



OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Call for submissions: COVID-19 and the increase of domestic violence
against women

SUBMISSION CONCERNING ITALY

by CHAYN ITALIA ONLUS



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Who we are and our role during the COVID pandemic in Italy

Chayn Italia is a platform that uses open source technologies to **provide women in need with tools, information and support against gender-based violence**. The internet is the first place that many women experiencing domestic violence turn to for information on how to deal with their situation. However, most searches do not lead them to any clear and reliable material. Thanks to Chayn Italia, anyone with an Internet connection can now have direct access to information and practical advice put together by volunteers and experts. The goal is to give women practical tools to regain agency and break the spiral of violence.

Chayn Italia combines knowledge and know-how, makes it freely available online and creates solidarity mechanisms to help women in abusive relationships and their support network too. The service provided by Chayn Italia is in no way meant to replace individual in-person assistance. Rather, our goal is to provide accurate and immediate advice and guidance to women in need. To this end, Chayn's work is in line with and linked to that of the many domestic violence prevention centres, and our website hosts a section where you can find an up-to-date map of the centres and useful services available in Italy.

The Chayn project was born in Pakistan in May 2013 – Chayn means “**comfort**” in Urdu. Today, it counts 130 volunteers in 13 different countries. There are currently three other Chayn platforms beyond Italy: Chayn HQ, Chayn Pakistan and Chayn India.

Chayn Italia came into being in September 2015, thanks to the work of over 50 volunteers. The platform was born out of digital and in-person collaborations between volunteers living abroad and others active in Italy. We are intersectional feminists with different skills: researchers, designers, social workers in domestic violence prevention centres, teachers, lawyers, graphic designers, web developers, communication experts and illustrators. Therefore, the project functions as a meeting point for a generation of women keen to contribute to social change and tackle gender issues in Italy, either through their presence on the national territory or abroad. We are constantly expanding our skill set based on the specific and dynamic areas of expertise of our volunteers. Chayn Italia is therefore a **feminist tech project in continuous evolution**.

Importantly, we want to help spread the good practices already in place, not to reinvent them. As such, we collaborate with domestic violence prevention centers, women care professionals, and whoever works in the field of domestic violence prevention and control in Italy.

During the **COVID-19 pandemic**, we at **Chayn Italia** felt that, as a **digital platform**, we had an **important role to play** in a time where the digital sphere was substituting most daily activities and interactions in society. Importantly, with restrictive measures forcing many women experiencing domestic abuse to stay in the precise place that posed the greatest threat, ie the home, we immediately activated all our resources to spread accurate information in a timely manner on where and how to find help. We started a campaign called **#inretenonseiola** (**#onlineyouarenotalone**). As part of this campaign, to collect and share truly accurate information on where to find help, we carried out a series of phone **interviews with social workers and women's shelter operators** to ensure we were receiving information from the grassroots level. We also created an online questionnaire to receive information from whomever was able and willing to provide it online.¹ We published brief practical articles on how to carry out video calls in a simple and secure manner,² and provided a list of feminist resources geared at enhancing women's awareness and well-being during lockdown.³ Our volunteers put together a **Guide on Neighbourhood Solidarity**, where we recognised the fundamental importance of community solidarity in times of social isolation and recommended practical steps to follow in case of becoming aware of a woman in the building or neighbourhood experiencing abuse.⁴

Preliminary picture: domestic violence and gender-based violence in Italy

The health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has had, as in the rest of the world, an undeniable impact on the situation of domestic violence and gender-based violence (GBV) in Italy and on the abilities of dedicated organisations to carry out their work. However, these impacts (and the information provided in this submission) must be read within the overall **socio-cultural context and pre-existing trends** surrounding domestic violence and GBV in Italy. Indeed, following a troubled history of grave gender inequality in law and in practice, the Italian reality is still largely characterised by deeply entrenched traditional views on gender roles that continue to cause and/or perpetuate negative (if not pejorative) trends in sexual and gender-based violence. We provide a brief preliminary look here at some official data on the occurrence of these forms of violence in Italy and at where Italy ranks in the regional and global pictures in terms of gender equality.

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<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdVvAQyIU4efUN94ROKvWdhAglGZ5cGpNY7rj5d1eZm6DM8OQ/viewform>

2

https://medium.com/chayn-italia/come-fare-videochiamate-in-modo-semplice-e-affidabile-291fd307b660?source=collection_home---4-----4-----

³ <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qpRQXG0hWGGPyKfDLUGsIZrxqvxX6HxITuTmx6P6LEw/edit#gid=0>.

⁴ <https://chaynitalia.org/guida-alla-solidarieta-di-vicinato/>.

Data published by the EURES Database of Wilful Homicides in Italy (EURES)⁵ on 20 November 2019 entitled '*Femicide and gender-based violence in Italy*',⁶ revealed a consistently troubling picture of violence on the rise compared to the previous year. According to the data recorded in this Report, in Italy a woman is killed every three days and a woman experiences some form of violence every 15 minutes. In 2018, 142 women were killed (+0,7% compared to 2017), of which 119 homicides occurred within the family (+6,3%) and 102 homicides occurred in the first months of 2019. EURES reports that "never has there been such a high percentage of female victims (40,3%)" of wilful homicides, and that jealousy and possession are still the main drivers of this group of crimes. EURES also recorded an increase in criminal complaints for sexual violence (+5,4%), stalking (+4,4%) and abuse in the family (+11,7%).

Around the same time, on 25 November 2019, the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) published a report entitled '*Stereotypes on Gender Roles and the Social Image of Sexual Violence*'.⁷ These results are important to understanding the socio-cultural dynamics that underlie, and are largely the cause of, the numbers seen in the preceding paragraph. One in four individuals (men and women) says they are convinced that violence depends on the behaviour of women. Specifically in relation to sexual violence, there is a widely held opinion that this offence is determined by how women dress and in general (just under 40%) it is thought that it is always possible, if one wants, to subtract oneself from a sexual aggression. 15% of those interviewed believe that if the woman had alcohol she is responsible for the violence she suffers. Moreover, 10% believe that criminal complaints are mostly false and 7,2% believe that, even when women refuse sexual intercourse, their behaviour actually implies acceptance thereof. Finally, a troubling 7,4% are of the opinion that it is acceptable for a boyfriend to slap his girlfriend "for having flirted with someone else" and 17,7% considers it normal for a man to check his girlfriend's phone or social media accounts.

