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## **UN IN SERBIA: CONTRIBUTION TO PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SERBIA**

### **Summary**

This paper shows activity of UN in Serbia in the field of preventing violence and improving the system of protecting women from violence. The first part considers violence against women in global and local context with review of comparative international studies about prevalence of violence against women in the world, as well as review of researches on national level carried out in the Western Balkan countries. The second part describes the context in which UN acted during the last decade and in what way UN contributed to establishment of institutional approach, which recognizes close bond between gender inequality and violence against women as most usual manifestation of gender discrimination. The third and fourth parts show in what way UN agencies are being connected in order to achieve coordinated support to local subjects in the fighting violence against women from different mandates perspective.

*Key words:* UN in Serbia, Western Balkans countries, violence against women, violence in family

### **1. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – A GLOBAL AND LOCAL ISSUE**

Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions which affects all countries. Based on UN data globally, up to 60 percent of women worldwide experience some form of violence

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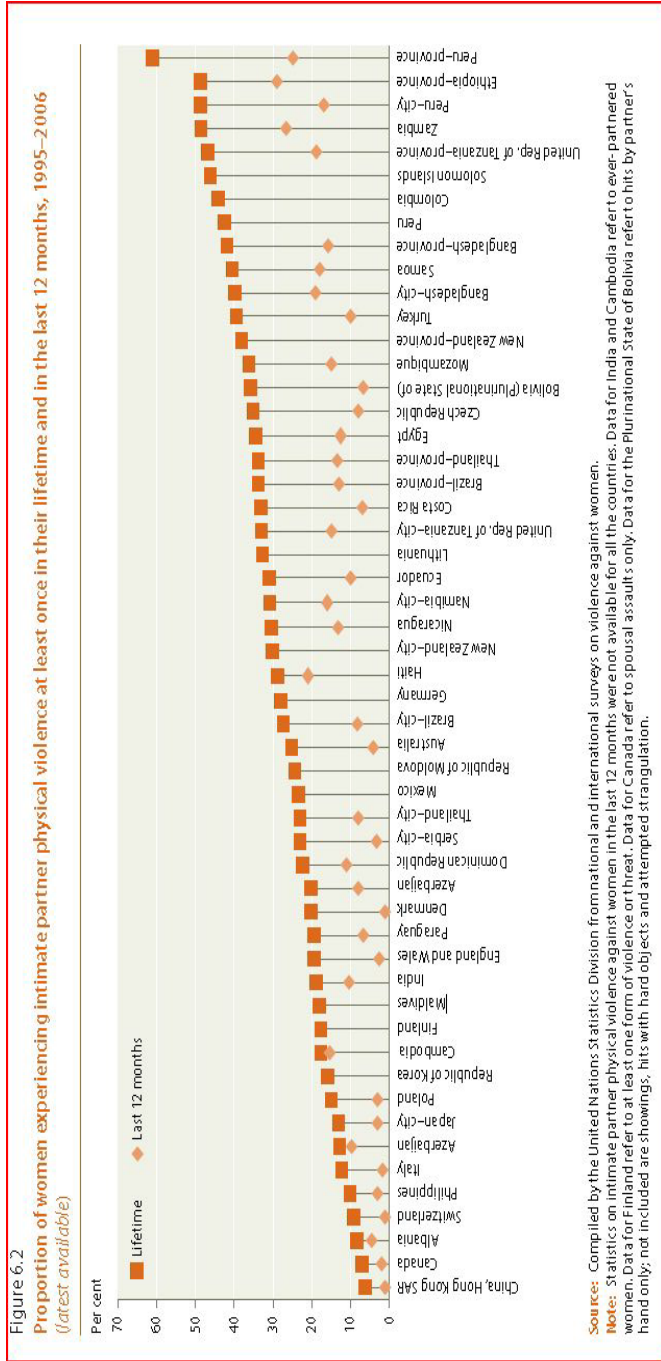
(psychological, physical, economic or sexual) from men in their lifetime, and most of this violence takes place in intimate relationships. Statistics indicate that violence against women and girls is a universal phenomenon, irrespective of income, class and culture. Among women aged between 15 and 44, acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined. Perhaps the most pervasive human rights violation that we know today, violence against women devastates lives, fractures communities, and stalls development.

