



**Spotlight Initiative**  
To eliminate violence against women and girls



# **SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE GUIDANCE**

## **COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS<sup>1</sup>**

Worldwide reports are showing an alarming rise in domestic abuse in the context of COVID-19, as isolation, shifting frontline service priorities, and diminishing resources all create a perfect storm for abuse in the home to intensify.<sup>2</sup>

As the largest global investment to eliminate violence against women and girls, Spotlight Initiative teams can quickly identify context specific risk factors and available assets and draft a plan for mitigating risks and responding to critical needs. This also presents an opportunity to even more deeply engage with civil society partners, who remain on the frontlines of this pandemic, and to ensure a stronger orientation on *leaving no one behind*, as crises exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

Kindly note: though there is a need to innovate around solutions to violence now, some innovative ideas or models may increase women and girls' risk of violence. Any measures taken must use an evidence-based and survivor-centred approach and consider both the ethics and potential safety concerns that might emerge, in line with the do no harm principle.

### **Suggested interventions include**

#### **Pillar One:**

- Support advocacy to address gaps in legislation and policies on COVID-19 to strengthen protection of women and girls, and address any discriminatory provisions in COVID-19 care.
- Support capacity development, and awareness raising on protective legal frameworks to vulnerable groups in the context of the pandemic.

#### **Pillar Two:**

- Integrate prevention of violence against women and girls into national COVID-19 response plans, and advocate for resource allocation on EVAWG in the national response plans on COVID-19. For example, some countries are allocating additional resources to women's shelters as part of their COVID 19 economic response plan.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Pillar Three:**

- Engage social media, radio and/or TV programmes that specifically address prevention of violence against women and girls in the context of COVID-19 and support community reporting mechanisms to prevent incidents of violence.

<sup>1</sup> In light of the evolving situation, the Spotlight Initiative Technical Guidance is a living document which will be continuously updated as we continue to monitor the impact of COVID 19 across the globe with relevant tools and resources, and good practices on EVAWG.

<sup>2</sup> Lockdowns around the world bring rise in domestic violence, the Guardian, March 28, 2020

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister announces more support for workers and businesses through Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada. 18 March 2020. <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2020/03/18/prime-minister-announces-more-support-workers-and-businesses-through>; Government of Canada is providing up to \$50 million to women's shelters and sexual assault centres, including in Indigenous communities, as part of its COVID-19 economic response plan.

#### **Pillar Four:**

- Strengthen support to shelters or one-stop centres, safe spaces, hotlines (assuming service availability), etc.
- Support capacity development of front-line responders on GBV case management, update GBV referral pathways to reflect changes in available services and support innovative reporting mechanisms. For example, a new system is being rolled out in France that allows women experiencing domestic violence to use a secret code at pharmacies to report a perpetrator, at which the police will be contacted to take on the case directly.<sup>4</sup>
- Support remote services such as virtual chat groups, remote counselling, legal aid, and other specialised services for survivors in line with the “do no harm principle”. For example, Argentina, Colombia and Chile are providing support systems for survivors through hotlines, email and WhatsApp.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Pillar Five:**

- Work with relevant institutions to collect timely, quality, and disaggregated data by sex, age, disability and other vulnerability factors on the impacts of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls, including societal and economic factors.
- Support documentation of the lessons learned and good practices in the prevention and response to EVAWG in the context of COVID 19.

#### **Pillar Six:**

- Strengthen the leadership and meaningful participation of women’s rights groups in national and local preparation of national policies and plans on COVID-19.
- Support creation and/or sustainability of women’s rights groups and volunteer networks that provide remote support to survivors. For example, in France, the government is supporting local feminist organizations in coordinating and organizing “pop-up” support systems in front of supermarkets for women experiencing domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>
- Engage with civil society partners to determine those who remain in place in providing front line support and how Spotlight can support these organizations to safely scale up their work. A good example is how the UN Trust Fund has taken action to ensure flexible core support for grantee partners to utilize in ways that they feel are best for their organizations and communities.<sup>7</sup>

### **RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR SPOTLIGHT PROGRAMMING IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19**

The Spotlight Secretariat is collecting relevant resources and tools to inform programming and support Spotlight staff with business continuity in the changing context of COVID-19. Please find relevant resources below. The full repository that will continuously be updated is available [here](#).

#### **Guidance and Research Reports**

- [COVID-19 and violence against women: What the health sector/system can do \(World Health Organization, 26 March 2020\)](#): This brief guidance gives an overview of how violence against women remains a major global public health and women’s health threat during emergencies, and provides recommendations on what can be done.

<sup>4</sup> Les pharmacies, refuges des victimes de violences conjugales. Ouest France. 26 March 2020. <https://www.ouest-france.fr/faits-divers/violences/confinement-les-pharmacies-refuges-des-victimes-de-violences-conjugales-6794337>

<sup>5</sup> Donde pedir ayuda si convives con un agresor durante la cuarentena por COVID-19? El Universal. 24 March 2020. <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/mundo/coronavirus-donde-pedir-ayuda-si-convives-con-un-agresor-durante-la-cuarentena-por-covid-19>

<sup>6</sup> Violences faites aux femmes : des points d’accompagnement devant des hypermarchés. France Bleu. 30 March 2020. <https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/societe/violences-faites-aux-femmes-des-points-d-accompagnement-devant-des-hypermarches-1585542726>

<sup>7</sup> COVID-19: Statement of Solidarity and Call for Funder Flexibility. Global Fund for Women. 2020. <https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/covid-19-call-for-solidarity-funder-flexibility/>

- [GBV Case Management and the COVID-19 Pandemic \(GBV AoR Help Desk, March 23, 2020\)](#): This note aims to provide practical support to practitioners to adapt GBV case management service delivery models quickly and ethically during the current COVID-19 pandemic.
- [Technical Note: Protection of Children during the Coronavirus Pandemic \(The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, including UNICEF, March 2020\)](#): The aim of this brief is to support child protection practitioners to better respond to the child protection risks during a COVID-19 pandemic, including violence against children and provides preparedness and responsive actions that can be taken by practitioners.
- [COVID-19: A Gender Lens Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Promoting Gender Equality \(UNFPA, 20 March 2020\)](#): This technical brief provides an overview of the impacts of the pandemic on sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as recommendations for possible actions to take.
- [Guidance Note 1. Prevent and respond to gender-based violence \(Gender and Recovery Guidance package UNDP, 14 February 2020\)](#): This note provides guidance on preventing and responding to gender-based violence in crisis and recovery settings.
- [Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Violence against Women and Girls \(VAWG Helpdesk Research Report, UKaid, DFID, 16 March 2020\)](#): Emerging evidence suggests there are several ways in which the pandemic may impact violence against women and girls, including in emergency settings. The report provides useful lessons from other similar epidemics, and recommendations that can be applied to Spotlight programmes.
- [COVID-19: How to include marginalized and vulnerable people in risk communication and community engagement \(IFRC, OCHA, WHO, 15 March 2020\)](#): The report identifies the populations most at risk, including women and girls, pregnant women, and gender-based violence survivors, and offers suggestions to include these groups in risk communication and community engagement, incorporating lessons learned from previous epidemics.
- [Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for GBV in Emergencies Programming \(2019\)](#): This guidance establish a common understanding of what constitutes minimum GBV prevention and response programming in emergencies, and provides 16 Minimum Standards aim to enhance accountability among GBV actors, improve programme quality, and guard against practices that may cause harm.

