



Call to Action for the OECD

Taking Public Action to End Violence at Home



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Background

On 5-6 February 2020, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) hosted its inaugural High-Level Conference on Ending Violence Against Women (VAW). Under the theme “Taking Public Action to End Violence at Home,” the Conference focused on the ways by which governments should act to end a particularly insidious and common form of trauma: violence committed by an intimate partner. Ministers and high-level officials from OECD member countries, emerging economies and developing countries; representatives from businesses, trade unions, and civil society; and survivors of violence came together to share experiences, practices and ideas on how to prevent, address, and eradicate this form of gender-based violence, which affects more than one in three women worldwide.

The Conference concluded with the following Call to Action. Inspired by the good practices and lessons learned during the Conference, OECD Ambassadors call upon the OECD, in co-operation with relevant international organisations and stakeholders, to deepen its work in identifying and recommending key policy measures for governments to eliminate violence against women, especially tackling intimate partner violence (IPV). Depending on available resources, this work programme on IPV should take a holistic perspective, focusing on the OECD’s expertise in the areas of administrative and survey data collection, integrated and tailored service delivery, harmful social norms and institutions, gender stereotyping, people-centred access to justice, and adopting a whole-of-government perspective to address gender biases and inequality. The OECD is eager to support Ambassadors and interested governments in taking public action to end intimate partner violence.

An overview of OECD work on VAW

The OECD is engaged multilaterally with governments, civil society organisations, and other intergovernmental organisations to address VAW. In particular, the OECD is working with the United Nations and other intergovernmental organisations to develop mechanisms such as the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)ⁱ to measure progress on SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, including by ending all forms of gender-based discrimination and eliminating all forms of VAW.

Under the OECD Public Governance Committee (PGC) Strategy for Gender Mainstreaming and its Action Plan,ⁱⁱ the Organisation has committed to supporting countries in providing integrated, cross-ministerial and state-wide responses towards VAW in line with its mandate for the Working Party on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance. OECD Roundtables on Equal Access to Justice advanced victims-centred approaches for women victims of violence to reduce re-victimisation and contribute to greater rates of reporting of VAW.

The OECD Family Database and the OECD’s *Pursuit of Gender Equality*ⁱⁱⁱ report critically evaluate data on intimate partner violence in OECD countries, and the OECD’s *Fast Forward to Gender Equality*^{iv} report maps out systems response to gender equality challenges including VAW.

The OECD Development Co-operation Directorate tracks aid in support of ending violence against women and girls from the 30 members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

Finally, the OECD Gender Recommendations provide a strong foundation for the organisation’s work on VAW. The 2013 OECD Gender Recommendation on Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship^v and the 2015 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life^{vi} identify violence and harassment as longstanding challenges in OECD countries. The OECD DAC Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance is the first international standard on how to prevent and respond to violence against women in aid implementation.



Taking Public Action to End Violence at Home

CALL TO ACTION FOR THE OECD

Policy context

Violence against women (VAW) exists in all countries and across all socio-economic groups.¹ In a 2016 survey of countries adhering to the OECD Gender Recommendations, 21 of the 37 governments listed VAW as one of the three most urgent gender equality issues in their respective countries. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a particularly common form of abuse; as many as one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.^{vii viii} Male intimate partners carry out most of this violence: globally 30% of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner, and intimate partners commit 38% of all murders of women.^{ix}

VAW exists in many different forms and may be experienced within family and intimate relationships, in public spaces and workplaces, as well as online.² Domestic violence, often perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner or spouse, can include physical violence, rape or other forms of sexual assault, psychological abuse, coercive control, and economic abuse. Other forms of violence perpetrated against women include all forms of harassment, cyberbullying, child and forced marriage, human trafficking, and female genital mutilation. Barriers to reporting VAW and seeking protection and justice include the fear of retaliation, stigma, and lack of economic independence.

VAW maintains and is maintained by discriminatory social norms defining male superiority and dominance over women. Cultural norms that inform male behaviour create the environment in which men are allowed or even encouraged to abuse. The same cultural norms can allow women to justify this behaviour. Violence is used by many men to keep girls and women in their position of having less economic, political and social power. Many boys and men are directly harmed themselves by widespread masculine stereotypes that expect them to be violent and aggressive.

