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UNDP BRIEF

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND COVID-19

# THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK HAS INTENSIFIED DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) GLOBALLY.

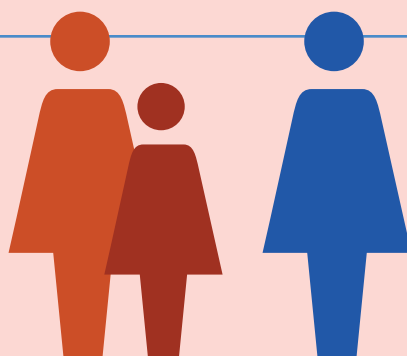
**GBV increases during every type of emergency – whether economic crises, conflict or disease outbreaks.**

Pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequalities, economic and social stress caused by the pandemic, coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in GBV<sup>1</sup>. Many women are in 'lockdown' at home with their abusers while being cut off from normal support services.

To prevent and address GBV, we must work on dedicated actions and strategies, which are outlined in section 1 of this briefing note. UNDP Country Offices, UN sister agencies and other partners can also contribute to addressing GBV by ensuring that their broader interventions to cope with the COVID-19 crisis – even when they do not explicitly address GBV – can help enhance the protective factors to prevent GBV (see section 2). This briefing note also provides cross-cutting considerations to be mainstreamed across every intervention (see section 3).

GLOBALLY

**243  
MILLION**



**WOMEN AND GIRLS  
AGED 15-49 HAVE BEEN  
SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL  
AND/OR PHYSICAL  
VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY  
AN INTIMATE PARTNER IN  
THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS.**

**The number is likely to INCREASE as security, health, and money worries heighten tensions and strains and are accentuated by cramped and confined living conditions.**

<sup>1</sup> In France, for example, cases of domestic violence have increased by 30 per cent since the lockdown on March 17. Helplines in Cyprus and Singapore have registered an increase in calls by 30 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively. In Argentina, emergency calls for domestic violence cases have increased by 25 per cent since the lockdown started.

**COVER IMAGE:** Angelina Bambina/Shutterstock

**INFOGRAPHICS:** UN Women (2020). *The Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women and Girls and COVID-19*, New York. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2020/4/infographic-covid19-violence-against-women-and-girls>

# 01

## DEDICATED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND ADDRESS GBV

### Integrate GBV in national and sub-national COVID-19 response plans

In our work with governments, UN agencies and our partners play a critical role in ensuring not only business continuity of existing GBV response and prevention services, but also to support governments in preparing for the increased demand for such services in the context of COVID-19.

- Ensure that GBV response services, including justice services, are designated as essential and remain open and accessible, including through online and digital platforms.
- Support budgeting to, at minimum, ensure human and financial resources are not diverted from essential GBV services and essential maternal health services. Data from Ebola-affected Sierra Leone indicates a spike in maternal mortality due to resources being diverted elsewhere<sup>2</sup>. In anticipation of increased demand for essential GBV services, advocate for additional human and financial resources for essential GBV services to the extent possible.
- Conduct a rapid GBV and COVID-19 assessment to understand the changing context and any gaps in capacity or services.
- Promote the inclusion of women's organizations in COVID-19 plan development, implementation and monitoring.
- Support governments in promoting and protecting human rights throughout COVID-19 response. This may include efforts to ensure emergency COVID-related policies and legislation uphold international human rights standards and that civic spaces for civil society, including human rights defenders, are protected. **In Bangladesh**, UNDP is supporting the National Human Rights Commission to establish a hotline to receive human rights complaints<sup>3</sup>.

### Provide coordination support and advice

Working closely with UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators on the ground, UNDP and other partners can support governments in coordinating multi-sectoral action.

- **In Paraguay**, UNDP is working with partners to activate and expand a national roundtable which brings together law enforcement and justice, GBV and child protection officials. UNDP Paraguay is also working with partners to equip the Ministry of Women with a "situation room" that will track the evolution of GBV and coordinate the response and the prevention of GBV during the COVID-19 crisis.
- **UNDP Mexico** is working with UN Women to develop a "sorority network" among municipalities, safe spaces for women and girls, and other institutional programs delivered by the Centers of Justice for Women.

2 Sochas L, Channon AA, and Nam S. (2017) *Counting indirect crisis-related deaths in the context of a low-resilience health system: the case of maternal and neonatal health during the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone*. Health Policy Plan 2017; 32 (suppl 3): iii32–39.

