



To: United Nations - Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

To the attention of: Ms. Dubravka Šimonović – Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences

Vienna, 25th May 2016

Dear Dubravka Šimonović,

While 1 in 3 women in Europe experiences physical or sexual violence, the states women pay taxes to continue to ensure little or no access to specialised support services. Only 15 out of 46 European countries provide a specialised helpline and more than 47,000 women’s shelter places are missing in Europe. Support centres for rape and sexual assault are not available. Discrimination hinders most vulnerable women from accessing support! There is a serious underinvestment in specialised support services in many countries in Europe and as a consequence women have nowhere to turn for adequate help.

This is why the [Women against Violence Europe \(WAVE\) Network](#) launches the European campaign *Step up!* In the next two years, WAVE and its members throughout Europe will be calling on EU authorities, national governments and other interested parties in society to **STEP UP** investments and action to stop violence against women, promoting the rights of survivors of violence and their children to access adequate support and protection throughout Europe. Violence against women and girls remains the most widespread form of human rights violation and it can be fatal - in 2012, an estimated 47% of all homicides of women were committed by a family member or an intimate partner. The FRA Study showed that only a small fraction of women report their most recent serious violent incident and distrust in public institutions is widespread among survivors. The lack of adequate support, the widespread victim-blaming and the overall acceptability of violence against women are responsible for the under-reporting of violence. Despite prohibiting violence in law, most societies continue to cover it up or tacitly condone it, failing to ensure adequate protection and prosecution even when women do report. This is a message for survivors to keep silent. Therefore independent support services advocating for women’s rights are vital to prevent secondary victimization and enable women and their children to seek safety and empowerment for violence-free lives.

STEP UP INVESTMENTS!

Effective protection and support for victims of gender-based violence, and decrease in the prevalence of this widespread human rights violation, will not be reached without investing adequate financial resources. Given the high financial costs on society induced by gender-based violence, investment in tackling the issue pays off!

Figures about the costs of violence in Europe

- The European Added Value Assessment estimates that the annual cost to the EU of gender-based violence against women in 2011 was about EUR 228 billion - 1.8% of EU GDP; (European Parliament, 2014, Para R)
- This amounts to about EUR 450 per European citizen each year; an investment of only 10% of this cost (or EUR 45 per citizen, per year), would significantly contribute to reducing the financial impact of gender-based violence on national budgets, i.e. through investment in prevention of violence.

WAVE calls upon governments to “*allocate appropriate financial and human resources for the adequate implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes*” (Council of Europe, 2012, p.8) to prevent violence against women and their children, as required by the Istanbul Convention.

European institutions play a key role in promoting the urgency of such investments and in shaping policies and funding priorities. Therefore we also call on European institutions to:

- Promote access of all women to independent specialized support services that work from a women’s rights perspective, throughout EU policies and funding programs!
- Actively support good practices in prevention and protection for victims of violence against women by adopting a comprehensive strategy and action plan to end violence against women and address the disparities in access to support across Europe!
- Urge Member States for ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention!

Figures about the lack of access to specialized services (WAVE Report 2015):

- Only 15 out of 46 European countries provide a helpline that runs 24/7 and is free of charge
- More than 47,000 women’s shelter places are missing in Europe, particularly in new EU member states that have joined after 2004 and non-EU member states , according to Council of Europe standards
- Support centres for women and girls victims of rape and sexual assault are not available in most countries
- Access to specialised support services is hindered for many women, including Black and Minority Ethnic (BME), migrant and undocumented migrant, differently-abled, elderly and LGBT women

Women against Violence Europe (WAVE) calls on you to support the *Step up!* Campaign:

- ✓ Send us a statement how you plan to Step Up action and we will publish it!
- ✓ Promote on your website the campaign launch video available here
www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvcu2lZgpNE
- ✓ Show your support by adding The Step Up Twibbon to your Social Media Profile
<http://twibbon.com/Support/step-up-campaign-2>

For more information or to support the *Step up!* Campaign, please the WAVE Office in Vienna - office@wave-network.org, +43 1 548 27 20 For a Blueprint of the campaign please see http://wave-network.org/sites/default/files/WAVE_Blueprint_Final.pdf

Contact in the WAVE office: Rosa Logar, rosa.logar@interventionsstelle-wien.at or Maria.roesslhumer@wave-network.org

Yours sincerely,

Rosa Logar
President of WAVE

Sources:

European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). 2014. Violence against women – an EU-wide survey. Available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2013. Global study on homicide – trends, contexts, data. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf

Women against Violence Europe (WAVE). 2016. WAVE Report 2015 – On the role of specialist women’s support services in Europe. Available at: