



WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE

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PRESS RELEASE

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Women's rights and Children's rights – Human rights?

While Europe lacks between 40,000 and 50,000 shelter places for women and children, perpetrators are still considered being good fathers.

Not long ago, human rights signified men's rights. Women and children were considered property of men, domestic violence men's private matter. *Only 20 to 30 years ago*, said Vienna Police President Gerhard Pürstl in his speech on 25th of November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the police did not take domestic violence seriously. Today women's rights are recognized as human rights. Today, human rights encompass the private sphere. Today, violence against women is understood as the most visible and the most repulsive form of discrimination against women. However, laws are only effective if enforced and protection is only possible if resources are provided.

One year ago, we discussed how to improve the quality of our services. Today, we struggle to keep services at all, said Nicola Harwin from Women's Aid in the UK. It is estimated that every other woman in Europe suffers male violence at least once in her life, every fifth falls victim to domestic violence, every tenth to rape. The European Commission has designated 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. In this same year 2010, governments cut funding for women's shelters. WAVE has been informed by several countries that shelters are at risk of being closed.

Europe still lacks between 40,000 and 50,000 shelter places

WAVE's Country Report 2010 is based on the European Parliament's Recommendation to provide one shelter place per 10,000 inhabitants (the Council of Europe recommends 1/7,500). 45 European countries have been analyzed: 23,415 shelter places are provided (six countries lack sufficient data) – whereas there should be 81,100 places for 811 million inhabitants. Only six countries - Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia – meet the European Parliament's Recommendation. Belarus, Latvia and Lithuania do not provide any women's shelters, Ukraine only three. Women and children who do not find a safe place are denied the most basic rights to physical and sexual security.

Male violence increases women's poverty risk

Violence against women has an increasing impact on the risk of poverty and social exclusion, says Regina Webhofer from WAVE who had been invited to speak at the public hearing of the European Parliament *How poverty affects women in the European Union* in September 2010. Violence causes serious health problems, sometimes disability or even death. Women separate from their partners to protect their own and their children's lives. As single mothers, they are at a high risk of poverty – in Austria 20% of all single mothers live in poverty. Violence reduces women's job chances, makes them dependent on social benefits, increases

the risk of homelessness. Women's shelters, by providing a safe place for women and children, by empowering women and by supporting children to cope with the trauma of violence, serve as a good practice model in the prevention and reduction of poverty. WAVE's recommendations have been included in the European Parliaments Draft Report (PR\837399EN.doc): It calls once again on the European Commission to establish a European Year for combating violence against women and *calls on the Member States to provide adequate funding for the support and protection of victims of violence.*

A 1 Euro investment with a return of 87 Euros should be a good enough argument for any government to provide enough funding for prevention work, protection and assistance to victim, said Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the Commission at the European Commission Conference on Violence against Women the 25th of November 2010. Domestic violence alone costs the European Union at least 16 billion Euros annually. Recent research concluded that every additional Euro spent on the prevention of violence against women would give savings of 87 Euros on the total cost of domestic violence.

Children lack respect. Fathers' rights at the costs of children's rights

I will never expose a child to his torturer, says Fred Galva who, together with the French Association Fédération Nationale Solidarité Femmes (FNSF) fights for a better protection of children. Children who witnessed domestic violence shall be considered as victims. *The minimum of victim's rights is to be protected from the perpetrator.* The psychologist is in charge of a program for perpetrators in Martinique. By refusing to expose children against their will to their fathers, he even challenges the law. *Current laws do not protect children. A violent man cannot be a good father,* underlines Galva. Fathers' rights are still put over children's rights. The myth that violent men can be good fathers is still prevailing. In France, children under the age of 13 are not allowed to refuse to see their fathers, in Austria the age limit is 14 years. Violence against their mothers is highly traumatizing for children. They see the suffering of their mothers. They are exposed to constant menace, insecurity and terror.

If anything, PAS is a machistic manipulation, states Jean Yves Jalain, director of a women's shelter in the north of France, who questions why the so-called Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) is in almost all cases used against mothers. *We had cases when men who were convicted of violence and sexual abuse or even murdered their children's mother, got custody of their children,* said Christine Clamens, director of FNSF. Norway, which banned physical punishment in 1972, could lead the way for a better protection of children: The high court has recently convicted a man because his step daughter witnessed his violence against her mother. *It is a question of the evolution of mentalities,* underlines Clamens. Once, human rights did not include women's rights. Now it is high time to strengthen children's rights.

<http://www.wave-network.org>

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/femm/pr/837/837399/837399en.pdf

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