

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 3rd 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 3rd 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 set up a *Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Do-*

mestic Violence and carried out a Campaign on the same topic, which ran from 2006 to 2008.

On the occasion of the 6th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Stockholm, 8-9 June 2006), the Resolution adopted encouraged member states to support both the Task Force and the Campaign. As a result, this two-year Campaign received significant backing at national and international level. It was one of the most successful and visible campaigns of the Council of Europe and has led to significant progress in preventing and combating violence against women.

Activities

Under the main responsibility of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) 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 3rd 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, this first international legal instrument proposes a global strategy to prevent violence and to protect victims. 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 publication *Protecting women against Violence – Analytical Study on the effective implementation of Recommendation Rec (2002) 5 on the protection of women against violence*. Results of the second monitoring cycle are analysed in *Protecting women against violence – Analytical Study of the Results of the Second Round of Monitoring the Implementation of Recommendation Rec (2002) 5*. A third round of monitoring is envisaged for 2010.

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. Starting 1998, a compilation of legislation on violence against women in Council of Europe member

states is published and periodically updated (next update: end 2009).

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: 2009). Similarly, a *Study on forced marriages*, analysing different approaches in legislation and policies implemented in Council of Europe member states to fight against this phenomenon, was published in 2005.

Violence against women – a violation of human rights

Violence against women in its various forms 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 Strasbourg in June 1997.

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 violence against women.

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. 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. The role of men as agents of change was further explored during the *Regional Seminar on Men's Active Participation in combating Domestic Violence* in Zagreb in May 2007, organised within the framework of the Campaign. The importance of intervention programmes, therapy and counselling for men who resort to violence against women in their lives was the topic of

two seminars organised in June 2003 and November 2004.

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

With a view to the further promotion of Recommendation Rec (2002) 5, many activities were organised within the framework of the Campaign. Seminars and conferences for governmental and non-governmental representatives as well as parliamentarians were organised, focusing on legal measures, data collection, the role of men and the provision of services in the field of violence against women. Member states implemented the Campaign at national level by carrying out national campaigns and other important measures. On the occasion of the Closing Conference of the Campaign (Strasbourg, 10-11 June 2008), the *Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence*,

presented its assessment of national measures to combat violence against women and recommendations to the Council of Europe on future action in this field.

Ad Hoc Committee on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CAHVIO)

Recognising the need for a legally binding instrument on violence against women – one of the recommendations of the Task Force – the Committee of Ministers set up an Ad Hoc Committee to draft a convention which will set common standards in preventing and combating violence against women in all its manifestations, including domestic violence. The work of this Committee will result in the first European legally binding instrument in this field and is expected to be concluded by the end of 2010.

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;
- 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;
- 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;
- Recommendation 1777 (2007) on sexual assault linked to “date-rape drugs”;
- Recommendation 1861 (2009) on Feminicides;
- Recommendation 1872 (2009) on the rights of today's girls – the rights of tomorrow's women;
- Recommendation 1873 (2009) on Sexual violence against women in armed conflict;
- Recommendation 1881 (2009) on the urgent need to combat so-called honour crimes.

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Gender Equality Division
Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex

Tel. +33 (0)3 88 41 37 36
Fax +33 (0)3 88 41 27 05
dghl.equality@coe.int