

## Guidance to address Domestic Abuse and other forms of Gender-Based Violence affecting UN Women personnel

Domestic abuse<sup>1</sup> and other forms of gender-based violence often escalate during and after a crisis, such as a pandemic. Measures to contain the current COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic have led to changes in the way UN personnel live and work across all locations UN Women operate.

In these challenging times, UN Women recognises that some personnel may be in unsafe environments, including at their home or residence. Recent reports from parts of Asia, North and Latin America and Europe show a significant rise in the number of women calling helplines and reporting abuse during the current pandemic<sup>2</sup>. Families and members of immediate households are having to spend more time in close proximity with each other and cope with additional stress resulting from school closures, possible increased care burden and financial constraints<sup>3</sup>. Additional risk factors, such as unhealthy consumption of alcohol and/or substances, can also lead, for example, to an increase in intimate partner violence. These risks are difficult to mitigate in daily contexts and are even more acute in crisis conditions.

As more cities go into lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19, this response can isolate UN personnel who may be experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of GBV from existing networks of support systems, including emergency health care, timely police response, access to justice, helplines, safe accommodation, shelter and psycho-social counselling.

Gender-based security incidents affecting UN personnel are assessed to be underreported and, as a result of the current pandemic, the scope and nature of these incidents may now be more difficult to measure. UN Women personnel experiencing domestic abuse or other forms of gender-based violence or personnel who are concerned for other UN personnel and/or a member of their household, should know that **support is still available, including during the current crisis**. Many existing service providers are substituting, supplementing or expanding the use of online and/or mobile technologies, for example, to deliver support to survivors during this period of limited mobility and increased demand.

In all contexts, gender-based violence is unacceptable. UN Women takes all forms of violence affecting our personnel inside or outside the workplace very seriously.

If UN Women personnel seek help from UNDSS or UN Women, personnel will not be forced into making decisions; rather they will have access to confidential advice and support to develop the best plan for their safety (within or outside of a relationship). If personnel choose to seek support, they will receive compassion and care. UNDSS and UN Women are also able to refer you to local services, including psycho-social counselling and other external support, if requested.

<sup>1</sup> Domestic Abuse is a form of gender-based violence, which can include intimate partner violence. It is a pattern of abusive behaviour in a family, dating or intimate partner relationship where the abuser exerts power and control over the victim. etc. Domestic abuse can be mental, physical, economic or sexual in nature. Incidents are rarely isolated, and usually escalate in frequency and severity.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-and-children-experiencing-domestic-abuse-and-the-life-saving-services-that-support-them/> and <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/emergencies/COVID-19-VAW-full-text.pdf>

### **If you are concerned about domestic abuse affecting UN Women personnel, spouses or dependents**

- Communicate your concerns to affected personnel regarding their safety and well-being. Ask them if they would like to connect safely in the current circumstances, e.g., through instant message, text, over a call, etc.
- Be clear that you are trying to help and not to judge. Let them know that you are there for them, to help them figure out the best strategies to get through this situation safely.
- Let affected personnel know that the abuse is not their fault and that you believe what they're saying.
- Do not pressure someone to leave when they don't feel ready. Listen empathetically to them and don't belittle or criticize the reasons for which an individual may stay or return to an abusive person.
- Recognise that men, women and personnel of all genders and ages can be subject to domestic and other forms of abuse. It can be difficult to recognise, especially in situations where the abuse is psychological or economic rather than physical and the impact may not necessarily be visibly obvious.
- Stay in communication with affected personnel. Try and avoid making the abusive person suspicious, to allow communication lines with affected personnel to stay open. Be creative, e.g., joint calls with children to 'play games' online may deflect suspicion.
- If necessary and upon the consent of affected personnel, refer them to the Aide Memoire for local support resources.

### **Responsibilities of all UN Women Personnel, Supervisors and Heads of Office**

- All personnel should share security advisories with their eligible family members. All UN Women personnel are accountable to UN Women and regardless of their level have the responsibility to abide by all UN Security and UN Women security policies, guidelines, directives and plans. This includes informing their eligible family members of the security requirements and advisories affecting their safety and security.
- All personnel should continue to stay in touch with their support networks and to check in with their colleagues regularly.
- All personnel must conduct themselves in a manner consistent with UN core values and accepted standards of conduct.
- Heads of Office, through the Security Management Team (SMT) should ensure support and referral resources are identified in the Aide-Memoire on the Immediate Response to Gender-Based Security Incident for each location. This document should be disseminated widely to all UN Women personnel. If you do not have access to this document, please contact your local UNDSS and your UN Women [Regional Security Specialist](#).

### **UNDSS and UN Women Security response and support for UN Women affected personnel**

Domestic abuse incidents or other forms of gender-based violence that affect UN Women personnel and eligible family members constitute security incidents that require United Nations Security Management System (UNSMS) support. Any security support will be consent based and driven by affected personnel. Support will be gender responsive, sensitive to affected personnel and prioritise their confidentiality, rights, needs and preferences.

