

Call for submissions: COVID-19 and the increase of domestic violence against women

Survey of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

Appel à contributions : COVID-19 et l'augmentation de la violence domestique à l'égard des femmes. Sondage de la Rapporteuse spéciale des Nations Unies sur la violence contre les femmes

1.To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered during the COVID-19 crisis. Dans quelle mesure avez-vous constaté une augmentation de la violence contre les femmes, en particulier la violence domestique, dans le contexte du confinement lié à la pandémie COVID-19? Veuillez fournir toutes les données disponibles sur l'augmentation de la violence à l'égard des femmes, y compris la violence domestique et les féminicides, enregistrées à ce jour depuis le début de la crise du COVID-19.

The following monitoring was made by D.i.Re ,the National Network of women'centres and shelters, on 82 members. Italian lockdown was declared on 9 th of March and the data collection was divided in two periods :first period , beginning of lockdown from 2nd of March till 5th of April and second period (in the hardest moment of restrictions) from the 6th of April till the 3rd of May.

First period: DiRe registered 2.983 contacts by women victims of violence, and the 28 % of them were "new contacts" , that means that 836 were women that contacted for the first time a center or shelter of the Network.

Second period: 2.956 is the number of contacts registered by members of D.i.Re . There was an increase of the number of "new contacts" in this

period, 33% of the total, which means 979 women , 143 more than in the first period.

Comparing the data of the same period 6th of April – 3rd of May in 2018 D.i.re declared an increase of 79,9 % of contacts , +6% women asking for refuge.

During both periods DiRe observes that only 3% (in first period), 4,6 % (in second period) of total contacts of women came through the National Help line 1522; the others called directly the centers/shelters.

2.Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? Des lignes d'assistance gérées par le gouvernement et / ou par la société civile sont-elles disponibles? Y a-t-il eu une augmentation du nombre d'appels dans le contexte de la pandémie du COVID-19?

*1522 is the National Help line for women victims of violence.
(The National number will direct women victims of violence to the nearest anti-violence center thanks to a national mapping provided by the official web site. <https://www.1522.eu/mappatura-1522/>)*

During the months of lockdown, the data of 1522 show an increased of 73% in calls compared to the same period in 2019. These data were collected by Istat in a study on 'Gender violence in Covid's time'.

3.Can women victims of domestic violence be exempted from restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation if they face domestic violence? Les femmes victimes de violence domestique peuvent-elles être exemptées des mesures restrictives de confinement à la maison si elles font face à la violence domestique?

Yes, all women (and their children) victims of domestic violence were/are officially exempted from restrictive measures: they can move to go to police or to services or safe places/shelters. In any case, all anti-violence centers and shelters carried out safety protocols to avoid spreading of the virus.

4.Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity? Des maisons d'hébergement sont-elles ouvertes et disponibles? Existe-t-il des alternatives

aux maisons d'hébergement si celles-ci sont fermées ou sans capacité suffisante?

With the hashtag #noicisiamo, D.i.Re Network launched a social media campaign, a week after the enacting of the national "red zone" (most affected Covid areas). A campaign on social media and on all media focused on a 30-second spot to inform that the anti-violence centers and the shelters of the network were available and active during the lockdown; those were suggesting women when to call safely, for example during the permitted exits, and recalling the URL of the DiRe web site where a dedicated page was created with "all phone numbers of anti-violence centers", city by city in alphabetical order.

After first weeks the Government issued an order to all regional prefects of Police and to all majors of municipalities to allow requisition of vacant properties in the territory to be made available to women and children escaping violence. In fact where WWS (women specialized services) and DiRe members activated their network with the authorities, this order allowed to increase availability for women, especially allowing to avoid to risk that the reception of "new" woman in shelters would spread there Covid virus.

5.Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic? Les ordonnances de protection sont-elles disponibles et accessibles dans le contexte de la pandémie du COVID-19?

On the paper and by ordinary criminal laws protection orders and measures of women victims of violence, have to be guaranteed under all circumstances, therefore also during Covid-19. In fact this has happened differently in every area, depending on the good-will of prosecutors and the capacity of Courts to function efficiently for those cases. Generally speaking, Italy does not have (for several reasons already existing before Covid-19) a well guaranteed access to justice for VAW cases; this has impacted even more in this Covid -19 period, leaving many women at risk and not guaranteeing them any efficient protection. This has also been publicly denounced by the Group of Women's lawyer of DiRe.

6.What are the impacts on women's access to justice? Are courts open and providing protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence? Quels sont

les impacts sur l'accès des femmes à la justice? Les tribunaux sont-ils ouverts et offrent-ils protection et décisions en cas de violence domestique?

The courts guarantee protection orders , almost sentences for divorces have been suspended with the hard impact for women victims of violence.

See previous answer about criminal justice.

Regarding civil justice with all crucial judicial decisions on civil protection orders and child's custody the situation has been and is still dramatic, as most family law cases have simply (automatically) been postponed for 3-6 months, Court's offices are hardly working and guaranteeing basic service, all pending cases with high conflicts/violence involved, especially about custody's questions, would not find any hearing, leaving situations totally in the hands of the parties, with sharp increase of very harmful and dangerous situations for women and children. New cases of family/custody coming up in Covid-19 period are practically impossible to be considered and treated in Courts in appropriate times; Justice is simply being denied.

