

*Combating violence against women in Europe. When networking makes a difference**

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Summary. *As underlined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) - in the report “Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the EU Member States: Violence against Women Victim Support” - 9 out of 10 victims of intimate partner violence in the EU are women. Although some European countries – Italy included – have signed the Istanbul Convention for preventing and combating violence against women at all levels, there is still the need to implement best practices. The need to define an EU Strategy to combat violence against women arises in the context of various field work on the EU Commission that ask to act in a concrete manner. In this framework, the role of European networks is extremely important: one of the first and wide network build was ATHENA (Advance Thematic Network of Women’s Studies in Europe). From the constitution of the network in 1997 there has been a huge growing in the field of gender studies in Europe and new collaborations and exchanges were made possible*

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«Violence against women is the most brutal manifestation of gender inequality and is a violation of human rights that Europe must not and cannot ignore» (statement by Vice-President Reading, the EU's Justice

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According to the last report of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) on violence against women (Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the EU Member States: Violence against Women Victim Support, 2012) nine out of ten victims of intimate partner violence in the European Union (EU) are women.

In the EU Member States, the number of women victims of physical intimate partner violence ranges between 12% and 35%. Numbers reveals a tragic reality that involves the whole EU, from national governments to civil societies.

The current EU commitment in combating violence against women is based on the following documents:

- Women's Charter (2010);
- the European Commission's Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010–2015;
- the Action Plan on the Stockholm Programme for 2010–2014;
- the Council of Europe: Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention, 2012).

Documents mentioned above provides an important legal framework, whose legacy depends on the actions (safe accommodation, protection, healthcare, legal, psychological and employment counselling, social and financial support) of each member State, through national and transnational actors. At the moment those actions are insufficient, as stressed by the director of EIGE, Virginija Langbakk.

The main problems, underlined in the report, are as follow:

- lack of data (official statistics by national governments) and research studies on sexual violence,
- few Member States have developed intervention protocols and training programmes for professionals (i.e. policies, and forensic examiners) or awareness-raising campaigns on sexual violence.

In order to overcome those problems, the role of transnational networks such as ATHENA, ATGENDER, GEMMA and WAVE - is fundamental.

ATGENDER, GEMMA and WAVE represent a useful resource for

combating and preventing gender inequalities and violence against women, through the sharing of knowledge, best-practices and training programmes.

ATGENDER

The European Association for Gender Research, Education and Documentation is a network of academics, practitioners, activists and institutions in the field of Women's and Gender Studies, Feminist Research, women's rights, gender equality and gender diversity (AtGender, 2012).

The association was established in 2009 by three main networkings previously established in the European framework of gender, feminist, and women studies, such as WISE, AOIFE, ATHENAATGender is a platform where academics in the interdisciplinary field of gender studies, feminist research and professionals promote women's rights, gender equality and gender diversity in Europe (AtGender, 2012).

The main goal is disseminating the knowledge produced in the field of gender studies and feminist research in Europe and beyond.

International exchanges has allowed women national movements to grow and to implement best-practices, both at academic level (i.e. GEMMA Master's program) and in the women shelter organizational system (i.e. Di.Re network). This global and especially European vision seems to facilitate internationally wide spread ideas and concrete actions taken to enhanced the feminist perspective in society.

Daphne: EU programme for women's rights

The Daphne III programme (2007-2013) – coordinated by the European Commission DG Justice and Home Affairs - aims to contribute to the protection of children, young people and women against all forms of violence.

The programme is part of the general programme "Fundamental Rights and Justice" and it supports private or public organisations and institutions (local authorities at the appropriate level, university departments and

research centres) through action and operating grants. The programme focuses on the following actions:

- assisting and encouraging NGOs and other organisations active in this field;
- developing and implementing targeted awareness-raising actions;
- disseminating results obtained under the previous Daphne Programmes;
- identifying and enhancing actions contributing to positive treatment of people at risk of violence;
- setting up and supporting multidisciplinary networks;
- ensuring the expansion of knowledge base and exchange, identification and dissemination of information and good practice;
- designing and testing awareness-raising and educational materials, and supplementing and adapting those already available;
- studying phenomena related to violence and its impact;
- developing and implementing support programmes for victims and people at risk, and intervention programmes for perpetrators.