When it comes to **sexual and reproductive health and rights**, according to data collected by the Ministry of Health in 2018,⁸ Italy has a high number of conscientious objectors (*obiettori di coscienza*), who are protected under Article 9 of Law no. 194 of 22 May 1978 on maternity and voluntary interruptions of pregnancy ("Law 194").⁹ The Ministry recorded that in 2017 objectors constituted 68.4% of gynecologists, 45.6% of anesthesiologists and 38.9% of non-medical staff. Differing approaches to abortion and other reproductive health issues among the Regions across the country has been found to

⁵ <https://www.eures.it/> (accessed 20 June 2020).

⁶ <https://www.eures.it/sintesi-femminicidio-e-violenza-di-genere-in-italia/> (accessed 13 June 2020). The full report can be obtained upon request with ufficiostampa@eures.it.

⁷ <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2019/11/Report-stereotipi-di-genere.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2020).

⁸ http://www.salute.gov.it/imgs/C_17_pubblicazioni_2807_allegato.pdf (accessed 27 June 2020).

⁹ <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:1978-05-22:194> (accessed 27 June 2020).

lead to “medical tourism” (or “abortion tourism”) within the country and abroad, with women seeking out Regions of the country with a greater openness to providing the services they need.¹⁰ The European Committee on Social Rights of the Council of Europe has pronounced itself on two occasions on the high number of conscientious objectors in Italy and its impact on women’s access to abortion services, providing a detailed picture of the situation surrounding abortion in Italy. First, in *International Planned Parenthood Federation - European Network (IPPF EN) v. Italy* (Complaint No. 87/2012), the Committee found on 10 September 2013 that Italy had violated Article 11(1) of the European Social Charter *inter alia* for having failed to ensure an effective implementation of Law 194, failure that resulted in women facing “substantial difficulties” in accessing abortion services in practice.¹¹ Later, in *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL) v. Italy* (Complaint No. 91/2013), the Committee on 12 October 2015 found Italy once again to be in violation of Article 11 of the European Social Charter as the shortcomings described in the IPPF case remained “unremedied”.¹²

From a broader international perspective, according to an update of its Gender Equality Index¹³ published in late 2019 by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), which monitors the progress of the European Union (EU) countries in terms of gender equality, while some progress was considered as being made on gender equality in Italy, the country ranked 14th in the EU, its score (63.0 out of 100) 4.4 points lower than the EU’s score.¹⁴ Notably, Italy has the highest score of all EU Member States in terms of gender equality in the domain of health, but the lowest score in the domain of work.

According to the UN Women Global Database on Violence against Women, in Italy 19% of women experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their lifetimes, and 6% has experienced such violence in the last 12 months.

Key dates in the Italian COVID-19 timeline

- **30 January 2020:** World Health Organization (WHO) declares a global state of emergency.
- **21 February 2020:** First cases registered in Italy (in the Lombardy region).

¹⁰

<https://www.dire.it/22-05-2020/463927-durante-il-lockdown-su-aborto-no-info-e-stop-farmacologico-le-attiviste-boom-di-richieste-di-aiuto/> (accessed 27 June 2020);

<https://www.linkiesta.it/2020/01/campus-biomedico-aborto-crimine/> (accessed 20 June 2020).

¹¹ [https://hudoc.esc.coe.int/eng#f{%22ESCDIdentifier%22:\[%22cc-87-2012-dmerits-en%22\]}](https://hudoc.esc.coe.int/eng#f{%22ESCDIdentifier%22:[%22cc-87-2012-dmerits-en%22]}) (accessed 28 June 2020).

¹² <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168063ecd7> (accessed 20 June 2020).

¹³ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/compare-countries> (accessed 26 June 2020).

¹⁴ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/IT> (accessed 26 June 2020).

- **4 March 2020:** The Italian government shuts all schools and universities in Italy until 15 March.
- **8 March 2020:** The Italian government orders lockdown in Lombardy and 14 other provinces in the North of Italy (which become a so-called “red zone”) through the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM) of 8 March 2020.
- **9 March 2020:** Lockdown extended to the whole national territory pursuant to the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM) of 9 March 2020. Beginning of the *#iorestoacasa* (*#imstayinghome*) campaign. It is possible to leave the house only for reasons of (i) necessity, (ii) work, (iii) health.
- **11 March 2020:** The WHO declares a global pandemic.
- **17 March 2020:** The Italian government issues the “Cure Italy Decree” (*Decreto Cura Italia* n. 18/2020 converted into Law n. 27/2020) with measures to deal with the widespread effects of COVID-19 in the country.
- **4 May 2020:** Beginning of the so-called “Phase 2 in Italy”: Reopenings begin in Italy, subject to social distancing obligations.

Data and information underlying the answers provided in this submission

The information provided in the answers below was retrieved from the following sources:

- **Direct information based on our daily work.** Part of our volunteer base is made up of social workers working in women’s shelters and women's shelters or carry out other work in direct contact with social workers assisting women experiencing abuse, ensuring Chayn Italia is constantly up to date with the reality on the ground.
- **Interviews carried out with social workers and women’s shelter operators across the country:** eleven interviews, during the month of March and April 2020.
- **Answers received from our online questionnaire.**¹⁵ four.
- **Publicly accessible sources available in Italian,** including:

¹⁵

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdVvAQyIU4efUN94ROKvWdhAglGZ5cGpNY7rj5d1eZm6DM8OQ/viewform>.

- Legislation, regulations, orders and circulars issued at institutional level during the emergency response period;
- Information from official government websites;
- Reports by and information from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), associations and other women's rights organisations working in Italy;
- Surveys and projects carried out by renowned research groups and institutions in Italy;
- Open source news articles, blogs and opinions.

Disclaimer

Please note that the information provided in this submission is, to the best of our knowledge, accurate. However, we do not assume any responsibility for the accuracy or veracity of the information and data reported herein. Any translations provided are, unless indicated otherwise, unofficial courtesy translations.

We thank you for issuing this call for submissions and taking the time to consider the information we have collected and collated in the pages that follow concerning the situation of domestic and gender-based violence in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Question 1. Level of increase of violence against women

To what extent has there been an increase of violence against women, especially domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns? Please provide all available data on the increase of violence against women, including domestic violence and femicides, registered during the COVID-19 crisis.

According to data retrieved from D.i.Re, the prime Italian network of independent women's shelters¹⁶, one can see the trends of increase of violence against women by dividing the lockdown period in two periods: the first, from **2 March to 5 April 2020**, and the second from **6 April to 3 May 2020**.¹⁷

- 2 March - 5 April 2020

Between 2 March and 5 April 2020 the total number of women who reached out to the shelters was **2.983**, of which 836 (**28%**) were contacting the shelters for the first time. The remaining 2147 women had already been in touch with professionals working in the shelters belonging to the D.i.Re. network (shelters which average 36 women per structure). D.i.Re's previous survey (in 2018) found that 19.715 women had sought help during that year (with an average of 1.643 support requests per month), among which 15.456 (**78%**) were women seeking help for the first time.¹⁸

D.i.Re. summed up that the data collected during the first month of lockdown revealed that:

- Compared to "usual" contacts (ie pre-lockdown), in this period **more than 1.300 additional women sought help** from a women's shelter of the D.i.Re network.
- **In 2018 women who sought help for the first time were 78% of the total amount; during the lockdown they represented instead only 28%.**
- The women who requested hospitality made up 5% of the overall number of women who requested help.

¹⁶ The national association D.i.Re "*Donne in Rete contro la violenza*", founded in 2008, is the first association that unites the network of non-institutional women's shelters, managed by women's associations. Their aim is combating male violence against women, taking into account the perspective of gender differences, finding the causes of such violence to lie in the historical, but still vivid disparity of power between men and women, in their different life circumstances. The association is made up of 80 women's rights organizations, managing 111 anti-violence centers, 90 shelters and 108 info points distributed in 18 Italian regions.

¹⁷ https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Scheda_11-mag_Monotoraggio-contatti-DiRe-Covid19.pdf (accessed 25 June 2020).

¹⁸ https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Scheda_11-mag_Monotoraggio-contatti-DiRe-Covid19.pdf (accessed 25 June 2020).

- The **women who called via the national helpline 1522 were only 3%** of the total.
- 6 April - 3 May 2020

Between 6 April and 3 May 2020, the number of contacts changed. D.i.Re's shelters were contacted by **2.956** women, of which only 979 (33%) were "new" women. The remaining 1.977 had already been in touch with the women's shelters.

D.i.Re. summed up that the data collected during the second month of lockdown revealed that:

- Compared to "usual" contacts, **in this period more than 1.300 additional women sought help** to a women's shelter of D.i.Re's network.
- In 2018 **women who sought help for the 1st time** were 78% of the total amount; **during the lockdown they represented only 33%**.
- The women who requested hospitality are 6%.
- The **women who called via the national helpline 1522 were only 4.6%**.

Comparing the two lockdown periods, D.i.Re. revealed how things evolved over time during the lockdown:

- **The number of women seeking help for the first time increased**, passing from 836 contacts between 2 March and 5 April to 979 between 6 April and 3 May. There was thus an increase of 143 units (17%);
- **The number of women already assisted by a shelter slightly decreased** and passed from 2.147 units between 2 March and 5 April to 1.977 between 6 April and 3 May (170 less interventions, representing a decrease of 8%).
- **On the whole, the data remains consistent over the two month period**: between 2 March and 5 April the total number of requests were 2.983; between 6 April and 3 May, the requests were 2.956, only 27 less.
- In 2018 **women seeking help for the first time were 78%**; **between 2 March and 3 May 2020 they were only 30% of all requests.**

→ The women who **asked for hospitality** were **5,6%**.

→ The women who **called via the national helpline 1522** were **only around 4%**.

Most notably, comparing the number of requests received in the “deep” lockdown period (between 6 April and 3 May), i.e. 2.956 contacts, with the average number of requests received in one month of 2018, i.e. 1.643 contacts, we can see **an increase of 79,9%**.

Question 2. Availability of helplines and increase in number of calls

Are helplines run by Government and/or civil society available? Has there been an increase in the number of calls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In Italy it is possible to call the helpline 1522 (also called “*Telefono Rosa*”), a public service of the Council Presidency - Equal Opportunities Department, active 24 hours a day, or in chat, which hides the answers for safety purposes. During the lockdown, the trend of calls suffered an initial decrease in the 1st phase, but then in the following period there has been an important surge in calls to the helpline. In fact, if in the first phase of the lockdown both anti-violence centers and women had to reorganize their response to violence, in the second phase, the trend began to increase again.

As we can see from the data of the “*Telefono Rosa*”, compared to the same period last year, the calls made to this helpline **in the first two weeks of March decreased by 55.1%** (from 1,104 to 496): of these, victims of violence who called the helpline were 101 with a decrease of 47.7%. The number of calls from stalking victims had practically collapsed: last year there were 33, this year only 7 with a decrease of 78.8%¹⁹.

Subsequently, data recorded a surge in calls to the helpline. According to the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), **calls made to the helpline 1522 increased by 73%** in the overall period between 1 March and 16 April, compared to the same timeframe in 2019. In this period a number of 2.013 (+59%) women sought help.²⁰ This trend of increase was also recorded by NGOs across different regions in over 228 shelters.²¹

Question 3. Exemption from restrictive measures for women experiencing abuse

¹⁹ <https://www.telefonorosa.it/> (accessed 26 June 2020).

²⁰ https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/05/Stat-today_Chiamate-numero-antiviolenza.pdf (accessed 22 June 2020).

²¹ <https://actionaid.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GBV-during-COVID-19-Pandemic-Report.pdf> (accessed 26 June 2020).

Can women victims of domestic violence be exempted from restrictive measures to stay at home in isolation if they face domestic violence?

The issue of exemptions from restrictive measures for victims of domestic violence was not dealt with in the relevant pieces of legislation that provided for these measures. The only express exemptions from the restrictive measures were (i) health reasons, (ii) proven work reasons or (iii) situations of “necessity” (Article 1, para. 1, lett. a) of the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM) of 8 March 2020²², then extended to the whole territory of Italy under DPCM of 9 March 2020²³). Violating these provisions was deemed to constitute a criminal offense.