3 This is part of a broader effort - through the Global Programmes Tripartite Partnership with the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) - to support National Human Rights Institutions.



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## Adapt and expand services such as shelters, safe spaces and essential housing, along with psycho-social support and advice for individuals experiencing or at risk of GBV

- Ensure that individuals can safely prepare to break free of abusive situations, by providing accessible support, advice and reporting mechanisms. **UNDP Mexico** is working with UN Women and other partners to support the LUNA centers (safe spaces for women and girls) to develop new protocols and provide support via phone and a virtual platform. In **Paraguay**, helplines will be strengthened by the provision of key equipment and COVID-19 specific training, including on how to address cases of children whose caregivers are ill or in quarantine elsewhere. In **Fiji**, through the Global Programme on Rule of Law and Human Rights, UNDP is supporting civil society organisations that have responded to the crisis and opened counseling helplines, where expert counsellors are responding to calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In **Chile**, UNDP and UN Women are strengthening the capacities of the Women's Centers to provide remote care.
- Expand capacities of shelters and guarantee that survivors have somewhere safe to go to, as demand for GBV safe spaces will very likely increase. For example, **France** has made 20,000 hotel room nights available to women needing shelter from abusive situations.

### HELPLINE TIP

Lockdown situations add an additional challenge for women accessing helplines, as they may fear being overheard by their abuser, which specific measures such as code words, code numbers and 'no-dial or chat' options can help mitigate. If you are initiating a new helpline, two key elements are: training of staff and referral pathway partners, and widely disseminating information about the service.

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## Support police and justice actors to provide adapted services

Periods of confinement or lockdown do not lessen the need for access to justice or rule of law. On the contrary, the needs are even greater as some rights and freedoms can be rolled-back or threatened in the context of COVID-19 response (such as the implementation of discriminatory measures targeted against LGBTI and vulnerable populations and reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services). GBV strategies need to be integrated into operational plans of the justice and security sectors throughout COVID-19 preparedness, response and recovery. When courts are not operating, advocate for the inclusion of GBV services in the skeletal services provided and ensure that necessary safeguards exist for GBV survivors.

- Update GBV protocol and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in the context of COVID-19. In **Spain**, for example, women are exempt from the lockdown if they are leaving a situation of domestic violence. In **Italy**, prosecutors have ruled that the perpetrator – rather than the survivor – must leave the family home, in situations of domestic violence. In **Argentina**, dispatched police are instructed to remove the perpetrator from the scene and receive complaints and statements at home or remotely. The government has extended protection orders for survivors to 60 days. Statutes of limitations on offenses, particularly sexual violence offenses, should also be suspended.
- Support partnerships and coordination between police and non-justice sectors that women and girls may have safe access to. In the **Canary Islands, Spain**, women can use the code message "Mask-19" to alert pharmacies about a situation of domestic violence that brings the police in to support. In **Cumbria, UK**, police have enlisted postal workers and delivery drivers to look out for signs of abuse.
- Ensure civil cases, such as protection orders in the case of domestic violence, are classified as urgent cases by courts that have restricted operations due to emergency COVID-19 measures. Where hearings cannot be held in the short term, support to access alternative dispute resolution mechanisms should be facilitated.

- Provide justice services virtually, including legal advice, psychosocial advice, police and justice services including hearings, as is the case in **Colombia**. Courts in places such as **Beijing, New York City and Canada** have also instituted phone, teleconference and online hearings.
- Provide increased capacity strengthening, to keep pace with the adapted services. **UNDP Uganda** is working with government and UN partners to adapt e-learning modules for police, public prosecution, judiciary and prison officers.
- **In Chile**, UNDP and UN Women have been working with the National Prosecutor's Office to increase the number of survivors that pursue legal proceeding against their aggressors. The intervention, developed with the support of the Behavioral Insights Team and funding from the Innovation Facility, offers remote accompaniment and information to women throughout the legal proceedings.
- Explore other ways to address accessibility challenges during lockdown, such as: legal aid helplines for survivors; the possibility to admit testimony and evidence electronically; and mobile justice units.

### **Assess and update GBV referral pathways to reflect any changes in formal or informal services or access points as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Coordinate with partners from UN agencies, civil society and government, including women's machineries and national human rights commissions, and disseminate rapidly. Continue to monitor the situation and update the referral pathway regularly.