Even though violence against women is one of the most prevalent forms of human rights violations in the world, it is yet to be researched in a way to provide comparable data across different regions in the world. There are very few researches conducted so far based on the same methodology that would provide basis for the truthful comparison. Namely, the first research of a kind that included Serbia has been done by the World Health Organization in the period 2000-2003 where 10 countries were included in the study (Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand, and the United Republic of Tanzania) . More than 24,000 women were interviewed on that occasion. The similar methodology was applied by the WHO in 2013 to measure the progress made . Data showed that domestic violence/intimate partner violence, in particular, continues to be frighteningly common and accepted as “normal” within too many societies. The proportion of women who had ever suffered physical violence by a male partner ranged from 13% in Japan to 61% in provincial Peru . In Serbia 23% of women were exposed to that form of violence.

EU Agency for Fundamental Rights published in March 2014 a first comparative prevalence study on violence against women in the 28 member countries of the European Union . The study through which 42000 women were interviewed showed that VaW prevalence in EU is worryingly high. This study offers the methodology for mapping various forms of VaW, ranging from domestic violence forms to violence in public sphere such as workplace and provides basis for future comparative studies in the Region of Western Balkan.

The only mean to compare the situation in various countries are the studies based on the same methodology which provides the grounds for comparison. In the Western Balkan region, so far, there were several researches, but the comparative study is yet to come. Thus, the results of different national surveys are not completely comparable, because of the lack of the common methodology and statistical standards. In conclusion, the comparisons of prevalence data for the Western Balkan region countries are actually approximation of the prevalence of vio-

Chart 1 Proportion of women experiencing intimate partner physical violence at least once in their lifetime and in the last 12 months (1995-2006)



lence against women in the countries that conducted national surveys on this issue.

UNDP Serbia has supported the Government to perform a survey in Central Serbia in 2010 and it informed us about very alarming data of 54% of prevalence of violence against women in family and in intimate relationships during their lifetime . Another study in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, commissioned by the Provincial Secretariat for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality (PSEEGE) in 2010 revealed that 56.2% of women have experienced some form of domestic violence in their adult life . Similar study, yet based on different methodology was conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina last year and according to research findings, more than half of the women surveyed (47.2% in BiH, 47.2% in the FBiH and the RS, 47.3%) experienced at least one form of violence from the age of 15 . The research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina relied on the research experience in Serbia, supported by the UN, but still applied slightly different contextualized parameters for that country. In interpreting these results it is necessary to take into account the different methodologies used in these surveys and the fact that definitions of violence and collection methods were not identical.

According to the compilation of data from the national surveys performed by the UN Division for Statistics, the proportion of women exposed to physical violence in their lifetime ranges from 12 per cent in China, Hong Kong SAR and 13 per cent in Azerbaijan to about a half or more in Australia and Mozambique (48 per cent), the Czech Republic (51 per cent) and Zambia (59 per cent). According to data from national and international statistical surveys presented in graph, the percentage of ever-partnered or ever-married women that suffered physical violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner at least once in their lifetime ranges from 6 per cent in China, Hong Kong SAR and 7 per cent in Canada (data refer to spousal assaults only), to over 48 per cent in Zambia, Peru-city<sup>18</sup>, Ethiopia-province and Peru-province.

## **2. CONTEXT OF THE UN INTERVENTION IN SERBIA IN THE FIELD OF PREVENTING AND COMBATING VAW**

Over the past decade, Republic of Serbia has established gender equality mechanisms at all levels of power: legislative, executive and independent monitoring mechanisms, at national, provincial and local levels. When it comes to violence against women (VaW), Serbia has ratified a body of laws and policies to reduce and eliminate gender-based

violence (GBV). The country's priorities are outlined in the 2011 National Strategy for Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women in the Family and in Intimate Partner Relationships (2011-2015). The National Strategy is aligned with the international standards with specific attention devoted to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating VaW and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention), which was ratified by the National Assembly in October 2013. In 2011 General Protocol on Procedures and Cooperation of Institutions, Agencies and Organizations in Situations of Domestic and Partner Relationship Violence against Women (hereinafter: General protocol) was adopted by the Government of Serbia (GoS). The General Protocol introduced the obligation for line ministries to define and adopt the specific procedures in response to committed violence against women in family. The set of laws, general and sectorial protocols as well as the National Action Plan for Protection of Children from Violence have been endorsed in the previous years as well. Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), as example, adopted (in the period from 2007-2011) bylaws and other instruments for the protection of children from violence abuse and neglect, which obligated schools to establish necessary mechanisms for prevention and response to violence. This confirms Government recognition of the importance of the problem as well as government's commitment to end violence against women and girls. While there has been some progress in democratic governance reforms, implementation of agreed upon strategic and policy frameworks is still lagging and change of government can still affect the way policies are implemented. Lack of continuity can negatively affect the policies and practices that are currently in place, and which should be strengthened further.

