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FEMINISMO

# themisMAGAZINE

GENDER JUSTICE  
RIGHTS HUMAN

NOVEMBER 2023



## THE FEMINIST ETHICS OF CARE

women's activisms and self-organization in the pandemic



# *Th*EMIS MAGAZINE

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RIGHTS HUMAN

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## **THE FEMINIST ETHICS OF CARE** women's activism and self-organization in the pandemic

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*Th*EMIS  
GÉNERO JUSTICIA  
DIREITOS HUMANOS



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the feminist ethics of care: women's activism and self-organization in the pandemic.

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We dedicate this Magazine  
to all the women who  
lost their lives during the  
pandemic,  
and to all those  
who cared and  
resisted.

This interconnection of experiences produced powerful learning about women's rights and access to justice, which led to the creation of emblematic programs such as the Popular Legal Promoters (PLPs) in Brazil.

This edition of **Themis Magazine - Issue 4**, shows how – in a historical moment of profound health and political crisis, Themis reacts in cooperation with the network of PLPs and leaders of domestic workers' unions across the country. The Magazine is an immersion and review of the pandemic we have been experiencing since March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, the greatest health crisis of our generation, was aggravated in Brazil and the world by the expansion of inequalities marked by other epidemics that were already plaguing humanity - such as hunger, unemployment, violence against women- and that have increased in that period. Gender issues have thus emerged as a result of the failure of states to prioritize strategies to care for women's lives.

From the concept of feminist ethics of care, we show how this crisis has revealed itself to women and how we organize resistance and reaction. We have effectively seen, here and in the world, an increase of at least 22% to 30% in cases of gender-based violence, and we show in the research carried out in conjunction with the NAMATI - Global Network of Legal Empowerment, which involved 16 countries in Latin America,



Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, the role of Paralegals in acting and defending the lives of women at a time when states simply closed their doors.

In Brazil, justice and care services began to operate virtually without considering the need to anchor women in a moment of crisis. Policies to care for women in situations of violence were not initially considered essential policies and, therefore, were not kept open. With the transposition of services from the face-to-face space to the virtual one, another problem became evident: the difficulty of access to the digital environment. Many women only have a primary cell phone, and approximately 90% of the Brazilian population does not have access to the Wi-Fi network; people access the internet from home on their mobile data and access a Wi-Fi network at work. Wi-Fi in Brazil is still for the privileged. The difficulties of accessing the virtual universe, therefore, were yet another challenge for access to justice.

At the same time and structurally, there was a rearrangement in the care economy, an issue that became particularly evident in the pandemic. A large part of the population went into social isolation, which required the reorganization of household chores and the activities of caring for children, the sick, or the elderly, or washing, cooking, etc. This rearrangement was made visible from the issues involving paid domestic workers, Brazilian women's largest category of employability. For this reason, and for other reasons as well, it is the category that sustains women's autonomy. Both because it is

the category that employs the most women, with around six million workers, and because it is the category that enables other women to enter the labor market. During the pandemic, one and a half million domestic jobs were lost and there was a huge incidence of forced labor.

Once again, we feel impelled by circumstances to act in defense of guaranteeing the rights and lives of domestic workers. We work together with Fenatrad (National Federation of Domestic Workers) promoting campaigns, such as the campaign "Essential are our rights," informative actions, training, articulation, and dialogue with domestic workers, described in the pages that follow and make up the body of this magazine.

In the midst of all this, civil society organizations such as Themis, in addition to having a massive increase in demand, see cases arise with another profile. These are cases of absolutely impoverished people. Themis opened a humanitarian aid program that was supposed to be very punctual, precisely in that most acute period of the pandemic; only this has been extended. By humanitarian aid we mean food, food parcels [T.N. 01] and connectivity. Even domestic workers needed this connectivity to search for work and information about the pandemic. For all the women we served, we needed to give them food parcels and keep recharging their cell phones so that they could ask for help, talk to their mothers, or for the domestic worker to speak with their families at home, or even look for work, ask for help.

We went through these, among many other challenges, taken by even greater courage, which overlapped the difficulties, pains, and limits. We reinvented ourselves in record time, closed the physical doors of the institution, but opened many fronts of work and care in Brazil and the world. We survive because we constitute ourselves together, acting collectively, in solidarity and immediately. Just as we wish to record the enormous losses of people and rights that have significantly affected women, we would also like to record the vital power of women. collective actions that we undertook together in the midst of chaos.

We invite you to immerse yourself in the pages of issue number 4 of Themis Magazine as witnesses of these times when the feminist ethic of care has proved to be a powerful and exemplary resistance action in the activist actions of women in Brazil and worldwide. We celebrate our 30th anniversary with a radical experience of reinvention marked by this time and place, Brazil and Latin America, where feminism has shown its vitality and strength to change the world whenever it needs to.

Have a good reading!

Márcia Soares  
Executive Director

The Themis Magazine issue 4 is an action of resistance and collaboration that we share as a record of this historical moment. Producing this issue was both a challenge and an urgency. It is a challenge because this is still a period of mourning and struggle, still marked by violence, hunger, and loss of rights, but also by important achievements. It is urgent because we increasingly need to build and share collective experiences weaving protective strategies for women. Reflecting on our experiences over the last few years has shown how much the feminist ethic of care has guided our practices, inspired the solutions we've been able to find, our ability to reinvent ourselves, and has been fundamental to getting us through all the storms. Taking the **Feminist Ethic of Care** as the theme of this issue, we present interviews and articles from different women's perspectives.

The dialogue between theory and practice appears in the speech given by the Italian theorist and writer **Silvia Federici** to domestic workers in the virtual open class promoted by Themis and Fenatrad in July 2021, when she presented the basis of her thinking, which for more than four decades has contributed to the recognition of domestic work as the foundation for the maintenance of life, central to care work, and answered the domestic workers' questions and of other people present at the event.

The testimony of **Cleide Silva Pereira Pinto**, from the Nova Iguaçu/RJ Domestic Workers' Union and Fenatrad (National Federation of Domestic Workers) presents, through the narrative of the unique experiences of her life, both personal and political, the challenges and

strategies experienced by the category during the pandemic. Cleide tells us the same as Silvia Federeci: “Our work is essential. It’s essential for the economy, it’s essential for everything, because if there isn’t a female worker in the house, no one will be able to go out to work.”

The interview with **Jéssica Miranda Pinheiro**, coordinator of the Paid Domestic Work Area at Themis, gives us an idea of the challenges faced, the solutions found, the projects developed, the partnerships, and the next steps. Jéssica also reinforces empathy as a fundamental element of the ethics of care: “I think that this period was critical for us to strengthen ties; it was a period of great diversity, a lot of pain, a lot of suffering, but also from this movement, there was a lot of empathy. The ethics of care is also about that, about empathizing and being with each other.”

In the article Women in times of crisis: Popular Legal Promoters in the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, **Fabiana Cristina Severi** presents some of the results of the research carried out with Popular Legal Promoters (PLPs), the central aim of which was to find out the main strategies used by PLPs to support women in situations of domestic violence during the pandemic, as well as to analyze their perception of public services to combat domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The testimony of **Malvina Beatris Souza**, a Popular Legal Promoter (PLP) from the Grande Cruzeiro region in Porto Alegre [see T.N. 02], provides an insight into what it was like to experience the pandemic in a Brazilian favela [see T.N. 003], with women at the forefront.

Bia tells us about the challenges that she, as a resident, as a PLP and as a Guardianship Councillor [see T.N. 004], has faced in the face of growing hunger, unemployment, the closure of public services, and the increase in violence, which has mainly affected women, as well as the tragedy she experienced with the death of PLP Jane Beatriz da Silva Nunes, killed on her doorstep during an illegal action by the Military Brigade on 8 December 2020.

In the interview with **Renata Teixeira Jardim**, from Themis Violence Area, you can learn about the activities carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic, a period marked by an increase in the violation of different women's rights. Advocacy actions, and with PLPs and women in situations of violence, the adversities and innovations created in the process of readjustment due to social isolation are presented in her testimony.

Finally, **Izabel Belloc's** article presents an excerpt from the research report *Gender Justice During and Beyond the COVID-19 Crisis: Institutional Responses to GBV and the Role of Legal Empowerment Groups*, carried out by Themis and the NAMATI Network. The research 'examines institutional and civil society responses to gender-based violence during the pandemic, in particular domestic violence and intimate partner violence, and investigates the role of legal empowerment groups in filling justice gaps, reducing violence, improving service delivery and demanding accountability. The study collected and analyzed data and information from 19 grassroots organizations and their



experiences of frontline legal empowerment to address gender-based violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in 4 regions: Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.'

In this historical time, solidarity, creative and pulsating actions of life, based on a feminist ethics of care expressed in the daily practice of women, activist groups, and entities, organized in different parts of the country and the globe, is a show of singular resistance.

With these testimonies, we hope to document a memory, to tell crucial parts of the story made by women whose attitudes and collaborative practices teach us how to continue living (surviving), existing (resisting), and taking care (of one another). We also hope to form new links through reading and expand our networks through the exchange of experiences, solidarity, and action.

**Márcia Veiga da Silva**

Journalist, member of the Board of Directors of Themis



**ARTICLE   INTERVIEWS   TESTIMONIALS**

# Care

## ABOUT WORK AND CARE

*“without us the world does not move”*

Silvia Federici<sup>1</sup>

Good night.

I will start by talking a little about my life. They call me a teacher, and, really, I was a teacher for a long time, a whole life. But mostly in recent periods, I have worked, not as a domestic worker, but I have spent years taking care of my mother, with the help of my sister and other women, and I know very well the meaning of working every day for years, with a sick person. Today, a good part of my journey is dedicated to housework because my companion is quite ill. So I could talk for a long time about all the tasks that make up housework, and that is why I completely agree that it is not possible to separate work from care, from general work, and I have always felt a little bad about this: to separate the concept of work from the concept of care.

<sup>1</sup>Silvia Federici is an Italian philosopher, teacher and autonomist feminist based in the United States. In the 1970s, she was one of the pioneers in campaigns demanding a living wage for domestic labor and has published extensively on the ethics of care. Transcript of the open class of July 29, 2021.

I've been dealing with this issue of domestic labour and reproductive labour for over 40 years. Over the last ten years or so, I've been very excited to learn about the struggle of women paid domestic workers, because the struggle has developed globally. Ever since my first activism in the feminist movement, the issue of domestic labor, the work of the home, has been central to my thinking, my activism and my involvement in the women's struggle.

Together with other comrades, we began to analyze what this work is, what it is about, and why it has always been undervalued, invisibilized, and forgotten - including by the left and all the movements that call themselves revolutionary. Movements that have always looked at people who do domestic work not as political subjects, not in the same way they looked at laborers or factory workers. And we realize that, in fact, this work that has been so despised and forgotten is one of the most important jobs in this society because it is the work that sustains our life every day. It is also the work that sustains the whole economic organization, that sustains all professional activities. That is, it guarantees the ability to carry out other work. So we understand that the organization of work is much broader than we commonly think. In general, we see only the production of consumer goods as labor, and it is not seen that people, in order to produce, need to have the ability to work.

After rethinking domestic labor, we defined household work as that which produces our ability to work. Therefore, it produces our daily life and also the life of each generation. This was extremely important for us not only because it

made us understand the material basis of discrimination against women, the reason why women, in this capitalist society, are so discriminated against and have been confined to work that is not recognized, work that is devalued and invisible. And it even seems that it would be a 'natural' thing, a 'normal' thing, something that belongs to women,' so it's not seen. We don't see that this work produces social wealth, and we don't see that the domestic workers who do this work for pay are the ones who sustain all the other activities in society.

That's why we asked ourselves why this work, which is so important, has been so devalued, so forgotten, and the answer became very clear: because if this work were valued, bosses, employers, companies, corporations, and capitalists wouldn't be able to accumulate so much wealth. Because if it were recognized work, which entitles us to benefits and decent pay, it wouldn't be possible for employers or those who accumulate so much wealth to continue accumulating their profits.

From this, in the 1970s, we started a campaign for a living wage for domestic work, aiming to show what this work was. At the time, we realized that one of the main reasons for the difficulties they faced was that when women left home to work for pay, it was always for miserable wages. It is always very difficult to get a job, a job that allows some autonomy. There is a very direct link between the fact that millions of women do this work and the fact that this work is so little recognized. And even when it is done on a paid basis it is treated as if it is not a real job.

For example, in the United States, only after the year 2000 some states have begun formally recognizing that paid domestic workers are workers. In all labor laws, from the years 1930, at no time was paid domestic work recognized as a job. Domestic workers were always welcome as a companion, as a help, not as a laborer. In many cases, despite the struggle that began back in the 1930s, the states rejected this recognition, and change only really began in the 1990s.

It was also during the 1990s, with the restructuring of the global economy in Europe, the United States, and much of the world, that many women entered wage labor, mainly in the service sector. At that time, we saw the importance of domestic work because we saw that the entry of many women into salaried jobs created an immense care crisis. Governments' response to this crisis was to open the doors to the immigration of women from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Women were arriving in Europe and also in the United States to replace other women who were now working outside the home.

This showed us that housework is so important that it cannot be forgotten, it cannot be reduced, it cannot be abandoned. When we say that women have left and now work in various places, the first thing to emphasize is that emancipation through wage labor is a great illusion. Especially since the jobs women got in those years were paid miserably, were precarious, and didn't give them much autonomy.



At that moment, we saw that there was a crisis, and that this crisis was responded to by the employment of women who were forced to leave their countries, their families, and other women as well. We've seen a new global restructuring of reproductive labor and restructuring of domestic labor on an international level. For this reason, the vast majority of domestic work that is done today, for example, in the United States, Europe, or the Middle East, is done by migrant women who come from other countries. This happens in very difficult situations because they arrive from other countries and encounter great violence, especially when they work in family homes. These families often steal the women's passports, use the fact that they are migrants and, therefore, fragile because they don't have work permits or use illegal documents, and take advantage of this to avoid paying them, abuse them, and force them to work endless hours. That is, there is no limited work schedule, and often, when they live in the house where they work, they cannot close the door at any time of the day. They can't stop working, the work never ends.

For many, it is an achievement to have one day a week off and manage to get out of the House. In addition to all the sexual abuse by the men of the house, the children, and the husbands, because they know that these women are vulnerable, that they have entered the country illegally and that if they report it, they will lose their visas, they will have their right to work taken away, and they won't be able to send money to their families in the countries they came from. So it's a terrible situation. These women have faced many difficulties, and because of this, they have started to organize collectively in various countries.

I live in the United States, but I come from Italy, and I can tell you that in Italy, all the care, all the work of carers for the elderly and other people, is done by immigrants. I live near a park, where I go for a walk with my partner who needs to

walk, and I always come across women looking after children, and they are immigrant women who do this work. But these women began to organize themselves in a very important way. In the United States, for example, women united in the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), in Spain, in Mexico, in various places they began to organize, and this was a very important movement that grew over the years and changed many things.

This struggle needs to grow much more, but this movement was fundamental because the struggle of domestic workers and migrant domestic workers put the issue of domestic work and reproductive work, and its devaluation, back on the table. This issue was at the center of the feminist movement in the 1970s, and in the years since, most feminist movements have dedicated themselves to fighting for women to be able to enter workplaces that men have traditionally dominated, and this is a legitimate struggle. But over time, more and more feminist movements, and I'm referring to the United States as well as other places, forgot about the problem of domestic labor. The only issue was abortion, etc., but the issue of domestic work was kind of abandoned, and it was the struggle of migrant domestic workers that put the issue of domestic work at the center of the women's struggle. This struggle also revealed this work's fundamental importance in maintaining our lives and in the continuity and development of the economic and social system.

The slogan of the women of the Home Territory in Spain is 'sin nosotras no se mueve el mundo' (without us, the world doesn't move), which is very much the case there. Whether in public places or within family homes, domestic labor allows life to continue every day and the production of social wealth to take place. This is another reason why the struggle of domestic workers was and is so important because this struggle demonstrated the continuity of women's struggle against the devaluation of their work and the struggle against racism and imperialism.

The struggle of the women domestic workers, most of whom arrived from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, showed the systematic racism that is institutionalized in so many countries, especially in the United States and Europe. It is no coincidence that the majority of immigrant domestic workers are black women who come from a history of colonization and slavery. It's important to realize that the colonial relationship continues today but in a new and more mystified way. Why do so many black women leave their village, and their city, their country to work as domestic workers with all the difficulties they are going through? What does it mean to move to a country where you often don't speak the language, don't know the culture, where there will be no protection or people who know you, and where you will be vulnerable to any abuse? They migrate because colonialism continues. Not the more formal colonialism of the European countries that arrived with their army. Today, it's the financial colonialism of the IMF, the World Bank, the agribusiness corporations, the mining companies, the oil companies, those who come in and impose austerity programs on us, poverty for the majority of the population, and those who create national and individual debts.

Therefore these are not spontaneous or voluntary migrations. Of course, migration is always a struggle, but these are forced struggles, which means that for many women, it represents the possibility of securing a livelihood for their family.

So these women have created an organization that is increasingly connected, and is increasingly international. Today, there is an International Federation of Domestic Workers, one of the most important new phenomena within the context of the feminist struggle. It is not just the feminist struggle; it touches on so many issues of imperialism and colonialism, like the struggle against racism.

I've read a lot about the struggle of domestic workers in Brazil, and I've seen that the same dynamic exists, which developed, for example, in the National Federation of Domestic Workers (Fenatrad), which expanded at the end of the 1990s. It was only in 2011 that the International Labor Organization (ILO) recognized domestic work as a form of work, and this makes us reflect on how this work has been devalued. Because it's an endless job, very heavy and with so many tasks, so many forms of knowledge, and so many demands, so much effort that women make and only since 2011 has the ILO recognized it as work, recognized that women workers have rights, have the right to benefits, that they have the right to a formal contract.

That was an important moment, and although it was a formal recognition, not all countries recognized it, which is interesting. However, several countries incorporated it into national legislation, and after 2013 came ILO Convention 189, when many countries joined organizations and networks, which was important and also impacted the feminist movement. It's no coincidence that in the 1980s, organizations began to focus their activism on the issue of care. This is the direct result of the struggle of domestic workers and their organizations.

The main task is to put life in the center. That is, valuing domestic work means that this work is recognized in all its effects by all governments. Fight for them to put more resources into this work. It seems to me that we are at an important moment: on the one hand, this formal recognition was a victory, but on the other hand, the struggle begins now because formal recognition is not sufficient when many women find themselves isolated in family homes. Then, it is important to consider what else we should do so that what is formally written is applied in practice. Second, ensure that not only what is in the law applies in reality. The fight to value domestic work must at the same time be a fight to transform the social system, to recognize that change can only be achieved by changing the social system, because a system that doesn't recognize, that devalues the most essential activities in people's lives is a system based on a perverse logic. Nós precisamos inverter a lógica, ou seja, para ter uma sociedade digna onde se possa viver dignamente, precisamos transformar a produção da riqueza e todo o resto para o bem-estar das pessoas, e não para a produção do lucro, como é feito hoje em dia no mundo inteiro.

What to do? Well, there are many experiences for this network, such as creating centers at the community level that could support women's struggles when they are isolated or in an individual relationship. Thus, creating a support network so that they are not isolated and their struggle has a kind of resonance in the community. For example, in several cases, we have seen community organizations that have come together to support protests and struggles against violence to expand rights, which is fundamental.

Women workers have experimented with different forms of organization, whether by joining unions or other organizations or often by creating autonomous forms of organization. They created autonomous forms because there are many women domestic workers who did not want to leave their decisions in the hands of unions, which were often dominated by men, who did not have a conscience or a real knowledge of the needs of these women. They have also developed new forms of organization because it is not easy for women workers to find themselves when they live isolated in the homes of some families.

Today there are very strong networks, and I speak mainly in the United States. I'm talking about networks of migrant women from India and the Philippines who are organizing to defend their right to set hours, holidays, rest, retirement, health benefits, etc. For all this to come true.

What I want to propose is that there is hope. These forms of organization are very important. Today, among domestic workers at the global level, there is a need for organization that is very large and very strong. We have been talking about this for more than 30 years, and it is important that this organization is also of immigrant women because there is a new generation of women who arrive in the United States and Europe.

I still believe that the most strategically important change that we must achieve and fight for is the creation of a strong women's movement that can bring together all the women who do this work for pay and the women who do it without pay within their own homes. This is a movement of women coming



together because they have the same interests and can confront the state. Now, of course I'm not talking about women who identify with the exploiters of this society. I don't believe all women are interested in fighting for the common good, but most women have the same problems. So, I think an essential turning point would be this ability to come together and believe that we can solve the problem of domestic work, not with competition between women, but by forcing the state to create and dedicate resources.

This means having the capacity to change state policies and get the state to recognize the strategic and vital importance of this work, to recognize how much social wealth women have produced, and to return part of this social wealth to this support for the work of reproducing life. Today, much of the social wealth in any state is used to destroy life; it is used in prisons; the police use it; it is used in war; it is used in the destruction of the environment. I believe that the great challenge, the great task of the struggle of women – and not just women, I understand this concept of women in a very broad sense – is to immediately ensure that labor rights, which are not included in many places as law, are

recognized and implemented. That is, that immediately the rights of domestic workers are recognized, that their work is well paid, and that they have all the rights.

Going forward as a strategy, as a kind of vision for a united women's march, a joint struggle that changes the relationship between women, social reproduction, and the state. That changes the social position of housework and domestic work, how it is experienced, and how the state organizes it. Because great wealth has been built on the bodies, efforts and lives of women. And now it's time for women to come forward with the bill. Today the situation of women domestic workers shows us all the injustice of this society. It is women who move the world; it is women who make the world go round, and they still have to fight to have their minimum rights recognized. They still work without any guarantees for the future, all this needs to change. Therefore, I believe in this vision of a women's movement that recognizes a common interest, and that confronts the state to change not only our condition but society itself. That is, in the end, the struggle, the effort in which we should all be involved.

**Cleide Silva Pereira Pinto**

PRESIDENT OF THE DOMESTIC WORKERS UNION OF NOVA IGUAÇU/RJ  
DIRECTOR OF FENATRAD

My name is Cleide Silva Pereira Pinto, I am president of the Domestic Workers Union of Nova Iguaçu, Rio de Janeiro, and I am the director of Fenatrad<sup>2</sup>. I'm the granddaughter and daughter of a domestic worker and a union leader. I was practically raised within the Union. Because of my rebellious behaviour, my mother put me to work in a family home. Not that she wanted me to, but it was to get me off the streets. I was a very rebellious teenager, and I didn't want to study. Instead of going to school, I would go to the mall for a walk with my friends, a senseless gang. And then my mother said, "Since you don't want to study, I'll put you work."

<sup>2</sup> National Federation of Domestic Workers

She had a boss who needed a nanny for her grandchildren. So I went to work at my mom's boss's son's house. My mother would take me on Monday and pick me up on Saturday. At the time, we didn't stress child labor very much, so it went unnoticed, even though I was a trade unionist. Her business was to get me off the street, so she was thinking of doing good. I was about 13 at the time, a child caring for two. But their mum didn't work, she stayed at home too. So I went to work there. I went, but I didn't want to be a domestic worker. To this day I go to this house, because now I am a day laborer. I chose to be a day laborer because we have no day-off from the union, and there is no way to work directly and go to the union either.

The priest in my community said all the time, "go help your mother." Because he was the one who took mom to the Union, and he was trying to do the same thing to me. When my mom worked in a family home before joining the union, she used to say that she worked at Globo<sup>3</sup> because the house she worked in was next to Globo, in Jardim Botânico. I mean, she was ashamed, like all uninformed domestic workers, because domestic work is also a decent job like any other. So I also said no, I don't want to be like my mom', and the priest insisted. At the time, I used to come to the union from time to time, and Francisca, who was president, said one day: "Cleide, come on board, just to complete the board, just so we don't run out of directors. Because if it's not renewed, the union stops. Just to help." After a couple of months in the board, she put me in the treasury, and I didn't understand a thing. This happens, we usually learn things by force, because there is no way, the necessity forces us to learn. I was about 20 at the time. Francisca told me: 'I'm going to take you on a course at the CUT school. You'll stay there for four days to

<sup>3</sup>Rede Globo is one of the largest media conglomerates in Brazil.

get used to it. I went to Belo Horizonte, alone, by bus. Arriving there, early in the morning the course began. And I thought it was a course for domestic workers only, but no, it was training for treasurer-presidents of all the categories affiliated to CUT. Doctors, nurses, etc. Everything. And 90% of trade unionists are men, right? Everyone started introducing themselves, and how desperate was I? I only had an incomplete primary education, because I was rebellious. They started saying, 'My name is so-and-so, I'm from the doctors' union, I've got a degree in I don't know what, a degree in I don't know what, a doctorate in I don't know what,' and I started to get desperate. And they spoke beautifully, phrases that I had never heard in my life; then I thought, 'I'm not going to say anything; I'm going to keep quiet. There were so many people that there was a coffee break. There was a payphone at the time, so I went to the payphone, rang Francisca, and said, 'Look, I'm leaving now! People are saying some words that I don't understand at all!'. And she: 'Calm down, Cleide, calm down. Nobody's going to mistreat you. The only thing you say is, 'I'm learning; I came here to learn.' You introduce yourself, and that's it; nobody will bully you. 'And they really treated me very well. After everyone had introduced themselves, I introduced myself. As domestic workers hardly took part in courses like this at the time, they all came up to me to ask about the union, and I said: 'Hey, guys, I thought I wasn't going to contribute anything.' I mean, I understood my category, even though I didn't have a degree, but I attended the *school of life*. From that day on, I started taking courses and getting involved. I finished primary school and high school and took a technical course in accountancy.

Along the way, I tried to change professions, but I didn't adapt. I went for an office internship, I couldn't stand it. I said: 'You know, I'll go back to where I really like it.'

