

Women victims of violence receive insufficient support in the EU

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New report:

In connection to The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November) and the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign (25 November-10 December – Human Rights Day)

Research recently conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows that domestic violence against women remains widespread and under-reported, and that victims of violence are not effectively supported by public services. Insufficient specialised services for women victims of violence and the absence of mandatory gender-sensitive training for professional helpers of victims and perpetrators are only a few of the reasons. In fact, only 12 out of the 27 EU Member States legally foresee state funding of specialised services for women victims of violence. EIGE's report will be available online in December 2012. More information on EIGE's work in the area of gender-based violence:

<http://www.eige.europa.eu/content/activities/gender-based-violence>

European commitments

Nine out of ten victims of intimate partner violence in the EU are women. The number of women victims of physical intimate partner violence in the EU Member States ranges between 12 and 35 percentage. The EU and its institutions are committed to combat violence against women. The commitment is affirmed in: the Women's Charter (2010), the European Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010–2015 and the Action Plan of the Stockholm Programme for 2010–2014. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known also as the Istanbul Convention) offers the most recent and comprehensive international legal instruments to combat violence against women. The Convention requires states to provide general and immediate, short and long-term specialised services for women victims of violence and to support their funding.

Support is insufficient

EIGE's Report "**Violence against Women: Victim Support**" (full title: "**Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the EU Member States: Violence against Women Victim Support**") describes the current (2012) status of the specialised services for women victims of intimate partner violence in the 27 EU Member States and Croatia. It also presents recommendations for improving these services. The report concludes that only specialised services can fully meet the specific needs of women victims of violence (including safe accommodation, protection, healthcare, legal, psychological and employment counselling, social and financial support), and support women's recovery from trauma.

"EIGE's research shows – says Virginija Langbakk, Director of EIGE – that current support services do not meet the needs of women victims of violence. The specialised services are insufficient and unequally distributed in certain countries and the funding for them is inconsistent. Moreover, training for professionals working with victims of violence is not yet mandatory, systematic or gender-sensitive."

The report points out that 26 Member States and Croatia have counselling centres/services for victims of violence, but only eight Member States and Croatia fulfill the recommended ratio of one counselling centre/service per 50,000 women. Although 17 Member States have helplines for women victims of violence, only six of these helplines are free of charge and available 24/7, which are the basic requirements highlighted in the Istanbul Convention.

Member States strive for change

“It is important to highlight – says Virginija Langbakk – that the vast majority of the EU Member States have developed and implemented national action plans to combat domestic violence. They have also included intimate partner violence into the penal codes and adopted protection orders. Some Member States have demonstrated significant improvements in service provision, such as the provision of services for women facing multiple discrimination (including migrant, young, older, ethnic, LBT women and also women with disabilities).

However – she adds – there is still space for improvement: majority of national action plans lack monitoring and evaluation systems; only four Member States introduced gender-based definition of domestic violence into their criminal codes and in many Member States the protection orders are not implemented effectively. Moreover, the funding of specialised services is instable and has suffered from the current financial crisis. Funding of specialised services for women victims of violence is ensured in the legislation of only 12 Member States.”

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the report, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) recommends the Member States the following actions:

- Acknowledge the need for specialised gender-specific services to support the complex range of immediate and long-term needs of women survivors of violence and their children.
- Guarantee sustainable funding for specialised services, such as women’s shelters, helplines and counselling services.
- Safeguard the independence and funding of specialised women’s non-governmental organisations delivering support services for women victims of violence.
- Mandate systematic and continuous training of professionals on violence against women and secure funding for it.
- Ensure that services are accessible to women facing multiple discrimination, including migrant, young, older, ethnic, LBT women and also women with disabilities.
- Monitor and evaluate regularly the coordination of public support system for victims of domestic violence.
- Develop national definitions and classifications to be used for surveys, research and administrative statistics; to ensure their consistent use at the national, regional, European and international levels and guarantee regular data collection.

The report is a part of EIGE's broader work in the area of gender based violence – aiming at supporting policy makers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to combat and prevent violence, by providing them with reliable and comparable data and information on gender-based violence in the European Union. The subject was chosen by the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The eradication of all forms of violence against women is one of the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the 4th World Conference on Women in 1995. The European Council acknowledged the EU's commitment towards the BPfA and expressed its intent to review its implementation regularly across the Member States. The European Institute for Gender Equality plays an important role in this process.

EIGE's report **"Violence against Women: Victim Support"** will be available in December 2012 at: <http://www.eige.europa.eu>. More information on EIGE's work in the area of gender-based violence <http://www.eige.europa.eu/content/activities/gender-based-violence>.

Contact persons:

Magdalena Gryzko, Magdalena.Gryzko@eige.europa.eu, tel. +370 64514340

Jesper Hansen, Jesper.Hansen@eige.europa.eu, +370 5 2192898