However, official statements by members of the government made clear that a woman experiencing violence or abuse would be exempt from these rules. In a leaflet published by the Department of Equal Opportunities, it was expressly stated that the restrictive measures “do not mean that women victims of violence must feel imprisoned in their homes. We remind them that it is possible to leave one’s home, other than for work or health reasons, also for reasons of NECESSITY, such as living in a situation of extreme danger in the home.”²⁴ This was confirmed by the Minister of Equal Opportunities Elena Bonetti.²⁵ It is worth noting that, considering that violating the restrictive measures was made a criminal offense, “necessity” is also a ground of justification excluding liability for a criminal offense provided the required conditions are met for the ground to be invoked (Article 54 of the Italian Criminal Code).

While some doubts were raised as to how this would work in practice (e.g. how would a woman prove that she was violating the restrictive measures for reasons of abuse?),²⁶ technically these official statements made clear that a woman experiencing abuse could leave her home to seek help.

Question 4. Functioning and operation of women’s shelters

Are shelters open and available? Are there any alternatives to shelters available if they are closed or without sufficient capacity?

Yes, anti violence centers (*centri-anti violenza* or CAV) in Italy have been open and operational during the pandemic.

²² <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/08/20A01522/sg> (accessed 25 March 2020).

²³ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/09/20A01558/sg> (accessed 25 March 2020).

²⁴ <https://ordinefarmacisti.torino.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/122.2020-e-allegati.pdf> (accessed 12 June 2020).

²⁵ https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/03/21/news/elena_bonetti_se_subite_violenza_chiedete_aiuto_andate_a_centro_antiviolenza_e_nessuno_vi_multera_-251867069/ (accessed 15 June 2020).

²⁶ <http://www.salvisjuribus.it/denunciare-i-maltrattamenti-anche-ai-tempi-del-coronavirus/> (accessed 13 June 2020).

The VIVA project (Project on Monitoring, Evaluating and Analysing Actions to Prevent and Fight Violence against Women) developed a full research on this matter.²⁷ Its survey '*women's shelters at the time of coronavirus*' aimed at mapping women's shelters active in Italy and continued until 4 May 2020.²⁸ The survey involved 335 women's shelters that had already participated in the survey carried out in 2018 (referring to 2017), 253 of which were surveyed by ISTAT as they adhere to the requirements of the State-Regions Agreement and therefore are accredited by the Regions, and 82 of which were identified by the National Council of Research (*Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* or CNR). Among these, 7 have reported that they have ceased their activities in the meantime. Among the others, 228 replied to the questionnaire '*women's shelters at the time of the coronavirus*' (coverage rate of 69%).

According to the survey, during the period of the health emergency linked to the COVID-19 epidemic, women's shelters worked predominantly remotely and were accessible only in special cases (57%): 32% of the centres, in fact, were not open to the public and worked remotely, while only 5.7% stated that they remained physically accessible to women just as before the health emergency.

In the centres that guaranteed continued access to women, the operators adopted various measures (often more than one) to deal with the emergency and protect their health and that of women. In particular, in 62% of the centres protective masks were used, in 57% of the centres disposable gloves were also available and in 36% environments were sanitised. Only 3% said they were unable to take any of the previous measures.

Many centres (78%) reported a decrease in the number of new contacts following the introduction of restrictive measures, while only a few (18%) reported no change. The decrease appears particularly critical, since the number of new contacts has decreased by about half: while before the emergency each centre had an average of 5.4 new contacts per week, during the emergency period they fell to 2.8 per centre.

With regard to relations with women who had already started a path out of violence before the health emergency, 38% of the centres stated that they had decreased, 20% that they had increased, while 42% of the centres stated that they had remained unchanged.

Measures to contain and combat COVID-19 have led to greater difficulties in managing the daily work of the centres in relation to the Anti-Violence Territorial Network and other territorial services. Despite these difficulties, however, about half of the women's shelters state that they have not experienced any

²⁷ <https://viva.cnr.it/covid19/> (accessed 26 June 2020).

²⁸ <https://viva.cnr.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/viva-pb-cav-covid19.pdf> (accessed 26 June 2020).

change in the intensity of their relations with municipal social services, law enforcement agencies and police headquarters.

Compared to the other specialised support services for women victims of violence, relations have increased or remained at most unchanged: 21% of the centres claim to have strengthened relations with the other women's shelters and 22% with the hospitality structures, while they remained unchanged for 59% and 50% of the centres respectively.

On the other hand, the relationship with hospitals (53%) and with ordinary courts (53%) and juvenile courts (48%), which have suspended their activities, has been significantly reduced or even interrupted. Currently, Viva Project researchers are engaged in the elaboration and statistical analysis of the collected data. The results will soon be made public through a Policy Brief available on the Viva Project website and disseminated within the scientific community and among the operators.

The data we retrieved through our campaign #inretenonseiola generally confirms these trends, in sum that the women's shelters were experiencing real difficulties but adopting every available measure to continue to assist women.

Question 5. Availability and accessibility of protection orders

Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Protection orders in Italy ("*ordini di protezione*") can consist of either civil measures or criminal measures.

Under the Italian Civil Code (Art 342-bis and 342-ter), a person can request a judge to issue a protection order (so-called "*ordini di protezione contro gli abusi familiari*" or "protection orders against family abuse") when the conduct of their spouse or other cohabitant (some form of current or former cohabitation is necessary) causes grave harm to the physical or moral integrity of the person or to their freedom. These civil measures will thereafter be referred to as "civil protection orders". The protection order can consist of:

- An order to cease and desist the behaviour and leave the common home for a time period determined by the judge (this can include an order for the person not to come near places that are habitually frequented by the requesting party); as well as

- An order for the social services or a family mediation center or women's shelter to intervene; and/or
- The periodic payment of an amount for necessities of the requesting person arising as a result of the order to leave the common home.

The request for a protection order is usually followed by a hearing of the parties, where the judge decides whether to grant the order. However, under Article 736-bis of the Italian Code of Civil Procedure, the judicial authority can in urgent cases issue a civil protection order *inaudita altera parte*, after having gained some summary information, and postpone the hearing of the parties following the immediate application of the protective measure. However, in practice this expedited procedure is only "marginally" applied, with the "ordinary" procedure being adopted more often than not.²⁹

Under the Italian Criminal Procedure Code, there are different measures that can be requested to ensure a timely response to abusive behaviour. These include obligatory arrest "in the act" (*arresto obbligatorio in flagranza*, Article 380 of the Italian Code of Criminal Procedure), specific precautionary measures (Article 282-*bis* of the Italian Code of Criminal Procedure), as well as the criminal version of protection orders, namely an urgent removal order from the family home (*ordine di allontanamento urgente dall'abitazione familiare*, Article 384-*bis* of the Italian Code of Criminal Procedure). The latter criminal protection order will thereafter be referred to as a "criminal removal order".

