



German  Institute for Global and Area Studies  
Leibniz-Institut für Globale und Regionale Studien

## **COVID-19 Gender-Based Violence Policy Tracker**

### **Policy Briefing Paper: Brazil**

#### **Working Paper # 1**

The Policy Briefing Papers in this series are a set of Working Papers. They are authored by volunteers and have benefited from a network of scholars, anchored by Merike Blofield (GIGA) and coordinated by Asma Khalifa (GIGA)\*, and provide a strategic input to the Lancet Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Maltreatment of Young People, co-chaired by Flavia Bustreo and Felicia Knaul.

The Working Papers were developed as a resource for policy-makers, advocates and scholars, to explore and assess key policy responses enacted following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and to support the formulation of policy recommendations to better address GBV in the future.

The Working Papers are not peer-reviewed, do not represent the views of the respective institutions or the Lancet Commission, and are not meant to provide a comprehensive or systematic analysis.

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## **The Scope of the Policy Briefing Papers**

The policy briefing papers cover government policies to address *violence within the household*, a specific risk during the COVID-19 pandemic, with social distancing and shelter at home policies, combined with the increased financial and mental stress caused by the pandemic and associated policies.

Early in the pandemic, the Center for Global Development published a working paper that highlights potential policy solutions likely to be effective (Peterman et. al., 2020). The policy briefs build on the policy dimensions identified in this working paper. Each policy brief addresses the following measures, to the extent possible:

National-level government policies on the following dimensions, pre- pandemic and since the onset of the pandemic:

- GBV-related hotlines in operation in early 2020; changes since March 2020
- GBV-related communication campaigns implemented in early 2020; changes since March 2020
- GBV- related physical first-response health and legal services; changes, since March 2020
- GBV-related social protection policies in early 2020; changes since March 2020
- Shelter and temporary housing for survivors; changes since March 2020

The briefs conclude with a set of proposed policy recommendations.

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## **Working Paper #1<sup>1</sup>**

### **Brazil:**

## **Policy effort on violence against women and children/domestic violence before and since COVID-19**

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## Introduction

Brazil has long lacked a clear legal framework protecting women from gender-based violence (GBV). To counteract the historically high numbers of violence against women (VAW) incidents in the country, governments have gradually adopted laws aimed at preventing and responding to this form of violence since the 1980s. Especially the last two decades have been decisive for Brazil which, since then, has significantly advanced in developing a solid set of public policy measures in response to VAW, including an apparatus of laws, ministerial programs, ordinances, international treaties, campaigns, and specialized services for women.

The current legal and policy infrastructure essentially got consolidated under the 13 years of leftwing Workers' Party (PT) government, between 2003 and 2016. When the PT came to power, the institutionalization of women's advocacy reached a new level with the foundation of the Special Secretary for Women's Policies (SPM), introduced by then-president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Holding ministerial status, the SPM acted as a catalyst within the government to improve the lives of Brazilian women and turned out to be a game-changing player in the advancement of VAW policies in Brazil, as it proved to reach a new level of effectiveness in creating new funds (Estrella, 2004), enacting new laws, organizing events, and implementing preventive and assistance measures (Alves de Araújo Lima et al., 2016; Teresi, 2017). Until the creation of the SPM, women-only police stations (Delegacia Especializada de Atendimento à Mulher, or DEAM) and shelters constituted Brazil's main governmental tools at the federal, state, and municipal level to assist women victims of violence (SPM, 2011). In the years following its foundation, the SPM managed to improve this situation by promoting the amplification of extant support measures, while also introducing numerous new policies and national media campaigns<sup>3</sup>.

