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WAVE POSITION PAPER

Intersectionality and the inclusive approach to dealing with gender-based violence

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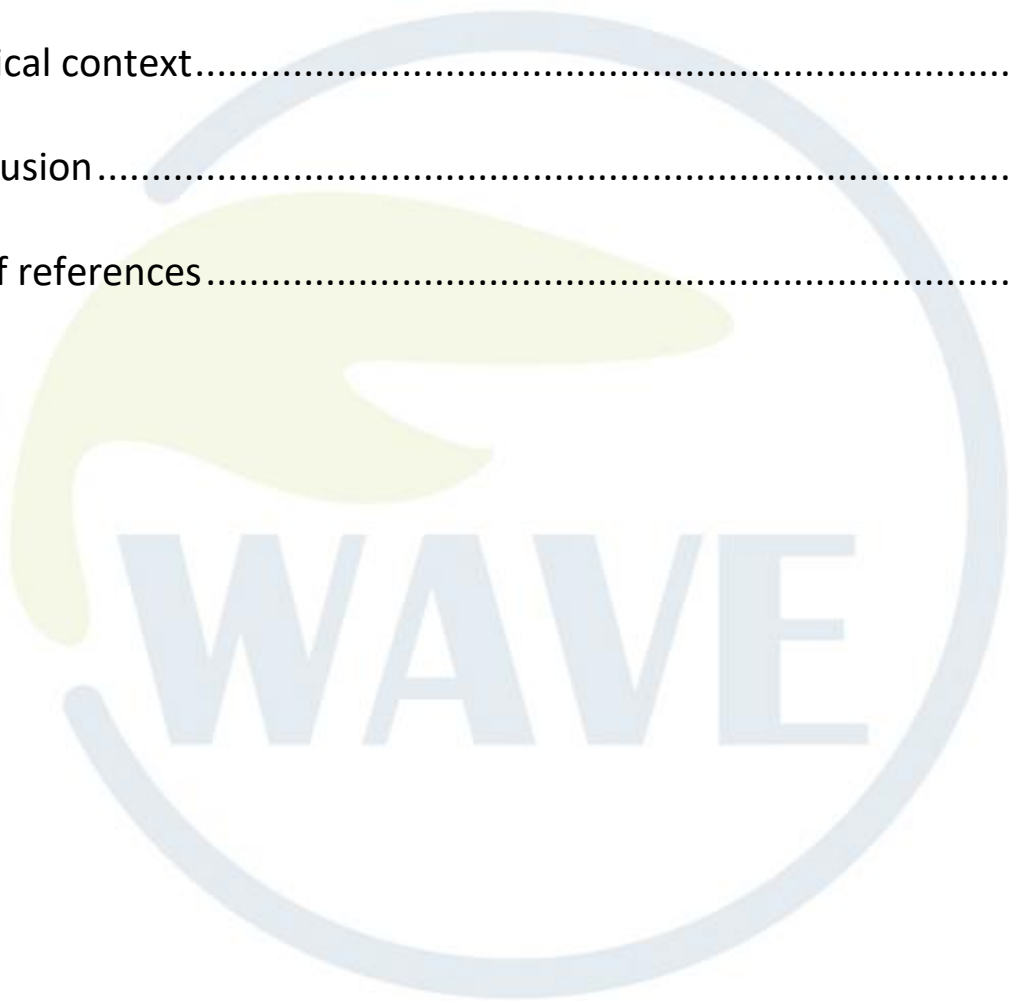
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Introduction

I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own. (Audre Lorde)

Women Against Violence Europe – The WAVE Network firmly believes that the violation of women's rights is a violation of humanity. Therefore, it has been working towards the implementation and protection of women's rights as well as the elimination of violence against women (VAW) since its foundation in 1994. The promotion of justice and access to shelters as well as service provision for women and girls who are experiencing violence are main objectives of the Network and its Members. A key aim of the network is to fight for the rights of all women by implementing an intersectional approach to its work and thus oppose discrimination and oppression. The focus of this position paper is to highlight WAVE's stance on the importance of integrating intersectionality and inclusivity while providing services to women survivors of violence.

The paper is divided into two sections; the **first part** is dedicated to the theoretical basis and legal framework surrounding intersectionality. The protection and inclusion of all women irrespective of their race, colour, sex, language, political and religious views, origin, migration status or more are embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Istanbul Convention. These frameworks serve as the theoretical basis that state the necessity and prerequisite to a) include and strengthen all women within the feminist movement, and b) work against the patriarchy, toxic masculinity and VAW. WAVE does not only follow these guidelines, it internalizes the articles of the Declaration and Conventions, and strives to implement them in order to strengthen the European-wide Network, establish cross-border relationships and provide services to all women.

The second section of the paper is dedicated to presenting and analysing the practical context of intersectionality within the Network and its Members. The aim is to present the work of the organizations that have successfully and effectively implemented an intersectional and inclusive approach dealing with all women survivors of violence. Five WAVE Members– from Austria, Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and the United Kingdom – have been selected to exemplify best practices regarding the implementation of an intersectional approach within the context of VAW. It is of great importance to provide multilingual support, provide barrier free access as well as access to women in secluded and rural areas; and engage in cooperation with other women's organisation and women's service providers to fortify women's rights and status within society.

Lastly, the position paper summarizes WAVE's position on intersectionality, its work and projects that aim to ensure an intersectional approach and provides strategies and ideas to include all women. WAVE strongly adheres to the principles of intersectionality, and its implementation and effective execution to provide support to all women. Furthermore, intersectional approaches in service provision do not only reflect counteracting gender-based violence, but also patriarchy. With united forces, all women must support each other, and embrace their differences in order to appropriately receive equal and adequate support for a life free of violence.

Legal and theoretical context

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 2

As it is carved into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that all people are entitled to all rights irrespective of the distinctions mentioned above, it is one of WAVE's key responsibilities to internalize these principles and reflect them in all its activities. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations*¹. The focal point of the WAVE Network is to embrace, strengthen and develop the rights of women and girls in Europe. The notion that *women's rights are human rights* has gained universal prominence and importance. Nonetheless, the WAVE Network strongly believes that this must be deemed as more than a mere statement, and therefore must be put into action by governments and institutions not only in Europe, but all around the world.

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination. (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 7.)

International and national laws must be amended accordingly to the needs, protection and security of women and girls. In the context of gender-based violence, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, short Istanbul Convention, serves as the groundwork for the promotion and protection of women's rights as human rights. The Istanbul Convention which entered into force on 08 January 2014 sets standards for inclusivity that must be implemented by the states that have ratified the Convention. *This landmark treaty of the Council of Europe opens the path for creating a legal framework at pan-European level to protect women against all forms of violence, and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention also establishes a specific monitoring mechanism ("GREVIO") in order to ensure effective implementation of its provisions by the Parties*². The Istanbul Convention ensures inclusivity and intersectionality by declaring that states must provide services to all women.

The implementation of the provisions of this Convention by the Parties, in particular measures to protect the rights of victims, shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status. (The Istanbul Convention. Article 4, 3.)

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>, Effective: January 2018.

² The Istanbul Convention. In: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210>, Effective: January 2018.

Within the context of violence against women, the following is evident. There are multiple layers to service provision to women affected by violence; multiple layers to being a survivor of violence, and multiple layers to being a woman. Therefore, the survivor centric approach must be adapted to the needs of the concerned woman, particularly when providing services to different women survivors affected by different forms of violence. Concretely, the emphasis must not only be put on how to refer to the violence that was perpetrated against her, but on how to refer to the women that this violence was perpetrated against.

Parties are encouraged to apply this Convention to all victims of domestic violence. Parties shall pay particular attention to women victims of gender-based violence in implementing the provisions of this Convention.

(The Istanbul Convention. Article 2, 2.)

Parties shall provide or arrange for specialist women's support services to all women victims of violence and their children. (The Istanbul Convention. Article 22, 2.)

The acknowledgement of social differences contributes to the inclusion of all women. This can be achieved through the implementation of proper tools and the employment of trained staff to adequately deal and work with these differences. Inclusivity of all women must be the aim of women organizations and women's service providers as well as society as a whole. Therefore, it is the groundwork and concept of inclusivity and intersectionality that WAVE implements to best represent, include and cooperate with all women and girls.

The intersection of different forms of discrimination is referred to as *Intersectionality*. Its dominant influence on the status of minorities within societies has persisted for many decades; however, the formal recognition of the term intersectionality can only be traced back to the 1980s. The term intersectionality was coined in 1989 by the US-American lawyer, academic scholar and pioneer of the critical race theory Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the complexity of social injustice. Through analysis of the overlapping of racism and sexism in the United States of America, Crenshaw focused on the intricacy of discrimination, and the subsequent and analogue repercussion of these both components on the concerned individual. Consequently, it is evident that the intersection of social differences on multiple levels can be found within all societies worldwide. Through the intersection of racism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and classism - concerned individuals are confronted with new obstacles and hardships. Crenshaw compares intersectionality as an analogy to traffic in an intersection.

Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. [...] [B]lack women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination-the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. (Crenshaw 1989: 149)

Furthermore, the intersection of two or more forms of social discrimination cannot be explained through social discrimination A or through social discrimination B. To exemplify, experiencing discrimination as a black woman cannot be solely referred to as an act of racism or an act of sexism, it has to encompass the intersection of race and sex. Crenshaw exemplifies this social phenomenon through the hardships of a black women; however, her example can be adapted to many other variations of concerned individual, these are further possible examples of intersecting discriminations:

discrimination against	intersection of discrimination forms
woman with disabilities	sexism and ableism
woman from lower class	sexism and classism
lesbian Romani woman	sexism, racism and homophobia
and more.	and more.

There are no defined limits to the forms of discrimination a woman can experience, since a woman encompasses multiple layers to her identity.

The first step to the effective implementation of gender equality, which is the ultimate prospect in the fight of combating and eliminating violence against women, is through equality within womanhood. It is of utmost importance to regard all women as equal, and to provide all women with equal opportunities by adequately and justly responding to their different needs. Therefore, the knowledge of these intrinsic social differences contributes to the inclusion of all women, if proper tools are implemented and trained staff is employed. Inclusivity of all women must be a key aim in women’s organizations and women’s service provision.

States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

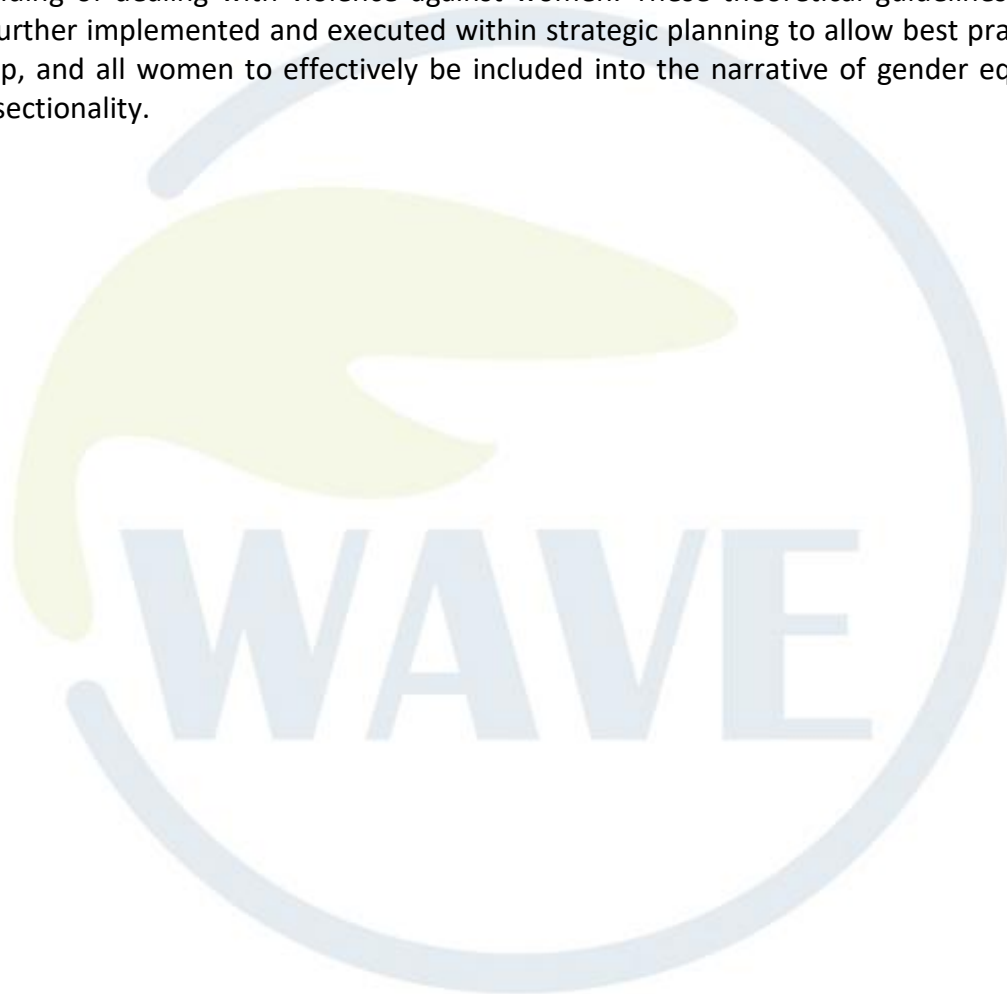
(Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Article 3.)

