



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 November 2012

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-seventh session

4-15 March 2013

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by Autonomous Women’s Center, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

The forthcoming period in the Republic of Serbia brings serious concerns. The parties who formed the new Government in July 2012 were leading warmongers in the nineties. Women's civil society organizations are concerned with another wave of "naturalization", "retraditionalization" and "instrumentalization" of women. The high level of institutional corruption, increasing poverty and threatening debt crisis additionally impact the overall insecurity of citizens.

In the last few years, violence against women became more visible in public, but institutional protection is still not satisfactory. In the last few years, Serbia established a legislative and strategic framework related to the prohibition of discrimination, gender equality and protection from gender-based violence. The legal framework seems to be at the centre of the State gender equality efforts, but insufficient attention is paid to implementation. There is hyperproduction of such documents and plans, a lack of precise distribution of responsibilities and competence, as well as the absence of a coherent framework for implementation and reporting on the results of planned measures and activities.

The National Strategy for Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women in the Family and in Intimate Partner Relationship was adopted in April 2011. A working group for drafting the Action Plan is being formed, although some of the activities planned in the Strategy are already being realized within the three-year project, "Combating Sexual and Gender-based Violence" (2009-2012), but reporting is not comprehensive. The Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Gender-based Violence in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina for the Period 2008-2012 (adopted in 2008) has been implemented within the three-year project, "Toward a Comprehensive System for Suppression of Violence against Women", in all municipalities in Vojvodina, with regular reports and evaluations. The General Protocol on Procedures and Cooperation of Institutions, Agencies and Organizations in Situations of Domestic and Partner Relationship Violence was adopted on November 2011 and three more special protocols on the procedures of professionals in the relevant sectors should be adopted by the end of 2012. There are no data on the implementation of these protocols.

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was signed (April 2012), but still not ratified. Regarding the Convention, the Republic of Serbia reserved the right not to apply two articles. The same provisions stipulated in the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse were signed without reservations, which is an indicator of discrimination in the field of protection of women from violence. Funds allocated by the State for domestic violence issues are project-based and small, and mainly come from donor sources (foreign Governments).

Primary prevention

There are no continuous activities with regard to awareness-raising campaigns for the elimination of violence against women organized by the Government. The Gender Equality Directorate conducted a campaign with national coverage on the public service, but there is no continuity in this activity. In recent years, some

governmental institutions have joined the international campaign, “Sixteen days of activism against gender violence”, that women’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been organizing since 1995. On the provincial level, the Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality has conducted a public awareness-raising campaign, “I want you to know!” A campaign to involve men and boys in prevention activities has been organized by NGOs.

Although there are sporadic awards for responsible media reporting in the field of gender-based violence, media reporting in Serbia is still sensationalistic. The training of journalists is rather more sporadic than systematic and has no visible effects on the content of reporting. There is no systematic education of young people or content in school and faculty curricula on gender-based violence.

As regards the education of professionals, there are accredited training programmes on domestic violence and violence against women, sexual violence and human trafficking for professionals from social, health and educational institutions. The autonomous province of Vojvodina has organized systematic training for employees of these institutions in all 45 municipalities in its territory. The remaining municipalities in Serbia were not systematically covered by such education. Curricula for the Police Academy and Judicial Academy for the education of professionals in this field have been developed, but there is no system of accreditation of training that would make it possible to offer increased training, although the judiciary and police allow training provided by NGOs on official request. A rising number of educated professionals from all sectors does not guarantee that knowledge gained will be applied. Therefore, systematic monitoring is especially important.

Multisector services and responses for victims/survivors

Prejudice against women and victims of gender-based violence is widespread among professionals in all key services. The recognition of violence is still problematic, especially when there are no physical injuries. There is no mandatory screening of violence in health-care and social services. The police have no defined procedures for risk assessment or a special “line of work” in cases of domestic violence, which further increases the risk to the life of victims (26 women in 2010 and 29 in 2011 were killed by their current or former partners). There is no regular practice of information exchange between services (with the consent of the victim and respectful of security principles). Multisectoral meetings to plan interventions for the protection of victims (case conferences) are rarely organized.

The system of specialized services for women victims is not developed. There is a lack of continuous and systematic financial support for women’s organizations that specialize in empowering and providing psychosocial and legal assistance to women. There is a tendency to close specialized SOS helplines provided by women’s organizations owing to the lack of funds (four SOS helplines were closed in 2011). At the same time, the Gender Equality Directorate has failed to distribute budgeted funds to NGOs (RSD 2 million in 2011).

The treatment programmes for perpetrators of violence have been promoted (instead of punishment) and their effect is uncritically presented (85 per cent success rate, although the follow-up monitoring lasts only three months after the treatment and information that more than 50 per cent of abusers withdraw from the treatment in the first two sessions is missing). The amount of money allocated for

the treatment of perpetrators is disproportionate in relation to the money allocated for the support of women victims.

There is an established practice of separation of children from families in cases where the mother was unable to protect them from a violent father. Instead of interventions directed at stopping violence and punishing the perpetrator, victims were punished. Victims of violence have no systematic psychosocial support in the trial process. There are no integrated interventions for protection and support to victims, which would include psychological support, economic empowerment (employment), housing and childcare, so women remain trapped in violence because of poverty.

Evidence of violence is not standardized and accurate, which complicates court proceedings. There is no precise data on the number of reported domestic violence cases and other forms of gender-based violence per year in various institutions (data on the annual number of domestic violence reports received by the police is not publicly available; it is available only on request). There is no data on the relationship between a perpetrator and a victim in judicial statistics presented by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (in addition to data on sex and age).

In one third of procedures for the crime of domestic violence, public prosecutors dismiss charges. From the moment of filing criminal charges to the first instance decision, an intolerably long period of time passes (up to a year). Serbia does not give the right to compensation to the victims in cases where State authorities failed to protect them.

The authorized institutions for filing civil suits for the issuance of protection measures against domestic violence prescribed by the Family Law (Public Prosecution and Centres for Social Welfare) do not use their legal authorization. Only six Public Prosecutor's Offices (out of 58) filed civil suits in 2011. All the Centres for Social Welfare filed only 294 suits out of 8,481 instances of violence for the issuance of protection measures. Court proceedings for the issuance of protection measures are lengthy, although the Family Law prescribes that proceedings in the field of protection from domestic violence shall be considered urgent. In only 20.4 per cent of cases the first instance judgement was passed within a month, while in a significant number of cases the judgement was passed after three or even six months from the day the suit was filed. The violation of protection measures is a criminal act, but the criminal procedure lasts too long. The court is not obliged to forward judgements on the issued protection measures to the police, who should monitor violations of issued measures.