Measures of special significance were the 2005 creation of the support service "Call 180" (Ligue 180)<sup>4</sup>, the groundbreaking Maria da Penha<sup>5</sup> Law (MPL) on GBV (Lei 11.340, de 7 de agosto de 2006), and the adoption of the "National Pact to Combat Violence against Women" (Pacto Nacional de Enfrentamento à violência contra as mulheres)<sup>6</sup> as part of the Brazilian social agenda. By 2010, as a result of this policy line, health services providing care to women suffering from sexual violence or domestic violence had increased from 138 to 443 (SPM, 2010). In the last three years of its governance, the PT administration further adopted Brazil's 2015 Femicide Law<sup>7</sup> and established the project "House of Brazilian Women" (Casa da Mulher Brasileira), a federal action implemented by the Brazilian government through partnerships at

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., "Your life restarts when violence ends" (Sua vida recomeça quando a violência termina), which was conducted between 2004 and 2005 on the occasion of the International Day of Non-Violence Against Women (SPM, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> A toll-free nationwide hotline functioning 24/7 to receive reports about instances of GBV and provide advice to women victims of violence (Lei 10.714, de 13 de agosto de 2003). The hotline has the authority to mobilize police units to take action in response to reports of domestic violence and to monitor the status of reported cases. "Call 180" is one of Brazil's most important measures to support women who seek assistance and has been upheld throughout all governments since its creation under the PT administration.

<sup>5</sup> Named after Maria da Penha, a Brazilian biopharmaceutic who was left paraplegic after her violent husband tried to kill her while she was asleep. The MPL was the first law in Brazilian history to recognize different forms of abuse and violence against women. The MPL established a set of integrated VAW policies, transformed previous gender-insensitive criminal procedures to deal with cases of VAW, called for stricter sentences for aggressors, and structured a new network of assistance to women victims of violence.

<sup>6</sup> The pact included a nationwide agreement between federal, state, and municipal authorities to plan and put into practice concrete actions for the enforcement of the MPL and Brazil's public policy strategy to end VAW (Alves de Araújo Lima et al., 2016; SPM, 2011; Teresi, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Together with the MPL, this law is regarded as women's most important conquest in Brazil in terms of VAW laws.

state and city levels (Ávila TP, 2018). This center offers, 24 hours a day and in a single space, specialized services in the areas of health, justice, social assistance, and the promotion of financial autonomy to women victims of violence (Decreto nº 8.086 de 30 de agosto de 2013).

Since 2016 - when then-president Dilma Rousseff was impeached after being reelected for a second term, ending 13 years of PT governance - the priority attached to VAW policies, as well as resources, declined dramatically in Brazil. Under conservative interim president Michel Temer (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, 2016-2018) and current far-right president Jair Bolsonaro (no Party, in office since January 2019), the focus of political interest has shifted, detrimental to the interests of women's rights advocates. Especially the period between August 2016 and the outbreak of the Corona pandemic in early 2020 was marked by crucial setbacks concerning the advancement of VAW policies and the promotion of Brazilian women's autonomy and empowerment.

Since the pandemic hit, the Brazilian government's policy approach has not significantly changed, despite the increased vulnerability of women and growing numbers of VAW incidents in the country. The government has rather relied on the relatively robust federal infrastructure to combat gender-based violence that its predecessors had developed.

The first case of Covid-19 was registered on February 26<sup>th</sup> in Brazil, the first confirmed one in Latin America. On March 16<sup>th</sup>, the first death related to the Coronavirus was confirmed. However, no compulsory isolation measures were enacted by the federal government. In complete opposition to Bolsonaro, regional governments have acted on their own behalf, imposing mandatory social distancing and closing educational establishments. Drawing widespread criticism both in his country and abroad, the president has heavily attacked state governors and mayors who have mandated lockdowns (BBC, 2021). Bolsonaro, who has exchanged his health minister three times since the pandemic (Paraguassu, 2021), continuously defended his idea that the country should resume normal routines and back up the economy. In line with the president's strategy of denying the seriousness of Covid-19 (Watson, 2020), a study by the Institute of Socioeconomic Studies (INESC, 2021) found that 80.7 billion reais of the federal government's 2020 Covid-19 relief fund were left unspent. The amount represents 13% of the 604 billion reais that were originally allocated to the so-called "war fund" to fight the pandemic. 56% of the 524 billion reais that were actually executed under the Covid-19 relief fund were spent on social protection (INESC, 2021).

