



European Commission
Justice

Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Awareness raising activities to fight violence against women and girls

United Kingdom, 7-8 February 2012

Comments paper - Croatia

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Awareness raising activities to fight violence against women and girls

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1. Introduction

This Comments paper aims to present Croatian general context concerning violence against women and girls (VAWG), current policy debate relevant for Croatia as well as transferability issues of the good practices of the United Kingdom and Greece to Croatia.

1.1. Background and general context of Croatia

Croatia is a country in southern Europe, with a total population of 4 429 078 inhabitants¹, 2 292 847 of whom are women (51.8%). Of the total number of women, about 1.3 million are adults (older than 18).

Croatia is a country in transition, in which war has raged until 16 years ago, and left behind a devastated country with many problems, ranging from economic to the problems associated with high tolerance to all forms of violence, including violence against women.

The average salary in Croatia in October 2011 was 720 EUR, and the registered unemployment rate was 17.9%². Women in general have 10.6%³ lower salaries than men. Today, women comprise 22.5% members of the Croatian Parliament and out of 20 ministries, four are led by women⁴.

1.2. Violence against women and girls in Croatia

1.2.1. Prevalence of violence against women

Violence against women has become an important issue only in the last 15 years, with significant changes occurring since then. Until then, there was no research on the prevalence of violence, and police statistics were not gender sensitive, and did not control for a number of important indicators, such as the relationship between victim and perpetrator. Today we have official police data on the number of reported cases of domestic violence and sexual violence, and the first research on the prevalence of violence against women.

According to official police data, according to the **Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence** (2003) each year between 11500 and 17500 offenders were

¹ Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2011) „Woman and men in Croatia 2011“.

² Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2012) <http://www.dzs.hr/>

³ Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2011) „Woman and men in Croatia 2011“.

⁴ Radio Free Europe (January 8 2011) „Political scene/scena in Croatia does not belong to women“.

reported. Number of victims of such acts was between 14500 and 22200, of which women were victims in 64% to 71% of cases, depending on the year (Mamula, 2010).

In regards to the violent behaviour in the family, in accordance with the Criminal Code (Art. 215A), the official police data shows that each year between 1400 and 2000 offenses were reported, causing harm to 1500 to 2100 persons, of which women were victims in 75% to 80% of cases (Mamula, 2010).

In the past 10 years, 305 women were **killed** (between 22 and 47 per year). Their current and/or former partners/husbands were the murderers in 20% to as many as 65% of cases (Mamula, 2010).

Data on reported **sexual violence** to the police in Croatia show that from 2000 until 2010 there were a total of 6625 reported crimes, between 461 and 761 cases per year. The most frequent were lewd acts (34%) rape (15%) and satisfying the lust in front of a child/minor (14%). Women were victims in 86% of cases, the percentages vary from 47% to 99% depending on the offence (e.g. 95% for rape) (Mamula et al., 2011).

According to the available **research**, data shows that the problem of hidden figures is highly present, and that victims often do not report violence. The data of the Autonomous Women's House Zagreb (2003) shows that 21% of women in Croatia experienced physical violence from a partner, 29% of women have a friend who is a victim of violence, and as many as 36% of the women witnessed their mothers being a victim of violence by the father. Research data on the prevalence of sexual violence against women showed that 55% of women experienced unwanted sexual comments, 43% of women experienced unwanted touching of the body, and as many as 17.5% of women experienced rape or attempted rape. Of the total number of women who have experienced violence, only 5% reported it to the police (Mamula, 2006). According to research by the organisation CESI, which was conducted with young people, 70% of youth experienced some form of violence, the most common form being psychological violence (Hodzic, 2007). In regards to violence in schools, girls more often reported experiencing spreading of lies and rumours (49%), verbal abuse because of the physical appearance (31%) and unwanted touching (21%).

