

# IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SPAIN

# 2022

## Executive overview

### 1. Introduction

The study entitled, "Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on gender-based violence in Spain", has been promoted by the Government Delegation against Gender-Based Violence and was carried out by a team from the University of Granada made up of Miguel Lorente Acosta, Juan de Dios Luna del Castillo, Miguel Ángel Montero Alonso and Marta Badenes Sastre. Its main objective is to analyse the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on gender-based violence in Spain.

In order to investigate how a situation, that has caused profound and sustained changes in society and in how we relate to each other, has impacted on gender-based violence suffered by women in intimate partner relationships, a broad analysis is required that goes beyond identifying the indicators that have seen significant variations during the period and the circumstances considered, and in what sense they have occurred.

Studying gender-based violence is not the study a social outcome that occurs outwardly in the form of certain behaviours, such as a decrease in travel or shopping in both restricted and unrestricted situations. The aim is to analyse how all the elements of society, including gender-based violence, is reorganised from its "normality" and how it responds to certain social changes.

The study carried out is not therefore the analysis of a specific event, such as the pandemic and its components, but rather it is a study of how society responds to the circumstances of the pandemic based on the androcentric cultural structure that defines it.

The study analysed gender-based violence in terms of some of its components and looked into the different responses to it, mainly homicides, complaints filed and calls to 016, as well as social circumstances that are part of the context of violence as a cause and as a consequence.

### 2. Analysis

To this end, the work has been carried out around a series of basic parameters:

- It has considered three time periods for analysing the impact of the pandemic on gender-based violence:
  - Five years before the pandemic (2015-2019)
  - The year before the start of the pandemic (2019)

- Evolution of the pandemic since its inception. Within this parameter, five different periods of social circumstances and measures have been considered. They have been called Alert 1, 2, 3 and 4. (A1: 14 March 2020 to 20 June 2020. (A2: 21 June 2020 to 09 October 2020. (A3: 10 October 2020 to 09 May 2021. (A4: 10 May 2021 to 30 September 2021.)
- The analysis of gender-based violence was carried out on homicides, complaints filed, protection orders taken out, calls to 016, comparisons with violence in general and domestic violence in particular, and some of the consequences and situations related to violence.
- The results obtained are presented as conclusions and as evidence and indications of the circumstances deduced or induced by the analyses carried out.

### 3. Main results

- The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on gender-based violence through three mechanisms:
  - It enhances the factors that aggressors habitually use to exercise violence (isolation, justification, control, etc.) in circumstances that make it difficult to identify them.
  - It makes it difficult for women to escape violence because they don't have the opportunity.
  - It limits women's access to care.
- Control of women is at the heart of gender-based violence within intimate partner relationships, a situation that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Under this circumstance, when control over women increases, aggression is less severe, but when it decreases the intensity increases in relation to time spent being controlled.
- Continued violence generates an increased risk of lethality that increases the likelihood of homicide when the perpetrator perceives that he is losing control over the woman. This situation is primarily related to the breakdown of the relationship.
- The pandemic created circumstances that led to a significant decrease in the number of gender-based homicides, especially during lockdown.
- The analysis of the complaints filed shows a different result in their assessment compared to the previous year (2019) and the previous five years (2015-2019). In the first case, there was a decrease in the number of complaints filed in 2020, especially due to a drop in complaints that occurred during the second quarter. In the second case, a slight increase (1.4%) is observed when comparing the pandemic situation with the non-pandemic situation (2015-2019). This is explained by the low number of complaints filed in the first two years of the five-year period studied. The overall assessment of complaints also reveals a greater social awareness of gender-based violence and increased trust in the system, allowing responses to complaints to be maintained under very complex circumstances, such as those caused by the pandemic.

- Analysis of gender-based homicides and general homicides reveals that while gender-based homicides and homicides against men decreased in 2020 compared to the 2015-2019 average, homicides against women due to causes other than gender-based violence increased.
- The analysis of female victims of gender-based violence in cases where precautionary measures or protection orders had been issued, vis-à-vis victims of domestic violence with precautionary measures or protection orders, also shows different behaviour under the same social situation created by the pandemic. Thus, while those relating to gender-based violence decrease in 2020 compared to 2019, those relating to domestic violence increase. This result points to the different nature of the two types of violence.
- The response of women to gender-based violence has two broad patterns with consequences on the outcome of the violence. The first pattern revolves around the reaction to the violence and is manifested in behaviours such as calling 016, filing complaints, breaking off the relationship, etc. The second pattern involves remaining in the violent relationship, a situation that leads to increased psychological consequences and increased stress, with the possibility of needing anxiolytic and hypnotic medication, especially if the causes of the psychological abnormalities are not diagnosed and the gender-based violence remains invisible, with deeper psychological abnormalities that can lead to suicide.
- The evolution of female suicide in 2020 compared to 2019 and the five-year period before the pandemic (2015-2019), having a higher increase than with male suicide, reveals that women have been more heavily impacted by the pandemic. This result is related to the same circumstances that generate the increase in gender-based violence, and should therefore be considered components of the same reality.
- It is necessary to work to identify patterns in 016 calls, complaints and homicides due to gender-based violence, patterns that should help to develop policies and measures to advance the prevention of gender-based violence and the protection of women who suffer from it, as well as their children.
- Following analyses of the development of female unemployment, the external factors that further women's professional opportunities indicate that they should be included among the benchmarks and measures aimed at managing risk and improving women's protection.