7.What are the impacts of the current restrictive measures and lockdowns on women's access to health services? Please specify whether services are closed or suspended, particularly those focusing on reproductive health. Quels sont les effets des mesures restrictives actuelles, notamment sur l'accès des femmes aux services de santé? Veuillez préciser si les services sont fermés ou suspendus, en particulier ceux en matière de santé reproductive.

A very bad example of impact on women's health was the abortion issue. The Ministry of Health, underlined since the beginning of the health emergency that abortion had to be guaranteed. Despite that and a clear guaranteeing Law n. 194 , the reality was that many women had to face diverse inefficiencies , endless processes and severe disservices; practically Law n. 194 was not respected in many places. One of the main problems for those who had to face an abortion in full Covid emergency, was the lack of an institutional site where to find all necessary information: where to go or whom to ask for help and how to move. Another big obstacle is the fact that in Italy the pharmacological abortion (RU 486) is only legal if accompanied by a three-day hospitalization, which of course is not possible in Covid-19 times; while the surgical one is practiced in day hospital, but again with a lot of difficulties and "pretentious" obstacles.

It was very important that a Pro-choice 's petition written by a national network of associations addressed to the Minister of Health and the

Government asked to facilitate access to abortion' pills during COVID-19 emergency in order to guarantee the legal rights of women.

<https://prochoice.it/2020/04/04/facilitare-accesso-ad-aborto-farmacologico-durante-emergenza-covid-19/>

8. Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Veuillez fournir des exemples d'obstacles rencontrés pour prévenir et combattre la violence domestique pendant la situation de confinement dans le contexte du COVID-19.

Covid-19 has only exacerbated all obstacles which already existed in Italy.

To have a complete and clear picture on all that see GREVIO Report Italy

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/grevio-publishes-its-report-on-italy> .

Just a quick and uncomplete summary of main obstacles mentioned in GREVIO Report and Shadow Report for Grevio coordinated by DiRe:

<https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-women-s-ngo/16808eaaa5>

- 1) Cultural background on stereotyped views of role of man and women leading to a believe of inferiority of women; persisting inequality between man and women; prejudices about women denouncing violence and their credibility.*
- 2) Insufficient comprehensive central and local policies on VAWG instruments and lack of long-term programs and financial support to WWS.*
- 3) Lack of knowledge and awareness by all services – police, social services, health, Courts – about all aspects and dynamics and gravity of VAWG; lack or insufficient trainings of professionals.*

9. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by Governments. Veuillez fournir des exemples de bonnes pratiques de la part des gouvernements pour prévenir et combattre la violence à l'égard des femmes et la violence domestique et pour lutter contre d'autres effets sexistes de la pandémie de COVID-19.

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Good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by Governments :

- *Try to solve the request from anti-violence centers for new housing solutions, including temporary ones (as described sub answer n.4);*
- *Exemption of women and children escaping violence from restrictions (see answer sub 3).*
- *Include WSS worker in categories which could continue access their working place during restrictions.*
- *Financial support by Government:*
A huge numbers of families are undoubtedly already in, or about to enter, serious financial difficulty; therefore Italian Government is trying to guarantee generally some basic financial support for certain situations. i.e. Emergency Income
be guaranteed for the months to come to lessen the risk of panic.
All debts with taxes, banks and utilities companies (such as electricity etc.) have been suspended till September
- *Everyone losing their income from work (employed or self-employed) should receive unemployment benefit for some months, through a simple self-certification process.*

10. Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by NGOs and NHRIs or equality bodies. Veuillez fournir des exemples de bonnes pratiques de la part des organisations non-gouvernementales et des INDH ou les organismes de promotion de l'égalité pour prévenir et combattre la violence à l'égard des femmes et la violence domestique et pour lutter contre d'autres impacts sexistes de la pandémie de COVID-19.

- *NGOs launched from the beginning of the lockdown the campaign based on the following slogan “ # Stayathome means stay in dangerous place for all women victims of domestic violence” to raise awareness of VAWG problem, also underlining that this is not an emergency , but is unfortunately always and only evidenced by Covid-19, with an addition of specific problems.*
- *Important interaction with political institution about unsolved issues like:*

- *Urgent requests of Personal Protective Equipment , to guarantee health protection for the workers of the anti-violence centers and shelters and the women.*
- *Urgent request of “emergency funds” to cover the extra expenses during the emergency period for rents for extra place in safe houses or hotel rooms (for women’s quarantine) , for IT equipment, for extra bills.*
- *Exemption of women and children escaping violence from restrictions.*
- *Include WSS worker in categories which could continue access their working place during restrictions.*
- *Monitoring data during the lockdown.*

11. Please send any additional information on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on domestic violence against women not covered by the questions above. Veuillez envoyer toute information supplémentaire sur les effets de la crise du COVID-19 sur la violence domestique à l'égard des femmes non abordés dans les questions ci-dessus.

Women and the covid-19: the closure of schools from February 23 till September, smart working, family care work. This is the context that women faced during the lockdown. And if the situation was unsustainable for all, imagine for women victims of domestic violence confined to their abuser, economic and professional difficulties in addition to psychological ones. In May, 73% of male workers went back to work while most women continue to be confined to their homes. Job loss, for self-employed professionals or those who work illegally, is just one of the many consequences for Italian women.