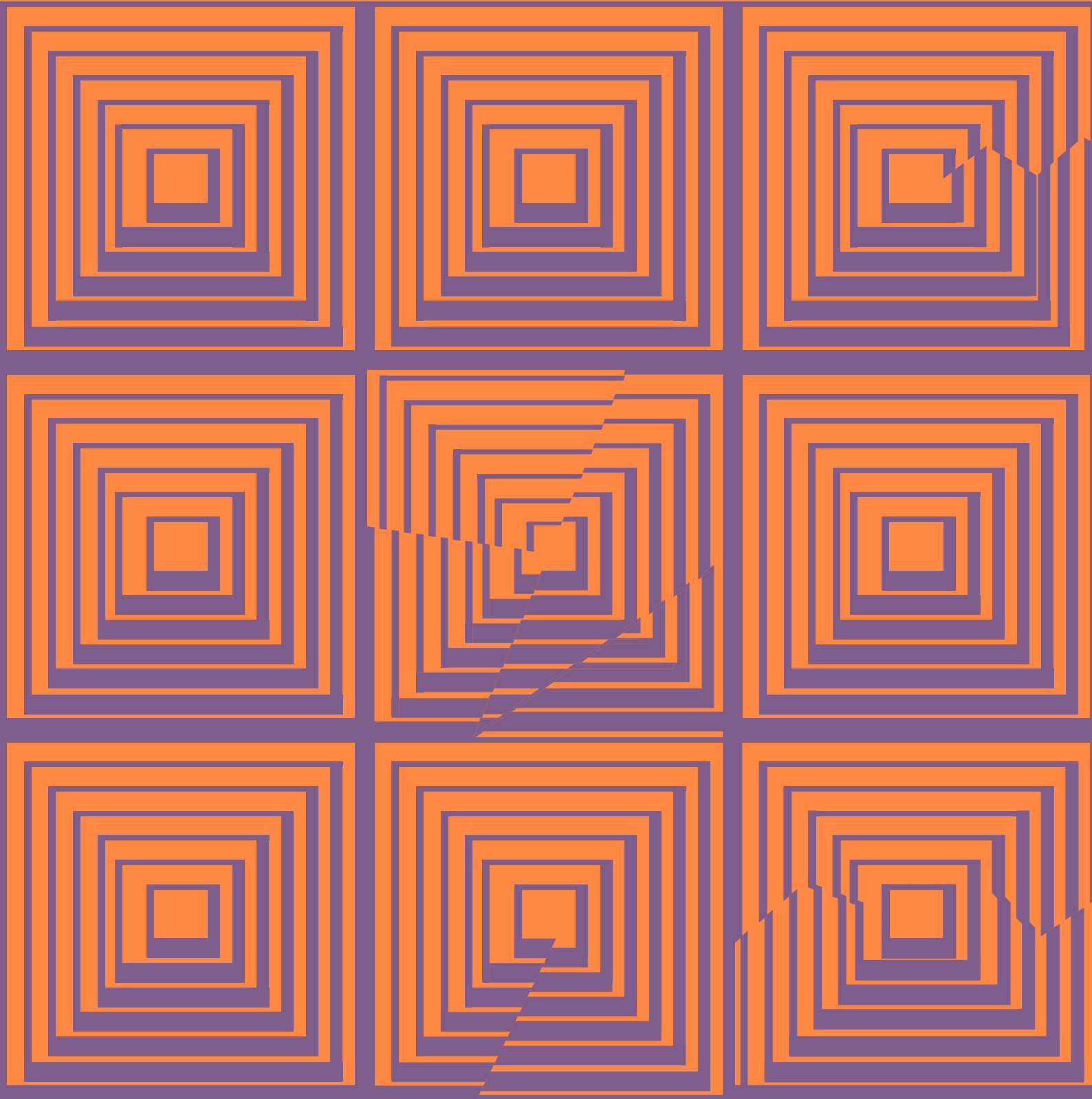




OASICIMIMESECVI

Violence Against Women

and the Measures to Contain the Spread of COVID-19



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La violencia contra las mujeres frente a las medidas dirigidas a disminuir el contagio del COVID-19

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Presentation

Alejandra Mora Mora

Executive Secretary

Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)

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Just a few months ago, the COVID-19 demonstrated, in the eyes of the world and particularly in the eyes of the Americas, how structural inequalities affect women and girls in this region in a differential way. The first of the signs of this inequality and the most evident within the first weeks of quarantine was gender-based violence against women. The media, international organizations, feminist groups, militants of women's organizations and governments, immediately warned that violence against girls and women was increasing in the context of the crisis. While thousands of people were infected throughout the region and the States issued measures to protect people's health, hundreds of women and girls found in these measures the declaration of imminent risk to their lives and, for a significant number, the declaration of the risk of death.