The idea behind both the civil and criminal protection orders is that the woman leaving the family home should be a residual solution, and the focus should rather be on distancing the abuser.

During the pandemic, especially following repeated calls by organisations, activists and social workers, the government and its institutions did take certain steps to ensure, at least on a formal level, the continued accessibility and availability of both civil and criminal protection orders.

In response to the pandemic, **Law Decree no. 11 of 8 March 2020**³⁰ ordered the suspension and adjournment of all civil and criminal judicial activities and hearings (from 9 March to 15 April). However, it provided for several exceptions to this suspension at Article 2, para. 2, lett. g) of the Law Decree. One exception to such suspension was "proceedings for the adoption of protection orders against family abuse". This list of exceptions was an open-ended list that extended to "all proceedings which delayed continuation can produce grave prejudice for the parties". In the latter case, the head of the judicial office

²⁹

http://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/18/SommComm/0/1145930/index.html?part=doc_dc-sedetit_edrpsppecldvdpdadmdcdc19.

³⁰ https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/stampa/serie_generale/originario (accessed 12 June 2020).

(*capo dell'ufficio giudiziario*), his delegate or the proceeding judge would have to declare the proceeding as urgent.

It is worth noting that these exceptions from the suspension of proceedings initially did not include the criminal urgent removal orders from the family home (Article 384-*bis* of the Italian Code of Criminal Procedure), which therefore, according to a literal interpretation of the Law Decree, were suspended like most other proceedings. This lacuna was criticized by the Parliamentary Commission on Femicide in its Report cited in the following paragraphs.³¹

Thanks to the proposal for amendment submitted by the Commission, criminal urgent removal orders were excluded, together with the civil orders already excluded in the preceding Law Decree, from the suspension of proceedings provision under **Law Decree no. 18 of 17 March 2020**³² (so-called the "Decreto Cura Italia" or "Cure Italy Decree") specifically under Article 83, para. 3, lett. b). The time period of suspension was further extended until 11 May 2020 under **Law Decree no. 23 of 8 April 2020**³³ (Article 36). The courts' activities are momentarily still blocked, with some talk around a possible reopening on 30 June 2020.

On 26 March 2020, the Parliamentary Commission on Femicide and All Forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) issued a Report entitled '*Measures to respond to the problems of victims of violence, of women's shelters, of shelters and of anti-violence sportelli in the emergency epidemiological situation of Covid-19*'.³⁴ In this Report the Commission, among others:

- recognised the risk that GBV could further increase during the health emergency and that isolation, forced cohabitation, restriction of movements and socio-economic instability carried a risk of greater exposure to domestic violence.
- recognised a decline in the number of criminal complaints for abuse (from no. 1157 complaints for so-called "family abuse" during the first 11 days of March 2019 to no. 652 complaints in the same period this year)³⁵ and a concomitant decline in police interventions. This decrease was

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http://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/18/SommComm/0/1145930/index.html?part=doc_dc-sedetit_edrpsppecl_vdnpdadmcdc19 (accessed 24 June 2020).

³² <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/17/20G00034/sg> (accessed 12 June 2020).

³³ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/gu/2020/04/08/94/sg/pdf> (accessed 12 June 2020).

³⁴

http://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/18/SommComm/0/1145930/index.html?part=doc_dc-sedetit_edrpsppecl_vdnpdadmcdc19 (accessed 24 June 2020).

³⁵ See also: In March, the Adjunct Prosecutor of Milan Maria Letizia Mannella stated that at the beginning of the COVID epidemic there was a decrease in criminal complaints for violence and abuse, from which she drew the conclusion that women were at the time discouraged from calling or going personally to the police to report the conduct:

interpreted as evidence not that cases of violence against women were diminishing but that women's exposure to controlling and aggressive behaviour by their abusive partners was increasing.

- urged Parliament and Government to implement measures and dedicate additional resources as well as adopt more speedy procedures to ensure the protection and support of these women.
- requested that the "rigorous application" of civil and criminal protection measures be ensured. More specifically, the Commission:
 - encouraged the use of the expedited procedure for civil protection orders under Article 736-*bis* of the Italian Code of Civil Procedure.
 - underlined the need to ensure the application of control through electronic devices or other technologies also to individuals subject to protection orders.
 - Requested that proceedings for criminal removal orders be excluded from the proceedings ordered under Law Decree no. 18 of 17 March 2020 ³⁶.

In issuing the Report the Commission also contacted the Head of Policy to indicate a series of possible measures which the policy could adopt to fight domestic violence in this unique period.

Moreover, on 27 March 2020 the Minister of Internal Affairs, Department of Public Security, issued Circular no. MI-123-U-C-3-2-2020-25, signed by Director General of Public Security F. Gabrielli, concerning '*Gender-based violence and domestic violence. Actions of sensitization*'.³⁷ In it the Director General among others guaranteed that the police were continuing to ensure daily "all necessary interventions to protect persons that experience domestic violence", even if with necessary adjustments considering the health risks.

Beyond the legal provisions and institutional commitments made, it is important to consider the concrete reality on the ground surrounding the manner and extent to which these measures are being used and implemented in practice.

https://www.ansa.it/lombardia/notizie/2020/03/13/procuratricedonne-non-in-luoghi-isolati_59c570a8-776a-4b01-b0d7-eb48ccb42afe.html (accessed 13 June 2020).

³⁶ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/17/20G00034/sg> (accessed 12 June 2020).

³⁷ <https://www.1522.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Circolare-violenza-di-genere-e-domestica-2020-03-27.pdf.pdf> (accessed 22 June 2020).

