



Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Prevalence, Proposals and Partnerships

**Side event organised by the
International Council of Women and the Council of Europe,
and co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations in
Geneva, the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of
Europe, UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
and NGO CSW Geneva**

**UNECE Beijing +25 Regional Review
Geneva, 30 October 2019**

REPORT



The opinions expressed in this report are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe or the co-organisers of the Conference.

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Interventions by the panellists

Brigitte Polonovski, President of ECICW, welcomed panellists and delegates and thanked the co-organisers, the International Council of Women and the Council of Europe and the co-sponsors, the Canadian Mission to the UN in Geneva, the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, UN Women and NGO/CSW Geneva, for organising the event.



Ms Polonovski offered a few brief comments before inviting the first panellist to speak, emphasising that gender equality and the elimination of violence against women and girls (VAWG) are inextricably linked and that there is a need for detailed and disaggregated data on VAWG. She also supported an initiative by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Dubravka Simonovic, to place VAWG permanently on the UN CSW agenda in New York, noting that this would be an important step in the elimination of VAWG.

Nicole Ameline, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) thanked the panel organisers and sponsors for the opportunity to speak and further expressed her gratitude for the unimaginable inspiration of civil society. She stated that the main challenge of Beijing +25 is to keep the promise of equality. There is a strong connection between the CEDAW committee and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which is the rule of law and the state of human rights, and which affords protection and freedom but can also permit violence when those laws are discriminatory.

In her role as Vice-Chair of CEDAW, she confirmed the undeniable progress made since 1995 thanks to the commitment of states, civil society and UN agencies. However, she stressed that the law also had many inherent weaknesses which the Beijing review process offers a unique opportunity to remedy. Two of the main challenges are the slow pace of legal processes and the achievement of *de facto* equality. There has been a stagnation in the levels of women's participation in political life and also some regression.

Violence remains a threat and a persistent reality. Whatever its nature, magnitude and context, it is important that it remains a priority for regional institutions such as the Council of Europe which will pursue this challenge through its Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

CEDAW is the most ratified UN treaty related to VAWG with 189 signatories, and it serves as an instrument of change and transformation in a society which itself is rapidly evolving. The context today is radically different from 1995 when the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted. Today, women face new issues, including large scale migration, climate change, new economic pressures and conflict.

Confronted with these new challenges and structural weaknesses, existing laws must be strengthened by every means possible. Firstly, no society can be just, inclusive and peaceful if it is built on fundamental inequalities, meaning that equality before the law is essential. Therefore, the main priority of Beijing +25 is to consolidate in a definitive manner a legal framework - constitutional and legislative - to eradicate violence and discrimination, together with appropriate justice mechanisms and law enforcement.

Secondly, the universality of human rights must be preserved and protected from the challenges of a multi-lateral context. The strength of the UN treaty bodies such as CEDAW and regional bodies such as the Council of Europe and the African Union can all contribute to stability. As Boutros Boutros-Ghali said, whilst fundamental rights must be compatible with our cultural diversity, heritage and common history, they are not negotiable.

In addition to addressing violence against women, we must also reflect on women's empowerment. On average, only 24% of members of parliament are women. Women can and should be allowed to make decisions about their bodies and their lives, and they must also be put into positions to make decisions for their country and the future of the world. This is a governance challenge, and power must be shared between women and men who should make decisions together. On 8 March 2019, CEDAW and the Inter-Parliamentary Union issued a joint statement calling for 50:50 parity in women's representation in parliament and government by 2030.



One of the key words for the Beijing Platform for Action is mobilisation as all sectors, including the private sector, must mobilise at all levels of the world to ensure that women-led change becomes a reality. Secondly, there is an accountability issue as everyone must take up the urgent responsibility of addressing inequality as they must deliver the promise of equality. Taking the example of the newly-created digital world and its often discriminatory and regressive algorithms, it is clear that the most advanced sectors are still inaccessible to the majority of women. It is therefore imperative that women's access to these most innovative and vital sectors for the creation of a new world becomes a reality. This extends also to equality in the professional world.

