



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN TIMES OF COVID.

The perspective of grassroots organisations

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Abstract

Research so far indicates that women are at higher risk of domestic violence in times of crisis. Using four countries as case studies (Austria, Spain, Sweden and Turkey), we show how most of the contingency measures resulting from Covid-19 have increased domestic violence against women. On the one hand, the policies implemented by each government to counteract this increased prevalence have failed to curb cases. On the other hand, organisations working to eradicate domestic violence against women have experienced difficulties in the face of rising cases and lack of resources. The voices of these grassroots movements are very useful and must be heard, not only for the sake of better policies in future crises, but also to move towards the eradication of gender-based violence.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. THEORY	4
2.1. Domestic violence against women	4
2.2. Grassroots movements: Struggling from the bottom-up	5
2.3. Four countries, four regions, four different realities	5
3. POLICY RESPONSES AGAINST DVAW DURING COVID	6
3.1. Austria	6
3.2. Spain	7
3.3. Sweden	7
3.4. Turkey	8
4. METHODOLOGY	9
4.1. Methods	9
4.1.1. <i>Theoretical approach</i>	9
4.1.2. <i>Interviews</i>	9
4.2. Data	11
5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	13
6. BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED	14
7. BIBLIOGRAPHY	15

1. Introduction

Research so far on how Covid-19 has affected gender-based violence around the world indicates that contingency measures resulting from the pandemic have increased domestic violence against women (hereinafter referred to as DVAW) (Meurens N. et al, 2020, p.12). Our main objective is to highlight how women are at higher risk of domestic violence in times of crisis. To this end, our study focuses on the impact of the pandemic on DVAW in four European countries: Austria, Spain, Sweden and Turkey, providing a broad overview of the different realities in Europe. On the one hand, we investigated the policies implemented by each government to curb this type of violence. On the other hand, we researched the challenges encountered and responses undertaken by organisations working to eradicate DVAW. We believe that understanding the needs and views of grassroots feminist movements in a crisis can be useful to subsequently improve institutional measures and policies to combat DVAW. Our guiding research questions are as follows:

- How has domestic violence against women increased during the Covid-19 pandemic in Europe?
- On the basis of four selected European countries (Austria, Spain, Sweden and Turkey), what have been the challenges of and responses by feminist grassroots movements?
- What are the best practices and lessons learned by feminist grassroots movements, and how can this potentially prevent a spike in DVAW in future crises?

Based on these questions, qualitative research has been carried out on the measures taken so far, both by governments and by organisations supporting women victims of domestic violence. The paper is divided into four differentiated parts. The first section provides theoretical definitions of the main issues we have been researching. The second part is an exploration of the policies implemented in each of the four countries to curb DVAW during the pandemic. The third section is the main part, consisting of the analysis of the interviews conducted with the organisations. Finally, we discuss the results and make a comparison between the policy measures adopted and the views of the organisations. We end the paper with some concluding remarks. In general, the organisations feel frustrated for being kept out of the political arena. During the crisis, some of them stated to have received financial support, but this is not the core of the issue. They ask to be heard, to get stable funding and to put women victims of domestic violence at the centre of the discussions to end this social scourge.

2. Theory

This section provides a definition of domestic violence against women, a discussion on the concept of grassroots movements, and a justification for the choice of the four analysed countries.

2.1. Domestic violence against women

First of all, gender-based violence must be distinguished from domestic violence. ‘Domestic violence’ can be defined as the threat or exercise of physical, psychological and/or emotional violence against another person, to inflict harm or exercise power and control over that

person (Flury et al., 2010, p. 2). The perpetrator belongs to the victim's "domestic environment": an intimate partner, a husband, a former intimate partner, a family member, a friend or an acquaintance. The term is defined by the closeness of the relationship between the perpetrator and the abused victim, regardless of cohabitation in the same household. This definition does not imply that the victim must always be a woman, i.e. there is no explicit gender motive. For its part 'gender-based violence' includes all forms of harm inflicted against the physical and emotional integrity of another person, associated with power and gender (i.e., against women, non-binary persons, girls or LGBTQ+). Thus, this does not imply that the aggressor is part of the victim's close environment.

Domestic violence against women could therefore be defined as any form of physical, sexual or psychological violence, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, perpetrated against women by persons within their domestic environment: the former or current spouse, partner, or another family member (Moreno C. et al, 2006, p.368). According to UN Women reports on this issue, one in three women in the world suffers sexual or physical violence in their lifetime, mostly domestic violence from their partners (UN Women, 2020, p. 2). What the coronavirus crisis has done is to exacerbate this other pre-existing pandemic, that of domestic violence against women.

