

## **CHALLENGES FACED BY THE CURRENT MECHANISM FOR DEALING WITH VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC ABUSE UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN GEORGIA AND SWITZERLAND**

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### **Abstract**

Majority of the countries around the world declared a state of emergency to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, including Georgia and Switzerland. Although each nation adopted an individual method of fighting the pandemic, resulting in full or partial as well as short-term and long-term states of emergency, the pandemic has certainly become the main factor hindering social, economic and political activities around the globe.

A great number of citizens are finding themselves to have gone either into self-isolation or quarantine in order to prevent themselves from contracting the virus. These processes, on the one hand, are related to the prevention of the spread of the virus, but on the other, to confining many people in common space with potential abusers.

Correspondingly, the authors of the present study found it interesting to observe the patterns of reaction adopted by Georgia and Switzerland to face the actual challenges, whether or not the methods of fighting against women and domestic violence have changed, and what specific problems have been identified. The study serves to outline the problems, to assess the increased risks of violence and to ultimately evaluate the measures implemented to prevent the increase of violence in the two countries mentioned above. Finally, the article will evaluate and summarize the required measures and develop the recommendations that could possibly be applied in times of crisis.

The study given in the article was conducted under the Swiss international mobility project MOVETIA as well as with the support of Georgian National University SEU and Eastern Switzerland University through the involvement of their professors, experts and students. In addition to the authors of the article, professor: Ina Shanava and students: Mariam Esaiashvili, Anna Tsirekidze, Nina Malan, David Zanitti, Nikolai Laib and Kristina Paskov were involved in the research as well. The made experience showed perfectly the importance of international cooperation.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse, Prevention.

## Introduction

In general, in times of crises, including epidemics, violence against women tends to increase.<sup>1</sup> The number of female victims of violence has also virtually climbed in all countries.<sup>2</sup> Various circumstances lead to increased risk of violence in similar cases, such as fear caused by the pandemic, stress and deteriorating economic situation, serving as a kind of trigger for the abuser to engage in violent activities.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the victim is forced to spend more time with the abusive family member, making it difficult to escape from their clutches, as the victim may not be able to isolate itself and contact the law enforcement authorities.

Statistics show that both during and before the pandemic domestic conflict, including violence against women, is a universal reality all societies face, being a complex problem widespread throughout the world, which, given its specific nature and social dangers, has devastating consequences not only for the victim, but for the society as a whole.

It is important to note that the strict so-called “lockdown” in two to-be-compared countries of Georgia and Switzerland experienced two different durations. While strict measures of isolation lasted only 2-3 months in Switzerland, it was almost 3 times longer in Georgia. Moreover, the research process had to consider the pre-COVID-19 situation, namely service delivery in both Georgia and Switzerland. Due to different circumstances, the comparative analysis cannot be completely accurate, however, based on the situational (Covid-19 pandemic) analysis, the comparison is relevant and its results are interesting for the interested expert circles and the general public as well.

### 1. Research Methodology

The purpose of the research was to examine the challenges faced by the delivery of services against domestic conflict and violence against women both in Georgia and Switzerland, the adaptation process of the mentioned nations under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to compare the results. Depending on the purpose of the research, quantitative and qualitative research methods had been applied.

77 respondents took part in the quantitative survey of the Georgian case. The target audience of the research included the individuals, whose sphere of occupation had been related to issues of domestic violence and violence against women, namely employees of public and private shelters, crisis centers and organizations, working with victims of violence (psychologists, social workers and lawyers) across the nation. A questionnaire was developed for the direct survey and the data was processed, using the SPSS 23. As part of the qualitative research, semi-structured qualitative key informational interviews were used, namely the in-depth interviews conducted with four experts. Qualitative data analysis was carried out, involving the content analysis method.

Targeted sampling was used in the qualitative research, while available sampling was used in the quantitative research.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, COVID-19 and violence against women, March 26, 2020; UN Women, COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, UN chief calls for domestic violence ‘ceasefire’ amid ‘horrifying global surge’, April 6, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> COVID-19: Pandemics and Violence against Women: A Gender Lens on COVID-19: Pandemics and Violence against Women and Children | Center for Global Development | Ideas to Action (cgdev.org) [L.s. 21.12.2022].