And I began to learn to value my category and show other workers that their work has value. That we have value, that our work is essential. "Essential" is not only to exploit us, it is essential for Brazil. It is essential for the economy, and it is essential for everything because if you don't have a worker inside the house, no one will be able to go out to work. And yet they place their most precious possession in our hands. We contribute with everything, with the domestic economy, with the country's economy. In all seminars, in all courses, and in everything we do with working women, we always say: the first thing is to value your work; you have to give value. And all this I learned: not to be ashamed of my category, to pass on to other workers that they have value, that no one is doing a favor by giving them a job. On the contrary, it is an exchange. The boss has the money and she has the workforce. If he's hiring, it's because her work is good. So value yourself. Do not exchange your work for anything. Demand your salary; always look for a formal job to guarantee your future so that you can have a break later on because you need a break. Because if you're a day laborer, and you don't control it, you work 24 hours a day, every day, and in a little while, you're all feeling bad, and you can't stop. We clarify all this to the workers so that they value themselves. Because there's a lot of bullying within our category, and the most blatant is: 'we consider you family'. And thus they exploit, they mistreat. It puts you inside the pantry, where you put the cleaning supplies. A cubicle that you stay in and sleep badly so you can get up early the next morning to go to work. All this and "you are almost family". We don't want to be anyone's family. We have our family, if it's bad, if it's good, it's our problem. We want equal rights, that value us, that respect our work. Respect our category. That's what we want. I learned that from militancy. I learned to value myself. I always tell the women workers: we're not pompous, because in society you're only valued when you're white and



pompous. I tell them: no problem, lift your head up and look them in the eyes. And speak as an equal, you're no less than anyone else. If you're there it's because your work is good, so value it. If you value yourself, people will value you. We always say that to the women workers. And that's my story. I have joined Fenatrad and am involved with this wonderful category that does a lot of good for society. Devalued by the elite, but we are learning to value ourselves.

### **About the COVID-19 pandemic**

As soon as the illness started, the first thing my children said was 'Mom, stay at the union'. I had already reduced my days of work because of the crisis. I stopped working in a formal job and decided to be a day laborer. I have two children, Fernanda, 37, and Leonardo, 28. My children said: 'Mom, you fought so hard to raise us'. Thanks to PROUNI<sup>4</sup>, they both have degrees. I helped my daughter when she was at university because she went to a private university on a scholarship, but I paid half, and my money as a domestic worker went there, too. Now graduated, working, they said: "Mom, you slow down the work and we help you." They do it to this day. They both have their lives, their little houses, and their marriages, but they still help me to this day so that I don't sacrifice so much. I do some paid cleaning, but very little. And I thought: if I, who have two grown children to help me, am worried about my difficulties because I'm a day laborer, can you imagine the other workers? How are they coping?

<sup>4</sup> Brazil's Federal Government's University for All Programme, which subsidize tuition fees for low-income students

That's when I took an Uber and drove to the Union. It was closed, everything was closed. I took the membership forms home and started calling all of them. Every account I heard made me terrified, desperate. A worker was selling things from inside her house to be able to feed herself. So I started asking for help and talked to Fenatrad. Girls in other states were in the same situation. So we started mobilizing the NGOs and the partners we had. And with that, we did this big campaign to raise money to distribute basic food baskets. This happened throughout Brazil, in all unions affiliated with Fenatrad. Themis helped, all institutions that are partners of Fenatrad helped. We distribute more than 5 thousand baskets throughout Brazil to the workers. And in this way, the situation of the workers in this difficult time was somewhat alleviated. At the very beginning I settled in the Union. To avoid having to travel back and forth, I spent three months living in the union to help the workers. I usually say that it was difficult, but if it weren't for the unions and Fenatrad, I think workers' lives would be even worse. They are still in need of help. Some are not finding jobs and are having a hard time. We help in what we can, but now I think it's complicated for everyone.

But I also want to report something positive in the midst of all this tragedy. I created a group, to date there are 106 workers in this group, and we talk a lot. Of that group, 11 workers are inside the Union helping. Eight will join the next directors board, now in November. At that time, I told them that I had to settle in the union, that my house was abandoned, but that I didn't want to keep going back and forth, and some said: "I'm going there, I'm going to help you." And they got used to coming to the Union to help. Now, they are here, already preparing, taking courses to take over the direction. I say, in the middle of the storm, that little sun, something positive

happened. They found that the only place they could count on was the Union. The only place that gave support to the workers in this difficult time was the Union. So that idea that bosses and other people were putting in their heads, to destroy, to end the unions, saying that the union only served to eat their money, was being deconstructed. Because they saw that only the union was there giving support and had no other place. Some of them, who lived on rent, lost their homes. Those who couldn't pay the rent and had relatives went to their relative's house. But what about those who didn't have relatives? Where'd they go? They're on the street, for sure. This all messes with us a lot. We care about the workers, we put ourselves in their shoes and we know how difficult it is. You spend your life raising other people's children, relating to other people intimately, because it's within a home. We know how to separate professionalism from affection, but when affection grows, it's no use, there's no way around it. We care a lot about each other. In that time of illness it was glaring. We cried about the plight of the workers. It was very difficult. Here in Rio de Janeiro, the first person to die of COVID-19 was a domestic worker who caught the virus from her bosses. We fought hard. Together with Themis, Fenatrad ran a campaign, "Take Care of Those Who Take Care of You" and "Our Rights Are Essential." We spent the whole time fighting so that our category wouldn't go crazy. We also did some conversation rounds with psychologists to help them. We always tried to alleviate the suffering of the workers so that they could at least survive all this.

### Caring for those who care

I'll tell you, they took care of me. I take care of them and they take care of me. They thought it was incredible that I gave up my life, because I gave up my life. At least for three months I gave up my life and came to the Union. I camped right here. There was even a moment when I said, "Guys, my house must be in trouble because I can't get there." The demand was so great, it was so much, that I couldn't go home. I stayed here from Monday to Monday. Ask here, report from there, do a project here, and I couldn't go home. Then two workers spoke like this: "we will come to your house to help you clean up." Three months, the house stood still. I'd just go in there, get some clothes, and leave. Two of them helped me clean up. That is, one taking care of the other, a matter of care. One taking care of the other so as not to freak out. My children were terrified. "Mom, for God's sake, go home." "Mom, don't get too close." "Mom, the hand sanitizer." "Mom, put on a mask." But they knew I wasn't going to sit around at home with my arms crossed, there was no way. And when people say, "I lost my husband", "my son is hospitalized". Oh, that hurt inside my heart, it made me desperate, and you couldn't do anything. I think the worst part of this disease is the isolation. And at first, when there was no vaccine, you could not even bury your own. You could not even take care in the hospital. And you know that public hospital is a matter of luck. Out of ten, one shift is good. One is there valuing his work and life, the others are there just to get through their day. So you become worried about this situation. I was worried; I thought that if I caught COVID-19 without a vaccine, I wouldn't survive because, in addition to my bad back, I also have allergic bronchitis. And I only heard that this disease was worse for those who had respiratory problem.

## FENATRAD, Union and Partnerships

The partnerships were more with NGOs because the unions of other categories were also in a tight spot. Our unions came together through Fenatrad, which was a form of mutual aid: what was available for one was available for all. The little that we had, that Fenatrad collected, we distributed to everyone. Sometimes, they even said, "Oh, this is only for three unions, and we said," "No, divide a little for each one." If only a little, but everyone will have a little. No one can be left out. We worried a lot about that. But we received a lot of help from NGOs and partners because the unions of other categories were also desperate to get something. Everyone in the same boat.

We have a project, with Care<sup>5</sup>, which is managed by Themis. We changed this project, which had in-person courses, to online courses, because of this disease. The courses were via *WhatsApp*, and it was a challenge for the workers. At first they would call us and say, "I don't know, I won't be able to do it." And we said, "Yes, you can do it. We'll help you until you can do it on your own." Through *WhatsApp*,

<sup>5</sup>"Women, Dignity and Work" project developed by Themis in partnership with Fenatrad, domestic workers' organizations from Ecuador, Brazil, and Colombia, and CARE International, with support from the French Development Agency (AFD).

we would say, “do this”, “do that”, “did it work?”, “let’s make a video call”. The one who knows teaches the other. And when they learned, they said, “I did it all by myself!”, and it was a joy, we celebrated. They learned how to use something that they had a lot of difficulty with. Before, they just turned the phone on and off. Others didn’t even have *WhatsApp*. On the day of using *Zoom*, they said: “I don’t know how to use this,” “I won’t be able to do it,” and we said: “Yes, you will be able to, we will help.” Some had difficulty because their cell phone didn’t have much power. The connection would drop, but even so, we would send the programs, what we could, whatever we could. Sometimes I would say “come to the union, you read it here, I’ll print it”. And that’s how it was, helping each other. More than 600 workers managed to complete the course that was given by Themis and Fenatrad.

Fenatrad held a Congress, which takes place every four years. At the conference we always invite everyone. We are affiliated with FITH<sup>6</sup> and CONLACTRAHO<sup>7</sup>. We also call on partners to participate in the congress. Themis helped a lot in the technology part. The congress was wonderful. And it was online.

<sup>6</sup> International Federation of Domestic Workers (FITH)

<sup>7</sup> Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Domestic Workers

**Jéssica Miranda Pinheiro**

LAWYER AND COORDINATOR OF  
THE PAID DOMESTIC WORK AREA

**Q. How was the situation of paid domestic work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how important was care and how lacking was care among workers?**

A. Domestic work was one of the two sectors most affected by the pandemic, with a loss of 1.5 million jobs. In 2019, according to IBGE, there were more than 6.3 million domestic workers in the country, 92% women, about 68% black women, and that number during the pandemic fell to 4.9 million domestic workers. We are

talking about a category in an extremely vulnerable situation, in which informal monthly workers were fired and did not have recognition in their employment records to prove their employment relationship. We have reports of domestic workers who were forced to stay at their employers' homes during the quarantine period, with the idea that if they left and returned home, they would be a vector for contamination, and so they were forced to stay at their employers' homes for two or three months without being able to return home.

The pandemic has further worsened the conditions to which these women were already exposed before, both in relation to Labor inequalities and Social Security inequalities. They were dismissed without pay and forced to work in conditions where there was a risk of contamination, whether due to the obligation to use public transport during rush hour or because they worked without personal protective equipment, such as masks, gloves, or hand sanitizer. We have received many reports of such situations through the Union.

The Unions and Fenatrad (National Federation of Domestic Workers) also played a fundamental role in protecting and promoting workers' rights. According to IPEA data, around 44% of the category is made up of day laborers. Monthly workers are those who work three or more times a week in the same residence, while daily workers are those who work up to twice a week in the same residence or in other residences. At the very beginning of the pandemic, Themis, together with Fenatrad and other partners, produced a video with Fenatrad President Luiza Batista to raise awareness among employers about the care to be adopted during this period. In this video, Luiza asked for the release of domestic workers with



pay, including day laborers, so that they could stay at home without losing their salary. This is because day laborers are the most unprotected; they do not have social security, as they do not have a signed work card, and the majority also do not contribute autonomously.

The lack of social protection and the inequalities that occur during the pandemic are the result of a historical context of social inequality towards domestic workers. Paid domestic work is part of the work that reproduces life. It is part of the care work; it is part of what we call the “Care Economy,” which is a term that has to do with the work of caring for people, the work of caring for elderly, children, work of caring for the home, with domestic tasks. In other words, it is the set of activities that are normally seen as not contributing to the economy, but which we argue do contribute to the economy because without these tasks and without care work, both paid and unpaid, we would not be able to work and produce in the job market.

However, these tasks are still seen as unworthy, or as less important. This relates to a historical context that dates back to the Greek period when intellectual tasks were more valued than manual tasks. Manpower and manual tasks belonged to slaves while intellectual tasks belonged to the wise. Brazilian society perpetuates this logic even more deeply due to the period of slavery. There were four centuries of enslavement of Africans and people of African descent in our country. That is why it is essential to say that the struggle of the black people, of the quilombos, for freedom and reparation was significant. Even so, despite all this struggle, there were no effective laws that guaranteed decent conditions for this population to have the

means to repair this historical error of slavery. So, the domestic care work that was done by enslaved black women continued to be done by their descendants.

Structural racism in our country and the myth of racial democracy maintain this condition of inequality to this day. And also sexism, because unpaid care work has historically been carried out mostly by women. Data from OXFAM shows that women and girls worldwide dedicate 12.5 billion hours every day to unpaid care work. That's a contribution that amounts to 10.8 trillion a year to the global economy of the world's technology industry. Data indicate that during the pandemic, 50% of Brazilian women began to take care of someone.

We know that *working from home* during the pandemic has exposed the issue of the Care Economy, and even though we don't use this term, it does expose this issue. Middle- and upper-middle-class people stayed home during the quarantine and dismissed domestic workers. Those who had empathy or saw Luiza's video dismissed the workers with pay and started doing the housework. This brought the topic of care into the discussion, which in turn brought the topic of paid domestic work to the center of the debates. A theme that was previously invisible, is now visible. We understand that this work is far from being valued, far from being well paid and having equal conditions. Still, today, society is beginning to debate much more about paid and unpaid domestic work. This is the result of the campaigns and work of the Union, Fenatrad, and allies such as Themis, which promote and defend the rights of women domestic workers.

**Q. What did Themis do,  
what actions and partnerships were put in place?**

Faced with the crisis, Themis realized the need to create a unified scope of action. We created exit strategies for the crisis to guarantee minimum living conditions for women in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability through humanitarian aid actions, ensuring the right to communication and information for these women, understanding this as essential to guarantee their lives. It was necessary to keep them connected through networks so that they could access public bodies, health information, the union, and each other. So, right at the beginning of the pandemic, together with the unions involved in the Women, Dignity, and Work project, we created *WhatsApp* groups with workers from each city linked to the union in each region. There, we disseminated content on prevention and care during the pandemic, as well as information on rights.