2.2. Grassroots movements: Struggling from the bottom-up

Grassroots movements are composed of multiple self-organised and local-level organisations which are mostly made up of civilians (Longley, 2020). They advocate a cause to make a change at local, national or international levels. Grassroots organisations can focus on environmental issues, violence against women, labour rights, etc. As they are made up of members of civil society, they operate with a bottom-up approach and are community-based (Best, Augustyn & Lambermont, 2011, p. 2). Some scholars argue that appropriate cooperation between grassroots movements and government institutions is essential to improve responses to crises and situations of inequality. The former can provide local perspectives to help the latter implement the most appropriate measures in every situation (Bettencourt, 2021).

2.3. Four countries, four regions, four different realities

The four selected countries in this study correspond to different European regions. Although domestic violence against women is a universal problem, we aim to reflect the diversity of this continent, as realities can be very different. During Covid-19, each country has been affected by different circumstances — economic, social, political and cultural — so the challenges and responses to this issue both from governments and grassroots movements need not necessarily be the same.

Regarding the choice of the four countries, we believed that conducting the interviews in our mother tongues could be an advantage to analyse the data rigorously. For this reason, we chose Spain and Turkey first. Secondly, we selected Austria, a Central European country where the Ban Ki-moon Centre (the agency we collaborate with) is based. One of our group members lives there and works for a women's organisation, which has enabled her to contact local organisations and NGOs. Finally, another group member was doing a research stay in

Sweden during autumn 2021, so she took the opportunity to investigate the topic in this country. Sweden regularly scores high in international rankings of gender equality in many dimensions and is considered to have advanced progressive norms and attitudes in this area (Perrotta Berlin, 2021). The Swedish case, therefore, offered a valuable comparison with the studies focusing on the other three countries.

3. Policy responses against DVAW during Covid

3.1. Austria

The number of DVAW restraining orders increased slightly in Austria, already since the beginning of the pandemic. In 2020, the Austrian police enforced 31.4% more entry and approach bans compared to 2019 (Vienna Family Violence Intervention Centre, 2021). In 2020, 26 women's shelters served 9.92% fewer women than in the previous year (Statistics of Austrian women's shelters, 2020). The reason for the decrease is precisely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. For many affected women, it was much more difficult to flee. The family was constantly present, they were more exposed to the control of the violent partner and, especially in rural areas, the social control of being watched was palpable (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, 2021). The government appealed to citizens not to look the other way if they detected possible cases of domestic violence around them, but to call the police (Postl, 2020). Following the March lockdown, domestic violence helplines reported a 38% increase in calls from women seeking support and safety (Amnesty International, 2020). More specifically, in March, April and June 2020, the Women's Helpline staff handled 71% more calls than in the same period in 2019, and 33% more calls in December 2020 compared to the previous year. The average increased from 21 to 38 calls per day in spring and 28 in December 2020 (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, 2021).

The Austrian federal government developed a support package for victims of DVAW, including guaranteed places in women's shelters and the removal of violent family members from homes. The *Corona-Sorgenbotline* was set up to provide confidential and professional counselling for people facing crises or difficult circumstances more generally. Furthermore, from 1 June 2020, Helpch@t provides online counselling every day to women and girls affected by violence. Extra funding was provided to the national 7/24 helpline to expand online counselling services and helpline support increased counselling hours and started to give services in many more languages than before. Counselling is offered in German, English, Turkish, Russian, Romanian and Italian. The victim logs in with a nickname to ensure anonymity. In addition, the Domestic Violence Intervention Centre Vienna continued helping the victims remotely (Meurens et al., 2021).

Women's shelters have taken extra measures to provide the highest level of protection for users and staff; for instance, the government provided them with disinfection products. Irrespective of coronavirus protection measures, the *Protection Against Violence Act* has indefinite validity. In most cases, interim measures must be applied for in-person at the district court of the victim's domicile. However, due to the Covid-19 restrictions, it was possible to send an application for precautionary measures to the relevant court by post, e-mail or fax for limited periods of time. Victim protection services and the police assisted in

the preparation and submission of the application. The Ministers of Women's Affairs, Family Affairs, Justice and Home Affairs have organised several press conferences to draw attention to the increased risk of domestic violence and to inform the public about the wide network of available support services and additional measures implemented. Some federal states also initiated public awareness campaigns on support services for victims of abuse during the Covid-19 crisis, as criminal prosecution of perpetrators and access to courts for victims of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse were always guaranteed (Chair and Vice-Chair of the Lanzarote Committee, 2020).

