



ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY IN TIMES OF COVID-19

ONLINE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

26-27 NOVEMBER 2020

The regional conference is organized by the Center of Women's Rights from Bosnia and Herzegovina, within the regional programme on ending violence against women "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds," funded by the European Union.



REPORT AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

„Access to justice for women victims and survivors of violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey in times of COVID-19”

26-27 November, 2020

Regional Conference „Access to justice for women victims and survivors of violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey in times of COVID-19” is a result of two-years long work on the identification of shortcomings, gaps and omissions in the (non) functioning of the protection systems in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey, as well as creating concrete action priorities for each of the countries involved.

The context of pandemic and the use of online space made this event not limited to the presence of professionals and practitioners in the systems of protection of women against violence, but rather it was made available to the general public regardless of where it is located and from which country was interacting.

The Regional Conference aimed to present the key action priorities for ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, contained in the officially presented document “Regional Guidelines for Risk Assessment and Risk Management to Prevent the Recurrence and Escalation of Violence against Women”.

The action priorities contain concrete recommendations to states at the regulatory and operational level to address the identified shortcomings and gaps in the protection systems. The priorities are addressed from the perspective of the Declaration of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention on the implementation of convention during the COVID-19 pandemic¹, as well as other relevant international documents, standards and guidelines developed since the onset of pandemic.

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/declaration-committee-of-the-parties-to-ic-covid-/16809e33c6>

Justice Delayed is Justice Denied

„With the world in the lockdown against COVID-19, we all know that the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls has also broken out.

We all have seen the rule of law institutions suffering many delays in responding more effectively to the problem of violence against women. We all know and are aware that the justice delayed is justice denied. We know that the rule of law and access to justice remain the foundations through which women are able to uphold for their rights. And yet today they are at risk that everything will come too late.

This Conference is extremely important, especially in the context of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global response in the context of COVID-19 did not sufficiently take into account the needs, concerns and priorities of women and girls.

COVID-19 exposed very concretely the threats the inequalities and factions that exist in our society long before the pandemic. But it has also opened the door for lot of opportunities for change, for us to work together to change ending violence against women and girls, to promote collectively access to justice for women and girls.“ - Blerta Cela, UN Women Deputy Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia

Regional Conference comes timely and its topic is relevant and directly contributes to the realization of the EU's new Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III)

“This Conference is a unique space for exchange of experiences, to verify good practices and also identify obstacles and I hope that it will allow to learn from the

best approaches to find the ways to overcome these obstacles. Actions that we are hoping to see is that we want to see this access to justice being reached by creating a enabling environment for women's access to justice, reforming the legal norms that discriminate against women, and also creating effective gender responsive justice institutions and reforming institutions providing capacity building and empowering women directly, informing them about their rights so that they can claim and exercise their rights. There has been a lot of progress, but there are significant gaps and limitations left in the protection systems. Although all IPA beneficiaries have made a lot of efforts and reached a certain level to improve the state of women and to promote gender equality, there is still a lot of work to be done.“ - Liselotte Isaksson, Head of Civil Society and Social Inclusion, Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Western Balkans, European Commission

Women's organizations and civil society organizations key players in comprehensive action for ending violence against women

„It is clear that we have to further deepen cooperation between governmental and non-governmental actors in this area, we need to build capacities, we need to build skills, and we need to bring together all stakeholders that are involved in the protection chain of victims and survivors of violence.

I want to underline the importance of civil society organizations because they have been the main drivers for the development of all national gender policies, they are the watch-dogs, they play the crucial role in fighting what we can now see more negative trends of backsliding of gender issues. They are the key players in insisting on justice and reparations and services for women who have suffered violence.“ - Liselotte Isaksson, Head of Civil Society and Social

Inclusion, Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Western Balkans, European Commission

„We are very privileged to partner with the Center of Women’s Rights that has proved to be an incredible partner in the joint challenge of putting together forward recommendations on women’s access to justice and the protection in the region, bringing all the parties in this protection justice chain together.

16 Days of Activism and this Regional Conference is our chance to work collectively to accelerate our steps so that together we can ensure justice for women and girls.“ - Blerta Cela, UN Women Deputy Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia

Regional Guidelines are a path for taking actions on ending violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey

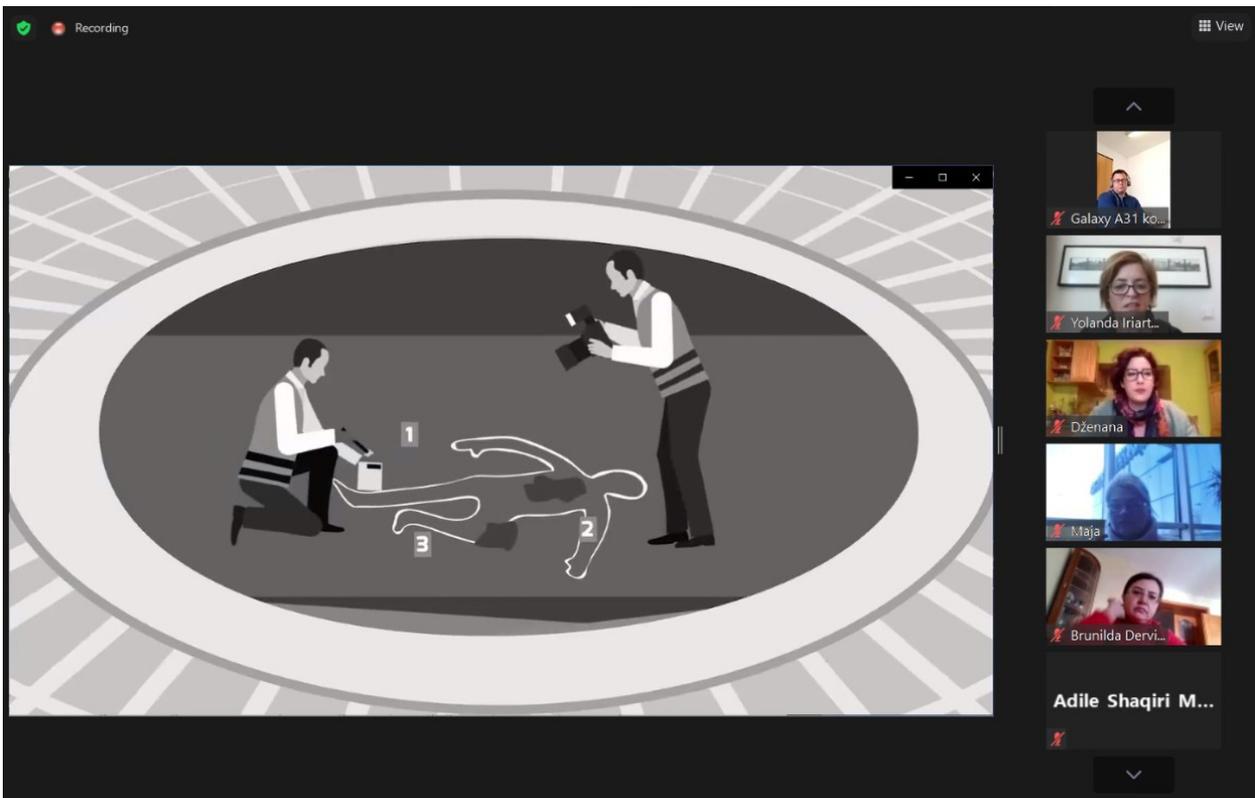
Conference was a space for official presentation of the document of **“Regional Guidelines for Risk Assessment and Risk Management to prevent the recurrence and escalation of violence against women“**, developed as a result of a series of roundtables and trainings held by the Center of Women’s Rights across the

Western Balkans and Turkey over the last 20 months. The guidelines represent and respond to needs within each of the countries. They serve as a basis for further cooperation and work in the region.

The Conference premiered documentary series **“Justice for Women“**, featuring 14 in-depth real stories from the Integral Regional Study **“Is justice failing women survivors of violence? - Action-oriented recommendations for effective prevention, protection and prosecution in the Western Balkans and Turkey“**, showcasing real cases of women victims of violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey who justice has failed.