We also rethought legal empowerment and professional qualification courses<sup>8</sup>. The courses were already part of the Women, Dignity and Work project, but they were designed for in-person activities. With the pandemic, we had to restructure the entire project and think about a form of Distance Learning (EAD, in Portuguese) We found *WhatsApp* to be the best tool for this job because it was a platform they were already familiar with. Then, the courses were conducted through video lessons and, especially, audio lessons, which was the format they knew best and also more economical, thinking about the data.

<sup>8</sup> Course#DomesticWorkersWithRights (#DomésticasComDireitos)

We then launched the campaign “Our rights are essential”<sup>9</sup> together with Fenatrad. At that time, four states declared domestic work essential, even during quarantine, a time of extreme vulnerability. So we launched the question: “What does Brazilian society consider essential when it comes to domestic work? The health and dignity of women workers or the availability of the service at any cost?” And the campaign had several communication products, including videos by Djamila Ribeiro, Claudia Abreu, Elisa Lucinda. In conjunction with the campaign, we also launched a video in December 2020, asking for the continuation of emergency aid. We also created, right at the beginning of the pandemic, a “Guidelines for Domestic Workers”<sup>10</sup>. We also produced the “Responsible Hiring Guide”<sup>11</sup> in accessible language, designed for dissemination to employers and civil society as a whole.

During the pandemic, we also strengthened and activated new alliances, such as with the Veja brand of cleaning products. The Reckitt Brasil group sought us to make this alliance, and we were together with Fenatrad supporting the “See With The Heart” program, which acts by valuing domestic workers, bringing visibility to the social problems they face, and supporting the socio-economic qualification of these professionals. We also developed several awareness activities of civil society, one of them with the employees of this company, understanding that awareness

<sup>9</sup> <http://essenciaissaonossosdireitos.themis.org.br/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DLrfUoiGp2EW7E03PpP-gzSXR4aiWrso/view?usp=sharing>

<sup>11</sup> [bit.ly/oguia-td](http://bit.ly/oguia-td)

has to be internal, not just external. Veja was also a supporter of the professional qualification course, which was organized by the Women, Dignity, and Work project.

Another fundamental alliance was with the Public Ministry of Labor, especially in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Rio Grande do Sul. With the MPT/RJ, a project was carried out that guaranteed food security for workers linked to the domestic workers' unions of Nova Iguaçu, Volta Redonda, and Rio de Janeiro. We also carried out a specific communication campaign on Technical Note No. 04 of that body, in addition to the prosecutors participating as allies in training carried out by the Women, Dignity, and Work project.

We must also highlight the alliance with the University, UniRitter, and the SENAC-RS to conduct the legal empowerment and qualification courses, respectively. As part of the humanitarian aid actions carried out by Themis in 2021, we support 1771 domestic workers directly with a guarantee of food, connectivity, or qualification courses.

**Q. You have also expanded your networks beyond Brazil. Could you talk about this alliance with organizations from other Latin American countries?**

A. The first phase of the Women, Dignity, and Work project, from 2019 to 2021, involved domestic workers' organizations in Brazil, Ecuador, and Colombia. Over this period, we produced several studies on Convention 189 and Convention 190

of the International Labor Organization (ILO), which are conventions that address the rights of domestic workers. Convention 189 is specific to the rights of domestic workers, and Convention 190 will address sexual harassment and moral harassment in the world of work. We carried out specific studies on these conventions in each country, and we also produced knowledge on the behaviors, attitudes, and practices of employers, workers, and civil society in relation to domestic work, and we shared these studies among all of us.

Another very important study that we carried out was a compilation on Convention 189 in several countries in the region, which resulted in the Ebook “Between Advances and setbacks in Latin America and the Caribbean: reflections on the ratification of ILO C189 in Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador<sup>12</sup>”. In this study, we analyze how Convention 189 was promoted through the domestic workers' movement, through CONLACTRAHO (Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Domestic Workers), through the workers' movement and how it was implemented, or not, in the countries that ratified the Convention. Several countries have signed and ratified the convention, but the law is still not enforced, as is the case in Brazil. It is recent legislation, from 2015, and it is not complied with. Less than 30% of the workers are formalized. In these studies we see the similarity between countries. The Women, Dignity, and Work – PHASE I project proposes to contribute to the autonomy and empowerment of female domestic workers and their organizations to influence public policies to fulfill their human and labor rights in Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil. Over these three years, we can see the

<sup>12</sup> <https://themis.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ENTRE-AVANCOS-E-RETROCESSOS-NA-AMERICA-LATINA-REFLEXOES-SOBRE-A-RATIFICACAO-DA-C189-DA-OIT-NO-BRASIL-COLOMBIA-E-EQUADOR-29062021.pdf>

construction of these results in each country, with a project with a feminist focus on Human Rights done by and for women. Each domestic workers' organization, UNTHA in Ecuador, UTRASD in Colombia, and FENATRAD in Brazil, expanded their alliances and had significant impacts during this period.

**Q. Thinking about ensuring connectivity and the work of “caring for those who care,” talk about Themis’ other actions that are part of what we can call an ethics of care.**

A. This period was very important for us to strengthen ties, it was a period of a lot of difficulty, a lot of pain, a lot of suffering, but also from this movement, there was a lot of empathy. The ethics of care is also about that, about empathizing and being with each other. So there was this strengthening of ties and possibilities of creating powerful alliances. Somehow the pandemic brought this shortening of distances. Speaking about Latin America, before, to hold a regional meeting, we had to travel from one country to another, we didn't think so much about these technological tools as a possibility of meeting. So, as the distances were shortened, somehow, we were able to look at each other and see ourselves as closer. We were also able to use the anger that this moment generated as power to create and support these networks, to strengthen and enhance these networks of women and care. I also believe that, not by chance, this category, which is a vulnerable category, which does not have access, which suffers from many inequalities, and which

throughout the pandemic, and especially last year, 2021 saw a significant increase in cases of reports of work analogous to slavery; they also became stronger as a category. The trade unionists strengthened and were in more spaces because they strengthened themselves in a network. They networked together and reinvigorated alliances with women and organizations like Themis. This strengthening of alliances was very important for both parties.

It was also important to see a virtual Congress being held. The Fenatrad virtual Congress was held in 2021, something unheard of. We were partners throughout the congress, and the power and realization of this combination of anger and frustration was significant, for example, in the “Fora Bolsonaro” [see N.T. 06] agenda, an important topic for the unions. This is because we were talking about a government that dismantled public policies, which resulted in the deaths we saw due to the delay in vaccines. We built that agenda during the conference. It was a very important political movement to watch. This talks about how we can build new and powerful things even in moments of pain and resignation.

This pandemic has made us learn a lot. I also think we've become more united. Now we are required to be in a group of *WhatsApp* and be connected all the time. This condition of having to stay at home, work from home, needing to help, you had more dialogue with your children, your husband, partners. It is necessary to work, and it is essential to unite because one knows one thing, another knows another, and we have to combine knowledge. One rises and pulls the other. Regarding the relationship with Themis, we say that whoever joins as a partner becomes part of the Fenatrad family, that is our category. We're a big family.



# pandemic

## **WOMEN IN TIMES OF CRISIS: POPULAR LEGAL PROMOTERS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL**

Fabiana Cristina Severi<sup>13</sup>

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated pre-existing structural gender and racial inequalities in the country, disproportionately affecting women and girls, especially black women and those in social vulnerability. In addition to the situation of vulnerability and risk of the virus itself, they were overburdened with the already asymmetrical responsibilities of caring for family members. Their living conditions, health, and autonomy worsened with increasing unemployment or the causes of income suppression and food insecurity.

Domestic and Family Violence Against Women in the country, which was already worrying, has taken on even more severe expressions. With social distancing measures, many began to live closer to the aggressors and experienced greater differences in access to services from the care network and even to their socio-affective support networks.

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Feminist organizations and women's community networks were relatively quick to try to respond to this new scenario in order to facilitate access for women in situations of domestic and family violence to care services and provide assistance for more urgent demands, especially for women living in areas where public authorities are more absent. This was done, for example, through emergency support for basic needs, advice, dissemination of information, and assistance in accessing public services.

This article presents some results of a survey carried out with Popular Legal Promoters (PLPs) who led such initiatives during this critical period. Therefore, the main objective of the research was to understand the main strategies used by PLPs to support women in situations of domestic violence during the pandemic, as well as to analyze the perception of such community leaders about public services to combat domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We interviewed 50 PLPs active in several regions of the country. The questions covered the sociodemographic profile of the interviewees, their career path and training as PLP, and each one's perception of the services provided by the support network for women in situations of violence.

The team of interviewers consisted of five researchers. Each was responsible for a relatively equal number of interviews, which took place between November 2020 and January 2022, in a virtual environment using the Zoom or Google Meet platform.

## I.COVID-19 and domestic violence against women

Before the new coronavirus arrived in the country, a process of dismantling public policies to combat domestic and family violence against women was already underway. Since 2015, the federal government has been reducing the budget allocated to implementing such policies and distributing resources to the support and protection network for women in states and municipalities. At the beginning of 2020, budget resources were zeroed for this topic. Many services in the service network across the country had already closed their doors due to this budget restriction<sup>14</sup>.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, feminist and women's movements have warned public authorities and society about the likely increase in domestic violence and the need to intensify support actions, especially for women in greater social vulnerability<sup>15</sup>. Several international human rights organizations have also guided countries not only to ensure the continuity of services to assist women in situations of violence but also to develop specific forms of support for women in the context of the pandemic (UN WOMEN, 2020; COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> BRASIL. Câmara dos Deputados. **Estudo Técnico nº 16/2020. Execução orçamentária de Ações de Combate à Violência contra as Mulheres**. Brasília: Câmara dos Deputados, 2020. Disponível em: [https://www2.camara.leg.br/orcamento-da-uniao/estudos/2020/ET16\\_Violencia\\_Mulher.pdf](https://www2.camara.leg.br/orcamento-da-uniao/estudos/2020/ET16_Violencia_Mulher.pdf). Acesso em: 21 jul. 2022. ZIGONI, Carmela. Inesc, os números do boicote às políticas para mulheres. **Outras Palavras**, São Paulo, 8 mar. 2022. Disponível em: <https://outraspalavras.net/crise-brasileira/inesc-os-numeros-do-boicote-as-politicas-para-mulheres/>. Acesso em 21 jul. 2022.

<sup>15</sup> CONSÓRCIO LEI MARIA DA PENHA. Nota Técnica referente aos Projetos de Lei em tramitação no Congresso Nacional sobre medidas para o enfrentamento à violência doméstica e familiar, no contexto do distanciamento social, decorrente da vigência do Estado de Calamidade Pública instituído pelo Decreto nº 6/2020. Brasília: CLP, 2020. Disponível em: <http://cepia.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Nota-do-Conso%CC%81rcio-Lei-Maria-da-Penha-COVID.pdf>. Acesso em: 26 mai. 2022.

The first measures adopted by domestic violence services in the country were the conversion of support services to a virtual format - by telephone or messaging apps - and the broadcasting of campaigns on social media with the promotion of the Women's Support Center - *Call 180* and *Dial 100*. In the following months, other strategies were implemented to facilitate, for example, *online* registration of police incidents and requests for urgent protective measures provided for in the Maria da Penha Law.

In July 2020, Law No. 14,022 was approved, which provides measures to combat domestic and family violence during the public health emergency period. Among other points, the law recognized such services as essential activities and the urgent nature of judicial processes in this area, extended the virtual format with simultaneous interaction of occurrence registration to the entire national territory, and guaranteed priority for the conduct of body of crime examinations in the case of crimes related to domestic and family violence.

Despite the speed with which these measures were taken, the primary strategy for converting care to virtual modalities was unsatisfactory, especially for groups of women in conditions of greater social vulnerability. This is because many of them did not have cell phones or credit to make direct line calls; they shared their cell phones with their children, and with the aggressor; they did not have access to the internet, either due to a lack of resources to hire the service or due to the unavailability of access networks in the region, and they had varying levels of digital literacy.

One indication that these actions taken by the country were insufficient was the data provided by the Brazilian Public Security Forum (2020) that, in the first few months of social distancing measures, there was a decrease in requests for urgent protective measures in the courts of justice, most likely due to the difficulty women had in accessing care services. In the same period, there was an increase in cases of femicide<sup>16</sup>.

At a time when the country had to face the effects of the health crisis on women's lives, public policies were already in a state of great precariousness. This means that the measures immediately adopted by various services to deal with the worsening of domestic violence against women failed, at least in the first year, to produce significant effects, especially if we consider the groups of women who are most vulnerable.

As a way of responding to this scenario, many feminist organizations sought to strengthen social initiatives of solidarity and support. Themis, in partnership with other organizations that promote training programs for Popular Legal Promoters (PLPs), sought to support the work of PLPs in their territories with women in domestic violence situations. To this end, the organization provided cell phone recharges, food parcels, and biweekly meetings with dozens of PLPs.

<sup>16</sup> In the first half of 2020, it was possible to observe a drop in police records of domestic violence cases (11% in intentional bodily harm, 17% in threats, and 24% in rape of women), combined with a 1.2% increase in cases of femicide compared to 2019 (FBSP, 2020).

