



GPKT Phase II – Women’s Working Group Report No. 13

25 November – 10 December 2007

GPKT Women’s Cross-Border Initiative Against Domestic Violence

As part of the GPKT Women’s Working Group strategy to promote women’s rights in their communities and advocacy work, three member NGOs, *Florens Najtingeill*, *SOS* (Kumanovo) and *Fortesa* (Kamenica) launched an advocacy campaign against domestic violence from 25 November to 10 December 2007. The campaign was launched on 25 November to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.



Implemented independently by the three NGOs, the fifteen-day campaign, which adopted the slogan 'Women’s Across the Border Initiative Against Domestic Violence', aimed to strengthen links between women representing all communities across the borders in the micro-region, as well as to further strengthen the capacities of local women’s NGOs to implement cross-border activities. After an open call for proposals, the GPKT Project awarded a grant to the three partners through funding provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The campaign included the distribution of awareness raising materials and the implementation of public debates on women’s rights and domestic violence. The first debate took place in Kamenica on 1 December, with over thirty local women participating in the open discussion. Sonja Arsovska, representing the NGO SOS from Kumanovo, moderated the discussion and pointed out that, “Unfortunately domestic violence affects women from all GPKT communities. We as women could jointly turn the violent language to the language and culture for dialogue...we are the main actors and have the power to educate our children because we need to help them grow into healthy young men and women. Women in the micro-region should identify strategies for changing the social and institutional norms that perpetuate family violence.”



The second public debate took place on 7 December in Kumanovo where GPKT Women’s Working Group members were joined by representatives from the Centre for Social Work and the Medical Centre. Mr. Naser Veseli, Deputy Ombudsperson said that, “...so far no case has been reported or no single woman has ever approached our office to seek support.” According to the participants in both debates, this is largely due to the fact that domestic violence is still a taboo theme within the culture. Additionally, the economic dependency of many women in the GPKT municipalities, regardless of their ethnic

background, also contributes to their hesitancy in reporting cases of domestic abuse. At both debates posters and multi-lingual pamphlets were distributed to all participants.



The key conclusions and recommendations from the debates include:

- There is a lack of information sharing among government and civil society institutions regarding existing laws concerning domestic violence.
- NGOs run by women have proven to be more trusted by local women.
- There is a need to establish better communication and co-operation between NGOs and institutions dealing with issues related to domestic violence and abuse of women.
- More awareness raising activities and training for staff providing support services to women are crucial to protecting and supporting women from domestic violence and other forms of violence.
- The existing SOS line in Kumanovo needs to be available in the Albanian language as well as the Macedonian language.
- Systematic co-operation is required among relevant authorities in order to establish a mechanism to support victims across borders (there are cases where women approach shelters across the border from their home community).
- Central governments need to allocate sufficient budgets for support services and to establish shelters to support victims.

Local TV stations TV Nova and TV Hana covered the press conference and the debate in Kumanovo. Sonja Arsovska of SOS and Advije Latifi of *Florens Najtingeill* gave interview to both TV stations.

Motivated by the assassination of the three Mirabel sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on 25 November 1961, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed in 1999 the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women as 25 November.