3.2. Spain

In 2020, the number of women victims of domestic violence increased by 8.2% compared to 2019 (INE, 2021). In addition, calls to the emergency telephone number for victims of gender violence rose by 20,6 % in March 2020 (Secretaría de Estado de Igualdad y contra la Violencia de Género, 2020). That same month, the Spanish Ministry of Equality issued a *Contingency Plan against Gender Violence during the Covid-19 Crisis*, which included some specific measures to prevent and respond to domestic violence (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2020). Firstly, it declared protection and assistance services for victims of domestic violence as essential. This included the 016 telephone number, the Red Cross ATENPRO hotline, shelters and telematic monitoring services for the enforcement of restraining orders. For the first time, women victims of domestic violence were able to request psychological assistance via WhatsApp, and send an alert message to the police through the ALERTCOPS app.

For their part, the Official Associations of Pharmacists of the Canary Islands promoted the *Mascarilla-19* initiative. When a woman asked for a “Mask-19” in a pharmacy, the staff would make a call to 112 to alert the situation, thus activating the care protocol from the closest point to the victims outside the home. The initiative quickly spread throughout Spain and was also taken up in other countries. In addition, the Spanish Ministry of Equality disseminated, through the media, a prevention and awareness-raising campaign against domestic violence during the period of confinement. The Spanish government also published a *Guide for women who suffer from domestic violence during Covid-19 lockdown* (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2020). The document contained some guidelines for action, as well as information on emergency, legal, psychological and security services available. The guide also recalled the continuity of assistance services for victims of domestic violence even during the lockdown. On 31 March 2020, the Spanish government approved a *Royal Decree-Law on urgent measures to protect and assist victims of gender-based violence during the Covid-19 crisis* (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2020). The document qualified these assistance services as essential and reaffirmed the implementation of the contingency plan. Subsequently, the law of 24 March 2021 reimplemented the measures adopted by the Royal Decree-Law of 2020, adding some details (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2021). However, some authors claim a lack of funding for the approved measures (Ruiz-Pérez and Pastor-Moreno, 2021).

3.3. Sweden

Despite not having strict lockdown and social distancing measures, the Swedish government has paid special attention to violence against women during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data

revealed that in 2020, calls to the hotline Kvinnofridslinjen (women's peace line) increased by 10% compared to 2019. However, the call centre suggests that the increase in calls is not directly related to the pandemic and follows an increasing trend since 2017. Furthermore, both the National Council for Health and Welfare and the Brå (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention) reported that assaults on women over the age of 18 in Sweden increased by 4% in the first half of 2020 compared to 2019. In 79 % of the cases, the crime was committed by a person known to the victim.

The Swedish government increased its funding during 2020 and 2021 — approximately 10 million EUR— to women's shelters whose work has been affected by the pandemic and to non-profit civil society organisations fighting violence, including domestic violence (Ministry of Employment, 2021). The Board also conducted an information campaign on violence against women to remind health and social services to ask patients about their possible exposure to violence. In addition, according to the interviewed organisations, the government has refined methods of data collection and information dissemination at the municipal level. Furthermore, the Global Guy Talk project aims to help men talk about issues they are rarely comfortable with, to overcome gender norms and expectations that could create a destructive environment for them and their families (Profeta, Caló & Occhiuzzi, 2021). It is an initiative by the Swedish foundation *Make Equal*, which is now being spread to the rest of the world by the Swedish Institute (#globalguytalk, 2021).

In addition, the Gender Equality Division of the Ministry of Employment provided grants to regions (health care), municipalities (social services) and civil society organisations.¹ The Swedish government presented an overall strategy to prevent and combat violence against women, which has four objectives (Leppämäki, 2021): 1) Increased preventive and effective work to combat violence; 2) Improving the detection of violence and strengthening protection and support for women and children who are victims of violence; 3) A more effective fight against crime; and 4) Improved knowledge and methodological development. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has received 180,000 EUR in 2020 to carry out these tasks.