With the support of Themis, many PLPs were able to strengthen or create local networks of solidarity and support among women to address the most severe socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic at the local level, such as food insecurity, shortages of basic hygiene and health items, increased domestic violence and difficulties in accessing the few and precarious public services.

## 2. The PLPs interviewed

The PLPs interviewed, for the most part, reside in some municipalities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, with 35% of them concentrated in the capital. The rest live in the states of São Paulo (22%), Rio de Janeiro (6%), Bahia (6%), Amazonas (4%), Distrito Federal (4%), Goiás (4%), Paraná (4%) and Santa Catarina (4%).

In terms of sociodemographic profile, the majority declared being over 40 years old, black, cisgender, heterosexual, religious, without disabilities, are enrolled in or have attended higher education, and having some source of formal or informal income. In terms of paid occupation, there is a very wide variety of responses. The majority (60%) stated they carried out some paid activity, 8% were retired, 6% indicated they were housewives, and 6% were unemployed. In these last two categories, all associated their response to another activity, for example, housewife and artist, housewife and activist or unemployed and activist, unemployed and student.

Themis and União de Mulheres are the two organizations most cited as responsible for training the interviewees as PLPs. All of them were interviewed because they maintained some activity to support women in situations of domestic violence during the pandemic period and were identified as references in their territories, in addition to having access to the internet and having the equipment to conduct the interviews in a virtual format.

### **3. The role of PLPs during the pandemic**

Given the already precarious situation of social policies and services for women experiencing violence, many women's groups and organizations across the country have become involved in political actions, created community support networks, and promoted collective care practices to alleviate some of the effects of the pandemic in their territories. This was also the case with the PLPs (CUENTRO, 2021; SALOMÃO, 2021; MARX, 2022).

Themis restructured its action strategies with the PLPs, seeking to ensure the continuity of training activities for such leaders and create new ways to support the PLPs so that they could continue their work of welcoming women in situations of domestic and family violence in their territories safely and in a manner aligned with the demands imposed by the new scenario.

The PLPs immediately felt the effects of the pandemic in the communities in which they work: the poorest women and those from peripheral regions were affected both by the loss of work and income and by the abrupt rupture of informal support networks that could guarantee minimum conditions of safety and subsistence. The PLPs and the women assisted also faced greater difficulties in accessing care services that migrated to the virtual format:

*The women who were employed lost their jobs, you know? And then we are no longer dealing only with a question of a case of violence because violence is systemic; it attacks everything. You know this thing about thinking that violence is an isolated thing that happens inside the home? No. It happens in all social spheres. This woman, speaking of her role as a social agent, does not produce. Therefore, she is held hostage by situations involving her husband and a family member who is close by and super aggressive towards her; the economy does not turn because she is a great caregiver. We women are great caregivers. We take care of the mother, the father, the child, the grandfather, the parakeet, the girl neighbor, the guy neighbor. So imagine this woman, amid the pandemic, having to deal with all of this without being able to leave the house. And still with a process of violence. So the issue of vulnerability has increased a lot. (Marta)*

*The pandemic has also greatly limited our ability to reach them. Because we have always done a lot of work within the community and associations. (...) So I think we tried, through some live broadcasts, which also do not directly access the community. I think the fact that this online format came about made it quite difficult. It contributes a lot, but still leaves us limited. (Joana)*



The main actions carried out by PLPs during the pandemic can be organized into 3 axes.

The first of these was emergency aid through collecting and distributing food parcels, personal hygiene kits, medicines, etc., in response to the abrupt worsening of women's living and health conditions due to the pandemic. Many of these items were made available by feminist organizations working with the PLPs, such as Themis, the Women's Union, and the Geledés Institute. Other solidarity networks were also mobilized to obtain donations from individuals, organizations, and community groups of which the PLPs are part, as well as religious entities, municipal departments, and companies. Some PLPs also donated items, and others in a more vulnerable situation also received support, as many of them were also affected by the pandemic context.

*There was a lot of mobilization like that to bring food because many people lost their jobs. (...) They went back to using wood stoves, because they didn't have a gas cylinder, they went back to looking for community gardens to see if there was food, because they were really out of work. (Raquel)*

*In the first phase of the pandemic, it was more about food and hygiene supplies. So much so that we spoke to the donors of the food parcels and asked them to also deliver those hygiene products such as toothpaste, sanitary pads, and other things that women were looking for a lot, in addition to diapers that were also missing (both geriatric and children's, which ends up falling to the women to take care of both children and older people).*

*So, this first moment of the pandemic was very strong, and this second moment was more about psychological care. (Rosanna)*

It is important to say that this type of action is not characteristic of acting as a PLP. Although many of them already carried out activities of this type, they did so due to their ties with other community groups (churches, associations, volunteer groups, etc.). With the pandemic, emergency aid became something primary, both due to the critical situation in which many families were thrown by the health crisis and due to the perception of impoverishment and food insecurity among women as central factors that aggravated domestic violence.

The second set of actions involved disseminating information about social programs and services for women experiencing domestic violence. Some women, for example, continued to go to psychosocial support services, police stations, or justice agencies and found the doors closed. In other words, not everyone knew that some services were operating remotely or had information on how to access them.

*Themis released a [newsletter] that had some of the network's telephone numbers and passed them on to us. And from that came the idea of us complementing these numbers, making a double-sided folder, a small card, that could be used throughout the municipality without having just one campaign. But that it could be released indefinitely with the networks' phone numbers. All contact numbers and emails of the municipal network: Public Prosecutor's Office,*

*Brigade, CREAS, CAPS, Basic Health Unit, PLPs, Comdim, guardianship councils. So, everything that would add to human rights and allow people to access these contacts and the service. (...) From this material, we also made a poster that we put up throughout the municipal network: open schools, bars, pubs, and haberdashery, especially in highly vulnerable regions where people do not have much access to information. The intention of this poster, these folders, was to work in these regions. (Rute)*

The PLPs, then, were fundamental in mapping the services and how they were functioning, as well as in disseminating information in the communities where they operate. They had to innovate in their advertising methods due to social distancing measures. As the example above shows, many posted posters in strategic locations in the neighborhoods, produced content for circulation via WhatsApp or social networks such as *Instagram*, and distributed pamphlets in the spaces where basic food baskets were delivered.

The third axis of action of the PLPs was direct support for women in situations of domestic violence. They supported some women in resolving difficulties in accessing services in the care network, even if virtually. Themis, for example, has made pre-paid cellphone minutes and mobile devices available so that PLPs can continue to support women. These devices were used in many circumstances so that women could access public service channels safely, schedule appointments for such services, file complaints, or pass on information. The PLPs were thus able to continue performing one of the most symbolic roles of their work: helping other women to reach out to the State, acting as mediators between them and public services.

*Themis even sent me a phone, a device with a SIM card, and a specific number to make these calls and to be able to make contact with the network and with the services. As I say, the network is one of services, but it is the contact with the people in this network [that is carried out]. (Roberta)*

This direct support, in addition to enabling access to public services, also ends up meaning emotional support and acceptance. In the absence or weakening of personal support networks, many women in situations of violence were able to count on PLPs to feel welcomed, informed, and interacted with, even if this was only happening through phone calls or chat apps. It is a type of action capable of minimizing feelings of uncertainty, loneliness, hopelessness, and fear heightened by the pandemic. A central support strategy to empower women to seek to break violent relationships.

In addition to these three axes of action, we can also mention an innovative experience. In Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul, Themis, in partnership with UniRitter University, developed a project involving PLPs and a specialized domestic violence court. The objective was to structure a new methodology for providing care to women at most significant risk through the support and advice of PLPs so that they could monitor the situation of women who have been granted protective measures. The action directly affected more than 300 women, with around 630 reports of cases being sent to the specialized court.

## **Final Remarks**

The research findings reinforce the argument maintained for over a decade by Brazilian feminist organizations that PLPs, as community mediators between public services and women in conditions of greater vulnerability, are fundamental agents in ensuring women's access to justice.

Specifically concerning the pandemic period, PLPs and the organizations that support them were relatively quick to seek new ways of acting and were capable of responding to the new scenario. This adaptation was necessary because, even when they are not the majority among the people killed in a health crisis, women are the most affected, especially those who are black and located in peripheral regions. They mobilized solidarity networks to enhance emergency aid, sought to learn about new formats for public services to operate, and disseminated information about this among groups of women who had little or no access to virtual means of communication. Furthermore, they created ways to continue “moving” through the territories to help other women seek support in the support network.

These actions are practices of feminist solidarity, which show the ability of popular women to support each other and to produce collective projects of mutual aid. Through these experiences, they also generated critical awareness about the actions of public authorities during the pandemic, which can anchor other forms of feminist political action by PLPs against the multiple and intersectional forms of violence against women and against the current setbacks in social policies.

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**Malvina Beatris Souza**

POPULAR LEGAL PROMOTER (PLP) OF THE CRUZEIRO REGION, PORTO ALEGRE / RS

My name is Malvina Beatris Souza, I am 60 years old, and I am the mother of six children. I have three girls and three boys, all adults, married, with children. I have 17 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. My last partner, whom I was married to, was the father the children chose for themselves because three of them were not his children. I chose someone to be the father of my children because of everything I was afraid of: the abuse I suffered as a teenager, begging at traffic lights, the mistreatment I suffered as a teenager, as a child, everything I didn't want. I didn't want the domestic violence I saw my mother go through. Knowing what I didn't want, I separated three times, decided to raise my children alone, and dedicated myself to other things.

I have been an activist since I was 22 years old in the area of popular movements together with the União de Vilas, a council that dialogued with all the villages in this enormous territory that is Cruzeiro. At the time there were no public policies, there was no water, there was no electricity, everything was very unhealthy. At that time, everything was a construction, everything you wanted you had to participate in. I learned that to get water to rise up the hill, which is where we live, I had to shout and curse at the mayor. I learned to shout for my rights and the rights of others when I was 22 and had four children.

I am a daughter of this territory, because my mother came here when I was one year old, and I live here to this day. As a teenager, we fetched water from a well, with a can on our heads. The school was too far away, in another neighborhood, and we had to cross a bridge to get there. We have been resisting. My grandmother resisted, my mother resisted, and I transformed. My grandmother occupied it, my mother kept it and I managed to transform our territory. Today, I understand that I participated in this transformation and that this transformation also had my signature. I understood this when I was president of the CMAS (Municipal Council of Social Assistance). At a CMAS meeting, a Union person was there to learn about the values that arrived at the Council, which should be passed on to assistance policies. I was sitting with him and asked, “But don't you have to be sitting with the president of FASC (Social Assistance and Citizenship Foundation)?” and he said, “No, I have to be sitting with you because you are the one who signs for the president of FASC, including the salary of the president of FASC, it is you who signs.” And I said, “Oh my God, what if something goes wrong?”, and he replied: “It's your CPF” [T.N. 07: acronym for Social Security Number in Brazil]. I think I lost my naivety there. Imagine me, a semi-literate person, signing? When this man told me what I was responsible for, that my CPF was not just a few digits, that I was responsible for that, I started to understand that you can represent and be accountable, and there I was



the responsible one. Then my life started to take another direction. That awakening made me go back to studying and made me want more, to read everything that came in front of me, especially everything I signed. Community leadership has made me much more accountable. I went back to school, finished high school. I became a better, more centered mother, and I became a more responsible professional. I qualified for this, and that qualification qualified me for life.

I was a guardianship counselor four times. Of these, two as incumbent, and two as substitute. Today I am a substitute. I discuss the issue of children and adolescents a lot because we need to understand that healthy children and adolescents will be healthy mothers and fathers. I created a women's association, the Grande Cruzeiro Solidarity Women's Association (ASMUSOL). It's a little pink house, here in the middle of Vila Cruzeiro, which is now 25 years old. It is a space where we produce income for women and work with the solidarity economy, mainly with sewing. Since the beginning of the Association, we have encouraged women to return to study and to change jobs, and we have fostered ideas to emancipate people. This community life, for me, is very rich. We win because we win together. We emancipate women and we emancipate ourselves.

Today, I am a Popular Legal Promoter (PLP) at Themis, a place where I have always referred girls and women, but I had never been a part of it. I was always close to the PLPs, but I wasn't one. In the meantime, I went to college and needed to do my internship. I had already done two internships in Social Work, but that wasn't what I wanted to do. One day I met Guaneci<sup>17</sup> and said that we needed more PLPs, that Cruzeiro hadn't had a training course Popular Legal Promoters, for a long time,

<sup>17</sup> Maria Guaneci Ávila is a Popular Legal Promoter, Social Worker and Project Advisor at Themis.

and few of them were working in the region because many PLPs were already elderly and passed away. Our biggest references were Jane, Angelina and Maria Eleonice. These women, these PLPs, were fantastic. But Angelina had passed away, and Jane was still there, so I said to Guaneci, “We have to do it.” And we went to talk. I did my Social Work Internship I, which was an observation at Themis. Stage - internship<sup>2</sup> was the training of women in the PLPs course. We trained 28 women. 3, Stage - internship which would be the practice, was the hardest part. Because it seems that you are ready to act, but it does not depend on you, it depends on the network. Today I am a PLP at Grande Cruzeiro, a social worker, and I graduated with great pride from Themis. Themis was extremely important. Guaneci and Maria Inês, women from Themis, were my great teachers out here to complete my degree in Social Service.