The Swiss part of the survey was methodically based on an online questionnaire in all 54 (N=54) support facilities in Switzerland dealing with issues in domestic violence, both in shelters and crisis centers as well as advice centers. The questionnaire contained both closed questions as well as partially open questions with scaling options. Together with a covering letter, the link to the online questionnaire was sent by email on June 2nd to the chosen facilities, followed by the two short reminders within 10 days. We asked for answers until June 17th 2022. The given answers were completely anonymous with no option of identifying the answering facility. The evaluation explored both quantitative aspects such as statistical numbers and figures, while qualitative aspects were concluded by content analysis.

## **2. Quantitative Research Results (Georgia)**

Based on the data processed, it was revealed that according to the majority of the respondents (92.2%), victims most often called the police (112) to make a report. A part of the respondents (5.2%) believed that the victims use the violence hotline (116 006) actively, while the opinion of the rest of the respondents about the mechanisms preferred by victims to report violence was equally divided between the hotline of the Ministry of Health (1505) and the non-governmental organizations (1.3% and 1.3%).

In terms of the socioeconomic status of the victims, according to 74% of the research participants, victims in shelters are often holders of the socially disadvantaged status, 14.3% of them maintain that victims with status rarely find themselves in shelters, and according to 11.7%, victims in shelters almost always have a socially disadvantaged status.

Regarding the change in the number of victims with the status of socially disadvantaged under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to 53.2% of the research participants, the referral rate of victims with a low socioeconomic status has increased. By the same token, 11.7% of the respondents believe that the referral rate of victims with a high socioeconomic status has increased, while according to 35.1%, no changes have been detected in this regard.

One of the areas of interest of the research was the dominant nature of violence revealed in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the processing of the received data, it was revealed that 49.4% of the respondents highlighted the form of physical violence, 46.8% centered on psychological violence, and 3.9% focused on the increase in economic violence.

In order to determine the person, the victims of violence frequently identify as the abuser, based on the processing of the results, it was found that according to the experience of the respondents, the victims particularly experienced violence from their partners (68.8%) and ex-partners (15.6%).

Within the quantitative survey, the respondents answered a question about the challenges they had faced in terms of providing services to victims during the pandemic. Based on the analysis of the responses, it was revealed that 68.8% of the respondents believed that no difficulties had been detected in that regard, while 31.2% of the respondents mentioned the following challenges: “transportation problems”; “taking a COVID-19 test to be transferred to a safe place during night hours”; “social isolation (lockdown) during a pandemic”; “contacting with victims, intervention, identification of actual violence”; “an information vacuum”; “spending a 14-day period of isolation in quarantine, before entering a shelter”; “psychological and economic assistance” and “psychologist’s counseling”.

When asked whether any special measures had been taken to effectively provide services to victims during the COVID-19 pandemic, 55.8% of the respondents gave a negative answer, while 44.2% gave a positive answer. The respondents mainly identified the following activities: “an application was created, through which the victim could request help with a voice signal”; “transportation had been

provided”; “COVID-19 treatment, health services”; “psychological assistance, inclusion in the crisis program”.

In order to determine the extent to which coordinated cooperation among agencies involved in the process of providing services to victims of domestic violence was ensured under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the processing and analysis of the collected data, it was revealed that according to 46.8% of the respondents (often), 39.0% (almost always), 13.0% (rarely) and 1.3% (almost never), coordinated cooperation between various agencies was noted in the process of providing services to victims of domestic violence.

To determine whether there had been any gaps in victim resource empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey found that 68.8% reported no gaps, while 31.2% identified some. The following was named as the major difficulty by the respondents: “in the case of not having the status of socially disadvantaged, due to the distance working mode, the delay in the process of granting the status, particularly the one in effective response to the reference”; “disruption of movement, excess in asylum service”; “in terms of employment, due to the non-functionality of employment places under the pandemic”; “vocational training and employment involving the empowerment of the victim”; “less effectiveness of psychologist’s online services”.

As part of a quantitative study, the respondents assessed the handling of domestic violence cases in remote court settings. Based on the analysis of the obtained data, it was determined that the evaluation of 27.3% of the respondents was positive, while 26% was negative. It should be noted that 46.8% of the respondents chose the answer: “I find it difficult to respond”.