3.4. Turkey

While the reports and statistics by women organisations and free media outlets have shown that DVAW during Covid-19 has increased in Turkey, government and pro-government mainstream media outlets have claimed the opposite. According to the report from *We Will Stop Femicide*, the lockdown imposed due to the coronavirus led to an increase in domestic violence against women. They stated that the number of people calling the platform's application hotlines increased by 55.4 % and the number of applications made by third parties such as mothers, siblings, friends and neighbours who witnessed violence increased by 60%. Compared to other European countries, the situation in Turkey in terms of DVAW has been more challenging since Covid-19. Firstly, Turkey withdrew itself from the Istanbul Convention, which protects women and LGBTQ+ persons against violence, on 20th March 2020. Secondly, Law 6284, which regulates the procedures and principles regarding the

¹ By November 2021, the number of available women's shelters in Sweden had already reached 130.

measures to protect women, children, family members and victims of stalking and preventing violence against them, is not being implemented very effectively in Turkey (Evrensel, 2019). 41% of women who applied to the platform *We Will Stop Femicide* in April 2020 expressed complaints of physical violence, 18% psychological violence, and 12% economic violence or requests for economic support. 11% of women reported digital violence, 4% for sexual violence, 4% for support for the femicide case, and 10 % for non-violent reasons. While Istanbul leads the statistics of violence with 29%, Ankara is the second with 10%, followed by Izmir with 7% and Mersin with 6%. It was also noted that women who were exposed to violence or who want to get a divorce postponed the use of their rights such as applying to official institutions and filing lawsuits due to the coronavirus pandemic (Deutsche Welle Türkçe 2020). Gülsüm Kav, head of *We Will Stop Femicide* stated that despite requests, no emergency package of measures was announced in Turkey. According to a report by the *Purple Roof Foundation for Women's Shelter*, the General Directorate for the Status of Women under the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services stated that they only took the necessary precautions recommended by the Turkish Scientific Academy (Erem, 2020). On 3 April 2020, a statement entitled “Additional measures taken against coronavirus in women’s boarding houses” informed that, in addition to sanitary checks and regular disinfection in the shelters, these were not provided for all women due to limited capacity, except if they were “at risk of life safety” as there are only 145 women’s shelters in Turkey. (Mor Çatı, 2020).

4. Methodology

4.1. Methods

4.1.1. Theoretical approach

This study is based on qualitative methods. First, we explored the existing literature on the topic to provide a solid background. On the one hand, research on the concepts of ‘grassroots movements’ and ‘domestic violence against women’ was crucial to properly contextualise our empirical study. On the other hand, we investigated the different policies implemented in the four selected European countries during the pandemic. Subsequently, we developed a comparative analysis of the four case studies. For this theoretical approach, we consulted official statistical governmental sites, books, academic articles, reports from international and national organisations, and press articles.

4.1.2. Interviews

For the empirical research, we collected data from eight interviews (two organisations per country), during August and September 2021, both by video conference and in person. We interpreted them through Qualitative Content Analysis. This mixed-methods approach consists of assigning categories within the information collected and then comparing the results of each interview in each of these categories (Mayring, 2014, p.10). Regarding the interview questions, we asked organisations about the country context, the challenges encountered in implementing their services, and the role of government, feminist grassroots

movements and academia in addressing DVAW. The specific interview questions are in Appendix 2.

N°	Interviewee	Organisation	Country	Date of interview (2021)
I	Pia Hoffman (psychologist)	Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser	Austria	8th Sept.
II	Tamar Citak (social worker)	Wiener Interventionsstelle gegen Gewalt in der Familie	Austria	26th Aug.
III	Carmen Benito (chief)	Mujeres Unidas Contra el Maltrato	Spain	16th Sept.
IV	Press Commission of the association	Asociación Malos Tratos	Spain	13th Sept.
V	Hanna Bengtsson (curator)	Kvinnojournoresund	Sweden	3rd Sept.
VI	Jenny Westerstrand (chair)	Roks (Riksorganisationen för Kvinnojourer & Tjejourer i Sverige)	Sweden	7th Sept.
VII	Gülsun Kanat (social worker)	Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (Mor Catı)	Turkey	24th Aug.
VIII	Nihan Damarli (member of supervising council)	The Foundation For Women Solidarity (Kadin Dayanisma Vakfi)	Turkey	24th Aug.

Table 1. Detailed list of the interviews.

4.2. Data

Data collected through the interviews, following Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis approach (section 4.1.2.).

QUESTION (during pandemic)	ORGANISATION'S ANSWER			
	AUSTRIA	SPAIN	SWEDEN	TURKEY
1. Impact of increased DVAW on daily work activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More workload. • Highest number of cases since 2017. • Creation of a second office. • Increase of psychological and physical problems in social workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More workload. • Tripling of previous year's cases. • Increased containment enquiries and requests for information on resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More workload. • Hybrid work. • Doubts: rising demand is due to more visibility or increased DVAW? • Women wait a lot before contacting organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More workload. Rapid adaptation. • Hybrid work. • Efforts to be more visible: provision of tablets and phones to women in shelters. • Increased use of social media.
2. Challenges in supporting women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited face-to-face service. Some women don't have email or internet. • Technological challenges. • Poor visa services for migrant users. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited face-to-face service. • Technological challenges. • Loss of calls → permanence with aggressor. • Decrease in number of volunteers. • Coordination & security protocols. • Difficulties to accommodate victims. • Containment measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited face-to-face service. • Communication difficulties. • Efforts to be more visible. • More complexity women's situations. • Loss of calls due to teleworking. • Barriers organisations - social services. • Quite chaotic: uncertainty of situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological challenges. • Lack coordination with government & police. • Decrease in number of volunteers. • Increase of psychological and physical problems in social workers. • PCR tests to let women into shelters. • Media misinformation.
3. Capacity of grassroots feminist movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient capacity. • Need for more financial support. • Closure of small shelters, more work in large ones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity but need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Greater dissemination of information. ◦ Effective awareness-raising measures. ◦ Other institutions providing shelter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only in cooperation with social services, healthcare, police, etc. • Short-term financial support. • Money is not the only need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great support among Turkish women's organisations. Rapid adaptation. • Insufficient shelter space. • No financial support from government. • Support from EU and UN Women. • Lack of cooperation and volunteering.
4. Government support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological equipment aid. • Help from the Ministry of Justice but not from the M. of Women and of Interior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral support from government and institutions, albeit insufficient. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of communication and concern. • State institutions cooperate but limited capacity of municipal shelters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support. • No data provision by Ministries.
5. DVAW policies implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority to organisations that support government policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good but overdue policies. • Comprehensive DVAW law, but lack of funding for its implementation. • Arbitrary judicial decisions. • Lack of resources in trials (physical partitions between victim and aggressor...) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction with conducting no strict lockdowns. • No special DVAW policies during Covid-19. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No DVAW policies during Covid-19. • Withdrawal from Istanbul Convention. • Inadequate implementation of laws. • Release of convicted perpetrators from prisons due to full prison capacity.

6. Recommendations to policymakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More cooperation & communication. • Need to feel listened to. • More progressive governments. • More budget to combat DVAW. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More institutional coordination. • Technological improvements. • Need for more shelters. • More cooperation among services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communication with organisations. • More cooperation among organisations. • Stronger shelter policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More communication with organisations. • Understanding that femicide is political. • Perceive organisations as political mechanisms. • Education policies on gender equality.
7. Lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of networking. • Education is essential despite lockdowns. • Need to provide better psychological support to victims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of networking. Need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ More resources and shelters. ◦ Better psychological support for victims. ◦ Better prevention, education & justice. ◦ Education on gender equality. ◦ Gender perspective in all work fields. ◦ Employment insertion of DVAW victims. ◦ Mandatory courses of aggressors. ◦ Eradication of sexism in the media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of networking. Need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Adapting to women's needs. ◦ Long-term funding. ◦ More social awareness of DVAW. • They are more flexible than expected. • Importance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Meeting face-to-face. ◦ Social activities. ◦ Non-sexist education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of solidarity for women. Need for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Better coordination. ◦ Organisations to be more visible. ◦ Long-term funding. ◦ To be prepared (do drills). ◦ More technology & infrastructure.
8. Shortcomings in DVAW eradication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of progressive political parties. • Ignorance of the organisations' work. • Misperceptions about DVAW. • Lack of education on gender equality. • Lack of budget to combat DVAW. • Poor economic conditions of women make them dependent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations are only a stopgap. • Poor economic conditions of women make them dependent on aggressors. • Many judges rule precariously. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little listening to the organisations. • Too many laws. • Lack of social awareness and understanding of DVAW. Situation of women questioned. • Micromachismos. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of government with feminist perspective. • Tolerance of DVAW in society. • Insufficient and dissuasive law on this issue. • Disinformation Istanbul Convention & Law 6284. • Arbitrary justice system. • Lack of prevention, education & justice.
9. Needs for improving organisation's activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More stable budgets. • Coordination with government & police. • Better technological equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More resources and more stability. • Coordination of all DVAW services. • More dialogue with the administrations. • Inclusion of feminist organisations in workshops and prevention courses in schools, universities & companies. • Training health workers to detect DVAW. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable budget and finances. • To be put at the centre of DVAW discourse. • Work to prevent violence, not to confront it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue and cooperation with government. • A more progressive definition of the family. • More sustainable projects.
10. Importance of the academic sector	<p>Need for academia to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out more research. • Provide more data. • Bring an interdisciplinary and intersectional perspective to gender equality and violence against women. 	<p>Need for academia to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive a change in social ideology. • Gender mainstream knowledge. • Take DVAW organisations into account. • Work with a panoramic perspective. • Express the needs of the organisations. 	<p>Need for academia to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better research & records. Knowledge transfer. • Cooperate with organisations. • Study economic violence and vicarious violence against women. • Fewer laws, more competencies. 	<p>Need for academia to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain more data and written materials. • Set up more projects related to the issue. • Lobby politicians. • Provide solutions and make the issue visible.

