



Division for the Advancement of Women



***"Violence against women: Good practices in
combating and eliminating violence against women"***

Expert Group Meeting

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**WAVE
(Women Against Violence Europe)**

A short profile of WAVE

WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe), the network of European women's shelters and women's help organisations, was founded in 1994 and has since followed its aim of combating violence against women and children. Having started off with just six organisations WAVE currently networks about 2000 organisations and experts in all European countries. The main networking activities are carried out with the support of 60 so-called WAVE Focal Points, themselves key organisations in their countries.

The network has a broad range of activities including a website and a database containing a diversity of information on prevention, research and national as well as international legislation in the field of violence against women; in addition, training courses are organised, studies are published and the publication "Fempower" is issued. One of the main functions of the network is the continual exchange of information and experience between the organisations which are part of the network. Another key task is to answer requests by women seeking help, social workers, researchers, students, public administration employees and journalists. As a non-profit initiative the WAVE network is mainly funded by the European Union and national public authorities as well as private donors.

Two members of the Vienna based WAVE Office participated in the Beijing +10 review in New York in spring 2005 where WAVE organised a side-event entitled "Current challenges and forward looking strategies to eliminate violence against women and violations of women's human rights."

ASPECTS FOR CONSIDERATION

Imbalance of power between the genders as a cause of violence: One of the basic problems that presents itself when fighting violence against women is how to define violence against women. The definition proposed by the Platform for Action is clear and comprehensive but in many cases disregarded at the national level. Violence against women is veiled when it is subsumed under concepts like "domestic violence" or violence against persons in general. "Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement," according to the UN Declaration on the elimination of violence against women.¹ Because the historical and gender-specific origins of violence, rooted in the traditional imbalance of power between the genders, have not been taken into account adequately, measures to prevent violence are often insufficient. What is necessary in order to prevent the reproduction of violence is to effect far-reaching changes in gender relations e.g. by eliminating gender role stereotypes and terminating all forms of discrimination against and disadvantage for women.

The prosecution of domestic violence: It should always be the state, not the victim, that is responsible for bringing charges against the perpetrator. Given the victim's dependence on the perpetrator, it is often difficult for abused women to take legal action against their partners. Laws can be seen as clear commitment by a society as to what is right and what is wrong. The legal system of a country and of international bodies have to make it clear that inequality between women and men will not be tolerated and that, in particular, violence against women is a crime and that the victims shall receive maximum protection and support. Every form of violence against women must be declared a breach of law and accordingly be prosecuted by the state. This must include marital rape, stalking, trafficking in women, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced prostitution etc.

Legal assistance and protection against violence: It is necessary to provide immediate and effective legal protection from violence. This means that the police must be empowered to expel the perpetrator from the dwelling, making it possible for the victim to remain there. Such laws exist in countries like Austria, Luxembourg and other countries.

¹ United Nations: Declaration on the elimination of violence against women, New York/December 1993b

Intervention programmes: It is not enough to have laws only in statute books, they need to be enforced. Laws on protection from violence must be accompanied by the establishing of victim support centres providing active support, and by intervention centres co-ordinating action on behalf of the victim.

Lack of help for, and rights of, immigrant women: The present situation, in which immigrant women often find no adequate help, or too little of it, is also a cause of concern. The BPFA says that government should “establish linguistically accessible services for migrant women and girls, including women migrant workers, who are victims of gender-based violence” (BPFA para. 125b). Governments are called upon to provide adequate funds for help services available to immigrant women and to promote women’s NGOs which provide services specifically targeting immigrant women. The situation is especially dramatic for immigrant women whose status of residence is linked to their violent husband under national law. If they try to get out of the violent relationship, they risk losing their right of residence. Therefore the member states should grant immigrant women residence and employment rights independently of their husbands to give them a real chance to start a new life on their own.

Appreciation and promotion of the work of women’s NGOs: In many European countries an impressive commitment of women’s initiatives in the field of fighting violence against women has been registered. Deplorably, in many cases they lack the funds to actually provide help services. In almost all the Eastern European countries sufficient financial support by the governments for the women’s NGOs is lacking.

Standards for Women’s Refuges: Following two recommendations by international bodies there should be one place per 10,000 (per 7,500 respectively) of the population.² It is essential that women receive crisis support and that they can come to the refuge at any time, even during the night. It should be a matter of principle that no woman in acute danger is turned away and forced to stay with or return to the violent partner. When there is only one women’s refuge in a given region, then this refuge must be open round the clock to admit women and their children. Transport should be available at the lowest possible cost (preferable free of charge) to enable women and their children to get to the refuge without having to worry about the costs.

24-hour helplines: A toll-free 24-hour helpline that provides support and crisis counselling and refers women to face-to-face services such as refuges, counselling centers or the police is an essential part of support services for women victims of violence. Support by a helpline is often the first step to a safer life. Every country should operate at least one nationwide women’s helpline. National helplines provide important initial counselling to abused women. These helplines should be funded by national governments and operated by women’s NGOs with long-standing experience in providing counselling and support for victims of violence.

Prevention and awareness-raising: Prevention work at every social level has a decisive impact because it targets the prevention of violence at its roots. Women’s support organisations play a far-reaching role in this field (training programmes for various professional groups, lectures in schools, compilation of information material etc.), sometimes in conjunction with state authorities – as in the case of awareness-raising campaigns. Sufficient financial resources must be made available for these purposes, because the problem of violence against women cannot be solved only by providing support for victims on an individual basis. Since violence is intrinsic to our societies, it is essential that children and young people become familiar with non-violent ways of resolving conflicts, living together, dealing with problems etc. as early as possible. Activities to promote non-violence have to be part of all levels of child education. Experts from women’s organisations / women’s rights experts must be included in the development of programs, curricula etc. and also be involved in their implementation.

² As early as 1986 the Women’s Rights Committee in the EU Parliament recommended “one family place per 10,000 of the population”. In 1998 the Council of Europe expert group reduced this figure to 7,500.