



# *Covid-19: Exacerbation of violence, struggle, and silence*

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## ***Abstract*** —

*This article aims to highlight the underlying causes that perpetuate violence against girls and women during the Covid-19 crisis and the measures needed to reduce it.*

*It also intends to assess the effectiveness of Law 103-13 on gender-based violence in terms of managing its effects, especially since public policies seem to focus only on short-term responses to fundamentally structural problems.*

*Finally, it will also enable us to draw conclusions about the strategies capable of reconciling the imperative of strengthening equality and the objective of establishing a unified, egalitarian, and equitable strategy for the reduction of violence against women.*

***Keywords***—*Violence, women, equality, parity, women's rights, Law 103-13 concerning violence against women*

## ***INTRODUCTION***

During the Covid-19 crisis, millions of women and girls around the world have been victims of physical, sexual, and economic violence inflicted by men. This violence is a human rights violation and an extreme form of gender discrimination. It has denied women and girls their dignity and violated their human rights, harming their health, reducing productivity, and preventing them from reaching their full potential.

Unfortunately, the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have worsened the situation, with millions of women suffering disproportionately and in different ways. During this crisis, women were put through challenging situations,



were at greater risk of losing their livelihoods, and numerous women were unable to access social and medical support. Furthermore, women found themselves more isolated than ever, confined in violent households and bearing the brunt of their partners' anxieties and frustrations in the face of the devastating social and economic consequences of this crisis.

The current global emergency has resulted in a dramatic increase in gender-based violence (GBV). This is a poignant reminder to take urgent action and engage governments to launch concrete solutions to end the misery and suffering engendered by violence against women in all its forms.

The implementation of the state of health emergency, during the year of 2020, restricted freedoms by depriving people of their right to move freely out of their homes. It is a form of violence that has affected all people living in Morocco, regardless of gender.

Nevertheless, this has also had specific drastic consequences on the frequency of gender-based violence.

In this context, it is crucial to remember that one of these state of health emergency measures was the travel ban and lockdown. This situation led to a total lockdown of families in their homes or apartments. Staying in a small space without being able to leave it fostered friction and arguments between partners, which has all too frequently led to psychological, physical, or sexual violence, especially when given a cramped accommodation and/or one occupied by a large number of people.

In addition, when travel was subject to authorizations from the local authorities as per health emergency measures during Covid-19. The gender-based violence victims, undoubtedly and very frequently, gave up leaving their homes to seek help as they feared being checked and fined by the law enforcement authorities.

The latest available data, gathered before the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, is a stark reminder to the world that there is still a tremendous amount of urgent work needed to be done to end gender-based violence.

The reality of these gruesome figures is deeply shocking. According to the World



Health Organization (WHO), 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Whereas the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime estimates that 137 women are intentionally killed by a loved one daily, and 72% of women and girls are subject to human trafficking, with more than three out of four children trafficked being girls.

Figure n°1: Violence against women and girls  
(see appendix)

This perpetual cycle of violence, abuse, and suffering affects not only women and girls but also all members of society. It creates fragile and wounded families and leaves deep psychological scars that ultimately have extremely negative impacts on the sustainability and tranquility of our global communities.

According to UN Women, one in three women worldwide is a victim of physical or sexual violence, mainly by an intimate partner. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, and the immediate and long-term physical, sexual and mental consequences can be devastating and even lead to death.

Therefore, violence negatively affects women's overall well-being and deprives them of participating fully in society. It impacts their families, their communities, and the country in general. Furthermore, violence has ravaging costs ranging from increased pressure on health care to legal fees to productivity loss.

In this regard, it would be relevant to share some UN initiatives that have been put in place by all countries to measure the degree of violence against women in the world. The figure below includes measures launched by countries over the world against violence and some actions launched by other UN agencies.

Figure n° 2: Measures launched by countries against violence (see appendix)

In this regard, the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, coordinated by UNDP and UN Women, monitored the policy measures governments have adopted around the world to address the COVID-19 crisis and highlights responses that have incorporated a gender lens [1]. The system highlights national measures that directly address women's economic and social security, including unpaid care



work, the labor market, and violence against women.

Figure n°3: COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker (see appendix)

This figure describes the gender sensitive measure implemented by governments such as the “economic monitoring committee to confront the direct and indirect economic repercussions of Covid 19 on the national economy.”

The figure shows that African countries reached 86% with the least gender sensitive measures to combat violence against women compared to the European country reaching 92%. According to the graph above, Morocco for example reached barely 29 measures while Monaco reached only 12.

Figure n°4: Measures undertaken by Morocco during Covid 19 in favor of women (see appendix)

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations Population Fund has carried out several structural actions to meet the needs of vulnerable populations in terms of sexual and reproductive health and the fight against

gender-based violence. The following actions mentioned, mainly “Operation Salama” led by the UNFPA that aimed to protect field workers and vulnerable populations against the pandemic. Operation SALAMA was organized in 275 establishments covering more than 90 urban and rural localities in the Kingdom, to distribute protection kits and adapt them to the specific needs of each population, protective equipment to health professionals, and other frontline workers.

This operation supported the reorganization of health services for better care of pregnant women and newborns in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic at the level of childbirth facilities: care algorithms, recommendations for best practices, support for a self-care approach for greater empowerment of women and girls with regard to their sexual and reproductive health.

On the other hand, several actions were planned to strengthen the capacities of civil society organizations in order to ensure the continuity of support and accompaniment of women and girls victims of violence during the COVID-19 crisis through



raising awareness, legal and psychological support for the care of victims of violence in the multifunctional spaces dedicated for women or by the NGOs in different regions.

Therefore, it is important to clarify that violence against girls and women is not limited to a specific culture, region, country, or a specific group of women. It strikes both in times of peace and in times of war and crises, and has enormous social, economic, and human costs. Today, although women are increasingly holding decision-making positions, they continue to deal with numerous obstacles denying them their right to equality. Unfortunately, they still face preconceived ideas about their appearance and behavior. Even in decision-making positions, women are exposed to different forms of violence and harassment.

In fact, social media often perpetuates the problem by reducing women to stereotypes, sexualizing them, and giving their words and behaviors an excessively emotional load.

Hence, the horizon of this article can only be limited to objectives of a methodological nature rather than analytical:

- (i) A thematic framing objective on indicators of violence against girls and women as well as the link with human development is crucial according to international standards. In which, it is interesting to highlight the effects of the dynamics of violence against women, social inequalities, and territorial disparities. This analysis will demonstrate that violence against women is not linked to particular social and regional contexts.
- (ii) An objective of putting the indicators in context with the measures needed to reduce violence. No one can deny the efforts made over the years to reduce violence against women by adopting Law 103-13 on gender-based violence, but challenges remain.

In particular, this article proposes to highlight the underlying causes that perpetuate violence against girls and women and the measures to be adopted to reduce it during the Covid-19 crisis. It also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Law 103-13 on combating violence against women in managing these effects, especially since



public policies seem to focus only on short-term responses to problems that are fundamentally structural. It will also enable us to draw conclusions on strategies that can reconcile the imperative of strengthening equality with the objective of establishing a harmonious, egalitarian, and equitable strategy for the reduction of violence against women. In this regard, it would be interesting to address the issue of violence against women in the following three areas:

**I- Indicators of violence against women and girls**

**II- Factors aggravating violence against girls and women**

**III- The challenges of Law 103-13 concerning gender-based violence**

**IV- Measures adopted to reduce violence against women during the covid-19 crisis**

*I. INDICATORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN DURING COVID-19*

As mentioned, numerous international agreements, including the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women,

have recognized women's fundamental right to live free from violence. The United Nations provides a broad definition of violence against women, which includes any act that harms women's physical, sexual, or mental health. Nevertheless, despite the adoption of numerous laws to protect women from violence, existing legal systems, and social norms continue to tolerate the use of violence by men against women in many circumstances. The 1993 United Nations General Assembly declaration defined violence against women as a violation of women's human rights and a manifestation of discrimination against them. It is important to highlight the fact that gender-based violence is also considered a public health problem with a harrowing negative impact on women's and children's lives, general health, and socio-health. This public health issue has also disastrous social consequences such as early marriage, unwanted pregnancies, clandestine abortion, single mothers, abandoned children, children in street situations, dropping out of school, etc.



Yet, women continue to carry out most of the tasks related to the home, child rearing, and care of extended family in our communities. Millions of women are therefore primarily homemakers. This makes them more vulnerable to domestic violence while being voiceless and invisible.

Measures taken to contain COVID-19, such as curfews, have severely affected women as the rate of violence against them during these lockdowns increased dramatically. The value of the work women do at home as caregivers for their families and communities is colossal.

Based on the observation of violence against girls and women is shocking, it would be relevant to share a few indicators of violence against girls and women in Morocco.

- Even prior to the pandemic, women's unpaid roles in healthcare and other care roles accounted for an estimated \$11 trillion in global economies. Moreover, 70 percent of healthcare workers and 65.3 percent of the paid healthcare workforce worldwide are women.

They have found themselves on the front lines of the increase in gender-based violence in their workplaces as well as in their homes.

- It is important to clarify that violence against women and girls has no face, space, or nationality. According to the estimates of the various studies, 35% of women in the world and 70% in Morocco have suffered from physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner or sexual violence by another person at some point in their lives. [2]. According to the second National Survey on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women published in 2018, 54% of women are subjected to violence throughout the country, i.e., more than one in two women.
- With regard to human trafficking worldwide, it is regrettable to report that nearly 3 out of 4 women and girls who are victims of human trafficking are used for sexual exploitation [3].



- Contraceptive prevalence reached around 70.8% and that of modern methods alone is around 58%. Reproductive health needs will, however, continue to increase since the number of women of reproductive age, currently estimated at more than 9 million, will continue to grow to exceed 10 million around 2025.
- Maternal mortality is more than twice as high in rural areas (111.1 deaths per 100,000 live births) as in urban areas (44.6 deaths per 100,000 live births); and the maternal mortality ratio has fallen by more than 35% in the space of 7 years, falling from 112 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2009 to 72.6 in 2016.
- Infant and child mortality (0 to 5 years) has, in turn, decreased from 30.5‰ in 2011 to 22.2‰ in 2018 and that of neonatal from 21.7‰ to 13.6‰ in the same period.
- When it comes to child marriage, about 650 million women and girls worldwide in 2019 were married before the age of 18. In Morocco,

the rate of child marriage has increased from 7.75% (18,341 marriages) in 2004 to 9% in 2018 (30,203), 95% of which involve girls [4]. This rate, already critical due to its increase, often results in early pregnancy and social isolation, which interrupts schooling, limits girls' opportunities and exposes them more to domestic violence [5].

