

NORWAY

Report on A/RES/73/148 and A/RES/73/146

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is a serious gender equality problem. Surveys show that sexual harassment, especially among young people, is a major problem in Norway today. Sexual harassment is unacceptable and illegal. We are pleased that the theme has been put on the agenda, including through the #MeToo campaign. The campaign helps to highlight important stories from women worldwide. All public authorities, school authorities and employers currently have an obligation to work actively against sexual harassment within their own business and, if necessary, take action. The Anti-Discrimination Ombud plays an important role in putting this theme on the national agenda.

In June 2019, The Storting adopted new provisions on active equality efforts. The new rules strengthen public authorities' duties to make efforts against discrimination on the basis of gender and other protected discrimination grounds, and also give public authorities' a duty to issue a statement on their work with equality issues (mainstreaming). Public authorities, including the education authorities, have a duty make active, targeted and systematic efforts in all their activity to promote equality and prevent discrimination. This also includes an obligation for public authorities to prevent harassment, sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and to counter stereotyping.

The new provisions also include the establishing of a low-threshold system free of charge for handling cases regarding sexual harassment. The Anti-Discrimination Tribunal is given authority to handle these cases. The new provisions entered into force 1 January 2020.

Trafficking in women and girls

Resolution 73/146 calls upon concerned Governments to allocate resources, as appropriate, to provide access to appropriate programmes for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of human trafficking, as well as comprehensive information and voluntary counselling, and to take measures to cooperate with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to provide for the social, medical and psychological care of the victims in ways that protect their privacy and identity.

The Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security runs a grant scheme that provides funding for projects that provide assistance to victims of trafficking, the majority being women exploited in prostitution. Funds are allocated to non-governmental organisations, who provide a number of different services including counselling and housing. The size of the scheme has been significantly increased the last two years. Funding for 2020 was distributed in May. The COVID-19 outbreak did not lead to any reduction in the funding. Organisations who received grants have been told that the Ministry understands that it will not be possible to implement all of the projects as outlined in the applications. While major changes should be discussed with the Ministry, it is fully acceptable to adjust projects due to the current situation.

The Ministry has received reports that suggest that service providers since mid-March 2020 have made a commendable effort to change their short term working methods in order to assist victims and identify new victims. In the very early stages of the outbreak, it was recognized that women in prostitution as well as certain groups of male and female migrant workers would be extremely exposed and vulnerable. NGOs worked relentlessly to inform about travel restrictions and other elements of the new situation, and to assist several individuals in travelling back to home countries or seek refuge in safe locations.

Concerning new trends in trafficking, we wish to draw attention to current challenges facing both Norway and a large number of Council of Europe member states. Countries of destination in this region have over the years developed comprehensive systems for the identification and assistance of women and girls trafficking for sexual exploitation.

The same countries have recently seen an increase in trafficking for forced labour, where male migrant workers are the predominant victims.

The 7th General Report from the expert group GRETA, published in 2019, provides more detail on this topic. We especially wish to highlight some excerpts from the executive summary:

The statistics included in GRETA's country reports indicate that trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation has been on the rise and has emerged as the predominant form of exploitation in some countries. Trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation occurs in the formal and informal economies, with migrant workers particularly at risk. Men constitute most of the identified victims of labour trafficking, in sectors as diverse as agriculture, construction, hospitality and fisheries. Women are also victims of trafficking for labour exploitation, often in the more isolated setting of domestic and care work.

The provision of assistance to victims of trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation has specificities linked to the fact that the majority of these victims are men who may fear losing their jobs and any payments due, may feel responsible for what happened to them and not see themselves as victims. Providing support to victims of labour exploitation therefore requires an approach which addresses these particular factors.

The second evaluation round has brought to light some improvements when it comes to assisting male victims of trafficking. However, in several countries, there are still no shelters or crisis centres providing assistance to male victims of trafficking. GRETA has urged States Parties to provide assistance, including safe accommodation, adapted to the specific needs of male victims of trafficking.

Recent police investigations in labour exploitation cases in Norway have mainly involved male victims. The identification and assistance system for male victims has however not been developed in a fully satisfying manner, but developments are underway especially to increase counselling services for migrant workers.

Efforts to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and girls – in general

Combating violence against women and domestic violence is a priority for the Norwegian Government. In line with its policy platform, the Government will continue, intensify and improve the work against domestic violence.

Despite many positive and significant achievements in policies and practices, violence against woman in various forms remains widespread at all levels of society, in all countries in the world. Norway is no exception in this regard.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence entered into force, as regards Norway, on 1 November 2017. The ratification of the Convention is an important signal from the Norwegian government that this work will be given high priority.

