

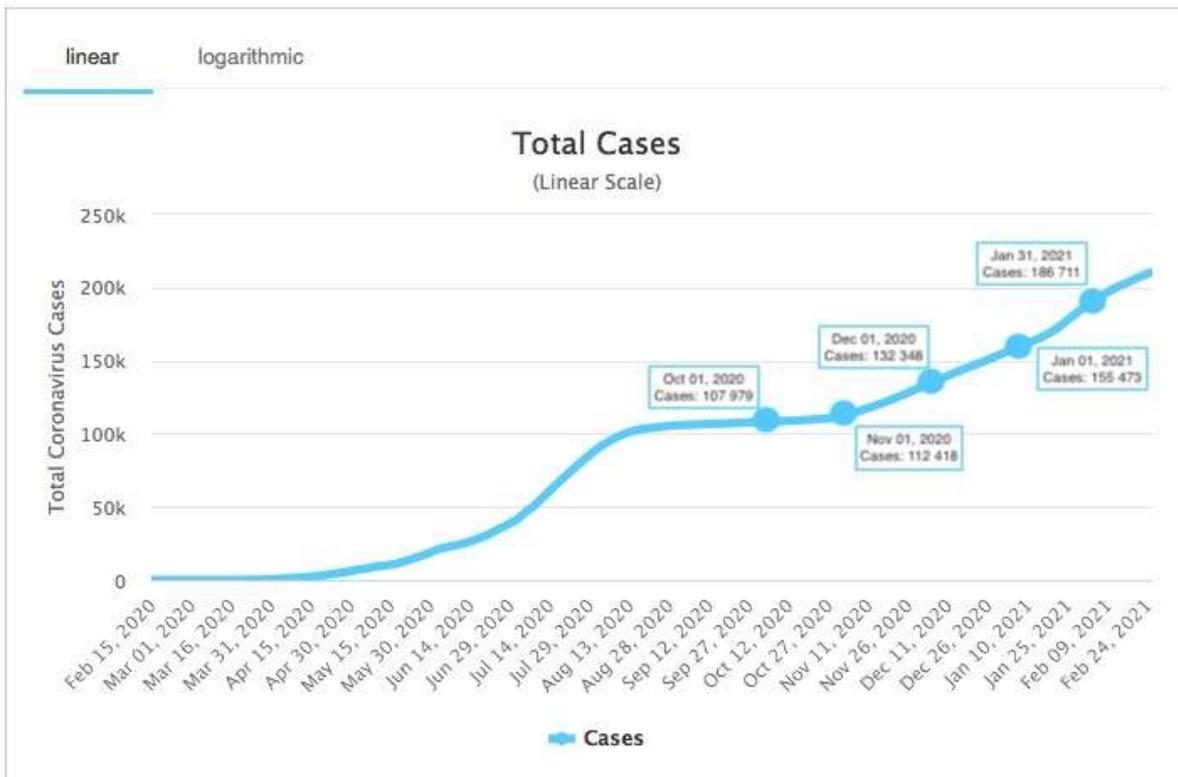
### 1.1 Chronology from 01 October 2020 to 31 January 2021

Month	COVID-19 situation
<i>September 2020</i>	The situation with the COVID-19 spread is stable, marked as “green” [4].
<i>October 2020</i>	<p>Kazakh authorities increased the COVID-19 measures in the main cities of Kazakhstan. Gatherings of more than 10 people were banned, and hospitality services opened only between 07:00 and 23:00 (local time). Public transportation ceased after 23:00. The wearing of face masks was mandatory nationwide in all public spaces, including inside vehicles. Local lockdowns are in place throughout the country. Most travellers were restricted from entering Kazakhstan although some exceptions are in place. Travel options for entering these countries were limited [5].</p> <p>Kazakhstan launched "Saqbol" mobile app in order to control the spread of COVID-19 and timely localize the infection spots UNDP provided employment opportunities to 150 at-risk youth as part of its COVID-19 response program in Kazakhstan [6]. Young people, who lost their jobs to the pandemic, took part in a subsidised three-month apprenticeship programme, accompanied by soft skills trainings and mentorship support. The apprentices were placed in private companies, NGOs and government agencies across the cities of Nur-Sultan, Almaty and Karagandy region. They were encouraged to try out a new profession and gain respective experience, while receiving a KZT 60,000 (143 USD) monthly allowance. For three months, the companies were monitoring the apprentices and upon completion of the internship hired those who performed the best. 84 participants out of 150 were women, who also make up over 90% of the recipients of targeted social assistance in Kazakhstan. The initiative is part of a larger UNDP Kazakhstan strategy on youth engagement, which aims to contribute to their employability.</p>
<i>November 2020</i>	The situation with the COVID-19 spread varied from region to region. The residents of the capital (Nur-Sultan) were prohibited from: holding entertainment, sports and other mass events, as well as family, memorable events, including at home, rallies, processions, gatherings, etc.; organization of excursion, corporate, group trips to nature and sightseeing of the city, with the exception of groups of no more than 3 people or members of one family; to visit objects whose activities have not been resumed: billiard rooms, karaoke, bowling centers, computer and game clubs, nightclubs, children's playgrounds, indoor areas and attractions, trampolines, karaoke, bookmakers and lottery draws, etc. Markets and

	<p>public transport allowed in Western Kazakhstan on Saturdays. The strict restrictive measures were extended in Kostanay region.</p>
<p><i>December 2020</i></p>	<p>The Karaganda pharmaceutical complex has launched the production of the Sputnik V vaccine as part of the implementation of agreements between the presidents of Kazakhstan and Russia.</p>
<p><i>January 2021</i></p>	<p>Incidents of COVID-19 continue to rise. As of 31 January 2021, there were 186 711 confirmed cases in Kazakhstan (with positive PCR for coronavirus infection). The total death rate came to 2 530 persons.</p> <p>According to Yerlan Kiyasov the Vice Minister of Public Health RK the second wave of COVID-19 spread has started, and the situation has deteriorated, marked as “yellow”. It varied from region to region: from “green” to “red” marks [7].</p> <p>The electronic passport on COVID-19 vaccination was developed in January 2021. The data on vaccination to be kept in an electronic format in the centralized information system of the Ministry of Public Health RK. As the Minister of Public Health RK Alexei Tsoi said, the information system is capable of integration with global information systems and the vaccinated people will easily provide this data to all interested parties, and it will ensure the freedom of movement. It looks as follows [8]:</p> <div data-bbox="523 1070 1332 1547" data-label="Diagram"> <p>The diagram, titled "УЧЕТ ВАКЦИНАЦИИ ОТ COVID-19 В ИС", illustrates the data flow for COVID-19 vaccination. On the left, a "Пациент" (Patient) is shown with a smartphone displaying a mobile application interface. An arrow points from the patient to a "Поликлиника" (Polyclinic) icon. From the polyclinic, an arrow points to "Информация по вакцинации" (Vaccination information), which is represented by a computer monitor icon. A bidirectional arrow connects this information to a "Врач" (Doctor) icon. Below the main flow, a computer screen displays a web interface titled "Вакцинация была проведена" (Vaccination was performed), showing fields for patient identification and vaccination details.</p> </div>

