



Policy Brief

The invisible threat: Covid-19 and ending violence against women and girls (ALBANIA)



Survivor of Gender based Violence
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1. Introduction

This brief paper presents an overview of the available evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women and girls in Albania. It summarises the main challenges related to essential service provision for the survivors of sexual and gender- based violence, including domestic violence during this time as well as key issues and concerns raised by the affected population, based on the reports of service providers supported by Iamaneh, such as the Counselling Line for Women and Girls CLWG, based in Tirana (the National Helpline 116117), the Shelter for Abused Women and Girls (SAWG, based in Tirana), Women to Women (WtW, based in Shkodra) and two centres providing services for perpetrators in Tirana and Shkodra, Counselling Line for Men and Boys (CLMB, based in Tirana) and Centre for Men and Boys (Zyra per Djem dhe Burra, ZDB, based in Shkodra).

This is a living document, drawing upon the knowledge and experience of these organisations, who have been engaged for a long time in the fight against gender-based violence, as well as other key resources available that help us to complete the country context and main issues related to domestic violence. It presents some of the main challenges faced in services provision leading to lessons learned and needs that require preparedness, flexibility and skills to be able to deliver efficient support services.

This brief concludes with a number of recommendations for the key actors – government and civil society organisations, related to prevention and response to violence against women and girls, in the medium and long term based on crises management response.

2. Snapshot of the Situation: violence against women and girls and Covid-19

The section below indicates the situation of domestic violence situation bases on recent years and compares with the period during COVID lockdown, where possible.

- **Increase of calls by 4 times for the same period;** The National Helpline received about 2194 calls in the period of March 13– May 31, 2020 compared to 708 calls in 2019 or about 4 times more calls over the same period.
- **Annual data on domestic violence for the last two years (2018-2019) indicate increasing numbers over the years:** 4,411 reports to the police for 2018 and 4,629 reports to the police for 2019 and 535 men were arrested¹. In March 2020 were registered 249 reports to the police (compared to 390 reports for March 2019).
- **In 2019 were doubled the requests for shelters** – 69 cases referred to shelters in 2019 by Iamaneh partners compared to 34 referrals in 2018. About 10 cases were referred by CSOs only during March 2020.
- **Concerning data on domestic violence crimes:**
2019: 14 homicides with 17 survivors, of which 12 were women;
2018: 11 homicides in the family with 20 survivors, 16 women and girls murdered.

¹ <http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6121/publikimi-dhuna-ndaj-grave-dhe-vajzave.pdf>

In the first two months of 2020: 5 survivors, of which 4 women murdered by their abusive partners or other family members in Albania, and 2 Albanian women were killed by their partners in other countries.

3. Trends and Issues

The Government of Albania in the last five years has taken a number of important steps on gender equality and empowerment of women. Main achievements include a) improvements in the national legal framework in accordance with the ratified international documents as well as with European Union legislation; b) improvements in national and local plans, aiming to implement concrete actions for empowering women and advancing gender equality; c) integrating gender responsive budgeting at all stages of public budgeting at central and local level; and d) expanding specialized support services to the treatment of survivors / survivors of domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence. The Law no. 9669/18.12.2006, “On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations” was amended in 2018 in conformity with the standards of the Council of Europe’s Convention on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

Other forms of violence against women, including rape, harassment and stalking remain largely unreported. A study on the safety of women and girls in public spaces conducted in 2018 and 2019 in several municipalities of Albania revealed that around 65% of the respondents think women do not report sexual harassment because survivors are too ashamed or afraid that people will judge them or their families.² Services in Albania are geared towards domestic violence; other forms of violence have not received adequate legislative and institutional response. This is also one of the findings of GREVIO - the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) - in its first baseline evaluation report on Albania issued in December 2017, where it was recommended that measures taken in accordance with the Istanbul Convention should address all forms of violence against women, in a holistic and comprehensive fashion.

The number of reported cases of domestic violence to the police has increased (3,725 cases registered in 2016; 4,543 cases in 2017, 4,951 in 2018 and to 4,629 cases in 2019), which is an indication that women have more confidence in authorities to report domestic violence.

