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Third Regional Forum: Ending Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey



Draft
Concept
Note

“Integrated Policies, Inclusive Partnerships”

Online, 1-2 December 2021

1. Background and context

Violence against women (VAW) is one of the most pervasive human rights violations and an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination. Efforts to prevent and address VAW are grounded in a wide array of universal and international legal standards, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the recommendations of its Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, as well as the European Union’s *acquis communautaire*.

The urgent need to protect women from violence is well recognized in the Western Balkans and Turkey, as evidenced by countries’ alignment with international legal standards. As highlighted during the **First** (2018) and **Second Regional Forum** (2019) “Integrated policies, inclusive partnerships”, hosted respectively by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Government of Albania, there have been significant achievements in the implementation of CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention in recent years. However, there are still areas of concern and space for improvement.

As noted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres during the Generation Equality Forum, which took place online from Mexico between the 29th and 31st of March, achieving equal rights for women and a life free from violence is “the unfinished human rights struggle of the century”.¹ VAW was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in 2013 while COVID-19 was declared as such on the 11th of March 2020, thus creating a dual pandemic which unveiled and exacerbated structural inequalities across countries, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Concomitantly, specialist services to support survivors of VAW are being disrupted or made inaccessible, and specialist services providers, caught short by the dual pandemic, face difficulties in appropriately reshaping their services to provide continuous assistance to women who are simultaneously at the frontline of the dual pandemic’s response and the first victims. On the other hand, there is an opportunity to strengthen through targeted support the systemic weakness in VAW prevention and response revealed by the dual pandemic.

For the fifth consecutive year, the UN Women regional programme “**Ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing norms, changing minds**”, funded by the European Union, is continuing its progress toward identifying and addressing the challenges and gaps in preventing and addressing VAW in a coordinated manner.

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1088512>

Within a span of five years, meaningful results have been achieved, inter alia: Joint advocacy efforts between UN Women and supported civil society organizations (CSOs) led to over 25 changes to the legislative and policy frameworks in the Western Balkans to better prevent violence and protect victims of VAW. Over 50 CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey were able to continue providing essential women's support services during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as helplines, shelters, sexual violence referral centers and psychosocial counselling. In addition, over 70 state institutions and organizations across the region strengthened their response to the needs of nearly 70,000 women victims or those at risk of violence through the adoption of the regional **guidelines to better support women and girls victims of violence throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond**.

Within this context and within the framework of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the Third Regional Forum "Integrated Policies, Inclusive Partnerships" will be held under the auspices of the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina in recognition of the country's achievements and progress made towards gender equality and ending VAW, such as the admission of the person of trust institution to parliamentary procedure in Federation Bosnia and Herzegovina; amendments to the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence in Republika Srpska that now treat domestic violence as a criminal offence instead of misdemeanor offence; the revision of protocols on cooperation in response to cases of domestic violence in over 15 municipalities in line with the Istanbul Convention and entities' legislation; and established cooperation at all levels between Roma women's rights organizations and several institutions, notably the Ministry of Human Rights and the Agency for Gender Equality.

The forum will be held online, organized by UN Women and co-convened with the Council of Europe and the European Union.

2. Themes

To address the root causes of VAW and regain progress lost as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to address in a coordinated manner the challenges and gaps exacerbated by the pandemic. The First and Second Regional Forums "Integrated Policies, Inclusive Partnerships" offered for the first time a space for relevant stakeholders from the Western Balkans, Turkey and Europe to come together to identify and address challenges and gaps impeding efforts toward gender equality and ending VAW.

Informed by the front-line work of over 60 partner organizations and the First and Second Regional Forums, the Third Regional Forum will address the following themes: Positive social norms to combat violence against women; Preventing and responding to sexual violence against women and girls; Leveraging data to prevent and respond to cases of femicide; Advancing work with perpetrators to protect women and children.

› Theme 1: Leveraging data to prevent and respond to cases of femicide.

Gender-related killing of women and girls, also known as femicide, is the most violent and extreme form of VAW. Femicide is defined by the current UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (UNSRVAW) as the killing of women because of their sex and/or gender (**United Nations General Assembly**, September 2016). This distinctive form of VAW is a universally recognized crime and often represents the ultimate step on a continuum of violence committed by an individual within or outside the family sphere (**United Nations General Assembly**, 2015).

