



This programme is funded  
by the European Union



vol 17

# IMPLEMENTING NORMS, CHANGING MINDS

## OVER 40 NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in 2013, and COVID-19 in March 2020. The dual pandemic has exacerbated structural inequalities across societies and disproportionately affected marginalized and minority women. In order to end gender-based discrimination and VAWG, the European Union and UN Women embarked on Phase II of the regional programme “[Implementing Norms, Changing Minds](#)” (February 2020 – July 2021), fostering partnerships with over 40 civil society organizations (CSOs) that will contribute to addressing the old and new challenges posed by the dual pandemic. [Read more.](#)



Photo symbol. Credits: Liria Center

## IN THE WORDS OF BILJANA STEPANOV: “TO HELP WOMEN STAY SAFE, WE ARE DEVELOPING A MOBILE SOS APP TO REPORT VIOLENCE”



Biljana Stepanov is the director of Center for Support of Women (CSW) in Serbia and Board President of SOS Vojvodina Network. Stepanov is talking about the challenges women faced in reporting violence during the state of emergency and how this prompted CSW and SOS Vojvodina to innovate to address the needs of women at risk of violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, they are developing a safe virtual platform for chat support for women survivors of violence with SOS services and a panic button, created under the regional programme “[Implementing Norms, Changing Minds](#),” funded by the European Union. [Read more.](#)

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD



### AIDA MEHDIC: “WE CREATED A PLATFORM THAT WILL IMPROVE ROMA WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND STATUS”

“The **Platform for the improvement of Roma women’s rights and status** in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a document that contains a detailed analysis of Roma women’s needs in relation to issues such as employment, housing, education, health, political participation and protection from violence and discrimination. The first of its kind, it presents recommendations for key decision-makers for creating policies, strategies and action plans that address the needs of Roma women, as well as measures that would improve the position of Roma women in BiH. The Platform was created in response to consistent, institutional and intersectional discrimination faced by Roma women, whose needs are not specifically addressed in action plans tackling gender inequality or the status of the Roma population. The Platform was developed by the Roma Women’s Association “Bolja buducnost” Tuzla and Roma Women’s Network “Uspjeh” (Success), financed by the European Union, UN Women, OAK Foundation and Kvinna till Kvinna. It will also be used as an advocacy tool for the development of the new Roma Action Plan 2020-2024, led by the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees in BiH.”

**Aida Mehdic, Coordinator of the Roma Women’s Network, Bosnia and Herzegovina**



### JOVANA HAJDUKOVIĆ: “THE CREATIVE ACTIVITIES OPEN A WINDOW TO HAPPINESS FOR WOMEN WHO SUFFERED FROM VIOLENCE”

“The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in the number of women and children for whom the Women’s Safe House in Montenegro became a home. Running away from home, leaving an abuser during the period when isolation measures were in force, and fear of an unknown disease made these times even more challenging for women who suffered from violence. Even us, as an organization, had some challenging times that took a toll on our mental and physical health. So, we defined a new protocol for the functioning of the shelter, but we didn’t want to give up on organizing creative workshops for women, as well as educational and creative work for their children, that were conducted under the regional programme “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds,” funded by the European Union. Women report that this kind of work fulfills them, calms them down, gives them space to be creative and to “escape” from everyday worries and thoughts about what their life will look like after leaving the shelter. The children were even more eagerly awaiting each workshop. They built relationships, got to know each other, and helped each other solve tasks. And we are happy that, in these hard times, these creative activities open a window to happiness for women and children who suffered from violence.”

**Jovana Hajduković, Program Manager for advocacy in NGO Women’s Safe House, Montenegro**



## EXPERT'S TAKE: THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HIGHLIGHTED THE VITAL ROLE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN OUR SOCIETIES

“As we grapple with many unknowns of the ongoing health crisis, one long established truth is surfacing: Women’s civil society organizations are playing a vital role to empower, protect and inform women and girls. Their ongoing feminist efforts, even in abnormal times such as these, stimulate and encourage collaboration needed to transform society and continue to push towards systemic change.” [Read more.](#)



## ASK A POLICEWOMAN: WHAT CAN POLICE DO TO BETTER PROTECT WOMEN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE IN AN EMERGENCY CONTEXT?

Xhemile Behluli has been a sergeant within the Kosovo Police since 2004 and has been domestic violence section supervisor since 2011. Besides her dedication to a life free from violence for women across Kosovo, she is also committed to achieving gender equality within the Kosovo Police, as part of the regional programme “[Implementing Norms, Changing Minds](#),” funded by the European Union, to ensure all of her colleagues are treated equally. [Read more.](#)

---

## IN THE WORDS OF ESMERALDA HOXHA: “WITHOUT TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS, SURVIVORS GET ENTRAPPED IN A VICIOUS CYCLE OF VIOLENCE”



Esmeralda Hoxha is project coordinator at the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) in Albania, currently implementing a project under the regional programme on ending violence against women “[Implementing Norms, Changing Minds](#),” funded by the European Union, which aims to monitor the implementation of the National Gender Equality Strategy (2016-2020) in Albania, focusing on ending violence against women and girls. [Read more.](#)

---



## MEMBERS OF THE POLICE, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND JUDICIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO COMMIT TO PROTECT WOMEN FROM VIOLENCE

Around 30 professionals working in the protection system in Montenegro and Serbia are better equipped and determined to lead change to improve the management of cases of violence against women, especially in emergencies. This comes in the result of online seminars “The marginalization of the issue of violence against women under emergency circumstances, forced isolation and restrictive measures,” organized by Centre of Women’s Rights, within the UN Women’s regional programme “**Implementing Norms, Changing Minds**,” funded by the European Union. [Read more.](#)

## IN THE WORDS OF BÜŞRA SÜNETCI: “DURING LOCKDOWN, THE WORLD EXPERIENCED WHAT WOMEN HAVE EXPERIENCED FOR YEARS”

During the COVID-19 lockdown, women in Turkey and around the world have faced serious safety risks as the quarantine exacerbated violence, according to representatives of the Foundation for Women’s Solidarity in Turkey. Büşra Süneci, representative of the Foundation and a social worker, told UN Women about the support they provided to women during lockdown under the regional programme on ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, funded by the European Union. [Read more.](#)



**WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE**  
WAVE is a network of over 150 women's NGOs working towards ending violence against women in 46 European countries. The WAVE Network has been working for over 25 years to promote and strengthen the human rights of women and children in general and prevent violence against women and children in particular.

