

European organisations working with perpetrators of domestic violence continue to fight violence against women during and after COVID-19

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“For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest: in their own homes” UN Secretary-General António Guterres reminded us in an appeal to the public at the beginning of April¹. With 1 in 3 women worldwide experiencing physical and/or sexual violence throughout their lifetimes², violence against women has long been a devastating health and human rights crisis. However, the present conditions have compounded several critical factors:

- Women and girls find themselves in isolation with their abusers, causing an around-the-clock control and lack of support from friends and family.
- Unemployment and part-time work rates have skyrocketed, causing money worries and financial dependence on abusers.
- Plans to reopen businesses without reopening schools and kindergartens will increase the already significant pressure on women to fulfil caretaking duties while employed.
- Essential services for survivors of abuse are under threat due to lack of funding and resources to meet the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These circumstances have caused a dramatic rise in reports of domestic violence in Ireland, Italy, France, Germany, Cyprus and the UK.^{3,4}

Women’s shelters, crisis hotlines and psychosocial support services are crucial for the protection of women and girls affected by abuse, while organisations working with violent men represent essential complimentary services as part of a coordinated response against gender-based violence⁵. So-called perpetrator or battering intervention programmes work with men on admitting to and changing their violent behaviour. During the current rise in domestic violence incidents, these programmes are increasingly important services to which men can reach out and find assistance to stop their violence. For example, the Australian helpline run by No to Violence has seen a 94% increase in calls from men who already are or fear becoming violent towards their partners or families⁶. Additionally, UK-based organisation RESPECT has reported an increase of calls to their hotline by 96% while their e-mail based support has seen an increase of over 200%.

For the past five years, the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP EN) has been supporting member organisations in developing responsible, safe and victim-centred interventions against gender-based violence. Responsible perpetrator work centres the safety and needs of those affected by the violence while addressing the harm caused by the perpetrator and challenging him to take responsibility for his actions.⁷

¹ <https://twitter.com/antonioguterres/status/1246973397759819776>

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

³ https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl_policy_brief_on_covid-19_impact_on_women_and_girls-2.pdf;
<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>

⁴ <https://27esimaora.corriere.it/20-aprile-21/covid-19-violenza-donne-20-giorni-mille-denunce-telefono-cd8cb852-8358-11ea-86b3-8aab0c7cf936.shtml>

⁵ <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/127-what-is-a-coordinated-community-response-to-violence-against-women.html>

⁶ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/helpline-calls-by-family-violence-perpetrators-skyrocket-amid-isolation-20200410-p54iw7.html>

⁷ <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/about-us/faqs>

In an effort to strengthen the capacities of its members and to support them in meeting the demands of the COVID-19 crisis, WWP EN has

- Published its guidelines for ensuring responsible perpetrator work during COVID-19 at the end of March. Developed with the support of international experts, the guidelines lay out a plan for crisis intervention during the unusual situation perpetrators and service providers are facing.⁸
- Been working with international organisations, e.g. Global Rights for Women, to spread the guidelines for ensuring responsible perpetrator work during COVID-19 and to support perpetrator programmes in establishing safe, responsible interventions.
- Supported US NGOs in adapting the European guidelines to their regional context
- Been working with its Russian member organisation Men of the 21st Century (M21), who have extensive experience with one-on-one online perpetrator work. In weekly peer support sessions, other member organisations have been seeking counsel on moving their activities online.
- Provided a website on COVID-19 related resources for perpetrator programmes and is continuously updating the available resources.⁹

As the world is coming to terms with the effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, one thing is apparent: No one can ever again deny the extent and dangers of violence against women and girls. Accordingly, governments must work to mitigate the ramifications of the present crisis. We join UN Women¹⁰, UNFPA¹¹ and the European Women's Lobby¹² in demanding that:

- Governments declare support services for women and girls affected by violence as essential services, enabling them to stay open and receive crucial funding.
- Governments consult women's organisations in decision-making processes, ensuring that their concerns and needs are identified and included in all plans.
- Governments gather sex-disaggregated data that captures the diverse backgrounds and contexts of women to understand the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls and inform the response.
- Additionally, WWP EN demands that governments support a coordinated community model as response to domestic violence, including perpetrator programmes.

For more information on perpetrator programmes and their response to the COVID-19 pandemic, get in touch with the WWP EN Communications Manager Anna McKenzie (anna.mckenzie@work-with-perpetrators.eu, +49 176 4579 1097) or look at our website at <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/covid-19>.

WWP EN is a **European network with 60 member organisations from 32 countries**, which promotes capacity building, information sharing and good practices exchange between organisations working with perpetrators and survivors of domestic violence. The focus of WWP EN is violence perpetrated by men against women and children.

⁸ https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Resources/COVID_19/20200406_Guidelines_final.pdf

⁹ <https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/covid-19>

¹⁰ <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5006>

¹¹ https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_Preparedness_and_Response_-_UNFPA_Interim_Technical_Briefs_Gender_Equality_and_GBV_23_March_2020_.pdf

¹² https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl_policy_brief_on_covid-19_impact_on_women_and_girls-2.pdf