

UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

WE ARE 25!





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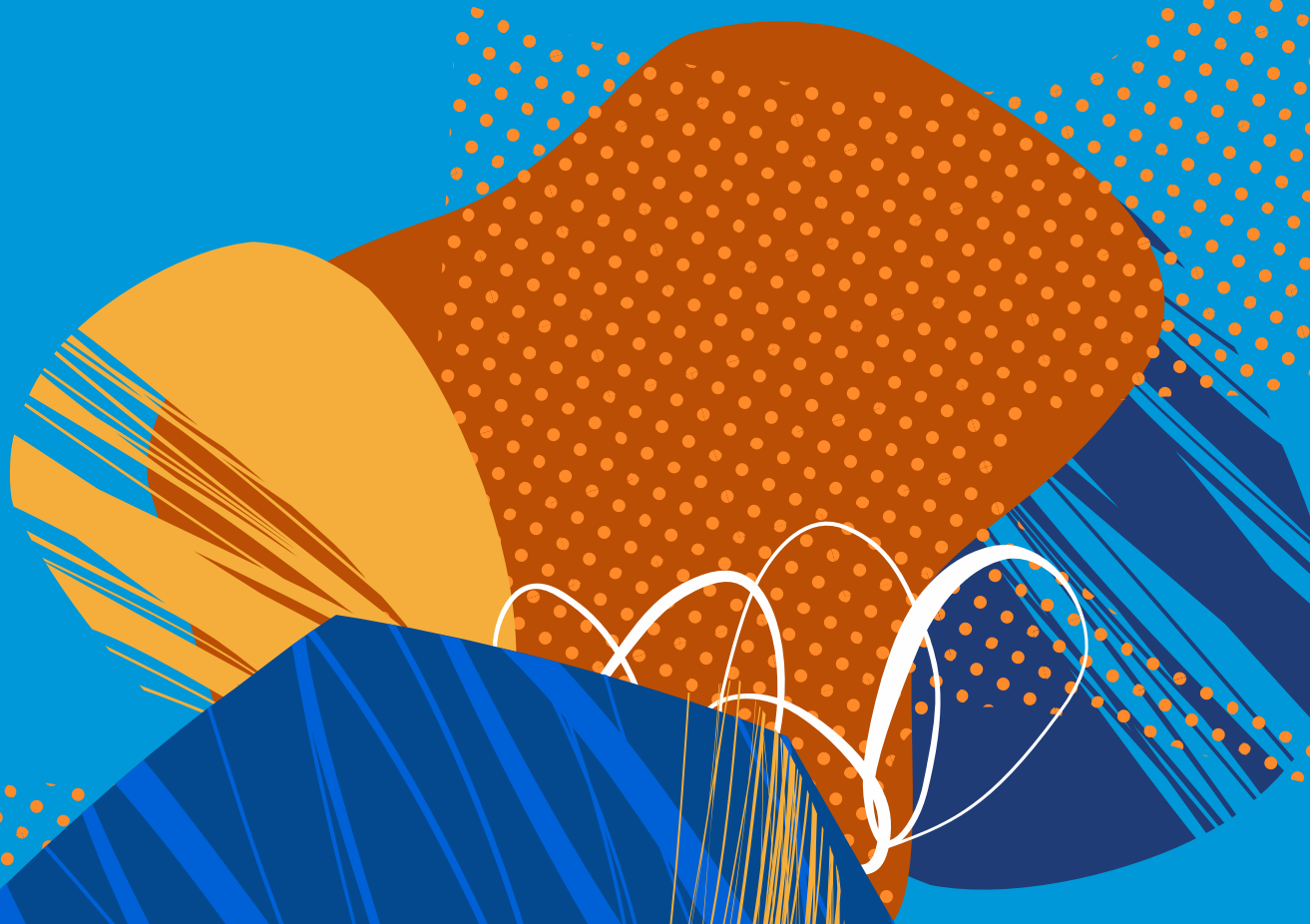
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“The [COVID-19] lockdown was on, so everything was more difficult. When I wanted to call you, I came to the wall that was too big for me to cross it on my own. After that first conversation, I felt some help, some psychological support. [...] That same moment my life somehow changed because I believed that there is someone who will help me [...] to cross that wall. [...] With your help, I reported the violence.”

A survivor explains how UN Trust Fund
Grantee, Center of Women's Rights in
Bosnia and Herzegovina, is improving life for
women survivors of violence





The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) is the first, and remains the only, global grant-making mechanism exclusively dedicated to eradicating all forms of violence against women and girls. It is managed by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) on behalf of the UN system and involves UN bodies and organs, civil society organizations (CSOs)¹ and experts on ending violence against women and girls in its decision-making processes through its Programme Advisory Committee (PAC).² As it marks its first 25 years of operation, the UN Trust Fund would like to take this opportunity to extend its thanks and acknowledge its debt to all those who over the years have contributed to and aided its work.