In 2018, Law 103-13 regarding gender-based violence criminalized forced marriage, which is aggravated if the offence is committed against a minor. In the same year, the Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office sent two circulars to the lawyers, prosecutors general and magistrates of the Public Prosecutor's Office concerned, urging them not to hesitate to oppose any marriage application that does not take into account the interests of the child.

- In parallel, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council called for the appeal of Articles 20, 21 and 22 of the Family Code. The National Observatory for Human





Development (ONDH) [6] started a study on the same theme and the National Human Rights Council launched in 2019 an awareness campaign “Child Marriage: Abolish the exception, restore the norm” which aimed to strengthen the debate on the revision of Article 20 of the Family Code. Unfortunately, this issue continues to exist and persists increasingly.

- Concerning education, globally, one in three students (aged 11 and 13-15) has been bullied by their peers at school for at least one day, and both girls and boys are exposed to these practices. School-based gender-based violence is a major obstacle to universal access to schooling and the implementation of the right to education for girls [7].
- In a survey of 27 universities in the United States in 2015, 23% of female undergraduate students reported having experienced sexual assaulted or misconduct [8].
- Regarding harassment, in a study conducted in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa, between 40 and 60% of women reported they had been sexually harassed on the street. Meanwhile, findings from a study conducted in Australia show that nearly 2 in 5 women aged 15 or older who have been in the workforce in the past five years have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace during that period, compared to 1 in 4 of their male counterparts [9].
- Apropos the presence of women in positions of power, and according to the European Union report, one in ten women over the age of 15 has already been the victim of cyber-harassment such as unwanted messages and texts of offensive and sexually explicit nature on social networking sites [10]. For example, 82% of parliamentary women who participated in another study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 39 countries in five regions reported having experienced psychological violence in one form or another (gestures and signs of sexist or



sexually humiliating nature, or intimidation against them) during their mandate, and 65% were the target of sexist remarks, mainly from male parliamentary colleagues [11].

## II. FACTORS AGGRAVATING VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN

Well before the pandemic, progress in closing the global gender gap in labor force participation rates, occupational segregation and gender wage gaps remained pervasive and the majority of working women around the world were stuck in informal and precarious jobs with few rights and protections. “COVID-19 exacerbated these trends, taking a disproportionate toll on women’s jobs and livelihoods. In 2020, women lost 46.6 million jobs globally, a 3.6 per cent loss compared to 2.9 per cent for men.” Job losses were particularly acute in the services sectors, including retail, hospitality, tourism, and care, where women, especially young women, are overrepresented [12].

Violence against women is the result of a complex interaction between individual and relational factors, but also social, cultural and environmental ones. To understand this complex set of influences, researchers often use the ecological model [13].

Figure n°5: Factors associated with violence against women based on the ecological model (see appendix)

According to studies, while some factors are consistently associated with an increased risk of violence against women and girls in many countries, others are context-specific and vary from country to country – or even within the same country (for example, between rural and urban areas).

In some cases, the factors associated with a woman’s risk of exposure to violence may be the same as those associated with a man’s risk of committing violence, such as low levels of education and witnessing parent-to-parent violence during childhood.

In other cases, the factors may differ, for example, young age is a known risk factor for a woman to experience intimate partner violence, but not necessarily for a man to commit violent acts.



Sociological studies generally focus on individual determinant such as low levels of education, childhood sexual or physical abuse, and harmful use of alcohol.

However, researchers are now increasingly recognizing the importance of community and societal risk factors, such as traditional gender norms and stereotypes, women's unequal social, legal and economic status, the use of violence to resolve conflicts in general, and the poor sanctions against violence [14].

On the other hand, existing studies indicate that certain aspects of women's life experiences, such as the presence of a disability, as well as certain contextual factors, such as humanitarian crises, can increase women's vulnerability to violence.

In most cases of violence, women victims of violence request some form of aid from their families, and women's rights NGOs.

According to the High Commission for Planning of Morocco survey on violence against women, only 25% of complaints filed with the police result in a written report, and 38.3% of these complaints result in women withdrawing charges. Of

all reported domestic violence cases, only 1.3% of offenders were arrested.

While the pandemic has drawn significant attention to violence against women, high prevalence rates have long pointed to an endemic crisis, rooted in unequal gender power relations. The rise in risk factors and demand for services also caught many governments unprepared, leading to significant gaps and bottlenecks in the rollout of support for survivors.

Even in countries with more robust infrastructure, hotlines and shelters were often stretched to breaking point due to rising demand. Nevertheless, the early and sustained mobilization of feminist movements and other gender equality advocates and the urgency of the pandemic also spurred important innovations and increased awareness among policymakers and the public.

The World Health Organization study [15] concerning the lethal consequences of violence against women includes homicide, suicide, maternal mortality, and death. Non-lethal consequences include a wide range of physical and mental suffering, such as injuries and physical



disabilities, unwanted pregnancies, abortions performed in unsafe conditions, pregnancy and childbirth complications, depression, anxiety, decreased self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder.

According to this World Health Organization study, women exposed to violence experience on average more surgeries, medical visits, and hospital stays than those who have never been abused. Furthermore, the services supporting vulnerable women face increasing constraints, a lack of funding and resources. Consequently, many of them have now reached a breaking point. This inexcusable lack of investment in urgent resources and funding, specifically for women, has an immediate and devastating impact on families and communities which must be urgently addressed if severe long-term socio-economic damage is to be avoided.

Given the heightened urgency of providing emergency and continuous support services to victims of physical and psychological violence, it is now of crucial importance that the political will in the communities and nations be firmly

challenged and strongly mandated to ensure that women's safety is a high priority in policy and funding decisions.

At this unprecedented time in our world history, it is now more critical than ever that the vital concerns that gravely affect women and girls today be brought to the forefront of the political arena. To face these gargantuan challenges, governments should invest in services such as:

- Investing in accessible, quality services for survivors of violence (women and girls) in all the region,
- Setting public policies and strategies to eliminate violence against women and girls, and change perceptions, stereotypes and patriarchal norms that reinforce unequal power,
- Establishing a strong link between social protection, labor market and economic empowerment programs and efforts to end GBV,
- Adapting the legislation and strategy to ongoing crises with multiple needs, that must also be adaptable to humanitarian contexts, conflicts, and disasters,



- Creating and strengthening institutions for continuous coordination of prevention measures and services mobilized against GBV that can be deployed for rapid emergency responses,
- Strengthening the feminist movements and civil society organizations to continue the advocacy for women's rights and change the discrimination norms,

### *III. THE CHALLENGES OF LAW 103-13 CONCERNING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE*

Due to the health, human rights and socio-economic consequences of violence against women, the international community has made a growing call for action to address the problem through a wide range of programs and policies. Factual data on how to prevent and respond to violence against women is still limited but is growing.

For its part, Morocco adopted for the first time in 2018 Law 103-13 to combat violence against women, a law much criticized by NGOs of the women's rights

movement. While this law has recorded some impact, it remains highly controversial and criticized by lawyers and jurists who apply this text on a daily basis and who suffer from numerous of its shortcomings. It would be wise to briefly mention some heavily criticized novel aspects of Law 103-13 by women NGOs, and which are as follows:

- Penalties aggravation, for certain forms of violence, when the perpetrator is the husband, the divorcee, or the suitor or when the victim is a minor or a person with a disability.

- The necessity of implementing prevention measures and the provision of new protections to victims, Law 103-13 obliges victims to initiate criminal proceedings in order to obtain protection, which only few are able to do.

- The issuance of restraining orders that prohibit a person accused of violence from contacting, approaching or communicating with the victim. Nevertheless, these orders can only be issued in the context of criminal proceedings or after a criminal conviction. In addition, these injunctions can be lifted if the spouses reconcile, which can only increase the pressure on



women to renounce resorting to such measures.

- The application of new personal safety measures: in particular, prohibiting the perpetrator from contacting the victim and the follow-up of adequate psychiatric therapy.

- The criminalization of certain acts but with many restrictions, some of which are degrading: expulsion from the marital home, but without protective measures for women, squandering of common property, forced marriage ...

- Sexual harassment is punishable by 1 to 6 months in prison, without providing any definition, and regardless of the sex of the perpetrator.

“UN Women recommended that victims of domestic violence have the opportunity to apply for a restraining order without initiating other legal proceedings, such as criminal prosecution or divorce. Civil restraining orders are issued in many other countries, such as Lebanon and Tunisia” [16].

In turn, Human Rights Watch denounced that the law does not contain a provision requiring courts to consider all forms of

evidence in domestic violence cases and establishing that a victim’s testimony in court can constitute sufficient evidence to reach a guilty verdict. Moreover, the law fails to provide any financial assistance for victims and does not clearly define the role of the government in providing support and services to victims of domestic violence, including the provision of shelter, medical care, psychological support, legal advice, and emergency hotline assistance.

In this momentum, it would also be relevant to cite some recommendations, in no particular order of priority, from the CNDH memorandum concerning Law 103-13 are as follows [17]:

*1- Define violence against women as one of the forms of gender-based discrimination, and include in the definition of violence against women all acts of gender-based violence that cause or are likely to cause physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm to women, including the threat of such acts, restraint, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in the public or private sphere;*



- 2- *Redefine rape as provided in the Article 486 of the Penal Code. The Council proposes the following definition of rape: “Rape is considered sexual penetration of whatever nature and purpose, committed against another person by the use of violence, coercion, threat or surprise, regardless of the nature of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.” This proposed definition makes it possible to include marital rape;*
- 3- *Redefine elements of sexual harassment by replacing the terms “injunctions, threats or of coercion means” by “any verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of sexual nature”;*
- 4- *Criminalize complicity and support for all violent crimes against women;*
- 5- *With respect to the proposition in the draft law to supplement article 61 of the Penal Code, the Council recommends clarifying personal security measure No. 10, which concerns “prohibiting the convicted person from contacting the victim,” so that the measure includes the prohibition of access to the victim’s home, the ability to reside in a defined area around the home of the victim, to frequent places where the victim usually goes or knowingly provoke encounters with the victim;*
- 6- *Aggravate systematically the penalty in the following cases: when the author of the offense is the current or former spouse, current or former fiancé, a family member, a person living with the victim, a person abusing his authority, if recurrence, if the offense is committed against a person in a precarious situation, or on the person of a child or in their presence, or committed by several perpetrators, when the offense is preceded by to serious violence or related to it, when the offense is committed with or under threat of weapons, or when it causes serious physical or psychological harm to the victim;*
- 7- *Add the following protective measures to be taken immediately by the judicial police or the Public Prosecutor’s Office, as deemed appropriate, in cases of violence against women: referral of the victim to a support*



*center specialized in helping victims of violence against women; allow the victim to choose to be domiciled in the office of the lawyer representing her or at the home office of a legal person authorized to accompany her during the period of the protection order; and allowing the victim to access a list of legal persons who are empowered and who can accompany her throughout the period of the protection order (for instance, specialized associations). It is possible, with the agreement of the victim, to bring the real address of the victim to the knowledge of the authorized legal person in order to come in contact her;*

- 8- Urge local authorities to participate, in partnership with the state, in the creation of social centers to shelter women victims of violence, which will ensure greater proximity and availability in the field of protection of women victims of violence;*
- 9- Add a provision to the first paragraph of Article 10 of Law 103-13 to enact the creation of care and support units for women victims of violence within the sheltering social centers created*

*within the local communities, and if necessary, within social protection institutions established by Law 14-05 on the conditions for the opening and management of social welfare institutions;*

- 10- Revise paragraph 2 of Article 10 of Law 103-13 by adding the security system, including the right to safe housing for victims and their children within the shelter and support centers for women victims of violence.*

To put it briefly, this law is certainly a step forward but still requires amendments to fill the procedural gaps it contains in order to ensure that all victims are protected from abuse through including legal assistance providers, social services and health services to ensure the immediate needs of women facing violence, or the tightening of legal sanctions against perpetrators of violent acts.

#### **IV. MEASURES ADOPTED TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS**





The COVID-19 pandemic caught the world largely, around the globe, governments have struggled, to mitigate the negative fallout on women and girls, with reverberations that will still be felt for years to come. Yet, COVID-19 is not the only crisis threatening gender equality, today numerous sizable challenges such as the climate and conflict-induced displacement, as well as forced migration, rising poverty and food insecurity, are having a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including through greater exposure to abuse and violence.

Despite unprecedented policy efforts in all countries and territories, the pandemic response has fallen significantly short of protecting women from loss of income and employment. Poor integration of gender concerns in social protection and labor market policies before the pandemic, coupled with longstanding gaps in the coverage, comprehensiveness, and adequacy of existing policies, created substantial bottlenecks in COVID-19 responses across countries and regions. Women with intersecting socio-economic disadvantages (e.g., informal workers)

were particularly left unprotected. Women are heavily represented in the informal economy and/or sectors most affected by the lockdown, such as restaurant workers, domestic workers, and goods trafficking, many of whom lose their jobs as they are not registered in the social protection system; on the other hand, women have faced numerous personal, familial, and external obstacles to seeking assistance, accessing services and filing a complaint with authorities for the violence they have been subjected to. The confinement context meant that women had fewer opportunities to escape the violence and no other housing alternatives other than to remain in the violent and abusive home.

In this conjuncture, it is important to highlight some measures adopted in Morocco to reduce violence against women in public policies and strategies that have proven effective or, at least, promising, in particular:

- The Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office issued a statement on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, reminding all prosecutors to “firmly and rigorously” handle



cases of violence against women, and highlighting digital methods of filing complaints via special email addresses, an online platform, telephone and fax numbers.

- The Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office has also published directories with the telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of all courts and prosecutors in the country.
- The President of the National Union of Women of Morocco (UNFM), Princess Lalla Meryem, launched "Kolonamaak" a listening and support platform, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development, the DGSN-General Directorate for National Security, the Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Royal Gendarmerie, the OFPPT-Office for Professional Training and Promotion of Work, Poste Maroc and ANAPEC-National Agency for the Promotion of Employment and Competencies. This platform was created to

remotely collect complaints related to violence against women during the sanitary lockdown period and to provide the necessary listening and accompaniment, assistance, and support to the FVV-Female Victims of Violence. This platform, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through a direct telephone line (8350), is a free application downloadable on smartphones with the purpose of reporting any abuse or violence against women and girls and directing victims to the competent security or judicial authority, especially cases that require urgent intervention.

- The Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office, in partnership with UN Women, has launched an awareness-raising video on violence during the COVID-19 crisis against women and girls, and information on remote judicial services available for women and girls' victims of violence.
- The MSFFDS- Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development launched the



“Himaya” Protocol and awareness campaigns with actors and influencers to combat violence against women.