Table 2. Results of the interviews by country and by question.

5. Results and discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic has unleashed many challenges for women organisations tackling DVAW and has uncovered how policies implemented are inadequate to tackle the issue. Regarding the DVAW policies implemented during the pandemic by governments, there are different views. According to the interviewed organisations in Austria and Turkey, it appears that their respective governments have not implemented adequate policies. However, organisations in Spain and Sweden expressed considerable satisfaction with the measures. Spain stands out for the adoption of a comprehensive and innovative specific law, as well as a package of measures and an awareness-raising campaign. Turkey, in contrast, seems to have worsened the pre-pandemic situation, having changed laws, and left the Istanbul Convention, endangering the safety of victims. Due to the incorrect application of the restraining order of law 6284, which guarantees the prevention of violence against women, some aggressors were released from prison with the excuse of the full capacity of the prisons during the pandemic. Furthermore, Austrian organisations have pointed out that, according to the Istanbul Convention, 228 million EUR are needed worldwide to combat violence against women. Austria has only provided 26 million EUR. In addition, they mentioned a new law, according to which the offender who is suspended will be taken to a violence prevention centre and receive counselling for six hours by a social worker. Although this is particularly new, the organisations are dissatisfied that 11 of the 26 million euros are allocated to this measure (Futterknecht, 2021).

The results of the interviews with DVAW victim support organisations are particularly revealing. All four countries have experienced an increase in DVAW during the pandemic. Reporting was low at the beginning of the pandemic in Spain, Sweden and Turkey but not in Austria, as organisations were known to be open and working well for the victims. However, in Sweden and Turkey, after the organisations became more visible and informed women that they were still open and working, they started to receive calls. As many victims in Spain were living at home with the aggressor, they could not contact the organisations. Nonetheless, after a short time, the calls from victims tripled. Thus, being locked down with the perpetrators seems to be an important factor that increases violence. One of the interviewees in Turkey wanted to concretely underline that the pandemic itself did not increase DVAW, because violence always exists. But the drivers of violence have increased during this time. Being confined in the same space with unavoidable intensive interaction, sometimes with little room for privacy and no other social contact, victims are often “trapped” with their perpetrators.

The pandemic has affected the way people work around the world, and grassroots organisations have been no exception. The restrictions have created even more challenges for them; they had to connect and work in a hybrid way, use more technology, work longer hours, etc. This created physical and psychological problems for staff and social workers. The decrease of volunteer support in organisations in Turkey and Spain increased the workload of social workers according to the interviewees in these two countries. Often, women could not get sufficient or immediate support as they were locked up with their abusers. On the other hand, as the organisations started to work online, the lack of technological infrastructure made work and counselling difficult at the beginning. This has

revealed that organisations need technological literacy and equipment more than ever. On the other hand, organisations in Turkey mentioned the difficulties of some of their shelter users to receive online counselling, as they did not have smartphones or computers. Therefore, the organisations claim that the governments should implement better policies concerning DVAW, such as providing more space at shelters and improving coordination between administrations. In terms of implementation, organisations complain that the governments have failed to reduce cases of violence and femicides. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the inadequate implementation of effective policies and the lack of coordination and communication between organisations and governments.

