



Parlamentum Europaeum

**Ms. Ursula von der Leyen**  
President of the European Commission  
European Commission  
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200  
1049 Brussels

**cc: Ms. Helena Dalli**  
Commissioner for Equality

Brussels, 8 April 2020

### **Concerns: Urgent measures to tackle the surge of domestic violence and access to sexual and reproductive health services**

Dear President Von der Leyen,

Recently the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), António Guterres, and the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, released a statement on the horrifying surge of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Guterres called for all countries to address the issue of violence against women as a key part of their national response plans to fight the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>.

We have seen examples of Member States such as France, Italy and Spain, who have taken specific measures to address the issue of violence against women during this pandemic. Italy has launched an app that will allow women to ask for help from the police without making a phone call. In France and Spain, women can discretely seek help at pharmacies.

UN Women recommended that countries should support grassroots and women's organizations and communities. In France, one million euros has been made available to assist these organisations. France has also made 'shelter' hotels available for possible victims of domestic violence.

In line with this, we urge the Commission and the Member States to take actions on these pressing issues:

- Guarantee that women's fundamental right to decide over their bodies is fully respected and to ensure continued swift and safe access to abortion facilities and contraceptive products. Further calls on Member States, in their health response mechanisms, to consider addressing this as an urgent matter.
- Support additional 'smart' measures like the use of apps that can prove to be lifelines for women and children facing domestic violence.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>

- Introduce strategic places like pharmacies and supermarkets where women can discreetly seek help. Call upon the Member States to organize this in their respective territories.
- EU (financial) support for on the ground organizations that work closely with the victims of domestic violence, as well as to mobilize local resources to provide legal aid and shelter service during this pandemic.

Finally, let us isolate the virus, not the victims of domestic violence. We urge the Commission to stay true to one of its own objectives to protect women from gender-based violence. A clear timeline is needed on the presentation of the initiative of the so-called Eurocrimes. We need to make it a priority to protect the victims and punish offenders of gender-based violence. Further, it is clear that a framework directive to combat all forms of gender-based violence is urgently needed and we urge the Commission to begin this important work.

We ask you to address this urgent matter in the Council in the shortest possible time.

Yours sincerely,

Samira Rafaela  
Irène Tolleret  
Karen Melchior  
Susana Solís Pérez  
Hilde Vautmans  
María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos  
Radka Maxová  
Sylvie Brunet