


# Legislative Actions for the Prevention of Violence against Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic

#ParlAmericasGEN #Covid19

The ParlAmericas virtual meeting, [Legislative Actions for the Prevention of Violence against Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), aimed to share experiences on the actions parliaments have taken to prevent and mitigate the effects of the pandemic on violence against women. Representatives of Latin American parliaments shared their recent experiences following a presentation by a specialist from UN Women, who shared studies with emerging data indicating that violence against women, especially domestic violence, has intensified in the region during the pandemic.

 Access the recording of the session [here](#) (in Spanish)

## THEME

Preventing domestic violence during social distancing

## LOCATION

Virtual meeting

## DATE

May 8, 2020

## PARTICIPANTS

More than 70 parliamentarians and parliamentary staff members from 14 countries



This activity is aligned with SDG 5

# Summary

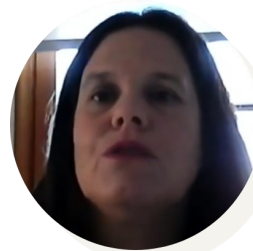
This virtual activity was inaugurated by Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas, and by Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Maya Fernández Allende**, President of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality, who gave welcoming remarks. **Anabella Zavagno**, Deputy Director General of ParlAmericas, moderated the meeting.

Participating in the meeting as panellists were **Yeliz Osman**, Policy Specialist on Ending Violence Against Women at the UN Women Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean; Member of the National Assembly **Karina Arteaga** (Ecuador); Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Marcela Sabat** (Chile), and Senator **Verónica Camino** (Mexico). The session featured concluding remarks from Member of the Legislative Assembly **Cristina Cornejo** (El Salvador).

[Violence against women in the context of the pandemic] is one of the most serious problems that we must work on, and we must avoid the risk of losing ground where progress has been made. That is why we need to collect experiences and join efforts among our countries to find the best solutions and in some way mitigate this terrible evil. Every epidemic is fought with education, with profound changes in behavior, and with solidarity.



Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas



Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Maya Fernández Allende** (Chile), President of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender quality

## Panellists

In her [presentation](#) (in Spanish), **Yeliz Osman** shared data analyzed by UN Women, although she clarified that there are no systematized figures yet, and it is too soon to reach conclusions on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women; however, the emerging figures do point to some trends. Many countries have recorded a 30-90% increase in calls to help lines. The other trend is that, in some countries in the region, reports of violence have decreased. Ms. Osman explained that this does not imply that violence against women has decreased, but rather suggests that women are less likely to file complaints because they are confined with their perpetrators with little opportunity to leave their homes, and with additional barriers to seeking support. On average, only 10% of women report cases of violence under "normal" conditions, so the new reporting figures are not indicative of actual levels of violence. Ms. Osman also underscored the importance of recognizing the differentiated impacts on different groups of women; for example, migrant women, women with disabilities, health workers, and those in the informal sector, among others.



## Call to Action

UN Women has released a call to action with four key messages on the prevention of violence against women during COVID-19:

1. Ensure that services for attending and responding to violence against women are considered essential during the pandemic (through health services, justice centers, shelters, refuges, legal advisory services, sexual health services, psychosocial services, alert networks, etc.)
2. Work closely with grassroots women's organizations and civil society, feminist women's networks, and human rights defenders on the prevention of violence against women in the recovery phase, incorporating an intersectional approach by including organizations of different groups of women.
3. Increase investments in the prevention of violence against women and girls during the crisis and in the recovery phase to avoid devastating impacts on women, girls and boys and on society as a whole.
4. Carry out public campaigns and effective measures of zero tolerance for the perpetration of violence; ensure that the police and judicial services prioritize addressing and punishing violence; and involve the community to unite against gender violence.