Indeed, on emergency economic assistance in the form of income support, the Brazilian government instituted the most broad and sufficient program of its kind in the region. It was pushed for by a coalition of civil society organizations and the political opposition already in late March 2020, and after receiving unanimous approval in both houses of Congress, Bolsonaro had no choice but to sign it into law (Blofield et al., 2020). His government extended the duration of the program several times during the year due to heavy pressure from the opposition (ibid). This included increasing funding to the recipients in Brazil's well-known Bolsa Familia conditional cash transfer program, which provided cash transfers to mothers in return for regular health check-ups and school attendance of children, as well as making all low-income households that had lost their income during the pandemic eligible (ibid).

## **VAW policies pre pandemic**

### *1. Bolster violence-related first-response systems & legal services*

On the sub-national level, a 2018 report on VAW services and first-response systems in Brazil found that just one in ten municipalities offered specialized services to women victims of sexual violence, and just eight percent had women-only police stations (DEAMs) (Loschi, 2019). With a total of 5.572 municipalities in the country (IBGE, 2020), this corresponds to 540 municipalities with specialized VAW services and 462 municipalities with a DEAM. Most of them were concentrated in the most populous regions (Loschi 2019).

In addition, by 2018, Brazil had four Houses of Brazilian Women, in Brasília (2015), Campo Grande (2016), Curitiba (2016) and São Luis (2017). Another two were built in late 2018 in Fortaleza and Boa Vista.

After the removal of Rousseff from power, one of the first actions of Temer in his function as Brazil's new interim president was to slash the SPM and fold it into the Ministry of Justice, thus decreasing the autonomy (before, the SPM had ministerial status) and institutional power of the key office in charge of advancing and protecting women's rights. In this context, he also renamed the SPM to Secretaria Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres (SNPM) and closed down any policy negotiations and proposals that the "former" SPM was involved in (Brown, 2016). In 2019, the SNPM that Temer had integrated in the Ministry of Justice was incorporated into Bolsonaro's newly created Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH) - headed by anti-abortionist Damare Alves (Progressive Party, in office since 2019). Her potential involvement in a movement aiming to prevent a ten-year old girl from undergoing a legal abortion after being raped by her uncle is currently being investigated at the Brazilian Attorney General's Office (Vila-Nova, 2020). Some scholars argue that the general policy orientation of the current Bolsonaro government and overarching project of Minister Alves is to change Brazilian gender roles back to a more conservative concept, with an emphasis on religious values, family ideals, and the vision of women as mothers and caregivers (Medeiros Martins et al., 2020).

As a consequence of Temer's and Bolsonaro's failure to advance gender-sensitive policymaking, the VAW policy infrastructure in Brazil deteriorated in the years prior to the outbreak of the pandemic. Despite this, the Brazilian Congress managed to push some laws against GBV through.

Under Temer, this included, for instance, law n° 13.505, which bolstered VAW response services by granting affected women the right to receive specialized and uninterrupted services of police and expert assistance, preferably by female employees (Lei n° 13.505, de 8 de novembro de 2017). Furthermore, decree n° 9.586 established the National Policy System for Women (Sistema Nacional de Políticas para as Mulheres, Sinapom) and the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence (Plano Nacional de Enfrentamento à Violência Doméstica contra a Mulher, PNaViD), the latter constituting a set of principles, guidelines and objectives to frame Brazil's strategy to combat domestic violence and its integrated implementation at the municipal, state, and federal level.