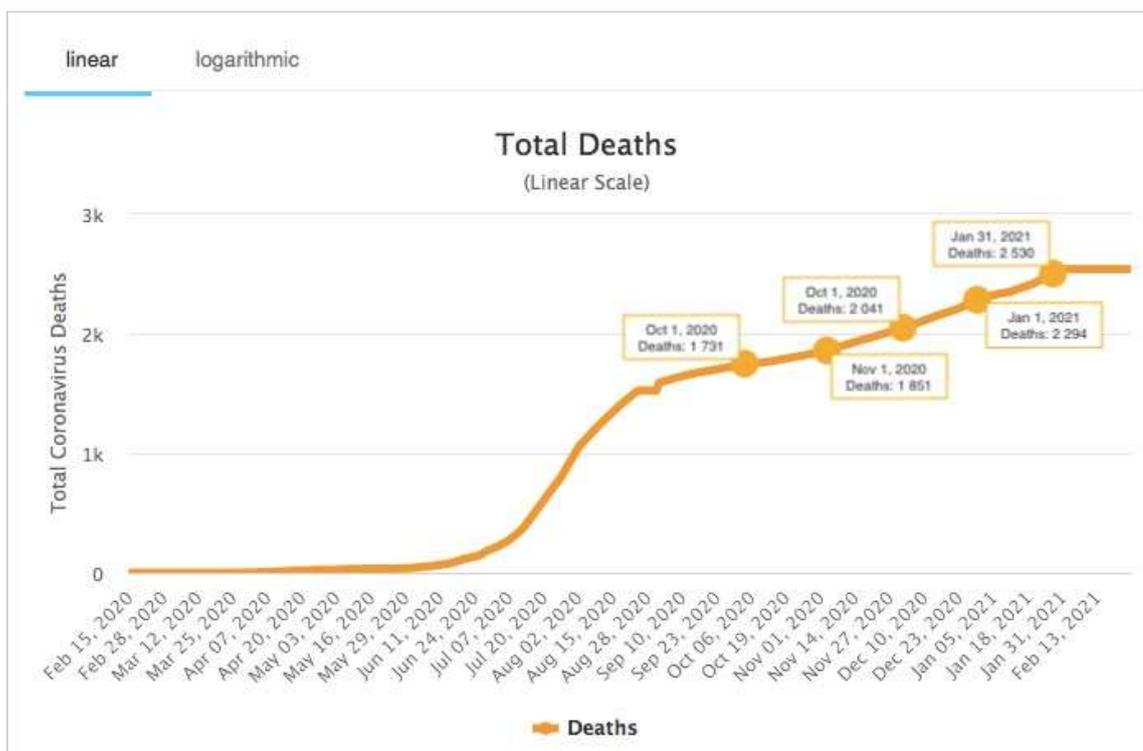
- *The total coronavirus cases in Kazakhstan (October 2020 – January 2021)*

## Total Coronavirus Cases in Kazakhstan



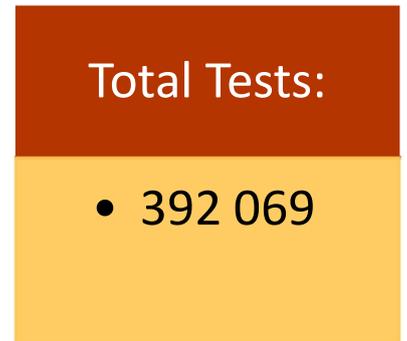
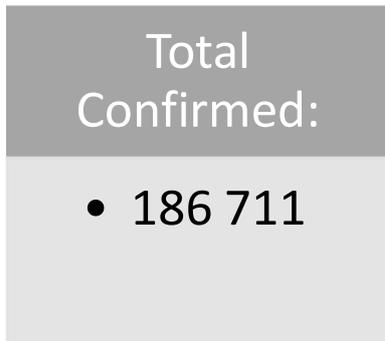
- *The total coronavirus deaths in Kazakhstan (October 2020- January 2021)*

## Total Coronavirus Deaths in Kazakhstan

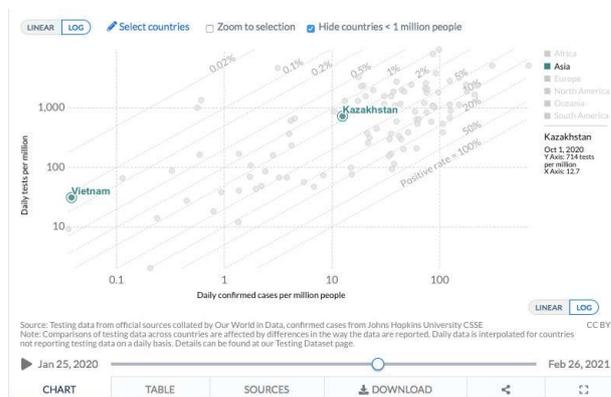


## 1.2 Most recent statistics (31 January 2021) – No of tests, confirmed cases, deaths, etc.

As of 31 January 2021 [10].



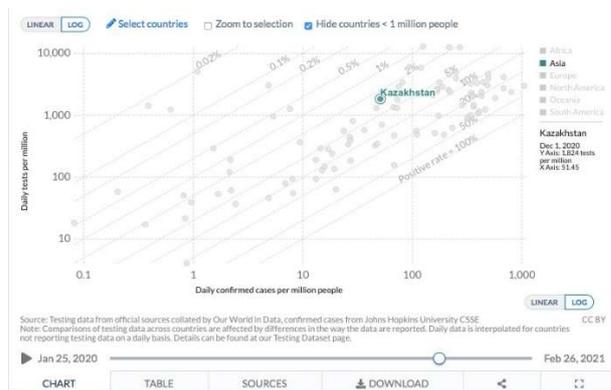
### Coronavirus Testing (right corner/per million) [11]



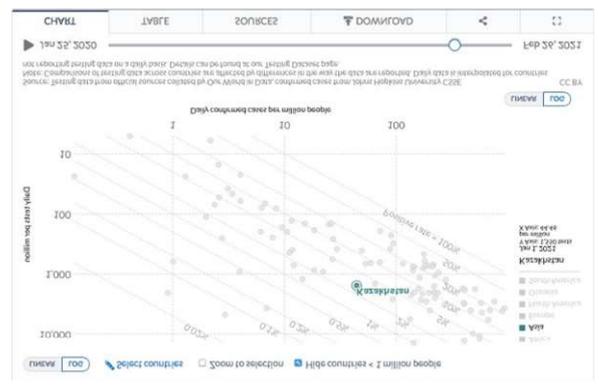
01 October 2020



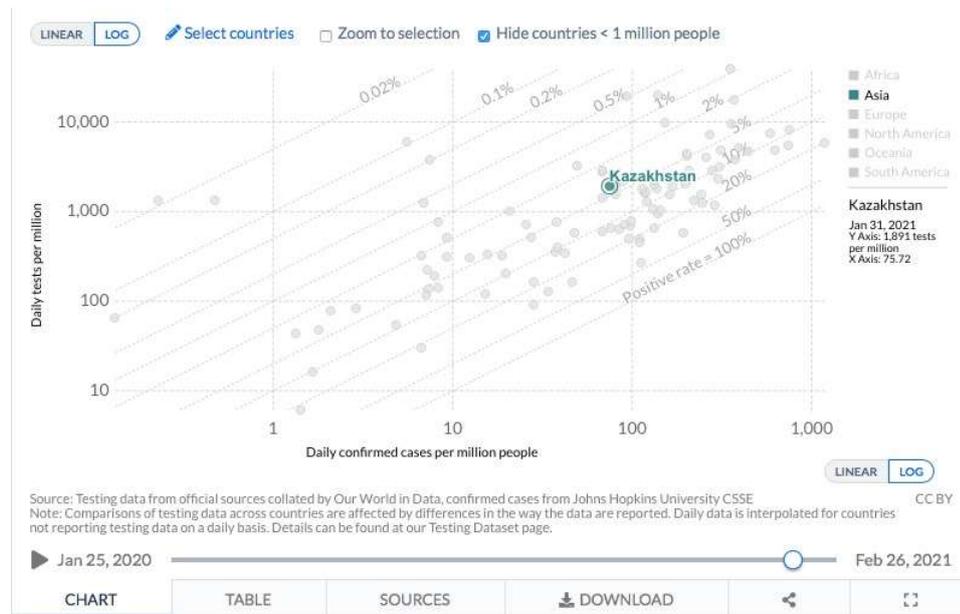
01 November 2020



01 December 2020



01 January 2021



*\*31 January 2021*

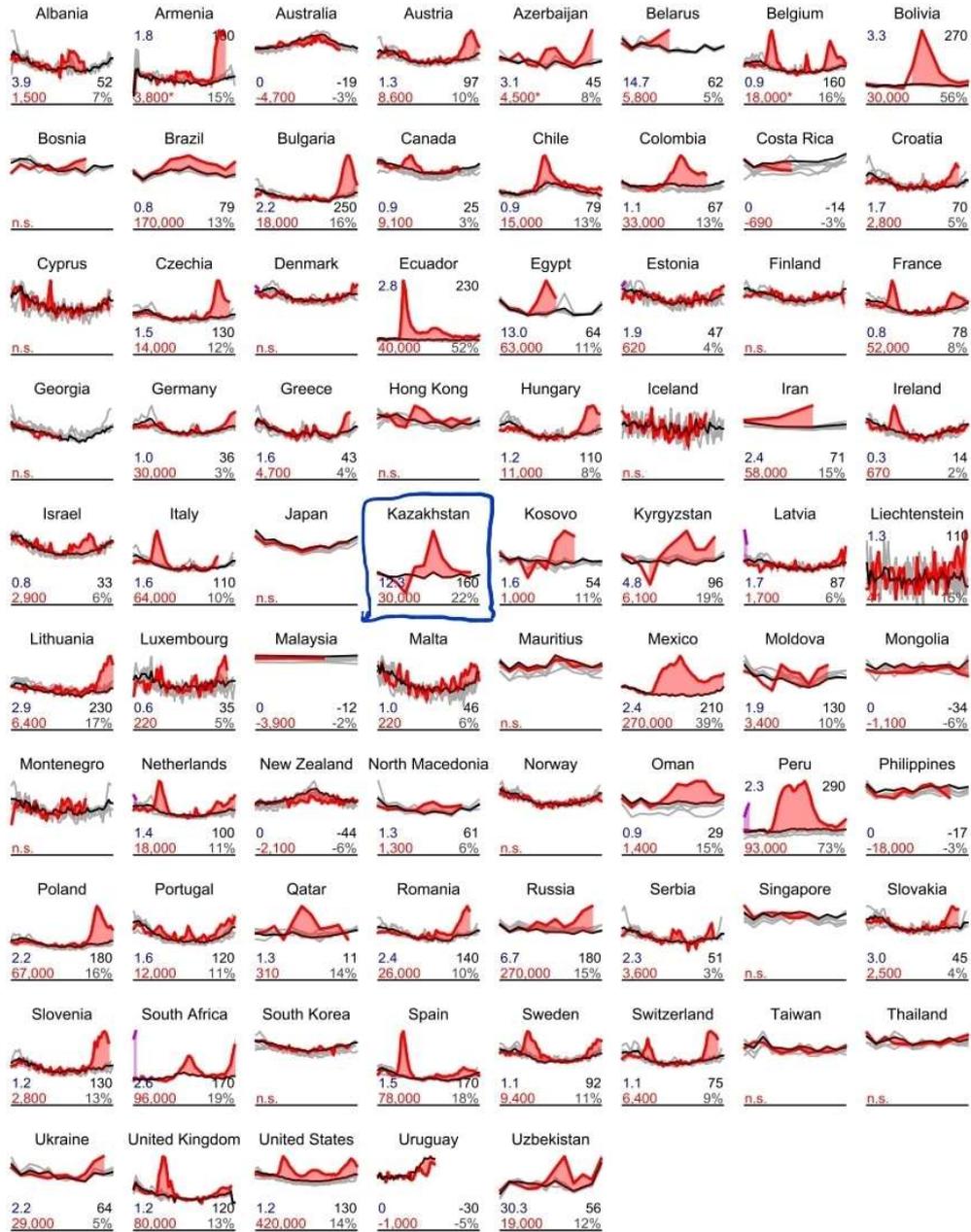
### 1.3 Data and Trends – Number of tests, confirmed cases, deaths

The Ministry of Public Health RK Alexei Tsoi expects the pick of COVID-2019 outbreak by the end of March 2021. However, the strict lockdown will not be needed if the optimistic scenario works out. This forecast is made on the assumption that all restrictive measures are observed including the compulsory mask regime, keeping social distancing and planned vaccination [9]. As he said the deaths rates decreased four times in comparison with summer time indicators.

It is worth mentioning that comparing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic between countries or across time is difficult because the reported numbers of cases and deaths can be strongly affected by testing capacity and reporting policy. Excess mortality, defined as the increase in all-cause mortality relative to the recent average, is widely considered as a more objective indicator of the COVID-19 death toll. However, there has been no central, frequently updated repository of the all-cause mortality data across countries. To fill this gap, the researchers from the Institute for Ophthalmic Research, University of Tübingen (Germany) have collected weekly, monthly, or quarterly all-cause mortality data from 77 countries, openly available as the regularly-updated World Mortality Dataset [12]. The infection-fatality rate (IFR) of COVID-19 is strongly age-dependent (Levin et al., 2020). As the countries differ in their age structure, the expected overall IFR differs between countries. To account for the age structure, the researchers also normalized the excess mortality estimate by the annual baseline mortality, i.e. the expected number of deaths per year without a pandemic event. This relative increase (also known as a p-score) was the highest in Peru (73%), Bolivia (56%), Ecuador (52%), and Mexico (39%). These Latin American countries have much younger populations compared to the European and North American countries, which is why the excess mortality per 100,000 inhabitants there was similar to some European countries, but the relative increase in mortality was much higher, suggesting much higher COVID-19 prevalence. These Latin American countries were followed by Kazakhstan (22%), Kyrgyzstan (19%), and South Africa (19%).

They used this dataset to compute the excess mortality in each country during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found that in the worst-affected countries the annual mortality increased by over 50%, while in several other countries it decreased by over 5%, presumably due to lockdown measures decreasing the non-COVID mortality. Moreover, the research found that while some countries have been reporting the COVID-19 deaths very accurately, many countries have been

underreporting their COVID-19 deaths by an order of magnitude or more. Averaging across the entire dataset suggests that the world's COVID-19 death toll may be at least 1.6 times higher than the reported number of confirmed deaths. The research found the highest undercounts in Uzbekistan (30), *Kazakhstan* (12), Belarus (15), Egypt (13), and Russia (6.7). Such large undercount ratios strongly suggest purposeful misdiagnosing or underreporting of COVID-19 deaths.



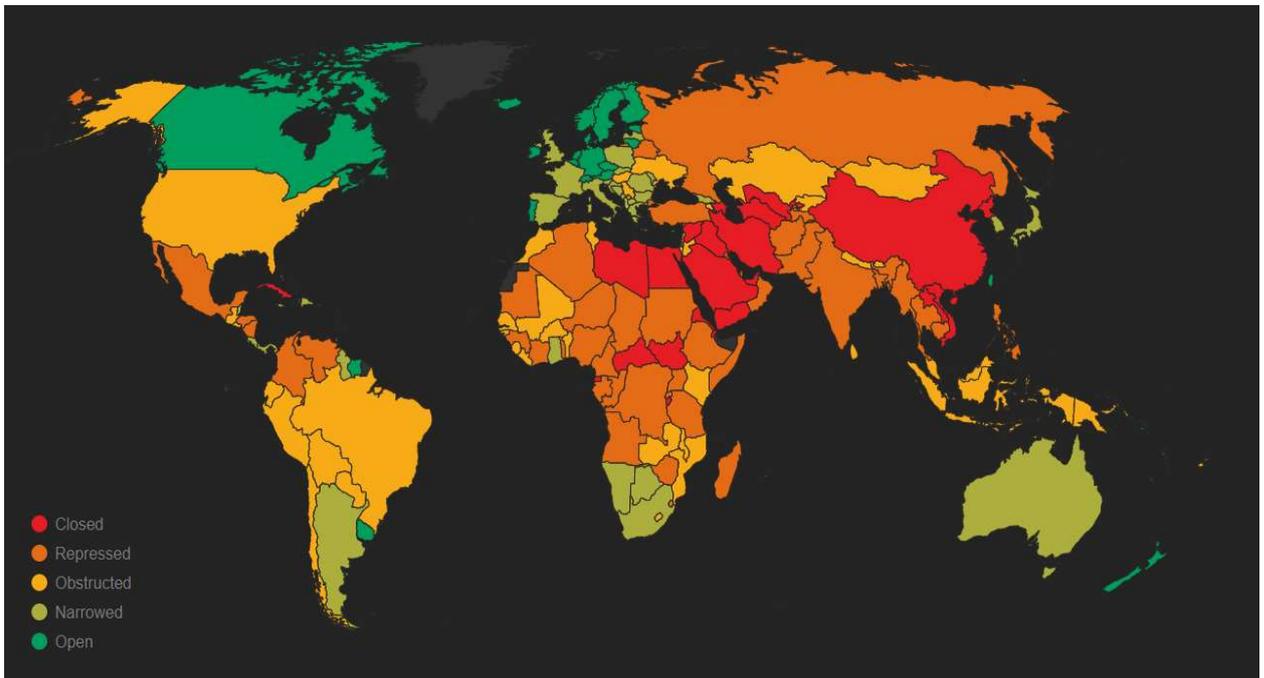
**Figure 2: Excess mortality time series for all countries in the dataset.** Each subplot shows baseline mortality (black), mortality in 2015–2019 (gray), in 2020 (red) and in 2021 (purple). Excess mortality is shown in red/purple shading. The numbers in each subplot are: total excess mortality (red), excess mortality per 100,000 population (black), excess mortality as a percentage of annual baseline mortality (gray), and undercount of COVID-19 deaths (blue). See text for the exact definitions. “n.s.” – excess mortality not significantly different from zero ( $t < 2$ ). All numbers were rounded to two significant digits. The  $y$ -axis in each subplot starts at 0. The  $x$ -axis covers the entire year. Asterisks mark excess mortality estimates that were downwards corrected (see Methods).