The research participants also assessed the difficulties encountered in their employment conditions under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to 55.8% of the respondents, no difficulties had been identified in their employment conditions. 44.2% of the research participants gave a positive answer, and the answers to the open questions revealed the following difficulties on the part of the participants: “troubled working relationships with abusers, difficulty in accessing technical means”; “difficulties in addressing needs of the beneficiary, including the fear of make an appeal”; “lack of opportunity to meet in person”; “risk of movement, contracting with the disease”; “online consultations and meetings with minors, dependent persons”; “setting up a face-to-face meeting, including due to lack of transportation”; “evaluation procedures having gone more complicated”; “working was even more stressful, accompanied by worries about health, both for themselves and for the beneficiaries”; “it served also as a barrier in terms of monitoring”; “there was difficulty in transportation”; “during the pandemic, they did not want to welcome a stranger to their home just to shield their own safety”;

### **3. Qualitative Research Results (Georgia)**

Experts, involved in the services related to domestic conflict and violence against women, answered questions about the challenges and difficulties encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both public and private sector representatives participated in the qualitative research. The respondents singled out communication difficulties as the main problem, according to which the alleged victims faced obstacles in contacting the police for help. The lockdown had become a significant challenge in terms of movement as well. In particular, alleged victims of violence could not go to the police to report their problems due to traffic ground to a halt. The respondents named 112 (police), 116 006 (victim connect resource center), social networking sites (Facebook page) as the main means of communication, and noted that since the alleged victims were unable to make a call due to being in the same space with the abuser, they often communicated through neighbors and outsiders, reaching out to the police and shelters as well as the crisis centers. According to a representative of the private sector, this prompted

them to create an application that would allow women to send a message to the police without actually calling them. It should be noted that a similar type of application was created on the basis of both non-governmental organizations and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

As indicated by the respondents, initial difficulties were also encountered in the case of COVID-19 positive victims. Due to the fact that there was no relevant experience, the medical examination was delayed. The remote survey was also ineffective, which in turn significantly complicated the timely response to the case.

The representative of the public sector singled out the lack of technical equipment as the main problem in the institution (shelter). Due to the number of dependents of the victim, minors in particular, the shelter had a hard time ensuring the inclusion of students into the distance learning process. There were also cases when the employees of the institution lent their personal computers and telephones to students to use. According to the lawyer of one non-governmental organization, in the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, difficulties related to movement were identified as well. Transportation was allowed only with a special pass, which hindered their professional activities. However, after this problem was identified, lawyers were allowed to freely move based on a warrant of attorney and a certificate presenting to the patrol police.

According to the respondents, despite the fact that significant differences in the forms of violence against women were not identified in the mentioned period, psychological and physical violence may still be more prominent.

Residents housed in a public sector facility, who had to report to work, were provided with transportation, conditioned by the safety measures to avoid the risk of getting infected on public transportation. The Crisis Center for the Victims of Violence of Tbilisi has actively started working processes since February 2020, and in the month of April, it launched a hotline, which was also equipped with the possibility of providing psychological and legal services on an online platform. In addition, if desired, it was possible to receive face-to-face consultations in compliance with all COVID-19 regulations. On the basis of active cooperation with the public and private sector, precisely in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to add a new shelter in Tbilisi was identified.

According to the opinion of the research participants, the issue of employment presented itself in the COVID-19 situation. In keeping with the experts, some of the beneficiaries who had been employed before the pandemic lost their jobs, since a number of organizations stopped their activities due to the regulations. The representative of the non-governmental sector points to the state's inaction in this regard and notes that the state's involvement in this very direction has not been identified. However, the state institutions still managed to keep the beneficiaries employed and to provide their financial security.

The respondents indicate the existence of a number of problems in terms of inter-agency coordinated action at the beginning of the pandemic. However, after a certain period of time, they shift their focus on the gradual elimination of almost all issues. Due to the fact that the chancellery was out of service and movement was limited, it was not possible to submit a complaint or referral. After a short time, special emails were created, where complaints, applications or petitions could be sent. Additional strain was caused by the hybrid mode the prosecutors had to adopt, in particular working two weeks from the prosecutor's office and two weeks remotely. During the remote working period, they failed to be in touch with the relevant documentation, leading them to actually take more than two weeks to provide a decision on a specific case for which 48 hours is defined as a maximum by law (circumstances might have significantly changed during this waiting period in a criminal case). All these processes were later made clearer, as documents were sent to a specific prosecutor by email, which notified the lawyer of

their receipt as a confirmation. In case of emergencies, the capacity to quickly prepare the warrant electronically had also been adopted.