In conclusion, the key words are mobilisation, accountability and equality in all areas and women's participation in decision-making within the framework of a new model for society. We are moving towards a renewed model of society where every human being has a role and place in life. Success does not only mean implementing Beijing +25, important as this is, but also to pass on a renewed vision of equality to the next generation for a more just world. We must always bear in mind not only life's winners, but also those from the most vulnerable populations who are too often left behind. The future is not only about economic success but also about the hope that equality can bring for everyone.

Alia El-Yassir, Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Europe/Central Asia thanked the organisers and co-sponsors for organising the side event and for turning the spotlight on the urgent need to eliminate violence against women and girls in the UNECE region. She highlighted the importance of such platforms to discuss solutions based on promising practices and lessons learned to accelerate progress in ending this global pandemic. She stated that the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDG framework both stress the need for effective policies to eliminate all forms of violence and the need to take integrated and effective measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women. The Beijing +25 national reports and consultations from the UNECE countries show that combating violence against women and providing protection and services for victims are clear priorities across the region.

Recent efforts reflect in part the significant impetus generated by the Istanbul Convention. Its signing and ratification have driven many states' commitments to eliminating VAWG, and it is praiseworthy that 45 countries in the region have signed or ratified the convention.

Despite notable progress, there is still have a long way to go before women and girls can live their lives safely and free from violence. Patriarchal social norms, discriminatory gender roles, tolerance of VAWG and victim-blaming remain widespread.

Ending violence against women is one of UN Women's key priorities. UN Women supports expanding access to quality multi-sectorial responses for survivors, covering safety, shelter, health, justice and other essential services. UN Women also advocates for laws and helps guide policies and action plans to improve the implementation of international standards.



In the Europe/Central Asia region specifically, this is done through the UN Women-EU regional programme “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds”. Launched in February 2017 to build on the momentum created by the Istanbul Convention, this programme is aimed at ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women in Turkey and the Western Balkans. The programme is unique in ensuring comprehensive and meaningful engagement of civil society organisations in the implementation of the Istanbul

Convention by acting as agents for change. To date, the programme has officially partnered with over 70 organisations at both the European Union and country levels.

Civil society and women's organisations play a crucial role in promoting gender equality and women's rights. They are key advocates in moving governments from commitments to action. Strengthening the capacities of women's organisations and fostering collaboration between them strengthens their role in advancing women's rights and enables their recognition by local and national authorities as key actors to prevent violence against women and girls.

In this regard, enhancing the capacity of women's civil society organisations for monitoring, collecting and analysing data in the field of violence against women has a positive long-term impact on the prevention of violence and the acceleration of gender equality. A good example is Serbia where the Roma Women Network trained fifteen Roma women's organisations in collecting data to report on human rights violations against Roma women to the CEDAW Committee and GREVIO. As a result of strategic mentoring by the UN Women partner, SOS Network Vojvodina, ten women's organisations were able to submit shadow reports to GREVIO and the CEDAW Committee.

UN Women established the first regional civil society platform addressing VAWG, the Civil Society Strengthening Platform (CSSP), which is led by the Women Against Violence in Europe (WAVE network). This platform strengthens women's voices and agency, especially those representing the most marginalised groups. It has improved the capacities of nine organisations from seven countries to monitor and report on CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention through training involving international experts and GREVIO members.

Civil society organisations are also critical in ensuring the availability of accessible, comprehensive, co-ordinated, inter-disciplinary and sustained multi-sectoral services for survivors of violence. In Turkey, together with civil society organisations, UN Women has trained 80 female lawyers who provide free legal support to survivors in line with existing international mechanisms such as the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW.



In Albania, Human Rights in Democracy Center (HRDC) and the Shelter for Abused Women and Girls conducted on-the-job training for over 550 service providers including police officers, health care providers, municipal staff and teachers to address cases of domestic violence and fulfil their legal obligations regarding service provision to all survivors.

In Serbia, seven Centres for Victims of Sexual Violence were established within general hospitals as a result of the fruitful partnership between UN Women, UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, civil society organisations, and the Provincial Government of Vojvodina.

Civil society organisations can also be instrumental in challenging prevailing social norms that justify violence against women because of their very close ties with local communities.

