Domestic violence in the time of coronavirus: Women's organizations share their experience

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The GNCHR, as the independent advisory body to the State on human rights matters, closely monitors the issues of domestic violence and systematically delivers opinions on the adoption of the necessary measures to address it.

The GNCHR, in the context of its mission, had submitted an extensive text of observations on the draft law for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Since then, the GNCHR has been monitoring the implementation of the Convention and could substantially assist the State in the production of horizontal policies (which will effectively incorporate the principle of gender equality in all areas) and in the adoption of appropriate measures in all three axes that constitute the cornerstones of the Convention: prevention, protection and prosecution.

In fact, the GNCHR through its institutional role as bridge builder, namely a bridge that narrows the gap between civil society and the State by bringing them closer, as the national legislator has acknowledged, could take action to raise awareness of civil society, on a systematic basis, in cooperation with NGOs, the mass media and the private sector, as well as training actions of the professionals involved in the treatment of incidents. These are key obligations of the States under the Convention.

With regard to the period of the pandemic that we are going through, we would like to mention that throughout the entire confinement the GNCHR held meetings on a weekly basis, online, with the participation of the bodies involved in the decision-making process, in order to face the new challenges, assess the impact of the restrictive measures, provide the government with appropriate advice and at the same time inform the public about its rights and the relevant risks of their breach due to the pandemic.

The press releases from the meetings have been posted on the website of the GNCHR.
As it was pointed out in every meeting, any measures adopted should take care for the persons that are threatened.

During the discussion on domestic violence, where the Secretary General of Family Policy and Gender Equality had been invited and was present, the GNCHR expressed its strong concern over the increase in incidents during the confinement period (official figures show almost four-fold complaints on the SOS line). The GNCHR acknowledges, of course, the fact that the State has carried out and continues to carry out information and support campaigns, but reiterates the need for coordinated state action while ensuring that victims benefit from special protection measures.

Therefore, the GNCHR calls on the State to exploit all the possibilities, **also after the end of the health crisis**, such as:

- Systematic provision of prevention services and psychological, social, legal support and housing to women at risk, including vulnerable groups: foreign women, women with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people.

- Continuous awareness and information campaigns on available telephone lines and existing structures.

- Strengthening of health and police structures.

- Reinforcement of all the services and the telephone lines for complaints and

- Ensuring effective access of victims to justice.

After all, we should not forget that domestic violence preceded confinement and does not end with the termination of the confinement.