Faced with this reality, we decided not only to join the voices that alerted us to this situation, but we have also tried to create a space for the constructive dialogue to understand the facts, identify the tools and build a platform that allows us to permanently exchange with the States and their efforts to address the two pandemics that plague our reality.

This multilateral space that both CIM and MESECVI offer is an opportunity not only for the design of public policies on gender in the region, but also for the voices of women to be listened on an equal footing, leave the domestic space and be heard by those who are making decisions at this juncture, who from the politics of the traditional are in their great majority men.

Staying at home for many women has meant not only putting life and physical integrity at risk, it has meant a risk for those who, as heads of households, cannot stay at home, because it means putting at risk the food security of the family or of losing the home, submitting to the abusive employer for the risk of losing their job, or risking COVID-19 on the front lines, either because they belong to the health sector, or because they belong precariously to economic sectors that did not close their doors within the framework of the quarantine.

In this context, it is necessary that all our voices are heard, that we defend the space that we have won over years of struggle and that we advance in protection measures without

going backwards in the spaces we have won. The return to the private sphere cannot mean a risk to life and physical integrity for women and girls in the region, but above all, it cannot pose a danger to the freedom and equality that we have achieved.

There are many risks looming in this new paradigm shift; the return or not to the normality that we knew cannot put women's lives at risk, cannot overburden us with care work, cannot ignore the permanent defense of the rights achieved or the struggle of a movement that against all odds has remained at the forefront of the recognition of rights. We must be alert, now more than ever, because this situation allows us to demonstrate and rethink ourselves, to what normality we want to return, and what new normality should be imposed after the measures imposed to mitigate the COVID-19.

From the Organization of American States (OAS) and from the Executive Secretariat of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) we are committed to being a platform for the voices of all women, not only those who are already in these spaces, but also those that are usually not heard. For this reason, this joint work with the Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) is an opportunity to make visible the voices of millions of women in our region, for whom decisions to protect have been made and not necessarily to their benefit. They are also the voices of the Ministers and the National Women's Machineries, which with few resources and many efforts are doubling down on their response to this crisis. We hope that this material will serve so that together we can continue to build the necessary bridges and the new paths through which essential agreements for this new reality must pass, and that we continue together singing, with or without COVID-19: Not One Woman Less, Ni Una Menos.

Presentation

Tatiana Rein

President

Committee of Experts of the MESECVI

The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against women is a framework for the entire region under any circumstances. Conceived more than 25 years ago, the Convention foresaw, from the perspective of unequal relations between men and women, a legal protection framework and tools for action aimed not only at combating gender-based violence against women, but at eradicating it. Ten years after its entry into force, the States agreed to create a Follow-up Mechanism to make the implementation of the obligations of the Convention more effective, and to generate a multilateral platform that would allow the States Parties a mechanism for exchanging the efforts developed to combat this violence.

This Mechanism, through its Committee of Independent Experts, has been pointing out the importance of advancing not only better protection mechanisms, but also better mechanisms for identifying the causes and consequences of violence against women. Likewise, it has insisted on the need to identify the tools that are useful for combat violence, as well as the challenges that are evident on the path towards the elimination of violence.

Today, when almost everyone is isolated, confined, or quarantined, women and girls in the Americas region are being affected differently by the protection mechanisms that have been implemented to protect populations from the greatest global threat of the last 60 years, the COVID-19 pandemic. So far this year, the Americas region has seen a substantial increase in news regarding the violent deaths of women, calls to assistance services, complaints of sexual violence against girls, pregnancies in girls under 14 years of age, indiscriminate limitations to sexual and reproductive health services for women, all within the framework of an already limited capacity of States to address violence against women in its different manifestations.

This context forces us to think differently about public policies designed to address the high rates of violence against women in the region, but it also forces us to seek joint alternatives, with States, with women's organizations, with the feminist movement and with the other multilateral agencies that are called, through their mandates, to respond to violence and that, together and separately, are joining efforts to respond actively and quickly to the differentiated effects of this pandemic.

Our objectives are: to strengthen the capacities of the States; recognize and exchange the efforts that are being made in the fight against violence; establish the challenges that the health emergency places on us; and continue working with the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and the National Authorities of the MESECVI, to advance innovative formulas so that we can continue aiming at effective action, not only to prevent violence, but to ensure effective access to justice for women and girls and really get closer to our final objective, which is the eradication of violence.

For this reason, in the framework of this study, we want to highlight how the other pandemic, the pandemic of violence against women, has developed, what factors may be affecting women and girls differently, what new patterns of violence or unequal relations we could be facing and what new actions have been taken to-date by the States to combat them.

