



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

Challenges in the new millennium for women with disabilities

Madrid, 27-29 June 2012

Cécile Gréboval, EWL Secretary General

First I would like to very much thank CERMI and in particular Ana Pelaez for the invitation, I am delighted to be with you today to express the will of the EWL to work in solidarity with women with disabilities!

The EWL is the biggest coalition of women's organisations in Europe.

Present in 30 European countries and includes organizations representing the diversity of women ex the Women's Committee of the European Disability Forum.

The EWL covers a whole range of areas from women's economic position to the equal representation of women and men in decision-making to violence against women.

Main focus of our activities = EU level advocacy. Violence = one of the areas where we would like to see more common action on the part of the EU

Today's conference is about two major issues of concern for the EWL:

- VAW has been identified as the priority number one by our membership;
- The diversity of needs and situations of women is central in all our work.

The EWL has been calling for years for an EU strategy to address all forms of violence against women.

→ The broader picture of VAW in general makes it obvious that we need much stronger action on the part of national governments, the EU and international institutions to protect women and girls with disabilities.

- I. Why is violence against women an issue of high concern for women's organisations?
- II. Why is it urgent to act?
- III. What is the situation in the EU?
- IV. EWL activities
- V. Conclusions EWL recommendations

I. Why is violence against women an issue of high concern for women's organisations?

1. **VAW is a very serious phenomenon and it affects all women:** seven women die every day from domestic violence; **women with disabilities are four times more likely to experience sexual violence;** undocumented women face deportation when reporting acts of violence against them. VAW is not private or accidental, it is structural!
2. What is shocking however is that **VAW is highly tolerated:** there is a high level of tolerance towards VAW amongst the judicial, the police. Impunity of perpetrators: in France, 205 women are raped every day, only 2% of perpetrators are condemned, only 1 victim out of 10 will report to the police.

3. **VAW is invisible and underestimated:** there is a lack of data at national and EU level, and a lack of info about the sex/gender of the victims. Therefore, without assessment of the phenomenon, there is a lack of services to protect and support women: only 5 EU members states comply with the requirement of 1 place in a safe shelter per 7500 inhabitants. And very few of them are accessible to women and girls with disabilities.

II. Why is it urgent to act?

At the moment, the political context interacts with the economic context for the worse...

1. **Politically, there is a backlash on women's rights which impacts directly on VAW and women's sexual rights.** We identify this backlash in the way VAW is depoliticised, culturalised and trivialized.

- VAW continues to be seen as a private issue, whereas it's a human rights issue: some EU countries don't classify acts of domestic violence as criminal offences (Estonia, Hungary, Italy). Therefore, VAW is not political anymore, it becomes an individual issue.
- Culture and tradition are used as excuses to accept some forms of VAW. What happens regularly at the level of the UN is symptomatic of the current backlash: opposition to fundamental concepts such as inequality between women and men, women's rights, VAW, women's sexual rights.
- VAW is trivialized: pornification of the public sphere through media and advertising, hypersexualisation of girls. The US States with the higher circulation rates of pornographic magazines have the higher rape rates.

→ All these phenomena contribute to the perpetuation of the tolerance for VAW. Our role as NGOs is to raise awareness on the issue of VAW and push for more political will for policy makers to act!

2. The economic crisis and austerity measures have a clear impact on all women:

- The economic situation aggravates tensions within society and households and therefore also the unequal power relations between women and men, and leads to an increase of domestic violence, prostitution and trafficking.
- Women have fewer resources to be safe, to flee, and to protect themselves and their children.
- Impact on public services: legal aid, health, housing benefit..., including of course services for women with disabilities.
- Impact on NGOs: in Hungary, the crisis centres for women victims of violence saw their number of places halved. NGOs see funding cuts: how can they help women?

→ The State is taking less and less responsibility. The crisis is used as an excuse to put back violence against women at the margins of the political agenda.

III. What is the situation in the EU?

1. Women are not equally protected: In our evaluation, only one country addresses all forms of VAW, including prostitution: Sweden. For example, the issue of forced sterilisation of women with disabilities is not identified as a form of violence against women in all countries.

The definitions of VAW are very different from one state to the other. Marital rape is not a criminal offence in Lithuania. Sexual harassment at work is not penalized in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovakia. **We need more from the EU, to guarantee an equal protection of all women in Europe.**

2. **The cost of VAW should be questioned:** how come we don't address the issue when domestic violence is estimated to cost 16 billion euro per year = 1 million euro every half hour? In comparison, the budget of EU member states for prevention is 1000 times less... At the same time, we see threats on the only EU programme that addresses VAW: the Daphne Programme. Our role also to ensure continued funding for activities on equality and on VAW.

→ **Our message is that the fight against VAW is not a luxury for times of prosperity and that we simply cannot afford not to end VAW financially and from a HR perspective!**

IV. EWL activities on violence against women

- ✓ All forms of male violence against women – including violence against different groups of women
- ✓ Includes prostitution and trafficking in women for sexual exploitation
- ✓ Includes sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

- Observatory on VAW: experts from 30 countries
- Publications
- Campaigns & projects

- **Ex EWL campaign ‘Together for a Europe free from prostitution’ (2010-12)**
- Lobbying for EU legislation on VAW: **European Coalition for an EU Year and EU Action to End Violence against Women**
- Work also at UN & Council of Europe level: drafting, signature and ratification of convention – 13 countries signed – 1 ratified (10 needed) Spain not ratified

The EWL activities and work with women with disabilities are stronger since the women’s section of the European Disability Forum joined the EWL in 2000 and has been represented in the EWL Board since then. A representative of the EDF Women’s section was the EWL president a few years ago (Lydia La Rivière Zijdel). The EWL also fully supports the manifesto of women with disability and cooperates with EDF in issues of funding, the UN convention and of course, violence against women. Ana Pelaez is part of the EWL Board representing EDF and our main interlocutor in this context.

V. Conclusions : EWL recommendations:

- An EU strategy on VAW, including legally-binding instruments to establish a common definition of VAW, based on international human rights instruments (CEDAW, Beijing) for all countries.
- The EU and the Member States to address the needs of women and girls with disabilities and all forms of disabilities, in all Ps of their policies: prevention, protection, service provision, prosecution, partnership.

- Funding for women's organisations and service providers working to support women, including women and girls with disabilities, and advocating for an end to VAW at European, national and local level.
- 2015 the EU Year to End VAW and to foster a long-term EU campaign: join the Coalition!

Women with disabilities are not visible enough in the women's movement and in the disability movement and we need to continue to cooperate and strengthen each other in order to ensure progress for the rights of all women.

Thank you very much for your attention.

More information: www.womenlobby.org