According to the respondents, during the pandemic, finding alternative housing for the beneficiaries presented itself as well. In some cases, beds were added to the shelter itself, however, there had also been cases when victims were transferred to shelters formed by certain private individuals. Quarantine regulations also proved to be an issue, due to the large number of beneficiaries, institutions had to control the number of service recipients directly in the yard to prevent them from getting concentrated in a single space in order to avoid infection. Such regulations proved particularly uncomfortable for children.

According to the research participants, the COVID-19 positive beneficiaries were immediately transferred to medical facilities and COVID-19 hotels as needed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, not a single alleged victim of violence was refused help (both in the public and private sectors).

The research participants identified certain issues faced during the pandemic to be improved, such as considerable amount of financial support, increased number of human resources, additional shelters, boosting up the preventive measures against violence and actively using the media as well as social networking sites both to raise awareness and to make a report, especially if the victim found it impossible to otherwise make a referral.

#### **4. Research Results (Switzerland)**

All in all 32 (59%) of the asked 54 facilities answered the online questionnaire completely, and 22 (40%) partially, the results can therefore be seen as reliable. The facilities were: 18 women's shelters, one men's shelter, 11 victim advice centers and two other facilities. 11 of them (around 35%) are crisis centers, 32 % offer shelter services, while around 26% offer both services. 93% of these facilities (also address women and women with children, 46% (also) address men and men with children (a lot of victim advice centers address their offers to all genders, while women's and men's shelters address their offers gender specific). 5 facilities also deal with teenagers and trans women respectively, including "persons of all genders and sexual orientation" as well as "all victims of violence".

A good one third of all clients are Swiss citizens, just under 29% come from EU/EFTA states, also just under 30% are related to third countries. Here we see clear differences between shelters and crisis centers: Help seekers with a Swiss background make 25% in women's shelters, but more than 40% in victim advice centers. 25 facilities reported on the socio-economic status of their clients: around 75% state that their clients mostly come from a socially disadvantaged group, while in women's shelters this number stands at around 85%, in victim advice centers it is a little less with 78%.

##### **4.1. Help Seekers: Ways of Contact, Numbers of Help Seekers and Numbers of Consultations and Accommodations**

Getting in contact with the help facility is mostly done by telephone and in the most cases by the victim her-/himself, followed by police reports transmitting the data of victims, accompanied by reports from the specialists. That hasn't changed during Covid-19 in two-thirds of the facilities. Changes are likely due to restricted numbers of personal contact and contact possibilities (less mobility, stressed families). 22 facilities, involving 64% of all facilities that answered, report a growing number of help seekers during Covid-19, based on a higher presence of domestic violence as a public topic. This led to extremely high loads and overloads of women's shelters, especially after the reopening of schools in June 2020, consequently new rooms had to be found and women had to be relocated. Longer waiting times are reported by 45% of the shelter facilities.

More than 50% report more or way more numbers of consultations and accompanies. In case of accommodations, the numbers are ambivalent: 8 facilities report more resp. way more, 3 report less and 8 report no changes in accommodations during Covid-19.

#### 4.2. Forms of Domestic Violence, Abusers

Not one facility reports changes in the forms of domestic violence before or during Covid-19 (First: psychological violence, followed by physical violence, less often economical violence. Sexual and social violence are seen a little less often.) Reported changes concern the severity of violence, also stalking has grown. Due to closed courts, limited options on the rental market and a lack of responsible specialists clients had to stay longer in accommodations.

Partners are, not surprisingly, named in 91% and ex-partners in 68% of all cases as abusers. Two times their own children and five times other family members were reported as abusers.

#### 4.3. Necessary changes and special measurements in facilities due to Covid-19

Covid-19 forced – besides one – all facilities to experience adjustments and changes, sometimes dramatic ones as well. Those adjustments concern hygienical, spatial and temporal measurements. New technical infrastructure was needed, more employees were (urgently) needed, more financial support was needed. To sum up, dealing with all these necessary changes is reported as a sometimes tough and also exhausting task. The necessary money needed for these adjustments came mostly from the state, sometimes the institutions themselves had to finance (parts of) it or more donations were needed.

Concerning the cooperation with state authorities during Covid-19 the services answered inconsistently. Half of these facilities (N=22) reported no differences compared to the past, the other half had additional effort to make the cooperation work.