This work is the result of a series of meetings with key groups of women's organizations working in the region to eradicate violence,¹ from the concerns and reflections of the Experts of the MESECVI² and the concerns raised by the Ministers for Women and high-level authorities on gender equality.³ Likewise, we have carried out an analysis of hundreds of complaints that have circulated in the media, highlighting the work of public and private organizations that warned of the increase in violence against women. The idea is to maintain a process of permanent dialogue, which allows us from our different mandates and activities, to be able to contribute to highlighting the best efforts, to guarantee an active and fluid exchange and to be able to combine in the best way within the framework of this situation, the lessons learned over years of work to eradicate violence against women with new initiatives that are trying to respond to this regrettable increase in violence.

We are aware that this is an evolving process, which is why we hope that this is one of a series of both individual and joint initiatives of the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI, with the CIM and with the other agencies of the Inter-American and international human rights systems, that allows us to contribute not only to our current situation, but to the growing concern over the return to an unprecedented normality in terms of economic impacts, which as we know always have a disproportionate effect on women.

With the commitment to continue working to eliminate violence against women, we hope that this material will be useful, and we continue to advance in our objective.

Introduction

On March 18, 2020, the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), pointed out to the Member States its concern regarding the measures being taken to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19, because of the impacts they could have on women.⁴ According to the reports that have been broadly circulating in the media, the information provided by civil society organizations that work on the issue, and the reports received by the Experts of the Committee⁵, the confinement and restrictions on movement, limitations to some essential services provided to women who are victims of violence, decisions to grant parole in many detention centers, among others, could have a disproportionate effect on women and girls and, in some cases, could be increasing violence against them.

In this respect, the Committee highlighted some necessary recommendations to prevent and address violence against women and girls during this period. In the document *“COVID-19 in Women’s Lives: Reasons to Recognize Differential Impacts”*, the CIM/OAS has emphasized how the measures to eliminate the risks of infection during the pandemic have aggravated structural discrimination, and have overexposed women and girls to an increased inequality gap in every sphere.⁶

Over two months after these recommendations were issued and after confinement has started, the media still shows multiple cases of violence against women and girls. This makes it necessary to: deepen the analysis; evaluate measures already in place; constantly update information on the effectiveness of these measures; and, strengthen the States’ ability to respond thereby averting another pandemic - the pandemic of violence against women and girls.

Enormous power inequalities manifested throughout the region, give rise to additional factors that accentuate the violence suffered by women and girls during the pandemic. Access to information, purchasing power, dependence on someone else’s financial support or care, limited access to personal and family health services, employment instability, belonging to a vulnerable group, and even the personal and collective way of facing the crisis are some of the elements that must be taken into consideration in order to strengthen preventive measures already in place.

During the period of the pandemic, violence against women has significantly increased both in the public and private spheres and will possibly keep increasing if no direct and specific actions are taken to prevent it.

Chapter I. Patterns of Violence Accentuated by COVID-19

In the Americas, where violence against women was already a concern before the pandemic, some countries and local governments have noticed that the number of calls to hotlines, that offer specific attention and counseling in case of violence, has increased up to 80%⁷. At the same time, calls from children or family members of women who are victims of violence have since increased during quarantine⁸.

Several countries have identified that high alcohol consumption is related to registered cases of domestic violence, so they have taken measures such as limitations on the sale of alcohol⁹. Other States have reported that, despite the general decrease of criminality, there was an increase in the number of cases of domestic violence, sexual abuse towards girls, feminicides and frustrated feminicides;¹⁰ including by aggressors released from prison as a measure for containing COVID-19, who murdered their former partners after the release.¹¹ In addition, new patterns of violence have emerged, including:

- Increased rates of femicide/feminicide committed by partners or former partners. In Argentina, civil society observatories pointed out that 25% of the cases in 2020 happened during mobility restrictions aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus. Most cases happened inside the victim's house or in the house they shared with the aggressor¹².
- In Chile and Uruguay, there was a decrease in the number of complaints from women who suffered from violence, while, at the same time, the number of femicides increased, which could indicate that there are limitations to file a complaint¹³.
- Increase in the number of cases of physical and psychological violence in the private sphere conducted by partners, former partners and family members¹⁴.
- In Bolivia, many perpetrators that were facing provisional incarceration due to gender violence crimes were released. This measure did not take into account the effect or the protection due to the victims of these crimes, who were left without protection¹⁵.

- Increase in sex violence against girls committed by close relatives in their homes.
- Violence against women and family members who work in the health system¹⁶, in public transportation and in their own homes¹⁷.
- Increase in violence against migrant women, which are more exposed to many offenses, such as sexual exploitation, disappearances and femicide¹⁸.
- Increased vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities, who have less available tools to press charges and to access information and services adapted to their needs¹⁹, as well as care services.
- Restricted access to sexual and reproductive health and care services²⁰.
- Violence within unequal power relations due to economic vulnerability²¹.
- Illegal restrictions to the freedom of domestic workers who sometimes are put in a position of quasi-servitude while being confined in their employers' homes²².
- Increase in the number of digital violence cases due to the need to dedicate more hours to telework²³ or to online education. There has been a higher number of crimes related to sexual extortion and online child pornography²⁴.
- Reports show that women in Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru have been subjected to sexual violence²⁵, threats and unjustified arrests²⁶ by police officers because of the quarantine.

