



# Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs Gender Equality and Anti-Trafficking Division



## Combating violence against women

### Introduction

Despite positive and significant achievements in Europe in the field of equality between women and men, gender equality is still far from being a reality. Women are, by virtue of their sex, exposed to serious forms of ill-treatment, such as physical violence, rape, forced marriage or genital and sexual mutilation. Failure by state authorities to take effective measures to protect women against violence may amount to a violation of human rights. It also represents a serious obstacle to equality between women and men.

Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Rome, October 1993) devoted to the theme of combating violence against women, the Council of Europe has intensified its action in this field.

In 1997, the Heads of State and Government affirmed their “determination to combat violence against women and all forms of sexual exploitation of women” in the Final Declaration at the Second Summit of the Council of Europe.

Expressing their continuous support, the Heads of State and Government defined in their Action Plan adopted during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit of the Organisation (Warsaw, May 2005) the future activities of the Council of Europe in this field. Turning words into action, the Council of Europe has set up a *Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence* and has, during a high-level conference in Madrid, Spain, on 27 November 2006 launched its Campaign on the same topic.

Strengthened by the Resolution adopted at the 6th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Stockholm, 8-9 June 2006), in which, *inter alia*, member States were encouraged to support both, the Task Force and the Campaign, the Council of Europe and its member states are currently implementing this Campaign. They were also encouraged to adopt and implement all the measures contained in *Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence*.

The Campaign will end in June 2008 with the presentation of the Final Activity Report of the *Task Force*, which will contain an assessment of national measures to combat violence against women and recommendations to the Council of Europe on future action in this field.

### Activities

Under the main responsibility of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) and within the framework of the *Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence*, many activities have been undertaken to combat all types of violence against women.

#### **A strategy for combating violence against women**

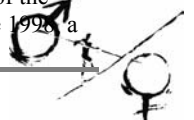
Protecting and promoting women’s human rights means taking measures to fight against interferences with their liberty and dignity.

In 1997, when implementing the recommendations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Conference, an *Action Plan to Combat*

*Violence against Women* was developed, providing a global strategy for combating violence against women. Followed by the adoption of *Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence* by the Committee of Ministers in April 2002, the first international legal instrument to propose a global strategy to prevent violence and to protect victims came into existence. Covering all forms of gender-based violence, it calls on governments to inform the Council of Europe on the follow-up given at national level by responding to regular questionnaires. This Monitoring framework evaluates progress in the implementation of the recommendation. First replies in 2005-2006 were assessed in the publication *Combating Violence*

*against women - Stocktaking study on the measures and actions taken in Council of Europe member states, completed by the recent publication Protecting women against Violence - Analytical Study on the effective implementation of Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence.*

In the framework of a global intervention strategy, the Council of Europe set up an integrated project on “Responses to violence in everyday life in a democratic society” for a three-year period (2002-2004). Conferences and seminars aimed at raising awareness of the scale of this phenomenon were organised and a number of documents covering the different aspects of the problem were published. Since 1992, a



compilation of legislation on violence against women in Council of Europe member states is published and periodically updated (last update 2006-2007).

A compilation of the main Council of Europe texts in the field of violence against women, including judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, has also been periodically updated since 1995 (last update: 2006).

### **Violence against women – a violation of human rights**

Violence against women is a violation of human rights, the very nature of which deprives women of their ability to enjoy fundamental freedoms. It is a serious obstacle to equality between women and men and perpetuates inequality, an issue examined during a *Seminar on Promoting equality: a common issue for men and women*, organised in June 1997 in Strasbourg.

### **The role of men**

While men represent the majority of perpetrators of violence against women, they also fall victim to domestic violence and have an important role to play in preventing and combating this phenomenon.

Some of these aspects of male violence against women were considered during the *Seminar on Men and violence against women*, organised in October 1999 in Strasbourg.

## **Adopted texts**

- Recommendation Rec (2002) 5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has also adopted a series of recommendations and resolutions on the theme of violence against women:

- Recommendation 1450 (2000) on violence against women in Europe;
- Resolution 1212 (2000) on rape in armed conflicts;

The *Seminar on violence within the family: the place and role of men*, organised in December 2005, aimed at further identifying possible roles of men in the context of family violence.

### **Domestic violence**

Violence against women takes place mainly in the private sphere and it is within the family or domestic unit that women are at greatest risk. An *Information Forum on Ending domestic violence*, organised in November 1998 in Bucharest, put particular emphasis on the legal aspects, and on the role of men in combating violence against women.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is also working on this issue. A *Seminar on Violence towards women: from domestic abuse to slavery* was organised in November 1999 in Bari, and several recommendations in this field have been adopted.

### **Measures dealing with men perpetrators of domestic violence**

Men who resort to violence in the home must take responsibility for their acts and incur criminal liability. However, any legal measures must be accompanied by intervention programmes, therapy and counselling to help men understand that violence is never a solution. This innovative approach was the topic of two seminars organised in June 2003 and November 2004.

- Resolution 1247 (2001) on female genital mutilation;
- Recommendation 1523 (2001) on domestic slavery;
- Recommendation 1555 (2002) on image of women in the media;
- Recommendation 1582 (2002) on domestic violence against women;
- Resolution 1327 (2003) on so-called “honour crimes”;
- Recommendation 1663 (2004) on domestic slavery: servitude, au pairs and mail-order brides;

### **Forced marriages and so-called “honour crimes”**

These practices based on out-dated traditions still exist in Europe. They are denounced in Recommendation (2002) 5 which provides for specific measures against this type of violence. A *Study on forced marriages*, focusing on the legislation and policies implemented in Council of Europe member states to fight against this phenomenon, was published in 2005. The Parliamentary Assembly has also condemned such practices in its resolutions and recommendations.

### **Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence**

With a view to the further promotion of Recommendation (2002) 5, many activities have been organised within the framework of the Campaign. Seminars and conferences for governmental and non-governmental representatives as well as parliamentarians have been organised, focusing on legal measures, data collection, the role of men and the provision of services in the field of violence against women. The *Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence*, is meeting regularly to assess progress at national level. Detailed information on the Campaign can be found at [www.coe.int/stopviolence](http://www.coe.int/stopviolence).

- Recommendation 1681 (2004) on Campaign to combat domestic violence against women in Europe;
- Recommendation 1723 (2005) on forced marriages and child marriages;
- Recommendation 1512 (2006) on Parliaments United in combating domestic violence against women.

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