



OHCHR Special Procedures
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Deres referanse:

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Submission by the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution regarding COVID-19 and domestic violence against women

Reference is made to the call from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Dubravka Šimonović, for submissions regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's right to a life free from violence.

The Norwegian National Human Rights Institution hereby submits information as relevant to the issues raised.

- 1. 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 since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis.**

A brief summary of the situation in Norway prior to the outbreak of Covid-19:

Nearly one out of ten Norwegian women report having been subject to severe violence from their partner, and 2/3 of the women who have been subject to such violence have also been subject to controlling behavior by their partner.¹ Statistics show that 3500 cases of domestic violence were registered by the police in 2018.² However, based on various surveys it is estimated that between 75 000 and 150 000 people may be subject to domestic violence yearly.³

¹ Report on domestic violence from Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), «Vold og voldtekt i Norge» (2014), available (in Norwegian) here:

https://www.nkvts.no/content/uploads/2015/11/vold_og_voldtekt_i_norge.pdf.

² Statistics Norway's figures from 2018 show 3492 cases of domestic violence, 86 cases registered as 'grov mishandling'. Statistics available (in Norwegian) here: <https://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/statistikker/lovbrudda>.

³ Norsk Helseinformatikk (NHI), Webpage on domestic violence, available (in Norwegian) here:

<https://nhi.no/familie/barn/vold-mot-kvinner/>

There is a strong concern for domestic violence in Norway. The government is currently working on a new action plan against domestic violence.⁴

Statistics on registered cases of domestic violence after the Covid-19 outbreak

On 12 March 2020 the Norwegian government introduced “the most radical measures in times of peace”, sending most of the population home from school and work in order to stop the pandemic from spreading. The measures have affected the crime statistics. The number of registered criminal cases from week 11 to week 15 declined by 25 % compared to the same period last year. The decline was particularly significant for cases of sexual abuse and violence, as the number of reported cases declined by 44.2 % and 33.8 % respectively.⁵ When publishing the figures, the police stated that they were concerned about under-reporting and that the figures most likely did not reflect the actual situation. The decline may be due to the victims spending every day with the perpetrator, leaving little or no opportunity to ask for help. Both the Government and civil society organizations have voiced similar concerns.

Three months after the outbreak of Covid-19, the figures are back to normal.

In summary, available figures do not indicate an increase of violence against women in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. However, the consequences of the emergency measures for women subject to domestic abuse are still unclear. Both the Government and civil society organizations are preparing for an increase in inquiries as society re-opens.

2. 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?

General information

There are multiple helplines for victims of violence and domestic violence in Norway. Normally, the helplines are run by civil society and financed by the Government.

- Vold- og overgrepslinjen (VO-linjen): + 47 116 006

Helpline for anyone subject to domestic violence, open every day, 24 hours a day. Run by Krisesentersekretariatet and Oslo Krisesenter, financed by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

⁴ Information on the action plan against domestic violence, available (in Norwegian) here: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/regjeringen-starter-arbeidet-med-ny-nasjonal-handlingsplan-om-vold-i-nare-relasjoner/id2661655/>

⁵ Official figures from the police, available (in Norwegian) here: <https://www.politiet.no/politiet-informerer/politiets-tiltak-i-forbindelse-med-koronaviruset/informasjon-fra-politiet---korona/utvikling-i-kriminaliteten-de-siste-fem-ukene/>.

- Dinutvei.no

A national website that gives information about the support service in all municipalities available to persons subjected to or fearing domestic violence. Run by NKVTS, financed by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

- Support Centre for Crime Victims: +47 800 40 004

Guidance on how to report a crime, continual support from filing of the police report to case conclusion, witness support before, during and after any legal proceedings and guidance on how to apply for criminal injuries compensation. Run by the police.

- Shelters

All Norwegian shelters have a help line, open all day, 24 hours a day.

The Government has established a [website](#) with relevant information on where to seek help in case of domestic violence.⁶

After the outbreak of Covid-19

After the outbreak of the pandemic, the *VO-phone line* has experienced a decline in the number of inquiries. However, the helpline for children (*Alarmtelefonen for barn og unge*) experienced a 100 % increase after the Covid-19-outbreak.

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

Unlike other European countries, Norway has not imposed a curfew on the entire population. However, strict infection control measures have been introduced. There are distinctive rules for people in isolation, quarantine and the general population. Only people with confirmed or probable covid-19 infection are in isolation and are prohibited from leaving their home. Intentional or grossly negligent (*grovt uaktsomt*) violation of the isolation regulations *may* be met with sanctions from the Government. However, a circular from the Attorney General emphasizes “the importance of a careful assessment of each case in order to determine whether to impose sanctions”. Hence, it is highly unlikely that the Government would meet victims of domestic violence who seek help with such sanctions.

