

GBWN Community Session Report: Love Doesn't Hurt: Following the Budgets for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Introduction

The session convened key experts and stakeholders from various organizations addressing gender-based violence across the Western Balkans. The discussion focused on systemic challenges in combating gender-based violence, specifically within the context of limited institutional capacity, insufficient funding, lack of education, bureaucratic obstacles, and the lack of interest in addressing these issues at the decision-making level. This report synthesizes the key points discussed during the session, highlights the challenges identified, and suggests possible solutions to address the gaps in gender-based violence services.

Key Challenges Identified

- **Lack of Institutional Capacity:** Several speakers emphasized the lack of capacity among institutions tasked with addressing gender-based violence. This includes insufficient resources, training, and manpower, which prevent organizations and institutions from effectively carrying out their duties in providing adequate support to survivors of violence.
- **Inadequate Cost Analysis:** A critical gap noted by multiple speakers was the lack of proper cost analysis for gender-based violence-related services. For example, while Bosnia and Herzegovina does provide SOS helplines and safe houses, the cost per hour for professional services remains inadequately low. This leads to poor compensation for service providers, who often have to work voluntarily, contributing to burnout and insufficient service delivery.
- **Lack of Public Education:** A recurring theme in the discussion was the necessity of public education, especially starting from a young age, to prevent and address gender-based violence. Education was seen as a tool to change societal attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the normalization of violence.
- **Bureaucratic Obstacles:** Bureaucracy was highlighted as a significant barrier to effective operation of safe houses and related services. The complexity and inefficiency of bureaucratic systems often lead to delays in assistance, contributing to the vulnerability of survivors who are in immediate need of shelter and support.

- **Lack of Political Will:** Political will at the government level is another challenge identified by participants. There is a strong backlash against organizations addressing gender-based violence in certain regions, where such efforts are seen as foreign or inappropriate. This lack of support from political leaders is compounded by insufficient funding and poor prioritization of gender-based violence-related issues.

Funding and Budgeting for Gender-Based Violence Services

Funding for gender-based violence services is a critical issue across the region. Many organizations rely on donations and grants, with government funding often falling short. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, safe houses are typically funded at the municipal level, resulting in limited financial resources for their operation. This inadequacy often leads to survivors being forced to leave safe houses before they are ready, due to the lack of resources.

Key points regarding funding challenges include:

- **Donor Dependence:** Many organizations, especially those providing SOS helplines, are heavily dependent on external donors. However, the trend is shifting as donors move away from funding gender-based violence projects, further straining available resources.
- **Insufficient Government Support:** Even when government budgets are allocated for gender-based violence services, they are often insufficient. In some cases, the central government does not allocate enough resources, and local governments struggle to provide the necessary funding for gender-based violence-related services.
- **Voluntary Work:** Many service providers work on a voluntary basis, which is unsustainable in the long term. The lack of funding for paid positions results in burnout and high turnover, reducing the overall effectiveness of gender-based violence services.
- **Cost Analysis Gaps:** A major concern discussed was the need for comprehensive cost analysis of shelter services, which could help better allocate funding and ensure that survivors receive long-term support.

Regional and Institutional Coordination

The session also addressed the importance of regional coordination in tackling gender-based violence. While some countries have made strides in organizing their approaches, the lack of coordination between central and local governments remains an issue.

For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the country's complex governance system with 14 ministries of finance makes it difficult to harmonize budgets for gender-based violence services, further complicating the allocation of resources.

The possibility of using anti-corruption frameworks to track the funding for gender-based violence services was also suggested. By following the money and ensuring transparency in grant allocation and expenditure, stakeholders may be able to reduce corruption and misuse of funds allocated to support survivors of gender-based violence

Conclusion and Recommendations

The session concluded with a call for increased attention to these issues at both the regional and national levels.

Key recommendations included:

- **Improved Funding Mechanisms:** Ensuring that governments allocate sufficient and stable funding for gender-based violence services, including safe houses, helplines, and victim support services. Local governments should be encouraged to set up specific budget lines for these services.
- **Tracking and Transparency:** Establishing mechanisms for tracking the flow of funds allocated to gender-based violence services, ensuring that they are not misused or lost in bureaucracy.
- **Strengthening Public Education:** Starting public education campaigns from a young age to change attitudes toward gender equality and violence prevention.
- **Collaboration Across Regions:** Encouraging collaboration between organizations, governments, and international bodies to share resources and strategies to combat gender-based violence more effectively across the Western Balkans.
- **Political Advocacy:** Working to increase political will and awareness about the importance of addressing gender-based violence, both in terms of funding and legal frameworks.

The session concluded with a commitment to continue working together and exploring ways to push the issue of gender-based violence higher on the political agenda across the region.

This report summarizes the key takeaways from the discussion, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in funding, education, and institutional support to address gender-based violence effectively in the Western Balkans.

GENDER BUDGET WATCHDOG NETWORK COMMUNITY SESSION

Love Doesn't Hurt

Following the Budgets for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

