

Peace, Justice and Inclusion in the Pandemic

Sharing country experiences

PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

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Domestic Violence and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Governments have instituted lockdowns and taken other measures to keep people at home in order to protect them from the COVID-19 pandemic. They may have simultaneously condemned many to abuse in their homes.

[More than](#) 1 in 3 women and girls experience some kind of abuse in their lifetime and up to [1 billion](#) children have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year. The pandemic and subsequent shelter-in-place orders have forced victims to be locked in with their abusers with no escape in sight. The number of people, including women, children, and members of the LGBTQ+ community experiencing physical, sexual and emotional abuse is unprecedented and this is a public emergency.

This crisis requires justice solutions that are adaptive and flexible to the needs of victims. Governments have been prompted to react quickly, with the collaboration of justice, health and social sector actors, to ensure the safety of the many who are in danger when they are required to stay home.

"I call for [a ceasefire,] an end to violence, everywhere, now. But violence is not confined to the battlefields, for many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes"

-UN Secretary General, António Guterres

Scale of the problem

In **China**, [90%](#) of reported cases of domestic violence were found to be linked to COVID-19 lockdowns

[Refuge](#), a **UK** national domestic abuse hotline reported a 700% increase in a single day and [65%](#) overall increase in calls in March 2020

The number of women killed by domestic abusers has [increased](#) and more than [doubled](#) in the **UK** since the COVID-19 epidemic began.

Online consultation [services](#) in **Spain** for women trapped at home, saw a [270%](#) increase in consultations since the lockdown began

In the first week of **France's** coronavirus lockdown, authorities reported a more than [30%](#) rise in the country's domestic violence cases.

The [National Commission for Women](#) in **India** measured a [48%](#) increase in domestic violence complaints between March and April 2020

Emerging country responses

Innovations in Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Italian police have adapted a YouPol app—originally designed to report bullying near schools—to allow victims of abuse to send messages to the police without alerting their partner. ▪ Canadians are using special hand signals in video calls to signal for help, while others are told to use code words in public spaces. ▪ In Brazil, a volunteer justice vigilante group of 700 in San Pablo has responded to calls for help from victims and offer them medical, legal, and psychological assistance on WhatsApp.
Accessing Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Governments and NGOs in countries like Singapore have ramped up communication about domestic violence including creating: special manuals, webpages, national hotlines/Whatsapp lines with discrete number dialing, safety plans, guides and legal aid for women and children ▪ Existing apps like rAlnbow AI software, and HolliGuard are a lifeline for victims who need discreet support and reporting. ▪ Countries like Spain and France have created pop-up resources in supermarkets and pharmacies to offer counseling and help with reporting.
Safe Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Out of a necessity for more shelters, 20,000 hotel rooms for victims will be paid for in France. ▪ Uber has pledged to give 50,000 free rides to people in 35 cities and 16 countries, which will help thousands of victims get to a safe space away from their abusers. ▪ During the pandemic, easing loan restrictions and opening microfinancing opportunities in Egypt secures greater financial independence from abusers. ▪ The Government of Canada is keeping shelters open and earmarking resources in their relief bill.
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Police in Odisha, India have implemented a Phone-Up Programme, where police officers check up on women who previously filed reports of domestic violence before the lockdown. ▪ Local community groups in St. Louis, Missouri are handing out gun locks and manuals about safe storage of guns. Rates of femicide and domestic violence are as much as 500% higher in gun owning households. ▪ Certain countries, such as Thailand and South Africa, and the state of Tabasco, Mexico, have banned or restricted alcohol sales in efforts to curb domestic violence. ▪ Bogota, Colombia has implemented gender-based lockdown hours to reduce harassment and domestic violence. ▪ In some US states, restraining orders have been automatically extended for 90 days, and emergency protective orders can be filed over the phone. States like Texas and Pennsylvania have issued automatic custody orders. ▪ Australia’s family courts have fast-tracked all lockdown related cases to mitigate risk of violence.

Other Resources

- UN Secretary-General: policy brief on [The Impact of COVID-19 on Women](#)
- UN Women: briefing on [COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls](#)
- UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights: [COVID-19 and The Human Rights of LGBTQI People](#)
- Council of Europe: Promoting and Protecting Women’s Rights, overview [by country](#)
- UK AID: [Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- Center for Global Development: [Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children](#)
- [A Practical Approach to Prevent, Address and Document Domestic Violence under COVID-19](#)
- UNDP Brief: Gender Based Violence and COVID 19 (forthcoming)