- Each referral listed should contain: the name of the institution/organization, type of service(s) provided, how it can be reached during the COVID crisis (phone number, physical location, etc.), contact person, cost of service(s) and hours of operation.
- Create referral booklets. This resource list should be small enough to be hidden and should include a range of other non-GBV services (e.g., social welfare, healthcare, social grants, community centers, and others relevant to the broader project activities such as weather services) so as not to alert a potential perpetrator about the nature of the information supplied.

**Emerging data shows that since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls, and particularly domestic violence has INTENSIFIED.**

## 30%

IN **FRANCE**, REPORTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HAVE INCREASED BY **30%** SINCE THE LOCKDOWN ON MARCH 17.

## 25%

IN **ARGENTINA** EMERGENCY CALLS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES HAVE INCREASED BY **25%** SINCE THE LOCKDOWN ON MARCH 20.



## 30 & 33%

IN **CYPRUS** AND **SINGAPORE** HELPLINES HAVE REGISTERED AN INCREASE IN CALLS OF **30%** AND **33%** RESPECTIVELY.

INCREASED CASES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND DEMAND FOR EMERGENCY SHELTER HAVE ALSO BEEN REPORTED IN **CANADA, GERMANY, SPAIN, THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE UNITED STATES.**

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## Engage government<sup>4</sup>, private sector and civil society actors, including community, traditional and faith-based leaders, to send a strong message that violence will not be tolerated

In addition to sending a strong message that violence will not be tolerated, government and civil society actors should also emphasize: perpetrators will be punished; services for survivors, such as the ones listed above, are available; and everyone has a role to play.

- Be inclusive. To reach as many people as possible, including hard-to-reach, remote and vulnerable groups, use multiple channels (such as TV, radio, SMS, etc., as electricity, internet, and mobile network access may vary significantly), and if applicable, multiple languages. Text captioning or signed videos for hearing impaired and online materials for people who use assistive technology should be employed to reach persons with disabilities<sup>5</sup>. The public outreach campaign **in Paraguay**, for example, will use community radio stations and SMS messages in Spanish and Guaraní. **UNDP Peru** is developing a podcast to raise awareness of the risks of GBV and the rights of survivors.
- Collaborate with civil society organizations, including local women's organizations, as they can help disseminate information to those who need it most. Partner with disability organizations and caregiver groups, to help reach women and girls with disabilities, and ensure their needs and interests are integrated into GBV services and delivery<sup>6</sup>.

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## Provide direct and indirect support to civil society organisation service providers

Many civil society organisations (CSOs) will be under increased pressure to provide essential services, while staff may have fallen ill or have significant care responsibilities as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

- Provide additional funding and capacity support, particularly to those CSOs that provide services to hard-to-reach communities or groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination. **In South Africa**, support is being allocated to accelerate community-level service delivery for survivors of GBV, with dedicated focus on women in the informal economy, as well as young girls and women affected by HIV and AIDS.

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## Enable community-led solutions, including empowering “good bystanders”

- Create spaces for communities to lead GBV prevention and response. For instance, **UNDP Sudan** supports community-based paralegals in camps for internally displaced people to provide basic legal advice and employ dispute resolution techniques to prevent or mitigate violence. **In Somalia**, UNDP is working with partners to develop “neighborhood watch” systems, whereby elected men and women will receive training to regularly patrol their neighborhood to prevent or mitigate incidents of violence.<sup>7</sup> **In the UK**, the network ‘[Vaccines Against Domestic Violence](#)’ has over 2,500 volunteers who support families to resolve conflicts without violence.

4 Messages should come from the highest level of government, and be reinforced across relevant ministries (Justice, Health, Finance, Social Welfare, etc.).

5 For more guidance on inclusion of women and girls with disability, please see this brief from the GBV Area of Responsibility Helpdesk (2020). Disability Considerations in GBV Programming during the COVID-19 Pandemic. [https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-03/Disability%20Considerations%20in%20GBV%20programming%20during%20COVID\\_Helpdesk.pdf](https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2020-03/Disability%20Considerations%20in%20GBV%20programming%20during%20COVID_Helpdesk.pdf).

