

Covid-19 and gender-based violence: Has the pandemic taught us anything?



Photo: Chiara Luxardo

Lockdowns to prevent the spread of Covid-19 trapped many women at home with abusers. Several countries saw spikes in domestic violence reports. As lockdowns ease, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is taking a closer look at how we can protect women in times of crisis – be it a pandemic, natural disaster or economic recession.

Domestic violence happens everywhere. Yet each EU Member State collects data in a different way, with important details sometimes missing. To properly measure the extent of violence and predict what will happen in a crisis, we need to know more. How many women have faced physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence? What was their relationship with the perpetrator? How many requests for protection orders have been granted? EIGE's overview of how well Member States currently answer such questions will soon be published in our Gender Statistics Database.

Support services need to be proactive and coordinated. Police, health and social services should work together to identify women at particularly high risk, such as those who have previously faced violence at the hands of a partner. Working with perpetrators can also be effective and has been done online during the pandemic. EIGE's Risk assessment and management guide can help police implement such a multi-agency approach to ensure no one falls through the cracks.

Family, friends and neighbours should check in with those at risk and raise the alarm if they suspect violence. With abusers always present, lockdown measures can make it tricky to report. Government-led campaigns can help raise people's awareness of domestic violence, how to spot it, and how to get help. In March, for example, about a quarter of calls to the domestic violence hotline in Spain came from friends and family. EIGE is delving deeper into what helps witnesses act and will be publishing its results later this year.

Creativity and adaptability are key. Over the last few months, governments, support services and private companies have worked together to create digital tools that facilitate reporting and provide hotel rooms for those fleeing violence. Pharmacists and delivery personnel have been trained to assist victims. What did we get right and what will we need to do better to protect women from violence? EIGE will provide answers in a special study on Covid-19 and violence against women, to be published later this year.

Rapid action taken by several countries shows understanding that violence in the home is a problem which crises can exacerbate. The most wide-ranging measures to prevent domestic violence are laid out in the Istanbul Convention, which has been signed by all EU Member States and ratified by 21. Following this guidance remains the best way to protect women – in crisis times and beyond.

Further reading

[Gender Statistics Database: Administrative data on Intimate Partner Violence](#)



[Advancing administrative data collection on intimate partner violence and gender-related killings of women](#)



[Risk assessment and management guide](#)



[Factors that help witnesses of intimate partner violence act](#)



[Study on Covid-19 and violence against women](#)



[Helplines for victims of violence in the EU](#)



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