



## European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

### FLASH REPORT

<b>Country:</b>	Norway
<b>Title:</b>	COVID-19 and sex discrimination issues in Norway
<b>Date:</b>	22 July 2020
<b>Expert:</b>	Marte Bauge
<b>Context</b>	
<b>Issue at stake:</b>	Impact of COVID-19-related measures on women
<b>Grounds of discrimination:</b>	Sex, Gender
<b>Field of application:</b>	Violence against women, Employment
<b>Source:</b>	Policy development
<b>Applicable law:</b>	The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (GEADA), 16 June 2017

### Content

**Case/law/policy development:** Because of the COVID-19 pandemic the Norwegian government shut down large parts of the country from 16 March 2020. All kindergartens and schools were shut down entirely from 16 March 2020 to 20 April 2020. Kindergartens then reopened partially, and schools reopened for all pupils from 11 May, entirely or partially, depending on the school's administration.<sup>1</sup>

In Norway the pandemic has especially raised concern over the situation for women and children suffering from domestic violence. Recent numbers from the Directorate of Police show that the reports of domestic violence have remained unchanged compared to last year, with an increase of 1.5 per cent. However the Directorate also states that likely there will be an increase in the real number of domestic violence cases, including child abuse, both at home and online during the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

The Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic stress studies (NKVTS) and the regional resource centers on violence, traumatic stress and suicide prevention in Eastern Norway (RVTS Øst) have together with the women's shelters in Norway conducted a survey<sup>3</sup> on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the shelters, on the situation of victims of violence and the need for help as a result of the pandemic. 46 of 47 crisis shelters have answered questions in the survey. The survey was carried out in April 2020, during the stringent COVID-19 measures in Norway.

The report shows that the measures to stop and control the virus have clearly had an impact when it comes to what kind of help female and child victims of domestic violence get and have gotten so far through the pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> Timeline for COVID-19 measures: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/Koronasituasjonen/tidslinje-koronaviruset/id2692402/>.

<sup>2</sup> See article from the newspaper Dagbladet; <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/politiet---okning-i-vold-i-naere-relasjoner/72541222>.

<sup>3</sup> See the report; <https://rvtsnord.no/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/krisesentre-og-covid-19.pdf>.

The survey shows that women's shelters have changed their help offered to avoid COVID-19 infection to spread, and much of the follow-up on victims has been done by phone. The overall impression from the survey is however that the shelters in Norway still work well and handle the corona situation. The shelters report generally good cooperation with other municipal services and agencies during the pandemic. The conclusion is that the shelters serve as an important critical infrastructure and play an important role in a crisis situation like this pandemic, precisely because they have experience in and specialized expertise in dealing with crises.

However, the women's shelters also express great concern for certain groups of women and children, such as those with ethnic minority backgrounds, and children and women suffering drug addiction. Aid agencies and offers such as language training, voluntary offers provided by the Red Cross, school and kindergartens were closed for several months. Thus, agencies that can inform and refer users to the shelters are closed, and fewer have the opportunity to contact them for guidance and help if needed.

All in all, the survey's conclusion is that the pandemic will have a clear impact on women's shelters work for a long time, and that there will be an increased need for more awareness of domestic violence in general. The Secretariat for the women's shelters in Norway estimates that NOK 15 million (approximately EUR 1,5 million) will be needed to cover the crisis centers' increased costs in connection with infection control measures and the expected aftermath of the pandemic. The Equality and Anti Discrimination Ombud and the Director of the Secretariat for the women's shelters in Norway argues that the Government should give more resources to the shelters throughout the country.

When it comes to employment issues during the pandemic, reports<sup>4</sup> show that more women than men have applied so far for unemployment benefits during the pandemic. This may be explained by the fact that in sectors such as retail and accommodation there are most women working fulltime and parttime, and that these sectors have been especially affected by the Government's COVID-19 measures.

On 24 April 2020 the Norwegian government created a commission who shall evaluate the authorities' actions regarding COVID-19. Discrimination issues are not mentioned in particular, but the economic and social consequences of the pandemic and the measures taken against it are on the list of things they shall look into.<sup>5</sup>

The directorate for children, youth and family affairs (BufDir), Department for equality and universal design, has been assigned responsibility for looking into discriminatory effects of COVID-19 in Norway "based on gender and other grounds of discrimination in relevant areas, for example violence, employment and economics".<sup>6</sup> Their reports are not yet finished.

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<sup>4</sup> See the report from Statistics Norway; <https://www.ssb.no/arbeid-og-lonn/artikler-og-publikasjoner/attachment/416435?ts=1711ab33788>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.koronakommisjonen.no/>.

<sup>6</sup> E-mail from Lise Margrethe Østby, senior advisor in BufDir, Department for equality and universal design, 23 June 2020.