

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

Violence against women and girls is rooted in centuries of male domination. 1 in 3 women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently by an intimate partner, while 71% of all human trafficking victims worldwide are women and girls.¹

The Istanbul Convention defines violence against women “as a violation of human rights, a type of discrimination against women through acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic suffering or harm to women.”²

In this context, over the past years much work has been undertaken in Malta to enhance the prevention and protection of women and girls from different forms of violence. In 2018, the Maltese Parliament approved the Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act. The main objective of this Act is to fully integrate and implement the provisions of the Istanbul Convention in national law in order to promote and protect the right of everyone to live free from violence in both the public and private spheres. The Istanbul Convention is the most comprehensive international human rights treaty on violence against women and domestic violence.³

Such work has been reinforced particularly this year, whereby gender-based violence was exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic when a jump in domestic violence cases has been registered, with around 15% more cases reported in the first half of 2020 compared to the same duration last year.⁴

Reporting to the police means court proceedings and for a woman financially dependent on her aggressor, legal fees can be unaffordable. In this regard, the Justice and Equality Ministry announced that domestic violence victims could request free legal advice and assistance if there are grounds for the victim to proceed with a civil court case against the aggressor. Until 2nd October 2020, 135 domestic violence victims had requested and were given free legal advice by specially trained lawyers provided by the Maltese Government.⁵

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/>

² <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-11-25/newspaper-opinions/Stop-violence-6736228921>

³ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/domain/violence>

⁴ <https://lovinmalta.com/news/womens-rights-activists-applaud-much-needed-domestic-violence-unit-in-maltas-police-force/>

⁵ <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-10-06/local-news/135-victims-of-domestic-violence-provided-with-free-legal-aid-6736227581>

Moreover, various initiatives are undertaken in Malta to support the 16 Days of Activism campaign. This campaign is organised on an international level between 25th November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and 10th December, Human Rights Day, to raise awareness on violence against women as the most pervasive breach of human rights worldwide.

In this context, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) will, as in previous years, raise awareness about violence against women and domestic violence during 16 days of activism awareness raising campaign 2020 by creating effective social media posts, focusing on why victims do not look for outside help against their perpetrator.

In essence, research shows that victims choose not to seek outside assistance because they feel they can deal with the situation themselves or with the help of friends or family members.⁶ Moreover, fear, financial dependence, and low self-confidence are among the leading reasons victims refuse to testify against their perpetrators.⁷ A victim's fear for her/his life or that of her loved ones is a sufficient reason for the victim to stay in an abusive relationship. Furthermore, the victim often has no access or has limited access to financial resources and is financially dependent on the abuser. In addition, they usually feel that they deserve or cause the violence; which is intensified by the abusive behaviour.

Additional reasons why victims go back to abusers and refuse to testify in court proceedings include children missing their parent and blaming the victim for breaking up the family; the victim is threatened with further violence unless charges are dropped and the victim's lack of confidence in the judicial system.

Violence against women is a cause and consequence of discrimination against women and persisting inequalities between women and men in society. *“Violence against women continues to be an obstacle to achieving equality, development, peace as well as to the fulfillment of women and girls’ human rights. All in all, the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - to leave no one behind - cannot be fulfilled without putting an end to violence against women and girls”*.⁸

⁶ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf

⁷ https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Practice-Guide-Domestic-Violence_Eng-Final.pdf

⁸ <https://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/>



National Commission for the Promotion of Equality

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