On the one hand, many have reported that the expedited processes for civil protection orders and criminal removal orders, continuing a trend already registered in pre-pandemic times, have **remained largely underexploited during the COVID-19 period**. The Superior Council of the Magistrature (*Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura*) confirmed this in an important report issued on 4 June 2020 entitled "*Results of the monitoring carried out by the Group of work on the application of the 'Guidelines on dealing with proceedings concerning the crimes of gender-based and domestic violence' in the relevant judicial offices during the health emergency period*",³⁸ where it illustrated the results of a survey conducted in 70 Prosecutors' offices across Italy. The Council found that the criminal removal order was applied "very little" across the country. Some offices cited - among others - a lack of clarity around whether the confirmation hearings for such removal orders were among the hearings suspended by the relevant Law Decrees, logistical difficulties in carrying out such hearings safely, as well as complications in finding an alternative domicile for the abuser as contributing factors to this trend.

During the interviews carried out during our campaign **#inretenonseiola**, women's shelter operators reported significant delays in the judicial process, especially when it came to the granting of protection orders.

In this article published on 7 April 2020 in *Giustizia Insieme*,³⁹ Teresa Menante a criminal lawyer and head of the Associazione Differenza Donna, writes that **failure to use immediate orders and expedited procedures** during the pandemic has put women at real risk of harm, as in the ordinary procedure the abuser receives a notification of the hearing, thus creating the risk of retaliatory conduct against the complainant. Menante reported the case of a woman who, following her request for a protection order, was attacked by her abuser on 11 March 2020 while she was waiting for the hearing to be scheduled for her protection order. The police intervened and stopped the attack only after her son and the women's shelter notified them.

Moreover, immediate removal orders are often not used, as Menante also writes, because the situations of **abuse are not considered "serious enough"**.⁴⁰ Indeed, any formal measures taken by the institutions have to be contextualised within the specific reality of domestic violence and GBV in Italy, which as we mentioned in our introduction, is clouded in taboos and prejudices. Menante reported the

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<https://www.csm.it/documents/21768/41479/Linee+guida+in+tema+di+trattazione+di+procedimenti+relativi+a+reati+di+violenza+di+genere+e+domestica/f515cee5-3ca5-36ba-3b3c-8d06f4a94a75> (accessed 21 June 2020).

³⁹

<https://www.giustiziainsieme.it/it/diritto-dell-emergenza-covid-19/981-la-violenza-nei-confronti-delle-donne-durant-e-l-emergenza-sanitaria?hitcount=0> (accessed 22 June 2020).

⁴⁰

<https://www.giustiziainsieme.it/it/diritto-dell-emergenza-covid-19/981-la-violenza-nei-confronti-delle-donne-durant-e-l-emergenza-sanitaria?hitcount=0> (accessed 22 June 2020).

case of a woman for whom the prosecutor did not authorize an urgent criminal removal order despite the woman presenting injuries, injuries which were determined by a medical practitioner to be curable in 10 days. The woman had to leave her home and stay with her parents with her minor children since, due to the pandemic, she was not able to find an immediate place in a shelter.

Question 6. Impacts on women's access to justice

What are the impacts on women's access to justice? Are courts open and providing protection and decisions in cases of domestic violence?

The almost complete suspension of civil and criminal proceedings and closure of the Italian courts ordered during the pandemic (see Question 5. above) inevitably restricted, or at least postponed, most people's access to justice, including women. Court officials and lawyers alike have reported an almost complete paralysis of the Italian justice system during this period,⁴¹ with only some hearings proceeding remotely via video. At the time of writing this submission, many courts are still not fully operational even though the period of suspension of proceedings envisioned in Law Decree no. 18 of 17 March 2020 officially ended on 11 May.

As mentioned above in Question 5., certain exceptions were made to these suspensions. Law Decree no. 18 of 17 March 2020⁴² for instance contained a fairly extensive list of exceptions under Article 83, para. 3. These exceptions included proceedings concerning the urgent protection of fundamental human rights (including precautionary measures); proceedings concerning the protection of minors, maintenance orders and other familial obligations where there is a prejudice to the protection of essential needs; not to mention the civil and criminal protection orders exceptions discussed under Question 5.

However, despite these exceptions to suspension, the reality on the ground in terms of access to justice for women experiencing gender-based and domestic violence was far from a normal continuation of things.

First of all, the exceptions only concerned urgent measures and proceedings, and therefore **the vast majority of hearings** in cases concerning various offences - including sexual offences and domestic abuse - as well as other civil proceedings involving women, that did not fall within these 'urgent' exceptions, **were postponed.**

⁴¹ This video purportedly represents the situation of courts in Italy from the lawyers' perspective, put together by the "Organismo Congressuale Forense": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qG_8plQEfw0

⁴² <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/17/20G00034/sg> (accessed 12 June 2020).

Second, as hinted above in Question 5., **criminal complaints decreased** as women evidently struggled even more than usual, due to the restrictive measures in force, to emerge from their abusive relationship or living situation and reach out to the authorities for assistance.⁴³ The Superior Council of the Magistrature (*Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura*) confirmed the decline in criminal complaints in its report "*Results of the monitoring carried out by the Group of work on the application of the 'Guidelines on dealing with proceedings concerning the crimes of gender-based and domestic violence' in the relevant judicial offices during the health emergency period*",⁴⁴ in which it also recommended best practices based on its findings. The Council found that a decline in criminal complaints was recorded "in all Prosecutor's offices" which it contacted (around 70). The survey recorded a decline of criminal complaints of an average of 50%. A public prosecutor Gabriella Viglione wrote that her office had registered a dramatic 80% drop in criminal reports (*notizie di reato*) of GBV.⁴⁵ The Council found that this decline was in part due to the difficulty experienced by lawyers and anti-violence centers of finding "flexible" points of contact within the Prosecutors' offices so as to enable them to deposit complaints in a timely manner despite the restrictive measures in place.

Question 7. Impacts on women's access to health services

What are the impacts of the current restrictive measures and lockdowns on women's access to health services? Please specify whether services are closed or suspended, particularly those focusing on reproductive health.

The situation of women's access to health services during the pandemic reveals a dishomogeneous picture across the country, primarily due to the fact that the pandemic was affecting different parts of the country in different ways at different times.

According to the data collected through the VIVA Project (Project on Monitoring, Evaluating and Analysing Actions to Prevent and Fight Violence against Women),⁴⁶ access to hospitals during lockdown was drastically interrupted or suffered a significant decrease. This created unique problems for women facing violence and women seeking reproductive health assistance during the pandemic.

