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**Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls  
in the Europe and Central Asia region**

### **Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls in the Europe and Central Asia region**

#### **Note by the United Nations Children's Fund<sup>1</sup>**

##### *Summary*

The Economic and Social Council in its Resolution 2013/18 encouraged the United Nations Regional Commissions to undertake a regional review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to assess progress made towards the achievement of the goals of gender equality, development and peace through actions across twelve critical areas. One important area, especially for the member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), is Violence Against Women. It encompasses all issues related to the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls, in line with Strategic Objective D of the Beijing Platform for Action.

This background note provides an overview of the progress towards the Beijing goals on preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls. It focuses on the main trends in the Europe and Central Asia region (ECA), a sub-region within the ECE, with regards to forms of violence, perpetrators and victims. It reviews policies, their implementation and advances in research conducted on this matter, and presents the main challenges to preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls and areas for priority action.

<sup>1</sup> This note has been prepared in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, the United Nations Population Fund, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.



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## I. Introduction

1. This note presents a brief review of the progress towards achieving Strategic Objective D of the Beijing Platform, on preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls, in a sub-set of countries and territories of the ECE region. It has been prepared as a background document to the Beijing+20 regional review meeting for the ECE region, as part of the global 20-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action to be held in March 2015.
2. The note focuses on member States in the Europe and Central Asia region (ECA); it does not cover all the 56 ECE member States. It is based on existing literature and available data. Due to methodological limitations, the note does not contain a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of actions undertaken under each of the three sub-objectives (D1, D2 and D3) by member States and other stakeholders.
3. Part 1 of the note presents and analyses the main trends in the ECA region with regard to violence against women and girls, focusing on forms of violence, perpetrators and victims. Part 2 highlights progress and challenges in implementing actions under strategic objective D. Part 3 suggests priority areas for future action.

## II. Main trends in the ECA region

4. The levels of violence against women and girls throughout ECA are still unacceptably high. For instance, data from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) suggests that in almost all ECA countries for which data is available, women and girls make up more than 80 per cent of victims of sexual assaults.<sup>2</sup>
5. Violence occurs in various forms, in both the private and public spheres, is committed by different perpetrators and puts certain groups of women and girls at an increased risk of victimisation. In order to identify adequate and effective measures to address the remaining challenges that hamper the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls, this section captures the main trends across the ECA region and highlights the latest findings of independent studies regarding forms of violence, perpetrators and victims.

### A. Forms of violence

6. The findings of a 2014 comprehensive survey on violence against women in the 28 members of the European Union (EU), conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)<sup>3</sup>, provide valuable insights into the reality of violence experienced by women and girls. The survey examines different forms of violence and perpetrators, such as partners, non-partners, parents, persons within paid work contexts, etc. The survey found that, on average across all 28 surveyed countries, large shares of women experience different and often multiple types of violence during their lifetime. 31 per cent of women experienced physical violence, 11 per cent sexual violence, 43 per cent

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<sup>2</sup> UNECE (2014), Gender Statistics, Crime and Violence. Female victims as percentage of both sexes. Available at: <http://w3.unece.org/pxweb/database/STAT/30-GE/07-CV/>.

<sup>3</sup> FRA (2014), Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-main-results>.

psychological violence by an intimate partner (controlling, economic violence, blackmail), 18 per cent stalking and 45 – 55 per cent sexual harassment (with notable variances due to differences in perception of the assault). Equally complete and disaggregated regionally comparable data are currently not available in non-EU countries and territories. Nevertheless, the latest figures available<sup>4</sup> for some countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) indicate even higher prevalence rates, especially for psychological partner violence: e.g. 83.2 per cent in Belarus, 60 per cent in Moldova, 58.2 per cent in Albania.

7. Throughout the region, the lack of disaggregated data on forms of violence experienced by girls is of particular concern. A later section on girl victims further explores the issue of gaps in data disaggregated by age, and gives an overview of the different settings in which girls often experience violence, and the perpetrators of violence against girls.

## B. The perpetrators

8. Intimate partner violence remains a persistent problem across the region. According to available statistical data, some ECA countries rank among the highest in terms of prevalence rates of intimate partner violence in a worldwide comparison. For example, 58.3 per cent of women in Tajikistan reported that they experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their partner, 41.9 per cent in Turkey and more than 20 per cent in eleven more ECA countries for which comparable data exist.<sup>5</sup>

9. In Belarus<sup>6</sup>, one of the few countries of the region that has invested in collecting comprehensive data on the issue, 11.8 per cent of women aged 15-49 years have experienced some form of violence (physical, psychological, economic or sexual) from their current or former husbands/partners. Alcohol abuse was cited by survey respondents as the most common cause of violence against women committed by their intimate partners. This view was shared by over three-quarters of women aged 15-49 years and over a half of men of the same age. Jealousy was identified as the second most common cause of domestic violence by both women and men. About one-third of respondents attributed domestic violence to an emotional or psychological disorder in the intimate partner who perpetrated the violence. Adverse socio-economic conditions were named as a cause by one in five women and one in four men.

10. The above-mentioned FRA survey reveals similar prevalence rates in the EU. It highlights that out of all women who have/had a current or previous partner, 22 per cent have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner since the age of 15. Furthermore, one third of victims of physical violence by a previous partner experienced four or more forms of physical violence. Over half of the women who have been victims of sexual violence by their current partner have experienced more than one incident of this abuse. In the case of rape, about one third of victims has experienced six or more incidents by their current partner. Moreover, one in three women has experienced psychologically abusive behaviour by their intimate partner, whereas 43 per cent of women have experienced some form of psychological violence by their partner, including controlling behaviour, economic violence and blackmail. The survey also found clear indications that

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<sup>4</sup> UNFPA (2014), Strengthening Health System Responses to Gender- based Violence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Prevalence studies on intimate partner violence and domestic violence in the EECA region.

<sup>5</sup> UNWOMEN 2012, Violence against Women Prevalence Data: Surveys by Country. Available at: [http://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/vawprevalence\\_matrix\\_june2013.pdf](http://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/vawprevalence_matrix_june2013.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> MICS4 2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_FinalReport\\_2012\\_Belarus\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_FinalReport_2012_Belarus_Eng.pdf).

demonstrate a relationship between a woman's partner's heavy alcohol use and increased violence, especially in intimate relationships. Another, particularly concerning finding of the survey shows that 42 per cent of women who experienced violence by a partner were victimised while they were pregnant. Despite the scarcity of data for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asian (ECCA) countries and territories, the available prevalence rates for psychological violence range between 13.7 per cent (Kazakhstan) and 83.2 per cent (Belarus).

11. In terms of non-partner violence against women, data on perpetrators for the entire ECA Region is extremely scarce. The aforementioned FRA survey appears to be the only comprehensive regional study differentiating between perpetrators. It reveals that one in five women has experienced physical violence by someone other than their partner, out of which 67 per cent of victims said that the perpetrator was male. In the case of sexual violence, 97 per cent of women stated that the perpetrator was male, and almost one in ten victims of sexual violence by a non-partner indicated that more than one perpetrator was involved in the incident.

12. Stalking is an area of concern that has been receiving increased attention in the context of preventing and eliminating violence against women. Again, comparative data on victims of stalking from non-EU countries across the ECA Region are hardly existent. In the EU, prevalence levels of stalking are high, showing that 18 per cent of women have experienced stalking since the age of 15, and one in 10 women has been stalked by her previous partner. Cyberstalking has become an area of particular concern, especially for young women (15-29 years) who, according to the FRA study, were found to be at the highest risk of being victimised.

13. The figures on sexual harassment vary between countries, possibly due to differences in perceptions related to social and cultural values, norms and attitudes concerning gender roles and appropriate interaction between sexes. Nevertheless, estimated prevalence rates of women who have experienced sexual harassment in the EU are between 45 and 55 per cent, which are alarming numbers. In most cases (68 per cent) the perpetrator was unknown, whereas in cases where the perpetrator was known, 32 per cent of victimisation occurred in the employment context (colleague, boss or customer) and in 31 per cent of cases, the perpetrator was a friend or acquaintance.<sup>7</sup>

## C. The victims. Who are they? Where are they?

### 1. Women

14. Women who have been victimised before have a far higher chance of experiencing repeated incidences of violence, especially several forms of intimate partner violence. In terms of age groups, young women aged 18–29 are especially vulnerable to experiencing violence; this risk is disproportionately high for assaults committed via the Internet, such as cyberstalking and cyber-harassment.