In Kosovo*, UN Women worked with the Network of Roma Ashkali and Egyptian women to deliver a door-to-door campaign focusing on raising awareness about the consequences of early and forced marriages. This campaign was the first of its kind in Kosovo* and also raised awareness of the Istanbul Convention which requires states to pay special attention to vulnerable groups. Civil society organisations are critical in ensuring that the voices of the most discriminated against groups of women are heard by policymakers across the region.

UN Women's Regional Programme also aims to galvanise co-operation at the regional level and contribute towards building partnerships among key stakeholders in the region, including civil society organisations, national and local authorities, women's rights activists and representatives of regional institutions. We have created platforms and mechanisms for co-operation by which the implementation of the standards of the Istanbul Convention can be accelerated through the exchange of good practices and lessons learned.

In September, UN Women supported three sub-regional civil society consultations to prepare for the Beijing +25 regional review. They provided a clear vision of how the states' intentions to end violence against women have to be translated into action. They highlighted the urgent need to enhance the impact of international mechanisms that will make governments more committed, responsible and effective in promoting gender equality and women's human rights. They also stressed the need to strengthen national and local mechanisms for gender equality in order to more effectively design, implement and evaluate gender equality and women's rights policies.

Civil society organisations also highlighted the effectiveness of training UN Women provided on developing innovative approaches for behavioural change. In 2018, UN women trained eighteen representatives from thirteen organisations on developing and implementing strategic initiatives specifically aimed at challenging gender stereotypes and engrained social norms by targeted behaviour change approaches. This is called a "Gender Lab" which will aim to inform best practices that can be replicated across the region and beyond.

Civil society needs space and support to lead the fight to end violence against women. When the governments and the institutions come together to support civil society, civil society thrives. Ms El-Yassir said that we needed to build on our rich experience and that we can ensure a world where women and girls will not experience violence. She said that we are all a part of ensuring that we bring about this change and end the culture that normalises the abuse of women and girls.

Mohinder Watson, Founder, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage and Main NGO UN Representative Geneva for the International Council of Women, recounted her experience of discovering her 13 year old sister who had tried to commit suicide because she was a victim of honour-based violence. In some societies, family honour ("izzat") comes before everything else, and a spectrum of punishments are meted out to girls who do not conform to the rules of behaviour expected by their families and communities.

Her sister's crime was simply to wear make-up to cover up her acne, but this was interpreted by her family as trying to make herself more attractive to men. In reality, she was a self-conscious teenager who was embarrassed and did not want to be teased by her peers at school.

Ms Watson herself was also punished for bringing dishonour and shame on the family by refusing an arranged marriage as a teenager. She had been given an ultimatum to marry the man chosen for her or to leave the house, and she chose the latter.

A place at university offered her an escape route, but she paid a high price for avoiding an unwanted marriage as she was forced to leave behind her family, siblings, friends, community and everything she had ever

* All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

known. Being ostracised in this way was a powerful deterrent to other girls who might also be thinking of refusing an arranged marriage.



From birth, a girl's body becomes burdened with carrying the family's honour, and men in the family (often with the support of female relatives) feel it is their duty to defend it at all costs.

'Honour killings' and honour-based violence are forms of gendered violence, often planned and carried out by the family, condoned by the wider community and motivated by notions of 'protecting or restoring family honour.' A girl's every movement, action, choice of dress,

hair and makeup, who she talks to, etc. are all carefully scrutinised, monitored and controlled according to the prevailing social norms.

The range of punishments used to control girls range from coercion, blackmail, intimidation, social exclusion to threats of violence, physical violence and even murder to restore family honour. The family considers this to be a form of "self-administered justice."

Around 30 countries around the world have patriarchal structures where pre-marital and extra-marital sex are not permitted and women are expected to be virgins at marriage, notions which underpin honour-based violence. However, the Istanbul Convention states that 'honour' is an unacceptable justification for crime (Article 42) and also emphasises that a person who incites a child to commit such crimes do not have any reduction in criminal liability.

