



**Live Fear  
Free Helpline**

Providing confidential support  
and information on domestic  
abuse, sexual violence and  
violence against women in Wales

**Llinell Gymorth  
Byw Heb Ofn**

Darparu gwybodaeth a chefnogaeth  
cyfrinachol ynghylch trais domestig,  
trais rhywiol a thrais yn erbyn merched  
yng Nghymru

**0808 80 10 800**



## Summary of International information on VAWG and COVID 19

### International evidence and advice on increases of VAWG during COVID 19

1. World Health Organisation has produced briefings on VAWG and COVID 19, with evidence based on global information and previous pandemic research, available [here](#).
2. UN Women and WHO have produced a briefing on data collection relating to COVID 19 and VAWG, available [here](#).
3. Also check out the FAQ which has information for Policy Makers and on increases of VAWG, available [here](#).
4. UK Government DFID – UKAID have produced the following briefing stating expected increases in VAWG, available [here](#).
5. Rapid academic review looking at both quantitative and qualitative literature linking pandemics to VAWG, and the broader literature available [here](#).
6. The UN Secretary General produced a brief on the impact of COVID-19 on women that can be found [here](#)
7. UN women information on VAWG and COVID 19 available [here](#).

**Welsh Women's Aid has attended international seminars to inform promising practice and learn from other nations experiences – a summary of points below:**

### Impact of the pandemic on VAWG

Increase in calls to domestic abuse helplines have been recorded by services in Poland, Turkey (where the helpline has crashed due to high demand), Hungary and Singapore. However, calls to helplines are not the single indicator of need. For example, in Australia, Google reported a 75% increase in searches for help with domestic abuse, whereas calls have fallen amid fears that victims may not have a safe space to make contact.

The impact of COVID-19 on women with disabilities or those who experience other additional barriers and disadvantage are even more adverse. For example, women with disabilities face barriers to accessing information due to lack of availability and accessibility of critical information on precautions, where to seek help and who to contact in case of emergency.

Speakers from across the world, reinforced the message that these are not new barriers that women with disabilities experience, but simply demonstrate how women with disabilities are excluded from the wider discourse on violence against women.

### Government responses

The pandemic has amplified the existing challenges and shortcomings from government responses to VAWG across the world. For example, in Italy the resources for DA survivors



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are already limited for NGOs and the pandemic has shone a light on this. Equally, in the UK the pandemic has exacerbated difficulties that BME providers face. Imkaan have reported an increase in demand for services and statutory referrals to an already oversubscribed BME network of refugees. This has not been met with an increase in funding or a policy shift with regards to NRPF and the hostile immigration environment. Imkaan have provided a useful paper looking at the pandemic, available [here](#).

In Latin America, the sector is not seen as key and staff's movements are limited. Services are trying to establish contact with survivors under the guise of other contact, e.g. managing children's behaviour during lockdown. Other countries, such as Spain and the UK, have issued several decrees regulating VAWG services. The first decree considered all VAWG services as essential services.

Portuguese government has broadened dissemination of information on support services, strengthened and diversified help seeking channels, and strengthening support structures and services. This has included national campaigns for survivors and bystanders, all support services designated essential services, opening 100 new bed spaces in refuge, providing continued access to essential goods and resources for services, swift provision of money within 30day turn around.

### **Community interventions**

Some countries have developed bystander initiatives for neighbours (e.g. Puerto Rico) but these can only be successful if the police responds appropriately. For example, in some countries in Latin America the police will not respond to domestic abuse calls and in Turkey the police have refused to transport women to the hospital because they don't want to be exposed to the virus themselves.

In Kenya, a zoom hand signal was introduced for team meetings, signalling that you need support and that you're in danger. In the Canary Islands, survivors can seek support in pharmacies by using the 'MASK 19' code word. Since lockdown on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 15 women asked for 'MASK 19' help. Other Spanish autonomous states are now implementing similar initiatives. The problem with many of these initiatives is promoting them to survivors whilst keeping them covert from perpetrators. For example, newspapers covered a story in France with pharmacies providing support and now perpetrators are aware of that and are restricting partners from accessing that support.

### **Funding**

There is precedence of some countries providing additional funding for the specialist violence against women and girls sector. For example, the Scottish Government allocated £1.3 million to be distributed to groups and services. In Canada, \$26m was allocated to be distribute to frontline services - shelters were given \$32,000 to maintain staffing, purchase



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Welsh Women's Aid**

**Rhoi Merched a Phlant yn Gyntaf  
Putting Women & Children First**

equipment (particularly for children) and support food security. Increased resources have also been made available for accommodation in Australia. Sweden has provided a 9million Euro fund for VAWG sector to address the impact of the pandemic, this has gone to civil society organisations to meet the needs of survivors and adapting provision. Germany has provided 120million Euro fund for NGOs working on domestic violence to better equip the support structure for women who experience violence. The aim is to make support services easier accessible, especially for groups, who have previously struggled to access protection and help.

### **Accommodation**

Many countries have reported difficulties with maintaining appropriate levels of safe accommodation for survivors, with some reporting that shelters are no longer able to take any new survivors. This has led to some countries looking at alternative provision. For example, Spain issued a decree so that Airbnb and holiday accommodations can be used to shelter women. Similarly, Canada (where the shelters were already full) and the USA have resorted to the use of hotels. The Italian government has passed emergency legislation allowing local authorities to seize empty properties to accommodate DA survivors.

The Ethiopian Government has opened a quarantine shelter, where women can stay for 14 days before being moved on to another shelter. Finland has been alerting the CEDAW Committee and other treaty bodies to the situation of lack of accessible shelter places and a long-term campaign to have more accessible shelters audited properly.

Taiwan and Singapore have taken a very structured step by step planning with accommodation settings including, temperature taking, regular sanitising of premises and isolation spaces.

**We have also conducted desk research on responses elsewhere, summary of country responses can be found:**

- Information on Council of Europe countries (aligned to the Istanbul Convention compliancy) can be found [here](#)
- Information has also been collated by Wikipedia [here](#)
- The UN Special Rapporteur for VAWG is conducting an international survey aligned to obligations under CEDAW and other human rights obligations to assess countries responses, more information [here](#).