Since 2005, four UN-supported projects against VaW have been implemented at the national level and at the level of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina: "Schools without Violence" (hereinafter: SwW) lead by the MoESTD and UNICEF (2005-2012); "Combating Sexual and Gender Based Violence" (hereinafter: SGBV) - implemented by the Gender Equality Directorate of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and UNDP with the financial support of the Kingdom of Norway (2009-2012), "Towards a Comprehensive System to End Violence against Women in AP Vojvodina" (hereinafter: EVaW) - implemented by PSEEAGE with the support of UN Trust Fund to EVAW (2009-2012) and "Violence against children in South East Europe" (2011-2013) implemented by UNICEF and EU. Contributing to the government's committed action, these projects represented the driving force in improving the policy and legislative framework to prevent and combat VaW in

the country. They addressed the need to strengthen the institutional response to committed VaW, as well as improve the horizontal and vertical coordination of relevant stakeholders and to create the knowledge basis related to the phenomenon of VaW in Serbia, as well as to raise awareness. The ultimate aim of all these actions was to introduce zero tolerance towards VaW.

Gender equality mechanisms are still relatively recent institutional arrangements. This is reflected in their capacities, both in the numbers of personnel employed and state budgetary resources allocated for the implementation of the strategic documents, and for the enforcement of new laws in the area of women's human rights protection, including addressing the issues related to VAW (both prevention and protection measures).

The severe financial and economic crisis in Serbia has heavily affected the national budget, resulting with reductions in allocation of resources for gender equality mechanisms (GEMs) for preventing and combating violence against women. This increases the threats to implementation of a well-structured policy and legislative framework for prevention and protection of VaW in family and intimate partner relationships. Insufficient funds to ensure the implementation of the anti VaW policies could result with backpedalling related to the existing government commitments and widening of the policy – practice gap, thus creating frustration among key stakeholders including both GEMs and civil society actors, as well as significant negative consequences in the lives of survivors of VAW, due to the weakening of available supports and services.

### **3. UN JOINT PROJECT “INTEGRATED RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SERBIA”**

The overall goal of the project is to create a social and institutional environment that will contribute to reducing Violence against Women (VaW) in Serbia. The project intervenes in two broad areas of activities: prevention and protection. Within the prevention pillar the project works on expanding and improving the quality of existing mechanisms to prevent and end VaW (Outcome 1). The focus is on raising awareness of violence and offering knowledge and skills among key population groups for non-violence behaviours (adolescent boys), rejecting violence (perpetrators) and reporting violence, when it happens (women subjected to violence). Within the protection pillar, the project

aims to expand access, provision and the range of services in response to VaW (Outcome 2). The project assists in implementing standards of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) and in reducing the incidence of VaW.

It is expected that the project will result in a sustainable, integrated response to VaW in Serbia. The existence of firm government commitment to VaW, good capacities of key stakeholders to implement measures to address VaW, strong partnerships between the UN and responsible governmental authorities, as well as civil society, and a proven track record of joint programmes and programming within UNCT Serbia constitute solid preconditions for the successful implementation of the project. There are a number of risks stemming from the current institutional, political and economic environment in the country, but the project is well positioned to address those, especially given the non-partisan position of the UN country team, which is not subject to possible effects of the political changes at different levels of the government.

UNCT Serbia, more specifically three UN agencies - UNDP (as lead agency), UN WOMEN, and UNICEF are the implementing partners of the Joint Project. UN agencies are partnering with the national institutions: the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy (MoLESP), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) and the Provincial Secretariat for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (PSEEGE).

UNDP's role is to contribute to setting the baseline for implementation of the Istanbul Convention, to further support implementation of the National Strategy and General Protocol of Cooperation, and encourage more effective law enforcement in the field of protection of victims.

UNICEF contributes to implementation of the National Strategy and special protocol for protection of children from violence in education institutions, primarily addressing social norms and behaviors of children and youth and working on strengthening education system response to GBV and youth mobilization and participation for ending GBV in the local communities.

UN WOMEN supports development and implementation of the project in Vojvodina, provide technical assistance to the PSEEGE and thematic advice for overall project implementation.

A key implementing partner is the national body responsible for implementation of GBV policies - MoLESP, as it is aimed at directly



contributing to the implementation of the National Strategy, which represents the overall framework of intervention. In addition, the project partners with the provincial gender mechanism –PSEEGE. The project works with the gender equality mechanisms (GEMs) at the national, provincial and local levels, strengthening their capacities to implement the National Strategy. At the same time, in line with the objectives of the Strategy, and its implementation documents (in particular the General Protocol), the project engages a wide range of institutions and organizations involved in the protection of survivors of violence, at the national (MoLESP, MoI, MoJ, MoH, MoESTD) and the local (CSWs, local territorial units of the Police, local healthcare centres, primary and secondary schools, courts and local prosecutors offices) levels. MoESTD is the key partner in changing gender perception and roles. Education system component is implemented directly by the MoESTD, Unit for violence prevention, thus ensuring its full integration and complementarity to the already existing institutional framework. Initiatives and activities to prevent violence against women and girls are addressing the general public and the community at large to educate and raise awareness on VaW. Working through primary and secondary schools, and youth-led organisations the project addresses youth and adolescents, particularly boys, in order to raise awareness on GBV, change stereotypes linked to gender roles and their relation to violence, and strengthen appropriate responses to GBV.

The UN supports public private partnerships to enhance and strengthen policy implementation in order to reduce and eliminate violence against women, especially in service provision, recognizing the role of civil society organizations (CSOs), which are important in providing services to the survivors of violence, thus capitalizing on their expertise and experience in supporting survivors of gender-based violence at the community level. The CSOs SOS helpline service providers are supported and engaged in the project through grants assignment in order to provide 24/7 SOS response mechanism through coordinated action. The existing SOS women's organizations led SOS hotlines are supported and involved in the minimum standards setting for SOS helplines, such as SOS from Vranje, Cultural Center Damad from Novi Pazar, Pešcanik from Kruševac, SOS women center from Novi Sad, Fenomena from Kraljevo, Women for Peace from Leskovac, "...Out of circle" from Belgrade and Novi Sad (target group: women with disabilities), Roma Association - SOS for minority groups women from Novi Bečej and Osvit from Niš (target group: Roma women), Autonomous Women's Centre etc. The project engages with the women's organizations network, such as Women against Violence network.



The outreach component of the JP is strengthened by the partnership with the media house Fund B92, partner organization in the raising awareness component and in creating zero tolerance to VaW social environment. The first web-one-stop-shop-info-center on VaW has been established through this partnership and became a reference point for the issue: [www.sigurnakuca.net](http://www.sigurnakuca.net)

#### **4. RESULTS/ACHIEVEMENTS**

The project built upon and expanded on mechanisms and frameworks that have been set through the three UN-led interventions, mentioned in the previous sections. The project consolidated the results of the previous actions and ensured that sufficient capacity is in place for an integrated approach in service delivery at the local level in order to ensure implementation of the existing policies and measures against VaW.

Key strategies for achieving the results were pursued as follows:

- Clear division of roles in the project implementation;
- Strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, including government at the national, provincial and local levels, as well as local women's NGOs and private sector (e.g. Fund B92);
- Ensuring full government ownership over the project activities through continuous coordination and in part national implementation modality;
- Strong outreach component based on joint project identity and common goal in creating social environment that condemns VaW.

The project built local level service providers capacities in Central Serbia and in Vojvodina to better deliver “integrated service delivery model” through following actions:

- by providing specialized trainings at the local level and developing capacities of actors working on different aspects of violence against women (police, healthcare, judiciary, social workers, CSOs) on multisectoral cooperation tools and modalities and by advocating for the commitment of local authorities to address gender based violence in a comprehensive manner and in accordance with the national strategy and to ensure the necessary framework for the successful implementation of the set of protocols. Only in 2013 the joint project worked in 15 towns in Central Serbia and AP Vojvodina and trained more than 500 professional service providers;

- by supporting specialist service providers (women NGOs) in a process of institutional recognition of their expertise (through the project MoLESP involved 10 women NGOs in drafting the minimum standards for SOS helpline service to women survivors of violence) and by supporting the process of establishing a unique SOS hotline as a 24/7 service for victims of violence. The project supports 11 SOS helpline service providers for women survivors of violence.

In addition, through cooperation with Police Academy and Judicial Academy, over 600 police officers, judges and prosecutors were trained to become better able to address the survivor's needs and use more efficiently and effectively the existing policy and legislative framework.

Vojvodina's government initiated the new policy drafting cycle in preventing and combating VaW, which will integrate the lessons learnt from this joint initiative and will build on the results of the previous Strategy for Protection against Domestic Violence and Other Forms of Gender Based Violence in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (2008-2012).

All components related to the education system have been integrated in the system. Baseline study has been conducted involving children and youth from elementary to high schools in mapping their perception of gender norms, gender based violence and perception of security related to gender specific parameters. Regional units of the MoE (education advisors, focal points from violence prevention) and 60 experts from the network of professionals active in violence prevention in the education system have been involved in the process of setting mechanisms for monitoring and provision of relevant support to schools re GBV, thus providing regular support through already existing mechanisms of support. Education packages for professional development of teachers are accredited and manuals for their implementation will be widely available. Schools are required to annually prepare plans for violence prevention and annual reports, and project is working on ensuring that reducing GBV becomes a continuous part of the school plans. Local youth community partners have been selected to enable their continuous work on these issues in the future. As education on GBV became integral part of the "School without violence" programme its integration within the system will be assured through it. The sustainability is dependent on the funds from local donations.

The interventions in the area of preventing and combating violence against women imply involvement of a wide range of stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sector. As for the public

sector the crucial aspect of success lies in active involvement of different sectors: social protection, healthcare, education, judiciary, police forces and civil society. For this reason the project is partnering with numerous line ministries in the project implementation: Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Policy (MoLESP) as the main national partner with the leading role in this field in the Government, but also the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD). In the same time, in order to assure the vertical coordination within the sectors, the project is partnering with the key gender equality mechanism at the provincial level – Provincial Secretariat for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality (PSEEGE), as well as with the numerous local level gender equality mechanisms (GEMs). The civil society sector plays an important role in this field, giving that the only specialist service providers in the country are women NGOs active in this field over past two decades. Thus, the CSOs are integral part of the protection system, as recognized by the recently ratified Istanbul convention. Over the past three years there is the evidence of increased media attention, as demonstrated by regular UN quantitative thematic media analysis and the recent qualitative media analysis published within the project. The private sector is also increasingly expressing the interest in the topic within their corporate social responsibility programmes. Thus, all of these stakeholders have been mobilized and included in the project implementation which required extensive coordination and mediation of different stakeholders' interests. UNCT is in a unique position for providing the neutral ground for cooperation and coordination with such a wide range of interested parties and guarantee the impartiality, integrity and clearly specified vision of the common goal in preventing and eliminating violence against women in the country.

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Database of all service providers (both general and specialist) that operate in Serbia, first time available and accessible to the general public: <http://www.sigurnakuca.net/srzn/index.php>

Femicide – database of stories of femicide in the context of family and intimate partner relationship violence. Stories are based on the media reports on these cases and the database covers all the cases media reported on in the period January 2011 to December 2013: [http://sigurnakuca.net/nasilje\\_nad\\_zenama/femicid/femicid\\_-\\_price\\_o\\_ubijenim\\_zenama.318.html](http://sigurnakuca.net/nasilje_nad_zenama/femicid/femicid_-_price_o_ubijenim_zenama.318.html)

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**УЈЕДИЊЕНЕ НАЦИЈЕ У СРБИЈИ:  
ДОПРИНОС ПРЕВЕНЦИЈИ И БОРБИ ПРОТИВ  
НАСИЉА НАД ЖЕНАМА У СРБИЈИ**

**Резиме**

Уједињене нације у Србији учествују у изградњи институционалног оквира за родну равноправност у земљи дуже од једне деценије. У последњих шест година значајан фокус је стављен на борбу против насиља над женама које је у исто време препрека развоју и најдрастичнији облик манифестације родних неједнакости. Насиље над женама у породици и у интимним партнерским односима је један од најраспрострањенијих облика родне дискриминације против жена, а комплексност заустављања починиоца и обезбеђивање сигурности за жену која је изложена насиљу огледа се у неопходности интервенције институција из различитих надлежности. Обезбеђивање физичке сигурности жртве, њено оснаживање, пружање психосоцијалне подршке, обезбеђивање минималних социо-економских услова за жртву и децу, ефикасно процесуирање случаја и санкционисање починиоца и други поступци су незаобилазне интервенције за заустављање насиља. Постаје очигледно да без координисане акције служби са различитим надлежностима у заједници, које постављају заштиту жртве као основни циљ, није могуће одговорити на потребе жртве. У погледу превенције, није могуће замислити да јавне кампање имају икаквог ефекта ако у исто време не радимо на генерацијама које долазе кроз школске програме, унутар курикуларне и ванкурикуларне активности које деконструишу динамике насиља и родне норме у којима је насиље прихватљив облик понашања. Стварање друштва нулте толеранције за насиље над женама захтева активирање целокупне друштвене заједнице и измену институционалне културе према родно заснованом насиљу. Уједињене нације у Србији, као неутрална страна посвећена унапређивању културе људских права и правичном развоју, својом подршком су у овом процесу показале преданост и спремност да граде и шире партнерство са свим заинтересованим социјалним и институционалним актерима.

*Кључне речи:* Уједињене нације у Србији, земље Западног Балкана, насиље над женама, породично насиље

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\* Овај рад је примљен 26. јануара 2014. године а прихваћен за штампу на састанку Редакције 23. маја 2014. године.