**WAVE urges governments and international bodies to uphold their commitment to international legislation protecting women and girls from violence**

Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) is a network of over 150 women’s NGOs working towards ending violence against women in 46 European countries. The WAVE Network has been working for over 25 years to promote and strengthen the human rights of women and children in general and prevent violence against women and children in particular.

The WAVE Network notices with great concern the backlash against the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Most states that ratified and implemented the articles of the Istanbul Convention have reported subsequent positive developments in the areas of policy development, protection and prevention of violence against women. By applying a holistic and victim-centred approach when supporting women experiencing violence, states have increased their political commitments to end violence against women at a national and European level. European and international institutions, such as the Council of Europe, EU bodies and UN Women among others, play a key role in upholding these commitments and promoting women’s human rights.

Although important milestones have been achieved when it comes to protecting women from violence, it is very concerning to notice that regressive forces around Europe promote false interpretations and misleading messages about the Istanbul Convention. As other European women’s NGOs noted, these messages are disseminated with the sole purpose of disrupting any legislative attempts to protect and uphold women’s human rights.

The WAVE Network would like to express its utmost support for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as it represents an important milestone in combating gender-based violence and offers a holistic approach when it comes to the prevention, protection and prosecution of violence against women. Today violence against women is still extremely wide-spread and continues to be a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime<sup>1</sup>. Particularly violence within the family is still seen as a taboo in many countries, where women are afraid to testify against their spouses/partners. Research indicates that the cost of violence against women could amount to around 2 per cent of the global gross domestic product (GDP). This is equivalent to 1.1 trillion, approximately the size of the economy of Canada<sup>2</sup>.

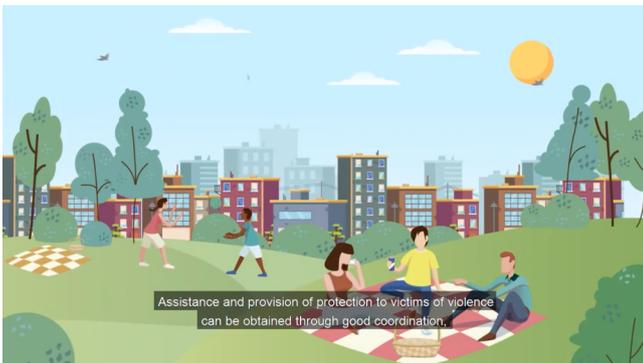
When it comes to the issue of ‘gender’, it is important to emphasize that the Istanbul Convention defines gender as ‘socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes’ that a given society considers appropriate for women and men<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of this term to emphasize how inequalities, stereotypes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.womenlobby.org/EWS-objects-attempt-to-withdraw-Poland-from-Istanbul-Convention>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/3/stories-by-laksmi-puri-on-economic-costs-of-violence-against-women>

## STATEMENT: GOVERNMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES ARE URGED TO UPHOLD THEIR COMMITMENT TO INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION PROTECTING WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM VIOLENCE

Women Against Violence Europe Network (WAVE Network), as the lead agency of the Civil Society Strengthening Platform (CSSP), has released a statement urging governments and international bodies to uphold their commitment to ending violence against women and girls by continuing to support the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, in response to the recent backlashes. [Read more here.](#)

## [VIDEOS] ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC AND IN CRISIS SITUATIONS



The Center of Women's Rights (CWR), programme CSO partner, launched two animated videos emphasizing that pandemics and any other crisis situation must not be an excuse for the failure of the protection system. Assistance and provision of protection to victims of violence can be obtained through good coordination, communication and multisectoral cooperation of all service and judicial institutions in the protection system. The video can be seen [here](#). Although the COVID-19 pandemic has pulled out to the surface already present shortcomings and gaps in the protection system of women survivors of violence, its functioning during pandemic or any other crisis situation must be a priority and violence against women should not be a secondary concern. The video can be watched [here](#).

In the same time, the **Civil Society Strengthening Platform** - a platform gathering 9 women's organizations throughout the Western Balkans and Turkey and led by WAVE Network - launched 9 videos to promote women's support services that victims of violence can access during the lockdown and beyond. The videos aim also to address women's needs in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The videos encourage women to make use of the services provided by women's support services, even during lockdowns, as the number of domestic violence cases has increased since the outbreak of the pandemic. Information conveyed in the videos is related to SOS helplines, counselling services, apps that can be used by victims, empowering messages etc. and is available in all local languages of the region. The videos can be watched [here](#).

Contact: Yolanda Iriarte, Regional Programme Manager,  
Implementing Norms, Changing Minds  
Victoria Puiu, Communications and Visibility Specialist,  
Implementing Norms, Changing Minds  
Email: [eca.evawproject@unwomen.org](mailto:eca.evawproject@unwomen.org)  
Web: <http://eca.unwomen.org>  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/unwomeneuropecentralasia](https://www.facebook.com/unwomeneuropecentralasia)  
Twitter: [www.twitter.com/unwomeneca](https://www.twitter.com/unwomeneca)



This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Ending Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