Forced marriage and honour killings can be related. A forced marriage is one in which one or both partners do not give their free consent to marriage. If a girl refuses a forced marriage, she may be killed or punished for bringing shame on the family. Furthermore, girls who are married off early but later decide they want to leave their marriage may also suffer violence or be killed. Thus, freely entering into and leaving marriage can be extremely difficult for women and girls in some societies.

Many factors can trigger honour-based violence including pre-marital and extra marital relationships, refusing a marriage, dressing in an unacceptable way, refusing to wear a hijab, wearing make-up, participating in paid work, seeking to marry someone outside one's community or engaging in homosexual relations. The perpetrators of honour-based violence can include intimate partners, parents, siblings, relatives, in-laws and other non-family members from the community. Honour-based crimes are not limited to any particular religion and occur in Islamic, Hindu, Sikh, Druze, Christian and Jewish communities.

Most victims do not report honour-based violence for many reasons. They are often confined to the home, lack financial resources and are afraid because even involving the police risks the further loss of family honour. They may fear retaliatory violence, or their access to the phone, internet, friends, work colleagues or outside professionals may be limited or monitored by their family. They may also have insecure immigration status, face language barriers or simply not know how to contact the police.

Honour-based violence has many harmful consequences for women. Victims may be too traumatised to articulate what happened when police arrive at the scene or may later retract their statements out of fear, limiting their access to justice. They are also more likely to suffer from poor mental health, self-harm and

even suicide. If they leave their homes with the police, their belongings may be stolen, and most will never be able to return because of the risk of further violence.

Some examples of positive practices developed against honour-based violence include the special Forced Marriage Unit established in the United Kingdom, better community liaison between the police and local communities, recruiting police officers from ethnic minorities for their cultural knowledge and language skills and recruiting more female police officers as women in some cultures are not allowed to speak to men outside their own family and female victims may not wish to discuss sexual violence with a male.

In London, female Muslim police officers go into Mosques to talk about VAWG, and there is culturally-sensitive training of the judiciary, police, social workers and teachers as well as better awareness in schools.

Honour-based violence should be viewed as a violation of human rights, and victims should be treated with dignity, empathy and validation. They should be provided with immediate safety from physical harm and be interviewed alone by the police, who must be trained to deal with victims of honour-based violence. It is important to listen to victims, especially in their requests for alternative methods for reporting violence such as online or mobile apps-based reporting. More awareness is needed of existing protection procedures and of honour-based violence in general to break taboos and empower friends, work colleagues, health professionals, NGOs and family members to support victims. Governments and civil society should work together to establish one-stop centres that provide shelter, health and psychological care, legal services and forensic examinations for victims of honour-based violence.

Some families go to extreme lengths to protect their 'family honour' as seen in the following cases:

Shafilea Ahmed, a 17 year old teenager from the United Kingdom, was suffocated to death in 2003 by her parents in front of her siblings for wearing a short-sleeved top which exposed her arms. She had suffered years of beatings and verbal abuse from her parents before they killed her for bringing 'dishonour' on the family. Her parents pinned her down on the sofa and stuffed a carrier bag into her mouth until she suffocated. The parents told the police she had run away from home. Her body was found five months after her death in a river near Cumbria. She had previously attempted suicide when her parents took her to Pakistan. She drank bleach in a suicide attempt, severely burning her throat and oesophagus. Her father told doctors she had confused the bleach with mouthwash.

Tulay Goren, a 15 year old from North London, was killed by her father in January 1999 for running away from home to live with her boyfriend, a fellow Turkish Kurd twice her age, whom her family disapproved of because he was from a different branch of Islam. Her father was jailed for life in 2009 for killing his daughter after kidnapping, drugging and tying her up. Her remains have never been found.

Ending VAWG including honour-based violence requires an all-encompassing approach and involvement of all stakeholders. Every opportunity must be used to raise awareness of the negative impact of all the different forms of VAWG on women and society and to lobby governments, the UN and other institutions for change to end VAWG. Ms Watson said that civil society organisations must use their unique privilege and power to effect change. "We are lucky to be here in the United Nations and to give voice to those who do not have one. With co-ordinated and concerted action, we can end VAWG. We owe it to the next generations to make this world free from all forms of VAWG including honour based violence." (See Appendix II for references in this text.)