Under Bolsonaro, the Congress adopted law n° 13.827, which altered the MPL by entitling police and legal authorities to ascribe emergency protective measures to women victims of violence and their dependents, and to record the attributed measures in a database maintained by the National Council of Justice (Lei n° 13.827, de 13 de maio de 2019). Furthermore, law n° 13.894 advanced VAW legal services by entitling specialized domestic violence courts and local courts from the victim's city to execute divorces, separations, annulments of marriage or dissolutions of stable unions in cases of GBV (in general, when a person in Brazil is accused of

a crime, the legal process has to take place in the city where the accused lives. This law established the exception that in cases of domestic violence, processes of divorces, separations, annulments of marriage, or dissolutions of stable unions can be run in a court of the victim's city). Moreover, the law determined that the Public Ministry is obligated to intervene in family affairs that are related to domestic violence, and that cases of domestic violence are given calendar priority in the court and case management (Lei nº 13.894, de 29 de outubro de 2019).

## *2. Shelters and temporary housing pre-covid*

Government-funded shelters can be provided at different levels in Brazil.

At the state level, Brazil had a total of 43 state-administered shelters in 2018. The state with the highest number of governmental shelters was São Paulo, accounting for 14. In contrast, Rio de Janeiro and another 13 states had only one, while seven further states had no governmental shelter at all (Loschi, 2019).

Altogether, Brazil has 5.572 municipalities including the Federal District (IBGE, 2020). Only 5,2% (ca. 290) of Brazilian municipalities had institutional shelters for women in situations of violence not subject to the MPL in 2018 – a figure that decreases even more to just 3,5% (ca. 20) for the less populous municipalities with under 50.000 inhabitants (ibid).

Only 2,4% of Brazilian municipalities (ca. 133) provided municipal shelters for domestic violence victims. Most of these municipal shelters were concentrated in Brazil's largest cities (Loschi, 2019). Of the 3.808 smaller municipalities with up to 20.000 inhabitants, which make up for almost 70% of all Brazilian municipalities, only nine had a shelter (Loschi, 2019).

## *3. Clear communication & support*

In 2018, decree nº 9.586 established the National Plan to Combat Domestic Violence (Plano Nacional de Enfrentamento à Violência Doméstica contra a Mulher, PNaViD) which constituted of set of principles, guidelines and objectives to frame Brazil's strategy to combat domestic violence and its integrated implementation at the municipal, state, and federal level. It included the governmental campaign "You have a voice" (Você tem voz) which was launched on the occasion of the International Day of Non-Violence Against Women 2018 and carried out by the Ministry of Human Rights (Decreto nº 9.586, de 27 de novembro de 2018). The campaign included the participation of the then-Minister of Human Rights, Gustavo Rocha, in a television program, in order to increase the visibility of the issue and the hotline "Call 180". Moreover, the Ministry disseminated content through communication channels such as television and social networks. For instance, Rocha participated in TV Record's "Hora do Faro" program. The campaign was also promoted through the TV show "Programa Eliana" by the Brazilian Television System SBT (MDH, 2018).

Under Bolsonaro, the federal government, in 2019, launched the campaign "Fight against VAW – 2019" (Enfrentamento à Violência Contra a Mulher – 2019) "with the objective of raising awareness, enlightening and calling on Brazilians to form a national union in the fight against this serious problem" (MMFDH, 2019a). The campaign comprised of the production of three video clips which were broadcasted on television, radio spots, cinema spots, and internet and social media content.

In contrast to these declared ambitions of the federal government stands president Bolsonaro's openly misogynistic rhetoric which, as argued by Lavinias and Correa (2020), relativizes and encourages VAW. For example, Bolsonaro has said that women "should stop 'whining' about femicide" (Carranca, 2018).<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. Budget pre-covid

The impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 was followed by a steep decline in the federal budget for projects directly aimed at fighting VAW, under Temer's government. From 2016 to 2017, the federal budget on VAW was cut by more than half from 42.9 million reais to 16.7 million reais - a 61% decline (Teresi, 2017).

Temer's focus was to "restore" the economy and balance the national budget (Brown, 2016). This affected social protections towards women in particular. This included for example a commitment to reduce the number of Bolsa Família recipients by 10% (Gross, 2018). In 2013, 14 million Brazilian families were recipients. Between 2014 and 2017, the number of recipients declined by 1.5 million (ibid).

