In response to the letter from the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, of 22 April 2020 concerning a call for submissions on the impacts of COVID-19 on violence against women

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.*

There are no official orders of a lockdown or curfew in Sweden. However, the general recommendations are to limit social contacts and to stay at home in case of symptoms of a cold and, whenever possible, to work from home. During the period 17 March – 15 June 2020 students in high school and university study from home, and formal education is cancelled. It is not allowed to arrange or participate in meetings with more than 50 people. The societal and economic effects due to uncertainties caused by financial stress and disruption of everyday activities and routines, are affecting individuals, including women and children who are victims of domestic and/or gender-based violence.

In January 2019, new crime codes on assault against women were introduced by The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention in the Swedish crime classification system which might have influenced how crimes are classified. Furthermore, the Swedish Police made changes in the systems for handling crime reports in January 2020, which also could have had an impact on how crimes are classified when reported to the police.

For these reasons, it is difficult to get reliable data on assault against women by intimate partner. Instead, two types of data are presented below, assault against women in general and assault against women by someone familiar with the victim (intimate partner, family member or other perpetrator known to the victim). The number of reported cases of assault against women in general increased by one percent in March 2020 compared to March 2019, and by one percent in April 2020 compared to April 2019. The corresponding figures for assault against women by someone familiar to the victim is -1 percent and +3 percent.

*Graph. 1. Assault against women 18 years or older. January 2019 – April 2020. Reported offences. Preliminary statistics (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Brå).*

*Graph 2. Assault against women 18 years or older by intimate partner, family member or other perpetrator known to the victim. January 2019 – April 2020. Reported offences. Preliminary statistics (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Brå).*

**Confirmed cases of lethal violence against women (femicide)**

It is not uncommon that deaths first reported as lethal violence prove to have other causes. Therefore, all cases of lethal violence that are reported in one year are analyzed manually by Brå, and the result is published in March the following year.

In 2019, the victim was a woman in 25 of the cases of confirmed lethal violence (23 %). In 16 of these cases, the perpetrator was, or had been, an intimate partner to the victim. Reliable data on lethal violence against women by an intimate partner in 2020 will be available in March 2021.

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According to a government decision gender impact assessment is mandatory in all government work. It has been a challenge for responsible line-ministries to conduct gender impact assessment in all policy responses to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Lack of time and, in some cases, limited access to sex disaggregated data have been the main issues. However, an early evaluation shows that a majority of actions taken by the government in response to the crisis include a gender impact assessment.

1. *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?*

Some helplines operated by civil society and NGO:s have reported an increase in number of calls. Helpline Children’s Rights in Society (BRIS) received an increase of calls.

The national telephone helpline for women at risk of being exposed to violence (**Kvinnofridslinjen**) is normally open every day around the clock. It has remained so during the COVID-19 outbreak.

In order to prevent men’s violence against women, a pilot project consisting of a national telephone helpline for men that risk exposing family members for violence was launched before the COVID-19 outbreak. This pilot project telephone line has extended its opening hours during the COVID-19 outbreak. Neither of these helplines have reported any increase in the number of calls.

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

Not applicable. (No lockdown).

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

Open and available, the Government continuously have a dialogue with the women’s shelter about the situation.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic has not affected the availability and accessibility of protection orders.

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

The courts are open and providing decisions in cases of domestic violence. Urgent cases are not affected and are handled in a normal manner by all courts. In non-urgent cases, hearings are postponed at some of the courts. In conclusion, women’s access to justice does not seem to be affected notably.

1. *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.*

Despite the challenging environment created by the covid-19 pandemic, reproductive health services in Sweden have largely continued as before, particularly in the highly prioritized area of basic maternity care. In general, physical appointments during pregnancy have remained to uphold patient safety, although alternative solutions have been developed for women with respiratory disease symptoms. At the beginning of the pandemic, reproductive health leaderships in the regions (which are responsible for health care) quickly developed priority guidelines to support providers in prioritizing between services in case of staff shortages or large number of patients with suspected covid-19 infections.

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

Not applicable. (No lockdown).

The Swedish Government has assigned the Swedish Gender Equality Agency to identify and develop efficient methods on how to reach out to victims of violence with information concerning gender-based violence and honour-related violence and oppression in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The methods elaborated are required to be adapted to the operations by the municipalities, and the Swedish Gender Equality Agency is assigned to carry out the mission in a quick manner and subsequently disseminate the methods to the municipal level. The Agency is given 1,8 million Swedish Crowns (approximately € 700 000) for the year of 2020 in order to complete the task.

1. *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.*

The Swedish government has taken several actions that will strengthen society’s possibility to combat violence. In order to be able to follow the development and be prepared to take measures, the Minister for Gender Equality, Åsa Lindhagen, has continuously had meetings with organisations and authorities that work with domestic violence and men’s violence against women. The government has also increased funding to social services and health care as they are the ones who make decisive efforts every day to protect and save lives. The Government has also increased funding to civil society and directed funding to reach out with information to victims of violence. These two measures responding to the increased vulnerability due to the spread of the corona virus were presented in depth at a press conference 30 April held by minister Lindhagen together with the Director General of the Swedish Gender Equality Agency and the Director General of the National Board of Health and Welfare.

The government has with extra funding strengthened civil society in their work to combat violence towards women, children and LGBTI-persons by violent partners or parents. This funding commissions the National board of Health and Welfare to distribute 100 million Swedish Crowns (approximately € 9 million) to civil society. Following the Covid-19 outbreak the civil society organisations may have a need to expand and develop their operations or find alternate ways of getting in touch with victims of violence. For instance, the organisations may find it necessary to enlarge their presence on the internet, in order to reach out to victims of violence.

The minister for justice and migration, Morgan Johansson, together with the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) held a virtual conference discussing the efforts on how to combat and prevent crimes in Sweden, where gender-based violence are one of the top priorities.

The government has commissioned the county administrative board to coordinate the situation in the municipalities in order to prevent social problems and exposure. The government commission includes risks and actions for children living in vulnerable families, domestic violence and honour related violence.

1. *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*.

During the pandemic almost every NGO very fast switched to digital communication and stayed open with high accessibility for their visitors and clients.

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

The 22 April minister had a meeting with the Minister of State for Gender Equality and the Fight against Discrimination in France, Marlène Schiappa to discuss and exchange experiences on how to handle the current situation due to the corona virus. On 9 March Åsa Lindhagen met with the national organisations Unizon and the National Organisation for Women’s Shelters and Young Women’s Shelters in Sweden (Roks) to gain more knowledge on how women and children living with domestic violence are now more vulnerable due to the outbreak of the corona virus. Together the two organisations represent 240 Swedish women’s shelters and young women’s shelters. The women’s shelters in Sweden have raised awareness to the issue that women who live with abusive partners risk facing increased violence in situations of self-isolation that is recommended due to the corona virus. The organisations expressed the importance of defining women and children living with domestic violence as a group at risk. They mentioned what consequences might follow from closing schools and how this can affect children and young people who live in families with domestic violence. The importance of offering information in different languages was also mentioned, to be able to reach out to women born in other countries. The minister emphasised the importance of the civil society and during a time like this, the importance of society to be able to keep function in order to protect these groups at risk.