

## Submission by the Government of Georgia for the report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Violence Against Women

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Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the Government of Georgia continued to pursue and enforce rigorous policies and measures against gender-based and domestic violence. As demonstrated in numerous countries (France, Spain), the COVID-19 crisis constituted to increasing risks of violence against women (VAW) and domestic violence (DV). To mitigate such risks, the Inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence elaborated a Communication Strategy on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Crisis. Together with line ministries, international and national partners, the Inter-Agency Commission was proactively implementing the strategy throughout the crisis.

The strategy and the ongoing communication campaign are, on the one hand, aimed at amplifying intolerance against VAW and DV by deepening knowledge and raising awareness on the matter. On the other hand, they serve to **provide information to domestic violence victims/survivors on alternate ways of reporting violence.**

It should be noted that at no stage of the crisis did Georgia utilize a full lockdown measure. The curfew that was in force from March 31 to May 22 limited the freedom of movement from 09:00 PM to 06:00 AM. However, citizens were able to leave their homes if necessary during the day following recommendations by the World Health Organization and the National Center for Disease Control.

Nevertheless, in a time of the crisis, reporting domestic violence to law enforcement could have been linked to complications for women. **Therefore, throughout the crisis, the state intensively disseminated information on the alternative ways of reporting VAW and DV.** For example, the mobile application 112 (Emergency Services) incorporates chatbox and silent SOS signal options.

Information on alternate ways of reporting violence was disseminated through a **state-wide SMS system - also translated into ethnic minority languages. Additionally, the information posters were displayed in pharmacy (GPC, PSP) and grocery store chains (Carrefour, "Two Steps") across the country.** Along with Georgian, the information was disseminated in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. **Relevant information videos were made for television and social media.**

**Information on state-provided services for VAW and DV survivors was displayed in quarantine hotels for citizens returning to the country.** By June 11, 2020, more than 13,000 citizens returned to the country.

Throughout the crisis, the Ministry of Internal Affairs rapidly responded to VAW and DV cases. Although the number of such reports did not

significantly increase compared to last years' data (see Table 2), **the Ministry took special measures for identifying and responding to domestic violence.** As part of the tailored policy solutions, the police were instructed not to fine persons who violated the curfew to escape domestic violence. Moreover, 112 Georgia - Public Safety Management Center staff were instructed to share this information with all the VAW and DV victims/survivors who reported the cases of violence during the curfew hours.

**Table N2. Data on reporting and responding to VAW and DV cases during the crisis in comparison to the same period of 2019<sup>1</sup>**

	2019	2020
<b>112 Data on Domestic Conflict/Violence</b>		
January	1807	1591
February	1579	1373
March	1668	1594
April	1497	1566
<b>Investigations initiated on the grounds of domestic violence and domestic crime</b>		
January	632	521
February	612	513
March	581	517
April	447	419
<b>Restraining orders issued on the grounds of domestic violence</b>		
January	876	947
February	868	836
March	953	924
April	818	786

**Throughout the crisis, the state continuously provided free services for victims of VAW and DV.** The Agency of State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia) re-structured service models for ten shelters and crisis centers as soon as the crisis began. In order to avert the possible spread of the virus, new models ensure to temporarily place newcomers separately. A special questionnaire has also been elaborated for receiving a new

<sup>1</sup> Information-Analytical Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

beneficiary at the shelter/daycare facility. In addition, some parts of the services are carried out remotely. The personnel is consistently provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).

**Throughout the crisis, emergency assistance and consultation hotlines continued to work non-stop.** Hotline and consultation services were provided through the Public Security Management Center under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia -112, Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking hotline - 116 006, Public Defender's Office hotline - 1481.

It should be noted that **the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking hotline - 116 006 provides citizens with legal, psychological, and social consultations in 8 languages.** Namely, Georgian, English, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Arabic, Farsi, Turkish and Russian languages.

In comparison to the previous year, January, February, and March saw a slight decrease in demand for hotlines, and a slight increase in April (see Table N2 and Table N3).

**Table 3. Data on calls received through the consultation hotline (116) during the crisis in comparison to the same period of 2019**

	2019	2020
<b>Calls received through the consultation hotline (116)</b>		
January	97	133
February	131	135
March	122	108
April	100	110

Despite the crisis, the state continues to combating VAW and DV through **strict policy solutions, rapid response, prevention, state-provided services, and awareness-raising.**