15. A recent ILO study highlighted that the following groups of women are at particularly high risk of experiencing violence at work: forced labourers, migrants, domestic workers, health service workers, and sex workers.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, women with a university degree and/or in higher occupational groups appear to be more alert to what constitutes sexual harassment, and may be more prone to report such incidents at work

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<sup>7</sup> In the survey, women were able to identify one or more perpetrator categories, based on their experiences, so the percentages of various perpetrator categories add up to over 100 %.

<sup>8</sup> ILO (2011), Gender-based violence in the world of work: Overview and selected annotated bibliography.

or in general. Recent studies show that up to 75 per cent of women in top management positions state that they have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime.<sup>9</sup>

16. In some countries of the ECA region, women in rural areas are more affected by violence than in urban areas, whereas in other countries, more urbanisation has lead to higher general crime rates which may have contributed to an increase of violence against women in urban areas. In Belarus<sup>10</sup>, for instance, the proportion of women aged 15–49 years who have experienced some form of violence (physical, psychological, economic or sexual) from their current or former husbands/partners rises in rural areas and with the woman's age, and decreases with the increase in the woman's level of education and the wealth of the household.

17. Women from some ethnic communities with traditional harmful practices that also violate their human rights are at extremely high risk of victimisation by such practices (e.g. forced marriage, bride kidnapping, honour killings).

18. Women in humanitarian crises, emergencies, armed conflict or women affected by natural disasters are more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, and often are targeted for it due to their sex and/or status in society. Throughout an emergency, women are at risk of becoming victims of several forms of violence. During the early stages – when communities are disrupted, populations are moving, and systems of protection are not fully in place – most reported incidents are of sexual violence involving female victims and male perpetrators. In acute emergencies, women are at higher risk of sexual violence, which is the most immediate and dangerous type of violence in these settings. Later – in a more stabilised phase and during rehabilitation and recovery – women often become victims of other forms of violence, including different forms of intimate partner violence or honour killings.<sup>11</sup> Due to the complexity of such situations and the urgency of responding to immediate humanitarian needs, violence against women is often underreported. No accurate data from recent years on such incidents in the ECA region exist, which highlights the importance of addressing this risk factor in the case of any emergency.

19. Women in the context of migration form part of an exceptionally vulnerable risk group that is often exposed to several forms of repeated physical and sexual violence at all stages of the migration process.<sup>12</sup> Often, intimate partner violence and/or violence against other family members is an important factor that can motivate migration, especially of women and children.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, migration policies that are gender-blind or discriminatory often have the effect of limiting regular migration channels for women and girls, resulting in their marginalisation to the most vulnerable labour sectors or as dependents of male migrants. These circumstances contribute to women's resorting to migration through smuggling and trafficking, exposing women and girls to violence and abuse during their migration journey, as well as in countries of destination. Because of gender stereotyping, migrant women often find only some types of paid work available to them in the destination country, such as domestic work, which might bring higher risks of experiencing violence.

20. The feminisation of poverty among the elderly population in the ECA region, due, *inter alia*, to different accumulated entitlements by women and men, might increase the

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<sup>9</sup> FRA (2014).

<sup>10</sup> MICS4 2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_FinalReport\\_2012\\_Belarus\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_FinalReport_2012_Belarus_Eng.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> IASC (2005) The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Taskforce on Gender in Humanitarian Assistance, Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings. [https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/GBV%20Guidelines%20\(English\).pdf](https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/GBV%20Guidelines%20(English).pdf).

<sup>12</sup> CRC (2012), 2012 Day of General Discussion. The Rights of All Children in the Context of International Migration. Background Paper. Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/Discussions/2012/2012DGDBackgroundPaper.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> A/HRC/11/7.

risks of victimisation faced by older women. Older women may experience even more barriers to disclosure than younger women, and may therefore be more reluctant to report violence. The abuse might be exacerbated in old age by disability, retirement, changing roles of family members and a number of other factors. There is currently no accurate data to document this phenomenon in the ECA region.

## **2. Girls**

21. Despite increased attention given to violence against girls, regionally comparable data on victimisation of girls remains absent. The majority of gender statistics related to violence in the ECA region refers to female victims, which tends to treat women and girls within the same category without necessarily distinguishing between age groups. In the few cases where data on violence against girls exist, figures mostly refer to reports of women who had become victims of violence as a child. Existing data is not able, therefore, to represent the full scope of the problem.

22. According to the aforementioned FRA study, 35 per cent of women in the EU experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence before the age of 15; however, overall prevalence rates in the entire ECA Region are likely much higher. Regarding the form of violence experienced when they were girls, 12 per cent of women indicated sexual abuse, 27 per cent physical violence, and 10 per cent psychological violence.

23. In terms of perpetrators, women in the survey stated that, as a child, they experienced physical violence in the family by the father and/or the mother or both, whereas perpetrators of sexual violence were mostly male (97 per cent) and often also unknown to the victim.

24. The consequences of sexual abuse for girls are undoubtedly severe in many ways, and it is also worth highlighting that girls who have been victimised in childhood are far more likely to become victims of sexual violence as adults.

### **Violence at home or in the family circle**

25. As described above, girls experience different forms of violence at home or in the family circle. While physical and sexual abuse are certainly the most severe forms of violence experienced by girls, psychological violence is an area of concern in the ECA region for which little data is available.

26. Violent child discipline is widespread in EECCA countries. Data on girls aged 2–14 years who have experienced violent discipline at home, including both psychological aggression and physical punishment, is above 50 per cent in all countries for which data is available, but varies widely, for instance, between 74 per cent (Moldova)<sup>14</sup> and 54.9 per cent (Ukraine)<sup>15</sup>. However, a higher percentage of boys experience this type of discipline across all countries for which comparable data is available.

27. Furthermore, cultural practises observed in some ECA countries (especially in some communities), such as child marriage (see below), forced marriage and bride abductions, put some girls at the highest risk of experiencing several forms of violence in the family – a scenario in which parent perpetrators convert into partners, translating domestic violence into intimate partner violence.

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<sup>14</sup> MICS4 2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/Moldova\\_2012\\_MICS\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/Moldova_2012_MICS_Summary.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> MICS4 2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_Ukraine\\_FinalReport\\_Eng\\_20140415.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_Ukraine_FinalReport_Eng_20140415.pdf).

### **Child marriage**

28. A recent UNFPA study<sup>16</sup> on the practice of child marriage conducted in 14 countries and territories of the EECCA Region found that rates of officially registered marriages involving girls aged 15-19 were highest in Albania (27.2 per cent), Turkey (23 per cent), and Kyrgyzstan (19.1 per cent), and lowest in Kazakhstan (0.9 per cent), Ukraine (2.2 per cent), and Serbia (5.9 per cent). Child marriage is an extremely complex issue, influenced by – and influencing – the social and economic conditions in a given national context, as well as cultural, social, and religious attitudes to gender roles, sexuality, and the appropriate age for childbearing. The practice mainly affects girls, but not all girls face the same risk of becoming child brides, even within countries. Child marriage is also more common among certain population groups. In Serbia, for example, 8 per cent of women overall were married as children; however, the share is more than half (54 per cent) among women in Roma communities.<sup>17</sup>

29. While there has been progress in many countries in raising the age of consent for marriage, forced marriage is still pushing girls and young women into vulnerable situations, including early or unsafe pregnancy and childbirth, exposure to violence and lack of support to leave violent marriages, and reduced opportunities for education and employment. Forced marriage is still a problem in parts of Eastern Europe, among minority groups in Central Europe, and population-wide in Central Asia (e.g. bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan).<sup>18</sup>

### **Violence in schools**

30. Schools are common settings where acts of violence against girls are committed. In this context, it is worth highlighting that the widely believed assumption that mainly girls are victimised does not apply to all school settings. Recent studies indicate that exposure to sexual and physical violence varies between boys and girls depending on the type of violence. However, boys appear to be more frequent perpetrators of sexual and physical violence against girls, as well as against other boys.<sup>19</sup> Similar observations can be made with regards to bullying behaviour, which constitutes a form of psychological violence. Recent studies found that most bullying occurs within same-sex groups (boy-on-boy and girl-on-girl), but when bullying occurs across sex groups it is mostly boys that bully girls. With regards to adult perpetrators of violence against girls in school settings, no accurate data that would allow the verification of any trend in the ECA Region could be identified.

