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25th WAVE Conference

October 16–17, 2023 | Madrid, Spain

‘Institutional violence and its impact on women’s human rights across Europe’

Concept Note



WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE
WAVE Network and European Info Centre against Violence



This year’s conference is organised by the WAVE office together with
WAVE Member Fundacion para la Convivencia Aspacia from Spain.

Description

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a pervasive form of violence. Globally, an estimated 736 million women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both in their lifetime. In the EU, 1 in 10 women has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15, and 1 in 20 women has been raped (FRA). Information on the full prevalence of these and other forms of *overt violence, such as sexual violence, femicide, domestic violence etc.*, although insufficient, is collected and acknowledged as a form of violence against women and girls in most contexts. In contrast, *covert violence* may be more difficult to identify and perceive, yet, its damage is no less real. Institutional violence is one form of covert violence.

Institutional violence refers to violence emanating from institutions which exercise power and can use that power to cause harm, or to further enforce structural oppression (i.e. public officials performing some type of discriminatory, humiliating or prejudiced action or delay, hinder, prevent the exercise of rights). It is a form of violence experienced through the relation people have in their interactions with public institutions and/or with people within such institutions. As a general criterion, the victims of this institutional violence in the context of VAWG are mainly minoritised women, women in a situation of social exclusion, or other groups considered as “inferior” by the system.

Institutional violence can be committed by state actors, and is further maintained not only through acts or omissions of public servants, such as not fulfilling their due diligence obligation, but also by implementing norms or specific institutional practices. The interplay between different forms of discrimination and maintaining patriarchal structures, that have both a conscious and subconscious influence on the way societies behave, is at the core of institutional violence, and can manifest as one-off acts or as a pattern.

While progress has been made in a number of areas, and the status of women in Europe has improved during recent decades, such progress cannot be taken for granted, as some of the rights established are vanishing faster than they were acquired and a life free from violence is still not ensured to all women across Europe. Furthermore, the rise of illiberal democracies^[1] and its consequent crackdown on citizens' rights has had a direct impact on womens' full and equal enjoyment of their rights.

[1] An illiberal democracy describes a governing system that hides its "nondemocratic practices behind formally democratic institutions and procedures". More on the concept here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/dpaer/-/timothy-snyder-on-current-illiberal-trends-in-europe-lessons-from-history->

Against this backdrop, this year’s WAVE conference will focus on the pervasive impact of institutional violence on women and girls, the different forms in which it manifests, and the key role women’s specialist services have in denouncing and undoing this type of violence. By looking at violence against women and girls through a multidisciplinary lens, the conference will focus on the link between institutional violence and state accountability.

The conference will explore institutional violence from three different angles:

- *the political context*, specifically, the ways in which a society’s/regime’s ideological stance allows this form of oppression and abuse of power to be an inevitable consequence of maintaining the status quo.
- *the institutional practice*, specifically, how institutions reinforce and/or create obstacles i.e. from processes to behaviours and attitudes, that limit women & girls’ access to rights.
- *the personal sphere*, specifically, how intersectional identities and experiences play a role in the level of institutional violence women and girls are subjected to.

We hope that you will find the 25th WAVE Conference interesting and enriching,
and look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in person in Madrid!



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