## II. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC SPACE

### 2.1 Impact of COVID-19 on key Human Rights and SDGs

A significant deterioration of human rights situation and a crackdown on civil society organizations in Kazakhstan has been observed during October 2020 – January 2021, with harsh restrictions imposed on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association; whereas civil society and human rights organizations working in Kazakhstan have been subjected to increasing pressure and penalization by the country's authorities, which prevented civil society from accomplishing their missions.

CIVICUS Civic Space Monitoring reporting violations of freedom of association, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression rated Kazakhstan civil society as *Obstructed* (2020). Meaning that *civic space is heavily contested by power holders, who impose a combination of legal and practical constraints on the full enjoyment of fundamental rights. Although civil society organizations exist, state authorities undermine them, including through the use of illegal surveillance, bureaucratic harassment and demeaning public statements. Citizens can organize and assemble peacefully but they are vulnerable to frequent use of excessive force by law enforcement agencies, including rubber bullets, tear gas and baton charges. There is some space for non-state media and editorial independence, but journalists face the risk of physical attack and criminal defamation charges, which encourage self-censorship* [13].



### COVID-19, Democracy/Civic Space, and Economic/Human Development

Country	COVID-19 <sup>1)</sup> (/219)	COVID-19 <sup>2)</sup> (/98)	Democracy <sup>3)</sup> (/167)	Civic Space <sup>4)</sup>	GDP per capita <sup>5)</sup> (/194)	HDI <sup>6)</sup> (/189)	SDG <sup>7)</sup> (/166)
Kazakhstan	100	47	128	Obstructed	72	51	65

1) Rank by Confirmed Deaths per Million by World O Meter (as of 2020, Feb. 13)

3) Democracy Index Rank by EIU

5) GDP per capita, current prices (U.S. dollars per capita) (as of 2020)

7) SDG index score by SDSN

2) Rank by COVID-19 Performance by Lowy Institute

4) Data by CIVICUS Monitoring

6) Rank of Human Development Index by UNDP

On 28 January 2021 the global anticorruption movement Transparency International published the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for 2020. Remarkably, Kazakhstan significantly improved its anticorruption rating. By the end of 2020 Kazakhstan gained 38 score and was ranked 94, was placed at the same level as such countries as Brazil, Ethiopia, Peru, Serbia, Sri-Lanka, Suriname and Tanzania. The rank was given based on 9 sources: experts of 4 ratings agencies evaluated highly anticorruption measures taken by Kazakh government, the rest of the agencies did not change the ranking (*the same as the previous year*) [25]. Please see below the table with details.

#	Source of Research	CPI 2020	CPI 2019
1	Bertelsmann Foundation Transformation Index	33	33
2	Economist Intelligence Unit Country Ratings	20	20
3	Freedom House Nations in Transit Ratings	24	24
4	Global Insight Country Risk Ratings	<b>47</b>	35
5	IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook	<b>61</b>	55
6	PRS International Country Risk Guide	<b>58</b>	43
7	Varieties of Democracy Project	17	17
8	World Economic Forum EOS	47	47
9	World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	<b>38</b>	36
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>38</b>	34

Nicaragua	3.60	120
Gabon	3.54	121
Mozambique	3.51	122
Ethiopia	3.38	123
Russia	3.31	124
Niger	3.29	125
Qatar	3.24	126
Zimbabwe	3.16	127
Kazakhstan	3.14	128
Congo (Brazzaville)	3.11	129
Cambodia	3.10	130=
Rwanda	3.10	130=
Comoros	3.09	132

Democracy Index 2020 ranked Kazakhstan as a country with authoritarian regime with dictatorship.

*“...Belarus, Azerbaijan and four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) remain dictatorships, the leaders of which have sometimes stayed in place for decades. In most of these countries, the score upgrades were led by a rising confidence in governments and political parties. However, the lack of any viable political alternatives, as well as repressive state apparatus that clamps down on dissenting voices, may result in exaggerated support for political elites in public opinion surveys...”*

### *Political Leadership and Democratic Governance*

On 21 October, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan called Parliamentary elections for 10 January 2021. Some civil society organizations, including those who observed previous elections, reported that they were targeted by tax authorities in the run-up to these elections [14]. They consider this to be a threat to their ability to plan and conduct election observation.

The COVID-19 pandemic was used as a pretext to restrict/impede the activities of independent observers during the election day. The new resolution of the Central Elections Commission RK (CEC) dated 04 December 2020 was issued prior to the elections. A newly adopted CEC resolution required that non-profit organizations intending to observe elections have in their statute a declared objective of “implementation and protection of the political rights and freedoms of citizens”. The decision as to which organization meets the stated criteria is made by the respective election commission. The CEC also regulated observers’ rights to make photos, video and audio recordings during the voting process and prohibits publication and dissemination of recorded material. In addition, elections observers had to provide the official medical document on COVID-19 test in order to be allowed to conduct elections monitoring in the election day. In the election day some observers were not allowed to conduct election observation referring to the decree of the sanitary doctor to limit the number of observers in the voting polls. These government concerted measures prevented some domestic election observers from effective observation.

Public Association *Erkindik Kanaty* which monitored the electoral process following the elections was fined at the amount of KZT 277 800 (661 USD) because of allegedly failing to comply with the tax requirement on filling the tax form on international funding timely. They consider that it was not written in the law, and the tax authorities just executed the order “from the above”.

Public Association *Eco* conducting election observation was ordered to freeze its activities for a 3-month period and was fined in the amount of KZT 583 000 (1 388 USD). The tax authorities made this decision after revealing minor errors in tax reporting for 2018 of the organization [15].

Prior to the elections (28 December 2020) the independent observers reported on the violation of certain rights of citizens during the electoral process [16]:

1. The freedom of association was violated as observers acting on behalf of public associations (Art. 22 ICCPR)
2. The state did not ensure effective legal remedies (Art. 2 ICCPR).
3. The right to open and transparent electoral process was violated since the observers ensure the observance of the principles of secrecy of voting and transparency of electoral process (Art. 24 ICCPR).

On 15 January 2021 the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan suggested to lower the floor for political parties from 7% to 5% to enter the Mazhilis (the lower chamber of the Parliament RK) and Maslikhats as well as to add the section “Against all” in the election bulletin.

### **2.1.1 Right to Health and SDG 3 (Target 3.3., 3.8, 3.b, 3.c, 3.d, etc.)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the gaps and ineffectiveness of the healthcare system. Hospitals were not adequately equipped with the modern medical equipment and the medical staff found themselves vulnerable to the coronavirus because of the lack of medical suits and other protection measures. The consequences of lockdown measures and the lack of information on medical aid available, and fees for testing made essential services inaccessible for some vulnerable groups of population.

On 03 November 2020 the Committee on Financial Monitoring informed that they arrested the ex-minister of Public Health RK Elzhan Birtanov on the ground of the suspicion in the grand embezzlement of state monies. Various unnamed media sources informed that he was accused of the embezzlement of 526 million KZT (1,2 million USD) allocated from the state budget for digitalization purposes [17]. Now he is home detained.

Kazakhstan has invented its own vaccine from the COVID-19 called QazCovid-in. It is also supposed to utilize the Russian vaccine called Sputnik V. The Karaganda pharmaceutical complex has launched the production of the Sputnik V vaccine as part of the implementation of agreements between the presidents of Kazakhstan and Russia. It is planned to produce 2 million doses of vaccine in total [18]. In December 2020 the first volunteers tested the QazCovid-in vaccine, the analogue of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine and the Oxford AstraZenica vaccine [19]. They were paid KZT 200,000 (475 USD) for testing. Volunteers will receive reimbursement in the amount of KZT 500,000 (1188 USD) in the event if the QazCovid-in vaccine adversely affect them and they will become disabled or die as a result of the vaccination [20].

The mass vaccination to be launched in February 2021. According to the Prime Minister Askar Mamin, first of all the medical workers, pedagogues, students, law enforcement officers, the representatives of state social and medical institutions as well as representatives of risk groups will be vaccinated on a voluntary basis.

