



## **Topic A: Measures to reconcile a better coexistence between the genders in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic**

### **I. Introduction**

During the last few years, the population has experienced a health crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which has resulted in a global pandemic, killing around 5 million people worldwide. Because of this situation, sanitary measures were taken to avoid contagion, such as confinement, which forced the population to stay in their homes to avoid the spread of the virus. Despite this attempt to prevent the spread of the virus, it caused women to become increasingly vulnerable even at home, due to the patriarchal environment and mistreatment, which made them the targets of violence today.

At the moment, ninety countries are in a state of confinement and as time goes by, attention has been requested to domestic violence shelters. It is known that “in Argentina, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States, government authorities, women’s rights advocates and civil society allies have reported an increase in domestic violence complaints during the crisis and a greater need for emergency protection” (UN Women, 2020). This has led to attacks against women and girls suffering any type of violence or abuse by family members and “during the last few weeks police intervention in cases of domestic violence has risen by 36%” and there has been “a 60% increase in calls for gender violence in Mexico” (Pantzer et al., 2020). This behavior is caused by tension, stress, and worry related to safety, health, and money, reinforcing the isolation of women who have controlling and violent partners at home, with whom they live daily.





“Even before COVID-19 existed, domestic violence was already one of the most flagrant human rights violations. However, in the past twelve months, 243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) worldwide have experienced sexual or physical violence by a partner” (UN WOMEN, 2020). With the pandemic, gender violence, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and harassment have become worse. Consequently, “87,000 women worldwide were intentionally murdered, more than half of them (50,000) by intimate partners or family members. The total number has increased from an estimated 48,000” (CNN, 2021). Also, “one in three women suffered physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner” (UN WOMEN, 2021).

These statistics will not diminish until actions are taken to counteract and eradicate these numbers of deaths or cases of gender violence that are increasing day by day. Therefore, we believe that your participation in the committee of UN Women can change the lives of millions of women who do not know how to protect themselves from these violent patriarchal actions. At this moment women and girls are not only victims of the pandemic, but also victims of gender violence, even at their own homes.

## II. Concept definition

**-Abuse:** The improper use or handling of something, usually in order to acquire benefits in an unfair or inappropriate manner. Physical or verbal violence, injury, assault, rape, unfair practices, crime, or other types of assault are all examples of abuse.

**-Consent:** Giving permission for something to happen or be done.

**-Domestic abuse:** It refers to aggressive behavior between current or former intimate partners, in which one partner seeks to impose authority and control over





the other by instilling terror in the other. Abuse can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, social, verbal, spiritual, and financial.

**-Equity:** Equity is not "giving everyone the same" but giving each one what is needed to accomplish the same considering the differences of every person and their situation.

**-Empowerment of women:** Enhancing women's self-esteem, their ability to make their own decisions, and their potential to affect societal change for themselves and others.

**-Gender equality:** The state in which gender has no bearing on access to rights or opportunities Gender equality protects women and girls from abuse. It is necessary for economic growth. Women and men being valued equally make healthier and safer societies.

**-Gender violence:** Any act of gender-based violence that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, pressure, or arbitrary denial of liberty, whether in public or private life. It includes everything.

**-Harassment:** Unwelcome behavior that offends you or makes you feel scared, intimidated, or humiliated.

**-Human rights:** Fundamental rights and freedoms that every person in the world has from birth to death. They apply to everyone with no exceptions.

**-Physical violence:** is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by using any type of physical force.

**-Sexual abuse:** Unsolicited sexual behavior in which perpetrators use force, threaten victims, or take advantage of them with no consent.

**-Sexual harassment:** Unwelcome sexual propositions, solicitations for sexual favors, and other sexually related verbal or physical actions





**-Sexual violence:** The word "sexual violence" refers to an act of compulsion or threat directed at a person with the intent of engaging in sexual activity.