VAW has far-reaching effects and can negatively impact women in different ways. It affects multiple aspects of survivors' lives, including their access to education, employment, housing, security, health, and justice. Threats to women's health include injuries; unintended pregnancies; sexually transmitted infections; pregnancy complications; mental health problems; and homicide and suicide.^x In terms of economic effects, women may be unable to work, lose wages, stop participating in regular activities, and have a decreased ability to care for themselves and family members.^{xi} Violence has long-term negative effects both within families, especially for children, and outside of the family and throughout society. There are widespread social, economic, moral, and human costs when violence occurs. Furthermore, the effects that particular individuals may vary due to intersections with other identities as well as social and economic factors, such as age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic class. Women and girls of indigenous backgrounds face higher rates of violence than non-indigenous women and girls, for example.^{xii}

In response to these challenges, many OECD countries are updating their legal frameworks to address VAW.^{xiii} OECD research shows that some countries with national gender-based violence strategies are implementing policies aimed at preventing violence, protecting victims and their families, prosecuting and rehabilitating offenders, and integrating policy approaches including access to justice and victim services. Many countries are making progress to improve gender equality in various forms, abolish discriminatory laws, and implement gender-transformative action plans. However, gender-based discrimination and violence remain a challenge across all countries and throughout women's lifetimes.

¹ Violence against women is an umbrella term that encompasses all forms of discrimination and violence perpetuated against women because they are women.

² In general, VAW can take physical, sexual, psychological or economic forms.

A Call to Action: Taking Public Action to End Violence at Home

IPV is rarely an isolated, one-time incident. Rather, it is usually part of an on-going pattern of abuse. It is therefore important that governments disrupt this process and eliminate violence in a comprehensive and sustainable way. Ending the cycle of violence requires that all relevant public institutions and services coordinate and work together to achieve the common goal of ending IPV. Unfortunately, however, long-standing cultural, institutional, and communication barriers between public institutions and actors often prevent this from happening. Uncoordinated responses across ministries and levels of government not only result in a failure to address VAW comprehensively, but also risk generating secondary victimisation, as victims and survivors navigate legal, social, and justice processes.

Ambassadors call upon the OECD to build on its expertise and scale up its engagement and activities on intimate partner violence. The purpose of the proposed work programme is to help countries achieve the following goals:

1. **Accurate measurement of IPV remains difficult, as governments face serious challenges in collecting administrative and survey data to assess the incidence of violence.** This partly reflects inadequate public resources devoted to data collection, but it also reflects societal reluctance to identify and condemn perpetrators and abuse when it occurs. Improved data collection and dissemination would help raise awareness, inform policymakers of the scope and pervasiveness of IPV, and improve evidence-based policy development and service provision to survivors. Ambassadors call on the OECD to expand its research into the prevalence of IPV by identifying best practices in data collection, by encouraging countries to collect data on IPV more frequently and more accurately, and by publishing and applying results to raise public awareness and improve service delivery for victims.
2. **Given the multifaceted challenges presented by IPV, governments should adopt a whole-of-government approach to end IPV.** An effective whole-of-government approach incorporates society-wide strategies for preventing, protecting and prosecuting against IPV; it begins with a comprehensive legal framework addressing VAW; it includes minimum standards for services; and it clearly outlines roles and responsibilities and achieves buy-in across the government. It also entails creating a culture of high awareness, zero-tolerance, and capacity building. Finally, it requires robust accountability mechanisms that encourage risk assessment and management, independent oversight of institutions, and enforcement of justice. In light of all this, the OECD is called upon to further research systems approaches to IPV; take stock of available country practices and institutional designs for tackling VAW; support countries to identify and close gaps in their systems and accountability mechanisms in relation to VAW; and look at ways in which OECD countries can provide support to change through development co-operation and other whole-of-government efforts.
3. **At the service delivery level, governments and other stakeholders should better coordinate to provide the range of complementary services that victims need to recover from violence and lead healthy lives.** IPV affects multiple aspects of survivors' lives, including their education, employment, income, housing, social protection, legal assistance, access to justice, security and health. To address these issues, policies must take a holistic approach and service providers must be able to work effectively with counterparts providing different services. Ambassadors call on the OECD to deepen its research into integrated service delivery, with a special focus on IPV, to help governments better understand how holistic, multifaceted support for victims should function on the ground, e.g. through co-located services or effective case management.
4. **Governments must address the bottlenecks in justice pathways that continue to persist.** Women who survive violence are particularly vulnerable when facing the justice system. They often face specific barriers in accessing justice, including financial costs, stigma, harassment and re-victimisation during the different stages of seeking justice. Survivors also often have multifaceted legal and related (e.g., social, health, economic) needs, yet most justice systems are fragmented and siloed, which results in proceedings being addressed in separate forums with multiple lawyers and often leading to women's multiple re-victimisation throughout the process. As such, creating survivor-centred justice pathways and their integration with other services that remove these barriers is critical to supporting VAW survivors. In parallel, criminalisation of multiple forms of IPV, including clear, substantial sanctions for perpetrators, and ensuring adequate definition of IPV crimes are also essential to facilitate the eradication of VAW. Ambassadors call on the OECD to deepen its understanding of access to justice for victims of violence from a people-centred perspective, and guide governments in improving these processes in their countries.



