

11. GOVERNMENT POLICY, FUNDING AND RECOGNITION OF THE WORK OF WOMEN'S NGOs

National Policies on Violence against Women

Introduction

The Istanbul Convention emphasises the importance of comprehensive and coordinated policies to prevent violence against women. It defines violence against women as a form of discrimination and recognises that the realization of de jure and de facto equality between women and men is a key element in prevention. Article 4 of the convention requires governments to take legislative and other measures to prevent violence against women and to prevent discrimination (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 6).

A national action plan (NAP) to combat and prevent violence against women can be seen as an indicator of the existence of a coordinated policy. However, the existence of a plan is in itself not enough. Effective measures for implementation are needed to achieve real change. Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention foresees the establishment of "one or more official bodies responsible for the co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures" (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 8).

Aims and Content of Data Collection

The aim of the WAVE Report 2015 questionnaire was to gather information on the current number of national policies in existence, the scope of violence covered and the timeframe for action plans. Since the report is focusing on the provision of specialist support for women victims of violence and their children, it was asked if the national policy contains measures in this area.

Further questions concerned the establishment of coordinating bodies to monitor the implementation of policies. To find out about the level of cooperation with women's NGOs, a question on their involvement in the work of coordinating bodies was asked.

Experts were also asked about their opinion on the effectiveness of the coordinating body.

To get an impression of the implementation of policies, questions were asked about the existence and tasks of a body responsible for monitoring and evaluating policies, the involvement of women's NGOs and the existence of evaluation reports.

However, these indicators alone are certainly not enough to assess the effectiveness of policies. In-depth research is needed on the measures to assess whether or not they are located in all policy areas (prevention, provision, protection and prosecution). Action plans and policies which mainly focuses on establishment of laws or on the area of criminal law will not be effective in preventing violence against women and domestic violence (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 10).

Evaluation of how comprehensive and coordinated national action plans and strategies are is necessary in order to assess the quality of policy plans. Most importantly, evaluation research and impact assessments, carried out at regular intervals, are necessary to establish the effectiveness of measures in preventing violence against women and protecting victims. Article 11 of the Istanbul Convention on data collection and research requires parties to support research regarding the efficacy of measures taken to implement the convention (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 9).

Findings

Although data gathered on the questions is patchy and not always complete, an impression can be drawn on the situation concerning national policies and their implementation.

Existence of a National Policy

The findings show that 33 of 46 European countries have some kind of national policy. However, the question on the timeframe revealed that seven had expired. 26 continue until 2016 or beyond. In at least three countries a national action plan or policy is in the making. Ten countries have no such instrument. National policies can have the form of a national action plan or strategy on forms of violence against women (see next section) or measures within a broader strategy or action plan on gender equality or human rights. For example, Bosnia & Herzegovina has adopted a Framework Strategy for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

As the Council of Europe Analytical Study found, while it can be beneficial to integrate measures on violence against women in action plans and strategies on gender equality in order to recognize it as a form of discrimination, such an approach runs the danger of failing to deal with the issue in a comprehensive way (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 8). National Action Plans specifically addressing all forms of violence against women coordinated and integrated into gender equality programmes is the most effective way of ensuring that the issue of violence against women is most effectively addressed at a policy level. Failure to tie national action plans to "an overarching policy that takes account of the interconnections among the various forms of violence, [they] can obscure the structural foundations of violence against women in gender power relations and its character as a form of discrimination, thus weakening the human rights basis for a holistic approach" (ibid. p. 8). Thus, while it is of great importance to coordinate policies and measures on gender equality and violence against women, developing and implementing separate action plans and strategies on violence against women is necessary in order to deal with the problem thoroughly.

Comprehensive and Holistic Policies

The findings of the Council of Europe Analytical Study (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 9) show that the number of forms of violence against women, which are addressed in action plans and strategies, has increased from 2005 to 2013. 23 Member States of the Council of Europe confirmed having a comprehensive and holistic policy addressing all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention (ibid. p. 6) yet only four member states actually had a policy that covered all nine forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention (ibid. p. 8).