Indeed, alarming data come from the latest National Population Survey “Violence Against Women and Girls in Albania”, 2018 (launched in 24th May 2019), which for the first time, in addition to intimate partner violence, collected data on the nature and prevalence of dating violence, non-partner violence, sexual harassment and stalking. Findings reveal that 1 in 2 women believe violence between a husband and wife is a private matter; 46.5% of women believe that a woman should tolerate some violence to keep her family together; and 26.1% of women believe a woman should be ashamed or embarrassed to talk to anyone if she is raped. Overall, 1 out of 2 or 52.9% of women surveyed experienced one or more of the five different types of violence during their lifetime.³ In terms of intimate partner violence, 47 % of women experienced intimate partner domestic violence, and 65.8% of women⁴ ‘ever’ experienced dating violence. Among all women age 18-74, 18.2% ‘ever’ experienced non-partner violence, 18.1% ‘ever’ experienced sexual harassment, and, 12.6% ‘ever’ experienced stalking. In terms of current experiences of violence (during the last 12 months before the survey) 1 out of 3 or 36.6% of women experienced violence. In particular, 33.7% of women experienced intimate

² Reports on safety of women and girls in public urban spaces in Tirana, Durres, Fier, Shkodra and Korca, IDRA and UN Women, 2018, 2019

³ Intimate partner violence, dating violence, non-partner violence, sexual harassment and/or stalking

⁴ Those who were never been married and never lived with a male partner, but have been involved in a relationship with a male without living together

partner domestic violence, 61.8% of women experienced dating violence. Among all women 18-74 years, 3.4% experienced non-partner violence, 8.5% were experiencing sexual harassment and 6.9% were experiencing stalking.⁵

There are insufficient numbers of emergency/crisis shelters and beds, thus not meeting the minimum standards of the Istanbul Convention for accommodation (which requires shelters to operate 24/7, providing shelter women and their children in emergency situations). Shelters are located only in the capital and main cities, and the geographical limitations mean that women in rural areas would need to move to access this form of assistance. Overall, counting all the existing shelters in the country, they have approximately 163 beds, while their capacity varies from five to 50 persons. In order to meet the minimum requirement of the Istanbul Convention (1 bed for 10000 inhabitants) additional 127 beds should be available.

Episodes of violence are reported more in cities, than in villages and that the women who reside in rural areas face more barriers when it comes to filing complaints, be them subjective barriers or objective institutional barriers. Rural areas face more barriers due to the existing mentality, lack of information regarding rights and existing services, as well as lack of access to free legal aid. The situation regarding the functioning of the institutions has impacted the geographical distribution and the number of complaints filed by survivors of violence. The objective factors are related to the incapacity of the institutions to provide services in due time while instilling trust in the individual. In the first two months of 2019 alone, 7 women were murdered, while the number of domestic crime survivors for 2015 were 18 women; 15 homicides with 16 survivors in 2017 and 11 homicides with 20 survivors in 2018.

During the lockdown (over a period of 3 weeks in April 2020), an online survey was conducted by the Women's Empowerment Network in Albania (AWEN) in 12 regions of the country, aimed to understand how much information citizens have on the existing services offering support to survivors of domestic violence and where they can turn for help in case of need during this extraordinary situation. Findings of this survey indicate that police and civil society organizations, the two most trusted institutions to seek help in cases of domestic violence. Nearly half of those surveyed reported that they would seek help from the police (65.7%), while 1 in 4 persons (24.6%) surveyed would turn to the civil society organization/s in the city where they live. On the other hand, 1 in 5 respondents (21.88%) report that they would turn to a circle of friends or family, and 17.4% would call the National Line. A worrying finding was the 7.3% of the respondents that did not know where to seek help.

More than half of the respondents responded that they know the National Hotline (60.5%) and how to reach out. Regarding the ways in which they would seek help, direct calls predominate, 3 in 4 citizens (74%) state that they will call the institution directly selected to seek help. The rest of the respondents said they would send message / text (12.9%), use apps like WhatsApp or Viber (12.1%), or messenger (5%). Some report that they would send e-mails (7.6%). The findings of this rapid assessment highlight the importance of working through different support channels for helping out the people in need for this service.

⁵ National Population Survey "Violence Against Women", conducted by INSTAT in partnership with UNDP and funding from UN Women and Government of Sweden, May 2019

4. COVID-19 impact on domestic violence

The pandemic increased the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, income loss, and the effects of the lockdown on gender-based violence are among the factors that have generally contributed to higher rates of stress and anxiety among women. The COVID-19 did not only impact the global health but also substantially affected people's livelihoods. In Albania, with a considerable share of informal employment, vulnerability is exacerbated by a weak social protection system and uneven spread and availability of services for those in need. Informal workers are more likely to be the first ones affected by the economic shocks.

