

"Crises are different, but the lessons we learn from them are similar," Branimir Jovanovic of the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies said in the addressing at today's (February 28, 2022) Regional Forum "The COVID-19 Impact on the Economy with a special focus on the social economy." He referred not only to the crisis caused by COVID-19 but also to upcoming crisis caused by the war between Russia and Ukraine. According to him, this upcoming crisis will have impact through five channels: price increase, which is already causing inflation, which, according to estimates of the Vienna Institute, will be on average 5% annually in North Macedonia. The absence of direct investments from Russia, which is the fourth largest investor in the Western Balkan, will also have an impact. In addition, slower growth is expected in the EU, which is the largest trading partner of the Western Balkan, and higher interest rates in international markets.



"One of the lessons to be learned from the experience with COVID-19 is that the economic crisis cannot be prevented," Jovanovic said. He stressed that it was important for governments to take action and that those countries that spent more during the pandemic recovered more easily. According to him, the restriction on prices, especially of food and energy, is in order. Although the pandemic did not distinguish between rich and poor, although it seemed that everyone was in the same storm, not all had the same ships. He stressed that access to health

services for the rich was easier. He believes the government should focus on helping smaller companies struggling to survive the crisis, not big, profitable businesses. After this crisis, the chance should not be missed and not make the necessary changes.

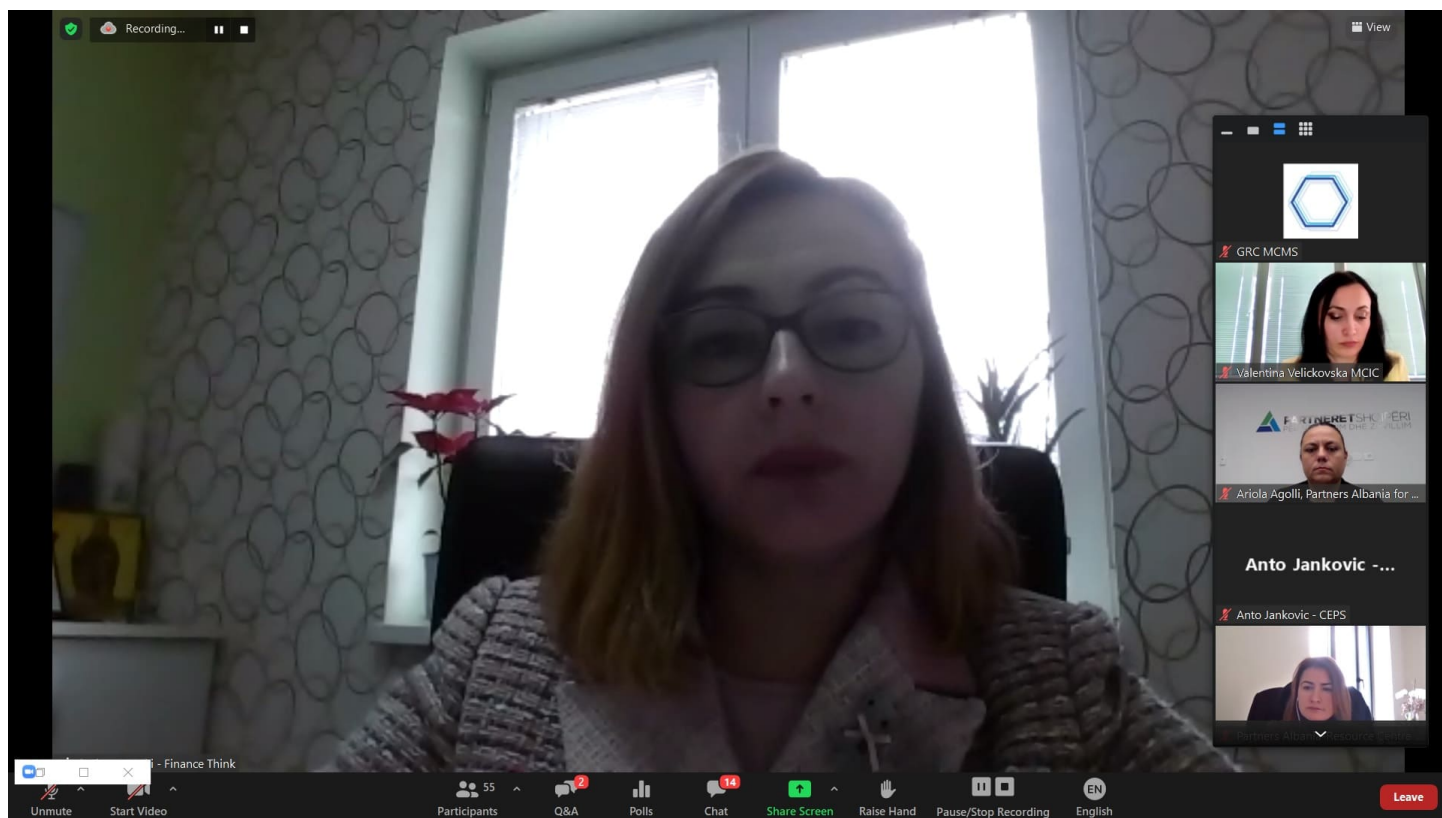
Daniela Zampini of the International Labor Organisation stressed that any policy recommendation must be addressed not only to governments but also to employers' organizations and trade unions. She stressed the transformative power of the crisis and the low level of social protection. According to her, at the crossroads of employment and social protection, solutions should be sought which, if not, will increase the numbers of passive population in a few years. "Young people have had a bad time during the pandemic," Zampini said. "They could not find employment, they stayed with their parents, the knowledge and skills they acquired over time erode," she added.



Barbara Sadowski, a regional expert from Poland, Dina Rakin from the Coalition for Solidarity Economic Development from Serbia, Vesna Bajanski-Agic from Mozaik Foundation from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Anto Jankovic from the Center for Economic Prosperity and Freedom from Montenegro and Ariola Agolli from Partners Albania for Change and Development spoke about social entrepreneurship and social economy in the time of COVID-19. They emphasized that it is necessary to build the institutional framework for this type of entrepreneurship and at

the same time to strengthen the awareness not only of the institutions but also of the citizens for the benefits of social enterprises. In addition, the speakers concluded that it is necessary to develop knowledge and skills on this topic, especially given that there is no formal education on the topic, at least not in all countries. While acknowledging that COVID-19 has accelerated digitalisation, they point out that, on the other hand, it has exposed the lack of technical skills.

Blagica Petreski from Finance Think, Ivana Tomasevic from the Business Center in Bar, Montenegro, Ariana Guli from Open Data, Kosovo and Branko Radulovic from the Serbian Association of Employers spoke about the CSOs' contribution in this area. "Although we were not directly involved in creating the measures against COVID-19, still, through our analysis, assessments, data, we indirectly contributed to some of them," said Petreski. She believes that CSOs have accumulated expertise, commitment, integrity with which they can fight for better policies. Having this in mind, Petreski stressed the need for greater attention to the issues of sustainability of civil society organizations, including their financial sustainability.



The regional forum was organised by the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) online, on the ZOOM platform. Over 70 representatives of civil society organizations, regional networks, international organizations, academia, private sector, media, relevant state

institutions and other stakeholders from Northern Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina participated.

The forum is organised in the frame of the regional project “Fostering regional cooperation and policy responses in time of crisis” implemented by Partners Albania for Change and Development, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, Center for Civic Initiatives, Centre for Development of Non-Governmental Organisations, Civic Initiatives and Kosovar Civil Society Foundation. The project is funded by the Balkan Trust for Democracy, a project of the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the USAID.

[Regional forum report](#)