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Domestic Abuse in Russia Doubles Amid Virus Lockdown: Official

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The United Nations has estimated that six months of lockdown could result in 31 million more domestic violence cases worldwide. **Maja Hitij / dpa / TASS**

Domestic abuse has more than doubled since Russia imposed lockdown measures to slow the spread of coronavirus, the country's top human rights official said Tuesday.

More than 13,000 women called Russia's domestic abuse hotlines in April compared with 6,054 in March, human rights commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova was quoted by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency as saying.

Related article: When Your Home Isn't a Safe Space. Russian Women Fear Rise in Domestic Violence as Coronavirus Quarantine Starts.

"It's not an optimistic picture," Moskalkova said.

Moskalkova called on the authorities to allow domestic abuse victims to leave their homes

without obtaining special digital permits that several Russian cities have introduced to monitor the lockdown measures.

Lawmakers last month asked the government to exempt victims from punishments for violating quarantine rules, provide them with shelter and order police to respond to all domestic violence reports. Russia's police chief in late March ordered regional precincts to inform women about crisis centers for victims of abuse.

Russia decriminalized first-time abuse offenses in 2017, a move that lawmakers had been working to overturn with new legislation before the coronavirus pandemic broke out. Russia's senate speaker has vowed to resume debate of the country's delayed domestic violence bill as soon as "circumstances permit."

The United Nations warned of a "growing crisis within a crisis" last week, estimating that six months of lockdown could result in 31 million more domestic violence cases worldwide. Another year of strict lockdown could double that number to 61 million, according to the UN Population Fund.

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