**For immediate security support UN Women personnel should contact the local UNDSS, Host Government Law Enforcement entities, Head of Office and/or UN Women Security.**

### 1. Information on support structures in-country for support or referral in the event of an incident

- The Aide-Memoire for Immediate Response to Gender-Based Security Incidents must be available in every location. This document is a mandatory security requirement and should be made available to all UN Women personnel. If offices do not have access to the Aide Memoire, please contact UNDSS with UN Women Regional Security Specialist in copy.
- The Aide Memoire details the following important support for personnel: safe locations, physical health care, psychosocial support, legal and justice systems and additional locally based resources.
- The Aide Memoire should be completed by the Security Cell (UNDSS and AFP security personnel) and approved and disseminated by the Security Management Team (SMT) at the country level.
- Should the Aide Memoire already be available, UNDSS and the Security Cell will ensure the identified resources are still available and functional in light of COVID-19 and update the existing Aide Memoire to reflect support structures and referral options based on the current operational reality.

### 2. Implemented prevention and mitigation measures for domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence to reduce risk to UN Women personnel

- Country level UN Security Risk Management (SRM) processes, security plans and scenario planning will assess the risk of domestic abuse and gender based violence to UN personnel, including UN Women personnel, in the local context, identify and monitor the implementation measures to reduce the likelihood and impact of such incidents.
- These processes, including but are not limited to reviewing the location specific SRM, ad hoc SRM processes, related security plans and develop scenarios to reflect the current context. This will be completed by the Security Cell and approved by the Designated Official, supported by the Security Management Team (SMT) at the country level.
- Given the current context of COVID-19, the likelihood and impact of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence may be higher than previous contexts, with some locations reporting between 30-50% rise in the number of cases reported.
- A step-by-step guide on how to mainstream gender considerations in the SRM process is detailed in the UN System Wide Gender Considerations in UN Security Management Manual and is available to UNDSS and UN Women personnel with security functions in completing the above processes.

### 3. Gender-responsive and confidential support/incident management for UN Women personnel

#### a) UNDSS and UN Women security personnel can advise UN Women personnel to prepare a personalized and practical Safety Plan to minimize the risk of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence. This includes:

- Referral to support services in the location
- Contact numbers of emergency services including numbers of domestic violence helplines, medical services, available shelters/safe accommodation and counsellors, UNDSS and UN Women security.

- Preparing a bag with important items to be kept in a safe place or with a trusted person. Items may include; identification, money, keys, bank cards, documents, clothes, toiletries, medication, phone etc.
- Charged, private and easily accessible communications options including pre-arranged signals or code words/phrases to request help or to get out and go to a pre-arranged safe space etc. if needed.
- Considerations of changes to existing safety plans due to COVID-19 measures. For example, if physical violence often occurs in the kitchen at a specific time during lockdown, a revised safety plan may be needed to include alternative places of safety where there are less dangerous objects/weapons and more escape routes, to mitigate the risk of violence, or travel/public transport restrictions impacting planned escape options.
- Consideration of alternate housing or shelter arrangements
- Whether identified essential services during COVID-19 measures (such as teachers, doctors, healthcare services, post office, supermarkets, community or religious leaders) could support safety plans
- Development of code word/sign to signal to trusted persons of danger or need for support
- Financial arrangements and access to money
- Residential safety per specific residential layout
- Consideration on how to manage your dependents and children in times of high stress

**b) Responsive security incident management for UN Women Personnel affected by Domestic Abuse or Gender-Based Violence incidents**

- UNDSS and UN Women Security personnel will respond to a gender-based security incident if requested by or on behalf of UN Women affected persons or if security personnel deem it necessary to intercede. Security personnel may only intervene at their discretion should they assess there is an imminent threat to life or the affected persons have been directly impacted or are unable to act due to being incapacitated and others that may be at subsequent risk.
- UN Women personnel affected by gender-based security incidents are not required to report incidents.
- Support and assistance will only be provided if requested and consent is given by UN Women affected personnel. Notably, no action will be taken without the express permission of the affected persons.
- UNDSS and UN Women security personnel support includes:
  1. Creating a safe space for the UN Women affected person(s) and;
  2. Referring the UN Women affected persons to defined resources per the Aide Memoire for further assistance:
    - Access to safety - If chosen, creation of a safe space for affected persons.
    - Access to physical health care – Inform affected persons of the importance of accessing health care as soon as possible, and if chosen, facilitate the transport of affected persons to medical services.
    - Access to psychological counselling and related support - If chosen, facilitate a connection to staff counselling.
    - Access to legal and/or justice systems if such support exists in the relevant location. If available and chosen, refer affected person(s) to resource as outlined in the Aide Memoire.