Simona Lanzoni, Second Vice-President of GREVIO, thanked the organisers for giving her the opportunity to talk about the Istanbul Convention, its monitoring process and the importance of civil society organisations (CSOs) and women's organisations in its work.

The Istanbul Convention has been ratified by 34 countries and signed by an additional 12 member states. It is supported by the Council of Europe, an institution that brings together 47 countries. The Council of Europe works for the advancement of human rights and supports democratic processes and dialogue in all member states. It is important to note that the Istanbul Convention is open for ratification by countries that are not member states of the Council of Europe.

The monitoring body of the Istanbul Convention is composed of two bodies: the Committee of the Parties which is the political body composed of representatives of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention, and the independent Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence known as GREVIO, which carries out the technical evaluation of the implementation of the convention in each State Party.

Within GREVIO, the monitoring procedure begins with the receipt of a governmental report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. CSOs and women's organisations in particular can also submit reports with their comments regarding the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the state under review. It is a democratic process which tries to maximise the opportunity to provide very specific recommendations to better implement the convention at the end of the monitoring process.



After reading the many documents received, a field visit follows in which the GREVIO members try to create an open and transparent dialogue involving different stakeholders in the state under review. These include representatives from the ministries of justice, interior, health, social affairs, labour, education, etc., as well as relevant stakeholders from CSOs and women's organisations.

At times, GREVIO members have had to deal with the backlash against the Istanbul Convention and its opponents who challenge the need to protect women and fail to recognise

that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which has led to the domination over and discrimination against women by men and has prevented the full advancement of women.

Some actors under the guise of "family values" do not want to recognise that domestic violence affects women disproportionately (although men can also be victims of domestic violence) and do not recognise that children are also victims of domestic violence, including as witnesses of violence in the family. Despite some of these setbacks, GREVIO members continue to seek an open dialogue because of their firm belief that as long as dialogue is open, there is hope for the advancement of human rights.

The Istanbul Convention is very innovative in several aspects, stating concretely how the provisions are to be implemented and requesting that States Parties collaborate with different stakeholders at national and local levels, including CSOs and women's organisations.

Article 9 of the convention requests States Parties to “establish an effective co-operation” with NGOs and civil society organisations. In many member states, it is grassroots women’s organisations who have raised the issue of violence against women, domestic violence and child witnesses to domestic violence, and were the first to voice these concerns. These groups protect women and their children and provide telephone hotlines and other essential services such as legal, medical, psychological counselling, women’s empowerment, employment, housing, etc.

Moreover, the Istanbul Convention requests that States not only recognise the efforts and knowledge of women’s organisations but also support the tremendous work they do by providing them with timely funds. In addition, States are encouraged to collaborate in an open dialogue with CSOs to allow them to offer their suggestions on how to build a participative process, amend and create new legislative measures and monitor the impact on VAW measures taken.

It is often difficult to open dialogue when the various actors at the national level misunderstand or do not trust each other. CSOs sometimes protest that States are not inclusive enough while States sometimes feel that CSOs and women’s organisations are too demanding. Moreover, austerity measures have worsened the dialogue for both States and CSOs and are a major obstacle to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention as well as the achievement of human rights for all.

The backlash does not make GREVIO’s task easy. A gender-neutral approach can divert resources away from women’s and specialised organisations, and it remains challenging for States to implement the necessary overarching gender approach to VAW measures, conduct specialised research on the issue and collect and analyse administrative data. Despite these difficulties, these measures are extremely important not only for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention but also to affirm what women’s organisations and civil society have been saying for many years.

The dialogue between women’s organisations, CSOs and States is part of the challenge in implementing the convention, and GREVIO members do their best to keep the commitment alive on both sides, to put women at the centre of each measure to fight VAW and to connect different voices with different experiences and competencies.

At the same time, in order to keep democratic dialogue between States and CSOs functioning optimally, we always recommend enhancing instead of ignoring the voice of women’s civil society which has concrete and direct experience in dealing with and overcoming violence against women and supporting child witnesses to domestic violence. To ignore this competence and knowledge would not make it any easier or less expensive to implement the provisions requested by the Istanbul Convention, and above all, will prevent women from advancing and being able to live free from fear and safe from violence.