On the other hand, restrictions on movement have disproportionately impacted:

- Women who cannot leave the house to press charges and lack access to telematic tools, because these tools were not facilitated or because they are not aware of their existence.²⁷
- Women and girls that require specialized care due to their age or disability.²⁸
- Elderly women who are abandoned, which exacerbates their situation of vulnerability; meanwhile, no measures to guarantee their access to essential care services are created.²⁹

- Women who are homeless while at the same time public spaces are less crowded.³⁰
- Migrant women and girls have experienced increased risk due to lack of mobility and migratory insecurity. In Mexico, applications for women's shelters increased 30%.³¹

As we can observe, some of these patterns show an increase in violence against women and girls in the private sphere, due to the situation of heightened vulnerability when living with their aggressors. However, other relevant elements such as the lack of collective spaces like the school, the workplace, or centers for elderly people, directly affecting the tools that women and girls had, as well as women with disabilities, for the identification of cases of violence, or the reception of information to address it and report it³². Furthermore, the cultural belief that situations involving couples or former couples should be perceived as a private matter could be amplifying the isolation and a generalized lack of mechanisms for support, follow-up and rescue for women that were at risk of suffering from violence.

Chapter II. Measures to Prevent, Address and Punish Violence Against Women and Girls

In this context, we present some proposed measures that could be implemented to immediately prevent and address cases of violence against women and girls, which have been accentuated by the pandemic. We will be addressing the following topics: a) public policies to prevent and address violence against women and girls; b) access to justice; c) institutional strengthening; and d) information and statistics.

a) Public Policies to Prevent and Address Violence Against Women and Girls

In order to prevent violence against women and girls during and after the pandemic, States should undertake specific actions that are focused on violence caused by the implementation of measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Those specific actions can be exemplified as follows³³:

- Increasing the capacity of existing shelters for refugees and respecting health safety measures. Declare shelters as essential services. Evaluating the possibility of temporarily using dignified and adequate spaces that can work as shelters and establishing administrative and judicial measures to separate aggressors from their homes, while guaranteeing protection measures to women and girls.
- Guaranteeing enough resources to keep existing shelters working adequately and identify extraordinary funds to create new shelters that will operate during confinement, by leasing spaces with the necessary infrastructure, such as hotels. Establishing health protocols to prevent the spread. It is also important to combine these measures with a perspective of women's empowerment, beyond a welfare model.
- Establishing shelter homes for migrant women and girls who cannot take any actions and do not have safe housing options during quarantine.
- Generating immediate reaction teams to effectively address cases and reports of gender-based violence, with real possibilities for protection of women and girls who are victims of violence. For example, preventive actions must be taken towards the

aggressor to stop him from committing further acts of violence, and to spare women and their families from having to seek shelters.

- Generating a special mechanism within the police force and/or prosecution office in charge of cybercrimes to identify cases of online sexual exploitation and other types of online violence against women which have increased during quarantine.
- Protecting the privacy and integrity of girls and boys during online classes through safe platforms. These virtual classrooms should have reporting channels of online violence that can be immediately handled.
- Offering teachers practical and immediate knowledge to recognize if their students are subject to direct or indirect violence, as well as generating adequate spaces to learn about their students' situation through technological means.
- Creating gender alert mechanisms that identify contexts of violence and generate immediate and focused response measures.
- Improving the accessibility to smart hotlines and silent messaging to access information and generate protection mechanisms for women, that experience violence to ensure access to measures such as: panic buttons, microphone activation, geolocation, as well as any other measure that guarantees their protection.
- Instituting hotlines dedicated to violence and centers that focus on legal, psychological, and psychosocial responses as indispensable services; strengthen them, prioritizing online and telephone assistance.
- Guaranteeing the mobility of women who are victims of violence and their family members and waiving the need for special authorization and payment of fines in such cases.
- Conducting direct or indirect inspections of households that have a history of violence towards women and girls.
- Guaranteeing emergency care for cases of sexual violence and pregnancy prevention.
- Ensuring access to information on counseling and services related to health, sexual and reproductive rights, the provision of short and long-term modern contraceptives, including emergency contraception. Similarly, guarantee that all women have access to risk-free childbirth as well pre- and post-natal care during the pandemic.

