



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S  
LOBBY  
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

# STATEMENT

## European Women's Lobby written statement for the 57<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU) and works to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. We very much welcome the fact that the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the priority theme for the 57th session of CSW.

**In a global context of economic and social crisis, where women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing male violence, the EWL calls on CSW to be the moment for reiterating the global commitment to put an end to all forms of VAWG. Women's organisations are expecting UN countries to listen to their voices and expertise and to agree on conclusions building on the existing international human rights instruments while at the same time reinforcing commitments at all levels and providing concrete steps for further action.**

**Moreover, in a context where women's rights are under attack at various levels, due to conservatism and antifeminist agendas, it is of crucial importance that UN member states stand for the strongest vision of a global community free from violence against women. Following the failure of CSW to agree on VAWG in 2003 and in 2012, the UN and its member states cannot afford another situation of compromising over women's human rights and must send a strong and clear sign that we won't achieve peace until we eliminate all forms of VAWG.**

### **VAWG is the most pervasive violation of women's human rights in Europe and worldwide**

VAWG continues to affect the lives of millions of women and girls, and it is the most pervasive violation of women's human rights in Europe and worldwide. The persistence of male VAWG in our societies strongly questions our vision of human security and peace: are we really longing for peace when half of the world's population is experiencing or might experience some form of violence just because they are female?

In Europe, 45% of women have suffered from men's violence and seven women die every day from male domestic violence. In addition, VAWG remains invisible and underestimated as a structural phenomenon because of the lack of official data, both at European level and in some European countries. This lack of knowledge leads to a lack of services protecting women and of activities aiming at preventing VAWG. For example, only five EU Member States comply with the requirement of one place in a safe shelter per 7500 inhabitants.

Impunity of perpetrators is also still high in Europe. Sexual violence in particular has one of the lowest conviction rates of any crime, and high levels of attrition. Such impunity is even more prevalent when the victims are women with specific needs. Women with disabilities are four times more likely to experience sexual violence and face forced sterilisation or abortion; many of them depend on the perpetrator for their daily care or even survival. Migrant women are denied access to shelters; undocumented women can face deportation when reporting facts of male violence. Worldwide, as many as one in four women experience



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physical and/or sexual violence during pregnancy which increases the likelihood of having a miscarriage, still birth and abortion.

## **The urgency of comprehensive policies addressing all forms of VAWG**

VAWG impacts on all society. The cost of domestic violence in the EU is estimated at 16 billion Euros per year, whereas the annual EU member states' budgets for prevention programmes of male violence are 1000 times less. In addition to the direct impacts on individuals and the aggregate costs to society, violence against women and girls shapes women's and girls' place in society. At the same time, inequality between women and men creates the conditions for VAWG and legitimises it.

The recession and austerity measures have a detrimental impact on the prevalence of VAWG and on their ability to escape the violence. Studies and reports show that the current economic context aggravates the unequal power relations between women and men and leads to an increase of domestic/intimate relationship violence, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, and a rise in prostitution and attacks on women affected by prostitution. It also impacts directly on women, as their economic independence is undermined and service providers and public services face funding cuts and cannot therefore provide adequate quality services to women. Women's organisations in Europe struggle with financial survival: funding cuts reached up to 30% in some countries. NGO-led services to support women victims of violence are also threatened by the tendering and marketization of services, which leaves behind and in isolation many women and girls affected by male violence.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has acknowledged that the impact of globalisation and of policies such as deregulation of economies and privatisation of the public sector have tended to reinforce women's economic inequality, especially within marginalised communities. This is why the issue of VAWG should be both addressed through a strong and consistent strategy, and mainstreamed in all policy areas (such as economic, health, family policies etc.), in order to make sure that those also contribute to ending VAWG.

## **Building on international human rights agreements to ensure progress on women's rights**

The UN and member states have a duty to protect women and girls worldwide and cannot afford not to reaffirm their commitment to existing agreed language and instruments and to strong action against all forms of VAWG. This issue cannot be left to national considerations, influenced by a profound and structural movement of antifeminist and conservative ideas. During CSW 2012, some countries and organisations contested the goal of equality between women and men, developed argumentation based on religion, tradition or culture to legitimate violations of women's rights, challenging universal human rights and the global solidarity for women's rights. Such backlash not only puts women's sexual and reproductive rights under pressure in all parts of the world and tries to re-qualify the issue of VAWG as a private issue, but it also directly questions women's participation to political, economic and social life in all countries.

The EWL would like to recall the CSW of the most important international UN instruments, which should be at the core of the 2013 conclusions. CEDAW General Recommendation 19 states that *'Gender-based violence against women is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately, and includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such*



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*acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty*'. The Beijing Platform for Action states that '*Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement*'.

Such internationally agreed human rights instruments make it clear that VAWG is a human rights violation, is a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men, is an obstacle to women's full participation in economic, social, political and cultural life, and has an impact on ALL women and girls on this planet. In Europe, VAWG is an obstacle to the EU Treaty goal of promoting equality between women and men. More importantly, VAWG should be considered as a universal struggle, which cannot tolerate any exception, justification or excuse.

## **We need strong CSW conclusions demanding comprehensive strategies to end VAWG now!**

With its priority theme on VAWG, CSW wants to address more specifically prevention and multisectoral services and responses to victims/survivors. The EWL acknowledges the importance of those two areas, but would like to stress that any improvement in terms of both policies and attitudes should be part of a holistic and integrated strategy. What is referred to as the 6 Ps approach (Policy, Prosecution, Prevention, Protection, service Provision, and Partnership) is the only way to overcome VAWG at all levels, and should therefore be addressed in the 2013 CSW conclusions.

Any action should materialise into a comprehensive *Policy* framework building on the international human rights definitions of VAWG. It should encompass: legally-binding instruments to ensure that all forms of VAWG are addressed in all countries (*Prosecution*) and to strengthen the *Protection* of all women and girls; long-term awareness raising activities and education programmes to foster *Prevention*; substantial and sustainable funding to support service *Providers* and build *Partnership* with NGOs working towards a world free from male VAWG.

At the level of the EU, such requirement should materialize now with the EU taking three main steps: establishing 2015 as the European Year to End VAWG; ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; and delivering an EU strategy to end VAWG, comprising legally-binding instruments, awareness raising activities, and support to and collaboration with women's NGOs and service providers. The EWL hopes to see the EU take a strong stance at CSW, speak one voice to defend a progressive agenda to end VAWG, and lead the work towards ambitious 2013 CSW conclusions.