Closing session

Moderator - Charles Ramsden, Chair of the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Commission



Marlène Schiappa, State Secretary for Gender Equality, France, said when considering the current position and status of women in the world, one is surprised and revolted by the magnitude and degree of violence committed against women.

“We are all gathered here today—ministers, heads of UN agencies, political leaders, NGOs, and women and men of goodwill—as we recognise our collective responsibility to ensure that progress in women’s rights and equality between women and men can become a reality. We are accountable for the progress made in the Beijing Declaration and the regional review must be used as an opportunity to make an honest and clear assessment of the situation. Despite the improvements seen, most notably in the legislative advances in many countries, sufficient progress has not been made in any country, including France.

It is high time to engage with greater perseverance so that change can occur in reality and in everyday life. The current situation of VAW is unacceptable, and we have a common goal to lower the tolerance of violence in our society. Rapid change is needed, and many of us here share the sentiment of this urgency. We have a common goal to ensure that women are not assaulted, raped or beaten by anyone.

Men who commit VAW are able to benefit from impunity and toleration of VAW, which usually begins with doubt in the victim’s assertions of violence and victim-blaming. If someone had their telephone stolen, they would not be questioned about whether it had really been stolen, if the owner had clung to the phone tightly enough or asked if it was a flashy phone which had drawn the thief’s attention. However, if a woman says she was sexually assaulted by someone, the initial response is often to doubt her story and ask many demeaning and irrelevant questions about the situation and circumstances of the assault: Did she smile at him? Did she look at him? Did she send any signals to him? Was she alone, and why? Was it night time, and if so, what was she doing out alone at night?

These reactions and phrases are all too familiar, but we must fight against these responses and update the law. It will not be easy, but it is possible. It will require enormous political will as changing people’s beliefs will be extremely sensitive and difficult but is something that we must address together.

To advance this work, the President of the Republic of France, Emmanuel Macron, wants to focus on gender equality during his term of office. During the General Assembly of the United Nations, he called for VAW to be put on the global agenda.

For too long, VAW has been left aside because we thought we had done all that could be done.

Combating femicide must be a top priority as it is difficult to see how women can ask for career advancement, salary increases and equality while in the background they fear for their lives on their journey to work. Women's minds are not free to succeed if when they return home they are criticised unfairly or insulted, beaten or even killed by their partners, all of which happens too often, including in France.

This is why the fight against VAW must be a priority for France as we work to classify harassment as a criminal offence. When this was first proposed, we were told it would not work, as police could not protect women all of the time as they had many other duties to attend to. But now, France has become the first country in the world to do this, and within several months of making harassment an offence, 1,000 cases have been reported.

We have also extended the period in which rape claims against minors can be brought before legal authorities, allowing victims to come forward at a time when they are ready and on 3 September, the Prime Minister launched an inter-ministerial *grenelle* to mobilise society to combat the scourge of domestic violence.



At the United Nations General Assembly, President Macron called on all countries of the world to create a legal framework on femicide to document killings of women by their partner or ex-partner. Last year, he was the first president to introduce the word 'femicide' to refer to female killings by male partners and ex-partners. It is important to highlight these acts to raise awareness and decrease societal tolerance to VAW.

Internationally, we work with the CEDAW committee on which Nicole Ameline presented earlier to address all forms of VAWG, including female genital mutilation, a mutilation of young girls and women which can never be justified on the grounds of cultural practice or religion.

Sexist and sexual violence committed in times of war is also unacceptable. France donated six million euros to support the work of Dr Denis Mukwege who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2018 for helping victims of sexual violence during the ongoing war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Generation Equality Forum in July 2020 in Paris will be an important opportunity for all countries, NGOs, governments and businesses to engage in the collective fight against VAW.

In considering best practices, one can be inspired every day. Even today, there was a bus on the street in Geneva with a poster campaign against sexual assault, showing that when you open your eyes, there are people everywhere fighting against sexist and sexual violence. We need to unite to move forward together at the Generation Equality 2020 Forum which will be an incredible opportunity to give rise to the first generation who will really know equality between women and men and between girls and boys, but this can only happen if all forms of violence against women and girls are totally eliminated.”