According to the newly appointed Minister of Public Health RK Alexei Tsoi the vaccine produced by Pfizer/BioNTech will be delivered to Kazakhstan only in the second half of 2021. In the meantime, the Kazakh QazCovid-in and Russian Sputnik V vaccines will be utilized [21].

For the first time in the history of Kazakhstan Youth Friendly Health Centers have been included in the MPH RK list of healthcare institutions. This is the outcome of the UNFPA and MPH RK comprehensive project aimed at institutionalizing an integrated youth-friendly health service system. Following the development of a Strategy for the sustainable development of Youth Health Centers, the project developed several clinical protocols, algorithms and training packages. So far 17 regional Youth Health Centers have been equipped, a policy paper disseminated and visits to

several centers organized to strengthen their capacity and attract young people to visit or contact them also during the COVID-19 pandemic [22].

Currently the Ministry of Public Health RK has introduced the mobile app called Ashyk (Open) designed for businesses which operate in red zones covered by COVID-19 pandemic (extremely dangerous zones). The information system shows what clients/patients were infected with COVID-19, and gives signal if these people visit these companies. The Minister of Public Health RK Alexei Tshoi said that this app was developed not to watch out for Kazakh people, its main goal is not to allow infected people to be in public places and contact with other people. He added that not all people abide by quarantine measures and thus put in danger other people. Now they are piloting this app in 40 companies such as fitness centers, SPA-saloons, restaurants, etc. [24] Some people raise concerns about such ‘a novelty’ since it could restrict the right to free movement.

### **2.1.2 Right to Education and SDG 4**

As the school year has kicked-off in Kazakhstan, some 3.3 mln schoolchildren, 466,000 high school students and more than 600,000 university students began a new academic year on 1 September. While the majority continued to study via distance learning via a mix of technologies, such as elearning platforms and TV broadcasting, about 780,000 primary schoolchildren will study in special groups at schools. Earlier, the Minister of Education and Science of Kazakhstan Askhat Aimagambetov said that the current approach to studying is a combined one [23]. It depends on the epidemiological situation. Children in grades 1-4 could study in the special classes at the request of their parents, with a limitation of up to 15 children per classroom. At the same time, sanitary requirements were strictly observed with constant temperature checks of both children and teachers, mandatory masks, frequent use of sanitizers, cleaning, airing and quartzizing the classrooms. Unfortunately, not all children (especially from rural areas) were equipped with computers or laptops to study on an equal footing with those having these devices.

There is a low engagement of children with disabilities in inclusive education, incomplete coverage of children with tutor services in schools, a large percentage of children who are homeschooled in special and general schools. It seems necessary to ensure the coverage of children with various types of disabilities with inclusive education in all regions of the country.

### **2.1.3 Right to Work/Job and SDG 8 (including SDG 1)**

Due to the global crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an atypical and expectedly negative picture of changes in the income of Kazakh people. The growth of real wages has slowed down. Real monetary incomes of the population continued to decline.

The rise in unemployment, and the general level of prices for goods and services, has led to an increase in the number of the poor or citizens whose incomes are below the subsistence level. According to the Bureau of National Statistics for the second quarter of 2020, there are 1.07 million poor in Kazakhstan (5.7% of the population) - 4.2% in the city, and 7.8% - in rural areas. According to the World Bank, the share of the poor in Kazakhstan in 2020 grew from the projected 8.3% to 12.7%, which in absolute terms means an increase in the number of poor by 800 thousand people.

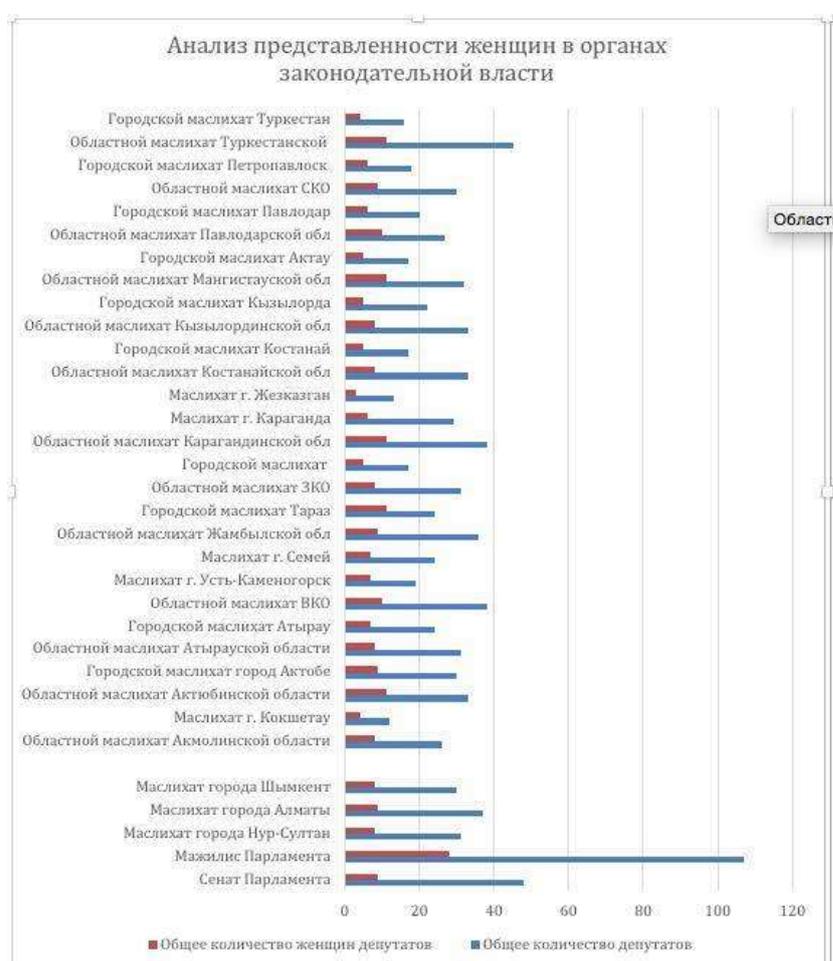
The political scientist Dosym Satpayev draw attention to distorted statistics. He considers that before the pandemic, the Kazakh authorities did not have a clear understanding, clear figures about the level of unemployment and real poverty, due to maneuvers with data on the self-employed. He also mentioned the data on the number of citizens who received 42,500 tenge each as part of aid in March 2020, when *4.5 million citizens* considered themselves socially vulnerable (*supported by*

official documents). In his opinion, this suggests that the problem of the growth of unemployment and poverty is now becoming acute in Kazakhstan [26].

### 2.1.4 Gender equality (SDG 5)

During COVID-19 pandemic women left behind all state support programs, leading to an increase in unpaid work, reduced access to financial resources, a widening economic gap, and more incidences of domestic violence.

According to the recent statistics the average Kazakhstani man is at work 7 hours more per week than the average Kazakhstani woman. But at the same time, Kazakhstani women are engaged in unpaid work 21 hours a week more than a Kazakhstani man. In Kazakhstan, women spend on average 12% more daily time on housework than men. It takes them 4 hours and 20 minutes, while for men it takes 1 hour and 25 minutes. The difference is almost three hours a day. The difference reaches 21 hours per week [38].



To ensure the representation of women and youth at the decision-making levels for the first time in Kazakhstan gender quotas were introduced for party lists. According to the law, the country introduces quotas of at least 30% for persons under 29 years of age and women from the total number of persons included in the list of candidates for deputies of the Mazhilis and Maslikhat from one political party. As a result of the 2021 Parliamentary elections the representation of women in Mazhilis RK constitute 26% and 19% in Senate RK. As it is seen from the diagram the novelty did not bring the significant change in representation of women at legislative bodies of Kazakhstan.

Diagram 1. Analysis of Representation of Women at Legislative Bodies of Kazakhstan. Source: Alliance of Female Forces.

Female medical workers compose the majority of frontline workers battling against the COVID-19. Their day-to-day challenges include high levels of exposure to the virus, long working hours, psychological stress, fatigue, occupational burnout, stereotypes, among others. The WHO Country Office in Kazakhstan has launched a one-year project funded by the Netherlands to study and provide recommendations to improve gender equality in the healthcare system during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project will focus on studying female frontlines workers and the inclusion of women at all levels of decision-making in the Kazakh healthcare system. The WHO jointly with

the UN Women and the UNFPA will share the survey results and recommendations with the Kazakh government and key stakeholders to help promote total gender parity in the country's healthcare system.

