

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 279 (2009)¹ Combating domestic violence against women

1. A very large number of women in Europe are victims of violence perpetrated by men in their immediate social environment. Domestic violence, which is a result of the imbalance of power between women and men, affects women of all nationalities, ages and backgrounds and has negative consequences for the whole of society, including future generations.

2. Towns and regions are directly confronted with the consequences of this type of violence and have to bear the brunt of not only the human and social costs but also the financial implications² of this problem.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe condemns this human rights violation and undertakes to do everything in its power to eliminate it. It welcomes that fact that, at the Warsaw Summit on 16 and 17 May 2005, the heads of state and government of the member states of the Council of Europe decided to make the issue of combating domestic violence against women a priority.

4. In response to the Congress' call for action, many European towns and regions took part in the Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (2006-2008). The synergies developed between the three tiers of political action – governmental, parliamentary and local and regional – contributed to the success of the pan-European campaign. The Congress thanks all the towns and cities which took part in the campaign under the slogan “Towns and regions of Europe take a stand”, thereby demonstrating that this issue is of central importance to local and regional authorities.

5. In view of the above and with a view to strengthening the capacity of towns and regions to provide an effective and co-ordinated response to the problem of domestic violence against women, the Congress recommends that, within the context of the law and their own specific powers and responsibilities, local and regional authorities:

a. develop comprehensive strategies, in the framework of national action plans in line with other associated local or regional strategies, which:

- i. set precise aims and objectives;
- ii. stipulate criteria for monitoring the situation;
- iii. establish partnerships with all the services concerned (in particular health, social and child welfare services, housing, services specialising in domestic and sexual violence and criminal justice) and women's non-governmental

organisations (NGOs), for example by setting up strategic planning groups on this theme;

b. ensure that the victims have access to a wide range of free, high-quality services, specialising in providing assistance to women and children: emergency and temporary accommodation in refuges/shelters, rehousing, local services (round-the-clock services, individual counselling and support), telephone hotlines, health care (including psychiatric care) and social welfare services (employment or welfare benefits, training, childcare, etc.). Such services should:

i. be set up by women's NGOs and in consultation with the women themselves;

ii. be available throughout the country;

iii. be non-discriminatory and accessible to women in situations of exclusion or with special needs (immigrant women or those belonging to ethnic minorities, refugees, women with disabilities and women suffering from alcoholism, drug addiction or mental disorders);

iv. guarantee users safety and confidentiality (the location of refuges/shelters must be kept secret);

v. foster victims' autonomy and self-determination;

c. introduce perpetrators' programmes in co-operation with the NGOs working in this field so as to guarantee victims' safety;

d. provide appropriate training for local and regional government staff and elected representatives so that they understand the dynamics and impact of domestic and sexual violence in the context of gender equality and human rights, the role of local and regional authorities in this field and the need for inter-institutional co-operation;

e. support NGOs working in the field of domestic violence against women, given that they are key players in upholding women's rights and assisting victims, and make resources (for example premises) available to them;

f. raise awareness and inform the public at large by:

i. involving men in awareness-raising activities, clearly condemning violence and highlighting the fact that violence against women is not a “fact of life”;

ii. drawing attention to local services which defend and support victims and disseminating information in public places and associations on how to secure access to these services;

iii. keeping a readily accessible directory of local services involved in combating violence against women;

g. conduct preventive activities in primary and secondary schools, and with this in mind:

i. devise and introduce, in co-operation with the NGOs concerned, programmes aimed at raising young people's awareness of gender-based violence, gender inequalities and sexual stereotypes and at promoting respectful relationships and non-violent conflict resolution;

ii. appoint a representative responsible for family violence issues and the integration of child protection policies and procedures, who can serve as a link with the social protection services;

iii. give appropriate training to teachers so that they can run and support this type of programme and provide education staff with the necessary guidance;

iv. encourage schools and educational services to detect the signs and indicators of family abuse and to offer support to ill-treated minors and their parents;

h. monitor and evaluate local and regional policies, the provision of services and other local and regional initiatives;

i. call on their parliaments and governments to become more actively involved in combating domestic violence against women, in association with local and regional authorities, and promote the measures identified by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe³ to prevent such violence, protect the victims and prosecute the perpetrators;

j. continue mobilising the public and devote 25 November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to specific activities on themes relating to domestic violence (assistance to victims or raising public awareness).

6. The Congress also invites regions with legislative power to enact specific laws on this type of violence within the context of their national legislation.

7. Finally, the Congress:

a. invites the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and United Cities and Local Governments to contribute to the United Nations campaign to end violence against women and girls (2008-2015), drawing on the Congress' experience in this field;

b. asks its Committee on Social Cohesion to continue its work on the theme of equality, in co-operation with the relevant committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG).

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 3 March 2009, 1st Sitting (see Document CG(16)7REP, explanatory memorandum, rapporteur: S. Barnes (United Kingdom, L, EPP/CD)).

2. For example, a study conducted at Umeå University, Sweden, in 2008, estimated the individual cost of domestic violence at €250 000 in the case of a man who had physically ill-treated his partner for twenty years.

3. Resolution 1635 (2008) on combating violence against women: towards a Council of Europe convention.