- Generating campaigns to recognize the work of women in the health sector and guaranteeing their safety, including options of private transportation or any other means to avoid their exposure to acts of violence.
- Strategically facilitating and disseminating various means for reporting gender-based violence, as through text messages, websites, strategies at pharmacies, supermarkets or any other establishment that is accessible during quarantine as well as any other means that does not put the woman at risk of being seen or heard by the aggressor and that is accessible to the whole population, considering the broad diversity of women and girls.
- Strategically informing about the measures that are being taken and how they are being implemented, including clear information in the official language, indigenous languages, sign language, braille as well as making them available in writing in formats such as Word or PDF. In addition, include written descriptions along with all graphic communications, so that women can understand the different ways in which they can get out of the situations of violence to which they are submitted.
- Promoting massive campaigns to prevent and identify cases of violence against women during confinement and urge society as a whole to be involved in the prevention of violence against women by stimulating, for instance, neighbors to intervene in cases of violence (see “Métete”, a campaign from the Ministry of Women of Paraguay). These campaigns should be widely disseminated through audiovisual means, general and community radios, social media such as WhatsApp, text messages, so that every woman and girl in every place is reached. Also, all campaigns must be written in easy and simple language, using the official language, indigenous languages, braille, videos with sign language and subtitles.
- Publishing statistics on violence against women periodically so that the whole society is aware of the situation and is able to compare this information with the measures taken to fight this violence and measure their efficacy.
- Strengthening the observatories for gender equality and equity that will provide appropriate information that can be used to prevent and address violence against women and girls.
- Giving transparency to actions resulting from mechanisms dedicated to women and all authorities involved in prevention, assistance and punishment of violence against women and girls, through the publication of reports that show the actions and results obtained, the executed budget, along with a public space for dialogue

where women can share their views on the actions taken.

- Publishing guidelines with recommendations that are easy to implement for women who suffer from violence during quarantine and people who are part of their communities, in a way that the whole society can get involved in prevention of gender-based violence.

b) Public Policies on Access to Justice

According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the containment measures to address and prevent the effects of the pandemic have resulted in the formal or *de facto* suspension and restriction of some specific rights while various declarations of “states of emergency”, “states of exception”, states of catastrophe due to public calamity”, or “health emergency”, through presidential decrees and regulations have had a similar effect.³⁴

In this context, it is fundamental for justice to be accessible to women and girls, both in terms of the formal and material access. Formal access concerns the courts’ operation and the scope of their areas of competence whose operations have been impacted due to the pandemic while material access concerns their proximity of these legal services to all affected women.

Regarding the formal sphere, although there is yet no information on cases where the rights to due process and to an effective remedy have been suspended, the truth is that different judicial powers have adopted measures to limit their operation under schemes that limit their operation to “essential functions” or that only allow for “urgent cases” to be processed.

This situation could jeopardize access to justice for women and girls. The following measures are proposed to mitigate the impact of the measures taken by the judicial powers of the region in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Automatically extend the protection measures granted to women and girls who are victims of violence during quarantine without any previous procedure.
- Information and communication technologies must be used to generate, disseminate, and massively implement tools that allow remote access to prosecutorial and judicial bodies. If access to electronic or online systems require obtaining electronic or digital signatures or certificates, States must guarantee that their processing can be carried out remotely and without the need to physically go to a state office.

- Procedural requirements must be modified or interpreted in order to facilitate notifications and the conduct and relief of legal proceedings, through instant messaging applications, email and social networks, as well as through the use of videoconferences.
- The use of new technologies should be implemented to receive complaints, such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, and other online applications to guarantee protection measures, as well as the generation of virtual police stations.³⁵
- Implementing measures such as mailboxes or windows in the courts and at strategic points such as supermarkets or pharmacies for filing complaints without the need for physical contact with public servants, as well as a free telephone line to follow up on cases, for those who do not have access to technological tools for remote action.
- Facilitate virtual mechanisms for the evaluation of risk to women and girls experiencing violence, and through these tools, determine the degree of insecurity or risk that the survivor has of suffering more violence in the future.
- Provide information and give flexibility to the procedures for the use of non-traditional tests for cases of violence against women and girls, such as recordings on cell phones, photographs of the consequences of violence, calls to emotional or emergency containment lines, among others.
- Ensure the operation continuity of the ombudsperson and any instances of guidance, advice and legal representation for women and girls, particularly those who suffer cases of violence, including through remote action schemes.
- Review and, where appropriate, expand catalogs of cases that are subject to judicial proceedings that serve women and girls. In this regard, it is important not to exclude family matters from the catalog of urgent matters, since much of the direct or indirect violence that is increasing at the moment is regulated in civil codes or other norms related to the family. For example, the dictation, execution, and supervision of some protection measures or the obtaining of alimony or compensatory pensions and other guarantees of protection of rights such as access to health and social security.
- Note that, in terms of the criminal sphere, even though multiple cases classified as urgent are of this nature, indications are that the focus is on the processing of new cases. Previously opened files (including those on protection measures for women and girls) are in impunity for lack of follow-up due to the pandemic, which generates a message of permissibility and the risk of exposure of victims to their aggressors.