#### 4.4. General Impression on Covid-19 / Innovations for the future?

Most answers on the question concerning necessary work changes during Covid-19 are between 5 and 9 on a scale of ten. To the question of whether the state measurements to fight Covid-19 had led to a general increase of domestic violence in Switzerland only 7 facilities answered yes, 5 say no, the rest failed to answer this question. Most of them agree that domestic violence was a bigger media (also social media) topic, which 60% see a connection between that and the growing number of help seekers and higher accommodation numbers. Some report of broad solidarity, more public and media awareness and partly more donations.

Changes like hygienical measurements and technological modernization will be kept for the future by around 75% of all facilities, as they see themselves well or very well prepared for future challenges.

Help seekers, as well as authorities and media show a high recognition for the work done by the facilities, on a scale of 10 the numbers are between 7 and 10. As for the wishes for the future, the following is expressed: Sustainable implementation of the Istanbul Convention, more (protected) spaces for victims of violence, an appropriate financial equipment for basic needs, more public awareness and campaigning, more prevention measures in whole Switzerland. To sum it up: There's still a lot to do.

### 5. Assessment of the research results

The Swiss part of the survey shows significant differences concerning shelters and advice centers:

Origin of help seekers: More Swiss citizens are reached by advice centers, more EU/EFTA or third state member citizens by shelters.

Information: Shelters see a higher demand on information during Covid-19, crisis centers see the same demand on information as before Covid-19.

Recognition: Advice centers do not see a difference in recognition of their work, shelters employees see a more of recognition during Covid-19.

Changes of work settings: Advice centers report less adjustment pressure, the one that can be explained by the different settings of their work compared to shelters.

Estimations on challenges in the future: Looking to the challenges in the future, consulting advice centers see themselves better prepared than shelters. There is possibly a direct link with unsatisfying financial situations of shelters service providers.

Estimations on the changes during Covid-19 in general: Clearly noticeable changes and adjustments had to be made by almost all service providers, but shelters seem to be much more affected than advice center services, mainly by the need of specific measurements and additional expenses for extra staff.

In summary, it can be stated that service providers in the field of domestic violence during the two years of Covid-19 and under partly very restrictive governmental measurements experienced both challenges and heavy loads in their daily activities. All in all, to offer shelter and support to concerned persons during Covid-19, they adapted very well, at the expense of enormous extra efforts.

Although the additional expenses could have been carried during Covid-19, there are open questions in financing these services in a long-term perspective, resources are (often too) scarce.

After now two years of experiences living in the pandemic it is desirable that political pressure leads soon to the full and swift implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Switzerland.

## **6. Comparative Analysis of the Results of the Two Countries**

Based on the studies conducted both in Georgia and Switzerland, several similarities and differences have been identified.

As it was revealed, physical and psychological violence proved to prevail during the COVID-19 pandemic both in Georgia and Switzerland. However, the mentioned types of violence were almost identical in pre-pandemic times in both countries. Also, based on the studies conducted in Georgia and Switzerland, the victims often referred to violent activities done by their partners or ex-partners, remaining almost the same in pre-pandemic periods as indicated by the data.

In terms of the challenges identified during the pandemic, several similarities have been found between the two countries, in particular both Georgia and Switzerland had faced human resource-related issues, especially with COVID-19 positive personnel. The facilities responsible for providing services to the victims of violence in both countries had found it difficult to comply with the COVID-19 regulations, and to offer complete services to the beneficiaries due to the lack of staff. Additionally, adjusting the existing infrastructure to the needs of the COVID-19 positive patients, arranging isolated compartments, adhering to the quarantine regulations also proved to be an issue, in the face of increased number of the beneficiaries. The facilities responsible for providing services in both countries also found it difficult to maintain a high level of hygiene standards, timely equipping the facility with necessary items such as face masks, disinfectants, medical smocks, etc. The participants of the studies conducted in Georgia and Switzerland name the stressful work environment during the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the important challenges.

Based on the research carried out in two countries, it was found that the delivery of services had shifted online, and the victims could receive various types of necessary counseling by phone, email, etc.

The inter-agency coordinated action proved effective in both countries, as indicated by the research conducted in the case of Switzerland, and in the case of Georgia, in addition to the research, it is confirmed by the communication strategy document developed by the inter-agency commission working on the issues of gender equality, violence against women and domestic violence of the Human Rights Council, which addresses issues of domestic violence and violence against women during the COVID-19 crisis.

