



RESISTIRÉ

Reducing gendered inequalities
caused by COVID-19 policies

Gender-Based Violence during Crises: Risk Assessment, Prevention and Effective Response

**Recommendations to policymakers to mitigate the
gendered impacts of COVID-19 and future crises, based on
RESISTIRÉ findings.**

Political institutions were not prepared for how much gender-based violence was both triggered and exacerbated by the lockdown restrictions and subsequent lifting of restrictions. While some efforts were made to address gender-based violence in the early pandemic policy responses, it is seldom mentioned in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs) and policies that were subsequently drawn up.

Instead, addressing gender-based violence should be a key concern when developing crisis management plans (including prevention, contingency plans, and recovery measures). Policymakers should learn from the COVID-19 crisis in order to design more effective responses to gender-based violence during crisis periods.

> Recommendations

Collect data and assess risks for an effective response and prevention of gender-based violence during crises

- **Multi-sectoral collaboration for risk assessment**

Risk assessment is key in the response to gender-based violence. Risk assessment should build on structured multi-sectoral collaboration rather than be based on individual contacts.

- **Systematic data collection**

Effective prevention measures need to be built on knowledge of the current situation. Accurate data would also make it possible to anticipate possible scenarios and shape policies that prevent the exacerbation of violence.

Include gender-based violence in all crisis management plans

Gender-based violence in **all its forms (including online violence)** should be carefully considered in all crisis management plans (existing and new) and in different types of crises (health, environmental, food, etc.). In the design and implementation of these measures, particular attention should be paid to **groups subjected to gender-based violence who risk being excluded by standardised measures**, such as refugee women, homeless people, and LGBTQI+.

To this end, it must be ensured that **decision-makers and consultative bodies** (task forces, expert committees, etc.) represent the interests and perspectives of women and vulnerable groups and that a **gender-sensitive approach** is consistently present during the policymaking process and the implementation phase.

Organisations working with survivors and all the stakeholders that have longstanding experience in assisting survivors should be involved in this process to ensure effective responses in emergency situations (see [factsheet no. 8](#)).

Ensure the prevention, protection, and prosecution of gender-based violence during crises

- Ensure that access to **support services** for victims is declared **essential** in times of health and other crises.
- Ensure that survivors of gender-based violence are taken into account as **recipients of economic support mechanisms**.
- Ensure that **public services** that can usually help in detecting gender-based violence (healthcare facilities, GPs, schools) continue to function and design protocols for emergency situations.
- Ensure ways of **reporting violent incidents and ways of accessing justice** under safe conditions.

Adopt a coordinated response across different levels

Prevention and crisis management require a coordinated response among different actors: governments, police officers, health workers, social workers, and care workers, together with civil society organisations that run services (including programmes for perpetrators) and local actors that implement policies. To build an effective response, **capacity building, training, adequate human resources, and sufficient funding** should be ensured.

For the response to be sustainable, the people who make up this structure, namely first responders, also need to be cared for in order to minimise the risk of them suffering secondary trauma and burn-out when they are exposed to an increasing workload and a growing number of crisis situations.

> Problem Statement

The measures adopted in the early stages of the pandemic crisis in 2020 regarding gender-based violence proved to be insufficient to tackle both structural needs and emerging issues, such as the difficulties faced by support services in ensuring the continuity and quality of their assistance to victims, the needs of specific groups of people who suffer from gender-based violence, or the increased use of digital services and their implication in this domain (Cibin et al., 2021: 33-34).

Gender-based violence was **almost completely neglected** in the NRRPs (Cibin et al. 2022: 56). For instance, only 8 plans out of 26 consider the domain of gender-based violence. In addition, those countries that did include measures on gender-based violence usually addressed **intimate partner violence**, thus neglecting other forms of violence. Moreover, the focus is limited to **heterosexual relationships**, leaving other victims of gender-based violence, such as LGBTQI+ people, and especially youth, unprotected.

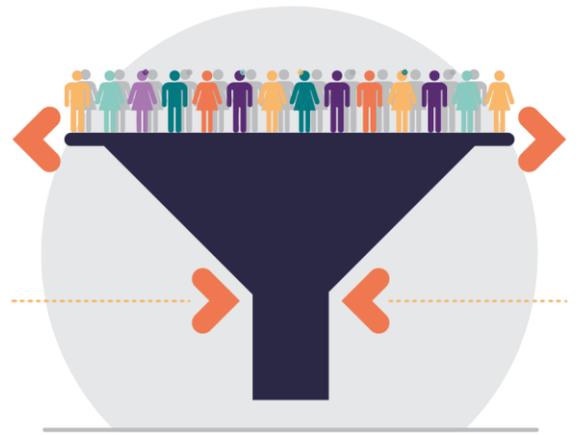


LIMITED TO STANDARDIZED, HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

> Insights from RESISTIRÉ

Difficulties with reporting and early detection

The **isolation and restrictive measures** that were adopted to contain the spread of the virus, together with other factors, made it even more difficult to report violence to the police and reach out to specialised services. Increased **bureaucracy, a lack of information** on the channels for reporting, and the lack of safe ways to report (without the perpetrator knowing) also contributed to the difficulties in reporting violence. Moreover, **limited access to hospitals and healthcare centres** prevented the early detection of gender-based violence and immediate response.