⁴³ See the the Parliamentary Commission on Femicide and All Forms of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) issued a Report entitled '*Measures to respond to the problems of victims of violence, of women's shelters and of anti-violence desks in the emergency epidemiological situation of Covid-19*'.
http://www.senato.it/japp/bgt/showdoc/18/SommComm/0/1145930/index.html?part=doc_dc-sedetit_edrpsppecl_vdnpdadmcdc19 (accessed 24 June 2020).

⁴⁴ <https://www.csm.it/documents/21768/41479/Linee+guida+in+tema+di+trattazione+di+procedimenti+relativi+a+reati+di+violenza+di+genere+e+domestica/f515cee5-3ca5-36ba-3b3c-8d06f4a94a75> (accessed 21 June 2020).

⁴⁵ <https://www.unicost.eu/codice-rosso-ed-emergenza-covid-19/> (accessed 2 June 2020).

⁴⁶ <https://viva.cnr.it/covid19/>

As to reproductive health, according to D.i.Re, women were facing acute **difficulties in accessing abortion services**, referred to in Italian as “*interruzione volontaria di gravidanza*” (IVG) or “voluntary interruption of pregnancy”. This is despite the fact that the Health Ministry specified that IVGs are among the non deferrable treatments. In practice, women found themselves racing against the clock of the 90 day-period within which IVG is legally permitted (with many women reporting having aborted in the last - 12th - week).⁴⁷ These obstacles were due to a series of factors:

- **Lack of clarity** provided by the government and by medical institutions concerning where to access the required services (many hospitals underwent a transformation and were turned into “covid hospitals” and thus turned away women seeking such reproductive health services⁴⁸);
- A critical move by many medical structures to **suspend of the provision of the abortion pill** (*aborto farmacologico*), contrary to other European trends that actually viewed this as a preferable alternative given the health concerns and restrictive measures in place. This may in part have been due to the fact that many regions oblige women to undergo a three-day recovery period in hospital after taking the abortion pill, leading hospitals focusing on COVID-19 patients to turn women away. In an open letter to the government, several renowned (including political) figures in Italy requested that abortion services be guaranteed and in particular that the obligatory three-day hospitalisation be rejected⁴⁹;
- **Suspension of the activities of many family planning clinics** (*consultori familiari*), which provide these kind of services in Italy, due to a lack of protective gear and other health concerns;

These obstacles have led many women to roam from region to region, and some cases even out of the country, in search of structures able to provide reproductive health services during the pandemic.

⁴⁷

https://www.dire.it/22-05-2020/463927-durante-il-lockdown-su-aborto-no-info-e-stop-farmacologico-le-attiviste-b-oom-di-richieste-di-aiuto/?fbclid=IwAR3IG4ITIVY_oK2DyRDzFNFEh465fm4v0uDFnbhhlil.2uby0MWh05I3yk (accessed 27 June 2020).

⁴⁸

https://www.dire.it/22-05-2020/463927-durante-il-lockdown-su-aborto-no-info-e-stop-farmacologico-le-attiviste-b-oom-di-richieste-di-aiuto/?fbclid=IwAR3IG4ITIVY_oK2DyRDzFNFEh465fm4v0uDFnbhhlil.2uby0MWh05I3yk (accessed 27 June 2020);

https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/04/07/news/aborto_appello_delle_ginecologhe-253414886/ (accessed 27 June 2020).

⁴⁹

https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/it/presidente_del_consiglio_dei_ministri_ministero_de_aborto_farmacologico_durante_emergenza_covid19_/ (accessed 27 June 2020).

DiRe reported that the *Obiezione Respinta* 24 hour helpline went from receiving 2-3 calls for help per month to 5-6 calls per day, and 10 requests for help per day via their facebook page.⁵⁰ The Laiga association (which defends Law 194 on abortions) reported a similar surge in calls for help by women desperately seeking a way to obtain an abortion.⁵¹

Despite recent moves to “restart” the country, the situation of uncertainty surrounding the provision of medical health services to women remains. Many clinics remain closed and are not sure when they will reopen and resume full operations.⁵²

Question 8. Examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence

Please provide examples of obstacles encountered to prevent and combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

According to what we discovered in our research #inretenonseisola,⁵³ the operators of women’s shelters faced many different obstacles in continuing their work to prevent and combat domestic violence during the lockdown period. Most of them reported the following experiences:

- During the entire lockdown period, they faced **difficulties in accessing personal protective equipment (PPE)**. In many cases, PPE was requested from official sources (public institutions such as the Region or the Municipality), but was never received or received very late. In fact, some shelters received PPE thanks to donations from non-profit organizations.
- All the shelters had to **reorganize their work**, in particular reinforcing their **remote working** capabilities. In the first phase of the lockdown, the main strategy adopted was to support women by maintaining a dialogue through video calls and phone calls. Nevertheless, the operators who were not as trained in the use of tech had to learn which tools to use on the spot;

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https://www.dire.it/22-05-2020/463927-durante-il-lockdown-su-aborto-no-info-e-stop-farmacologico-le-attiviste-bloom-di-richieste-di-aiuto/?fbclid=IwAR3IG4ITIVY_oK2DyRDzFNFEh465fm4v0uDFnbhzhliL2uby0MWh05l3yk (accessed 27 June 2020).

⁵¹ https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/04/07/news/aborto_appello_delle_ginecologhe-253414886/ (accessed 27 June 2020).

⁵²

<https://catania.meridionews.it/articolo/87131/lockdown-finito-ma-consultorio-piu-chiuso-che-aperto-attiviste-non-c-e-alcuna-certezza-sulla-riapertura/> (accessed 27 June 2020).

⁵³ In our research we interviewed 8 operators from 11 shelters across Italy.

<https://medium.com/chayn-italia/covid-19-e-violenza-domestica-cosa-ci-stanno-riferendo-i-cav-90731b5870b9> (accessed 27 June 2020).

in any case, many of them weren't sure of the best and safest ways to maintain open communication channels.

