



GW I COVID-19 outreach statement

Graduate Women International (GWI) and the Swiss Association of Graduate Women (SVA/ASF DU) join UN Women, NGO Committee on the Status of Women Geneva, New York, Vienna and its regionals, and the international community in voicing concerns about the shadow pandemic of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

GBV is a fundamental human rights violation that crosscuts nationality, culture, race, sexual orientation or religion. Globally, more than 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the last 12 months¹. Crises such as the current pandemic of COVID-19, have been linked to increased interpersonal violence, including incidence of GBV², as the associated fear and uncertainty of pandemics provide an enabling environment that may increase occurrences of GBV. As organisations committed to the empowerment of all women and girls and agents of change towards the elimination of GBV, GWI and SVA/ASF DU are remaining united and committed to pursuing their mission, by calling on governments worldwide to urgently combat domestic violence in the context of COVID-19 with practical and innovative measures to ensure adequate reporting of the phenomenon and assistance for GBV victims.

Emerging data from helplines and shelters across the world show more and more clearly every day that GBV and particularly domestic violence has intensified worldwide with the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, GWI and SVA/ASF DU call attention to the fact that GBV, as pervasive of an issue as it is, remains widely under-reported. According to UN Women, less than 40% of women who experience violence report these crimes or seek help of any sort³. As domestic violence shelters are reaching capacity or unable to take on new victims due to the measures taken to contain the virus, women and girls, victims of GBV are finding themselves more isolated and vulnerable than ever. Concerningly, the current situation makes reporting even harder, as GBV victims have limited access to helpline and contacts with the police, justice and social services, who are usually at the forefront of GBV response. These disruptions also fuel impunity for the perpetrators, even more so when one in four countries have no laws protecting women and girls from GBV and domestic violence.

Switzerland turned out to be one of the countries most affected by COVID-19 in Europe when comparing the number of confirmed cases to the size of its population. However, the government was quick to react by arranging a partial lockdown, which is to be gradually lifted beginning on 27 April. In terms of GBV, the legal protection guaranteed to protect (potential) victims of domestic violence remains applicable during the lockdown and police can still arrest or restrain perpetrators to guarantee the victims' safety. Whereas the number of reported cases of GBV in Switzerland has been on the rise for a few years now, some women's shelters communicated a further raise in the number of calls asking for help during the lockdown (Le News). Unfortunately, some shelters had to be quarantined due to the virus outbreak, but the government assured that enough places were available to those in need. A taskforce headed by the Federal Office for Gender Equality was established, and further measures were guaranteed if need be. However, the gap between women and girls affected by GBV, and those seeking help or



reporting their cases, remains.

GW and SVA/ASFDU call on governments to urgently address the rising GBV pandemic that is putting the safety and well-being of millions of women and girls around the world at risk. In line with UN Women recommendations, «helplines, psychosocial support and online counselling should be boosted, using technology-based solutions such as SMS, online tools and networks to expand social support, and to reach women with no access to phones or internet»⁴. GW and SVA/ASFDU call on governments to mobilize police and justice to ensure that incidents of violence against women and girls are given high priority with no impunity for perpetrators.

Finally, GW and SVA/ASFDU raise concerns that, whilst more and more media outlets around the world are reporting the ongoing rise in GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic, such publication concerningly lack information about how GBV survivors can find help and support. Providing survivors of GBV with contact to GBV actors, including a referral pathway or GBV special and focal point must be a priority and is even more vital as GBV victims are isolated. Some useful contacts and helpline in the region include :

- Direct connect to the police: 117
- Each Canton disposes of individual helplines and shelters; they all can be found at www.opferhilfe-schweiz.ch
- List of women's shelters in Switzerland and Liechtenstein: <https://frauenhaus-schweiz.ch/de/frauenhaeuser>
- Supportline, operating 24/7, every day of the year. Anyone can call the number 143 for support. Not ready to call? You can talk to the support team via the free live chat or via e-mail: <https://www.143.ch/>
- Supportline for teenagers and children, operating 24/7, every day of the year. Teenagers and children can call the number 147 for support. Not ready to call? You can talk to the support team via the free live chat or via e-mail: <https://www.147.ch/>
- Further information can be found at: <https://www.ebg.admin.ch/ebg/de/home/themen/haeusliche-gewalt/beratungsstellen-fuer-opfer.html>

However, if there are no GBV actor available in your area or if your measures put in place to fight the current the COVID-19 pandemic are making it difficult to access usual GBV referral, we encourage all to consult this [GBV Guidelines Pocket Guide resource package](#), providing concrete information on how to support a survivor of GBV. The resource package uses global standards on providing basic support and information to survivors of GBV without doing further harm. Resources include a decision tree, do's and don'ts, sample scripts of what to say to survivors and more in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Burmese and Turkish. When possible, an adaptation of this resource to your local context, with the support of a GBV specialist, is encouraged.

As a global community, we have the duty to ensure that the extraordinary circumstances and measures taken against COVID-19 do not put women and girls at risk of falling victim to GBV and deprive them of their fundamental right to live a life free of violence.



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- ¹ UN Women <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-infographic-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5155>
- ² PETERMAN et. Al. (2020) Pandemics and Violence against women and children, working paper 528, <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/pandemics-and-vawg-april2.pdf>
- ³ UN Women <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-infographic-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5155>
- ⁴ Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women <https://mailchi.mp/info/statement-violence-against-women-and-girls-the-shadow-pandemic-from-un-women-executive-director-phumzile-mlambo-ngcuka?e=2c9fe72ff0>

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GWI is a membership-based international non-governmental organisation based in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in over 60 countries. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 1947 and maintains official relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as well as the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Swiss Association of Graduate Women (SVA/ASFUDU) is an independent, lively and diverse network of female graduates from all fields of study, professions, cultures, nationalities and generations. The SVA/ASFUDU supports women in using, implementing and passing on their education and knowledge in their professions, society and politics. The association is committed to gender equality and educational concerns at the local level in the individual sections, nationwide and in the international umbrella organisation GWI (www.graduatwomen.org). Chapters can be found in Basel, Bern, Fribourg, Geneva, Grisons, Solothurn, Vaud, Zurich and in Central Switzerland.

This outreach project was prepared by the GWI Office with assistance by Anna Indermaur (Graduate: Advanced Masters LLM Programme in European and International Human Rights Law at Leiden University); Annalise Simons (Colgate University); and Morgan Cassidy (Boston University).