One of the significant common features that emerged on the basis of the research conducted between the two countries is that in the case of neither country there is evidence of a sharp increase in cases of violence directly under the conditions of the pandemic, which may be due to various factors.

In terms of differences between the two countries, the research revealed several significant factors. In order to receive services in Switzerland, the alleged victim does not need any kind of official document that gives them the status of a victim, which is a necessary condition for receiving state services in Georgia at this stage. The victims of violence can benefit from a full range of services based on police restraining order, a protective order issued by a court, or a victim recognition decree issued by the prosecutor's office. The mentioned documentation is usually issued in the process of administrative or criminal proceedings, which distinguishes Georgia from Switzerland. As it turned out, according to the Swiss approach, in cases of domestic violence, priority is given to civil proceedings, incorporating disputes arising from divorce, alimony and custody, while in Georgia, when the state becomes aware of alleged violence, more emphasis is placed on criminal proceedings and at the same time, a person who violates the law is identified and prosecuted, while the alleged victim is made eligible to enjoy the necessary services.

The research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the litigation process in Switzerland took longer than in Georgia, as the courts were closed for longer period due to the COVID-19 regulations, while virtual trials were quickly initiated in Georgia. However, Switzerland had not been in full lockdown during the pandemic, allowing victims to move freely without public transportation being restricted, while in Georgia, stricter quarantine regulations were in effect for several months, restricting movement, which made it difficult for victims to both report and have access to the necessary services.

In all shelters in Switzerland, there was a quarantine space for the beneficiaries, and in Georgia, only the Tbilisi shelter provided a space for isolation, and only after the quarantine period was over in Tbilisi, the victims were directed to different institutions. Also, there was a need to use shelters provided by private individuals in Georgia, which was not needed by the Swiss service providing organizations. Also, in Switzerland, institutions were equipped with the necessary technologies in a shorter time than in Georgia.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the studies conducted in Georgia and Switzerland, certain types of recommendations have been developed that will assist the states to better deal with the issues of domestic violence and violence against women in times of crisis.

It is necessary to actively implement preventive measures, using modern platforms (social networks). The pandemic has shown that social networking sites are capable of serving as a good ally in the fight against violence against women and domestic conflict. During the period of COVID-19, many victims

turned to various organizations through social networking sites, since they were unable to make a report in person due to being in isolation with the abuser. Various activities should be carried out through social networking sites to raise awareness of domestic violence and violence against women, so that as many victims as possible know who to turn to and what they can do to get help. This, in turn, will be a preventive measure to detect and prevent violence.

The pandemic has highlighted the need for financial stability in both countries. Financial preparedness in advance for a critical situation can be vital for those seeking help in order to meet any need in time, whether it is hygiene essentials or technological equipment for online education.

The Georgian experience revealed the need to add new shelters in Tbilisi. Also, the positive aspects of online services were revealed in both countries, which gives grounds for continuing to offer alternative (online) services to beneficiaries, who find it more comfortable receiving various types of assistance in this format even after the pandemic.

In the case of Georgia, besides the Covid-19 pandemic, 3 issues are of particular urgency: **First**, the need of more shelter funding; **Second**, the termination of care for victims of violence after leaving the shelter; and **Third**, the inadequacy of rehabilitation programs available to abusers.

Furthermore, on November 17, 2022, GREVIO Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence published a baseline assessment report on Georgia's implementation of the Istanbul Convention on November 22.

The report lists the following recommendations:

- More efforts should be made on women, experiencing intersectional discrimination. This includes raising awareness about such groups as well as their rights and available services.
- Certain legislative changes are to be initiated, including to define rape more clearly in the Criminal Code of Georgia in line with the resolution found in the Istanbul Convention.
- The report requires increased involvement of non-governmental organizations in all stages of preparation, coordination and implementation of laws, state policies and programs to prevent violence against women.
- There is a need to fight more with the existing gender stereotypes and their propaganda in the media. The private sector also needs to be encouraged to introduce self-regulatory standards on violence against women.

There still remains a lot of work to be done regarding the importance of raising awareness on expert and society level. Gender equality, equal and stable society and changing power structures enable participation.

Working with victims during the Covid-19 pandemic proved quite challenging. Adjustments due to the Covid-19 pandemic offers a good chance for innovation both in the shelters and crisis centers.

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