In Austria, Sweden and Spain, organisations were able to receive support from their governments, albeit at different levels. In Sweden, one respondent mentioned additional funding, while the other mentioned insufficient shelter capacity. In Spain, they reported that the government and institutions have provided moral support and facilitated the situation, but that this has not been sufficient. In Austria, the organisations particularly highlighted the way in which the Ministry of Justice supported them and facilitated their work. For example, they increased the budget to provide more lawyers for victims and gave the organisations full authority to send electronic lawsuit applications, so that they would not have to delay their judicial procedure. However, partner organisations in Austria shared their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the Ministry of Interior and the Police, as these institutions have not sufficiently collaborated with women's organisations and are reluctant to address DVAW. In Turkey, on the other hand, the government has not supported the organisations in any way. They point to the need for a stable budget to continue working and implement better services for women. Finally, all interviewed organisations coincide on the need for better coordination between governmental institutions and women's organisations. They argue that DVAW should not be the sole responsibility of organisations and that extra funding only in times of crisis is not a sustainable solution. The need for more solidarity and information among the organisations themselves should also be underlined. Several interviewees stated that constant communication with other organisations enabled them to provide more support, facilitating their work and services, even without government support.

6. By way of conclusion: lessons learned

Crises exacerbate situations of violence against women, the Covid-19 pandemic being no exception. In particular, there has been an increase in domestic violence against women in cases of strict lockdowns. Organisations fighting against domestic violence complain that governments do not put their needs at the centre and do not consider their knowledge and experience in this field. Seemingly, some states are unwilling to take initiatives to collaborate with such organisations or NGOs due to, in many cases, certain prejudices. From the interviews with organisations, it appears that grassroots movements are struggling to make their voices heard. This implies the need to bring such organisations into the political arena, to listen to their voices, as they probably have key information on this important issue. Financial support for DVAW from governments means nothing as long as governments do not see DVAW as a violation of human rights, and all the organisations in this study shared concerns about the lack of involvement of politicians.

Some organisations complained about the gap between government measures approved and what is finally implemented. Government accountability should be borne in mind when developing new policies, as it is very difficult to move forward if what is already in place does not really work. On the other hand, feminist grassroots movements attach great importance to the role of education in preventing domestic violence against women. They believe that appropriate workshops and educational activities should be developed in schools and companies. In addition, institutions can be good intermediaries to promote cooperation between feminist organisations fighting against domestic violence. For example, policies of rapprochement between the different shelters should be implemented. Of course, the reality of each organisation can be very different. However, it can be enriching to listen to each other, to see what works for some and what does not work for others and to find sustainable solutions together.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Specific measures adopted by governments during Covid-19 to curb DVAW

AUSTRIA	SPAIN	SWEDEN	TURKEY
Support package for women victims of gender-based violence.	Plan for Contingency against Gender Violences during the Covid-19 crisis.	No strict lockdown, and no specific national DVAW prevention package.	No DVAW prevention package.
Slight increase in approach and entry bans at the onset of the pandemic.	Declaration of protection and assistance services for victims of domestic violence as 'essential'.	Improvement of data collection methods. Dissemination at the municipal level.	Postponement of DVAW and divorce legal processes.
Survey on DVAW during lockdown.	WhatsApp number for victims. ALERTCOPS application to send alert messages to the police.	Increase in funding for organisations addressing DVAW.	Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (01/07/2021).
Extension of the <i>Helpchat</i> helpline opening hours. Set up <i>Sorgen Hotline Österreich Frauen</i> Helpline to offer advice to people in difficult circumstances.	'Mascarilla-19' as a strategy to facilitate pharmacy reporting.	Campaign reminding health and social services to ask patients about their possible exposure to violence.	Ineffective implementation of Law 6284 (protection of the family and prevention of DVAW).
Remote help from the Vienna Domestic Violence Intervention Centre.	Campaign for the prevention and sensibilization against DVAW.	Global Guy Talk.	Ordinary sanitary checks and disinfection in the shelters.
Appeal to citizens to call the police if they detect DVAW.	Guide for women experiencing DVAW during Covid-19 lockdown.	Increase in preventive and effective work to combat violence.	Shelter accommodation restricted to women "at risk of life safety".
	Royal Decree-Law 12/2020 and Law 1/2021 on urgent measures to protect and assist victims of gender violence.		