Given evidence that women's economic autonomy in general, and cash transfers to women in particular, can increase household wellbeing, women's bargaining power (Bastagli et. al 2018) and ability to escape situations of violence, cuts to "Bolsa Familia" may have increased the risk factors for VAW.

In 2019, the first year under Bolsonaro's rule, there is conflicting information about the budget of the SNPM (INESC, 2021; MMFDH, 2020a; Muñoz, 2020). However, the overall trend of underfinancing VAW policies continues: while the Bolsonaro administration has claimed plans to increase the number of Houses of Brazilian Women (MMFDH, 2019b), both Muñoz (2020) and the INESC study (2021) found that in 2019, it had spent zero reais to build new houses. According to INESC, the originally authorized (yet unspent) expenses for this purpose accounted for 20.9 million reais, while another 955.000 were made available for the maintenance of existing ones. Of the latter, 64.000 were effectively spent.

#### **VAW policies since pandemic**

As the pandemic has led governments to impose lockdown and quarantine measures, violence against women has been rising dramatically. In Brazil, the Covid-19 epicenter in South America, alarming figures suggest that since the outbreak of the virus, police officers in several states have seen a significant rise of emergency calls and reports made by women victims of domestic violence. In São Paulo state, reports of domestic violence to the police have increased by 45% from 6.775 in March 2019 to 9.817 in March 2020. The number of femicides rose 46% in the state, and in Rio Grande do Norte state, reported cases of intentional bodily injuries increased 34%, while reported threats against women grew 54.3% (Rodrigues, 2020).

Despite this shadow pandemic, Bolsonaro's administration has not significantly changed their approach towards more gender-sensitive policymaking. While the incidents of violence against women in Brazil kept increasing – especially when considering the intersections of gender with

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<sup>8</sup> The president has a track record of controversial remarks. For instance, in widely disseminated remarks in 2014 that resulted in charges against him in the Supreme Court, Bolsonaro – at the time, federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro – told his colleague, deputy Maria do Rosário (PT), that she was not worth raping as she was too ugly to deserve it (Romano, 2019).

race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, region, and territoriality – policies to protect women from violence continued being neglected, as the INESC (2021) study suggests.

Indeed, the Brazilian government has elaborated a “Contingency plan for domestic and family violence in the context of COVID-19”, which is divided into four areas: prevention (campaigns and awareness-raising), combatting violence (strengthening the MPL), guaranteeing rights (compliance with international treaties) and assistance (strengthening the network of assistance to women victims of violence). However, follow-up information about the measures that have actually been implemented in response to the plan are hardly accessible. A list provided by Minister Alves (MMFDH, 2020e) to deputy Soraya Santos in response to her official information request suggests that, rather than actual policies, steps effectively taken so far have mainly been limited to the launch of webinars, the creation of VAW working groups, the organization of meetings/discussions, and the elaboration of recommendations and informative notes.

Among the more concrete actions on the ground are a VAW training for the staff of a new DEAM in the Federal District and a course about how to respond to VAW during the pandemic that was offered to professionals from the network of assistance to women victims of violence. Moreover, the MMFDH contributed to a collaborative action with the National Supply Company CONAB, which enabled the acquisition of 450.000 baskets with basic alimentation and hygiene products destined to women in situations of violence and vulnerability. The baskets were distributed in 16 Brazilian states (CONAB, 2020; Governo do Estado de Mato Grosso, 2020).

On the other hand, local governments have advanced their own initiatives to tackle the rise of VAW in the wake of the pandemic. The state of Maranhão, for instance, has developed the app “Safe Maria” (Salve Maria) as an additional VAW reporting channel (Governo do Estado do Maranhão, 2020b) and sanctioned a law in July 2020 that obligates residents of housing complexes to report cases of violence against women, children, teenagers, and the elderly to the police (Governo do Estado do Maranhão, 2020c).