Charles Ramsden thanked the Minister for the work of her government which was an inspiration to everyone. He then invited questions from the audience.

In answer to a question about GREVIO appointment procedures, **Simona Lanzoni** replied that the procedure was included in the Istanbul Convention and that every State that has ratified the convention can nominate up to three candidates with the necessary experience and skills in VAWG work. The Committee of the Parties then elects the representative for each State. The Committee of the Parties is made up of members from the 34 states which have ratified the Istanbul Convention. The selection of candidates is sometimes made by the State’s permanent representative in Strasbourg and at other times by the head of equal opportunities, but it is up to each country to decide who to nominate to serve on the committee.

A representative of the United Kingdom’s Women’s Budget Group said they had experienced difficulty in obtaining data from other countries on the incidence rates of VAWG and associated costs. This had been addressed in the United Kingdom by having regular anonymous surveys of women who had suffered VAW; 17% of women reported being raped, and 20% of women in the United Kingdom will suffer sexual violence in their lifetime, as well as 25% who suffer domestic violence. This adds up to 1.3 million women in the past year alone. They found it easier to get the United Kingdom government to invest in eliminating VAW if the cost involved was known-£66 billion per year in the United Kingdom. She asked the panel how they thought data collection in other countries could be improved, especially data on incidence rates and costings.

Aliya El-Yassir replied that they had struggled with cost estimates. UN Women had tried to argue that it was cheaper to address VAW by investing in its elimination and there would be benefits of increased economic growth, but this had not led to the desired change in many countries. UN Women fully supports the idea of obtaining data as many data gaps do exist, but the lack of data and evidence should not be an argument used to stop working on addressing VAWG. She thought there were deep rooted discriminatory attitudes in institutions and organisations which were blocking the way forward and which needed to be addressed.

Simona Lanzoni said that the Istanbul Convention has a specific provision on data collection. There are two kinds of data collection: one is on prevalence (large surveys on how prevalent VAW is in every country); and the other one, that is very important for GREVIO, is the administrative data collection. It is important because if this data is available from the ministers of justice, interior, health, etc. you can understand how to write policies and how to prevent and communicate about violence most effectively.

Mohinder Watson said that while she is not involved in data collection she stressed that whatever data is collected, it is likely to be inaccurate due to the high level of under reporting. Victims of violence who are asking for alternative methods for reporting violence (other than going to the police physically) such as online or a mobile phone reporting app need to be listened to. In order to get more accurate figures, it is also important to eliminate the taboo around sexual violence as it is still the case that no one wants to talk about it or broach the subject.

Elly Pradervand from the Women's World Summit Foundation suggested to the French Minister that France might consider joining the White Ribbon Campaign which encourages men to fight for women's rights. It was already operational in over 60 countries, but France was not among them. Given President Macron's commitment to gender equality and eliminating VAW, she believed that joining the campaign could be helpful.

Marlène Schiappa said that France has called on all countries to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention. It had also started work on adding economic violence to the list of other forms of violence which would probably take a year to do. She also said she would be happy to look into the White Ribbon campaign.

Leslie Wright from Zonta International USA stated there was significant levels of gun violence in the United States of America and asked what the relationship was between femicide and guns both in the USA and other countries.

Simona Lanzoni replied that guns are of course a very important risk factor, and it is impossible not to connect femicide and the presence of guns.

Brigitte Polonovski closed the event by thanking everyone, particularly the audience, the organisers and co-sponsors and her co-moderator Charles Ramsden.



The flyer for the side-event is attached at Appendix I to this report.

Ending Violence against Women and Girls: Prevalence, Proposals and Partnerships

A side-event to the UNECE Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting,
organised by the International Council of Women and the Council of Europe,
and co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN in Geneva,
the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,
UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia and NGO/CSW Geneva

WEDNESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2019, 13:30-14:45
Room XXV, Palais des Nations (Building E, 1st floor)

Despite major advances in women's rights, Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), manifested as different forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, remains one of the most pervasive and persistent human rights abuses, with its most common form, domestic violence, taking place in the privacy of the home, often by an intimate partner. VAWG has extensive health (including long-term physical and psychological), social and economic implications for victims, their families, communities and society as a whole. It is a barrier to women's full participation in society and presents a wider threat to peace and security.