In March 2019 the Norwegian Government launched a national plan of action against rape. One of the measures in this plan is to consider an overall review of the chapter in the Penal Code dealing with sexual offences. In this connection it would be appropriate to examine more closely the wording in the description of the offence in section 291 of the Penal Code pertaining to rape.

In June 2019 the Norwegian Government decided to develop a sixth plan of action to combat domestic violence, including a specific part on violence and abuse in Sami communities. The plan will be launched in 2020, and will meet the obligations of the Istanbul Convention and will address issues under what we now as the four P's: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Integrated Policy.

In October 2018 the Government appointed a committee to review homicide cases where the perpetrator had been a current or former partner. The aim to was to find out whether, to what extent, and in what ways the public services' management of such cases had failed. The commission will make recommendations that may prevent and counter such cases from occurring in the future. The commission will submit its recommendations in 2020.

The government's Action plan against rape (2019-2022) was launched in March 2019. The action plan contains specific measures for victim support and assistance for victims in need to report rape and other sexual violence to the police.

Norway strives for equal access of both women and men to justice. General schemes like free legal aid, witness support and an attorney appointed by the court to assist and safeguard the rights of offenders or survivors in a criminal case, provide support for all and are of particular importance for vulnerable and those less resourcefull.

In February 2016 the Government established a new web portal on rape and domestic violence for persons exposed to such violence and for the support services, including the police. The web portal's purpose is to provide easy access to information about rights and assistance. The Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) is tasked with developepo and running the portal. <https://dinutvei.no/>

Measures and practices during the Corona crisis

The Norwegian Government has taken a number of measures to prevent transmission of the coronavirus and protect the population. On 12 March far reaching measures were announced, including the closing of schools and children's day care centres. In addition a number of public services have been closed, among them the administrative services provided by the police. Services for victims in general are mostly open, but often based on on-line and telephone consultations to reduce risk for contamination.

The number of persons contacting the police, the shelters and the round-the-clock helpline for victims have decreased during the crisis. There is a concern that this is a consequence of the measures taken to combat the virus.

Shelters (crisis centres)

- To be able to keep the shelters open during the crisis, the Norwegian Government has decided that employees at shelters are defined as personnel in critical social functions. This means that employees of shelters are allowed to send their children to kindergarten and school, even if kindergartens and schools are closed (for the majority of the children).
- The 45 shelters in Norway report on a weekly basis on the use of the shelters during the crisis, compared to the use of the shelters in a normal situation. Reports from week 14, with numbers from 44 out of 45 shelters, show that for 55 percent (24 centres) numbers are lower than usually, 34 percent (15 centres) say that the numbers are as usual, and 12 percent (5 centres) say they have more users than normally. No centres report that they are full.

Police

- When the Government introduced measures to prevent transmission of the coronavirus and protect the population, the Police Directorate immediately established an apparatus for identifying and handling the consequences of the pandemic and the measures introduced. Measures taken by the Police Directorate are:
 - The National Criminal Investigation Service (NCIS) has been commissioned to prepare weekly intelligence reports describing the most likely developments. Already in the first report NCIS wrote as follows: *“The incidence of physical and mental violence in close relationships is likely to increase, especially if the situation becomes prolonged. In vulnerable families, problems are likely to intensify.”*
 - Weekly statistics on reported crime, including domestic violence, are issued.
 - The police website has been updated, especially with information on how the public can get in contact with the police. Media is also used for spreading information. The police districts have actively used the “Police online patrol” to provide up-to-date information.

- The Police Directorate has given clear guidelines to the police districts to pay special attention to cases of domestic violence, both new cases and cases already under investigation.
- The police districts are requested to work closely with local authorities on measures, especially with the child welfare services.
- The Police can be reached by the emergency number (112), the nationwide telephone number (02800) or the police district telephone number. The Police Directorate is gradually considering reopening the public receptions. This will increase availability and opportunity for personal attendance.

Health Services

- The necessary services including sexual assault centres and emergency health services are still available and accessible 24/7.
- Public health information about intimate partner violence is presented through several official sites, among these helsenorge.no, <https://helsenorge.no/koronavirus/hjelp-ved-vold-i-naere-relasjoner>.
- Help lines and chat services are operated to meet the needs from the exposed.

Information

- Several information campaigns have been launched to inform the public about where they can access help in a situation of violence. This information has been translated into English and is available on the Government's Corona information page and is spread on social media. The messages are directed to victims of violence, those who are worried they may commit violence and those who suspect that someone around them is vulnerable.

<https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/law-and-order/lov-og-rett--satsing/vold-i-naere-relasjoner/seek-help-if-you-experience-violence/id2696812/>