

Addressing domestic abuse and violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic

As countries across the globe went into lockdown in March, reports of domestic abuse rose significantly as people were trapped at home with their abusers.¹ Many organisations providing support and services to survivors of domestic abuse, and especially those organisations working on the prevention of abuse, were already under strain before the COVID-19 crisis began, and they are now struggling to meet the demands for their assistance. The crisis has brought to the fore what has been there all along: the ‘shadow pandemic’ of gender-based violence, as the Executive Director of UN Women called it.² As lockdowns ease and survivors are able to seek out help, requests are continuing to grow. This demand for assistance is likely to remain high in the medium term as social distancing policies are predicted to remain in place for much of the rest of the year, at least, and many countries could cycle in and out of lockdown.

The following ideas and suggestions have been gathered from foundations actively working to end violence against women and girls in Europe and are offered to other foundations who are not as familiar with this area of work but who recognise the needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Needs of the sector

With ample support, the sector will be better equipped to respond to the demand but may also need to be creative and expand beyond their regular scope of work. Examples of the type of capacity that funders could provide to help the sector better respond include:

- **Strengthening NGO service provision to victims/survivors**

Services now need to be offered by phone and online, which requiring training and up-to-date hardware. Service provision hours will need to be expanded, requiring recruitment of staff and volunteers. As communities emerge from lockdown, there will be an increase in demand for legal aid, housing, and support for children, for example, and organisations will need increased capacity to meet all of these needs. In order to enable all relevant services to respond appropriately to violence against women, specialized organisations are well placed to provide trainings on the prevention of and response to violence against women. Staff providing such services are also likely to need mental health support.

- **Building communications capacity**

Online communications campaigns focusing on social media are crucial forms of outreach right now. Such campaigns reinforce that domestic violence is unacceptable as well as provide information about victim/survivor support. Also, it will be important that organisations are well equipped to lobby their governments to ensure that policies to respond to the pandemic and economic and social recovery respond to the needs with regard to the prevention of and response to violence against women. Organisations could benefit from communications strategy advice and tools, including advice on crowdfunding.

¹ See, e.g., “A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Abuse Rises Worldwide,” Amanda Taub, *The New York Times*, 6 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/06/world/coronavirus-domestic-violence.html>

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

- **Developing new relationships**

Service providers may need to work more closely with institutions, authorities, and businesses to meet current demands, improve accessibility of their services, and ensure that survivors receive the assistance and protection they need. They also need to be involved and contribute their voice to the processes of rethinking / envisioning the “post-COVID-19 society”. In addition to providing flexible financial support, foundations can help facilitate these connections.

How can funders respond?

Private philanthropy can play an important role at this time. As has been emphasized by a number of funder statements, across all of their grantmaking foundations should consider:

- Enabling organisations to change their workplans to adapt to the current crisis
- Relaxing reporting requirements
- Providing more flexible support to organisations

With respect to funding to address domestic abuse in particular, funders can:

- Increase support to groups that support survivors of gender-based violence and advocate for women’s human rights
- Consider supporting women’s funds that regrant to grassroots organisations serving the most vulnerable women (for a list of European women’s funds see [here](#))
- Review their own grantmaking strategy, in particular in response to the pandemic, taking into account gender-based violence and women’s vulnerabilities
- Take an intersectional approach and recognize the impact of domestic abuse on certain communities, including minority and immigrant women and girls and trans* people
- Ask grantees that receive funding related to COVID-19 emergency response how they are integrating domestic abuse into their work
- Consider a longer term, systemic approach that incorporates work on prevention and advocacy for better policies as well as direct services in the immediate term
- Ask their grantees how they address the issue of gender-based violence in their work and provide funding for the integration of a “gender / gender-based violence lens” in their work
- Help draw attention to the precarious position of women in the pandemic more broadly, such as this [funder statement from France](#)
- Ask governments what they are doing to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, in particular domestic violence
- Support advocacy to hold governments accountable to their commitments regarding violence against women and domestic violence. Countries that have ratified the Istanbul Convention have a wide range of obligations; in countries, where the Convention is not yet ratified, funders can support civil society organisations and parliamentarians who advocate for ratification.

Tools and Resources

Learn more about the situation in your country and the current government response, and assess where private donors can make the biggest difference:

- [Overview of national governments \(Council of Europe member states\) responses to protect women's rights during the pandemic \(with a strong focus on violence against women\)](#)
- [Compilation of resources from the Women Against Violence Europe Network](#)
- [A Guide for Europe: Protecting the Rights of Women and Girls in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic and Its Aftermath](#)
- [Compilation of the various initiatives, statements, reports and other relevant work carried out by NGOs, with particular regard to European and international NGOs, on COVID-19 and women's rights / violence against women](#)
- [EIGE and FRA heads statement: Let's step up our efforts to end domestic violence](#)
- [Council of Europe page on COVID-19 and women's rights](#)
- [Overview of responses by other international organisations \(collected by Council of Europe\)](#)

General resources on grantmaking that addresses violence against women:

- [The elephant in the philanthropy room: Violence against women in Europe \(Alliance Magazine\)](#)

If you would like to join future discussions with peer foundations working to end domestic abuse and violence against women in girls in Europe, please contact Florent Gonthier at florent.gonthier@ariadne-network.eu. We will add you to our invitation list for upcoming webinars and discussions.