COVID-19 vs gender violence
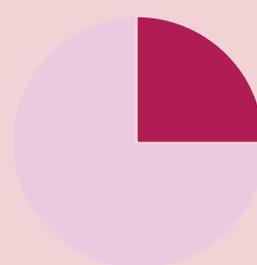
Which one is the real pandemic ?

In the previous edition of Gender Keys we learned that **Violence Against Women and Girls** (VAWG) **is the result of existing gender inequality in metropolitan areas** (where urban disparities are more evident) and one of the most serious - and most tolerated - human rights violations worldwide.

VAWG takes place everywhere: at home, at work, in public squares, parks, markets, streets, and in the public restrooms of our cities and metropolises; it occurs on public transport , as well as in our own governments, institutions, and even online, on social media and other platforms. In this sense, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated VAWG in **urban spaces**, both in **public and private** spheres, including violence in **politics and online**.

According to UN Women, as the **Covid-19 pandemic** deepens economic and social stress, coupled with the restricted movement and social isolation measures put in place, **gender-based violence has increased by 25%**, even doubling in some metropolitan areas.

gender violence has increased on average

25%

during the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic and the violence against women and girls

Periods of global crises and distress do not affect women and men in the same way. Women suffer from multiple types of violence across:

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

POLITICS AND ONLINE SPACES

THE GENDER DATA GAP

UN Women estimates that **243 million** women and girls have been subjected to **sexual and/or physical violence** by an intimate partner in the last year. Many women and girls are being forced into 'lockdown' at home with their abusers, while services to support survivors are disrupted or made inaccessible.

As a consequence, **in some urban areas, reports and calls to hotlines are decreasing as women are unable to leave home or access help online or over the phone**.

Current measures to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic have decreased the number of people on the street, resulting in a **heightened risk of sexual violence**. According to Plan International's study ,almost **60%** of women report feeling unsafe in urban spaces, affecting **women's autonomy** and access to employment and essential services during lockdown. **Women limit their movements in public spaces, adapting their itineraries, routes, schedules, and activities according to their perceived level of safety.**

The lack of statistics reflecting the lives of women and girls living in metropolitan areas renders many aspects of gender inequality invisible. In the context of Covid-19, accurate sex-disaggregated data is an essential tool to **understand the virus and quantify its impact.** Currently, only **45%** of the data needed to measure violence against women and girls is available.

Violence against grassroots leaders and political representatives remains one of the main barriers preventing women from full and effective participation and decision-making. Around the world, women are persistently under-represented in leadership positions, including in **local government**, in which **women's participation** is estimated at **36%** of seats . Likewise, women leaders face a range of **threats and constraints**, with higher levels of pressure and scrutiny in comparison to men, and greater difficulty in becoming candidates or accessing electoral funds, alongside an unequal division of unpaid care work, and much more.

More than ever, both during the pandemic and in the context of lockdowns worldwide, the **internet has become a public square** and space for accessing critical information and participatory processes. However, it's not an egalitarian space: **gendered misinformation and disinformation, sexual harassment, sex trolling and zoombombing**, among other types of violence, **have limited and censored women's rights** during the Covid-19 pandemic, including:

- access to **online services**

- **education** and **employment** opportunities

- women's voices and participation as **active digital citizens**

What challenges are we facing?

To turn the crisis into an opportunity to free our cities and metropolises from gender violence, we should start focusing on **7** main points.

5 GENDER EQUALITY

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

1. Integrate a **gender-responsive and gender-sensitive approach** to research, analysis and assessment to identify gaps in policies to respond to VAWG.

2. Ensure **sex-disaggregated data** is collected at a metropolitan scale to understand the impact of Covid-19 on VAWG and inform the response.

3. Guarantee **financial and political investment** by governments and partners to close gender data gaps.

4. Develop a **coordination mechanism** between government departments as well as strengthen **multi-sectoral partnership** during the emergency and recovery stage.

5. Ensure **services for survivors** are regarded as essential and remain open, and place a high priority on police and legal responses.

6. Adapt **public spaces** and **transport** across the entire metropolitan area to match **women's perception of safety**, ensuring an equal access to health, food security and shelter.

7. Include **women's and girls' voices in recovery plans** and **budgetary decision-making,** seeking gender balance in leadership positions, to achieve long-term transformation.

credits: Mostafa Meraji on Unsplash

TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVES

BRUSSELS
INTERMINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Interministerial Conference on Women's Rights, which brings together 12 ministers, aims to **strengthen coordination and collaboration between different levels of power** in order to guarantee women's rights in all areas of their daily lives, with a special focus on **domestic violence.** [+info]

BUENOS AIRES
WHATSAPP LINE FOR GENDER VIOLENCE SUPPORT

In the context of social, preventive and compulsory isolation, the Buenos Aires City Government has recently added a **new channel to provide information, support and advice on gender violence**. Now, through 'Boti', the City's WhatsApp, those who need help can request it automatically **via chat**, without needing to speak on the phone. [+info]

MEXICO CITY
ENLARGEMENT OF THE RANGE OF CRIMES FOR DIGITAL REPORTING

The Government of Mexico City has broadened the number of crimes to provide **further powers to its Digital Reporting System** - also available on the CDMX App. The number of crimes that can be reported digitally now includes **domestic violence, psycho-emotional violence, and crimes in relation to economic and sexual and reproductive rights**. [+info]