Taking Public Action to End Violence at Home

CALL TO ACTION FOR THE OECD

5. **The persistence of IPV depends highly upon social acceptance of such violence. The socio-economic and cultural environment in which VAW thrives must be changed.** Men carry out the vast majority of intimate partner violence against women, and any discussion of addressing and ending VAW must therefore start with the fundamental question of what leads men to harm women – and how to stop it. The social acceptance of IPV, notably by women themselves, also leads to higher levels of prevalence. While VAW remains pervasive, there are signs of change in public discourse and in public policy that indicate there is more motivation to combat all forms of VAW. The OECD is called upon to promote constructive policy dialogues, identify educational programmes that target harmful stereotypes, and support cultural change around harmful masculinity (as well as women's acceptance levels), inequality, and abuses of power and harassment.

The following Ambassadors to the OECD support this Call to Action to end intimate partner violence:

Mr. Olivier Quinaux, Deputy Permanent Representative (Belgium)

H.E. Felipe Morandé, Ambassador (Chile)

H.E. Carsten Staur, Ambassador (Denmark)

H.E. Tuomas Tapio, Ambassador (Finland)

H.E. Jean-Pierre Jouyet, Ambassador (France)

H.E. Martin Hanz, Ambassador (Germany)

H.E. Georges Prevelakis, Ambassador (Greece)

H.E. Kristján Andri Stefánsson, Ambassador (Iceland)

H.E. Antonio Bernardini, Ambassador (Italy)

H.E. Hyoungh Kwon Ko, Ambassador (Korea)

H.E. Lina Viltrakiene, Ambassador (Lithuania)

H.E. Martine Schommer, Ambassador (Luxembourg)

H.E. Sybel Galván Gómez, Ambassador (Mexico)

H.E. Per Egil Selvaag, Ambassador (Norway)

H.E. Ingrid Brocková, Ambassador (Slovak Republic)

H.E. Irena Sodin, Ambassador (Slovenia)

H.E. Manuel Escudero, Ambassador (Spain)

H.E. Anna Brandt, Ambassador (Sweden)

H.E. Giancarlo Kessler, Ambassador (Switzerland)

References

ⁱ OECD (2019), *SIGI 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities*, Social Institutions and Gender Index, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc56d212-en> and www.genderindex.org

ⁱⁱ OECD (2019), *PGC Strategy for Gender Mainstreaming and its Action Plan*

ⁱⁱⁱ OECD (2017), *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-en>.

^{iv} OECD (2019), *Fast Forward to Gender Equality: Mainstreaming, Implementation and Leadership*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/g2g9faa5-en>

^v OECD (2013), *2013 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264279391-en>

^{vi} OECD (2016), *2015 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264252820-en>

^{vii} OECD (2019), *SIGI 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc56d212-en>

^{viii} WHO (2013), *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/>

^{ix} Ibid.

^x OECD (2017), *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-en>.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (2015), *The World's Women 2015*, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/chapter6/chapter6.html>

^{xiii} OECD (2017), *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264281318-en>.