The state government of Rio Grande do Sul (RS), in August 2020, created the Inter-institutional Committee for Combatting Violence against Women, which has elaborated a range of new fast-track projects. Among others, the actions refer to the inclusion of VAW education in school curriculums and the production of informative materials for the state’s civil society. Another project is dedicated to the development of a standardized public strategy for the improved monitoring of aggressors and domestic violence cases in RS, aiming to minimize the risks and increase the safety of victims (Governo do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul, 2020).

On the municipal level, the city of São Paulo, in March 2021, launched a package of VAW measures, which includes a 400 reais cash transfer (for a duration of max. 12 months) to women victims of violence and living under vulnerable conditions to help them with rent in a new place (Marinho, 2021).

### *1. Bolster violence-related first-response systems & legal services*

In 2020, there was an increase of 39% in the number of VAW reports to the “Call 180” hotline, compared to 2019 (Massali, 2021). From the beginning of 2020 to September 2020, the service had received more than 91.000 complaints. In the same period during 2019, it was 67.800 complaints (MMFDH, 2020d).

In April 2020, Brazil's government developed a website and an app named "Human Rights Brazil" (Direitos Humanos Brasil) to denounce cases of violence against women, the elderly, children, and teenagers. The app offers humanized consultation services via videocall and assistance in sign language (MMFDH, 2020b). In addition, both the website and the app include a chat tool to enable victims to make their reports silently, given that, in times of social distancing and confinement, the aggressor is typically around the victim 24 hours a day (MMFDH, 2020c).

In May 2020, a decree established the creation of an arbitration body for women (Ouvidoria das Mulheres), linked to the Public Prosecution Ministry (Ministério Público), as a specialized channel for the prosecution of cases of violence against women (Portaria CNMP-Presi nº77, de 21 de maio de 2020). The task of this federal organ is to centralize information and transmit it to the Public Prosecution Ministry and the respective authorities at the state level. Women in situations of violence can seek assistance via WhatsApp, phone call, e-mail, or electronic form. A partnership between this service and the "Call 180" hotline is foreseen (Conselho Nacional do Ministério Público, 2020).

At the same time, however, the federal government would not list GBV services as essential. In fact, the Ministry of Health produced a technical note (nº 016/2020) establishing that sexual and reproductive health services should be considered essential during the pandemic. Instead of following this note, the federal government "exonerated" the professionals involved in the drafting of it from their obligations and the note was not adopted (Conselho Nacional de Saúde, 2020).

This approach by the government prompted both legislators in Congress and sub-national authorities to act. First, feminist legislators in Congress (the so-called Bancada Femenina) proposed a bill to determine that support facilities for women in situations of domestic and family violence are considered essential public services. This bill was passed in July 2020, four months after the onset of the pandemic (Souza, 2020). Law nº 14.022 states that public authorities must adopt the necessary measures to guarantee the maintenance of face-to-face reporting channels (mostly women's police stations) for women in the following cases: femicide, physical harm, threat under firearm, rape or rape of a vulnerable person, corruption of a minor, sexual act in the presence of a child or teenager, disruption of a VAW protection measure, violations of the child and adolescent statute, and violations of the elderly statute. In cases of domestic violence, state authorities must provide online assistance services to victims. In case of crimes involving sexual violence, security agencies must establish mobile teams to carry out the crime examination at the victim's location. Moreover, the law determined that reported cases of VAW will be treated as urgent processes for consideration of legal matters and assistance (Lei nº 14.022, de 7 de julho de 2020).

Sub-national authorities also took action to address the increase of violence against women (Alencar et al., 2020). For example, several women's police stations announced their on-site services would continue even before law nº 14.022 was passed, including in Roraima state (Roraima Civil Police, 2020), the Federal District (Peres, 2020), and in Altamira in Pará state (Confirmanotícia, 2020).

Currently, Brazil has seven Houses of Brazilian Women, in Brasília (DF), Campo Grande (MS), Curitiba (PR), São Luis (MA), Boa Vista (RR), São Paulo (SP) and Fortaleza (CE). Since Houses of Brazilian Women were not classified as essential services by federal mandate, their functioning during the pandemic was regulated on a case-by-case basis. Some continued their

services on a remote basis temporarily (Fortaleza), while others have provided full on-site services throughout the pandemic (Boa Vista, São Paulo, Campo Grande).