- The hardest thing was to assist the **women who were contacting the shelters for the first time**: due to the restrictive measures, operators had to build a new trustworthy relationship with these "new" women without meeting them personally, which was very challenging.
- The shelters also had to review their hospitality procedures. When women needed a place to stay, **the shelters often organized accommodation in hotels**. This solution can be only partially effective: in fact, the shelters reported difficulties in following this strategy, which is **very expensive** for them and can't be afforded in the long term. In this respect, D.i.Re reported that the funds made available by the Minister of Family and Equal Opportunities Bonetti was not sufficient for the new needs raised by the pandemic: "of the 30 mln, 20 mln are intended to the ordinary activities of the anti violence centers and shelters, and 10 mln intended to 'specific collateral activities for preventing violence', now diverted to deal with the emergency brought by Covid19"⁵⁴. In this way, **the state was not increasing the resources needed by women's shelters and women experiencing violence**. D.i.Re reported that "managing the ordinary life of anti-violence centers needs to be supported by resources that weren't allocated in due time, the coming of the pandemic only caused worsening of our activities"⁵⁵.

In addition to this general situation, the lawyers of *Differenza Donna*⁵⁶ reported that the increased precarity caused by the pandemic was having a **heightened impact on vulnerable categories of the population such as migrant women experiencing abuse**. In this health and economic crisis, migrant women are facing a higher risk of losing their job (often an irregular one) and their rights to access public health services are also in jeopardy. This is contributing to diminishing their chance to leave an abusive relationship. In fact, it is worth noting that the kind of violence experienced by migrant women is often physical and very serious, and often starts both in the country of origin (68,5%) and in relationships here in Italy (19,4%). Moreover, in addition to these forms of violence, we must add all the

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<http://www.vita.it/it/interview/2020/04/07/coronavirus-governo-dove-il-fondo-straordinario-richiesto-per-i-centri/325/> (accessed 30 April 2020).

⁵⁵

<http://www.vita.it/it/interview/2020/04/07/coronavirus-governo-dove-il-fondo-straordinario-richiesto-per-i-centri/325/> (accessed 30 April 2020). On this paragraph see also the ongoing research (started on June 2020 until December 2020) "La violenza contro le donne nel periodo del confinamento: una ricerca con le donne che si rivolgono a un Centro Anti-violenza", developed by the University of Trieste, with the scientific coordination of professor Patrizia Romito and the active participation of the women's shelters of Region Friuli Venezia Giulia. For further info: romito@units.it

⁵⁶ *Differenza Donna* is an anti-violence NGO based in Rome. See: <https://www.differenzadonna.org/>.

violence these women can face in the workplace and the forms of sexual exploitation experienced while involved in trafficking⁵⁷.

Question 9. Examples of good practices by Governments to prevent and combat domestic violence

Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by Governments.

In terms of the continued functioning of the justice system, many public prosecutors cited lack of clarity around the laws ordering suspension of certain proceedings, leading them in doubt to suspend confirmation hearings for protection orders requested by women. Therefore, it is essential for governments to ensure **clarity of law and in guidances** that integrate and support efforts to enforce instances of violence against women.

It is also crucial that governments offer more (effective) **support to women's shelters**. The Italian government has provided extra funding to women's shelters through Decreto Cura Italia (the *Cure Italy Decree*) in April 2020, which provided an additional 3 million euros to private and public shelters to support efforts in containing domestic violence while ensuring adequate protection to women victims of domestic violence. It is crucial that shelters and support centres for women are classed as essential services during crises and epidemics, as their services are crucial during these times that women face greater risk of violence and abuse. Wherever possible, it would be good practice to make empty hotels available to women and their children. Support could also take the form of a sustainable Domestic Fund for survivors of violence that would ensure free medical treatment and shelter provision during epidemics.

Additionally, governments can better prevent and combat gender-based violence by **working more closely with shelters, CSOs, and non-profit organisations**. For instance, in the Apulia region in Italy, governmental institutions at all levels have been involved in activity planning and organisation, including the sanitisation of shelter centres and supporting priority interventions.⁵⁸

As part of **digital awareness-raising campaigns** and in emergency situations, governments could also create and advertise help pages with FAQs, useful contacts, and a list of shelters that are open in

⁵⁷ <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/come-stanno-le-migranti-nella-pandemia>

⁵⁸ https://www.dire.it/23-03-2020/437638-violenza-sulle-donne-e-coronavirus-lallarme-di-befree-40-delle-chiamate-ma-noi-ci-siamo/?fbclid=IwAR29HLyrlmvfRu6H01eV_aoK6_FGmL_5Oz6esl6Xq3f_EFwIpQdixdc-DQ (accessed 27 June 2020).

emergency situations such as during the Covid-19 pandemic. This ensures that women know that they are not alone during difficult times, and that they can break free from violence during a lockdown.⁵⁹

Question 10. Examples of good practices by NGOs and NHRIs to prevent and combat domestic violence

Please provide examples of good practices to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence and to combat other gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by NGOs and NHRIs or equality bodies.

Communication with women is key to help and support women who are forced into isolation or lockdown with their abusers. NGOs and NHRIs can support this by finding and implementing innovative ways to ensure that women know who and how to contact people for help. In an increasingly digital world, **technology** plays a crucial role in helping to spread the message through online resources, SMS platforms or encrypted apps that allow users to quickly contact trusted friends or emergency numbers. By using technology to fill gaps in access to information, NGOs and NHRIs can complement governments' efforts in this respect.

Raising awareness of domestic violence during lockdown **among the wider community** is equally important. A supportive neighbourhood can create a help network for women who experience domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Chayn Italia published and posted guides on how to support women who live next door, or in the neighbourhood, who might be in need of help.

Due to their direct involvement with women's shelters supporting women, NGOs and NHRIs are well placed to fill in the communication gap between these centres and relevant institutions with the resources necessary to help women being forced into isolation with their abusers during the COVID-19 pandemic. One way NGOs can do this is by **collecting quantitative data** from the women's shelters around the increase of gender-based violence and present it at United Nations' high-level events, such as '*Combating and Preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crisis*', and other donor meetings to request funding and support for women's shelters. A more direct way for NGOs to help women facing violence and abuse is through their involvement in frontline work, especially supporting women's shelters by providing funds so that they can be sanitised and constitute safe and clean places for women.

⁵⁹ <https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/C.A.-Ministra-Bonetti-REV.pdf> (accessed 26 June 2020).

Thank you for reading!

Contact details

For further details on the information provided in this report, please do not hesitate to reach out to us through the following channels:

★ **Chayn Italia:** info@chaynitalia.org

★ **Elena Silvestrini:** elena@chaynitalia.org

★ **Chiara Missikoff:** chiara@chaynitalia.org

For more information on our organisation and work, please follow this link:
<https://chaynitalia.org/about-us/>.