### **Violence in institutions**

31. Children living in residential care institutions or in detention facilities have reported exposure to violence. While some reports suggest that girls are more likely to become victims of sexual and physical violence in either care or detention facilities<sup>20</sup>, there is not enough data to confirm this trend for the entire ECA Region. Nevertheless, in view of an

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<sup>16</sup> UNFPA (2014), Child marriage in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: regional overview. <http://eeca.unfpa.org/publications/child-marriage-eastern-europe-and-central-asia-regional-overview>.

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF (2014), Ending Child Marriage. Progress and Prospects. Available at: [http://data.unicef.org/corecode/uploads/document6/uploaded\\_pdfs/corecode/Child-Marriage-Brochure-7\\_17-HR\\_164.pdf](http://data.unicef.org/corecode/uploads/document6/uploaded_pdfs/corecode/Child-Marriage-Brochure-7_17-HR_164.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> ICPD Beyond 2014 review in the UNECA Region.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. UNICEF (2014), Research results on gender-based violence in schools in Serbia. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media\\_26196.html](http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_26196.html), UNICEF 2013, Assessment of Violence Against Children in School. Available at: <http://www.unicef.kz/files/00000835.pdf?sid=v51pu150q3c6fh0usv13dm39o0>.

<sup>20</sup> A/61/299.

observed over-representation of children with disabilities and Roma children in institutional care in EECCA countries, the risk of experiencing violence in these settings appears to be particularly high for girls of these groups.

#### **Violence in emergencies**

31. During an emergency, child protection systems, including laws, policies, regulations and services across all social sectors, especially social welfare, education, health and security, are weakened and disrupted. Displacement and separation of families and communities place girls at increased risk of violence and abuse. Sexual violence is often used as a method of warfare to brutalise and instil fear in a civilian population.<sup>21</sup>

32. Similar to the previously described context of women in emergencies, the risk of becoming victims of different forms of violence also changes for girls in later emergency phases, as they become vulnerable to victimisation by harmful traditional practices such as forced early marriage.<sup>22</sup> The lack of data on girl victims in emergency situations in the ECA region is likely to be a result of underreporting of such incidents which highlights the importance of addressing this risk factor in the case of any emergency.

#### **Violence in the context of migration and trafficking**

33. Another setting increasing the likelihood of exposure of girls to violence is that of migration. Girls are not only more likely to be among the persons to be trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, forced labour and other forms of exploitation and abuse, they are also often forced to resort to irregular channels to migrate. These circumstances expose more migrant girls to the risk of violence during all stages of the migration process, including physical violence or the request of sexual favours in exchange for protection or for the promise to cross borders.<sup>23</sup>

### **III. Progress and challenges in preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls**

#### **A. Progress**

34. Since the Beijing+15 Regional Review Meeting in 2009, significant progress has been made in the ECA Region regarding the implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), and of Strategic Objective D “Violence against Women” in particular.

35. In this context, the critical complementarity between the CEDAW and the BPA needs to be emphasised, and the legally binding nature of CEDAW for the countries of the ECA Region has to be stressed. As the primary and path-breaking international document on the subject, General Recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee (1992) has provided guidance for the international community, the states and civil society in combating violence against women and domestic violence. As such, it has set the standard for all other documents on the subject, globally and regionally.

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<sup>21</sup> UNICEF (2014), Gender based violence in emergencies. Available at: [http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929\\_58001.html](http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58001.html).

<sup>22</sup> IASC (2005).

<sup>23</sup> A/HRC/11/7.