To address this issue, UNSRVAW called upon all states to establish Femicide Watches, which should collect data on femicides and, with the assistance of interdisciplinary review panels, analyze all femicide cases, including court decisions, in order to identify gaps in the intervention system, criminal justice and criminal procedures system, as well as risk factors.

Considering similarities in the legal and political systems across the Western Balkans, as well as the prevalence of femicide, deeply-rooted patriarchal norms and widespread discrimination against women in the region, the Femicide Watch initiative **is being implemented in Serbia**, and will be replicated in Albania and Montenegro, paving the way for the establishment of a regional Femicide Watch in the Western Balkans.

› Theme 2: Preventing and responding to sexual violence against women and girls.

The pandemic unveiled pre-existing flaws in the application of the provisions and standards in CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention in the delivery of support services for women survivors of sexual violence.

Findings of UN Women rapid assessment “**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on specialist services for victims and survivors of violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey: A proposal for addressing the needs**” (April 2020) revealed that services are not well designed for crisis situations due to shortfalls in the system for prevention and protection, which can be better targeted with support. Over the last year, opportunities were seized and efforts were invested to innovate and respond to the challenges posed by the dual pandemic in the provision of women’s support services for survivors of sexual violence.

› Theme 3: Advancing work with perpetrators to protect women and children.

Considering the pervasive rate of VAW in the Western Balkans and Turkey, men’s and boys’ active participation in preventing all forms of VAW, as well as the adoption of essential legislative measures to set up perpetrator programmes, require urgent attention to advance the implementation of CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, particularly referring to Articles 12 and 16 in the latter. As an integral part of a coordinated response to VAW, perpetrator programmes ground their work in the belief that perpetrators can change by acknowledging the harm they have caused and taking responsibility for their past and future actions. It is therefore legitimate and necessary that relevant stakeholders and policy makers recognize the relevance and benefits of rehabilitation programmes for male perpetrators and their victims and develop or implement legislation to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent and neutralize VAW.

In the Western Balkans, only Serbia has begun to develop standards for responsible victim-oriented perpetrator programmes, while Albania is currently in the process of developing those. North Macedonia and Montenegro have not yet initiated development. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, courts rarely impose these preventive and treatment programmes, mainly because courts are required to pay the costs of treatment, and mental health centers often do not have the capacity to implement these measures. In Kosovo*, although working with perpetrators is foreseen in Kosovo’s Law on Protection against Domestic Violence and Law on Gender Equality, there are no specific rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. In the case of Turkey, no standard rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators have been developed, and the only available resource is an anger-management programme conducted in Ankara.

› Theme 4: Positive social norms to end violence against women.

Gender-based discrimination and VAW are complex phenomena that can only be understood within the wider social context in which they operate. Social and cultural norms both influence and are influenced by community and individual attitudes and behaviours related to gender equality and VAW. However, while improving attitudes and knowledge on VAW is an essential first step in its elimination, individuals’ behaviour does not always align with their attitudes, and significant shifts in knowledge and attitudes without similar shifts in behaviour have been observed in other contexts.

As a result, it is crucial to focus on behavioural change in addition to attitudinal change. To do so, relevant concepts from behavioural change science, such as Communication for Behavioral Impact (COMBI) and behavioural insights, can be leveraged to influence specific behaviours related to gender-based discrimination and VAW.

3. Format

The Third Regional Forum will feature four plenary sessions to introduce and set the four thematic areas of the Forum: Leveraging data to prevent and respond to cases of femicide; Preventing and responding to sexual violence against women and girls; Advancing work with perpetrators to protect women and children; Positive social norms to end violence against women.

In addition to the plenary sessions, the Forum will offer four interactive booths – participatory spaces for learning and exchange – on the four thematic areas mentioned above.

* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UN Women, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

Within each booth, experts from the region and beyond will present practical case studies featuring replicable strategies and methods for implementing interventions towards ending VAW in the Western Balkans, Turkey and Europe at large. For each booth, the case study presentations will be followed by a guided discussion with panelists and participants, the outcomes of which will be presented in plenary by a rapporteur(s). The outcomes will inform and advance collective efforts to prevent and respond to violence in the four thematic areas in the region.

Each day of the event will feature two plenary sessions followed by two booths on the same themes. Booths 1 and 2 below will take place concurrently on Day 1 of the event, and Booths 3 and 4 will take place concurrently on Day 2. Participants may select which booth they will attend on each day according to their interests.