## **COVID-19 pandemic**

In 2020 I was on the Guardianship Council. Covid was already being discussed worldwide in February, and in March, it was already in Porto Alegre; with that uncertainty of everything, no one knew what it was or what they had to do. Those of us who work on the front line had a public to serve and families being cared for when the “close everything” came. They started to close the daycare centers, and we, already with that protective look, began to ask ourselves: “Who takes care of them?” “who will stay with the children?”. We started a fierce discussion at that moment asking where the children would stay because the daycare center was the first thing to close, but the domestic worker mothers’ service did not close. The construction industry did not close, nor did the general services assistant service. And that’s the audience of women that we work with, and these women are mothers.

Who was going to take care of the children? What would they have to eat? As mothers became unemployed, the concern became greater. Who will bring food? Where will she get her livelihood from? It was chaos.

I'm talking about Grande Cruzeiro, with 60 thousand inhabitants, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics IBGE in 2010. Of these, 51% are poor and from families that work in the roles I mentioned. So, it was a matter of running to get food for these women. But with that, in June we had an outbreak of Covid and an outbreak of violence. These women had already arrived at the Associação de Mulheres Solidárias da Vila Cruzeiro - Asmusol, at SIM (Women's Information Service of Cruzeiro), the organizations that they knew provided assistance and listened. They'd arrive asking for food, leaving their name and phone number, saying where they were from. The pandemic was one of the most difficult times in the job. By June we had already mapped 200 people requesting food. The guidance was to do the consultations over the phone and everyone who could could listen to everyone else. Everyone was scared, but I didn't have time to be scared. How could I be afraid? If I were there one day and also the following day, I would open the doors of the Guardianship Council and listen to people, open the doors of SIM Cruzeiro and listen to people. We began to articulate how we would serve and care for these women in this territory. We were able to provide individual care to women who were victims of violence at SIM, and Themis provided food parcels for this group of women. A FASC authorized the purchase of food parcels for the adolescent girls served. I identified three groups: Themis serves this one, FASC serves this one, and we will ask for this one. We started to identify by age group: these are the elderly women, these are the "carrinheiras" [see T.N. 08], who collect recyclables on

the streets mothers with more than four children, mothers with less than four children. In July 2020, I left the Guardianship Council and dedicated myself exclusively to these actions, which were not social assistance, and I make a point of saying this: they were about food insecurity. It was food.

Through the SIM Cruzeiro service, I accompanied eight women to the police station to file reports. I cared for these eight women, following them through the process in 2020 and 2021 until they returned to work and the children returned to daycare. Adolescents were also treated in the SIM, and given guidance on where they could seek any help they needed. It was a SIM, really, a Women's Information Service about all the places she could go. In 2021 some people went back to work, some didn't. Many people work online, but online doesn't work for a family that doesn't have internet, that doesn't have a signal, that doesn't have a compatible cell phone, but that has manage of their children's online classes .

The pandemic was very difficult for women. We ended up serving 300 or so women. We identified those who could not communicate with us via the Internet, so we made pre-paid cell phone minutes available to them. Look, talking to you today, I see how much SIM Cruzeiro acted. Through the forms we filled out, with questions, answers, and requests for information from women and families, we identified around 200 situations of violence. We listened. The flagship was listening. We gathered 15 women at night to listen to them. We were impressed by the large number of women who are victims of HIV and by the courage of women in putting an end to some relationships. That for us was a gain. I created call groups for women, making my two phone numbers available, the SIM one and

my personal one, so they could talk and get information. Our SIM worked a lot, in my person and in the persons of Loerci and Teresinha. In 2021 Terezinha passed away, and that left us very fragile. Loecir, who was also a tireless companion, had to work, and many ended up retreating in fear of Covid. But that same year Conceição joined us in this fight.

We received a secure telephone number from Themis to talk to the women we serve and for activities and online meetings. In 2020 we had fewer face-to-face actions, because there was a lot of fear. In 2021 we had our first in-person Themis activity at Parque Redenção, in Porto Alegre, which was the PLPs meeting, and there we were able to get together and listen to the testimonies of colleagues. They said they didn't know who to turn to at that difficult time but would receive help from another PLP, who called to ask how they were doing. It was really good. We met in person the staff at the UFRGS<sup>18</sup> Feminist Clinic, a space to which we would refer some women. I'm very proud to say that we can talk to each other, you know? On the phone, in conversations, and those moments when we did the online meetings, we strengthened ourselves and knew that we were not alone. I felt very alone at many times but, at the same time, very strengthened by Themis, by my colleagues, by Guaneci, a tireless person. We need to think about the SIM as a protective space.

<sup>18</sup> Themis partnered with the Feminist Clinic in the Intersectional Perspective of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in 2020, through which care groups were created for Popular Legal Promoters and women victims of domestic and family violence. The meetings were weekly, in groups of up to three women, remotely. In addition to the groups, the initiative aims to disseminate information about mental health and access to rights for women at risk related to gender-based violence.

## Caring for those who care

Maria Guaneci, Maria Conceição, and Maria Inês, three PLPs, they took care of me. My daughters. My daughters were very angry with me because I didn't stay home, I was out there, in a risky situation. At the same time they listened to me and knew they weren't going to keep me indoors. But they never stopped catching my attention on it, and that is very important. My daughters were very important to me, and so were my friends. I felt very cared for by all of them. I think that protective net was very strong. I did not seek psychological assistance at any time, because I did not have time. I was a "psychologist" for a lot of people. I had coffee here, tea there. There is a little old lady in our territory, Mrs. Alice, who is a victim of domestic violence and psychological violence. She takes care of everyone and everyone is always up to mischief. Dona Alice would say to me: "Come have lunch with me". So, in the middle of the whirlwind, I would find a place, a wood-burning oven and a hot meal, you know? Solidarity cherished. Everyone took care of me just like I took care of everyone.

## Losing Jane

Jane was a first-class PLP, she was an opinion maker. She was a woman who, wherever she was, she talked. We started talking about something and that something was from the area of law. Where she lived, she was the person everyone was looking for to know about any subject, for any topic. Jane lived her

whole life on that street, so the people who were there were already in the second or third generation with her. Jane had a gate that was always open. This same open gate, which we usually say serves to guide, is also the gate that the police enter through as if they were the owners. A police officer never enters alone, two, three, four enter. And that's what they'd been doing at Jane's house for over a week. They arrived, shouted, wanted to arrest the boys, and Jane said they weren't doing anything. She always defended a large number of boys from halfway down the street who really didn't do anything but who were unemployed teenagers during the pandemic, had nothing to do, and stayed there. But everyone had a mother, they had a home. There was no one who did not have a house there. This was Jane's defense, who, at that time of the pandemic, was at home, quite weak, due to an accident she had suffered and was unable to recover well. Jane was a city guard. She was a woman on the move.

The Military Police were at Jane's house, and she said: "they must have a warrant". They looked, examined, saw and left. The next day again, you know? And the next day again, and the next day again. On December 6, 2020, they entered her house, and she, very upset, told them that this was the last time they would enter. And she argued with the cops. On the second day they entered Jane's house, everyone started bringing her information about what the police were doing in the territory with other women, including teenagers. Various situations of abuse. On the 8th, Oxum day, in the morning, we met; Jane and I greeted each other, and she went out to buy bread, a ritual she did every day. We had been talking a lot about the situations of police violence that we were going to address. On the way back, Jane

ran into the police inside her yard. A policeman at the gate, four or five policemen, we don't know exactly, inside the house. The patrol car was not on the avenue, it was not in the corridor, on the street where she lived.

According to the neighbors' testimony, because I was not there at that moment, Jane would have said, "You Again? Didn't I say you weren't coming into my house anymore?". A policeman did not allow Jane to enter the house. My phone rang, a call from Mother Andreia, a PLP from the Glória neighborhood, Mother of Saint, and she said to me: "Bia, run to Jane's house because the police are there at her house and something is happening. Jane fell and I don't know what's going on there." This is the network that we have, whoever is closest sees what is happening and warns the others. When I got there, the neighbor next door had already accompanied Jane to Postão<sup>19</sup> da Cruzeiro. We stood there listening to what people were saying, where it went. I called the social worker at Postão 3 and asked: "Did a girl, Jane, arrive there through the Military Police?" Because Jane was known to everyone. And the social worker on duty told me, "Yes, she was admitted here. I'm seeing the police's statement, who say they found her lying on the street." And I said, "No, that's not what happened." She said, "but that's the statement." I said, "No, but that's not what happened. What happened was that the Military Police were at her house, and the police officer pushed her; she fell and was taken there after much insistence from the residents, who screamed because they were already leaving as if nothing had happened." I reported what the community had reported to me. I said that she was even there with one the

<sup>19</sup> Community Health Center



residents of the street. And the report had already been issued; they were already finishing the first report. I insisted, so the social worker told me “I’ll see the parts here again then.” And then the discussion of the military brigade’s false testimony concerning Jane’s death began.

In the meantime, the entire community around Cruzeiro do Sul had already set fire to several points of the territory, and the confusion had already begun. There was a helicopter flying overhead because the first thing they put in our territory was armed police up there, scaring us. Those [police men] who do wrong disappear, and then others come, who know nothing, see nothing, with the sole intention of protecting their own. And then they are violent. They don’t know what’s going on, they haven’t heard, and they don’t accept the information. They hit you because they don’t talk and don’t give you the right to defend yourself. That December 8th was a horror. We have two types of police: uniformed and non-uniformed, who circulate naturally and film everything. We buried Jane, and then they started walking around with the image of the faces of the people who set fire to the avenue, the kids, the adults, the women who closed the avenue, asking who they were and where they lived. In all the movements we made in repudiation of Jane’s death, the riot police were present because we closed the avenue; the only way we have to draw attention to this. In less than six months they put Jane’s name on the street where she lived. The process of entering the council chamber, to name the street, has never been so fast, it has never happened like this. They used every way they could to silence us, intimidate us.

In 2021, on December 8th, we closed the street again. We drew attention to the lack of information and the way Jane's case was being handled. On the morning of the 9th, the civil police entered a house with dogs, in front of União de Vilas. And they left there, from in front of one of the places where I work with women, and went to my grandson's house. So that's it, every time we do something about Jane, we're going to be bullied. This makes me think that the police will probably not be held accountable and that this will be forgotten.

We spent eight months organizing door, window, wall, to give protection to Jane's family. The family did not want to change territory because they were safe in this territory and because everyone there was a witness. And safety exists here, where everyone knows each other. If you take them out of here to a place where no one knows them, they're unprotected. Police violence in this territory is serious.

Jane, because of the information she held about law and citizenship, also protected the youth. How the police see it is what we have to deal with. Because the villages are full of PLPs and women with information, but we don't have a card, we don't have a college degree, like the Deputy, like the lawyer. Because if the police are there, repressing, and you shout, "Mr. João, wait for me to call a lawyer," they take a step back in violence. With the PLP No. Because they knew who Jane was: "There's that woman on the corner cursing us, wanting a mandate, wanting us to treat the kids differently, wanting to guarantee rights in a place where there are no rights at all." This is very complicated.

All of us women are labeled exactly like that, you know? "Oh, the human rights defender has come." In Jane's case, the police went on a mission. They knew what they were doing. They knew whose house it was. They knew who that woman was. Because Jane, in fact, worked at the Municipal Security Department, where the Municipal Guard is located. A woman who, if you entered the system and entered her name and CPF number, you would know who she was. For the police this is facilitated, it is not like any citizen. The police knows who they're dealing with. The police are the ones who most violate rights in the favela. Porto Alegre is not experiencing viral cases like Rio de Janeiro because the media is not doing its job in this territory.

After Jane's death, I think we need to discuss more about protective public safety for women in the outskirts of town. What happened to Jane was very serious. It has served as a wake-up call for us. We've been talking a lot about it everywhere, including in this PLP course, which is being held now and named after Jane. Many women are talking about police violence in the course. The police need to be qualified to approach women in the community, especially in the situation of anonymous complaints. Those who should protect us, make us afraid.

The violence continues, but that's what we usually say: Jane lives. Jane is alive within us. Jane used to be one, today we are many Janes.



**Renata Teixeira Jardim**

LAWYER

**Q. Could you talk about the rates of violence against women during the pandemic?**

A. When the pandemic began, Themis and the women's movement issued a warning about the possibility of an increase in violence against women as a result of international experience in relation to health crises. Right from the start we noticed that there was a reduction in the number of police reports filed. So, to talk about rates of violence against women, we have to understand what data and type of record we are talking about.

The first thing to say is that the pandemic has made it difficult for women to access the service network. This difficulty meant that we had less data on violence records in police stations and also in the judiciary. When we talk about violence rates, we think of an organized set of data. Most of the information we are able to organize and produce is based on Public Security data, and this data has this issue: it refers to women who were able to access this service.

The first data pointing to an increase in violence against women comes from “Ligue 180” from the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH). Right at the beginning of the pandemic, we had data released that showed an increase in reports of violence against women in these telephone reporting spaces. We also had a moment of an increase in police reports of an increase in records, whether of rape crimes or femicide crimes. Femicide, for example, is very seasonal because the data is compared from one month to the same month of the previous year, with some moments of the pandemic showing more significant growth and other moments recording slight declines. Therefore, it has to be analyzed from a historical approach. The Femicide Map, which will provide data from 10 years, helps us understand the increasing trend in femicide and female death rates.

