

Reflections from conference "Eliminating Violence Against Women in Europe – Intersectoral Approaches and Actions"

At the conference "[Eliminating Violence Against Women in Europe – Intersectoral Approaches and Actions](#)" organised by EIGE, WHO Europe and the City of Vienna that started on this year's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 217 participants from a large variety of sectors and countries discussed approaches towards gender-based violence (GBV).

During highly informative presentations and intense discussions, speakers and participants **provided insights** into recently published and forthcoming studies, **shared promising practices** from various EU Member States and beyond, and **exchanged ideas** about how to tackle identified challenges.

The presentation of studies like WHO's report "**Global and regional estimates of violence against women**" (2013) and EIGE's study on **female genital mutilation in the EU** (2013), as well as of some tentative results from the **survey on gender-based violence against women** in the EU conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) met great interest.

The conference participants agreed that **intersectoral cooperation** is of fundamental importance to comprehensively addressing GBV, and that **intersectoral coordinating mechanisms** can play a crucial role. Yet, a number of challenges were identified, such as inter-institutional competition and the existence of very different procedures specific to each institution. However, experiences from a number of EU Member States show how some obstacles can be tackled.

Overall, there is a need to **challenge social and cultural patterns** that accept GBV, in particular through determined efforts to promote gender equality, to challenge gender stereotypes, and to involve women and girls not only as victims but also as empowered agents of change. It was repeatedly stressed that the cooperation between governmental institutions and civil society organisations is particularly important to tackle GBV and support victims.

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In several sessions, the numerous **health-related consequences of GBV** were presented, and the crucial role of the health sector was underlined, amongst others because it is often the first point of contact for women victims of GBV.

Moreover, the importance of strong **legal and policy documents** at national, EU and international level was stressed, and challenges regarding their implementation were discussed. It was also pointed out that measuring the costs of GBV can be very useful to drive forward policy-making to tackle GBV and to support victims; and methodologies and results of several national studies on the costs of violence were presented. However, it was argued that costs should not be considered the only reason for change.

Speakers and participants agreed that **comparable data** is crucial for effectively tackling GBV. However, several presentations and comments from the audience highlighted the **lack of such data** in Europe and beyond, and pointed to the need for harmonised indicators and definitions. Yet, the wish to capture the complexity of GBV and the very different forms of GBV may conflict with considerations regarding the feasibility and utility. The presentation of the Gender Equality Index developed by EIGE highlighted benefits of having one single indicator to assess GBV.

As argued by several speakers, **administrative data sources** could be very useful for collecting comparable data on GBV, but significant challenges persist, such as the fact that data is often not sex-disaggregated and that legal definitions vary between EU Member States. Some recommended actions in this respect are to introduce standard classifications of crimes, to define a set of core indicators, and to make the collection of sex-disaggregated data obligatory in relevant areas. However, it is important to also conduct dedicated surveys on GBV, and not to exclusively rely on administrative data and the inclusion of GBV-related questions in other surveys. Furthermore, when collecting data on prevalence it is important to keep in mind that GBV is never acceptable or excusable, even in places where the prevalence is lower than elsewhere.

As emphasised during the closing plenary, the organisers are very satisfied with the outcomes of the conference that brought together a large number and variety of committed actors. Hopefully the knowledge and experiences that were exchanged as well as the contacts that were made during this conference will support the daily work of all participants and strengthen intersectoral cooperation to eliminate GBV in the EU.