Regardless of the situation we are in, the presentation of a regional perspective paved the way for more effective direction of actions to overcome obstacles and shortcomings in the system of protection of women against violence

„I think that the Conference fully responded to the task of connecting, sharing experiences, both yours and ours. This is one of the steps that will certainly contribute to the goal of better solving the problems on this topic. - Tomislav Kljajić, Judge, Bosnia and Herzegovina



“The idea of regional networking is very good because the problems of violence and protection from violence are similar. It is very important to see that it is not just one country individually that is in trouble, to perceive common problems and to further develop action plans together.” - Olivera Pejak Prokeš, Judge, Serbia

“When it comes to violence against women, which is a global problem worldwide, cooperation and every regional guideline presented at the Regional Conference can provide a better course of action to overcome obstacles and shortcomings in the system of protection of women against domestic violence.” - Maja Živaljević, Judge, Montenegro

„First of all, I would like to thank you for the opportunity you gave us by organizing such event where we could share our experiences and work together. I have to be honest, women in the Balkans must have the opportunity to exercise their rights because their rights are severely violated. Initiative like this one will make a major contribution to the protection of women’s rights at a much higher level and at the same time will increase sensibility. This will shed light on cases of violence against women, the public will be informed. We expect that in this way the protection of women against violence will increase, where regional cooperation is something very important for our further work.” - Fatime Dermaku, Judge, Kosovo

„The Regional Conference was very useful for all countries in the region. We had the opportunity to hear other experiences and exchange views on legal procedures in protecting women against domestic violence. We also had the opportunity to see the shortcomings in the systems of protection of women against violence, but also to see the possibilities to change the same things in the protection of women against violence.” - Aleksandra Arsovska, President of the Center for Social Work, North Macedonia

„I think that the main benefit of this Regional Conferences is that we learn from each other, to see that we are not alone in this problem and that each country or each region has its own specifics that can indicate possible solutions to problems in our countries locally, but also how we can act regionally. Therefore, I think that this is the right path towards removal of the obstacles.” - Gökçe Bahar ÖZTÜRK, Judge, Turkey

“It is very important for us to be able to exchange experiences, hear new ideas, cooperate... because we cannot fight domestic violence and violence against women in general only in one country. We have to fight together with neighbors, with friends, we have to find different opportunities to reduce violence to a minimum and give our best.” - Gulhan ÖZKOÇ, Expert at the Institution of Ombudsman, Turkey

Conference participants confirmed that the Regional Guidelines are a good tool for a coordinated response of institutions in the protection system in any circumstances, including crisis situations

“It is now important to ensure that these Guidelines are communicated to all institutions in the countries of the region covered by these guidelines, both the legislative and the executive branch, the relevant ministries. It is very important to use this and make a plan. Whether to make a regional plan to ensure the implementation of the Guidelines through the establishment of a coordinating body, or for each country separately, with monitoring and coordination at the regional level. Now it really remains for those who have the capacity to ensure further implementation of the results of the Guidelines. Here, I primarily refer to the UN Woman and the Center for Women’s Rights, but of course also to the partner organizations from the region that were involved in the implementation of this project.” - Jasminka Džumhur, Ombudsperson, Bosnia and Herzegovina

“The Guidelines are great. For that reason, I did not speak, I just listened during the Conference. I was delighted with how everything was recognized, what it is that we will do in the future to enable people to deal professionally with this issue. I think that if those who organize the institutions listen to the Guidelines and if there are funds to do that, then it would mean a larger number of people/professionals who would not only deal with firefighting, but also prevent the wildfire.” - Edina Mahmutović, Coordinator for Psychological Affairs at the Center for Social Work, Bosnia and Herzegovina

“Great input and a great starting point to have Regional Guidelines in general. I am very pleased because at the regional level we are working to combat domestic violence.” - Dina Knežević, Advisor to the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms, Montenegro

„This document is more than welcomed and we look forward to receiving it. Our goal is to present to all responsible institutions the practice from the region, which we have formulated in one document, which we hope will be of great use to all of us.” - Fatime Dermaku, Judge, Kosovo

We thank UN Women and the EU for recognizing the problems that women faced even before the pandemic and who have together with us created the best possible plan to ensure that in this crisis situation, and in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, we do not neglect any women and girls who suffer violence, or is at risk of violence.

We owe special gratitude to UN Women who recognized local strengths and capacity within the entire region, and provided wholehearted support in the implementation of project activities and organization of this Conference and I believe that we will have the opportunity to change the reality around us in the coming period, especially when it comes to improving the position of women victims and survivors of violence.

We also thank all the participants who showed their commitment to the process of improving access to justice for women victims and survivors of violence in the Western Balkans and Turkey, and who did not allow the process to be stopped by the COVID-19 pandemic.

All stakeholders agreed with the content of the Regional Guidelines and consider them applicable in their countries.

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