### III. Current problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the progress achieved by women in recent years since there has been an increase in violence against women and girls, unpaid care work, and loss of jobs and livelihoods. Furthermore, the cohabitation between victims of domestic violence and their abusers has increased which, along with economic hardship and a reduction in access to services, has led to a dramatic increase in cases of violence against women. This phenomenon has always been of worldwide relevance, as according to the Organization of American States (OAS), even before the pandemic, 1 in 3 women experienced some type of physical or sexual violence by a relative or friend, while almost 6 out of ten intentionally killed women were murdered by a family member or intimate partner. Nevertheless, this health emergency has led to a rise in the previous statistics, since “when households are placed under the increased strains that come from security, health, and money worries, and cramped and confined living conditions, levels of domestic violence spike” (UN WOMEN, 2020). Emergency calls to governments, activists, and civil organizations to report cases of domestic violence and seeking asylum have increased dramatically around the world, in Argentina there was a 25% increase while in Singapore there was a 30% increment (UN Women, 2020), which shows that regardless of the socioeconomic conditions of the country, this issue is of great relevance.





The pandemic has not only influenced the increase in domestic violence against women, but also against healthcare workers and migrants. Some other groups that have become vulnerable to the problem are women human rights defenders, politicians, journalists, indigenous women, members of ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ women, and those with disabilities. It's important to recognize that the pandemic, which is being lived lately isn't just an exception, as the Ebola outbreak in West Africa also led to an increment in the risk of exploitation and sexual abuse, in addition to domestic violence, because as stated before, "when people are housed in close proximity for extended periods, rates of violence against women and children are high" (Adam et al., 2014). To prevent a greater number of contagions, the vast majority of countries implemented confinement measures, thus, since people spend more time together, women and children are at higher risk of experiencing violence. Statistics show that the regions that have been most affected are Asia, North America, and Latin America, thus, as it is a global problem, governments, NGOs, and international organizations have begun to implement strategies.

Likewise, by prioritizing the treatment of COVID-19 cases, psychological, mental, and social support for victims of violence and rape has been de-emphasized, and sexual and reproductive health services have been limited. In addition, access to police and justice has also diminished, as the resolution of most cases has been postponed. As a result, women have had greater difficulty reporting cases of violence and receiving adequate assistance from justice services, which contributes to impunity in cases of violence against women. Similarly, it must be recognized that due to the confinement, some shelters and crisis centers have had to close or postpone operations, hence, help and treatment for victims of violence has diminished. This violence also interferes with other forms of discrimination and inequality, as it has





resulted in women's lack of access to quality basic services, education, and employment. Likewise, it must be recognized that due to the confinement, some shelters and crisis centers have had to close or postpone operations, interfering with the achievement of gender equality and the eradication of gender-based violence.

Therefore, according to the results of surveys conducted by UN Women in 2020, 1 in 4 women reported feeling more unsafe at home during the pandemic, while 7 in 10 reported being physically or verbally abused by a relative. Similarly, 1 in 2 women stated having experienced violence since the beginning of the health crisis, with countries including Bangladesh (93%), Kenya (80%), Morocco (69%), Jordan (49%), and Nigeria (49%) standing out. Verbal abuse was the most common form of violence against women, with a prevalence of 23%, while sexual and physical violence was reported by 16% of respondents, demonstrating how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already existing crisis. Although domestic violence refers to violence between acquaintances and relatives, sexual and physical abuse of women and girls in public spaces has also increased, hindering their ability to fully develop in education and employment, as well as to participate in the political life of their country and to access cultural and recreational opportunities, which has a negative impact on their health and well-being. It is also believed that the pandemic has had a direct impact on the security of women, especially those who are unemployed, have children and live in rural areas.

However, both the pandemic and the violence against women that it has generated have led to a reduction in women's mental and emotional health, since nearly 41% of women and adolescents, according to UN Women, have confirmed that they suffer from such problems. It has been registered that violence against women has a direct impact on their mental state and can lead to conditions such as





depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide attempts. In addition, violence against women has a direct relationship with food insecurity, therefore, the denial of food can be considered as a manifestation of this violence. This demonstrates how gender-based violence has an impact on other spheres, showing the importance of eradicating it.