Inclusive and non-discriminatory approaches shall be achieved through social, local and linguistic accessibility. Language is a quintessential part of service provision; therefore, information in organisations, centres, shelters or via helplines shall be provided in various languages and barrier free languages such as braille or sign language. When working with women survivors of violence, it is utterly important to ensure that the communication process is conducted in a sensible manner. The Istanbul Convention states the importance of competent interpreters in judicial proceedings.

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to protect the rights and interests of victims, including their special needs as witnesses, at all stages of investigations and judicial proceedings, in particular by: providing victims with independent and competent interpreters when victims are parties to proceedings or when they are supplying evidence; (The Istanbul Convention. Article 56, 1 h.)

Not only in legal proceedings, but particularly in service provision, is it of great importance to work with competent and trained interpreters and translators. The WAVE Network follows the firm belief that it is not only important how we speak *about* women, but also how we speak *with* them. Trained translators have linguistic and culturally specific competences. Especially when dealing with migrant women survivors of violence, it is important to provide them with sensible information, considering their specific culture and origin.

In conclusion, it is essential to comprehend the theoretical framework of intersectionality as well as the legal landscape and policies to provide a gendered and intersectional understanding of dealing with violence against women. These theoretical guidelines must then be further implemented and executed within strategic planning to allow best practices to develop, and all women to effectively be included into the narrative of gender equality and intersectionality.



Practical context

WAVE is a European-wide Network that encompasses 130 Members comprised of network organizations, individual organizations and individual members, which work in 46 European countries to combat violence against women. To best represent the diversity of Europe and its citizens, WAVE Members are from EU as well as non-EU countries, and are based in the capitals as well as smaller cities and areas of the respective countries.

In the following section, we would like to present good practice examples of various WAVE Members who have successfully embedded intersectionality into a practical context. If an intersectional approach within an organisation or service is not achieved, it can have adverse consequences on the support service provider, the women affected by violence, the struggle against gender-based violence and the society as a whole. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for WAVE to represent a diverse group of women, and take appropriate actions to ensure the inclusivity of all women or at the very least – ensure the inclusivity of the largest minority³ groups of the respective country. WAVE believes that inclusivity can be achieved through social engagement, local prevalence of support services, and linguistic accessibility.

Best practise examples: Inclusivity and Language

The lingua franca of the WAVE Network for internal and external communications is English. Nonetheless, WAVE and its Members are aware of the importance of providing services in various languages for a broader and wider reach. WAVE Members provide multilingual support within their respective organisations and services to ensure the inclusion of all women. In the following section, WAVE would like to present two examples of effective implementation of intersectionality in two different WAVE member countries that best represent intersectional feminism on the basis of language, and strongly adhere to the beliefs of the Network.

Austria

The *Domestic Abuse Intervention Centre* Vienna is a centre for protection against violence located in the capital of Austria. The social and legal service providers ensure adequate and appropriate assistance of victims *within the framework of police barring orders for perpetrators of domestic violence. The centre provides the affected women with counselling services, and offers free support*⁴.

Together with the *Austrian Women's Shelter Network - Information Centre Against Violence (AÖF)* the domestic abuse intervention centre has published a brochure on the protection of women against violence. The most important information on women's protection, being legal frameworks and policies against violence, and the contact address of support services and women's organization are comprised in this brochure. The brochure is available in 21 languages, as well as in braille to ensure that all women who have been exposed and have been suffering from domestic violence or stalking in Austria, can contact the centre and access information in their language.

³ minority: A small group of people within a community or country, differing from the main population in race, religion, language, or political persuasion.

⁴ The Domestic Abuse Centre Vienna. In: <https://www.interventionsstelle-wien.at/english-summary>, Effective: January 2018

Ireland

Women's Aid Ireland is another WAVE Member that exemplifies the importance of inclusivity and intersectional feminism. One of their main services is the 24hr National Freephone Helpline which *offers confidential information, support and understanding to women in the Republic of Ireland, who are being abused by current or former boyfriends, partners or husbands*⁵. To ensure that appropriate support can be provided, the helpline offers *support in over 170 languages through the Telephone Interpretation Service. The service is available 7 days a week, is free and confidential*⁶. Furthermore, Women's Aid Ireland provides disabled women survivors of violence with a *Text Service for Deaf or hard of hearing women*. The Service is available 7 days a week and is strictly confidential.

