

Gender-based violence: EU Funds to Support Victims

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Stalking, sexual harassment, sexual violence, physical, and psychological abuse at the hands of intimate partners, forced marriage, and forced sterilisation are deeply traumatising acts of violence. The overwhelming majority of victims are women. Gender-based violence is a violation of a person's fundamental rights and one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based inequality.

In 2014, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published its first study which included feedback received from interviews held with over 42,000 women across the 28 EU Member States. The survey results showed that an estimated 13 million women in the EU have experienced physical violence in the course of the 12 months before the survey interviews were held and that one in three women (33 %) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. The study also found that one in ten women has experienced sexual harassment or stalking through new technologies.

In a Special Eurobarometer Survey on gender-based violence (GBV) issued in November 2016, about one in five respondents expressed victim-blaming views, agreeing with statements such as that women make up or exaggerate claims and that violence against women is often provoked by the victim. In Malta, the figure is as high as 47%. Similarly, while the overwhelming majority in Malta agreed that violence is wrong, 30% of the respondents claimed that such behaviour should not be considered unlawful. This clearly shows that while some progress has undoubtedly been registered in the EU, women in all Member States continue to suffer violence at the hands of abusive partners.

In 2016, the European Commission took a major step in trying to eradicate gender-based violence by proposing that the European Union accedes to the Istanbul Convention. To date, 12 EU Member States, including Malta, have already signed and ratified the Istanbul Convention, a comprehensive international treaty on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

To complement this effort, the European Commission has issued a call under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme to encourage public entities, private or international organisations to submit project proposals aimed at 'Promoting the Access to Justice and Support of Victims of Gender-based Violence and the Treatment of Perpetrators'.

For the purpose of this call, gender-based violence is defined as violence directed against a person because of that person's gender (including gender identity or expression) or as violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. Victims of gender-based violence may include but are not limited to women and girls, refugees and migrants, persons with disabilities, Roma people, persons belonging to national, ethnic or religious minorities, LGBTI, elderly women and homeless women and encompasses different forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

The main focus of the proposed actions should be on activities that directly improve the protection of victims of violence, the support available for victims of violence, the enforcement of legislation supporting such victims in line with EU law and serve to better integrate all agencies and components in existing systems.

Projects may include activities such as capacity building and training for professionals, in particular staff providing specialised support to victims of gender-based violence in shelters or through helplines and counselling, or in treating perpetrators. Training may also be addressed towards other professionals such as police officers, lawyers, medical practitioners, teachers and employers who may be the first point of contact for victims of gender-based violence and who may, therefore, be in a better position to meet the specific needs of victims such as signalling violence or referring the victims to more specialised support services.

Other than capacity building activities, projects may also include activities related to awareness raising, mutual learning, identification and exchange of good practices, development of working methods which may be transferable to other participating countries as well as their practical

implementation particularly when it comes to perpetrator treatment. Proposals may also explore innovative protection and reporting methods such as through the use of new technologies.

Proposals must be transnational and involve organisations from at least two participating countries. The EU grant will finance up to 80% of the total project costs. For the purpose of this call, the grant applied for cannot be lower than €75,000. Moreover, the duration of the project must not exceed 24 months.

The closing date for applications for project proposals under this call is March 8, 2017. For more information on this call, interested applicants are invited to contact MEUSAC on 2200 3300 or by sending an e-mail to funding.meusac@gov.mt.