



## Girls and women are uniquely at risk— and uniquely well-placed to lead

The threat of COVID-19 is especially acute in areas affected by crisis and conflict, where social distancing is often impossible and public health systems are already strained. In addition to the health risks posed by the crisis, women and girls living in these communities are also facing a significant and growing risk of violence.

We know already that violence against girls and women increases in every emergency, including epidemics. In the current crisis, stress and economic pressure are leading to increased levels of domestic violence. Isolation is reducing girls' and women's access to support networks, and when they do venture out, deserted streets present new risks of opportunistic attack. As frontline caregivers at home and at work, they are at increased risk of infection. And as international donors' attention turns to addressing the crisis, funds may be diverted from organizations that serve girls and women.

VOICE recognizes that girls and women must be at the center of any humanitarian response to violence during the current crisis. In addition to unique insight on the specific risks they face, girl- and women-led organizations also bring decades of expertise on the approaches that work in their communities and countries—including experience with organizing in low-resource contexts and during past health crises.

But as they work to respond to the crisis, girl- and women-led organizations face significant challenges. Available information on the virus is complex and conflicting, and often presented in academic English. Stay-at-home orders are disrupting organizations' normal ways of working and organizing. Staff members are facing increased caregiving responsibilities at home, or even the increased risk of domestic violence. Worse, some organizations may not survive the crisis, leaving girls and women with fewer resources when the pandemic eventually recedes.

There is a critical need for resources, support, and funding to fuel the efforts of these groups and address the growing violence that girls and women face as the COVID-19 crisis escalates.