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

⁶ The website is also available in English: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/law-and-order/lov-og-rett--satsing/vold-i-nare-relasjoner/seek-help-if-you-experience-violence/id2696812/?expand=factbox2696830>

General information

In 2018, 1842 adults lived in shelters in Norway. Almost half of them had children living with them. In the period 1992 to 2018, more than 100 000 people lived in the 47 shelters in Norway. The shelters handle around 20 000 inquiries each year.⁷

After the outbreak of Covid-19

All Norwegian shelters have been open throughout the Covid-19 crisis but with reduced capacity. Shelter employees were included on the Government's list of "critical personnel". The Government has recognized that the shelters have a crucial role when it comes to protecting and guiding people who are exposed to domestic violence. It is therefore important to maintain functioning shelters during the pandemic.

In May, a report from the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) showed that the admission requirements have been stricter than normal due to the reduced capacity of the shelters.⁸ At the same time, most shelters have increased their telephone-based service. More than half of the shelters reported reduced number of inquiries, describing the situation as "strangely quiet".

Concerning the seriousness of the situation for the women, some shelters report that more perpetrators suffer from drug abuse and mental illness-related issues than before covid-19. Some shelters also report that more women are in acute danger. However, the report recognizes that it is too early to conclude on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic measures.

In the meantime, the shelters are preparing for an "explosion" in the number of inquiries as society re-opens.⁹

5. Are protection orders available and accessible in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic?

The outbreak of Covid-19 has not affected the possibility of imposing and maintaining protection orders on perpetrators. However, the situation has affected some procedural rights of the perpetrator, as most cases are carried out on digital platforms due to the infection control measures.

⁷ Information available at the webpage of The Norwegian Directorate of Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir), see https://bufdir.no/en/English_start_page/. Information on shelters is available (in Norwegian) here: https://bufdir.no/Statistikk_og_analyse/Vold_og_overgrep_tall_og_statistikk/Krisesentertilbudet_i_norske_kommuner/

⁸ Report from Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS), "Krisesentre og covid-19 – resultat fra en kartlegging i april 2020", available (in Norwegian) here: <https://www.nkvts.no/content/uploads/2020/05/Krisesentre-og-covid-19.pdf>. Please note that the report is based on a study conducted in April 2020.

⁹ As stated by *Krisesenterserretariatet* to the media, available (in Norwegian) here: <https://www.vl.no/nyhet/krisesentrene-frykter-pagangen-skal-eksplodere-nar-samfunnet-apner-opp-igjen-1.1696046>

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

The outbreak of Covid-19 has not affected the possibility to investigate and sanction violence against women and domestic violence. However, the pandemic has led to reduced court capacity and several criminal cases have been postponed.

The Attorney General published on 3 April 2020 a temporary directive for criminal proceedings during the outbreak of Covid-19. The directive points out that the crisis measures mean that more people stay at home. Thus, there is reason to fear that violence and other types of domestic violence will increase and opportunities to notify about criminal matters will be limited. It is therefore very important that the police and prosecuting authorities give priority to cases of violence and domestic abuse.¹⁰

7. 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 outbreak of Covid-19 has not affected women’s general access to health care services. Both public and private health centers have remained open after the outbreak of Covid-19. However, some adjustments have been made to comply with the infection control measures. It has been possible to both have an abortion and seek advice on reproductive health at public hospitals throughout the pandemic. Other health services have moved their services to digital platforms.

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

Obstacles include:

- Difficulties for victims to access/find information on where to get help;
- Lack of information in relevant languages, especially minority languages both on infection measures and help services.

9. 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.

Good practice examples include:

- Government website compiling contacts for relevant help services;

¹⁰ The full directive (in Norwegian) is available on the website of the Attorney General, <https://www.riksadvokaten.no/document/midlertidige-direktiver-oppdatert/>

- Crisis centres open 24/7;
- Crisis centre staff formally identified as “critical personnel”.

10. 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.

Good practice examples NHRI and other actors includes:

- Quick turn around with comments to emergency legislation (some within 24 hours). See our webpage on covid-19 measures, [full list in Norwegian](#) or [short version in English](#).
- Webinars on different corona-related topics, including domestic violence;
- Media attention to the issue of violence and abuse, and many have included good “here you can get help” text boxes

11. Please send any additional information on the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on domestic violence against women not covered by the questions above.

Nothing to add.

Yours sincerely
for the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution

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This document is electronically approved and has no signatures.