- The website launched by the Ministry of Health, [www.stopviolence.ma](http://www.stopviolence.ma).
- COVID-19 assistance payments were made to workers registered with the CNSS-National Social Security Fund.
- The MSFFDS launched a national campaign with UNFPA on television and radio stations, with famous actors and influencers to raise awareness about violence against women and girls during the lockdown.

Despite the efforts made to publicize the existence of public services dedicated to responding to violence against women, great numbers of women victims are still unable to access the protection and services they needed during the state of health emergency. Lockdown measures and movement restrictions created barriers to seeking assistance and reporting violence.

That being said, it is important to stress that the recommendations also highlight areas that require further research, and how different sectors can tackle violence against women. They further underline that, regardless of the sector and approach, all interventions to prevent and respond to violence against women should be considered from a human rights perspective.

The persistence and increase of violence against women, calls for a stronger and broader mobilization to provide a structural, comprehensive, and effective response capable of putting an end to this practice. Meanwhile, a more favorable political and institutional context and engaged in sectoral interventions is needed to strengthen regulations, research, and raise awareness. These initiatives need to be consolidated, harmonized, and scaled up for a broader and sustainable impact.

These upstream measures include the implementation of media campaigns and community-based interventions to try to change the unequal norms governing relations between men and women; strategies for women’s financial empowerment; school programs to prevent



violence among adolescents and young adults; and the prevention of child abuse, which is a risk factor known to increase the likelihood of a child later becoming a perpetrator or victim of violence [18], including through:

- Improving Law 103-13 by including the important CNDH recommendations and the demands memoranda of NGOs of the women's rights movement;
- Sensitizing the legislator on the need to adopt effective laws, provisions that protect women and ensure their implementation.
- Organizing campaigns to raise awareness via public and private channels to put an end to harmful practices in society;
- Strengthening the care units for women and girls who are victims of violence to become integrated structures guaranteeing psychological support, counselling, supervision and the handling of grievances and complaints, instead of being security units only responsible for receiving and processing complaints.
- Raising awareness of the actors integrated into the care chain, the doctor, the police and the prosecutors, by clearly defining their roles and encouraging them to perform their duties properly.
- Integrating NGOs as commissions members for the care of women victims of violence.
- Increasing educational interventions, women's empowerment initiatives and programs to transform social norms at the urban and rural levels;
- Developing sectoral strategies and ensuring strong institutional frameworks for the implementation of laws for the reduction of violence against women;
- Raising awareness for cultural change so that gender inequalities and stereotypes about women are eliminated;
- Changing attitudes and social and cultural norms,
- Encouraging education on appropriate equality for boys and girls.



- Encouraging in-depth research and analysis at the national and regional levels to recognize and understand the issue of violence against women;
- Sharing best practices deployed in other countries and making them known within the community.

During the Covid-19 period, women have suffered a double violence. It is relevant to mention some situations in which NGOs offers proposals for reforms to strengthen the response of public actors to violence against women during a pandemic. Although more broad-based legal and structural reforms are needed to better address such violence, and have been amply detailed elsewhere, the proposals below focus exclusively on reforms needed to address the specific challenges of a lockdown.

- The suspension of support records during the period of lockdown.
- The rejection of protection requests from women victims of violence who did not present a medical certificate.
- The lack of assistance of women from rural areas, where there are no courts;
- The failure to provide psychological assistance to NGOs, pending official communication of alternative solutions.
- The platform's requirement to send a written complaint by fax, knowing that many complainants are illiterate women from disadvantaged and rural areas, and the complaints did not lead to a follow-up.
- The exclusion of women from hospital care when they did not have their national ID card to show.
- The lack of proactiveness towards women who are victims of violence, especially in rural areas, as well as the lack of care for them. With the lockdown and economic difficulties, the majority of victims of violence have not had the



means to send complaints by fax or to travel.

- Providing women estranged from their husbands a RAMED (medical assistance plan) card even in the absence of a divorce decree.
- Ensure that support allowances reach all women, even those not registered with the CNSS (National Social Security Fund) or without a RAMED card.
- The Law enforcement agents who would go with abused women who get evicted, to convince their husbands to commit to stop the violence and to have them sign a written statement.

## V. CONCLUSION

COVID-19 has fast-tracked ongoing social and digital transformations, from changes in

the world of work, social protection, and public services delivery to how people access information, organize, and coordinate collective action against violence. In all these areas, digital technologies hold potential for the empowerment of women and girls— whether as social protection beneficiaries or feminist activists, but also pose new challenges for governments that must be addressed to combat violence in society.

At the same time, programs with digital components could be a good alternative to reduce and prevent violence in society. Alternative routes for raising awareness and outreach to youth, such as television or radio campaigns, and the involvement of local organizations and communities should also be maintained. Digital tools have also been a significant enabler of collective action, particularly if their associated risks are properly addressed by feminist activism; social media, digital



meeting spaces and SMS messaging groups have become important tools for organizing.

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APPENDIX

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS  
HAS INTENSIFIED DURING THE PANDEMIC

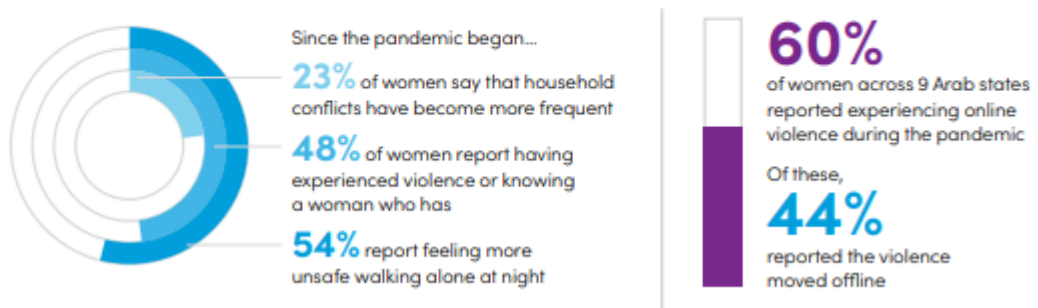


Figure n°1: Violence against women and girls

Source: “Report Government responses to COVID-19: Lessons on gender equality for a world in turmoil”, 2022

GOVERNMENTS HAVE RESPONDED,  
BUT MANY GAPS REMAIN



Figure n° 2: Measures launched by countries against violence

Source: Report Government responses to COVID-19: Lessons on gender equality for a world in turmoil, 2022



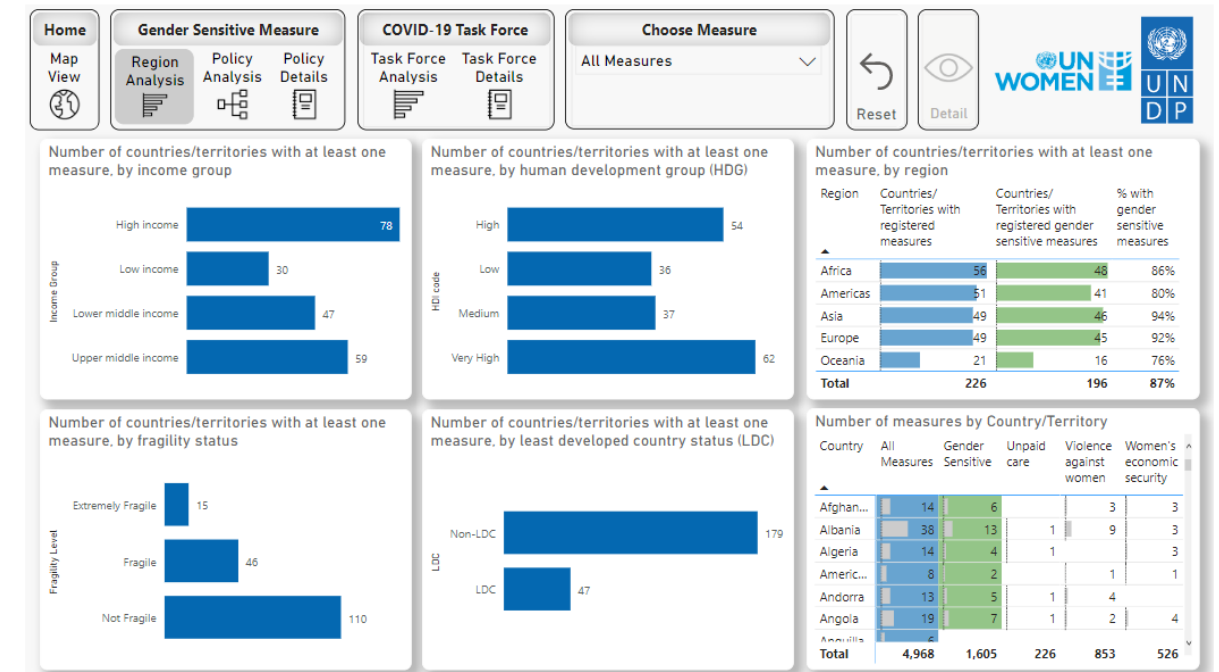


Figure n°3: COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker

Source: UNDP data /data.undp.org/gendertracker/ extracted in 2022.

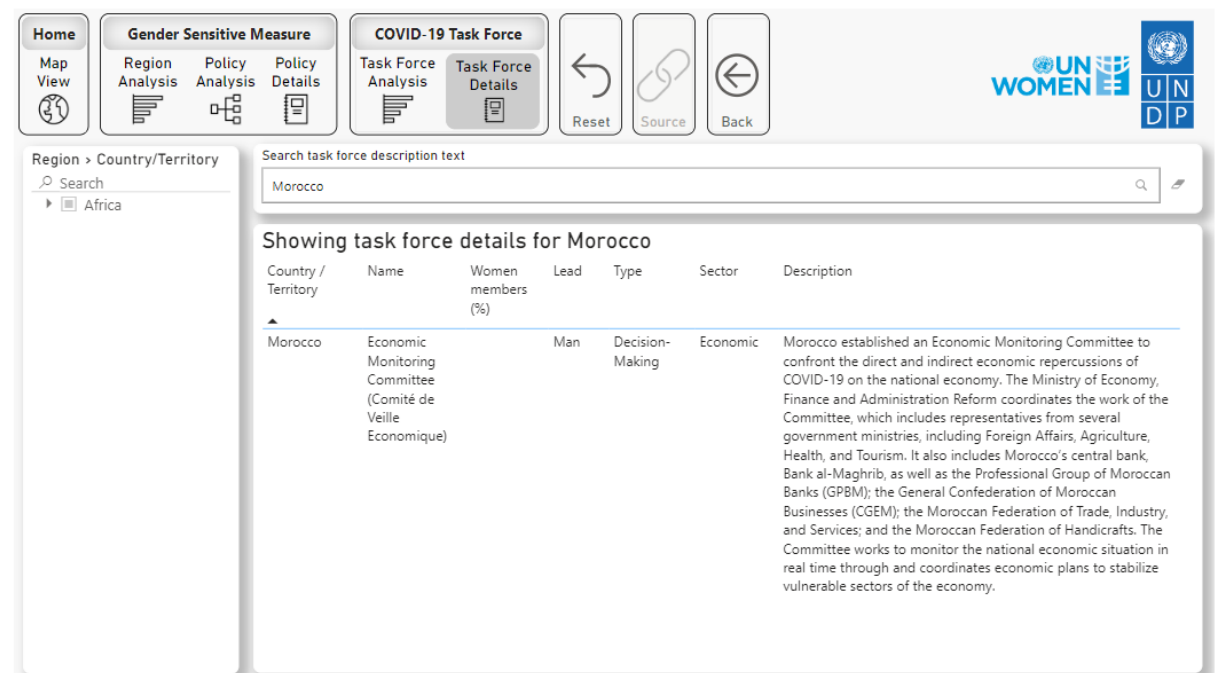


Figure n°4: Measures undertaken by Morocco during Covid 19 in favor of women

Source: UNDP data /data.undp.org/gendertracker/ extracted in 2022.

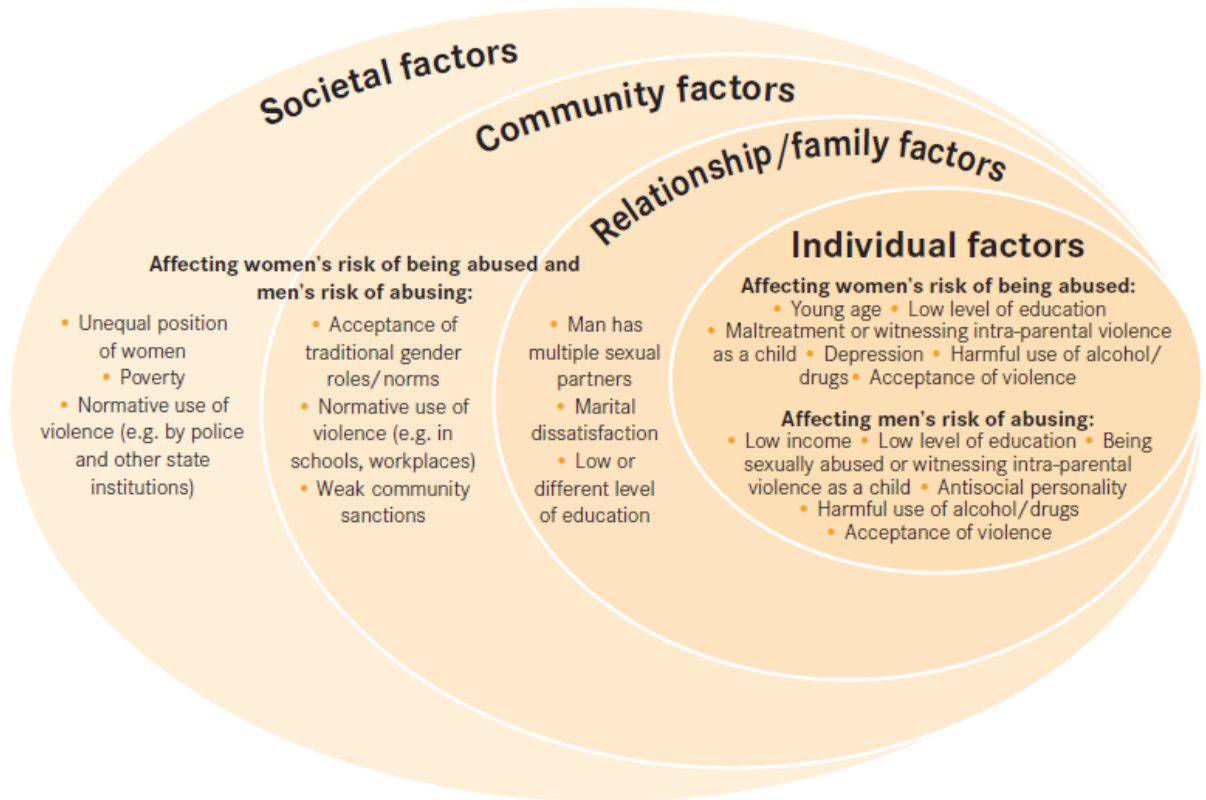


Figure n°5: Factors associated with violence against women based on the ecological model

Source: WHO /Understanding and addressing violence against women: overview.