36. The recent entry into force of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)<sup>24</sup> has marked an important milestone. Together with the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)<sup>25</sup> which entered into force in December 2009, it set legally binding standards that shape the regional human rights framework and obliges States parties to take action aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls. The Istanbul Convention explicitly defines a comprehensive series of acts that come under the umbrella of violence against women. As of today, the Convention has been ratified by 14 European states.

37. Important legislative progress has also been achieved in many countries in the EECCA Region, in particular with regard to the criminalisation of domestic violence. As the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women stressed in one of her latest country visits<sup>26</sup>, one of the most important measures – if not to say prerequisite – by which States can fulfil their due diligence obligation to prevent violence against women and girls is the enactment of laws, policies and programmes which was one of the critical measures outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action.

38. While the progress on efforts in the development of awareness-raising campaigns was positively valued at the Beijing+15 Regional Review Meeting in 2009, it appears that the economic crisis, which hit the ECA Region particularly hard, has had a significant impact on awareness-raising activities, as they were affected by austerity measures and budget cuts. This development is of particular concern as economic hardship and associated factors, such as unemployment, increase the risk of women and girls becoming victims of violence. As such, the awareness of and commitment against such violence is of particular importance during these times. Unfortunately, governmental and civil society actors striving for gender equality, as well as victim support services such as shelters, appear to be more likely to suffer from budget cuts as a result of the economic crisis<sup>27</sup>. This is in line with an observation about the attitude of some decision makers in the ECA Region, according to whom gender equality can wait until other priorities have been achieved – a position that promotes the perpetuation of harmful attitudes and stereotypes related to gender and which continues to hinder efforts to protect the human rights of women and girls and to promote empowerment.<sup>28</sup>

39. At the same time, a series of in-depth research studies conducted by several specialised intergovernmental and civil society organisations has provided new insights into the issue of violence against women and girls, which might allow for a new policy focus in the ECA region.

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<sup>24</sup> Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Available at: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/convention/Convention%20210%20English.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. Available at: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/treaties/Html/201.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> A/HRC/26/38/Add.3.

<sup>27</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (2013), Eliminating Violence against Women in Europe – Intersectoral Approaches And Actions. Conference report Vienna, 25-26 November 2013.

<sup>28</sup> International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Beyond 2014 review in the UNECA Region. Report of the expert meetings.

## B. Challenges

### 1. Social norms

40. Despite the progress made on public condemnation of violence against women and girls over the years, acceptance among many of violence – either within the private sphere of the family or in the public sphere including workplaces and society as a whole – is one of the main challenges to preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls.

41. Attitudes towards violence – especially intimate partner violence – vary across EEECCA countries. The percentage of women 15–49 years who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife in various circumstances ranges from 2.9 per cent in Ukraine<sup>29</sup> (9.4 per cent for men), 2.9 per cent in Serbia<sup>30</sup> (6.6 per cent for men), 4.8 per cent in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>31</sup> (6 per cent for men) and 12.2 per cent in Kazakhstan<sup>32</sup> (16.7 per cent for men). For countries where data is available, men are more likely to agree with one of the reasons to justify beating a wife/partner. In countries for which data is available, the large majority of respondents (primary caregivers) do not believe that children should be physically punished, which is sometimes in contradiction with the above-cited data on child discipline practices. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>33</sup> 49.5 per cent of girls have experienced violent discipline in the household, however only 13.8 per cent of primary caregivers believed that the child needs to be physically punished.

42. Attitudes are a social norm and an important entry point for policy intervention. That is why measures to address the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, which result from social norms – particularly the socialisation of both masculine and feminine identities – are a critical part of eliminating and preventing violence against women.

43. There is a relationship between the attitudes towards violence against women and girls and underreporting that has a direct impact on the accuracy of administrative data collection. In societies where intimate partner violence is considered largely ‘a private matter’, those who complain risk exclusion from the community and are usually dependent on the breadwinner. In such contexts, incidents of violence against women are unlikely to be shared with family and friends, and even more rarely reported to the police.