- Assess the possibility of implementing pre-liberalization benefits, substituting prison measures and a restrictive use of preventive detention that allow women, especially those who are not being prosecuted or have not been convicted of serious crimes, as well as for those who are in a special situation of vulnerability or are together with their young children in prison.
- Prevent people imprisoned for gender-based violence from obtaining parole due to the pandemic.

c) Public Policies on Institutional Strengthening

In order to implement measures to effectively prevent, address, and punish violence against women and girls in the face of the pandemic, it is necessary that States strengthen their institutionality and capacity to respond quickly to the crisis. For this purpose, it is necessary to implement measures such as the following³⁶:

- Include women experts and authorities in charge of national policies on violence against women in the cabinets that manage the current crisis and the post-crisis related to the pandemic.
- Generate, from the cabinet or council formed to deal with the crisis, a State policy that results in a comprehensive contingency plan to prevent, address and punish violence against women with concrete measures such as those presented in this document, starting from the premise of making procedures more flexible to generate efficient and immediate care and prevention plans that are appropriate to what is being experienced in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Involve specialized civil society organizations representing women and girls, in all their diversity, to participate in governmental and public policy decisions so that they have a gender and human rights perspective and an intersectoral perspective, to allow for visualizing and caring for women with disabilities, pregnant women, women in situations of exclusion or precariousness, deprived of liberty, migrants, LGBTI, victims of trafficking, domestic workers, among others. Also, finance the work of civil society organizations that provide care to women victims of violence.
- Maintain the strength of all administrative and judicial areas that deal with violence against women with all the necessary human, material and financial resources, allowing them to immediately adapt their procedures to the characteristics of the

pandemic to ensure prevention, care, investigation and punishment of acts that violate the human rights of women and girls.

- Implement measures in an articulated way and under established protocols of all relevant authorities such as the judiciary, public defenders, ombudspersons, human rights prosecutors, ministries of labor, areas in charge of vulnerable groups, social, economic and financial programs, the force police, and other areas of administration of justice.
- Execute the agreed measures ensuring that implementation reaches all sectors of the population and areas of the country, through territorial links that ensure implementation in all locations of countries and not only at the national level. For example, identification of the differentiated realities that women are facing at all levels of the country; and links with civil society organizations that carry out grassroots work in affected communities.
- Promote agreements with relevant social actors like private companies, the media, foundations, social organizations, among others, to promote cooperation in the measures proposed to reduce violence against women in all areas in which they take place.
- Consider the needs of women and girls in the different regions of each country so that they have a real and substantive effect on their lives. This implies that all the measures that are incorporated in national efforts are not standardized but rather focused according to the specific needs that arise from the identified situations of violence.
- Generate a program that contemplates the necessary resources to carry out post-quarantine actions, ensuring comprehensive access and the full exercise of all the rights of girls and women, especially guaranteeing the right to a life free from violence.

d) Information and Statistics

In order to focus the actions of prevention, care and punishment of violence against women, it is essential to generate the necessary information and statistics that provide information disaggregated by sex, education, age, socioeconomic level, and characteristics of vulnerability, among other relevant values, to have clear empirical data to improve the implementation and execution of public policies that are generated to counter the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This information gathering must be generated quickly with the means already available (emergency calls, information gathering platforms, social networks, etc.) so that the measures can be efficient to tackle the current problem. At the same time, the confidentiality of the personal data disclosed must be guaranteed, considering security systems, especially digital security. As an example, it is considered necessary to have information on:

- The situation of women and girls who are directly or indirectly experiencing violence (or the increase of it) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, giving special attention to girls, nurses, assistants, doctors, caregivers, domestic workers, women who work in the provision of essential services, single mothers, female heads of families, women in charge of caring for relatives or other people, women with disabilities, migrant women and girls, among others.
- The effects and concerns of women who work in the formal or informal sector, or have lost their jobs, their situation regarding the possible lack of access to livelihoods, the types of discrimination and violence encountered due to the pandemic, as well as whether the lack of employment has caused them to experience higher levels of domestic violence.
- Data on violence before and after home isolation. In addition, data on violence which occurs in public spaces as a consequence of less mobilization in the streets and on public transport, as well as the forms that violence takes during isolation.
- Good practices being implemented to counter the effects of violence on the lives of women and girls.

At the same time, it is necessary to generate process and result indicators that allow monitoring of the measures that are implemented to address the different problems that women and girls face as a direct effect of the COVID-19.