On March 9, 2020, following the two first cases infected with COVID-19 in, the Government of Albania (GoA) closed all schools and on March 24, 2020, the GoA declared the National State of Emergency. From that day, the measures became stricter with only essential services and business operating (grocery shops and pharmacies) with limited hours, while public administration and non-public services have been working from home.

The GoA also has been intensively working on relief measures for this situation. Yet, in the situation with limited resources and following the earthquake of November 26, 2019, recovery needs are just getting deeper and affecting most of the population.

As the unemployment is expected to raise to 12% in April (having about 90.0000 unemployed), the GoA also decided to double the unemployment benefit for the registered unemployed and also double the amount of social assistance to the poor households addressed through the social assistance programme. The self-employed are supported with minimum salaries. Yet, though these measures are a good step to support the most vulnerable, other groups also need attention and support throughout this difficult period. The strict lockdown with many services operating remotely, placed a lot of pressure on the delivery of services related to prevention and addressing domestic violence. With children home-schooling and lost income of parents, vulnerabilities of the many households living in poor housing conditions were exacerbated, due to insufficient resources to pay the bills and cover existential needs in the absence of temporary jobs in the informal market.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) report that the biggest issue remains the negative impact COVID-19 has had on people's income and access to health care. Problems have arisen for women who have lost their jobs at this difficult time and have no means to buy food for themselves and their families. They could not pay their rent and landlords are threatening to evict them and their families – and this has also happened in few cases addressed by the CSOs. In Tirana, the municipality supported the survivors of violence with food packages.

The survivors of DV were forced to live under the same roof for 24 hours with their perpetrator. Their home was not the safest place for them, so they are feeling more vulnerable than usual. The survivors of domestic violence who have taken steps to start a new independent life for themselves and their children, were highly affected by the economic shocks and loss of income.

As schools, kindergartens and nurseries were closed, mothers who had a job could not partake as they did not have care support for their children. While, women engaged in the hospitality industry, informal jobs as housekeeping, child or elderly care services were affected the most financially as they were not paid for the days that they did not work.

The domestic violence survivors who got laid off during the first month of lockdown, were eligible to claim the "war wage", and were helped by the counselling services to apply. However, as of April 10,

that is no longer possible and as a consequence women who have been fired from their jobs after this date are not eligible for this financial assistance. For many survivors, having a job and being economically self-sufficient is one of the key elements sustaining a life without violence. Jobless women living alone with their children in rented apartments are the most vulnerable ones in the current situation. Women that have reached out to counselling services have expressed their immense fear and uncertainty regarding their future economic situation and the health and wellbeing of themselves and their children's.

The situation was precarious for the women and children survivors of domestic violence living in the same roof with their perpetrators. Women isolated at home with their abusive husbands, did not have any possibility to ask for help. Various reports indicate that though the number of calls for help to counselling services may have increased, the number of police reporting has not followed the same trend given that they are isolated under the same roof with the perpetrator.

The situation in the rural areas is worse considering the absence of services and the mentality that is rooted also in the police services, they feel they do not have other options but to live with violence.

According to reports from nonpublic service providers, the number of women and girls reporting domestic violence has increased nearly four times. They mainly seek help for psychological support, referrals to the police and local administrative units for economic support. Following the gradual uplift of measures, the national helpline and counselling services have been receiving increasing requests for legal counselling, due to the restrictions and new regulations for the public services, especially courts.

Another striking evidence from the counselling line reports, is also the fact that women who have decided to report to the police the violence from their husbands during this period, are more disposed to start the divorce proceedings immediately, contrary to before, when it took a long time for the survivors to decide on divorce proceedings.

5. Impact in service delivery and response from the service providers

Many public and private services targeting domestic violence survivors have not been working at their full capacity at this situation. This has placed a higher burden on the service provision. Given the lockdown measures during the period of March to end of May, the face-to-face counselling was no longer available. Cases were addressed through online counselling, which proved to be efficient in the case of survivors but more challenging for the work with perpetrators.

The national helpline and other counselling services have promptly responded to the changed context by adjusting their service delivery to the new circumstances and trying to find ways to operate at full capacity to support beneficiaries and to ensure a smooth delivering of services. The helpline continued working 24/7, while all staff has been working from home, providing psychosocial, legal counselling and referral to survivors and survivors. In the case of the helpline, all the calls are diverted to a mobile phone which was managed in shifts by the counsellors. Recently, the Counselling Line for Women and Girls, managed to find funds to add two more mobile phones, ensuring that no call remains unanswered.

