



IMPACT STORY



REVISED LAW EMPOWERS WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE IN ALBANIA

Photo: UN Women Albania

Flora Leka* had an arranged marriage at the age of 17. She dropped out of school and lived with her violent husband and father of her four children for more than 15 years. “Violence started at the beginning of our marriage, for no specific reason. I will not forget when he hit me in the middle of a crowded street. I felt so ashamed,” confessed Leka.

She said that her husband would complain about household chores even though she had a full-time job while also taking care of the house and their children. He almost never worked and had taken up drinking. Even though she never opposed him and accepted the burden of paid and unpaid work at home, the violence never stopped, even when she was pregnant. At times she stayed in bed for weeks.

But when he became aggressive with their children, Leka could no longer endure it. With the help of her siblings, she reported her husband to the police commissariat in the outskirts of Tirana, Albania, and never looked back. Her separation process went smoothly with the support of the Human Rights in Democracy Center (HRDC), a civil society organization partnering with UN Women under the regional programme on ending violence against women “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds,” funded by the European Union.

“The organization has been with me every step of the way, helping me benefit from economic aid and rental bonus,” said Leka. During 2019, HRDC supported 54 women and girls living in Kamza city, 10 km from the capital, with free legal counseling and representation in court.

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

The multi-year programme on ending violence against women **Implementing Norms, Changing Minds** aims at ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women in the six Western Balkan countries and Turkey, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women. It is funded by the **European Union**. In Albania, UN Women has partnered with **10** civil society organizations and networks, including the **Human Rights in Democracy Center**, to implement the programme.

Since 2018, the **Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence**, a group of **48** organizations, established with UN Women support and led by the **Center for Legal Civic Initiatives**, has been actively engaged in lobbying, advocacy and monitoring the legal and policy framework on ending violence against women in Albania.

For more information about UN Women and our work, see the [Annual Report 2019-2020](#) and the [Regular Resources Report 2019](#).

* The name has been changed to protect the identity of the individual.

Photo above: Information meeting on violence against women and children with teachers of the 100 Vjetori Elementary School in Kamza, Albania with the Human Rights in Democracy Center.

Albania's legal framework for addressing violence against women and girls has undergone significant changes over the past two years. The most important changes were made in 2018 to the Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations with the active engagement of the Monitoring Network against Gender-Based Violence, a group of 48 organizations established with the support of UN Women and led by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives.

"The legislative changes have impacted the work of local structures in terms of monitoring and enforcing court decisions. An important step is the prohibition of the reconciliation procedure in court, which is also banned by the Istanbul Convention," said Aferdita Prroni, Executive Director of HRDC.

In the framework of its collaboration with UN Women, HRDC and the Shelter for Abused Women and Girls have been increasing the capacities of service providers for women survivors of violence since January 2018. They played a key role in informing over 200 service providers on their new responsibilities under the revised law.

Police officers were trained on their new obligations, such as carrying out risk assessments immediately after identification, reporting domestic violence cases and issuing preliminary emergency protection orders, which enable the immediate removal of perpetrators before a judge has issued a protection order. "The risk assessment and the preliminary protection order issued from police structures is an important step forward for women exposed to domestic violence. It could be life saving for women," highlighted Ms. Prroni.

Still, despite having a legal framework largely aligned with international standards, implementation continues to be a challenge. While important work has been carried out to strengthen the capacities of police structures and other responsible institutions, "the risk assessment, risk management and preliminary protection orders have yet to become a nationwide, well-established practice," said Aurela Bozo, Executive Director of the Center for Civic Legal Initiatives.

In this regard, both organizations highlight that much more should be done regarding women survivors' access to services and compensation. "Enrolling survivors of violence in support services is an important element in improving their socio-economic situation. The services available for this category are limited and still do not fully meet their needs," stated Ms. Prroni.

MAKING LAWS WORK FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN ALBANIA

With the support of UN Women, the recently-amended domestic violence legislation On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations (2018) protects non-married partners and persons with disabilities from domestic violence while improving appropriate essential services and the issuance of protection orders. Women and girls who experience violence in Albania are now granted immediate protection by the police and have access to safe shelters immediately, along with their children.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE FACTS:

- 1 in 2 women experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime.
- 55.8% of women aged 18-24 were most likely subject to intimate partner domestic violence.
- 21% of women experienced physical and/or sexual violence.






Data refers to violence experienced during lifetime.
Source: Violence Against Women and Girls in Albania: National Population Survey 2018.

Ms. Bozo also emphasized the need for a broader legal framework on violence against women and girls, inclusive of all forms of violence, not just domestic violence.

For Ms. Prroni, another critical point remains the lack of specialized social and rehabilitation centers for survivors and perpetrators. "Services and programmes are indispensable and should be established from local government according to the legislative amendments," she concluded.

Although there is much more to be done, Flora Leka says that she feels more relaxed and safer now. "I feel like my life has been enriched."

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