Endnotes

- 1 Meeting with representatives of civil society “COVID-19 and its impacts on the lives of women” (March 30, 2020)
- 2 Meetings with MESECVI Experts from Latin America and the Caribbean (March 31, 2020)
- 3 Ministerial Meeting of High-Level Gender Authorities in the Region: Challenges, Implications, and the Role of Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (MAMS) in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2, 2020)
- 4 MESECVI, [*Recomendaciones para la incorporación de la perspectiva de género para la mitigación del COVID-19 y acciones para la prevención y atención de la violencia de género.*](#) (Recommendations for the incorporation of the gender perspective in the measures taken to mitigate COVID-19 and the strengthening of actions for the prevention and care of gender violence).
- 5 Information obtained from meetings with civil society organizations regarding the measures taken to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 in the region, March 30, 2020; with the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI (CEVI) regarding the measures adopted to decrease the impact of Covid-19 in the region, March 31, 2020; and with the high gender authorities in the region called “Desafíos, Implicaciones y el Rol de los Mecanismos para el Adelanto de las Mujeres (MAMS) ante la pandemia del COVID-19” (Challenges, Implications and the Role of the Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (MAMS) in light of the COVID-19 pandemic), April 2, 2020
- 6 “COVID-19 in womens’ lives: Reasons to recognize differentiated impacts” (originally “COVID-19 en la vida de las mujeres: Razones para reconocer los impactos diferenciados”). Available at: <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>.
- 7 According to the media, there was a 39% increase in the number of calls in [Argentina](#), 70% in [Chile](#), 76% in [Colombia](#) ([Bogotá](#) registered 9.000 calls until April 20) and 80% in [México](#). On a local level, the number of calls in [Chicago](#) tripled during the month of March.
- 8 Information from [El Confidencial](#).
- 9 Information from [PAHO/WHO](#) and published in [Chile](#), [Colombia](#), and [Honduras](#).
- 10 Crime rates were reduced in Latin America, according to [The New York Times](#). However, the same newspaper, as well as [Reuters](#), [UNICEF](#), [ONU](#), among others, indicates the [increase in numbers of domestic violence cases](#).
- 11 See, for example, a case occurred in [Argentina](#).
- 12 See, Info Región: “[Números que duelen: 96 femicidios en 100 días](#)” (Numbers that hurt: 96 cases of femicide in 100 days).
- 13 This can be explained by “*the increased tension inside the homes*”, as pointed out by Inmujeres to the Uruguayan news media [El Observador](#). The former Minister of Women, Carolina Cuevas, told [La Tercera](#) that “*one must be careful when interpreting the numbers during quarantine, women won’t be able to press charges if they are at home with their aggressor, but it doesn’t mean that violence has decreased*”.
- 14 According to the National Police of [Bolivia](#), domestic violence is now the most reported offense in [Bolivia](#). The reports of physical violence against women increased 19% in [Chile](#), and frustrated femicide also increased.
- 15 Information from [Diario La Razón](#), Bolivia.
- 16 The WHO explains that [70% of the health workforce are women](#) but they only occupy 25% of high rank posts, and are exposed to prejudice, discrimination and sexual harassment.
- 17 In [México](#) nurses are asked not to use uniforms; in [Argentina](#) nurses had to move out of their homes and there are also reports of such events in [Colombia](#).
- 18 Report from [IOM](#)’s Regional Office for Central America, North America and the Caribbean.
- 19 [United Nations](#) report on the prevention of discrimination against persons with disabilities in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 20 UNFPA, 2020: <https://www.unfpa.org/es/COVID19>
- 21 Landlords are being accused of sexually abusing their tenants by demanding sexual relations from economically vulnerable women in exchange for rent in many cities of the [United States](#).
- 22 Working long journeys every day of the week. See, El Periódico: [Empleadas del hogar en la era del coro-](#)

navirus: esclavitud o despido (Domestic workers in coronavirus times: slavery or layoff). El País: El coronavirus pone bajo fuego a las empleadas domésticas brasileñas (Coronavirus puts domestic workers in Brazil under risk).

23 There were cases where virtual meetings on Women's Rights were attacked, such as the ones organized by the legislator Martha Tagle, in Mexico, and by the Institute of Philosophy UDP, in Chile, among others.

24 Information from Human Rights Watch and Europol in this regard. BBC Mundo also reported that police authorities in the United States, Denmark, Sweden and Brazil have been alerted about this.

25 There are open investigations about these allegations in San Juan Nepomuceno (Paraguay), Jujuy (Argentina), and Cali (Colombia).

26 Information from Perú21.

27 While Colombia established mandatory preventive isolation, in Argentina the same measure was declared unconstitutional.

28 Report of a survey with people with disabilities to know the complications and obstacles of the confinement.

29 United Nations expert denounces the abandonment of older people.

30 Civil society organizations highlight the danger and insecurity to which women are submitted when walking on empty streets in Colombia. In Nueva York and Washington DC, shelters mention the impact of the pandemic on homeless women.

31 Information from the National Network of Shelters (Red Nacional de Refugios).

32 Inquiries about child abuse have tripled in Argentina. Peru already registered 27 cases during quarantine.

33 Some countries in the region have made the following efforts in this regard:

- The Ministries of Health of Argentina and Paraguay shared recommendations on pregnancy, childbirth and nursing through their webpage (<https://www.argentina.gob.ar/salud/coronavirus-COVID-19>) and their official twitter account (<https://twitter.com/msalnacion>).