During data collection, respondents were asked their opinion regarding the nine forms of violence included in the Istanbul Convention (rape and sexual violence; violence within the family or domestic violence; sexual harassment; FGM; violence in conflict and post-conflict situations; violence in institutional environments; failure to respect freedom of choice with regard to reproduction; killings in the name of "honour" and forced and early marriage) and whether these forms of violence were adequately covered in their national action plan or strategy. 19 countries provided answers. None of the experts were of the opinion that all forms of violence were adequately covered. Of the 171 possible affirmatives, in only 43 cases did respondents report that forms of violence were covered, often adding that they were not adequately covered.

The forms of violence most often considered to be adequately covered were violence within the family and domestic violence (16) followed by rape and sexual violence (5). Violence in conflict and post-conflict situations was least often named (1).

Taking this finding together with the Council of Europe Analytical Study findings demonstrates that there certainly is a lack of comprehensive policies and a tendency to link together single measures in

action plans and strategies, rather than to develop a holistic approach and coordinate measures. Overall, respondents from governments and women's NGOs both demonstrate that there is much room for improvement in developing national action plans and strategies.

Integration of Specialist Women's Support Services in National Policies

32 WAVE respondents answered the question, of whether policies and measures relating to specialist women's support services are integrated into the national action plan or strategy. 22 indicated that the issue was mentioned in the national action plan or strategy; however, they often added that it was not covered adequately and no concrete measures and plans for identifying and closing gaps were attached.

Coordinating Bodies and Monitoring

Article 10 in the Istanbul Convention requires parties to designate or establish one or more official bodies responsible for the co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence.

WAVE respondents were asked about the existence of such a governmental body and out of 37 responses, 31 confirmed that such a body existed, five said there was no such body and one respondent indicated that the establishment of a coordinating body is planned.

This figure demonstrates that many European countries recognise the importance of a coordinated policy on violence against women. However, when it comes to the questions of role, status, competences and resources of such bodies, the picture is less positive. It was not possible to investigate in-depth the nature and role of the coordinating body in this research, but respondents were asked for their opinion on its effectiveness. The answers given revealed a number of fundamental problems and challenges of coordinating bodies:

Lack of Influence of Coordinating Bodies

Most often mentioned was the problem of the effectiveness of coordinating bodies, for example, that they are "no power broker" and have little or no influence on policy-making. A further problem was that the status and competence of coordinating bodies is often unclear as is the role of members. Consequently, some meet only occasionally and rather than being able to coordinate and monitor the work of the government on violence against women are relegated to a consultative status with no power or resources to influence policy makers. To be effective, such bodies need to have the power to coordinate between government ministries and regions within a country. Furthermore, a lack of involvement of women's NGOs and academics who are experts in the field of violence against women is obviously a loss to coordinating bodies. An additional impediment to the effectiveness of coordinating bodies is that in some cases austerity measures and budget cuts have made it difficult to complete planned projects and achieve targets and have also resulted in administrative restructuring which scatters any progress which has been made. One respondent mentioned, that the coordinating body only became active after 27 femicides were registered in one year. Despite these criticisms, it is important to note that respondents from 31 countries indicated that there is some involvement of women's NGOs working to prevent violence against women in the work of coordinating bodies. Two respondents made positive comments one mentioned that the coordinating body is effective and led to a reform of domestic violence legislation and another reported that considerable efforts had been made to make the coordinating body more effective and that the body was implementing the largest ever project in the area of violence against women with support of the EU structural fund.

Monitoring and Evaluation of National Policies

Monitoring and evaluation of national action plans or strategies are important to ensure they are effective. The Istanbul Convention assigns these tasks to the coordinating bodies. However, this does not

mean that this work needs to be carried out by one single body. Greater objectivity would be achieved if the task of coordinating and implementing policies is separated from the task of monitoring and evaluation and the body responsible for monitoring is independent of the government.