Talks to each of these Houses revealed a complicated situation in which each House is funded in different ways. The resulting lack of coherence and clarity – even for the officials who manage the Houses – leads to instability and unpredictability regarding continuity of the services. The House of Brazilian Women in Brasília, for example, was closed in April 2018 due to construction issues. It was closed for three years, due to a lack of agreement regarding which level of government was responsible for funding the house, and only reopened in a new building in April 2021 (Ortiz, 2021). However, following decree n° 41.841 sanctioned by the sub-national government of the Federal District, the CEAMs and the regional shelter have remained open throughout the pandemic (Government of the Federal District, 2021). Moreover, four new units of the House of Brazilian Women will be constructed in the region (in Sobradinho, Recanto das Emas, Sol Nascente and São Sebastião) following a cooperation between the MMFDH and the government of the Federal District. The contracts for this project were signed in December 2020 and construction works were said to start in 2021 (Ortiz, 2021).

In August 2020, the state of Maranhão further launched Brazil’s first state-funded version of the House of Brazilian Women, therefore named “House of Maranhão’s Women”, in the city of Imperatriz (Governo do Estado do Maranhão, 2020a).

## *2. Shelters and temporary housing since covid*

There has been no federal mandate to classify shelters as essential services to keep them open since the pandemic onset. Generally, states and municipalities have autonomy in determining the functioning of their public services. It has thus been left up to the sub-national entities that provide these services to determine this. Feminist legislator Alice Portugal (Communist Party of Brazil “PCdoB”), with the support of the Bancada Feminina, presented a bill already in April 2020 (PL 1444/2020) to legislate the continuous functioning of shelters for women in situations of violence (Camera of Deputies, 2020). However, to date it has not been approved by Congress and thus there is no nationwide obligation to maintain shelters open.

The Brazilian government has simply officially “recommended” that services for women in situations of violence remain open during the pandemic (i.e., Portaria n° 86 de 1 de junho de 2020; Ofício-Circular n° 1/2020/DEV/SNPM/MMFDH). However, given the lack of federal funding (discussed below) to enable state governments to follow the recommendations, these non-binding instructions are little more than symbolic.

There are dozens of state and municipal-level shelters that operate in Brazil, and systematically assessing how they have functioned since the onset of the pandemic is beyond the purview of this policy brief.

## *3. Clear communication & support*

The MMFDH has launched a few governmental campaigns in the context of Covid-19, such as “For some families, the isolation has been even harder” (Verdélío, 2020), “Love does not cause pain” (MMFDH, 2021), and “You are not alone”- a cooperation between the Brazilian

government, the non-profit private institution Social Service of Commerce (Serviço Social do Comércio, SESC), Instituto Avon, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2020).

Moreover, the MMFDH published some factsheets such as “Women in Covid-19” (Mulheres na Covid-19), with the aim to provide the Brazilian female population with easily accessible and comprehensible information about VAW, health, essential services, and assistance facilities for women in situations of violence (SNPM, 2020). All of these communication actions were part of the governmental “Contingency plan for domestic and family violence in the context of COVID-19”.

Overall, however, the measures by the federal government have been rather small-scale.

#### 4. Budget since covid

The trend of underfinancing policies for women continued in 2020. Indeed, much higher expenditures were budgeted and authorized by the federal government in 2020, compared to 2019: the announced budget that the government allocated to the SPM rose from 30 million reais in 2019 to approximately 120 million reais<sup>9</sup> in 2020 (MMFDH, 2020d). While, according to the Brazilian government (ibid), 106 million reais of this 120 million-budget were invested in policies for women in 2020, a report using data from the federal government’s Transparency Portal (Ferreira, 2021) and the INESC study oppose the numbers published.