- Access to additional resources as available both within the UN and within the country of operation.
- UNDSS and UN Women Security must ensure absolute sensitivity when speaking to and supporting UN Women affected personnel through empowering conversations, encouraging and helping survivors to make the best plan for their unique set of circumstances - with support and added referrals to support resources.

<b>UN Women Support Personnel and Resources</b>	
<b>Security Cell</b>	UN Women Security Personnel – UN Women Regional Security Specialists and/or country level security personnel
<b>Security Management Team (SMT)</b>	UN Women most senior official in the Duty Station, Representative, Regional Director or Head of Office
<b>Primary Security and Safety Support</b>	UNDSS Principal/Chief/Security Advisor in the country
<b>UN Women Regional Security Specialists</b>	<p><b>Regional Security Specialist for Africas:</b> Steven Barnes MBE, <a href="mailto:steve.barnes@unwomen.org">steve.barnes@unwomen.org</a>, +254 700 925348</p> <p><b>Regional Security Specialist for Americas / Global OSH Manager:</b> Bridget Hancock, <a href="mailto:bridget.hancock@unwomen.org">bridget.hancock@unwomen.org</a>, +1 917 331 7067</p> <p><b>Regional Security Specialist for Europe and Central Asia/ Global BCM Manager:</b> Dzenan Viteskic, <a href="mailto:dzenan.viteskic@unwomen.org">dzenan.viteskic@unwomen.org</a>, +31 638 957895</p> <p><b>Regional Security Specialist for Asia Pacific and Arab States:</b> Thirarat Yuenyong, <a href="mailto:thirarat.yuenyong@unwomen.org">thirarat.yuenyong@unwomen.org</a>, +20 109 749 4725</p> <p>All UN Women Security Specialists are gender responsive, however, if you would prefer to speak to a female security specialist, please contact: Bridget Hancock <a href="mailto:bridget.hancock@unwomen.org">bridget.hancock@unwomen.org</a> Thirarat Yuenyong <a href="mailto:Thirarat.yuenyong@unwomen.org">Thirarat.yuenyong@unwomen.org</a></p>
<b>Primary Counselling, Legal, Shelter and justice Support</b>	Detailed in the Aide Memoire in each location
<b>Critical Incident Stress Management Unit Regional Counselling Support</b>	<p>Arab States: <a href="mailto:Abdalla.Mansour.Amer@unwomen.org">Abdalla Mansour Amer</a>, +1 917 367 6097</p> <p>Asia-Pacific: <a href="mailto:Madhubashini.Hewage@unwomen.org">Madhubashini Hewage</a>, +1 212 963 6432,</p> <p>West Africa: <a href="mailto:Djeneba.Coulibaly@unwomen.org">Djeneba Coulibaly</a>, +1 212 963 3682,</p> <p>Europe &amp; Americas: <a href="mailto:Anne-Marie.Serrano@unwomen.org">Anne-Marie Serrano</a>, +1 212 963 1369,</p> <p>East Africa: <a href="mailto:Mohammad.Sohail.Ali@unwomen.org">Muhammad Sohail Ali</a>, +1 917 367 8557,</p>
<b>External global counselling support</b>	<p><a href="http://www.romeinstitute.org">Rome Institute</a></p> <p>To organize an appointment please reach out to the UN Women Rome Institute Focal Point, <a href="mailto:Petra.Miczaika@unwomen.org">Petra Miczaika</a>.</p>
<b>New York Support Services</b>	View the latest <a href="#">NY Aide Memoire</a>

**ANNEX**

**Practical Tips for UN Women personnel affected by domestic abuse and gender-based violence**

**Digital Communication tips<sup>4</sup>**

Due to increased measures to prevent the spread of COVID19 globally, UN Women personnel are increasingly using digital methods to communicate.

<b>Cell Phones</b>	Cell phones can track your exact location in real time. Call and text history can also be retrieved. Consider purchasing a pay as you go phone that you keep in a safe place to allow communication.
<b>Home Computer</b>	Persons may be monitored on home computers. Consider the use of computers and how an abuser might become suspicious. Consider continuing to use the monitored computer for normal activities, such as looking up the weather or recipes. Consider using a safer computer, like a work laptop, to research an escape plan, look for new jobs or apartments, bus tickets, or ask for help.
<b>Emails</b>	Emails are never guaranteed to be private; they can be traced even after they are deleted. Consider calling a helpline or use the email/contact online forms to ask for assistance in figuring out next steps.
<b>Internet Browsing</b>	It may not be possible to delete all the “footprints” of computers or online activities. It may be dangerous to change your computer behaviors such as suddenly deleting entire internet history if that is deemed abnormal.
<b>Instant Messaging (IM)</b>	Instant Messaging (IM) are not safe or confidential ways to talk to someone about the danger or abuse. Consider calling a hotline instead, or use safer computers or phone applications that are safeguarded that an abuser does not know about.

<sup>4</sup> For further information, see <https://www.techsafety.org/covid19>