The WAVE questionnaire asked about the existence of a national body entrusted with evaluation and monitoring of the national strategy. Experts from 36 countries provided information on this question. 23 indicated that a body carrying out evaluation and monitoring exists, while 13 said it did not. They were also asked to provide information on both the name and location of the coordinating body as well as of the monitoring body. From the information received it appears that in most countries the two functions are carried out by the same entity. Among the few countries which seem to have an independent monitoring body are Spain (Observatory on Violence against Women) and Scotland (Accountability Working Group). On the question of whether national action plan or policy has clearly set outcomes 29 responses were received of which 18 indicated this was so and 11 experts said there were no outcomes formulated in the document, indicating that not all national action plans and policies have been targeted towards concrete outcomes. This makes it even more difficult to monitor the implementation and only seven WAVE respondents answered that the government has been able to meet outcomes set in the action plan. Evaluation reports are an indicator for the level of implementation of policies and WAVE respondents were asked if the monitoring body is carrying out evaluation reports. 27 provided information to the question, 17 answered that an evaluation existed, while ten said it did not. 12 respondents (out of 22 responses) stated that the evaluation report was made public, and ten indicated it was not.

A further aim of the research was to find out if women's NGOs were involved in monitoring and evaluation. Responses from 28 countries stated that this was the case; however, the research was not able to go into greater depth and explore how women's NGOs were involved. WAVE experts were also asked if they themselves carry out evaluation activities regarding the measures in the national action plan or strategy and only 11 out of 31 who responded were able to say they did.

Funding for Measures and Policies to Prevent Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

Introduction

Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention states that parties shall allocate appropriate financial and human resources for the adequate implementation of integrated policies, including those carried out by NGOs.

The allocation of funding for measures and policies to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, is a strong indicator for the commitment of governments to the implementation of policies and measures. However, there are many obstacles to using such an indicator since data on financial spending in this area is difficult to obtain. This is not only due the fact that some resource costs are difficult to calculate, for instance resources for police intervention or health services supporting victims of violence. Governments also seem to have difficulties in specifying the amount of funding allocated to specific programs such as the amount spent on funding women's shelters. Reasons for this might be that such funding is not provided by one agency and that there are no mechanisms allowing the identification of spending on measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence and to support victims.

The Council of Europe Analytical Study (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 13) reported that although 39 countries indicated that there were funds at the national level allocated for activities to combat violence against women, only eight were able to provide a figure for this (ibid. p. 60).

Aims and Content of Data Collection

WAVE respondents were asked the number of questions about funding; their assessment of the availability of funding for the implementation of national action plans or policies; the allocation of funds for activities to combat violence against women on the national level; the amount of funding in the year 2014 for government activities and NGOs; whether governmental funding for women's support services is mandated by laws or regulations and types of funding.

Findings

WAVE respondents were not able to provide concrete information about the funding situation in their country because such data is not available to them.

However, all were of the opinion that their country does not provide sufficient financial resources to combat violence against women. Respondents from 23 countries stated that specific government funds were allocated for activities to combat violence against women at the national level, while ten stated that there were no such funds. Only five respondents were able to give a figure on the amount of funding for government activities in 2014 (Italy, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Slovenia and Spain) and seven on funding for NGO activities (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Slovenia, Spain).

The question of whether government funding of women's support services is mandated by laws or regulations was affirmed only by 15 respondents. 25 said it was not. The lack of a legal base for the funding of specialist support measures contributes to the lack of funding and the lack of information available on the funding situation.

Respondents were also asked what kind of funding women's support services received from governments. There were five options to choose from (project funding; annual core funding; 2-3 years core funding; permanent core funding and public procurement). Project funding was by far the most common form mentioned 27 times, followed by annual core funding (18) and 2-3 years core funding (10). Permanent funding is very rare, and public procurement funding seems to be on the rise.

This means that women's support services, which require stability and sustainable funding in order to provide middle and long term support to survivors and are, even decades after being established, permanently insecure and have a precarious existence.

Recognition of Women's NGOs

Introduction

Article 9 of the Istanbul Convention requires States to "recognize, encourage and support, at all levels, the work of relevant NGOs and of civil society active in combating violence against women and establish effective co-operation with these organizations" (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 8). This shows the important role the Convention attributes to women's organizations working to end violence against women and domestic violence and requires parties to work together effectively with them.

Aims and Content of Data Collection

Respondents were asked if they were of the opinion that the State recognizes, encourages and supports women's NGOs working to prevent violence and support victims. Furthermore, the question whether there is effective cooperation with the government was posed. Both measures are foreseen in the Istanbul Convention, Article 9.