44. Another challenge on the attitudinal level is a re-emerging conservatism regarding stereotyped and traditional gender norms and roles for women and men in the ECA region. In Belarus<sup>34</sup>, for instance, 12.4 per cent of women and 11.9 per cent of men linked domestic violence against women to stereotypical behaviors occurring at the societal level and in individual families. This societal shift contributes to reinforcing the concept of a male’s entitlement to be aggressive and act as the power holder and decision maker. Strict gender roles also reinforce existing systemic barriers for women and girls to access services and obtain remedies.

### 2. Social and child protection systems

45. Despite the described legal advances in many ECA countries, great efforts are still needed in order to translate legislations from *de jure* into *de facto* measures that will measurably and sustainably impact prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. Moreover, policy measures would be sounder, and hence more effective, if they

<sup>29</sup> MICS4 2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_Ukraine\\_FinalReport\\_Eng\\_20140415.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_Ukraine_FinalReport_Eng_20140415.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> MICS 2010 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_Serbia\\_FinalReport\\_2010\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_Serbia_FinalReport_2010_Eng.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> MICS4 2011-2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_BiH\\_FinalReport\\_2011-12\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_BiH_FinalReport_2011-12_Eng.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> MICS4 2010-2011 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/Kazakhstan\\_MICS4\\_Final\\_Report\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/Kazakhstan_MICS4_Final_Report_Eng.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> MICS4 2011-2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_BiH\\_FinalReport\\_2011-12\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_BiH_FinalReport_2011-12_Eng.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> MICS4 2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_FinalReport\\_2012\\_Belarus\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_FinalReport_2012_Belarus_Eng.pdf).

were based on a comprehensive gender analysis that includes the situation of men and boys as both victims and perpetrators.<sup>35</sup>

46. According to CEDAW concluding observations for many ECA countries, awareness of, agreement with and willingness to implement existing laws is a major challenge among several professionals in the law enforcement field (police, judges). Lack of training of law enforcement personnel is a weakness in many countries.

47. Members of several other professions (health professionals, teachers, employers as well as employers' organisations and workers' organisations including trade unions) can also play a key role in detecting, preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls. However, they are often not aware of existing legislation, do not know how to (re)act adequately, or are not convinced that their action could help prevent violence. Moreover, inter-ministerial regulations, protocols, guidelines, instructions, directives and standards, including standardised forms developed in collaboration with police, prosecutors, judges, the health sector and the education sector, for the comprehensive, timely and coordinated response to and protection of the survivors, are largely absent.

48. Lack of shelter for female victims of violence is a major problem in many EECCA countries; the number and quality of women's centres for survivors of sexual violence is still insufficient in many countries.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, lack of shelter or safe accommodation for victims may constitute another reason for not reporting intimate partner violence.

### **3. Data collection and management**

49. Data collection on violence against women and girls, both at administrative and population level, remains a major challenge in the ECA region. Slow progress is related to the inconsistency in definitions of different forms of violence experienced by women and girls, the lack of disaggregation by age or sex (girls and boys in the case of violence against children), and the frequency of survey data and national studies. Lack of implementation of relevant legislation and the aforementioned underreporting further contribute to the inaccuracy of the administrative data that is being collected.

50. Without a comprehensive understanding of the scope of the violence, including the voices and experience of women and girls, men and boys it remains difficult to establish effective measures to prevent and eradicate the different forms of violence, and provide appropriate support to female victims of all ages, and strategies to address underlying reasons of perpetrators to carry out such violence.

### **4. Access to justice**

51. Violence against women and girls is an extensive but widely under-reported human rights violation across the ECA region. For instance, in the EU, only 14 per cent of victims of partner violence and 13 per cent of victims of non-partner violence reported the most serious incidents to the police. Lack of trust in state institutions is often mentioned as the reason for not reporting by victims, while feelings of shame or embarrassment may be responsible for a quarter of the unreported cases.

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<sup>35</sup> ILO (2011), Gender-based violence in the world of work: Overview and selected annotated bibliography.

<sup>36</sup> WAVE (2014) Women Against Violence Europe. Country Report 2013. Available at: <http://www.wave-network.org/sites/default/files/WAVE%20Country%20Report%202013%20Final%20Version.pdf>.