- In Mexico, the Maternal Hotline (Línea Materna) provides information and support, including information on alarm signs during pregnancy.

- The official institutions in charge of gender policies in Ecuador and Peru made publications on their official Twitter accounts about the risks to which domestic workers are exposed during the COVID-19 crisis. The National Council for Gender Equality in Ecuador says that the pandemic is not a justification for terminating employment contracts and that labor rights violations can be reported through the number 171 or the email address denuncias@trabajo.gob.ec. In Mexico, the president of the National Institute of Women asked families to support domestic workers and to allow them to stay home in isolation while earning their salary.

- In Argentina, domestic workers have the right to take a paid leave if they are over 60 years old, if they are pregnant, if they are part of a risk group, if they have school-age children or if people in their workplace are under mandatory quarantine. The Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity published orientations for domestic workers to cash their salaries without breaking social isolation in case they don't have a bank account (<https://bit.ly/2QPJjIK>) and for those cases where the employer does not pay the employee's salary during the health emergency (<https://twitter.com/MinGenerosAR/status/1246060078064644096>).

- The government of Brazil announced that the free hotlines for victims will soon have specific characteristics to reach illiterate people and people with disabilities, such as chat options, videocall with Brazilian sign language and audio complaints, with the goal of guaranteeing that the service is broad and accessible.

- The government of Bolivia delivered to the Special Forces to Fight Violence (FELCV) biosafety materials and IT equipment for police officers and staff to keep fighting against violence during quarantine. The FELCV is developing its work in coordination with Radio Patrol 110 to effectively and timely address complaints about acts of violence against women.

- The National Service of Women and Gender Equity in Chile published on its official Twitter account a mass diffusion video with no sound, which gives key information on gender-based violence through a sequence of posters (<https://twitter.com/sernamegchile?lang=en>).

- In Brazil, information on violence against women and on the local support network was offered in pharma-

cies, health facilities and supermarkets, besides using electronic signs.

- In Argentina, the campaign #BarbijoRojo was released via Twitter in partnership the Argentinian Pharmacy Confederation. Victims of gender-based violence who are isolated with the aggressor can approach a pharmacy or make a call and ask for a red facemask, which is a codified request for the local staff to communicate with the assistance hotline 144.
- The Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity of Argentina has alternatives to accommodate people who are submitted to gender-based violence, with or without kids.
- The government of Chile announced the establishment of 65 new shelter homes to accommodate women who suffered from violence. In case a woman goes into one of these shelters during this period, they have to follow a special protocol to prevent new COVID-19 cases from happening inside the shelters.
- In Argentina, the trade unions offered hotels for situations of extreme gender-based violence.
- The official Facebook account of the National Institute for Women of Costa Rica streams open conversations through Facebook lives, where experts on violence against women offer information to prevent and address this issue.
- The Ecuadorian government used its social networks to inform women about the risks they face during the COVID-19 health emergency.
- The official webpage of the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity of Argentina listed the measures it took regarding gender and diversity during the public health emergency and published a guide with geolocated resources offered by Hotline 144.
- The government of Mexico also published a geolocated platform that offers services to women, girls, boys and teenagers suffering violence.
- The official Twitter account for the National Service of Women and Gender Equality in Chile gives specific information about the different women centers located in different areas of the country and publishes material with frequently asked questions that might come up amongst women.

34 Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. *Pandemic and Human Rights in the Americas. Resolution 1/2020*. April 10, 2020, page 4.

35 It should be noted that some countries have adopted other means of reporting, such as web pages, emails (like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and El Salvador), WhatsApp numbers (like Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica and El Salvador), social networks (like El Salvador), and telephone applications (like Argentina and Brazil). In the case of Brazil, the application and the website allow the victim to send photos and videos. In Chile, Women's centers and sexual violence centers offer remote care for users who are unable to attend and contact all women who have scheduled office hours and do not show up. Colombia, Paraguay, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic also offer remote psychological, social and legal attention through telephone lines.

36 About the points mentioned in this section, some countries in the region have made the following efforts to address these measures:

- In Argentina, the #ForosParticipativos (Participatory Forums) to design the National Plan against Gender-based Violence moved to a virtual platform to guarantee its operation in times of social distancing. (<http://argentina.gob.ar/generos/foroparticipativo>).
- In Mexico, the different secretariats are working to ensure that, in current plans, such as in the recovery plan, women are made visible and given special attention, especially indigenous, Afro-Mexican, and women who are heads of household.
- The Ministry of Women of the Dominican Republic has 57 offices that serve as information points for women, distributed throughout the country, which contributes to the awareness and early detection of situations of discrimination and gender-based violence, as well as facilitating the access to the necessary resources for women and their children.
- In Brazil, the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights is promoting the implementation of Committees to combat violence against women in the context of COVID-19 in the States, Federal District and Municipalities, and the dissemination of the services of the network of assistance for women in situations of violence (with updated services offered and special hours).



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