Following Ferreira (2021), this inconsistency is due to the government’s use of the words “spent”, “invested”, and “allocated” as synonyms: while the figures in the governmental press releases refer to the money that was *allocated* by the MMFDH to the SNPM, this does not correspond to what was *effectively spent*. As a consequence, the findings of INESC (2021) suggest that the actual amount spent in 2020 fell short for the figure that was originally budgeted for the same year.

According to INESC (2021), the MMFDH closed the year of 2020 having spent only 225 million reais of the 582.5 million<sup>10</sup> that were placed at its disposal. About a fifth of the MMFDH budget – approximately 120 million reais – was originally allotted to the SNPM for the funding of policies for women (MMFDH, 2020d; INESC, 2021).

However, the money that the SNPM effectively spent for women’s policies in 2020 accounted for only 35.4 million reais. This means that 70% of the SNPM budget was not spent and consequently failed to reach their intended beneficiaries – women - in terms of public policies in 2020. And that during a year that was marked by increased female vulnerability and a rise of GBV - especially in Brazil’s peripheries and poor areas (INESC, 2021).

Moreover, the execution of these investments moved only slowly: In April 2020, only 0.13 per cent of the 35.4 million reais were spent, increasing to 2.6 in May and 22% in September (INESC, 2021). About 5.8 million of the 35.4 million reais spent by the end of 2020 were payments to cover commitments from previous years (ibid). And approximately 19 million

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<sup>9</sup> The government press release (MMFDH, 2020d) indicates that the total 2020 budget of the SNPM was 125 million reais, slightly varying from the 120 million reais indicated by INESC (2021). This policy brief relies on the latter number.

<sup>10</sup> Before the pandemic, the calculated budget for the MMFDH accounted for 394 million reais. Later, this figure was increased to 582.5 million (INESC, 2021).

went to the “Call 180” and “Dial 100”<sup>11</sup> hotlines (INESC, 2021; Ferreira, 2021). The figure shows that the hotlines were assigned a high priority during the pandemic year of 2020, in comparison to other policies. However, it is noteworthy that originally, 61 million reais were budgeted for this purpose (Ferreira, 2021).

For the construction of new Houses of Brazilian Women, 65 million reais were authorized in 2020 (INESC, 2021). As announced by the Brazilian government in February 2020 (MMFDH, 2020a), 25 new Houses of Brazilian Women are to be financed with this fund, an initiative that was mainly pushed for by the “Bancada Feminina” (Melo, 2020). The plan of Bolsonaro’s government is to implement smaller (therefore, cheaper) versions of the House of Brazilian Women, so that more new units can be founded across the country (MMFDH, 2019b). Within the next two years, it is planned to reach a total of 30 units functioning in the country (MMFDH, 2020d). However, of the 65 million reais budgeted, only 280.000 were indeed executed in 2020. For the maintenance of already existing Houses of Brazilian Women, only 124.000 reais were spent, all of which reflected compensation payments to cover commitments from previous years (INESC, 2021).

The federal fund to combat violence against women, which includes some of these policies, had 25.7 million reais at its disposal in 2020, 13 million of which were effectively spent (ibid). Moreover, in March 2020, the federal government decided to exclude 158.000 families from the Bolsa Família program, a decision that was later revoked by the Supreme Court.

## **Policy Recommendations**

On the basis of the information collected for and analyzed in this policy brief, we highlight the need for:

- National-level coordination that ensures that essential services remain open and accessible, also during times of pandemic
- Broader geographical coverage of VAW/GBV services to ensure that all individuals can reasonably reach and be referred to these services
- Emergency services around the clock
- One-stop shops with access to information on the services available on all levels of government
- Stable and non-discretionary federal, state, and municipal budget commitments for funding to VAW/GBV services (including but not limited to Houses of Brazilian Women) to enable investments in further infrastructure

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<sup>11</sup> The “Dial 100” Human Rights hotline is not specifically targeted at women but at vulnerable people in situations of violence, such as children/teenagers, the elderly, LGTB, disabled persons, etc.

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