1.2.2. Progress in combating violence against women

Positive steps in combating VAWG have been visible in Croatia over the past 15 years, and a significant role in drawing attention to the problem and initiating changes was played by women's nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). There are numerous examples: from establishing the first services for victims, lobbying for the introduction of legislative changes, the organisation of training for public servants of competent bodies and institutions to conducting media campaigns for raising awareness of citizens, and the implementation of the first research on the prevalence of VAW in Croatia.

Organised provision of **assistance and protection for women victims of violence** has begun even before the war, since the establishment of the first SOS line (SOS Tresnjevka, 1988) and shelter (Autonomous Women's House Zagreb, 1990). After that followed a number of counselling services, centre for victims of sexual violence, so that today in Croatia more than 30 women's organisations, and several religious and public institutions that have opened shelters, provide quality assistance and support to women victims of violence. According to available data, at this moment Croatia is still missing a significant number of services for women and girls victims of violence (Appendix 1).

Furthermore, there have been notable significant **legislative changes**, such as a series of changes to the Criminal Code, adoption of the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence (2003), as well as development of the necessary protocols.

Another significant element is the **development of bodies and mechanisms for gender equality**, such as the opening of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, Governmental Office for Gender Equality, and Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality. These bodies enabled development of action plans and policies for combating violence against women.

During the last few years, the **education of representatives of relevant bodies and institutions** that work with women victims of violence has started. I would like to specifically mention the police, who conducted the most numerous and systematic education for their employees.

Since the late 1990s various **public campaigns** have been implemented to educate the public about the problem of VAW, and so far more than 20 have been implemented, which will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

Also, there has been a noticeable progress in the implementation of **research** on the prevalence of VAW, as well as the perception of gender inequality in Croatia.

1.3. Awareness raising activities to fight violence against women and girls in Croatia

The first media campaign aimed at combating VAW was launched by women's NGOs and since then they have continued with this practice, some on national, some on regional levels. In addition to NGOs, state bodies and institutions have also initiated and/or have joined the already existing campaigns, such as the Council of Europe's campaign.

The positive aspect of these campaigns is the significant raise in public awareness about this problem in Croatia. As a participant in these changes since 1995, I can attest to their importance at the level of society towards VAW, although the greatest emphasis was placed primarily on domestic violence.

What can be immediately pointed out as a problem is that most of these campaigns were carried out in a short period of time, did not give strictly defined impact criteria, and the assessment was reduced to the increase in the number of calls, number of media appearances, and information about the problem. Table below lists examples of particularly important campaigns in Croatia, with duration of at least 6 months:

year	organisation/ institution	title	target group	means
1997-2000	Centre for Women War Victims	Stop Violence against Women	public	2 posters, 4 postcards, TV spots, several types of leaflets
2006	Autonomous Women's House Zagreb	Domestic Violence is not a Sport	public	4 posters, TV spot, City- Lights, newspaper ads
2006 - 2008	CESI – Centre for Education Counselling, and Research	Silence is not Golden	youth/ public	3 TV spots, billboards, City -lights, newspaper ads, public panels, display of youth work, trainings for teachers and youth
2006 - 2008	Ministry of Family, War Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity (Campaign of the Council of Europe)	No Excuses for Violence	public	posters, billboards, round tables, brochures
2009 - 2010	Women's Room	STOP Sexual Violence	women/ public	7 different posters, city-lights, numerous ads in daily newspapers, trainings for different professions
2010	Ministry of Interior Affairs and United Nations	For a Life Without Violence	public	TV spots, leaflets, display of youth work, sport activities in schools

2. Policy debate

Despite many positive changes in Croatia in the area of VAWG, many additional steps need to be undertaken. Next priority areas are often the focus of the relevant actors in this field.

One of the main issues is the need for opening a sufficient number of services for work with victims, as well as introducing the criteria for assessing the quality of their work.

Furthermore, it is necessary to establish and improve inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral cooperation. In addition to the ongoing efforts, it is important to take the necessary measures to ensure this cooperation, including NGOs, be more advanced and efficient in terms of protecting the rights of women victims of violence. Closely related to this is the recognition of the role and importance of NGOs in this area as a relevant partner. Another important issue is the need for systematic education of persons from the competent bodies and institutions dealing with women victims of violence. Although there are organised trainings, they are not yet any specific requirements for work with victims, and the majority of faculties still do not include the topic of VAW. The emphasis is mostly on domestic violence, and gender perspective is often lacking.

One of the current issues is the adoption of the Protocol on conduct in cases of sexual violence, which has been developed by the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia, and is awaiting the adoption by the Government in order to become a binding document.

We are also expecting the signing and ratifying of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against women and domestic violence.

Regarding the prevention of VAWG, it is extremely important to continue to work on raising awareness of the public, vulnerable groups and young people. Despite positive steps, we should not forget that Croatia is a patriarchal country in which there exist

many prejudices against women, and VAW is surrounded by numerous myths and prejudices, which are mainly directed at blaming the victim. Closely related to this issue is the importance of introducing systematic prevention programs against VAWG into school curricula. Many civil society organisations are actively working on this task with relevant institutions and bodies. However, for now, these are still mostly the elective extracurricular educational activities, mostly implemented by CSOs.

3. Transferability issues

These examples of public campaigns in the United Kingdom and Greece are certainly valuable and interesting experiences, because they not only include the campaign's objectives and target groups, but the results achieved, and open important questions about the effectiveness of campaigns, which is one of the main issues regarding campaigns in Croatia.

A significant difference compared to most previous campaigns in Croatia is their comprehensiveness visible through the use of different strategies, which is a result not only of the political will, but also considerable financial resources that were invested in them.

One of the main advantages of, for example, the campaign in Greece is not only in terms of the comprehensiveness of the various methods of the campaign, but also focus on different target groups according to age and language. For instance, one of the major problems of campaigns in Croatia is that they are made exclusively in the Croatian language. In this way, some specific groups, such as the Roma, remain excluded. It is extremely important for campaigns in Croatia to include diverse groups, especially the marginalised, such as members of ethnic minorities, women with disabilities, and persons experiencing multiple forms of discrimination.

The next important element present in the above example is the inclusion of the deconstruction of gender stereotypes, which is underlying the VAWG and the promotion of gender equality. Unfortunately, except for NGOs, relating the causes of VAWG and gender inequality is still very rare. A large number of campaigns are dedicated to combating domestic violence in which the gender perspective is not in the focus, and often the main focus turns to the question of protecting children. I believe that in the Croatian context it is extremely important to emphasise the very approach of the protection of human rights and address VAW as one of the most blatant examples of violations of women's human rights.

As an important issue for the transfer of experience, I would like to point out the above-mentioned issue of the evaluation of implemented campaigns. From these examples, it is obvious that this is still an area that carries a number of problems, bearing in mind clear indicators for the assessment of performance and impact of campaigns.

Furthermore, from these examples, it is obvious that these are not short-term campaigns that last only for a short period of time (e.g. several months), but span over a longer period of time and consist of significant number of different activities, which is also an important message and experience.

Examples from both countries also include strategies that are innovative, creative, including campaigns aimed at young men and opening the questions of deconstruction of masculinity.

All these examples of good practice and experience of campaigns in the UK and Greece may serve as important starting points for developing and implementing new campaigns for combating VAW in Croatia.

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Appendix 1.

Council of Europe recommendations on number of needed services for women victims of violence, current number of services and number of services still missing in Croatia (Mamula, 2011).

Type of service	Recommendation	NGO	Public service	Missing
Shelter	1 054 places (woman + children on 10000 citizens)	11 (211 places)	8 (131 places)	712
SOS line	1 for all forms of violence against women (7 days, 24 hours)	-	-	1
Rape crisis centre	11 (1 on 200000 women)	1	-	10
Legal counselling	46 (1 on 50000 women)	22	?	?
Long term counselling	46 (1 on 50000 women)	30	?	?