Similarly, according to Anya Prusa, the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a direct impact on the number of femicides taking place around the world, mainly in Latin America and the Caribbean. "The explosion of femicides is tragic, but not surprising. An estimated 7 out of 10 femicides in Latin America occur in a victim's home, and coronavirus lockdowns have marooned women under the same roof as their abusers" (Prusa, 2020). In developing countries, there has not been an adequate response and the attention has been insufficient since even the helplines have become a risk for women; in the case of Mexico, it is estimated that only 11% of the victims of violence have reported their situation, statistics that are similar in countries with similar socioeconomic conditions.

Thus, UN Women recommends a series of measures, both at the individual, societal and governmental levels. These include creating shelters and care centers for women victims of violence, ensuring their rights and equal representation in various spheres, allocating resources, and establishing measures to respond to violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, strengthen care services for women who have been victims of violence; collect data and statistics regularly to monitor progress in this area; develop a holistic plan to ensure the safety of women in the health, transportation, education, labor, and economic sectors; and open spaces for women to actively participate in their communities and demand that their needs be met.





“The global cost of violence against women is estimated at approximately \$1.5 trillion” (UN Women), a growing figure due to the increment of this problem during the COVID-19 health crisis. Therefore, considering the 5th Sustainable Development Goal, which seeks to achieve gender equality, it’s the responsibility of the international community to respond to this situation.

#### **IV. International initiatives**

Efforts to combat the alarming increase of domestic violence have taken different priority in international agendas. The UN trust fund to End Violence Against Women and its grantees, such as the Fund for Congolese Women and the Fund for Indian women, have taken that priority to the first place. Their actions range from the absolute commitment to continue to provide their services to adapting to the COVID-19 situation and protecting their workers by moving follow-up appointments to video and phone calls.

Other non-governmental organizations have also taken matters into their own hands. An example of this would be The National Coordinator of the International Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (INERELA+), which, apart from HIV and AIDS-related issues, has dealt with domestic abuse cases with support from the UN trust fund to End Violence Against Women.

On a governmental level, the Indian government, for example, classified domestic violence shelters and support services as essential, allowing them to operate and aid over 300,000 women in the pandemic. This initiative, as well as the recent approval by the Lok Sabha of an anti-trafficking bill, both have proven to be a positive measure.







Another effective measure, in this case taken by the Ugandan Police Force, was the installment of a toll-free hotline to serve the purpose of receiving and responding to reports of violence against women and girls. This hotline allowed victims to contact a third party when in fear or doubt to reach out to the authorities; however, it is important to mention that the hotline responds immediately and contacts the local authorities for assistance. An important asset to point out in the previous case is the funding of this project. It was financed through UN Women, and truly funded by the Swedish government. This further proves the importance of international cooperation based in intersectionality, in the path to achieving gender equality.

Two other points must be considered in both learning and coming up with initiatives to combat these issues. The first one is the importance of including migrant and refugee women. These women have often been given a secondary thought inside their involvement of initiatives, but their worth and capability to contribute to the path of gender equality should never be doubted. The second point is the underestimation of the spreading of information; awareness of one's rights, locations of shelters, helplines for aid, resources to use in case of violence, people to contact, etc. are pivotal in the timely intervention, or timely use, in cases of violence against women and girls.

*Other positive examples include:*

- The developed plan to economically aid civil organizations that run shelters for women survivors in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Increased monthly allowance child payments by the Argentinian government.
- Grants and economical support to female entrepreneurs and informal traders in Togo, Georgia, and Morocco.
- Introducing additional family leaves for affected parents who work, in Cyprus,





Austria, and Italy.

- Allowance and insurance of childcare services to remain operating during lockdown in Costa Rica and Australia.
- Sweden and Colombia have, or will, make financial resources available to survivors of gender-based violence.
- Cash benefits in response to affected parents by closed schools and daycares will be introduced in the Republic of Korea, Spain, and Canada.

## V. Guiding questions

- What strategies can be implemented to reduce violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- What are the main concerns and consequences of the problematic?
- What are the main causes of violence against women? How can they be prevented?
- What should governments do to reduce the rate of cases and femicides?
- What makes women more vulnerable than men in terms of violence?





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