In conclusion, it is of great importance to provide information about and access to support services in various languages to prevent discrimination and assist a variety of women. Therefore, WAVE is pleased to have multiple members, that provide multilingual services to effectively respond to the needs of all women.

Best practise examples: Inclusivity and Location

WAVE believes that inclusivity can be best achieved through actively reaching out to various groups of women. Therefore, it is of great importance for different women's organisations and support services to be located in not only the capital and the most populated cities of the respective countries, but also in rural areas. Women in rural areas must not live in seclusion without access to help when dealing with violence; they must also be provided with information and granted access to services on site. Hence, WAVE is happy to present two best practice examples that ensure the inclusion of more women in combatting gender-based violence through local accessibility.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The *Medica Zenica Information* is one of two Bosnian WAVE Members. The NGO offers *psycho-social and medical support to women and children victims of war and also post-war violence, including victims of war rapes and other forms of war torture, sexual violence in general, domestic violence survivors, as well as victims of trafficking in human beings*⁷. One of their key activities is to provide economic empowerment to women in rural areas in Bosnia Herzegovina. From 2009 to 2012, Medica Zenica conducted psychosocial workshops in ten local communities (Arnauti, Briznik, Lokvine and Vrselje, Babino, Begov Han and Orahovica, Smajjici, Kolic and Starina) in cooperation with local community authorities to empower and educate women and girls. During these educational workshops, Medica Zenica discovered that women in rural areas *lack adequate information on their rights and access to education*. Furthermore, Medica Zenica was the first organization in most rural areas that conducted and implemented educational and supportive workshops for women and girls⁸. It is evident that women from rural areas must be included into the narrative of being protected against gender based violence. However, women and girls in rural areas must first

⁵ Women's Aid Ireland. In: <https://www.womensaid.ie/services/helpline.html>, Effective: January 2018

⁶ Women's Aid Ireland. In: <https://www.womensaid.ie/services/helpline/telephoneinterp.html>, Effective: January 2018

⁷"Medica" Zenica. In: http://medicazenica.org/uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=28, Effective: February 2018

⁸ "Medica" Zenica. In: http://medicazenica.org/uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56&Itemid=50, Effective: February 2018

be provided with adequate information on their rights as well as on the issue of VAW to realize the form(s) of violence that are perpetrated against them. It must also be made clear that violence is under no circumstances justifiable and that it is undoubtedly a serious human rights violation. Often, women and girls in rural and secluded areas are not aware of the violence they are suffering from, as they perceive it to be part of their culture. In this context it is vital that local communities contribute to providing empowering information to women and facilitate access to education. As a result, women and girls that are more aware of the context of VAW, are better able to seek appropriate and effective support.

Albania

Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) is one of seven WAVE Members of Albania and aims to disseminate *gender sensitive information, conduct studies, research and training courses, advocate and lobby* for women's right⁹. In 2015, the GADC conducted the project "*Engaging Korca' community in public sector affairs, mechanisms to ensure good governance*" to improve women's rights in rural areas. The focal point of the project was to achieve a more gender sensitive governance at local level. A key project strategy was to build local mechanisms that encourage interaction and dialogue between local authorities and women. The aim was for local authorities to address the needs of all locals, and to encourage women as well as men to interact with the authorities, and exercise their rights. Furthermore, the project aimed to build the capacities of local human resources. This included:

- preparation of social auditors as experts who monitor and assess gender sensitive policies undertaken by local government and implement the mechanisms that encourage interaction between authorities and community;
- empowerment of women with knowledge on their rights; build local structures' capacities to address gender equality issues and make women voices heard in local decision-taking¹⁰.

As a result, the project assessed that local governments must detect and respond to the needs of its locals by implementing a gender perspective throughout their work. This does not only contribute to developing local infrastructure, but also aims to empower women economically, and work towards ending domestic violence, according to the GADC.

In conclusion, organisations and support services must make an effort to provide information also to women from rural and secluded areas to effectively work against VAW. It is vital that local authorities engage in programs and activities that enable women in rural areas to benefit from social service provision and assistance when being exposed to violence. WAVE strongly supports the integration of women from rural areas by endorsing initiatives which work from an inclusive approach towards ending VAW and thus ensuring the recognition of women's specific struggles.