## **2.2 Impact of COVID-19 on people, especially vulnerable groups and sectors**

### **2.2.1 Migrants (Target 10.7, 16.b, etc.)**

The state disaster management system proved its ineffectiveness. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions there were long queues of labour migrants at the border of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for several days. The labour migrants wished to return home safely but both countries did not know how to tackle the issues in the most effective way. With the help of the international organization for migration (IOM) they managed to do it. IOM has assisted more than 4,619 migrants and victims of trafficking during the lockdown [27]. During October 2020 IOM has organized the return over 500 Tajik migrants who had been stranded due to COVID-19 restrictions and could not leave the territory of Kazakhstan. IOM is also contributing to research on understanding the supply of digital financial transfers and financial services in the corridor and the behavioural aspects of remittance transfers and use, and the decision-making process for how to send/receive and use remittances among senders and recipients in the context of COVID-19.

### **2.2.2 Women and girls (SDG 5 etc.)**

The combination of economic and social tensions caused by the pandemic, as well as restrictions on movement, have affected everyone and especially the most vulnerable people, including women and girls, people with disabilities, the elderly, those who suffer from various diseases.

In Kazakhstan, one of the hotlines created to provide assistance to victims of domestic violence reported a 50% increase in the number of calls in the first half of April 2020, compared to February 2020. 50% of girls are subjected to violent methods of upbringing in the family, including 21% are subjected to physical punishment, and 45% experience psychological aggression and violence [28]. At the same time, support services for women at risk of violence face cut and closures, and shelters are often unable to accommodate new people due to fear of infection and movement restrictions. This situation remained unchanged.

*"Domestic violence is a persistent problem for Kazakhstan and it does not depend on a pandemic, emergency situations. However, during quarantine, the situation with domestic violence worsened, because it was difficult for people to be close to each other for a long period of time, they do not have a culture of communication, so we saw a surge during quarantine,"* the Chairman of the Board of the Union of Crisis Centers Zulfiya Baysakova said during an online briefing at the multimedia press center Sputnik Kazakhstan.

*"The crisis centers of Kazakhstan, based on the orders of the chief sanitary doctor of Kazakhstan, could not accept victims of domestic violence without undergoing PCR tests. "This requirement worsened the situation, and a lot of women, not having permits to move around the city or between regions, were left alone with their problem. Therefore, we immediately began to appeal to the government, we are still writing"* Zulfiya Baysakova said.

According to the internal statistics of the Union of Crisis Centers, in 2020 their hotlines received 2,500 calls on domestic violence cases, while in 2019 there were about a thousand calls. This year, about 7-8 thousand people received consultations from social workers, more than 9 thousand people received shelter. In total, there are 11 state crisis centers in Kazakhstan with shelter

departments for victims of domestic violence. Among NGOs, only 7 crisis centers have shelters, the rest (38 crisis centers) - provide only consultations and social support. At the same time, in rural areas throughout the country, one can count 5-6 crisis centers, Zulfiya Baysakova stated [29].

In Kazakhstan, women's organizations and activists call on the government and development partners to ensure effective dialogue with civil society to put women's needs at the heart of efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and then recover. As a result, some suggestions were incorporated into practical recommendations jointly prepared by UN Women and UNFPA in Kazakhstan on changes in legislation and regulatory standards related to preventing and responding to domestic violence in a COVID-19 emergency.

In Kazakhstan, a law on the prevention of domestic violence has been in effect for 10 years, but the level of violence in our country has not decreased during this time, but, on the contrary, continues to grow, and this circumstance, according to the deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, head of the working group on the draft law, Aigul Nurkina, makes us to adopt a new law.

The initiative to develop a draft law in the field of family and domestic violence was supported in the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on February 27, 2020. On March 2, the original version of the draft law was posted in the public domain on the Mazhilis website so that any citizen of our country could get acquainted with it and send his proposals to the deputies on the [draft law](#) [30]. A working group was created, it included more than 50 people. And these are not only deputies of the Parliament of both chambers, but also representatives of the National Commission for Women and Family and Demographic Policy under the President, central government bodies, non-governmental organizations, legal scholars and notaries. Currently, the draft law has been sent for revision with further consideration in early 2021.

### **2.2.3 Persons with Disabilities**

In October 2020 the President RK Kassym-Jomart Tokayev entrusted the Parliament RK to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities until 2022 [31]. This measure will allow Kazakhstani citizens with disabilities to appeal to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with individual communications/complaints.

On 10 January 2021 the Parliamentary elections took place in Kazakhstan. According to the MLSP RK the total number of persons with disabilities comes to above 705 thousand (3.7% of population). As of today, there is no deputy with disabilities in the Parliament. Persons with disabilities were left behind in terms of having no voice to raise the most pressing issues on their own at the legislative body. It contradicts the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which Kazakhstan ratified in 2015. The representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities openly said about the barriers existing on political arena and 'glass ceiling' which prevent them from exercising their passive political rights [32].

*“The COVID-19 pandemic exposes existing gender inequalities as well as inequalities that people with disabilities face. According to the assessment, almost three out of four respondents reported that they do not have the opportunity to contact the district inspector, social and psychological, medical services and other institutions. People with hearing disabilities require sign language interpreter services, which limits their access to appropriate assistance. To help these people, the National Commission on Women, Family and Family and Demographic Policy under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and with the support of UNFPA has developed video materials with information on how to protect yourself from coronavirus infection, what steps to*

*take before leaving home and returning home, and also in the event of violence”* Julia Valesse said, UNFPA Representative in Kazakhstan.

Children with disabilities residing at state social medical institutions became victims of cruel and degrading treatment. It is observed in the video materials that the child is bandaged with a diaper like a straitjacket, the immobilized baby should sit in one place all the day. These cases were revealed by the representatives of the NGO during their site-visits of these institutions [33].

The most acute problem is the employment of people with disabilities, who are the most vulnerable group of the population [34]. Of the total number of people of working age, this category today employs 100 thousand people, or 23.3 percent. By 2025, they plan to increase this figure to 30 percent. In developed countries, about 40 percent of the working age of persons with disabilities is employed. It is not so easy for them to get a job in Kazakhstan. Not all employers want to see such people in their staff, since they have a shorter working week and additional leave, and depending on the disease, it is necessary to equip the workplace. Accordingly, this entails additional costs. So far, this problem is being solved with the help of various programs and initiatives. So, they are implementing the "Enbek" program, according to which 13 thousand people with disabilities have been employed in 2020, 626 people have been trained in the basics of entrepreneurship, 830 grants and 350 microcredits have been issued. The atlas of professions for persons with disabilities is being finalized. They provide training for persons with disabilities in demanded specialties, including IT skills. The period of the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the problem of low digital literacy of people with disabilities, and, as a result, helplessness in some issues. In this regard, it seems especially important to increase digital literacy of people with disabilities.

Persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities in Kazakhstan face stigmatization and isolation from society and are prevented from exercising their human rights. “Once a person is declared ‘incapable’, he or she literally has no legal recourse [35]. They lose the power to make decisions about their own life,” said Heather McGill, Amnesty International’s Researcher on Central Asia. “By law, they cannot study or work and they have no right to marry. From the moment the decision is made they are trapped, as courts will only hear challenges to the status if they are submitted by a guardian. Persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities in Kazakhstan are stuck in a vicious circle.” In addition, 50% of people with disabilities, deprived of their legal capacity, live in state institutions, which contradicts the provision of the Convention living independently and leading an independent lifestyle (taking into account the needs of every person with disabilities).

Kazakhstan's state healthcare system does not ensure the right to the highest attainable standard of health care without discrimination against women with disabilities. Despite the legislatively established reproductive rights, in practice, it is widespread to force women with disabilities to use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy, push to have abortions, and involuntary sterilization of women who are deprived of legal capacity because of their physical, psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities. There is no explicit legal provision stating that disability is the reason to force for abortion or sterilization. However, 80-85% of the "reasons" for abortion and sterilization became types of disabilities [36].

Even if the type of disability of a woman is not on the list, the doctor has the right to refer her to a medical consilium to consider the possibility of terminating the pregnancy. The duration of pregnancy in this case has no legal significance. A pregnant woman with a disability may refuse to have an abortion, but she will have to accept the refusal to take responsibility for her condition and her future child by clinicians. The situation of sterilization is complicated by the fact that, if

medically necessary, the procedure can be performed regardless of the age of the woman or number of children. Also, decision to sterilize can be made by an official guardian. There is no age limit for sterilization, i.e. the guardian has the right to sterilize a young girl without legal capacity at the age of 18 without notifying her of the procedure [37].

