

Eliminating Violence against Women in Europe Intersectoral Approaches and Actions - Press release

Copenhagen, Vienna and Vilnius, 25 November 2013

A quarter of all women in the WHO European Region experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.

Today, on the first day of the 16-day global campaign of Activism Against Gender Violence, the City of Vienna, with the European Institute for Gender Equality and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, will raise the anti-violence flag to draw attention in Europe to this hidden epidemic.

During their lives, 25.4% of women in the European Region experience physical and/or sexual violence by intimate partners, and 5.2% experience sexual violence from people who are not their partners, according to the WHO report *Global and regional estimates of violence against women*.

“Violence against women can not be tolerated in any society,” says Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe. “Eradicating violence requires determined efforts to promote gender equality, challenge gender stereotypes and work with women and girls – not only as victims of violence but as empowered agents of change. We must bridge sectors and engage all parts of society for concerted action, aligned with the new European policy framework for health and well-being – Health 2020.”

“Protection against violence involves restoring to women the dignity that violence has taken from them. We must not stop drawing attention to violence committed against women and focusing on it politically. Awareness raising is hard work, but it brings us closer to our goals,” says Barbara Prammer, President of the Austrian National Council. “Austria has established anti-violence legislation, trailblazing also in the European context. Austria is also among the first countries to have unconditionally ratified the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. In its chairmanship role in the Council of Europe as of November 2013, Austria will give particular emphasis to the issue of protection against violence.”

Experts meeting in Vienna on 25–26 November 2013 call on countries to adopt the new WHO clinical and policy guidelines on and improve the recording of violence against women.

“We must bring to light this hidden crime and the many different forms that gender violence takes throughout the European Union, from physical and psychological abuse in partnerships, to sexual assault and rape, forced prostitution, trafficking in human beings and female genital mutilation,” says Thérèse Murphy, Head of Operations at the European Institute for Gender Equality in Vilnius, Lithuania. “Gender-based violence, which reflects the unequal distribution of power between women and men in our society, is inflicted by men on women and girls. It reinforces inequalities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.”

New WHO guidelines for health care professionals

Health services play a central role in combating violence against women, since they are very often the first point of contact for victims. The new WHO clinical and policy guidelines provide effective health-sector responses to violence against women. They contain recommendations on first-line support, identification of and clinical care for intimate partner violence and sexual assault, training of health care providers, policy and programmatic approaches to delivery of services, and mandatory reporting of intimate partner violence.

“Eradicating violence against women requires determined joint efforts and ranks high on Vienna’s political agenda. Social, health and women’s policy in the city has been at the forefront of intersectoral efforts to make sure women affected by violence get effective support and that preventive action is put into place. This is secured by a particularly well developed network of protective and counselling facilities, as well as a wide range of health and social services, including specialized support for particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged groups,” say Vienna city councillors Sandra Frauenberger and Sonja Wehsely. At the core of the city’s protective network are Vienna’s shelter houses, whose 175 places for women and children afflicted by violence exceed the Council of Europe target number of 1 place per 10000 inhabitants. Particular emphasis is put on training **health care professionals and victim protection groups** to ensure that those affected by violence are identified, treated appropriately and receive ongoing care.

Urgent need for reliable comparative data

Developing policies on combating gender-based violence is a priority in the European Union (EU) and beyond, which must be supported by solid administrative and statistical data on victims and perpetrators, disaggregated by sex, age and victim–perpetrator relationship. This commitment is affirmed in the European Commission’s Women’s Charter (2010) and Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010–2015, the Stockholm Programme (2010–2014), the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) and the Health 2020 strategy. However, gender-based violence still remains widespread and underreported. Some data exist but are insufficient to offer an accurate picture of the prevalence of gender-based violence in Europe.

Since 2010, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has contributed to important work in the area of gender-based violence in Europe. In the period 2010–2013, EIGE initiated several studies on this topic. During the conference in Vienna, EIGE will share the results of some of these studies: on female genital mutilation, the Gender Equality Index and administrative data sources on gender-based violence. The EU’s so-called “victims’ package” and Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime will further contribute to the discussion. The 2012 conclusions of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) called for intensified efforts to develop common definitions and indicators for all forms of gender-based violence in Europe, ensuring their consistent use at both the EU and Member State levels.

The new EIGE study on administrative data shows that the current regulatory framework is insufficient to enable the collection of comparable data on violence against women, including data on victims and perpetrators, access to services for survivors of violence and institutions’ response to their needs. The study also underlines the need for a harmonized approach to data collection among EU Member States.

“Our findings clearly highlight the need for a harmonized data among EU Member States that enable assessing the prevalence and measuring the effectiveness of the struggle to combat gender related violence,” says EIGE’s Thérèse Murphy about the study, which is being presented at the conference for the first time.

About the conference Eliminating Violence against Women – Intersectoral Approaches and Actions

The conference, taking place in Vienna on 25–26 November 2013, brings together more than 200 participants to review the findings of new research on violence against women, the urgent need for reliable data on the problem, and the need for all sectors of society to work together to fight and prevent gender-based violence. How to introduce new international guidelines for health care facilities when treating victims of violence, and case studies of successful projects and measures are also on the agenda.

Representatives of international organizations, as well as experts from academe and civil society, are participating. The conference is jointly organized by the City of Vienna, EIGE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Campaign against gender violence

25 November is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and the start of a global campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence. To mark this occasion, conference delegates raised the anti-violence flag of women's rights organization Terre des Femmes at Vienna's city hall, with executive city councillors Sandra Frauenberger and Sonja Wehsely and representatives of a large number of nongovernmental organizations.

Engage in the debate on Twitter (**#stopVAWvienna**) and watch the event streamed live (<http://viewer.dacast.com/beta/b/25779/c/34321>).

Further information is available from WHO and EIGE:

- *Global and regional estimates of violence against women*
(<http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/index.h>)
- *Responding to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women: WHO clinical and policy guidelines*
(<http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241548595/en/index.h>)
- *Violence against women: victim support* (/content/document/violence-against-women-victim-support-report);
- *Female genital mutilation in the European Union and Croatia* (/content/document/female-genital-mutilation-in-the-european-union-and-croatia-report); and
- 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence
(http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/16_days/en/).

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