On average, one in three women report experiencing some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner and almost 58% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner or family member (Global Study on Homicide UNODC, 2018). Despite the serious nature and extent of VAWG, most incidents are not reported to the police, partly due to women's lack of trust in the authorities to help and protect them.

The Beijing+25 review provides a unique and timely opportunity to address violence against women as a key barrier to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular the achievement of gender equality, and to discuss how it can be overcome. In this context, the round table will focus on:

- ▶ The prevalence and manifestations of intimate partner violence/domestic violence against women and girls, including the physical and psychological impact on victims;
- ▶ The causes and consequences of VAWG such as honour killings and forced marriage;
- ▶ The findings of CEDAW and the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), which monitors implementation of the Istanbul Convention;
- ▶ The role of civil society organisations and of partnerships in combating VAWG.

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Simultaneous interpretation (English/French) will be provided courtesy of the French authorities



PROGRAMME

13:30 - 14:45

13:30 Brigitte Polonovski,
President ECICW, Moderator
Introduction to panel topic and speakers

Panellists

- ▶ **Nikole Amellne,**
Vice-Chair, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
Women's Rights, CEDAW and Beijing+25.
- ▶ **Alla B-Yassir,**
Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Europe/Central Asia.
VAWG across the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region: the importance of partnerships with civil society organisations – best practices and lessons learned.
- ▶ **Simona Lanzoni,**
Second Vice-President of the independent group of experts monitoring the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)
Monitoring implementation of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention – strengthening legal and other measures to end VAWG – how NGOs can contribute to GREVIO's work.
- ▶ **Elke Sleurs,**
Former Belgian Secretary of State, current Member of the Flemish Parliament.
Prevalence and manifestations of intimate partner violence/domestic violence against women and girls, including the physical and psychological impact on victims. Solutions.
- ▶ **Mohinder Watson,**
Founder, Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage, Main UN NGO Permanent Representative, International Council of Women, Geneva.
Causes and consequences of forced marriage and 'honour killings' and examples of best practices to address these.

14:20 Questions from the floor, summing up and closing statement

- ▶ **Charles Ramsden,**
Chair of the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Commission, Moderator.
- ▶ **Marlène Schiappa,**
State Secretary for Gender Equality, France.
Ending Violence Against Women: A priority for France and its Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

*Refreshments will be provided prior to the event
courtesy of the Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN in Geneva.*



Appendix II

References made in Mohinder Watson's intervention:

Al Gharaibeh, F.M., 2016. Debating the role of custom, religion and law in "honour" crimes: implications for social work. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 10(2), pp.122-139

European Parliamentary Research Service, Briefing 2015. Combating "honour crimes" in the EU. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/573877/EPRS_BRI\(2015\)573877_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/573877/EPRS_BRI(2015)573877_EN.pdf)

Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2019. 24 May 2019. Home Office. Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Grzyb, M.A., 2016. An explanation of honour-related killings of women in Europe through Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and masculine domination. *Current sociology*, 64(7), pp. 1036-1053.

Khan, R., 2007. Honour-Related Violence (HRV) in Scotland: A cross-and multi-agency intervention involvement survey. *International Journal of Criminology*, pp.1-8.

Korteweg, A.C. and Yurdakul, G., 2010. Religion, Culture and the Politicization of Honour-Related Violence: A Critical Analysis of Media and Policy Debate in Western Europe and North America. From: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/124186/2010_No12_KortewegYurdaku.pdf

Mulvihill, N., Gangoli, G., Gill, A.K. and Hester, M., 2019. The experience of interactional justice for victims of "honour"-based violence and abuse reporting to the police in England and Wales. *Policing and Society*, 29(6), pp.640-656.

Shafilea-Ahmed story. From: <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/uk-news/shafilea-ahmed-parents-guilty-murder-13549373>

Tulay Goren story. From : <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/6832862/Honour-killing-father-convicted-of-murder-of-Tulay-Goren.html>