

## COVID-19 and VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Even before the pandemic, violence against women was one of the most widespread violations of human rights. Since lockdown restrictions, domestic violence has multiplied, spreading across the world in a shadow pandemic. This is a critical time for action, from prioritizing essential services like shelter and support for women survivors, to providing the economic support and stimulus packages needed for broader recovery.

Emergency calls for domestic violence cases in Argentina have increased by 25 per cent since the lockdown began. Helplines in Singapore and Cyprus have registered an increase in calls of more than 30 per cent. In the USA, the National Domestic Violence Hotline reported a rising number of victims who reached out via text or phone. Evidence shows that, even before the pandemic, 1 in 3 women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.

Pandemics like COVID-19 can exacerbate not only violence within the home, but other forms of violence against women and girls. Violence against female healthcare workers as well as migrant or domestic workers increases. Xenophobia-related violence, harassment and other forms of violence in public spaces and online is more prevalent and the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse becomes more likely. Some groups of women, including human rights defenders, women in politics, journalists, bloggers, women belonging to ethnic minorities, indigenous women, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, and women with disabilities are particularly targeted by ICT-facilitated violence. In New South Wales, Australia, 40 per cent of front-line workers in a survey reported increased requests for help with violence that was escalating in intensity and complexity.

Investments to prevent and respond to violence against women have long been at crisis point. With already limited capacities and investment to address violence against women, this increase in violence is happening at a time of further reduced capacity of service providers (health, police, social care, charities) to cope with the demand. Women are locked in with their abusers and are isolated from the people and resources that can best help them.

To develop the film, UN Women received pro-bono support from global image library Getty Images and marketing agency MRM as well as production company Craft, part of Interpublic Group and members of the Unstereotype Alliance, convened by UN Women. Violence against women and girls is fueled by discrimination and harmful gender stereotypes that the Unstereotype Alliance works to eradicate from all advertising and media content.

This is a critical time for women and girls, and urgent action is needed. UN Women hopes that this campaign will make a lifesaving difference to women and girls across the world, during this crisis of historic proportions and for the long-term.

## PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) a strong women's movement and high level government commitments have contributed to favorable legislative frameworks for gender equality. Engagement in the region around global intergovernmental processes, such as the 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the negotiation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, has led to strong regional calls for a standalone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment in the

Sustainable Development Goals. The political and social climate has generally been favorable with significant dialogue, advocacy and coordination seen between States, civil society and the United Nations System.

In the LAC region, UN Women has advanced women's rights through a virtuous cycle of ensuring that transformative normative agreements and commitments that address the structural impediments to the fulfillment of women's rights are agreed and operational work at country levels helps implement these commitments. In particular, significant results have been achieved in the priority areas of work in the region: political participation and leadership, economic empowerment, and ending violence against women and girls. Issues related to women, peace and security have also been a priority in relevant countries.

UN Women Deputy Executive Director, Lakshmi Puri, together with the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, Harald Braun and the Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, Tété António, launched the "Women's Leadership Initiative for Stability in Africa" at an event in New York.

The two-year initiative, starting in 2017 and generously funded by the Government of Germany, aims to strengthen African women leaders' capacity to build sustainable peace in the continent. It will establish a network of African women leaders, facilitate their participation in major international and regional events and invest in increasing African women's participation in national electoral processes, among other measures.

"Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment across the world, including the meaningful participation and leadership of women in peace and security initiatives in Africa has been a priority for UN Women," said Ms. Puri. "I thank the government of Germany for its resolute support to this cause and in particular, for funding this new initiative that seeks to strengthen the leadership of African women for their improved contributions to sustainable peace on the continent. I commend the African Union for its commitment to gender equality and women's rights, and reaffirm UN Women's support as we embark on this new project."

As noted by the Global Study on implementation of the UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325, for peace to be sustainable and lasting, women must be included in all stages of the peace process—from prevention to negotiations, dialogue, peacebuilding and recovery. Africa not only subscribes to the provisions of UNSCR 1325, but has also developed other continental instruments, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women, commonly referred to as the Maputo Protocol and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. To date, 19 African Union Members States have developed National Action Plans on its implementation.

Targeting women in leadership positions in politics, the public sector, business, and civil society and the media, the new initiative will support women in conflict and post-conflict countries in Africa, those involved in building and supporting infrastructures for peace and conflict prevention, as well as those engaged in reconciliation, reconstruction and stabilization processes.

## WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

UN Women works with its private sector partners to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. To support this work, it has identified the need to create a self-assessment tool inspired by the UN System Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) accountability framework for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, and aligned to the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs).

To this end, UN Women has developed a provisional tool, the UN Women Private Sector Accountability Framework (UNW-PSAF). Its objective is to encourage and aid private sector partners to:

benchmark their own performance over time

locate and systematically monitor their progress in implementing gender equality considerations into their business, and

highlight their strengths and potential areas for improvement.

The UNW-PSAF uses the UN-SWAP methodology, and identifies a set of common performance standards or indicators for each of the seven WEPs to which companies can adhere and aspire. The seven WEPs provide a basis against which UN Women private sector partners can evaluate their gender-related performance and, together with the methodology of the UN-SWAP, constitute the starting point for the development of this tool.

On average, the tool incorporates five to seven indicators, presented in the form of questions, per WEP. The tool uses the UN-SWAP's progressive rating system which measures performance on the given indicator through five ratings of “not applicable”, “missing”, “approaches requirements”, “meets requirements”, and “exceeds requirements”.

UN Women hopes the UNW-PSAF will facilitate and accelerate the mainstreaming of gender equality considerations into the work of private sector partners.