Table 3. Specific measures adopted by governments during Covid-19 to curb DVAW.

Appendix 2: Interviews' questions

1. We did some research about DVAW during the pandemic in your country and found that it has increased. How has this impacted your daily work?
2. What kind of challenges have you faced regarding the support of women since then?
3. Do you think grassroots movements are able (with the necessary resources) to respond to the increasing domestic violence? If so, how?
4. Has the government supported or co-worked with you in any way? Has this support increased or decreased?
5. What do you think about the policies that have been enforced in your country concerning domestic violence during the pandemic?
6. What recommendations would you give to policymakers to be better prepared in future crises?
7. What approaches or support that you have given have been effective until now? What are the greatest lessons learned?
8. What was or still is lacking for effective and impactful work towards reducing DVAW?
9. What would you ideally need to enhance your activity of domestic violence prevention and tackling?
10. How can the academic sector help to fill the research and data gap about gender violence, to mitigate and tackle domestic violence against women?



POLICY BRIEF

Domestic violence against women in times of Covid

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I. Introduction

Research so far on how Covid-19 has affected gender violence around the world indicates that contingency measures resulting from the pandemic have increased domestic violence against women (hereinafter referred to as DVAW). To highlight how women are at high risk of domestic violence in times of crisis, we studied the situation in four European countries: Austria, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. Qualitative research has been carried out on the measures taken so far, both by governments and by organisations supporting women victims of domestic violence. On the one hand, we investigated the specific policies implemented by each government; however, they failed to curb DVAW cases. On the other hand, we researched the challenges encountered and responses undertaken by organisations working to eradicate DVAW. In general, they have felt frustrated for being kept out of the political arena. They have expressed their increasing difficulties in the face of rising cases and lack of resources. The voices of these grassroots movements are very useful and must be heard, not only for the sake of better policies in future crises, but also to move towards the eradication of gender-based violence. They ask to be heard, to get stable funding and to put women victims at the centre of the discussions.

II. Specific measures adopted by governments during Covid-19 to curb DVAW

AUSTRIA	SPAIN	SWEDEN	TURKEY
Support package for women victims of gender-based violence.	Plan for Contingency against Gender Violences during the Covid-19 crisis.	No strict lockdown, and no specific national DVAW prevention package.	No DVAW prevention package.
Slight increase in approach and entry bans at the onset of the pandemic.	Declaration of protection and assistance services for victims of domestic violence as 'essential'.	Improvement of data collection methods. Dissemination at the municipal level.	Postponement of DVAW and legal divorce processes.
Survey on DVAW during lockdown.	WhatsApp number for victims. ALERTCOPS application to send alert messages to the police	Increase in governmental funding for organisations addressing DVAW.	Withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (01/07/2021).
Extension of the Helpchat helpline opening hours. "Worries hotline" offering advice to people in difficult circumstances.	'Mascarilla-19' as a strategy to facilitate pharmacy reporting.	Campaign reminding health and social services to ask patients about their possible exposure to violence.	Ineffective implementation of Law 6284 (protection of the family and prevention of DVAW).
Remote help from the Vienna Domestic Violence Intervention Centre.	Campaign for the prevention and sensibilization against DVAW.	Global Guy Talk.	Ordinary sanitary checks and disinfection in the shelters.
Appeal to citizens to call the police if they detect DVAW.	Guide for women experiencing DVAW during Covid-19 lockdown.		Shelter accommodation restricted to women "at risk of life safety".
	Royal Decree-Law 12/2020 and Law 1/2021 on urgent measures to protect and assist victims of gender violence.		

III. Policy recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to individual states, who should make decisions according to their national realities:

1. Improve communication and broaden the dialogue with organisations that help women victims of domestic violence, listen to their needs and take them into account at the discussion and decision-making tables.
2. Improve intra-institutional coordination, especially between ministries.
3. Allocate stable, long-term budgets to organisations dealing with DVAW.
4. Invest in technological improvements to facilitate and streamline the work of the organisations., more shelter services for women victims and their children, as well as storage space for food and other necessary materials.
5. Pay special attention to and improve services in rural areas, where technology and access to resources are not guaranteed.
6. Invest more in gender equality education policies, starting from early childhood. Include feminist grassroots associations in the provision of workshops and prevention courses in high schools, universities, companies, etc.
7. Invest in training health workers to detect and manage cases of gender-based violence.