What we know is that Brazil is one of the countries in the world<sup>20</sup> that kills the most women and that with the pandemic, women faced greater barriers to breaking the cycles of violence and were more vulnerable to facing this type of violence within

<sup>20</sup> According to data from the 2015 Violence Map, Brazil is the 5th country with the highest homicide rate of women. The 2015 Map of Violence: Homicide of Women in Brazil was prepared by the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (Flacso), with the support of the UN Women office in Brazil, the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies (SPM) of the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights.

their homes. The barriers and vulnerabilities are of different orders. An important point is that women are usually attacked at home by intimate partners, so the isolation imposed by the pandemic has put women at a greater risk of suffering or worsening situations of violence in the domestic environment. On the other hand, in order to break free from violence, women depend on access to a network of services that is capable of supporting them, and they also need to feel safe when accessing these services. They also depend on social support, whether it be employment, daycare, or mechanisms that guarantee rights so that they can actually report and break with violence. And the pandemic has been affecting all of these situations, whether by placing these women in isolation or by making it difficult for them to access the service network. The service network itself was a factor in difficulties since many of these services were closed, and it took a long time to organize themselves to meet these demands in accordance with safety protocols and the necessary care during the pandemic. In this set of situations, in this context, we can see in an obvious way that there was an aggravation of violence in this period.

**Q. What did Themis do when it realized the difficulty in accessing rights during this period?**

A. Themis was worried about what was happening in Brazil. We were already on alert about the worsening of the violence situation due to the dismantling of public policies, which predates the pandemic. We were seeking to increase attention to

women understanding that the work of the PLPs in the territories, close to these women, with a different, welcoming perspective, from the perspective of rights, was fundamental to breaking or reducing situations of violence. With the pandemic, we need to think of specific and effective ways for this context, whether thinking about the safety of PLPs because their work is eminently in-person and collective or thinking about the difficulties they would have in leaving home. For this, we have articulated a remote service methodology. We thought of instruments to readjust the PLPs' performance, ranging from service forms to creating secure communication channels through which PLPs could activate and be activated via telephone. We set up working groups in the regions where the PLPs were organized. We provide a secure telephone line for them, with periodic minutes recharges made by Themis, ensuring that they have the conditions to participate in coordination meetings and provide assistance to women in situations of violence.

Another very important demand was the listening and mental health space for PLPs themselves. It is already well known that there is no mental health care in the service network, this is a historic demand, especially in the care agenda for women in situations of violence. In 2018, the theme of activist care and security became institutionally central, given the context of increased violence and criminalization of social movements, leading us to realize the need to look more precisely at the issue of care for those who care for other women, defenders, and activists. A mental health care methodology was designed for the PLPs in partnership with UFRGS and Simone Paulon, a partner from Themis. This is how the Intersectional Perspective Feminist Clinic was created. The project was initially designed for PLPs and some other activists, but later began to also serve women in situations of violence.

In addition to this, we were also aware that women would be in a much more serious economic vulnerability due to the issue of unemployment, the economic crisis that worsened due to the pandemic. In this context, the PLPs became poorer and had a reduction in income. This perception led us to develop a set of actions to ensure primary conditions, not only for services but also for personal life. We guarantee connectivity, support for mental health and nutrition, and the sending of safety materials, such as masks, alcohol gel, and hygiene kits. We carried out an intense social mobilization to guarantee this care for women based on donations from other organizations and our own resources.

The set of actions developed resulted in the humanitarian aid program, which is structured around understanding the importance of reinforcing healthcare and care for these women. We have also created a methodology for care and attention to women in situations of violence. We have also significantly strengthened our dialogue with the service network, putting pressure on the state and this network to pay attention to women.

**Q. This remote care methodology was partnered with the judiciary in Canoas, Rio Grande do Sul. Could you talk about that experience?**

A. We already had well-organized and well-articulated work from the PLPs in the networks of this municipality. As soon as the pandemic came, the Canoas PLPs began to articulate the improvement of these networks. This is where the idea of formalizing a partnership with the Judiciary Branch came about so that the PLPs could monitor women who were at greater risk, those who have urgent protective measures.



We formalized a cooperation agreement in which it was established that all cases of domestic and family violence against women in which emergency protective measures were granted during the pandemic would be institutionally referred to Themis. We collect this information and organize it in a database. We then pass this information on to the specialized women's support service, the Reference Center for Women Victims of Violence (CRM), which informs us which cases have not yet reached this specialized service. This is the service in which all women in situations of violence should be referred, especially those at greatest risk.

We received this information and passed on the data of the women who were not referred to the specialized center to the PLPs in Canoas. We set up a working group and selected the PLPs who were better able to perform this service remotely. We divided, distributed, and forwarded the cases according to the place of residence closest to each PLP. We sent this information, and the PLPs started to make telephone contact and monitor the situation of these women, whether they had new situations of violence, and whether they were at risk. In these services, the main demands are multidisciplinary monitoring, offered by the Reference Center, and for resolving family issues, separation, child custody, and alimony. In these cases, the PLPs guide women in seeking services and referrals. The PLPs do all that follow-up, and it's ongoing, it's not just a phone call.

This work was systematized; we produced reports and official documents that are attached to the domestic violence cases of each woman assisted. The methodology was part of the international research report that Themis organized with NAMATI<sup>21</sup> and is reported as a good practice in the UN Women document, which organizes the guidelines for dealing with violence against women during COVID-19. A technical note from IPEA also references this work experience of PLPs as a good practice and an important experience. It was very important to have systematized, organized and publicized this experience as a strategy that could serve as an example for others also to implement it.

This experience of Canoas will also inform the work we develop in Porto Alegre from articulations with services. In the capital, we established more community partnerships with the Maria da Penha Patrol, which provided the greatest support to the PLPs during the pandemic. This was a service that was really there on the ground and reached women's homes. We also had an important experience with seventy PLPs of São Paulo, in which we developed a remote care methodology. In a partnership with the Women's Union of São Paulo, Themis made the telephone minutes recharge available to PLPs from that state and the instruments we had prepared as service forms. Disseminating and organizing this attention also in the state of São Paulo was a very significant experience, with the production of a

<sup>21</sup> Gender Justice during and beyond the Covid-19 crisis – Institucional responses to gender-based violence and the role of legal empowerment group  
<https://themis.org.br/publicacoes-e-obras/page/2/>

**Q. You have been talking about partnerships and this “Who cares for those that take care”. I wanted you to talk about the dimension of care and how this idea expanded during the pandemic.**

A. It is important to say that this issue of care has always been an assignment of women. The pandemic has shown how critical this work is. Ninety percent of those on the front lines of the pandemic are women. In families, the responsibility for care always lies with women. The pandemic has placed an enormous burden on women's care work, which has historically been delegated and relegated to them, in a certain sense, as work of lesser value. At the same time, feminists and the actions we began to develop shed light on this work, which I think was valued. In practice and experience, people saw how important it was to take care of the house because they needed to stay at home.

The pandemic has put a strain on women, but in some ways, it has been an opportunity to show how critical this care is and how much we need to care for these women. We need to create alternatives and force the state to ensure that this care is not too costly. The greater the burden and difficulties, the more situations of violence may be generated or worsened. Not to mention the issue of children. Outside of schools, how much these issues have also aggravated the situation of violence against children.

We seek to work in partnerships, in order to expand our actions. We have invested heavily in the articulation of PLPs at the national level, understanding that they had an essential role in this period and that articulation is fundamental.

In this regard, the State Network of PLPs it was rearticulated. We rescued many PLPs with whom we no longer had contact, mapped them, and created a database of information about these women. And, of course, we insist on the need for articulation with this State, which is not easy.

Themis operates at different levels: at the executive level, with the State and managers; at the judiciary level, where we have a good presence; at the legislative level, where we have important dialogues; or with civil society. During this period, we seek to rethink and strengthen our partnerships in line with women's demands; this is our commitment. Participation in international networks was also meaningful, such as Namati itself, this legal empowerment network at a global level, in which Themis had already been working on dialogue and leadership, in the sense of being one of the few organizations working in the field of gender violence in the Global Legal Empowerment Network. But I also think that the isolation itself and the reinforcement of technologies made us see the possibility of bringing the whole world together on a screen, something that we might not have thought of. We know that demands lose a lot with virtuality. Discussing gender violence and receiving support is not the same online as it is in person. We needed to update and reinvent ourselves.

In the workshop we developed with the PLPs in which we articulated the national network, we hired a consultancy to think specifically about this methodology and how this group and virtual work would be. Our training courses have become hybrid, as have PLP training courses and refresher courses. We tried to have a particular perspective and qualify ourselves in order to ensure that the virtual space was a welcoming and possible space based on the themes we work with. We organized a national survey and listened to 50 PLPs in a virtual space, which was a huge challenge. We formed a team of interviewers trained to provide this welcome bond in these spaces.

**Q. I would like you to talk a little about the strategic uses of art and communication in this period. Thinking about the action that was done in 2021, the actions of muralism, etc.**

A. We produced many informational materials for PLPs to share during the pandemic on their community networks. During this period, there was also a national strategy to highlight the increase in femicides, and Themis was invited and became part of the Feminist Uprising Against Femicides, which is a national organization that created the #NemPenseEmMeMatar (Don't even think about killing me) campaign. We have a critical role in the campaign here in Rio Grande do Sul because of our base, the PLPs, who are very active. In addition to strategically planning this campaign at the national level, Themis worked to disseminate it in the communities. We produced materials such as scarves, we organized artistic interventions on walls and graffiti in three regions of the city of Porto Alegre, where PLPs reside, and we were in live broadcasts and virtual actions.

Another problem faced during the pandemic was the issue of legal abortion. Themis and the Rio Grande do Sul Legal Abortion Forum launched a Legal Abortion Guide<sup>22</sup>, created based on women's demands. There was the situation of difficulty in accessing sexual and reproductive health services, whether due to the closure or restriction of services provided by some services, such as legal abortion, for example, generating a movement to recognize that these

<sup>22</sup> <http://bit.ly/GuiaAbortoLegal>

services were essential. To address this context, we have put together a fundamental strategy to disseminate information, both for women and for legal abortion service networks, on how this service should work and be guaranteed, especially during the pandemic, reinforcing the importance of enforcing legislation. During this period, we had many setbacks concerning this area, with orders from the Ministry of Health revoking many actions and a series of emblematic cases, such as those of the girls from Espírito Santo and Santa Catarina. This was also a constant concern, and we used much of the communication space to inform and build dialogue and articulation strategies with the service network, managers, and society.

**Q. With the pandemic, many institutions were paralyzed without dealing with new modes of interaction, but Themis developed new methodologies for connectivity, protection and care. Can you see this dimension of the feminist ethics of care acting in this rapid readaptation of Themis?**

A. There was an emergency coming from women, and Themis, committed to women, committed to a feminist ethic of care, felt responsible for responding quickly to this. This community network and this close contact with women were fundamental. It's different than just taking a course and sending women out into the world. Themis does not do this, we are together with these women. So we had the opportunity to listen to these women, to receive their demands, and to support them in thinking and building concrete responses to their demands.

Very quickly the PLPs articulated their communities, organized the work groups, and made contacts. There are beautiful stories of PLPs organizing community actions, producing masks, and distributing them free of charge. So I think it was powerful, it was necessary, it was fundamental, but it was also very difficult. For us women who had to execute this was very difficult. I personally had a baby in the middle of the pandemic. I was returning from maternity leave in the midst of the pandemic. So I stayed at the headquarters for four days and had to go back home, having to take care of a baby at home. Other colleagues had handled the community's life, with challenges such as getting good internet. Or colleagues who lived with people in the risk group for Covid. All this was very difficult. It was very difficult to have that awareness that women's lives were going to become very difficult. Knowing that many more women would die or that many more women would suffer violence. It was very hard. I think we had the ability to reinvent ourselves, to use this suffering, this hardship, and this difficulty in the sense of power, but it was very difficult for us, too.

I think that this care, this feminist ethic of care, also permeated a very great concern with the team itself. There was very quickly suspended face-to-face activities, both from PLPs as for the work team. We built a strategy to ensure more appropriate work, which the Intersectional Feminist Clinic itself offered, and we organized a weekly space in the agenda to listen to the team. This space was fundamental. When we thought about the possibility of resuming face-to-face activities, we sought a partnership to establish a biosafety protocol. Today, despite this government saying that it no longer needs to wear a mask, we continue with a contingency plan at headquarters. We continue with our on-call schedule, holding virtual meetings as much as possible, always taking care. So, we really followed this ethics of care, understanding that the pandemic has not yet passed.



## **LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES**



# Justice

## **GENDER JUSTICE DURING AND BEYOND THE COVID-19 CRISIS. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF LEGAL EMPOWERMENT GROUPS IN LATIN AMERICA**

Izabel Belloc<sup>23</sup>

### **1. Introduction**

The World Health Organization – WHO estimates that deaths attributable to COVID-19 in 2020 reached 3 million people around the world<sup>24</sup>. During that first year of the global pandemic, the vast majority of countries adopted measures to contain the health crisis, including social distancing with severe restrictions on people's mobility, which meant, on the one hand, that populations were advised to stay at home and, on the other, that public and private services considered non-essential were suspended.