CONTENTS

1. FOREWORD	4
2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
3. WE ARE 25 - GROWING THE MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE	10
4. 2020: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19	16
4.1. Responding to the pandemic	18
4.2. Results of grantee adaptations to COVID-19 in 2020	22
4.3. Focus on organizational resilience	24
5. GRANTEE ACHIEVEMENTS	26
5.1. Results over the Strategic Plan 2016-2020	26
5.2. Preventing violence against women and girls	28
5.3. Access to services	31
5.4. Implementing laws and policies	36
6. EVIDENCE HUB LESSONS FROM PRACTICE-BASED KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING	40
7. NEW STRATEGIC CYCLE 2021-2025	46
8. EU/UN SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE	48
8.1. Key results	49
8.2. Innovation and promising or good practices	52
8.3. Movement building	53
9. THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR PARTNERS!	54
ENDNOTES	55



1. FOREWORD

As COVID-19 swept the globe – a health pandemic of devastating proportions – another storm of violence against women and girls (VAW/G) was unleashed. It is hard to assess what was more disturbing: the surprise at the horrific consequences, seen on the whole as an afterthought, of lockdowns on women and girls; or the fact that history keeps repeating itself. Yet again, it took the profound suffering caused by one global human tragedy to focus the world's attention on another: the ease with which women and girls are harassed, beaten, raped and abused – on a COVID or non-COVID day.

Let me be very clear, VAW/G did not happen because of COVID-19. It happens every day. To be more precise, it does not just “happen”. It is a horrific act committed by husbands, partners, fathers, brothers, friends and strangers – violent men. VAW/G did not emerge last year as a new or COVID-related phenomenon. However, COVID-19 did give rise to specific decisions and necessary life adjustments that “facilitated” even more of it. These decisions were essential to address the raging pandemic. But the impact on the reality of the lives of women and girl survivors, and the overall unpreparedness of governments to respond to that reality, caused intense harm and created a breeding ground for more violence.

The forms of harm and the places where they were committed were no different. They just increased, intensified and expanded. There was more of it, with no escape route, support or help. The decisions designed to protect us from COVID-19 – locked homes, empty streets, overstretched medical services, the closures of schools and justice system institutions, lack of access to regular social networks and sources of social support – exposed the depth of VAW/G. They revealed a core pattern of neglect, flawed structures and inequities affecting the lives of women and girls.

This should never have happened. Gender dynamics should not be put to one side in the frenzy of any new “normal” or crisis. They should not be overlooked as something to be dealt

with at the later stage, where careful consideration can be deferred. This is particularly true given that a spike in VAW/G during humanitarian and public health emergencies is not something new. We learned these lessons long, long ago and many, many times over. Most recently, the Ebola crisis in West Africa (2014-2016) clearly and painfully showed how school closures and quarantines expose women and girls to more violence, coercion and exploitation and how reports of such violence are de-prioritized and ignored.

Governments have a duty of care; they must apply the principles of due diligence in all circumstances and be well organized and prepared with policies and responses – on a “normal” or a COVID day. As their institutional machineries switch to crisis mode to contain a health pandemic, natural disasters or any, “normal” day issues – the rights and needs of women and girls must be addressed and the services they rely on must be available, prioritized and seen as essential.

In the first six months of the pandemic, UN Trust Fund grantees working in 69 countries and territories worldwide reported an increase in the severity and frequency of VAW/G, with marginalized women and girls and those most often left behind being disproportionately affected. While the pandemic was revealing the lack of sustainable, structural and societal support for women and girls and the overburdened state of referral systems, civil society organizations (CSOs) and women rights organizations(WROs) were rapidly adapting their programming and service delivery to fill the gaps.

As they always do, they immediately stepped in, provided support and adjusted the provision of their services to the “new normal”. At a time when national statistical capacity and administrative methods were out of action, CSOs and WROs were playing a key role in monitoring VAW/G by listening to survivors, documenting their experiences and making data available so that local and national response efforts could be informed by the realities on the ground.

Once again, and as in many crises before, their reaction was quick, focused, innovative and action oriented. They proved to be resilient and adaptable, but in urgent need of financial and advocacy support to continue their work, protect their staff and beneficiaries, avoid the risk of burnout and prevent closures of their own organizations as a result of the rising economic crisis.

This Annual Report is testament first and foremost to their humanity, compassion and determination. It demonstrates the incredible work, results and achievements of remarkable individuals and organizations who changed the reality of life under COVID-19 for so many women and girls. Working often in dangerous and truly testing circumstances, taking personal risks and putting themselves and their families in harm’s way – our grantees saved many, many lives, one by one.

I salute all of them.

Aldijana Šišić

*Chief, UN Trust Fund to End Violence
against Women*



2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violence against women and girls (VAW/G) remains the most widespread breach of human rights – a long-standing pandemic whose many forms and manifestations are often exacerbated in times of crisis. Since its establishment in 1996, the UN Trust Fund has evolved, adapted and learned about effective initiatives to end VAW/G. Over the past 25 years, its grantees have impacted the lives of women and girls in every region, addressing complex and diverse forms of VAW/G through innovative programmes driven by the demands of their particular contexts.

The UN Trust Fund deployed this cumulative and unique body of knowledge and experience in 2020 to support organizations confronting the challenges of implementing initiatives to end VAW/G during the COVID-19 pandemic. An understanding of the importance of flexible and swift responses, underpinned by relationships of trust, helped ensure that vital civil society organizations (CSOs), especially women's rights organizations (WROs), working to end VAW/G were able to survive and adapt.

During 2020, COVID-19 and the measures adopted to contain the pandemic saw a dramatic

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