GBV DURING CRISIS

The absence of gender-based violence in crisis management plans

The experts interviewed during the second cycle and participants in the Pan-European workshop highlighted the absence of specific gender-based violence measures in 'crisis management plans'. This problem was confirmed in the RESISTIRÉ policy mappings by the network of national experts. This absence is linked to the **lack of consultation with women's rights organisations and experts in LGBTIQI+ rights, as reported in experts' interviews**. In Hungary, and elsewhere, women's organisations with several years of experience in gender equality and gender-based violence were not given the opportunity to participate directly in the drafting process of the recovery plans.

According to the experts, consultation with NGOs working on gender-based violence is key to developing effective crisis and recovery policies and solutions. Another problem identified is the **lack of data on gender-based violence**, which is an obstacle to designing effective policy responses.



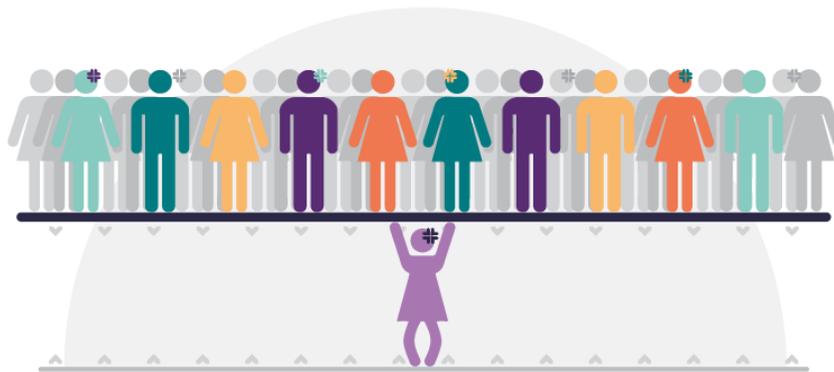
Support services during the crisis: challenges and opportunities

As witnessed during the lockdown, support services organised by civil society organisations played a key role during the crisis. They were often better organised and responded more promptly to emerging needs than governments. However, as RESISTIRÉ's findings show, these organisations faced **difficulties in ensuring the continuity and quality of their assistance** to victims (Cibin et al., 2021: 33-34), both in terms of **funding, available spaces, and human resources**. Moreover, during the lockdown, access to services was not always ensured, as they were not declared essential services in all countries. Beyond difficulties in access, it was reported that services for victims of gender-based violence are usually **standardised** and did not take into account intersectional dimensions of violence.

The increased vulnerability of people working with victims of violence and survivors

During the crisis management process and in the limited number of NRRPs that do address gender-based violence, **insufficient or no budget funding** was allocated to supporting people working with victims and survivors, including first-line responders, despite the considerable increase in their workload during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workers in this field are at a great risk of experiencing **secondary trauma, burn-out, compassion fatigue, exhaustion, or depression**.



SECONDARY TRAUMA

Experts interviewed during the second cycle repeatedly mentioned the need to take care of secondary traumas and to **develop support programmes for human resources** in the field. However, policy measures do not yet include systematic and structural intervention and actions to counter them.

Increased vulnerability of women

The narratives of gender-based violence survivors and supporters revealed three factors that enabled people to leave a violent relationship during the pandemic: being able to **support oneself economically**, having access to **social networks** such as family and community networks, and having access to **professional support**.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and its policy responses have added an extra layer of unease, uncertainty, and intensity for victims of gender-based violence. Being subjected to violence during the pandemic, compared to pre-pandemic times, was described as more 'intense' in RESISTIRÉ second cycle narratives.

The increased isolation, movement restrictions, and lockdowns intensified the use of different types of violence, including physical, psychological, economic, and legal violence. An example is the case of **economic violence**, which harms **not only the primary victim but also secondary victims (e.g., children)**. In the following narrative, the victim's children could not participate fully in online teaching because of the economic violence being perpetrated on their mother:

"I was with a partner during the first wave. I experienced violence, both psychological and physical. He also took my money. He stole from me when he couldn't find a job and didn't have money. He had no money. Only I had the parental allowances. But at that time a lot of money was needed. The children went on online schooling, I had to buy equipment and increase the data [limit]..."

Woman aged 36, Slovakia

Another form of violence present in the narratives is something that can be conceptualised as **legal violence**, which refers to how perpetrators (usually men in heterosexual relationships) use the legal system in order to **obstruct or delay litigation concerning divorce and custody**. This is not, of course, specific to the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic's effects on judicial systems meant that victims of violence were left on hold.

"I've been going through a custody dispute with the father of my child for several years now... The case went to the district court just as Covid was starting and it really took its toll on me and was absolutely horrible... I felt as if I wasn't allowed to be with my child. It felt like I had lost my child. I did not have custody of my child, but I was still trying to do my best to create a normal life for the both of us About half a year later the case then went to the Court of Appeal, where the prior ruling was reversed and I was granted full custody."