#### **2.2.4 SMEs**

SMEs were severely hit by COVID-19 crisis. Due to quarantine measures, many cafes and bars were closed, although they have rather large amounts of credit debt. This mainly concerns the spheres of catering, tourism, services and entertainment. According to the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs called Atameken approximately 500 thousand SMEs stopped operating in December 2020 [42]. One of the deputies of the Mazhilis of the Parliament Azat Peruashev suggested to introduce the tax amnesty for medium-sized businesses (SMEs), as well as prohibiting tax authorities and banks from bringing medium-sized businesses to bankruptcy with inadequate amounts of claims.

### **2.3 Impact of COVID-19 on civic space and democracy**

#### **2.3.1 Impact on Human Rights**

The government have used the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity to silence critics and adopt new repressive regulations. Human Rights Watch named Kazakhstan one of the countries where the situation with freedom of speech has deteriorated amid the pandemic.

The new restrictions to freedom of expression and freedom of association were introduced by the end of the year. The new resolution of the Central Elections Commission RK (CEC) dated 04 December 2020 was issued prior to the elections. A newly adopted CEC resolution required that non-profit organizations intending to observe elections have in their statute a declared objective of “implementation and protection of the political rights and freedoms of citizens”.

#### **2.3.2 Impact on Civic Space, including human rights defenders**

Starting October 2020 the Ministry of Information and Social Development RK initiated *the draft law on public oversight* aimed at prevention of corruption at local and national levels. The Ministry plans to organize public discussions to discuss issues of the draft law with the participation of experts and representatives of the public. The CSO experts express their concerns over the draft law since it contains provisions restricting NGO activities, and may adversely affect the CSO operational environment.

According to the European Union Statement, the Kazakh authorities abuse vague and overly broad extremism laws to persecute the opposition and human rights defenders; whereas following this law, since 22 October 2020, the day on which the authorities announced the date of the elections, the number of politically motivated criminal cases has doubled, rising to 99, specifically on the basis of ‘extremism’ charges; whereas 69 of those concerned are in danger of imminent arrest, such as the activist Gulzipa Dzhaukerova, and 11 activists were put under house arrest on trumped-up ‘extremism’ charges [2].

#### **2.3.3 Freedom of Assembly**

Following the Parliamentary elections in January 2021 peaceful demonstrators were detained, and concerted measures which prevented some domestic election observers from effective observation. During the campaign period mass arrests were carried out; whereas on election day the authorities

illegally detained at least 350 peaceful protesters in 10 different cities; whereas the Kazakh authorities routinely prevent peaceful protests critical of government policies from taking place; whereas the law on peaceful assembly and the amendments to the laws on political parties and elections adopted in May 2020 fail to respect the fundamental rights of the citizens of Kazakhstan [2].

The number of demonstrations were run in several cities of Kazakhstan following the elections protesting the results of the Parliamentary elections. Activists of unregistered civic movements were kept in circle for several hours by police which did not let them go to peacefully protest and after that they needed urgent medical aid (it was very cold that day). They require to keep police officers accountable for violation of their rights [39].

### **2.3.4 Freedom of Association**

Prior to the Parliamentary elections many NGOs experienced pressure on the part of tax bodies [40]. By the end of November 2020, they faced heavy fines and suspension of activities for minor errors in tax reporting forms. The following public organizations openly reported receiving notifications from tax authorities: Erkindik Kanaty, Kadir Kasiet, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, International Legal Initiative, International Journalism Center MediaNet, Legal Media Center and "Echo". The organizations faced fines in the amount of more than KZT500,000 (1188 USD) and suspension of activities for up to 3 months (in accordance with Article 460, Paragraph 1 and 2 of the Administrative Code).

The NGOs directly dealing with elections topics such as preparation of independent observers and elections monitoring were intimidated, fined, and their activities were suspended for a certain period of time [41].

At the start of February 2021 the Kazakh authorities drop all charges against some prominent human rights NGOs that had received fines and a suspension of their activity, based on unclear legal grounds.

## **III. RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19**

### **3.1 Major policies and programs carried out by the government**

Like in other countries, the Kazakh government was slow to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic at the initial stages. In autumn 2020 it managed to set up more hospitals, testing facilities and quarantine centres and started producing and purchasing vaccines to fight COVID-19. The various modern medical equipment was given by the international organizations and development agencies to Kazakh hospitals from abroad. The government purchased additional medical equipment as well. The government enforced mask wearing, social distancing, and free vaccination for state officers (medical workers, policemen, teachers, etc.).

The anticorruption agency intensified its work, and introduced some novelties into the national legislation aimed at effective fight against corruption in Kazakhstan.

### **3.2. Major activities and programs carried out by CSOs**

CSOs in Kazakhstan continued their efforts in advocating for transparency. In an open letter to the President, human rights defenders noted that government agencies often classify information about the spending of two billion tenge allocated to combat the pandemic as "for official use" and suggested legislative amendments to existing regulations. In its response, the MIOR recognized the need to change the procedures and announced the formation of the working group with the participation of civil society representatives.

### **3.3. Major activities and programs carried out by other stakeholder groups**

The international organizations and development agencies contributed to raising the acute human rights issues at the highest state level, and initiated dialogues on them with state officials. One of the successes of such intervention happened at the beginning of February 2021 when the Kazakh authorities drop all charges against some prominent human rights NGOs that had received fines and a suspension of their activity, based on unclear legal grounds.

UNDP provided employment opportunities to 150 at-risk youth as part of its COVID-19 response program in Kazakhstan. Young people, who lost their jobs to the pandemic, took part in a subsidized three-month apprenticeship program, accompanied by soft skills trainings and mentorship support. The apprentices were placed in private companies, NGOs and government agencies across the cities of Nur-Sultan, Almaty and Karaganda region. They were encouraged to try out a new profession and gain respective experience, while receiving a KZT 60,000 monthly allowance. For three months, the companies were monitoring the apprentices and upon completion of the internship hired those who performed the best. 84 participants out of 150 were women, who also make up over 90% of the recipients of targeted social assistance in Kazakhstan. The initiative is part of a larger UNDP Kazakhstan strategy on youth engagement, which aims to contribute to their employability.

## **IV. CHALLENGES AND ASSESSMENT ABOUT COVID-19 AND CIVIC SPACE**

### **4.1 SWOT Analysis and Assessment**

#### **STRENGTHS**

- Strong network of civil society organizations and coalitions which is capable of uniting and mobilizing when there is a strong need for that.
- The new civic activists have showed up during COVID-19 as a result of volunteering on some projects.
- Established local partnerships to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations.

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- Low engagement of civil society organizations into the agenda of SDGs at the national and international levels.
- Weak collaboration of state bodies, UN and civil society organization on the implementation of SDGs.
- The lack of updated and quality national data on SDGs available in open sources.
- International and UN Agencies are not strongly engaged with SDGs in Kazakhstan.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Government of Kazakhstan has setup SDG affairs Office under the Ministry of National Economy RK.
- Preparation of monitoring specialists on SDGs and UPR. Developing monitoring tools for them. Publication of analytical reports on that on a regular basis.
- The next Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) for 2025 could be prepared and reviewed jointly by the government and the representatives of NGOs, CSOs, DPOs, and private sector.
- Creation of the Working Group on SDG under the Parliament RK, the representatives of CSOs should be the part of it.
- Advocate for the ratification of the main human rights treaties and implement resolutions made to Kazakhstan (based on VNR and UPR recommendations) related to human rights issues.
- Reaching out various international organizations and platforms in order to become members or use their platforms to report on the realization of international commitments by the country (shadow reports). The main focus: gender equality, inclusion and disability issues.
- Raise awareness of state bodies and NGOs on SDGs, and how to collaborate together.

## THREATS

- The Government of Kazakhstan has not acknowledged the crucial role of CSOs in SDG implementation, and may hinder their activities under various pretexts.
- Limited access to 'independent' funding to carry out monitoring activities.
- Emergency restrictions on civic freedoms could set the scene for a longer-term clampdown on civic voice.
- Censorship and self-censorship may deteriorate the human rights situation.
- Limited/Lack of access to Internet may silence independent civic voices.

## V. ACTION PLANS, PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1.1 CSO campaign and activities at the national level

- Accelerate efforts on monitoring the localization and implementation of SDGs, particularly the SDG16+: gathering the data, developing reports, advocacy.
- Make efforts to be included into the Coordination Council on SDG under the Government RK.
- Increased citizen participation in government responses to COVID-19.
- Run meetings with the relevant Ministries responsible for SDG implementation.

