

Directorate General of Human Rights Equality Division



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HDIM.IO/91/06
4 October 2006



Combating violence against women

Introduction

Despite positive and significant achievements in Europe in the field of equality between women and men, in both legislation and policy making, effective 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 which are still common practice. Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” – 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 gave their support to this issue when they 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.

In 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member states reaffirmed their commitment to eradicating violence against women, including domestic violence, during the 3rd Summit of the Organisation

(Warsaw, May 2005) and they defined in their Action Plan the future activities of the Council of Europe in this field.

On the occasion of the 6th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women Men (Stockholm, 8-9 June 2006), the Ministers adopted a Resolution in which, *inter alia*, member States were encouraged to support and participate in the work of the *Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including domestic violence* and in the *Council of Europe Campaign* in this field. They were also encouraged to adopt and implement all the measures contained in the *Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence*.

Activities

Under the main responsibility of the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), many activities have been undertaken, in partnership with other Council of Europe bodies and other international organisations, 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 aimed at providing a policy framework for national administrations was developed.

This Action Plan providing a global strategy for combating violence against women was followed up in April 2002 by the adoption of *Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence* by the Committee of Ministers. This European legal instrument is one of the most important initiatives to combat violence against women. It was the first international instrument to propose a global strategy to prevent violence and to protect the victims and it covers all forms of gender-based violence. The Recommendation also calls on governments to inform the Council

of Europe on the follow-up given at national level. To this end, a monitoring framework to evaluate progress in the implementation of the recommendation was drawn up and sent to member states for the first time in 2005. The replies were assessed in the recent publication *Combating Violence against women - Stocktaking study on the measures and actions taken in Council of Europe member states*.

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



number of documents covering the different aspects of the problem were published. Since 1998, a compilation of legislation on violence against women in Council of Europe member states is published and periodically updated (last update 2003-2004).

Violence – an obstacle to gender equality

Violence against women is a serious obstacle to equality between women and men and perpetuates inequality. This issue was examined during the session on “Men and violence: the logic of inequality” at a *Seminar on Promoting equality: a common issue for men and women*, organised in June 1997 in Strasbourg.

Other aspects of male violence towards women were considered during the *Seminar on Men and violence against women*, organised in October 1999 in Strasbourg, in particular during armed conflict and post-conflict situations.

A compilation of the main Council of Europe texts in the field of violence against women, including the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, has been periodically updated since 1995 (last update: 2004).

Violence within the family

Violence against women takes place mainly in the private sphere and it is within the family or domestic unit that women are at greater risk. An *Information Forum on Ending domestic violence*, organised in November 1998 in Bucharest, put

particular emphasis on the legal aspects, as well as 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.

A *Seminar on violence within the family: the place and role of men* was organised in December 2005. The aim of this Seminar was to further identify other possible roles of men in the context of family violence, not just as perpetrators of violence, but as victims of family violence as well as their role in both preventing violence within the family and protecting the victims of this violence.

Measures dealing with men perpetrators of violence within the family

Men who resort to violence against women must take responsibility for their acts and if necessary incur sanctions. However, this action must be accompanied by various measures, including 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.

Forced marriages and so-called “honour crimes”

These practices, based on outdated 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. These practices were also denounced in resolutions and recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly which stresses the need to fight against these unacceptable customs.

Task force to combat violence against women, including domestic violence

As indicated in the Warsaw Action Plan adopted during the 3rd Summit of the Council of Europe, a *Task Force to combat violence against women, including domestic violence* was set up in 2006. This Task Force is composed of international experts in the field of preventing and combating violence against women and is in charge of evaluating progress at national level and establishing instruments for quantifying developments at pan-European level with a view to drawing up proposals for action. A pan-European campaign to combat violence against women, including domestic violence, was launched in 2006 in close co-operation with other European and national actors, including NGOs. A Factsheet on this Campaign is available on the following website: www.coe.int/equality

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.

Updated September 2006