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<sup>24</sup> WHO. World health statistics 2021: monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development

Many women, children, and adolescents found themselves overnight with their aggressors and without being able to seek help since services to assist women in situations of violence, in most countries, were not considered essential services and were closed. In addition, women's support groups also had their mobility significantly restricted, which prevented them from accessing these women to provide them with assistance. The devastating effect of this combination of factors was the increase in gender-based violence worldwide<sup>25</sup>.

This was the triggering social phenomenon that led Themis – Gender, Justice and Human Rights and the NAMATI Network to carry out the research *Gender Justice during and beyond the COVID-19 crisis. Institutional Responses to GBV and the role of legal empowerment groups*, whose report “examines institutional and civil society responses to gender-based violence (GBV) during the pandemic, in particular, domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) [...] investigates the role of legal empowerment groups in filling justice gaps, reducing violence, improving service delivery and demanding accountability<sup>26</sup>”.

<sup>25</sup> ONU. Declaração interagencial das Nações Unidas sobre violência contra mulheres e meninas no contexto da COVID-19 – ONU Mulheres. Em: 25 jun. 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.onumulheres.org.br/noticias/declaracao-interagencial-dasnacoes-unidas-sobre-violencia-contra-mulheres-e-meninas-no-contexto-da-covid-19>

<sup>26</sup> Gender Justice during and beyond the Covid-19 crisis – Institucional responses to gender-based violence and the role of legal empowerment group <https://themis.org.br/publicacoes-e-obras/page/2/>

## 2. Research in Latin America and the Caribbean

The study collected and analyzed data and information from 19 grassroots organizations and their experiences of legal empowerment on the frontlines to address GBV in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in 4 regions: Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. This article describes research in the Latin American and Caribbean region, with six social organizations: Fundación Markani (Argentina), Fundación Construir (Bolivia), Gelédes-Instituto da Mulher Negra (Brazil), Themis-Gênero, Justiça e Direitos Humanos (Brazil), Iniciativa de los Derechos de la Mujer (Guatemala) and EQUIS Justice for women (Mexico). The objective of the research focused on identifying actions and/or projects to combat gender-based violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to February 2021, according to the following criteria:

- a. innovation and resilience to maintain the promotion of access to rights, justice, and/or legal empowerment in the face of GBV;
- b. potential for sustainability in post-pandemic periods and/or in periods of crisis, such as health or humanitarian emergencies such as floods, earthquakes and conflict scenarios;
- c. replicability potential for implementation in other territories, countries or regions.

The research gathered data on the organizations through online surveys and semi-structured interviews with representatives of the organizations, a regional focus group, and documents submitted by the organizations. Secondary research was also carried out in the national contexts, especially with regard to national regulations and public policies to deal with GBV during the research period. In this regard, an important source of information on national legislation and public policies for the region was the *COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean - Economic and Social Impact*<sup>27</sup>, of the Economic Commission for Latin America - ECLAC<sup>28</sup>. The data collected made it possible to understand the legal-political contexts in which these organizations operate, the challenges faced by them and by women in situations of GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the actions planned and implemented to overcome these challenges, in terms of access to rights, justice and/or legal empowerment, during the period researched.

All countries of the organizations surveyed are signatories to CEDAW<sup>29</sup>, the Belém do Pará Convention<sup>30</sup> and the Montevideo Strategy<sup>31</sup> and have laws to combat GBV, whether first or second-generation laws,

<sup>27</sup> CEPAL. Observatorio COVID-19 en América Latina y el Caribe. Impacto económico y social. [S. l.], 2020. Text. Disponible em: <https://www.cepal.org/es/subtemas/covid-19>.

<sup>28</sup> CEPAL. Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. [S. l.], 2022. Text. Disponible em: <https://www.cepal.org/es>. Acceso em: 12 jul. 2022.

<sup>29</sup> ONU. Convención para la Eliminación de todas las formas de Discriminación contra la Mujer (CEDAW). Nueva York: ONU, 1979.

<sup>30</sup> OEA. Convención Interamericana para Prevenir, Sancionar y Erradicar la Violencia contra la Mujer, Convención de Belém do Pará. Belém do Pará: OEA, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> CEPAL. Estrategia de Montevideo. Montevideo: CEPAL, 2017.

that is, on domestic violence, as in the cases of Brazil and Guatemala, or comprehensive protection laws, as in the cases of Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico. Furthermore, all countries classify femicide as a criminal offense, which is included in comprehensive protection laws in Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico and constitutes specific legislation in Brazil and Guatemala.

Regarding the treatment of GBV from the perspective of public institutions, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that in all countries in the region surveyed, public services were suspended or restricted, at least temporarily; court hearings were also suspended initially and resumed *online* at a later stage; in general, public services, including police services, were restricted, which were offered *online* or through free telephone lines, although the lack of response in all countries hampered access to these services.

### **3. The challenges faced by women in situations of GBV and organizations**

The research can demonstrate that organizations develop their work in the void created by the absence of the State or the ineffectiveness of public policies in tackling GBV, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the State has withdrawn its services. In this sense, restrictive measures on movement that did not consider GBV, the gender perspective, the digital divide, among others,

led to, for example, services providing care to women in situations of GBV being moved to digital mode overnight and court hearings being suspended, only to be resumed in digital mode.

Thus, women in situations of GBV faced a triple challenge: lack of access to specialized services, living with their aggressors when they could not leave them, and, when they could do so, they had to seek support while still being in a vulnerable situation. The agency of Popular or Community Legal Promoters and Organizations was a determining factor in ensuring that these women received some assistance, often decisive in protecting their physical integrity and lives (and those of their daughters and sons) and in guaranteeing their rights.

The digital divide was another factor that significantly interfered with addressing GBV during the COVID-19 pandemic. For many women in situations of GBV, not having access to cell phones, *tablets*, or computers, not being proficient in the use of digital technologies, or not having internet service were additional barriers to seeking public services quickly and adequately during this period. In particular, poor women from peripheral urban, rural, or indigenous communities were left incommunicado with public institutions and/or social organizations in territories and periods of high mobility restrictions.

The digital divide in the context of COVID-19 was also an important challenge for social organizations: in all case there was a need to quickly implement new forms

of work due to measures of social isolation and restriction of movement, which significantly impacted communication and care for women in GBV situations. However, some organizations have managed to reorganize very quickly to make arrangements, such as purchasing and distributing mobile phones, tablets, and SIM cards for their teams and PLPs and using more affordable alternative technologies.

Given the precariousness of adequate public policies to address GBV in the context of a pandemic, for example, the failure to mainstream the gender perspective in policies and the inability to declare addressing GBV as an essential service during the health crisis, organizations had to mobilize to establish a dialogue with national, state and local authorities. In some cases, these organizations obtained some space or state support to implement more direct and effective community actions; in others, there was no possibility of dialogue, and the organizations could not develop activities during the period surveyed.

Generic public policies (not specific to responding to GBV) and the lack of mainstreaming of the gender perspective in these policies are also characteristics of the period. Some national governments have issued specific measures and guidelines with a gender perspective in the context of the health crisis; but, at first,

the general health measures did not have this perspective, and neither the specialized services were rethought to attend to women being interrupted, suspended, or restricted.

The lack of funding necessary for organizations to adapt to the new context has affected their ability to maintain activities during the pandemic. Organizations that relied on external funding, for example, from international cooperation, had a more significant, more regular, lasting, and consistent opportunity to think of actions and projects suited to new needs. On the other hand, organizations that relied only on donations from individuals faced a reduced amount of resources, restricted their actions, and often worked exclusively in local community networks without the necessary structure.

Finally, the irregularity or lack of production of data and statistical indicators on GBV and its response before and/or during the COVID-19 pandemic is also a detrimental factor. In the region, during the year 2020, the production of these data was absent or irregular in most of the countries surveyed, and only in Argentina were statistical indicators consistently produced by the State found. In other countries, the indicators found were produced by independent organizations, hindering the planning and implementation of more effective actions, whether by organizations or the State itself.



## **4. Perspectives and tensions**

The information obtained and analyzed in the research made it possible to verify the tensions and perspectives of tackling GBV during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic from the standpoint of legal empowerment organizations based on their members' perceptions. The prospects were demonstrated in the agency of organizations in the context of the health crisis despite the magnitude of the challenges faced. In turn, the tensions were seen in some impacts that played a negative role in the period, both for women in GBV and for the work of the organizations themselves.

The research did not aim to draw up detailed recommendations for resolving these tensions, but rather to highlight some points that enable the most diverse actors, whether from public authorities or organizations, to take them into account when designing and planning future actions. In this sense, considering the results of the research, it is possible to point out the following aspects that require attention and response: the need for institutionalization and mainstreaming of the gender perspective in public policies; the role of the digital divide, in its most diverse dimensions, in the access of women in situations of violence to care services; the need for adequacy and sufficiency of funding for social organizations; the need for dialogue between public authorities and organized civil society; the need to produce statistical indicators on GBV and its confrontation.

## 5. Lessons learned

Despite the challenges and difficulties imposed by health measures to combat COVID-19, organizations, mainly when associated with other organizations and when financing was not a problem, generally managed to quickly move from almost paralyzing their activities to direct and efficient action in combating GBV. The research revealed that social organizations stood out for their capacity for agency, innovation, and resistance in the face of new challenges to varying degrees. On the other hand, the community work of organizations in caring for and monitoring GBV cases generates sufficient knowledge and experience to allow efficient reconfigurations in times of crisis. In this sense, it can be stated that, in many of the cases researched, women in situations of GBV received attention exclusively through actions developed by the social organizations that were the object of the study, which made every possible effort to continue their regular activities in addition to occupying the empty spaces left by the State.

This combination of agency, creativity and resistance of the organizations researched gave rise to the design and implementation of successful experiences that meet all the research criteria: innovation and resilience to maintain the promotion of access to rights, justice and/or legal empowerment in the face of GBV; potential for sustainability in post-pandemic periods and/or in periods of crisis, such as health or humanitarian emergencies such as floods, earthquakes, and conflict scenarios; and potential for replicability for implementation in other territories, countries or regions. Some of these experiences were selected to compose case studies – written by the organizations themselves and which form part of the research:

## **5.1 FUNDACIÓN MARKANI**

### **Salta . Argentina**

Experience in mediating issues related to GBV cases (removing aggressors from the home, custody of children and adolescents, alimony, among others) developed in small urban and rural communities, using a method applied to Indigenous communities before the pandemic; the community mediation action includes the formation of consultation tables integrated by Councils of Women Leaders, Community Legal Promoters, municipal representatives and the Public Prosecutor's Office.

## **5.2 FUNDACIÓN CONSTRUIR**

### **La Paz . Bolivia**

Technical assistance to Popular Legal Promoters for the production of radio and TV programs that present training and information on services related to GBV on community radio stations, municipal radio, and TV (public) in the municipality of Punata, Bolivia, reaching the territories of indigenous communities in the municipality.

### **5.3 THEMIS . Gênero, Justiça e Direitos Humanos**

#### **Porto Alegre . Brasil**

Cooperation agreement with the Judiciary of Rio Grande do Sul, through the Court of Domestic and Family Violence against Women of the District of Canoas, to establish a monitoring flow for women with Urgent Protective Measures (Maria da Penha Law) granted, through the action of Popular Legal Promoters.

### **5.4 INICIATIVA DE LOS DERECHOS DE LA MUJER**

#### **Patzún . Guatemala**

Radio programs in Spanish and Kaqchikel (local language) to disseminate information about GBV and the increased risk faced by women during the pandemic were carried out in a network with other organizations and community radio stations, reaching the territories of indigenous and rural communities in the municipality.

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## Translation Notes

T.N. 01: '*Cesta Básica*' or 'basic basket', in Portuguese, refers to a minimum set of food products intended to nourish a family, usually of three or four people, for a period of time. (Page 9)

T.N. 02: "Vila Cruzeiro, also known as Grande Cruzeiro, is a complex of villas - or favelas, a term usually used in other regions of the country - located in the south of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul." Source: [Vila Cruzeiro \(bairro\) - Dicionário de Favelas Marielle Franco](#)

T.N. 03: "(...) an umbrella name for several types of impoverished neighborhoods in Brazil." Source: [Favela - Wikipedia](#)

T.N. 04: "What is known in Brazil as "Conselhos Tutelares" [*Guardianship Councils*] are municipal bodies responsible for protecting and guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents. They were created by the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA, in Portuguese), a Brazilian legislation that establishes the rights and duties of people under the age of 18." Source: [The agency responsible for children's rights targeted by the far-right](#).

T.N. 05: Referring to the use of sanitizer.

T.N. 06: "Fora Bolsonaro" was a movement and political campaign that called for the impeachment of the then president of Brazil, Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022), among other reasons, for his actions in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. It was organized by popular and union movements, entities, and collectives that comprise the Brasil Popular and Povo Sem Medo fronts.

T.N. 07: CPF is an acronym for Social Security Number in Brazil ('*Cadastro de Pessoa Física*', or Individual Taxpayer Registration)

T.N. 08: "*carrinheiras*" from the Portuguese word for "carts", which are used by these women and men to transport the recyclables they collect.

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