

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Women against Violence Europe (WAVE) is a network of European women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and experts working in the field of preventing violence against women and their children. WAVE focusses on advocacy, awareness raising, research, dissemination of information and the expansion and improvement of specialist, gender-sensitive and human rights based support services for women who have experienced gender-based violence.

As of December 2015, the network consists of 112 Members in 46 European countries. Through the network, WAVE fosters a transnational network of women's and other NGOs supporting and inspiring each other in their work to eliminate violence against women.

The WAVE Network was founded in 1994 and in 2014 became a legal entity with an elected Board and President. The WAVE office and information centre, which also coordinates the work of the network, is based in Vienna, Austria.

The WAVE Report (which was previously known as the WAVE Country Report) has been published every year since 2008 and is one of the network's main tools, providing information about new developments in the area of violence against women, as well as data and statistics on specialist women's support services. Monitoring the situation in the area of specialised support services in Europe is crucial, as the first EU wide survey on violence against women demonstrated that one in three women in the EU has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual assault since the age of 15 (FRA Report, 2014, p. 21). This represents over 60,000,000 women in Europe and these survivors of gender-based violence need safe spaces, protection, empowering support and access to justice. In particular, since the Istanbul Convention came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014, the WAVE Report is a main instrument for monitoring progress from the women's NGOs perspective and for this reason the WAVE Report this year is much more comprehensive than in previous years.

The Istanbul Convention is one of three legal instruments in Europe which provide an important base for strengthening efforts to eliminate gender based violence in Europe and for the protection and support of women who have experienced such abuse and their children, if any. The Istanbul Convention contains details on how to prevent violence, including a chapter on the protection and support of victims of gender based violence. Another instrument is the European Victims' Directive, adopted in October 2012 and had to be implemented into national laws by November 16, 2015, which, although concerned with victims in general, defines violence against women as a specific form of gender-based violence requiring States to provide specialist support for survivors. The third instrument is the European Protection Orders which came into effect in January 2015 and ensures that all victims of violence have the opportunity to get their protection orders recognized in any EU Member State.

These three instruments can be used to end a widespread violation of human rights rooted in the "historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women" (Istanbul Convention 2011 Preamble).

## Status of the Istanbul Convention as of 1st February 2016

- ▶ **The Convention has been ratified by 20 States:** Albania, Andorra, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey
- ▶ **The Convention has been signed by 19 States:** Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Switzerland, Macedonia, Ukraine and United Kingdom
- ▶ **8 States are still to sign the Convention:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Moldova and Russia.

Council of Europe Chart of signatures and ratifications: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures>, 01 February 2016

The information contained in this report has been compiled from data gathered with the assistance of experienced professional practitioners in women's specialist services in 46 European countries. These are experts on women's specialist services against gender-based violence in their respective country and we are very grateful for the considerable time and energy respondents gave to make this report possible. The report (and the questionnaire) is much longer this year and provides a broader overview of specialist women's services for women who have experienced violence, and their children. Up to now the WAVE Report on specialist women's support services has focussed on women's helplines and women's shelters. This report includes for the first time more detailed information on women's centres, such as counselling centres, rape crisis centres, sexual assault and other types of centres providing non-residential support to women survivors of gender-based violence and their children. Most specialist services are run by women's NGOs committed to combating violence against women and run a comprehensive service. This often includes prevention work as well as running support services and providing training to professionals in more general services, like police and health workers and consultancy to other professionals in contact with survivors and their children. This report additionally provides information on general services in European countries, which are also used by women seeking help, as these are often an invaluable part of the service landscape providing front line emergency assistance. Ideally, these services should be able to refer women to specialist services offering a gender specific analysis and a human rights approach to the problem of gender based violence.<sup>2</sup> The report makes visible the range of work done by women's organisations which not only provide empowering services to survivors, but also engage in awareness raising, prevention activities and training. Women's NGOs are important actors for change and the report also aims to examine if governments "recognise, encourage and support" the work of women's NGOs and establish "effective co-operation with them", as foreseen by the Istanbul Convention in Article 9 (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 8).

The WAVE Report presents the findings and provides detailed recommendations relating to the first three core services outlined above namely national women's helplines (Chapter 4), women's shelters (Chapter 5) and women's centres (Chapter 6). As mentioned above, we have expanded our data this year to include not only information on specialist services for women but also to indicate the broader general service provision. These general services are often a first contact point for women who have experienced gender based violence and have an important role in assisting victims. In countries where specialist women's support services do not yet exist or not in adequate numbers, these general services have an even more important role in supporting women survivors of violence. However, it is not enough to have general services; women victims of gender-based violence need to be referred to appropriate specialist women's services (Istanbul Convention Article 20).

Following these three chapters which outline core service provision we have included a more narrative account of women's journeys to support services, to provide a picture not only of the individual measures which exist in a country, but also how measures are connected and coordinated and whether they serve the needs of survivors (Chapter 7). In this chapter WAVE wanted to demonstrate the similarities and differences between countries and highlight some issues on which training and campaigning strat-

<sup>2</sup> See Istanbul Convention Articles 20 and 22 (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 13).

egies could focus. In Chapter 8, issues pertinent to the development of national women's networks are discussed in more detail. This is seen as a major element in strengthening national policies to combat gender violence and in improving fiscal support for specialist support services for women and their children.

Chapters 9 and 10 address the very important but nevertheless often "additional" tasks of prevention and training work for which many women's specialist services also manage to find time, despite the fact that they seldom receive funding for these activities. It is a measure of how important training and prevention work is to women's NGOs that they invest time and energy in these activities supplementary to the time consuming and demanding task of running support services for women victims. It is hoped that providing examples of prevention and training events will encourage and inspire more activities. Most importantly, by making this work more visible, the importance of adequately funding prevention and training will be made clear to national and local governments.

The last three chapters focus on Government policy, funding and recognition of the work of women's NGOs (Chapter 11), emergency barring orders (Chapter 12) and collaboration on work with perpetrator programmes (Chapter 13). These three chapters demonstrate the need for improved data collection on a national level and also lobbying work to encourage governments to not only improve funding for women's NGOs but to also make information on funding transparent. At this point WAVE is pleased to report that in the last year funding has been granted to elaborate and implement common criteria for data collection. The first phase, a report which maps which data is collected by whom (MAPPING: Women's Service user statistics in Europe, WAVE, 2016), has been completed and work has begun on the second phase of establishing uniform data collection standards. A final phase of implementing such standards will be undertaken in 2017.

Each chapter in this WAVE Report has been presented with graphics where useful. A complete set of tables which give full information for all 46 countries are included towards the end of the report. Following the tables the methodology for the study is set out. The questionnaire used for data gathering is available on the WAVE website <http://www.wave-network.org>.

The appendices include information on WAVE membership and national helplines and WAVE standards for specialist women's support services. In addition a reference list and a brief glossary of main terms is also provided. The report concludes with WAVE contact details and an invitation to use the WAVE Database and WAVE information centre.

In going into new areas we have, in some cases, only been able to provide partial base line data and illuminate some areas which require further exploration. Readers are invited to visit the WAVE website to keep up to date with developments through the WAVE Database as well as publications such as Factsheets and Thematic Papers, among others, which are freely available at <http://www.wave-network.org>. This year country profiles, which provide specific information on all 46 individual countries and their specialist service landscape for women who have experienced gender-based violence, are not included in this report for reasons of space. Readers are invited to visit the WAVE website where this information is also available.