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Statement submitted by Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

This statement examines the challenges confronting women and their children amidst crises, specifically when exposed to male violence. It identifies the issues in strengthening institutions and social protection systems, access to public services, sustainable infrastructure and addressing poverty, particularly during times of crisis, that are faced specifically by women and their children who experience male violence. It also outlines possible measures to overcome these problems. Even though the insights presented in this report derived from our grounded experience in Turkey, as members of the WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe) Network and EWL (European Women's Lobby), based on our exchange of information with organizations from around Europe, we know that these experiences are also exemplary in the way they showcase the issues faced by women who experience violence in different contexts during times of crisis. We provide these insights in order to contribute to the report by the UN General Secretary and the Agreed Conclusions.

The information provided in this report is based on the knowledge and experience that we gain from women who apply to Mor Çatı from all around Turkey (approximately 1100 women in a year). It also derives from our observations specifically in the earthquake zone in Turkey. After the earthquakes, which happened on 6 February 2023 and affected 10 provinces, Mor Çatı visited the earthquake zone, in February and April, in an effort to monitor the mechanisms for combating violence against women and the situation of women and children who are exposed to or at risk of violence. We also contacted some public institutions and municipalities that provide services in the region as well as women's organizations, NGOs and other civic initiatives and heard their experiences.

Integral and coordinated policies and implementations informed by gender equality approach are at the core of the combat against violence against women (VAW). It is necessary to create standardized infrastructures that can effectively and dynamically coordinate inter-institutions. These mechanisms should be in place to support women from different aspects, especially the women at the intersections of diverse inequalities, i.e., migrant women, poor women, minority women.

There are already existing issues: lack of information provided to women; deterrent behaviour; lack of institutionalization and standardization; and lack of coordination among institutions in the struggle against VAW. Women in Turkey, particularly, face the consequences of global rollbacks in women's rights and gender equality in their struggle to get away from violence. Family-oriented approach leads to deterrent behaviour by the officials in the social protection mechanisms towards women and thus to the non-implementation of women's rights. However, these issues intensify during crisis as we have experienced after the February 6 earthquake.

In regard to the lack of information provided to women, during times of crisis, it becomes more challenging for women to access information about mechanisms for combating violence. One example, in the earthquake region, the people in charge in the tent areas, who are possibly the main authorities that a woman should be able to access easily, have no knowledge of how to reach an institution that the woman immediately needs or of where to direct the woman. While some officials, in line with their personal interest and knowledge, voice some suggestions as to where to direct the woman in the event of violence, some others do not know what to do. Considering the language barrier, this lack of information among practitioners results in extra difficulties for migrant women. While there have already been issues with translation services for the migrant women who apply to the support mechanisms in Turkey, during times of crisis, their needs are often completely overlooked.

In regard to the lack of standardization and institutionalization, units for preventing violence, law enforcement agencies, and social services rely on personal initiatives, leading to inconsistent practices. This, in turn, results in poor implementation, particularly during crisis moments. For example, after the February 6th earthquakes, there was no coordination among Violence Monitoring and Prevention Centers (that are responsible for coordinating the supports provided to women) among the cities that were hit by the earthquake. As a matter of fact, some of them were not operating for a while. Psycho-social support teams (PSS) were established in order to provide support to women on the ground and women are referred to PSS teams when they file for a complaint or when a case of violence against women was observed. However, there was no coordination between PSS teams and the Violence Monitoring and Prevention Centers either. Another example is that due to evacuations of shelter buildings, shelter support was directed to nearby cities. In some cities, women were quickly moved to these shelters by the State, while in others, they were told to go to other cities on their own without any guidance and financial support for transportation. This created an inconsistency and an inequality among women in terms of access to public services. Especially considering the prevalent discriminatory discourses and policies against migrant women (currently migrant women are not accepted to the public shelters in Turkey), the lack of standardization puts them in a more vulnerable position vis-a-vis the practitioners.

Protection orders are significant tools for the women to create a sense of security, even for a temporary period, as they proceed with their attempt to get away from violence. However, there are many issues with the granting and enforcement of protection orders by the law enforcement and their coordination and monitoring. In the cases of confidentiality orders, women find it necessary to take the initiative themselves and conduct coordination among institutions on their own. The inability of women who apply for restraining and confidentiality measures to obtain the same orders for their children and/or to obtain temporary custody of their children continues to pose a significant security risk. In cases of migrant women, their complaints may not even be taken and they are not accepted to the public shelters and no alternative is provided.

However, specifically in times of crisis, in the earthquake region these failures and their effect on women exacerbate. In the earthquake region, law enforcement agencies in tent cities, in particular, did not provide solutions to the physical difficulties in enforcing restraining orders. The protection orders were not monitored and coordinated due to a lack of technical infrastructure, and that the flow of information across different mechanisms was not ensured. Besides revealing the lack of standardization mentioned above, with respect to implementing confidentiality decisions and restraining orders, we saw that the practice varied depending on the initiative of Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİM) staff.

Lastly, economic crises hinder women's escape from violence. Addressing poverty with a gender perspective and from the perspective of women who experience violence is vital for women's escape from violence. Instead of developing effective social policies, most of the states, including Turkey, currently transfer the state's responsibility to the family and puts the burden of poverty on women. It takes much longer time for women to move out of the shelters either by themselves or with their children; it becomes increasingly difficult for them to pay the high rents and other basic needs, in the absence of childcare support. Besides, specifically in Turkey, the existing financial supports by the (District) Governor's office, Foundations of Social Help and Solidarity located in every city are mostly limited number of cash supports that are mostly on one-time basis, not standardized and given as a medium of child support therefore women without children, single women or those who did not file a

divorce cannot benefit. Only a few municipalities provide cash or in-kind benefit on a small amount with their own initiative which is also not a standardized service.

Recommendations

- Prepare Emergency Action Plans that take into account the problems women may experience in escaping violence during disasters.
 - In times of crisis, establish mechanisms for providing information to all women who experience violence in regard to their rights and mechanisms that they can apply to, as well as alternative assigned institutions, their locations and the support that they can receive from these institutions.
 - Establish a standardized and non-discriminatory social protection mechanism for women and their children who experience violence that does not require any personal initiatives to operate.
 - Develop and implement a social policy system that provides different employment options, affordable housing, childcare for infants, toddlers and school-age children after school, cash benefits for women who try to get away from violence based on each women's unique situation and needs.
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