The European Daphne funding grants the Empower Project for the y 2010-2012 which aimed at the protection of women victims of violence. The project offers women in specialist “anti-violence” centers the chance to take part in psychodrama groups.

The overall objective of EMPoWER is to raise the awareness in women about their co-responsibility in taking the role of victim of abuse and passing it to the daughter, to study the phenomena and to test two methods (ecological and psychodrama) to face it. EMPoWER has been realized in Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, Portugal and Romania as well as in Albania; in each country the women victims of violence will be treated with the psychodrama and the ecological model after the research will show the results of the treatments and the differences among different countries.

GEMMA: education and training program in gender studies

GEMMA is the first Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies in Europe. It is a joint interdisciplinary program that provides high quality academic education and professional competencies for personnel working or intending to work in the areas of Women's Studies, Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities across Europe and beyond.

The programme is a perfect example of networking, created by several universities working together within the ATHENA network and based upon the sharing of knowledge across different field of studies (humanities, social sciences and health sciences).

GEMMA, indeed, offers the possibility of studying in the seven institutions of the consortium:

- University of Granada (coordinator),
- University of Bologna,
- Central European University (Budapest),
- University of Hull,
- University of Lodz,
- University of Oviedo,
- University of Utrecht.

From the 6th edition of the programme (2012/2014), the GEMMA consortium will include new partners (Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey from the United States) and associated institutions from North, Central and South America (Universidad de Buenos Aires, Universidad Estatal de Campinas en Sao Paulo, Universidad de Chile, Florida International University, Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), which will take part in GEMMA through an innovative e-learning program.

Since 2012, GEMMA has also started its collaboration with AtGender, the European Association for Gender Research.

WAVE: European NGO's combating violence against women

WAVE is a network of European women's non-governmental organisations that work in the field of combating violence against women and children. It involves 4000 women's help organizations in 46 countries of Europe, focusing on violence in family and in intimate relationships. The network supports women victims with different instruments/means: women's refuges, counselling centres, SOS hotlines/helplines, and organisations focusing on prevention and training.

At the moment, many Italian organizations are part of the Wave-networking, providing different services across the country:

- 25 women's refuges,
- 66 counselling centres,
- 23 crisis support,
- 2 health care/therapy centres,
- 2 legal services,
- other services.

In order to support and expand the network, non-governmental women's organizations from around Europe can have the possibility to become a WAVE Focal Point. Focal Points are responsible for the promotion of activities, tasks and information within the network. The following criteria need to be complied:

- the applying organization should be an umbrella organization of women's NGOs such as Women's Shelters, Women's Centres, Women's helplines or women's NGOs working in a specific thematic area including violence against women, violence against migrant or refugee women and their protection from violence, among others;
- the organization has to be committed to combating violence against women and their children;
- as a key information channel for the WAVE Network, the organization should have access to a wide national network.

Currently, WAVE has 98 Focal Points in 45 countries.

Conclusion

All these networks contribute to the sharing of knowledge at an international level, allowing the experts in professional fields to develop their own projects.

GEMMA, ATHENA, ATGENDER, WAVE DAPHNE PROJECT are important tools for strengthening the cooperation between social/civil organisations, academic institutions and local entities.

The networking's experiences show that, by ensuring trainings and financial support to those in the field such as women shelters and social services, it ensures long-term commitment and results. It is then highlighted the innovative approach of the networking process which can bring added value to the Community level by implementing good practices.

The effectiveness can be seen by the continuous growing of those networks, whose impact relies on the everyday activities of social and institutional actors involved. The ultimate goal is then to reach social justice in Europe through the exchange of innovative experiences and best practices.

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