52. In Belarus<sup>37</sup>, for instance, only 39.7 per cent of women age 15-49 years who experienced domestic violence by current or former husbands/partners turned to someone for help, while 60 per cent never sought help. This includes not only the professional assistance of psychologists, law enforcement officers, medical professionals, but also the advice and support from relatives and friends. Among women who experienced domestic violence and did not seek help, 35.9 per cent did not want anyone to learn about the misfortune and one in ten women did not believe they would be given help.

53. Additionally, awareness of their rights determines the access to justice for women and girls. In the EU, only 50 per cent of women are aware of existing legislation concerning protection and prevention of violence against women in their countries. It may be assumed that awareness levels in other countries of the ECA region are similar or even less. Furthermore, 19 per cent of women in the EU are not aware of any support services for victims of violence. Given the above-mentioned scarcity or even inexistence of such services in many countries, figures in EECCA countries and territories are likely to be considerably higher.

54. Moreover, justice systems are generally not adapted to hearing women and girls victims of violence, which contributes to deterring complaints and reporting.<sup>38</sup>

#### **IV. Priority actions**

55. Based on the findings of this review, the following priority actions for preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls in the ECA region remain paramount:

(a) Member States of the ECA region should put in place the necessary measures for the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and related concluding observations, and the recommendations from the Universal Periodic Review.

(b) Member States of the ECA region should review existing legislation for the effective prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls, to ensure conformity with international law and international human rights standards.

(c) Member States of the ECA region who are members of the Council of Europe, as well as all eligible States not members of the Council of Europe, that have not yet ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) are encouraged to do so.

(d) Member States of the ECA region should develop national action plans on violence against women and girls. Civil society, private actors and academia working with women, girls, men and boys, victims and perpetrators, and men's groups working to tackle gender-based violence, should participate in the advocacy, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national action plans.

(e) Member States of the ECA region should ensure the effective implementation of legislation and/or action plans by law enforcement staff who have received adequate training, are able to actively prevent violence against women and girls, and can help guarantee access to justice of (potential) victims. Active prevention measures, beyond the intervention in cases when victims resort to protection, should include education and sensitisation of men and boys, and proactive approaches to prevent potential victimisation.

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<sup>37</sup> MICS4 2012 [http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4\\_FinalReport\\_2012\\_Belarus\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/MICS4_FinalReport_2012_Belarus_Eng.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> UNICEF Regional Office for CEEC/CIS, exploratory study on children's equitable access to justice, 2012 (internal document).

(f) Member States of the ECA region should enable justice systems to hear women and girls in a gender-sensitive and child-sensitive manner, and provide timely and fair remedies to victims of violence. Victims of violence should receive legal, social and psychological support when seeking redress in courts.

(g) Member States of the ECA region should review whether current policies in the fields of employment, education (including school and university curricula), health, gender equality and women's empowerment, information and communication technology, the security sector (police), judiciary services, and social protection address the prevention of violence against women and girls in their respective fields.

(h) Member States of the ECA region should ensure funding for, awareness of, and access to adequately-staffed services that protect victims of violence.

(i) Member States of the ECA region should enhance data collection by including different categories of violence and disaggregating by age groups and sex of the victims, and by type of perpetrator. Data collection systems at national level should be unified.

(j) Men and women, boys and girls should be involved and targeted in awareness-raising campaigns that address the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

(k) Special attention should be paid to the needs and vulnerability of certain groups, such as women and girls with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and migrant women and girls. Additional efforts in the form of awareness raising and special targeted services are needed to ensure that these groups can access the needed information, services, protection and rights that can help prevent them from experiencing violence.

(l) Educational campaigns in various forms should target the entire population – including potential victims, perpetrators and key actors that can prevent victimisation – and address social norms that drive and reinforce the use of violence against women, such as harmful traditional practices including forced and/or early marriage or the misconception that intimate partner violence is 'a private matter'.

(m) All private sector actors, including the alcoholic beverages industry, should actively support educational and awareness-raising efforts. Law enforcement personnel should be made aware of and support the systematic collection of data on alcohol abuse with respect to incidents of intimate partner or domestic violence.

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