- Create the interactive (real time updating) dashboard on progress made regarding the realization of SDG/targets/indicators (national data + stakeholder’s data): comparable with international indicators.
- Do CSO/stakeholder analysis on the implementation of the VNR and UPR recommendations and put forward suggestions with regard to the improvement of their implementation.
- Run meetings with the MFA RK, Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission, National Commission on Women’s Affairs and Family Policy under the President RK regarding our readiness to contribute to national reports on VNR and UPR, and assist with the implementation of previous VNR and UPR recommendations.
- Advocating for creating the Working Group on SDG under the Parliament RK, the representatives of CSOs should be the part of it.
- Propose and advance the suggestion to prepare VNR on a 2-year basis
- Discuss implementation issues with the Parliamentarians: developing long-term action plan with them.
- Promote the alignment of national legislation with the requirements of the key binding instruments.
- Advocate for the ratification of the main human rights treaties and implement resolutions made to Kazakhstan (based on VNR and UPR recommendations).
- Build trustworthy relationships with business community to collect data and cases regarding human rights violations in their areas of work (meetings/presentations).
- Involve CSO independent expertise on monitoring trial decisions in respect to cases of bribery and corruption.

**Action plan on strengthening national CSOs coalitions:**

*Knowledge building:*

- Raise capacity of the civil society activists to monitor the 232 national indicators on SDG or speak out correctly on the performance of SDG and other international commitment.
- Raise capacity of the civil society activists to contribute to VNR and UPR.

*Research:* doing field and desk research on SDG and UPR issues (involvement of CSOs).

*Advocacy:*

- Larger stakeholder engagement and participatory work: engage all relevant stakeholders (NGOs, international organizations, academia, and other independent structures/experts. Vulnerable groups (*persons with disabilities, women, youth, migrants*) – gvnt+civil society and international organizations.

- Establish the network of all stakeholders on SDG.
- Prepare the team of 20 monitors (1<sup>st</sup> year) covering all regions and 2 cities of republican meaning.
- Develop and implement the concrete action plan on SDG 16 Plus: study, assessment, advocacy.
- Raise awareness on advocacy work done, and the results of the work among all stakeholders and broad public.

*Financial Sustainability:*

- To create fund to support the work of monitors on a regular basis from independent sources.

### **5.1.2 CSO campaign and activities at the international level**

In line with the Target 17.17 to implement the following activities:

- Reaching out various international organizations and platforms in order to become members or use their platforms to report on the realization of international commitments by the country (shadow reports).
- Running information campaign targeted at international community to raise their awareness on the civil coalition formed to report on SDG and other international commitments of the country.
- Reaching out international structures (UN, ODIHR/OSCE, etc.) to advocate for establishing regional offices in Kazakhstan or appoint special human rights advisors.
- Accelerate research, development and access to innovations to combat COVID-19 and emerging pandemic threats.

### **5.2 Proposals and Recommendations to the Government**

- Take steps to foster an enabling environment for civil society, human rights defenders, lawyers, trade unions and journalists.
- Enhance transparency and accountability on government responses and the use of public funds to combat COVID-19.
- Ensure the coverage of children with various types of disabilities with inclusive education in all regions of the country.
- Given the expected long-term negative impact of COVID-19 on the Kazakh economy, the government should extend and extend social support measures.
- Develop specific support programs for the most vulnerable groups of population taking into account economic impact of COVID-19 on them.
- Carry out a tax amnesty for the victims of the coronacrisis of SMEs to write off the amounts of taxes, fines and penalties.

- Increase the efficiency and monitoring of the implementation of employment programs in Kazakhstan, the ratio of allocated funds and the achievement of the set goals.
- Women's organizations and activists call on the government, international organizations and development partners to ensure effective dialogue with civil society to put women's needs at the heart of efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and then recover.
- Ensure equal representation of women at legislative bodies of Kazakhstan.
- End the practice to force women with disabilities to use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy, push to have abortions, and involuntary sterilization of women because of their physical, psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Put the primacy of international human rights legislation over internal regulations.
- Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
- Develop a professional and autonomous state apparatus.
- Ensure the rule of law and openness of the judicial system.
- Ensure diversified industrialization and economic growth.
- Develop comprehensive legislation against discrimination, which includes direct and indirect discrimination and all grounds of discrimination, including gender, disability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Simplify the procedure for the holding of peaceful public gatherings.
- During COVID-19 pandemic any restrictive measures must be legitimate and proportionate, limited in time, non-discriminatory, transparent, and should not hamper the effective exercise and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Ensure gender equality at decision making levels including for women with disabilities facing double discrimination.
- Ensure equal access to vaccine for all the vulnerable groups of population.
- Combat all forms of violence against women, including by ensuring effective and accessible reporting channels and protection measures that are sensitive to victims' needs and confidentiality; urges an end to impunity and action to ensure appropriate criminal sanctions against perpetrators, including in cases of domestic violence.

- Criminalise domestic violence as a stand-alone offence, and to ensure criminal sanctions against perpetrators; to deem shelters and services for survivors of domestic violence ‘essential services’ and to facilitate access to them for all women and girls (incl with disabilities), especially during the coronavirus crisis.
- Ensure a free and safe environment for bloggers, researchers, and independent journalists exercising their right to freedom of expression.
- Acknowledge and support civil society in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **5.3 Proposals and Recommendations to the International Organizations – regional and global (UN HLPF, APFSD, ASEAN, etc.)**

- Expand technical and knowledge support for CSOs dealing with SDG16 issues.
- Unleash programs aimed at combating violence against women, including by ensuring effective and accessible reporting channels and protection measures that are sensitive to victims’ needs and confidentiality.
- Support bloggers, researchers, and independent journalists exercising their right to freedom of expression.
- Create platforms to bring together various stakeholders dealing with SDG16.
- Women's organizations and activists call on the government, international organizations and development partners to ensure effective dialogue with civil society to put women's needs at the heart of efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and then recover.
- Pressure states to repeal or substantially amend restrictive legislation that is not in accordance with international law and standards in protecting freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression.
- Provide long-term, unrestricted and core support for civil society in countries where civil society is facing increasing restrictions from states. Funders should provide specific support to groups conducting advocacy in countries with rapidly closing civic space.

### **5.4 Proposals and recommendations to Development Cooperation Agencies (like KOICA, JICA, etc.)**

- Pressure states to repeal or substantially amend restrictive legislation that is not in accordance with international law and standards in protecting freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression.
- Adopt participatory approaches to grantmaking. Include human rights organisations in designing schemes and conduct situation assessments with CSOs; maintain engagement at every stage, including when the fund has been granted, to create adaptation and re-allocation strategies with grantees when required by a difficult working environment.

- Protect and open spaces for civil society to advocate and participate in decision-making. Strengthen existing mechanisms and put in place new mechanisms to address reprisals against human rights defenders who cooperate with international and regional mechanisms.
- Prioritise security. In sensitive cases, donors need to balance transparency and security needs. Where civil society and human rights work is criminalised, defenders are under surveillance or facing constant harassment, key information such as the identity, work, activities and location might need to remain undisclosed. Support programmes to ensure that defenders have appropriate training, skills and equipment to conduct their work safely.
- Take the necessary measures to ensure that activists and civil society actors are not put at risk because of the information they provide and publicly call out states who impose restrictions on the participation of civil society.

### **5.5 Proposals to the Tokyo Democracy Forum 2021**

- Place the SDGs at the centre of the COVID-19 response/recovery to introduce measures for economic and social inclusion that leave no one behind, including the future generations.
- Call on all the stakeholders to have much stronger ties and accelerate much more actions that promote synergy among the dimensions of the society, economy, environment, and science and technology.
- Planning, implementing, and reviewing all measures must be in democratic mechanism and governance among multi-stakeholders at local, national, sub-regional, and global levels.
- Initiate economic stimulus actions to widening social protection to ensure the livelihoods and wellbeing of most marginalized population including women, children, youths, and people with disabilities.
- Ensure and expand space for CSOs and vulnerable people to engage in decision-making processes at all levels of national, sub-regional, regional, and global levels.
- Refine current laws and policies to be more effective; eradicate Gender Based Violence (GBV) at home and in the workplace, provide related laws.
- Devise strategies for smart schooling, delivery of health care services, and support for firms especially SMEs.

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