› **Booth 1: Leveraging data to prevent and respond to cases of femicide**

Case studies:

- *Advancing institutional solutions to preventing femicide in Bosnia and Herzegovina:* To examine the progress, ways forward and challenges of institutional solutions to ending femicide in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- *Preventing femicides in the Western Balkans region:* To highlight opportunities for establishing femicide watches in the Western Balkans and Turkey, including by sharing examples from Serbia, Albania and Montenegro.
- *Good practices on administrative data collection on violence against women:* To shed light on good practices on data collection of violence against women across the region and encourage relevant stakeholders to enhance data collection.
- *A unified database for cases of violence against women and domestic violence: opportunities and challenges:* To examine the challenges and opportunities in establishing and operating a unified database for data collection on cases of violence against women and domestic violence, specifically through the example of Kosovo.

› **Booth 2: Preventing and responding to sexual violence against women and girls**

Case studies:

- *What should be done next in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Building on the momentum:* To exchange good practices and lessons learned on increasing the quality of women's support services for victims of sexual violence by strengthening cooperation among women's CSOs and between women's CSOs and health care providers; building the capacities of health care providers to support victims of sexual violence; and advocating for better services for victims of sexual violence, in line with international and regional standards.
- *Planning for and financing better essential services for women survivors of violence in times of COVID-19:* To collectively identify and address obstacles and barriers impeding the functional provision of women's support services to victims of VAW and multisectoral cooperation.
- *Rape crisis centers: the Irish model:* Through the experiences of Rape Crisis Network Ireland, to examine the rape crisis center model in Ireland and its underlying principles, operational elements and rationale in provision of support to victims of sexual violence.
- *#MeToo in the Western Balkans:* To build movements and harness momentum to empower survivors of sexual violence, advocate for accountability for perpetrators and demand zero tolerance for all types of misconduct.

› **Booth 3: Advancing work with perpetrators to protect women and children**

Case studies:

- *How perpetrator programmes can change harmful behaviours:* To learn about the relevancy and methods of perpetrator programmes to increase women's and children's safety, and ways forward to implement such programmes.

- *IMPACT for safe perpetrator programmes*: To examine the IMPACT tool developed by the European Network for the Work With Perpetrators as the sole existing tool to ensure quality and monitored perpetrator programmes.
- *Collaboration between perpetrator programmes and victims support services*: To take stock of opportunities and challenges in fostering and improving collaboration between perpetrator programmes and support services for victims/survivors of violence.
- *Working with perpetrators in Montenegro*: To examine practical strategies, approaches and lessons learned from Montenegro in working with perpetrators.

› **Booth 4: Positive social norms to end violence against women**

Case studies:

- *Transformative fatherhood*: To present case studies of the power of involved, nonviolent concepts of fatherhood to positively transform families and communities and raising awareness on the relevancy of fatherhood programmes to prevent VAW, including during times of crisis.
- *Applying behavioural science to end violence against women*: To leverage the principles and innovations of behavioural science to promote positive social norms and behaviours to reduce VAW, including through showcasing successful behavioural change initiatives in the region and fostering participants' knowledge on behavioural science to address harmful norms and attitudes towards VAW.
- *Engaging non-traditional actors*: To examine strategies and good practices in engaging non-traditional actors, such as religious figures, youth and young men, in the fight against violence against women, specifically through the experiences in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- *Transforming masculinities*: To fight 'harmful masculinities' and ideals around primary gender roles and socialization that uphold patriarchal codes and require men to maintain dominant and aggressive behaviours, through engaging football clubs in 16 Days of Activism against VAW campaigns.

4. Organization

UN Women, in collaboration with Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Agency of Gender Equality and Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe will organize online the Third Regional Forum within the framework of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, on the 1st and 2nd of December 2021.

Expected participants:

- National machineries for the advancement of women's rights
- Other key stakeholders from national governments and human rights institutions
- Parliamentarians
- GREVIO
- EUDELs and EC/DG NEAR
- Regional institutions and organizations, including representatives and staff from organizers (UN Women, Council of Europe), EIGE, OSCE etc.
- Representatives from CSOs
- Global well-respected experts/ well-established organizations

5. Language

English will be the working language of the forum. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in Albanian – Kosovar, Bosnian – Montenegrin – Serbian, Macedonian, and Turkish languages.

The Third Regional Forum is undertaken within the framework of the EU-funded regional programme "Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds."