Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Europe and CIS

What are the challenges?

In Europe and the CIS, women and men, girls and boys are at risk of physical, psychological and sexual violence every day. This occurs in spite of countries’ international commitments to the eradication of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Evidence confirms that women and girls constitute the majority of those affected by SGBV, which is both the cause and the result of existing inequalities between women and men.

![Image of young women during Skopje Fashion Week in 2014](image)

During Skopje's Fashion Week in 2014, two young local fashion designers created T-shirts with a powerful message with the support of UNDP —“Let’s end violence against women and girls now!” (UNDP Photo)

Sexual and gender-based violence is a violation of fundamental human rights. It compromises the freedom, autonomy and health of survivors. It affects participation in economic, political and social life, and the well-being of individuals, families, communities and nations.

Violence against women is not random. It is a mechanism to maintain gender inequalities. It reflects and perpetuates harmful social expectations that women be subordinated to men, which then justify the use of violence to control them. Social acceptance of violent behaviour and unbalanced power relations strengthen the preconception that SGBV is not a ‘real’ crime but a family issue, which should be settled within the walls of the family home. Such views reinforce the feeling of shame that often discourages women from seeking formal redress against the perpetrator. Because women are viewed as occupying a lower position in society, they often have fewer resources and opportunities to access justice. In addition, despite the growing number of relevant laws that address SGBV, state institutions still fail to respond to women’s complaints adequately in many cases. Inadequate responses can stem from a lack of procedures showing how to translate legal provisions into practical actions or from personal prejudices and beliefs that prevent officials from putting the rights of survivors first. Finally, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in the Western Balkans are still seeking justice, reparations and recognition 20 years after the war.

**MATTERS OF FACTS**

- As of 2014, approximately 29 percent of women in the ECIS region have suffered sexual or/and intimate partner violence. In Serbia, over 54 percent of women have experienced family violence. In Turkey, 39 percent of married women have experienced physical violence, 15 percent have suffered sexual violence and 44 percent psychological violence.

- Only one in ten women who experience violence seeks help or reports acts of violence to the relevant state institutions.

- Child marriage, which is another form of violence, affects an average of 5.8 percent of girls in Europe and the CIS.1

1 UNFPA, Marrying Too Young, End Child Marriage, 2012.
UNDP Responses

In response to these challenges, UNDP works with national partners to:

- Provide survivors of violence with multi-sector support and services. This support includes specialized and mobile courts, police and legal aid as well as prosecutors and judges. UNDP works to enhance the gender-equality capacities of police officers, prosecutors, judges and lawyers, and to increase the number of women in the justice and security sectors.

- Invest in research, collect sex-disaggregated data to identify underlying drivers of gender inequality and devise future programmes to tackle them.

- Raise public awareness and launch community mobilization campaigns on the prevention of and response to sexual and domestic violence, in order to address gender stereotypes and engage with men and boys.

UNDP in Action

- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNDP increased access to the provision of free legal assistance to women, focusing particularly on the survivors of sexual and domestic violence during the conflict of the 1990s.

- In Croatia, UNDP supported the Government with evidence and legal analysis to draft the law, which entered into force in June 2015, on the rights of victims of sexual violence during the conflict of the 1990s. This is the first law in the region that provides civilian victims of sexual violence in armed conflict with a comprehensive set of reparation measures: medical and psychosocial rehabilitation, financial compensation, legal aid and symbolic acts of reparation. UNDP supports the Ministry of Veterans’ Affairs in the implementation of mechanisms assessing the eligibility criteria for the status of survivors of sexual violence in armed conflict.

- In Moldova, UNDP advocated for the inclusion of gendered aspects of torture into the guidelines for prosecutors investigating torture cases, to ensure that the judiciary fully understands the true range of potential torture suffered by women when assessing prosecutions and supporting victims.

- In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UNDP supported the formulation of the first law on prevention and protection against domestic violence, which came into force in January 2015. To ensure its implementation UNDP engaged with the Academy for the Training of Judges and Public Prosecutors, and successfully advocated for the incorporation of gender equality principles into the curriculum for the judiciary, which was used to train 126 appellate court judges and public prosecutors.

- In Serbia, UNDP supported the development of the Multi-sector Cooperation – Institutional Response to Violence against Women Protocol, adopted in 2013. The protocol strengthens the coordination of state institutions to prevent and eliminate violence against women, and it promotes policies to combat gender-based violence.

- During the regional 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2014, UNDP in Azerbaijan, Albania, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, organized a range of advocacy campaigns and undertook innovative initiatives, such as a fashion week in Skopje in 2014, as part of the Secretary-General UNITE to End Violence Against Women campaign. These activities raised awareness of sexual and domestic violence and emphasized the need to engage men and boys in combating it. In Albania, the campaign focused on local communities and reached out to 600,000 women and girls, men and boys.

* References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

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