6 Ibid.

7 Those patrolling will apply the safety regulations of operating under COVID (keeping a distance of 1,5m – do not touch individuals – cough in the inside of your elbows – use hand sanitizers or wash your hands with soap at regular intervals).



- Promote dialogue across sectors at national and sub-national levels. **In Botswana**, Local Emergency Operating Centres will raise awareness and engage the community in addressing GBV. These community structures – made up of a school principal, a farmer, a veterinarian, a social worker, a nurse, a Councilor, a tribal chief, and a member of civil society – will advise government on the needs of the village. **UNDP Uganda** and Spotlight Initiative partners are working with faith-based organisations, traditional and cultural institutions, and CSOs to develop innovative approaches to disseminate real time COVID-19 messages, including those that promote social cohesion.

## Mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 on survivors of GBV

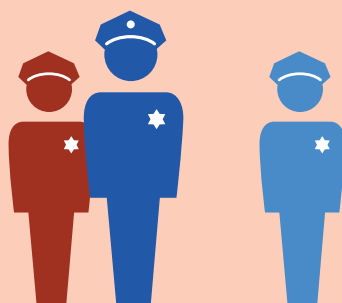
Economic impacts of COVID-19 will be felt most egregiously by women and girls, particularly survivors of GBV, who may already be economically disadvantaged or economically dependent on their abusers.

- Support survivors' economic resiliency and independence by putting funds directly into their hands. Several countries already have plans to do this, for example:
  - **In Bogotá, Colombia**, authorities are guaranteeing survivors of domestic violence full access to cash transfers during the COVID-19 crisis<sup>8</sup>.
  - **Paraguay** is incorporating a gender perspective in its recently launched cash-transfer programme, "Ñangareko", in order to ensure the most vulnerable women and their families have access.
  - **Australia, France and the UK** have each allocated additional, dedicated funding to support women experiencing violence.

## NATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 MUST INCLUDE:



**SERVICES TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.** This includes increased resources to support shelters, hotlines and online counselling. These essential services should be expanded and adapted to the crisis context to ensure survivors have access to support.



**A STRONG MESSAGE FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT THAT IMPUNITY WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.** Police and justice actors must ensure that incidents of GBV are given high priority and care must be taken to address the manifestations of violence emerging in the context of COVID-19.



**PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT** for women and girls affected by the outbreak, GBV survivors, frontline health workers and other frontline social support staff must be prioritized.

8 OECD (2020). [Women at the core of the fight against the covid-19 crisis](#).



# 02

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO MAINSTREAM GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE IN 'NON-GBV' INTERVENTIONS

### Address GBV risk factors in socio-economic assessment and response

The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 will be different for women and men, boys and girls. Increased economic insecurity may increase stress within the household, along with a GBV survivor's economic dependence on their abuser, making it more challenging to leave. The risk of child, forced or early marriage may also increase as a coping strategy to financial and food insecurity. Conversely, increases in women's economic autonomy may disrupt power dynamics within the household, potentially resulting in male backlash.

- Integrate GBV prevention into women's economic empowerment initiatives, including cash transfers, fiscal relief and stimulus for businesses, and skills programmes. In Ebola-affected **Sierra Leone**, a cash transfer programme that integrated GBV and sexual exploitation training to mobile money agents and other distribution partners offers a promising example<sup>9</sup>.
- Use gender-responsive budgeting to assess the gender differentiated impact of recovery programmes, as is the case in **Malawi**.
- Ensure impact assessments and responses leave no one behind. **Peru** is supporting Amazonian indigenous peoples, indigenous women in particular, improve their immediate access to social protection. Its socioeconomic impact assessment of COVID-19 on the indigenous peoples' economy and livelihoods will be gender- and interculturality-sensitive.
- See this briefing note on [The Economic Impacts of COVID-19 and Gender Inequality: Recommendations for Policymakers](#) for detailed advice on gender-responsive socio-economic impact assessments.

### Do No Harm

All COVID-19 interventions must, at minimum, do no harm, by ensuring that they do not reinforce or reproduce the existing power imbalances and patriarchal norms which not only underpin GBV, but also undermine broader social cohesion and sustainable recovery.

- Incorporate sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)/sexual harassment (SH)/GBV screening into all recruitment and procurement processes. Where available, use the Clear Check Database as a screening tool<sup>10</sup>. Ensure partners have been made aware

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