

## **Protection from domestic violence urgently needed for women and children under stay-at-home orders, say OSCE officials**

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VIENNA / COPENHAGEN / WARSAW, 2 April 2020 – Noting a troubling rise in domestic violence in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and self-isolation guidelines in many countries, OSCE leaders called today for measures to be taken by governments to protect women and children. They said that unfortunately, for them home is not always a safe haven, as they are the most susceptible to abuse and need increased protection in these extraordinary times and urged authorities to ensure that they are kept safe from abusers.

OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger said: “While dealing with the current health crisis participating States should not forget to uphold the right of women and children to live free of violence in times of families finding themselves in self-isolation. Urgent actions should be taken to address their needs and undertake measures to provide adequate protection for them.”

The Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Roberto Montella, said: “Some governments are already taking measures to counter domestic violence during the lockdown, which we hope can serve as best practices for others.”

OSCE officials noted that rates of intimate partner violence can increase in times of isolation at home, while availability of support services for victims of violence has reduced.

“Far too many are subjected to mental, physical and sexual abuse, a situation that often escalates when families are under stress,” said OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative on Gender Issues Hedy Fry (MP, Canada). “I urge governments across the OSCE area to increase efforts to provide safe spaces for victims of abuse, to prosecute abusers and to take other necessary measures to combat domestic violence.”

The OSCE officials noted a number of steps taken to reduce the risk of domestic abuse, including public information campaigns to inform the public that women’s shelters are remaining open during the coronavirus lockdown, banning the sale of alcohol as part of the effort to reduce domestic violence, and providing victims with the opportunity to report domestic violence in still-accessible locations such as pharmacies. In countries with strict lockdowns, some governments have announced that women will not be fined if they leave home to report abuse or seek safety. Governments and civil society organizations have expanded the availability of online and phone services for victims of violence.

“Combating domestic violence is the responsibility of the state. As governments seek to keep people safe from the pandemic, they need to take the potential effect of their measures on women carefully into account, and make sure that protection from both real and potential violence is a priority,” said the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir. “No one should be forced to choose between complying with the law and ensuring their own personal security, and authorities must ensure the safety of all their citizens, whether from the risk of infection or from violence in their own home.”

The officials pointed to a number of OSCE resources related to gender-based violence, including [an OSCE-led Survey on Violence Against Women](#), practical guides such as the [ODIHR Guidebook on Preventing and Addressing Sexual and Gender based Violence in Places of Deprivation of Liberty](#), and [several reports](#) of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues dealing with the topic.

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