Source: [UN Women, Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (in Spanish)

## Panellists

Member of the National Assembly **Karina Arteaga** explained that several measures have been taken in Ecuador to counteract the incidence of gender violence. For example, the public prosecutor's office activated an online service for victims of violence, and the judiciary authorized use of a location for attending to cases; cases can also be dealt with through phone calls. Ms. Arteaga also shared the experience of the [Financial School for Entrepreneurs](#), which initiated a pilot project aimed at encouraging women to improve their ability to run successful business ventures and not depend economically on their aggressors. Finally, she highlighted that there are still certain challenges, including strengthening the commitment of institutions to guarantee full application of the [Organic Law to Prevent and Eradicate Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls](#) (in Spanish), and improving the coordination of authorities and institutions to obtain reliable data by forming an inter-institutional group and working with local governments.

Member of the Chamber of Deputies **Marcela Sabat** commented that the Chilean Congress, including the recently formed Committee on Women and Gender Equity of the Chamber of Deputies, is still working on projects remotely; projects are aimed at increasing the penalties for crimes during quarantine and confinement, so that male partners who perpetrate violence are the ones who leave the home. Ms. Sabat noted that the government's actions have focused on [expanding the capacity to receive complaints](#), with the activation of complaints by WhatsApp and a web chat, as well as the #NoEstasSola campaign. She stressed that not all women have access to the internet or a smartphone, so a channel for discreet complaints was opened in pharmacies, by using the code words “*Mascarilla 19*” [Mask 19].

In her intervention, Senator **Verónica Camino** explained that Mexico has several legal instruments that regulate mechanisms to prevent, address, punish, and eradicate violence against women. Senator Camino emphasized the importance of collecting and consulting data on violence against women to inform decision-making and public policy formulation. Along the same lines, she expressed her concern regarding the establishment of the “dry law” prohibiting the sale of alcohol in her state, without having reliable information about the impact it can have on intra-family and domestic violence.

**Yeliz Osman**, Policy Specialist on Ending Violence Against Women at the UN Women Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

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It is still early for a regional analysis on COVID-related femicides, but there is some data to suggest that there are already alarming figures in some countries. This is not only happening in the region, but also globally.

## Panellists

The pandemic is not only affecting health, but also the economy, especially in countries that are not great economic powers, such as the countries of the region. Unemployment is beginning to be felt in countries like Ecuador, and unemployment brings with it domestic violence. Confinement itself may make us feel depression and despair when there is violence in the home, which affects women and children.



Member of the National Assembly  
**Karina Arteaga** (Ecuador)

Member of the Chamber of  
Deputies **Marcela Sabat** (Chile)



Paradoxically, for women who are regularly abused, the confinement measures to protect us from the pandemic put them at much higher risk as they are confined with their aggressors. The violence is exacerbated because those who had spaces of freedom are obliged to live with the aggressor.

Violence against health personnel has increased in the context of the current pandemic. Female nurses represent 85% of the personnel that practice this profession in Mexico. In addition to the aggression for being health personnel, there is the fact of being a woman, violence at home, and domestic burdens, which broadens the spectrum for suffering the consequences of violence.



Senator **Verónica Camino** (Mexico)

# Conclusions

A question and answer period followed the panellists' presentations, in which participants shared initiatives implemented in their countries to prevent violence against women. For example, an Argentine bill was mentioned that proposes to declare, for a two-year term, any instance of gender-based violence as a public emergency. The bill also includes a monthly financial allowance for women who are in emergency situations due to gender violence.

To conclude the meeting, the floor was given to Member of the Legislative Assembly **Cristina Cornejo** (El Salvador) who proposed the advancement of practices that have worked in other countries, extending maternity leave, for instance, or increasing the penalties for perpetrators while in quarantine. Ms. Cornejo clarified, however, that no matter how high the penalties are, if crimes are not prosecuted, the practices will be ineffective. In her closing, she also stressed that it is necessary to generate proposals for economic and health measures with a gender focus.



The political violence experienced during the pandemic is a complex issue. It is important not to forget and not to set aside what women parliamentarians suffer from raising their voices and not agreeing with the way many things are being handled.



Member of the Legislative Assembly  
**Cristina Cornejo** (El Salvador)

## Parliaments Present



Argentina



Costa Rica



Guatemala



Paraguay



Bolivia



Dominican Republic



Mexico



Peru



Chile



Ecuador



Panama



Venezuela



Colombia



El Salvador

# Canada

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