Woman aged 37, Iceland

Other **restrictive behaviours**, such as **coercion, surveillance, and control**, also surfaced during the pandemic. Exercising **power over where to live and settle down** during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, turned out to be an ‘effective’ form of surveillance and control, one that could be even more forcibly exercised when combined with the specific pandemic-related movement restrictions. Narratives illustrate how perpetrators (in most cases men in heterosexual relations) used the pandemic as an excuse to control and isolate their female intimate partners even further.

TYPES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



Moreover, despite the fact that no **sexual violence** was recorded in any of the narratives, it is important to stress that the intense and isolating nature of the pandemic seems to have made victims of sexual violence particularly vulnerable. Similarly, experts pointed to an increase in **online violence**, such as the non-consensual sharing of intimate or sexual images and the spread of hate speech based on gender (see [factsheet no. 10](#)).





> Better Stories

Within RESISTIRÉ, we use ‘better stories’, a term borrowed from Dina Georgis to refer to promising practices that identify how a given societal situation can be ameliorated to improve existing practices. This section highlights how some of the issues indicated above have been addressed both during the pandemic and in the NRRPs.

Ensuring access to support services during the pandemic

In several countries, municipalities and service providers designed **innovative ways to reach out to victims and overcome mobility restrictions**. The Ankara Metropolitan Municipality reached out to victims in their own neighbourhoods through **mobile vans**. This initiative made it possible to assist more than 3000 women in 13 districts over the course of 20 months (since April 2020). As stated by the Turkish expert interviewed: ‘the women could not come to us, so we went to them’. A similar initiative was adopted in Germany by the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, which introduced funding opportunities for projects implementing ‘**Mobile teams of counselling centres against domestic and sexual violence, prostitution, [and] human trafficking for sexual abuse during the corona pandemic**’. This involves converting existing services into mobile formats (using mobile teams for outside counselling, walk-and-talk services, and meetings in mobile small buses).



In Ireland, the National Police and Security Service (An Garda Síochána) launched ‘Operation Faoiseamh’. The first phase of the operation took place in April 2020 and aimed to **reach out to survivors of domestic abuse** with a view to ascertaining any existing issues of concern, offering support and reassurance, and ensuring that any issues identified were dealt with swiftly and decisively. The **proactive contact** gave survivors the opportunity to request further assistance from the police. Similar initiatives were adopted by the police in other places as well, such as in the Basque Country in Spain.



Coordinated response and the involvement of civil society organisations

In Ireland, a major campaign across TV, radio, and social media that aimed to reach out to victims of domestic abuse was launched in April 2020. The campaign was based on **collaboration between the government and frontline services** and it sought to reassure victims of domestic abuse that services for them were still available and that victims were being prioritised.



Experts pointed to **cooperation between policymakers and civil society organisations working on gender-based violence in Spain**. For example, the Catalogue of Urgent Measures of the Plan for Improvement and Modernisation against gender-based violence, which was agreed on by the Ministry of Equality and the Ministry of the Interior, was based on consultation with women's organisations.

Addressing structural needs in the NRRPs

- The Croatian recovery plan includes a measure that allocates 50% of the **Guaranteed Minimum Income Benefit (GMIB)** to homeless people, **survivors of violence, and victims of trafficking**, who were accommodated in shelters during the crisis. In Spain, the NRRP envisions the introduction of **work reinsertion programmes** for survivors of gender-based violence, together with a **personalised service of socio-labour orientation for all victims of all forms of violence** against women. The Portuguese NRRP facilitates access to accommodation by **streamlining the management of urgent housing responses for victims of domestic and gender-based violence**.
- The Spanish recovery plan envisions the creation of **centres of integrated 24-hour assistance** for victims of **sexual violence**, which will be located in each province and in autonomic cities (Ceuta and Melilla) and will include in-person, phone, and online assistance.
- The Portuguese and Spanish recovery plans include measures in the **healthcare domain** aimed at the **detection of gender-based violence**.



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- The Croatian plan focuses on establishing **family departments in courts** with specialised judges and licensed lawyers who will provide faster and gender-sensitive legal procedures. It also envisions the use of modern technology to prevent victims from facing their perpetrators during the trial.





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> About RESISTIRÉ

This factsheet is based on data collected within RESISTIRÉ's second research cycle, which ran from 1 December 2021 to 28 February 2022. In this research 31 national researchers worked with the consortium to map policies, societal responses, and qualitative and quantitative indicators relating to the pandemic in EU-27 countries, along with Iceland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey.⁴ This research activity was accompanied by workshops and interviews with gender equality experts whose input informed the main findings from expert consultations.⁵

RESISTIRÉ is an EU-funded Horizon 2020 project the aim of which is to 1) understand the impact of COVID-19 policy responses on behavioural, social and economic inequalities in the EU27, Serbia, Turkey, Iceland, and the UK on the basis of a conceptual gender+ framework, and 2) design, devise and pilot policy solutions and social innovations to be deployed by policymakers, stakeholders and actors in different policy domains.

Find out more about the project at <https://resistire-project.eu>.



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