The number of phone calls has surged during the second week of lockdown. The week of March 18 registered the highest number of phone calls, with more than 200 calls received at the free-toll

number 116117. During the last week of April, the National Hotline received **about 70 calls per day**. The counsellors are working around the clock to respond to the needs of callers. To avoid burnout, supervision sessions are being carried out online for the counsellors.

This marked the highest number compared of calls received at the national hotline in weekly bases. While, the clients have received psychosocial counselling in relation to domestic violence, a considerable number of calls were registered by previous or existing clients due to increased anxiety and panic attacks. The Covid-19 pandemic challenged the mental health of the most vulnerable, including the survivors and survivors of domestic violence which are one of groups most susceptible to mental health issues.

The courts have been closed during the lockdown and have only operated for emergency cases, such as protection orders and immediate protection orders. However, because of the Covid-19 situation and the risk associated with going out or meeting new people, women were less willing to call the police or go to court.

Some of the measures adopted to keep delivering services are: establishing working hours and arranging shifts; contacting existing clients (women and men) receiving psychological counselling to explain them with the newly adopted approach of online; identifying with each client the best way and channel of communication (phone calls, Viber, WhatsApp, Skype, etc.) and deciding the schedule of counselling.

Clients have been informed by the service providers about the available support channels, police number, helpline number, contacts of the coordinator in the respective municipality, and contact details of the organisations offering services.

NGO-run shelters in Shkodra and Tirana were closed for a period of time being functional only for the coordination of the cases. The shelters could only accept women and children that had the results of the COVID 19 test which required stronger coordination with the Municipality and the Health department for the provision of the test.

Shelters tried to manage the existing clients for the initial period. As the lockdown measures became more strict, the service provision within the shelter premises became very difficult for a number of reasons, such as lack of an operational protocol for organising the service under the unusual situation of a pandemic and inability of shelter staff to come to work due to the limited hours of movement and closure of public transportation. Shelters' staff could not come to work for the second and third shift due to the strict circulation restrictions. On the other hand, some of the clients had difficulties complying with the prevention measures (instructions related to hygiene) and continued to work for several hours during the day, putting other clients and the staff at risk. This created discontent and tensions in the shelter that therefore decided to close it down and not accept new clients.

As of March 24, the shelters adjusted the service delivery to the new situation, following up the existing clients which had been hosted in their relatives, or living in rented apartment – where rent and food costs were provided by the shelters' budget mainly. In Tirana, the staff of the shelter covered the rent costs of two clients from their personal contributions for one month.

Moreover, they were following up the cases daily and providing support to the clients' children with the homework and making sure they were attending online classes. As mothers do not have sufficient skills for using online media and two of them are working, it was impossible to monitor their children in school age. Children were supported by social workers through video calls and were helped to prepare their homework. They were supplied with smart phones that would enable online schooling

and internet costs and other learning materials needed were also covered by the SAWG. These children were supported to attend the classes regularly and finalised their tests for the end of the academic year. They are also engaged in different psycho-social activities such as painting, etc.

Shelters in cooperation with municipalities and donors managed to find support to provide the current and previous clients received during this year with food and hygiene packages. They continue to reach out to other potential donors to support mothers with young children, especially for baby milk. Women sheltered at their relatives also needed support as the host families were poor and could hardly provide for themselves. Food packages covering two weeks were provided to women that have received support in the shelter during the last three months.



*"The power of the voice"
Against the threat of Sexual and Gender based violence in COVID-19
Raise awareness intervention from WtW, ZDB, SAWG, CLWG and CLMB.
Photography from CLWG and CLMB*

6. Government Measures

The domestic violence shelters were deemed as essential services and were re-opened during the lockdown, in mid-April. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, with the technical support of UN, adopted a dedicated protocol⁶ on 10 April to ensure uninterrupted functioning of shelters during the COVID-19 emergency in Albania. According to the new protocol, domestic violence shelters are

⁶ Order of the Minister of Health and Social Protection no. 254 dated 10.04.2020 "Protocol on the operation of public and non-public residential centers that provide housing service (shelters) for victims of domestic violence and trafficking in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic"; and cover letter of MSHMS No. 2027 dated 28/04/2020 to the Municipalities "Protocols for Management of Domestic Violence Cases at the local level through NRM" and on "Management of domestic violence cases at the local level through NRM during the situation of Covid-19.

declared as essential services and must remain open and accept new survivors of gender-based violence.

Prior to the adoption of the protocol, in the absence of an operational guideline on how to function in the pandemic situation, shelters were closed trying to find different accommodations for their clients. In March 2020, the MoHSP issued an order of the Minister (no. 157, date 10.03.2020) "On measures to prevent infection by COVID-19 of beneficiaries of social care services". The protocol approved by the government provides guidance on accepting new women survivors into shelters during the pandemic, managing new cases and the obligatory hygienic standards to be applied by state, NGO-based and emergency shelters during the current situation. However, service providers report that full implementation of the protocol is a challenge, given that there is no financial support from the government to support the procurement of needed materials, which are an extra cost to already tight budgets of the existing services.

Courts remained operational addressing only to urgent matters, such as bail applications, maintenance, domestic violence and children-related cases.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection launched a major campaign across different media channels TV, aimed at reaching out to survivors of domestic abuse and reassuring them that services for them are still available and informing them on the toll-free number for the domestic violence helpline. However, CSOs sustain that the campaign was delayed by the government and municipalities should have played a more proactive role during the pandemic. Only few municipalities, with more capacities started to report online the cases of domestic violence with the support of international organisations.

Municipalities of Tirana and Shkodra worked with the CSOs to find donors and deliver food and sanitation packages to the survivors of domestic violence. Yet, the situation might be more challenging in the rural areas, with no active civil society and weaker municipalities.



Video spot produced by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection as a response to the growing rate of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting the National Helpline number 116117.

7. Impact on the Services for Perpetrators

The services addressing the counselling needs of the perpetrators also could no longer be provided face to face into prisons and probation offices and have shifted to phone or skype counselling. This happened after an agreement with the General Directorate of Prisons to have the mobile numbers of the counsellors listed on the phone directory they have inside the prisons and in the counselling room there. The same goes for the cases of Probation service as cases referred from the courts have also been addressed through online counselling. From the perspective of the perpetrators, based on the cases addressed by the counselling services most of them report anxiety, fears and uncertainty about the future given the economic situation as well as issues controlling their aggressive behaviour at home and how to manage everyday conflict with their family members. The situation of extreme poverty in some of the perpetrators has been linked to the aggressive behaviour towards women and children.

The preventive and awareness activities in schools and community have been rescheduled and postponed. Yet, in some cases (Shkodra) the school psychologists have been proactive referring cases of students in distress needing online counselling.

Currently, though the measures were uplifted, the clients face difficulties in finding a job. Most of the perpetrators that have accessed the services of these two centres, had casual jobs and feel more vulnerable. Thus, a big part of the counselling remained focused on the importance of self-management not allowing the economic difficulties impact their relationships with the family members, especially with their wives.

Organisations have been actively engaged in online awareness campaign in relation to gender-based violence, services available and promotion of online help services.



*The threat of Gender based violence and domestic violence in COVID-19
Psychologist Bledar Zeneli on @historiaimeklantv for the CLMB
Raise awareness intervention
rtvklan, tv channel*

8. Challenges in Service Provision and Lessons Learned for Improving Preparedness and Crisis Response

Non-public service providers have worked around the clock and demonstrated high flexibility to adjust to new working environment, putting the clients' needs at the centre with all the various limitations linked to lockdown measures placed by the government. Yet, working under the pandemic situation did highlight a number of challenges. Some of these challenges were addressed by the government, such as the new operational protocol for the shelters, but other challenges pointed out important direction of work to further intervene in the system and increase its flexibility for preventing and addressing the domestic violence cases. Other challenges are linked to the limited resources available and needs to upgrade technical skills of the service providers to mobilise adequately in the unusual working environment. Initially service providers were faced with a challenged work context following the earthquake that hit Albania in November 26, 2019 and just few months later marked the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. These situations highlighted the need for a better preparedness and appropriate crisis management and response.

Some of the challenges mentioned by the CSOs related to service provision are:

- Municipal technical groups were not active during the lockdown to discuss and manage the cases of severe risk.
- Shelters did not accept new cases due to the pandemic and travelling restrictions caused service interruption for the second and third shifts, leading to temporary closure of shelters.
- Case referrals to public institutions through phone proved not very effective – due to distant working and an absent culture of remote working.
- Due to the infection risks in detention services, police did not always take the decision that had the best interest of the survivors, as in many cases they left the perpetrators free after the reports for violence and increased risk of living under the same roof with the survivors.
- Though courts remained functional to address emergency cases, such as domestic violence and issuing protection orders, cases were dragged as the legal staff did not feel safe due to the risks of infection.
- Lack of an approved protocol and procedures to address online counselling approach.
- Lack of resources and support from the government for the implementation of the protocol, drafted and approved later in April 2020;
- The online support was another challenge as it requires adequate internet connection and suitable equipment for counselling online.
- Difficulty to establish a trust relationship in distance with new clients, as they feel susceptible by the fact that they are not sure about the confidentiality of the conversation, especially in clients that had an ongoing court procedure.
- A large part of the clients do not have internet access and the counselling sessions are conducted by phone. On the other hand, these sessions could not be properly timed, and clients were constantly showing resistance and it was challenging to go deeper in the counselling.
- Connectivity issues with video calls often lead to loss of focus and results not always effective.
- Some counselling techniques require face to face communication in order to observe also the nonverbal elements of the communication – which was not always possible online and impossible via phone counselling sessions.
- The need for additional resources to mobilize during crises situation – such as additional phones for each shift, particularly relevant for the hotline; funds to mobilize for food and sanitation packages for the clients in need, contingency costs to cover rent costs and provide some financial support. The workload for the counsellors and the staff was quite high.

Online and distance counselling also indicated some positive aspects related to this work approach related to the work with perpetrators, such as:

- Existing clients felt more at ease to participate more frequently in online counselling, illustrated by the higher number of calls received by this category. Forced to stay in isolation they used online counselling to talk about their emotions and the anxiety they are going through as a result of the COVID-19.
- Men find it easier to speak from their comfort zone by eliminating the stress of frequent office attendance for counselling sessions. They were not embarrassed that anyone could notice them entering counselling centres for perpetrators.
- Online counselling schedules were more flexible and fitting best to needs of beneficiaries.
- With existing clients, online counselling resulted to improved counselling relationship due to more frequent communication during this difficult period, and the availability of counsellors helped build trust and thus supporting better their psychological well-being.



*Counselling for men and boys
Jan to Jun 2020- 142 face to face sessions and 54 online sessions on
work with perpetrator and youth counselling on understanding the consequences of domestic violence.
ZDB*

9. Key messages and recommendations

- **For the Government:** It is important to resource and guarantee accessibility to essential services for survivors and survivors of domestic violence during the pandemic period and support safe response and service provisions for survivors of violence by public and non-public providers. Maintain essential services – as shelters and hotlines accessible and operational at all times, while supporting the adoption of these services to crises situations.
- Extend the support services to survivors of domestic violence in other areas of the country ensuring availability and accessibility of services closer to the population.
- Issue public service announcements with the message that violence against women and girls will not be tolerated during the pandemic and perpetrators will face severe consequences.
- Prepare in cooperation with key stakeholders and service providers a national preparedness and response plan for survivors and survivors of domestic violence during crises. Detail steps for adequate financing to mobilize for emergency situations, providing support to CSO service providers and rights-based organizations as well as financial support for the survivors and survivors of domestic violence.
- Build partnerships with the business community to top up the needed support to enable a safe and accessible assistance.
- Build the capacities of public officials and civil society organizations engaged in the prevention and fight against domestic violence and in child protection services – to be able to effectively engage online for case referral, management and support.
- The importance of applying a system approach, to raise awareness of the policy and judiciary institutions to prioritize and correctly address cases of violence against women and girls.
- Consider flexible work approaches the crucial sectors (police, justice system, healthcare) and ensure extend of the support responses in remote and rural areas.
- Community building to identify and refer domestic violence cases, including providing prompt information on the available support services.
- The importance of implementing gender transformative intervention, especially in COVID- 19 period, to keep addressing the rigid gender norms towards a more equal world.
- Support the justice system to address online cases of domestic violence so that there is no interruption of services and further capacitating them on human and gender rights approach.
- Monitor GBV trends and prepare adequate support in cooperation with all key stakeholders.
- Capacitate and empower the local governments to report and address GBV and actively refer these cases to the Coordinated Referral Mechanism (CRM).

For the Civil Society

- Capitalise on best work practices used during the pandemic period and tailor a crises response approach of services ready to be mobilized as needed. Develop further operational plans for online support services and protocols.
- Build solidarity with communities to prevent and address cases of domestic violence, as well as ensure that information on relevant support services is available and accessible through different channels of communication.
- Undertake safety planning with survivors to minimize their safety risk when living with an abusive partner, including emergency options for safe shelter.
- Develop and share tools and resources that have proved to be effectively used during the pandemic and engage in knowledge sharing with other service providers.
- Advocate for equal online use of services available as alternative support.
- Monitor domestic violence trends and prepare adequate support in cooperation with all key stakeholders.