⁹ GADC. In: http://www.gadc.org.al/v2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=27&Itemid=3&lang=en, Effective: February 2018

¹⁰ GADC. In: http://www.gadc.org.al/v2/index.php?option=com_fabrik&c=form&view=details&Itemid=7&fabrik=7&tableid=7&rowid=19&lang=en, Effective: February 2018

Best practise examples: Inclusivity and Social Engagement

Inclusivity encompasses the social inclusion of all women which can be achieved through various forms of social activism. WAVE firmly follows the idea that cooperation and collaboration is the basis of integrating women from different social locations and backgrounds into the process of combatting VAW. Through various campaigns, projects and programmes, different women's organisations can engage in partnerships to develop and implement tools to include all women. Integration of all women is the inherent idea of intersectional feminism and is one of WAVE's key values.

IMKAAN, a WAVE Member from the United Kingdom, has established its organisation on the basis of intersectionality and manifests intersectional and inclusive principles throughout all their activities and projects. IMKAAN is a second-tier organisation based in London and led by and for Black and minority ethnic (BME) women with the main aim to address violence against BME women and girls at a national and international level. They work in partnerships with various organisations to *improve policy and practice responses to BME women and girls*¹¹. IMKAAN exemplifies that various perspectives and experiences of women survivors of violence are most effectively represented through a diverse staff and team. Consequently, trainings and projects shall be conducted to not only raise awareness on intersectionality as a whole, but to also raise awareness on the individual obstacles faced by women experiencing violence. To ensure all women survivors of violence are appropriately approached and supported, intersectionality needs to permeate all work-levels in an organisation, the strategic as well as the operational. Women's organisations which are not explicitly by and for BME women, can best achieve this through cooperation with such organisations.

At the moment, the WAVE Network, IMKAAN and European Women's Lobby have cooperated and are partner organizations of the EU/UN WOMEN Regional Programme "Implementing Norms, Changing Minds", which aims at ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women in the Western Balkans and Turkey, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women. The aim of this programme is to jointly work towards a more inclusive regional approach to dealing with gender-based violence, with each of the three project partners, bringing their unique experience to the project: WAVE as an expert on women's networks working against VAW, IMKAAN as an NGO by and for BME women and expert on intersectionality and the EWL as a legal expert.

Best practise examples: Inclusivity & Barrier-free Access

The accessibility to services for women survivors of violence, especially survivors with disabilities is an adherent part of inclusive support. Therefore, it is vital for services to not only provide barrier free access to their services on a physical level but also in terms of language and access to legal/practical information relevant to the situation to truly include disabled women survivors of into their service provisions. Providing information in braille and sign language are key in including disabled women survivors of violence.

¹¹ IMKAAN. In: <https://www.imkaan.org.uk/>, Effective: January 2018

Conclusion

The WAVE Network firmly believes that social justice and the protection of women against violence can only be attained, if all women are reached and their different yet equally important needs are appropriately responded to.

We invite all of our Members to exchange strategies and form partnerships to include various groups of women in the context of the elimination of gender-based violence. Implementing an intersectional approach to service provision ensures that more women can be reached, and subsequently more women have the opportunity to be safe and secure. Although the WAVE Office is located in Vienna, we are proud to have a vast and diverse membership in Europe with at least one member organisation in almost every European country representing women from urban and rural areas.

Furthermore, intersectionality encompasses the awareness of the multiple identities a woman has, which can be understood through trainings, campaigns, projects and programmes. WAVE adheres to the importance of a survivor-centric and holistic approach to supporting women survivors of violence. Moreover, within specialized services all internal stakeholders should be aware of the multi-layered issues affecting different groups of women and aim towards the establishment of a diverse work. This approach represents the identities and interconnectedness of feminism, and can therefore adequately respond to the needs of the particular women survivor of violence. This awareness must be created both through a holistic organisational strategy, adequate training and related operational implementation. The provision of multilingual support and counselling services is inevitable in reaching all women survivors of violence. It is key to cooperate closely with networks and organization by and for women from minority backgrounds, to that deal with the issue of the concerned women survivor of violence.

The root of gender based violence is power imbalance. The institutional patriarchy is established in such way that women are deemed as inferior in society. Power imbalance should not occur within cooperation of women's organisations and women's service provision. WAVE strongly believes and works towards implementing the idea that transparent cooperation, appropriate relationships and partnerships must be formed. As a result, knowledge on women's issues is expanded, and information and service provision is done more effectively. Moreover, support services can be more directly offered to all women survivors of violence irrespective of their race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status.

"If we aren't intersectional, some of us, the most vulnerable, are going to fall through the cracks." (Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw)

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