Findings

Opinions expressed show a mixed picture. Whilst some respondents report good cooperation, for example; women's NGOs being consulted by ministries when drafting legislation or national governments advertising the services and work of women's NGOs and including them in national consultations and workshops for the national strategy; other respondents complained that women's NGOs do not feel recognised, encouraged or supported by the state or even that the State is establishing its own NGOs to exclude the independent women's NGOs. It should, however, be pointed out that one respondent considered that although the State did not directly encourage or support women's NGOs this has the advantage that they could work without interference from the government. Similarly although some respondents reported that the government supports women's helplines and other services, others complained of a lack of specific budget lines for funding women's NGOs, which feel they are not valued and not included as key actors in the development of NAPs. Furthermore, whilst in some cases governments cooperate with NGOs around activities for the national policy or strategy, invite them to conferences, involve them in training government officials and in planning surveys on violence against women and the recommendations of women's NGOs are included in election programmes of political parties others complain that their government does not support women's NGOs with a gender-specific approach.

Cooperation between Government and Women's NGOs

Respondents were asked if in their opinion there is an effective co-operation between government and women's NGOs. Eight respondents answered with yes, 10 with no and 15 provided their opinion in writing. Again the responses show a mixed picture. On the positive side, some countries reported that women's NGOs were invited not only to participate but to lead accountability workshops and were appreciated by the Government and invited as expert consultants to provide their expertise for the formulation and implementation of policies. Other respondents highlighted the limitations of such collaboration, for example, although women's NGOs were invited to meetings and can express their opinion they were not included in decision making, or they were recognized as experts, but not funded. Some even felt that the involvement of NGOs in developing the national action plan is sometimes a purely formal act and the plan often does not reflect the input of women's NGOs.

Some respondents reported that despite positive examples of cooperation, there was a lack of government interest in the work of the women's NGOs and rather a desire to demonstrate that they are fulfilling EU recommendations. Cooperation was often easier to achieve at the practice level e.g. with the police or social work departments rather than the policy level with governments. Several respondents bemoaned the lack of government support for prevention activities or that such work was diluted by the involvement with groups lacking expertise on the issue such as fathers' rights and church based organisations. One respondent simply states that women's issues were simply not on the agenda of the government

Recommendations

Despite some very good examples of women's NGOs being funded, recognised and involved in developing government policy to combat violence against women, overall there is much work to be done in achieving the level of support and cooperation necessary to be effective.

- ▶ A gender-specific analysis and human rights approach to tackling violence against women is required by the Istanbul Convention and should form the cornerstone of government policy on the subject. Governments should consult women's NGOs when drafting legislation on violence against women and establishing national policy and strategy and specialist women's support services should be integrated in national policies.
- ▶ All countries should develop and implement national action plans or strategies on violence against women. These NAPs or strategies should be comprehensive and holistic and adequately address all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and include clearly formulated goals and concrete outcomes
- ▶ A government body should be designated to coordinate the NAPs or strategy. This coordinating body should have clearly defined areas of competence and be able to take decisions and establish policies. Thus a coordinating body needs to be a high level body i.e. on ministerial level. Women's NGOs and academics in the field should be involved in the coordinating body.
- ▶ The Istanbul Convention includes the requirement to "designate or establish one or more official bodies responsible for the co-ordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence" (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 8) covered by the Convention (Article 10). While the Convention does not explicitly foresee that monitoring and evaluation are being carried out by a separate body, it does also not state that there should be only one body carrying out these tasks. For the sake of objectivity, functions should be divided and the body coordinating and implementing policies should not be the same as the body carrying out the monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring of the NAPs or strategy should be separate from the coordinating body and also independent of government.
- ▶ There is little known about government funding for activities and measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence. This is an alarming situation and more in-depth research is needed to reveal the financial commitment governments are making to eliminate this widespread human rights violation. Funding of policies and measures to end violence against women and to support survivors is definitely a weak point in many countries and this a serious obstacle to successful prevention of the problem. Change cannot be achieved with little investment and violence against women prevails if not impeded. National monitoring bodies should be given the task to regularly research government spending in this area and compare this to the costs of violence.