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**Co-operation is the key –  
the Action Plan of the Federal Government as a central control tool in the protection of  
women and children from violence**

**1. The background, central idea and cornerstones of the Action Plan**

On 27<sup>th</sup> September 2007, the Federal Government already adopted the Second Action Plan to combat violence against women. The first such action plan had been adopted by the Federal Government in 1999. All of the measures then announced by the Federal Government were implemented in their totality by the end of 2004 making it possible to draw up a new action plan with new focal points. This was recently achieved with the adoption of the Second Action Plan.

Like its predecessor, the Second Action Plan addresses all forms of violence. In other words, it deals not only with the question of combating domestic violence but also, for example, with the trafficking in women, forced marriages and honour crimes, genital mutilation, violence against women in contexts outside of the domestic setting, what is known as stalking, sexual harassment and so forth.

The Action Plan emerged from an **idea and an initiative from the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth**. It was based on an analysis which indicated that, since the mid-seventies in Germany, although individual legislative and societal changes had taken place in the area of violence against women, the measures taken thus far affected only individual areas, had only led to selective improvements, and had not produced long-term, co-ordinated strategies. For the Federal Government, the **central idea** for the first Action Plan to combat violence against women was to agree on and to concentrate measures within the framework of its jurisdiction. At the same time, it was to create a model for action which could also be made applicable to the federal level for the 16 federal Laender and would comprise possibilities for collaboration among the decisive players: the Federal Government, the Laender and non-governmental organisations. The submission of an overall concept in the form of an action plan was therefore meant to show clearly that the aim must be to achieve **structural changes instead of conducting individual, unconnected measures**. For the first time, the Federal Government had announced the measures to combat violence against women planned by its ministries in a binding form and brought them together under a single umbrella. The Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth was responsible for co-ordinating the entire process and bringing the measures together.

The **main objectives** of the Second Action Plan are: improving the efficiency of the fight against violence and improving the protection of affected women.

This Action Plan addresses all forms of violence against women and summarises the Federal Government's measures in **10 areas and chapters**:

1. Prevention
2. Legislation by the Federal Government
3. System of support and counselling for women affected by violence
4. National networking in the aid system
5. Co-operation between state institutions and non-governmental organisations
6. Work with perpetrators
7. Qualification and awareness building
8. Research
9. European and other international co-operation
10. Measures to support women abroad

to the **implementation** of which the Federal Government has **committed** itself. In the current Second Action Plan, this amounts to **over 130 measures**.

Alongside the contents-related measures and projects, **practical organisational forms** also need to be created to facilitate the co-operation among the various levels (Federal Government – Laender – municipalities – non-governmental organisations) so that the activities of the different players can be co-ordinated, combined and improved in a context of exchange with one another. Such forms had not yet existed in the combating of (domestic) violence against women. Consequently, in April 2000 – alongside the **Federal Working Group on Trafficking in Women** which had already been working successfully since 1997 – a **Working Group of the Federal Government and the Laender to combat Domestic Violence** was convened. It comprised not only the competent persons from the federal and Land ministries, but also from the municipalities, non-governmental organisations and especially from the women's shelters. These two working groups are among the steering bodies involved in implementing the Action Plan.

The Federal Government had linked the publishing of the Action Plan and the involvement of the Federal Laender in the work of the Federal Laender Working Group with the proposal that the Federal Government's Action Plan be supplemented by **corresponding action plans drawn up by the individual Laender**. This aim of serving as a source of inspiration for the Laender has been achieved by the Action Plan. Using the Federal Government's Action Plan as a model and explicitly drawing from it, all 16 Federal Laender have drawn up their own action

plans in the meantime or, on a smaller scale, have adopted catalogues of measures on the topic of violence against women.

## **2. Developments and changes in the area of domestic violence which have been initiated and implemented thanks to the action plan**

It is precisely in the area of domestic violence that it is possible to clearly demonstrate the developments in the cultural, political, legal and social understanding of this violence - developments which have been encouraged by the Action Plan and which have led, in Germany, to a decisively positive change in practical action and intervention. I would like to briefly outline this development in relation to the Action Plan in its role as initiator and steering instrument.

If we were to go back thirty years, domestic violence was not at all a topic of discussion in Germany. It did not become one until 1975. There was no official data about the type, degree and consequences of violence perpetrated by a partner; even in private, it was (or often only thought to be) a well-kept secret. Injuries were concealed and often explained away as accidents; neighbours and family members who noticed something supported the taboo and only rarely offered help. It was only in the context of the International Women's Year in 1975 that 'what was private became political' and with it also the issue of domestic violence against women.

At the outset, the daily violence against women was the preserve of the women's movement and projects for women, but later it became part of government policy for women. In **1976**, the **first shelter for women** in Germany was founded in Berlin as a pilot project of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs and the Berlin Senate. The continuous scientific evaluation was conducted by Prof. Carol Hagemann-White and Prof. Dr. Barbara Kavemann who, even today, still essentially work on the scientific aspects of violence against women. Their final report entitled: 'Assistance for Abused Women' (*Hilfe für misshandelte Frauen*) which was published by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs in 1981, became an important agenda for the women's movement. The recommendations and demands contained in that report have been implemented in the course of the past 20 years in Germany, most recently in 2002 with the entry into force of the so-called Protection against Violence Act.

Thereafter, **additional shelters for women were founded** in the cities and then also in the rural areas. This trend was also reinforced by the reunification process. After the fall of the wall and the subsequent reunification, the first shelters for women were set up in quick succession in the new Federal Länder at the beginning of the Nineties. Originally, they were sponsored by corresponding start-up funds from the Federal Government supplemented by municipal funds. Today, there are over 400 shelters and flats that provide refuge for women in Germany – giving the country, internationally, one of the best rankings when it comes to providing shelters for women.

The **end of the Eighties** brought stagnation to this development in Germany. Although the shelters for women were increasingly being seen as a part of the social network, the problem – violence against women – was, unfortunately, 'normalised' as a result. With the supply of shelters for women, those affected now had aid opportunities at their disposal. The result was that, predominantly, the other institutions no longer felt responsible for the subject.

It was at the end of the Eighties, with the 'discovery' of successful projects in the USA and Australia that the development of new strategies received a decisive fillip. The Ministry for Family Affairs commissioned a study on the transferability of the American co-operation concept against domestic violence – DAIP – to Germany. The **idea behind these co-operation and intervention projects** was the subject of lively debate in Germany. It took several years for the time to be ripe for such a co-operative, pragmatic approach for the implementation of which both the women's support organisations and the state-run institutions were prepared.

In **1995**, the **first German co-operation and intervention project against domestic violence – BIG** – became operative in Berlin. It was and continues to be a resounding success. The new concept of concerted action by the authorities and the projects against domestic violence, reinforced by a spirit of mutual acceptance, was a success. For the first time, alongside the women's support and women's policy institutions, other institutions also assumed their specific responsibility for combating violence against women, especially the police, judiciary, youth assistance, and the health sector, to name a few.

Today, several Federal Laender and cities have intervention projects which follow the Berlin model. They have been subject to continuous scientific evaluation by Prof. Dr. Carol Hagemann-White and Prof. Dr. Barbara Kavemann. The findings of this evaluation were published in 2004 and serve to support new initiatives.

Most decisive is the fact that the collaboration among the different professions within the co-operation project facilitated the **development and implementation of a new philosophy of intervention** which purports that:

- when violence is perpetrated in the immediate social environment, state interventions and intrusion in the private sphere are necessary and legitimate;
- domestic violence is the flip-side of power and (lack of) control. Laws and intervention strategies must make it clear that the State reacts unswervingly and consistently and that violence will not be tolerated (any longer);
- victims, perpetrators and the public must be given the clear message that 'whoever hits, goes' and takes the negative consequences of his/her violent actions;

- the victim's safety takes priority and is the central starting point of the intervention.

This modified approach pursued by the intervention projects led to a number of important statutory amendments at federal and Land level, creating better possibilities for personal protection orders against the perpetrator – eviction and orders prohibiting a return to or entry of the victims' home and immediate social environment.

These steps constitute some of the **central measures of the first Action Plan of the Federal Government to combat violence against women of 1999**. Others were:

- the above-mentioned federal pilot project, the 'Berlin Intervention Project against Domestic Violence' (BIG) which, for the first time successfully linked police, criminal law, civil law and psychosocial measures on the ground and served as an example for many other projects of this type;
- the continuous scientific evaluation of 10 different intervention projects against domestic violence in Germany. The resulting findings have become an important basis for decision-making in the Laender and municipalities planning and seeking to introduce similar projects and for those which have already done so;
- the Act on the Non-Violent Upbringing of Children, which entered into force in November 2000, and which prohibits all types of violence against children. To accompany its introduction, a nationwide campaign was conducted. The evaluations carried out in recent years prove that the Act has led to a change in awareness in the population. The use of violence in child-raising is rejected more clearly nowadays and is not resorted to as much.
- The Protection against Violence Act ('Act to improve civil law protection in cases of acts of violence and stalking as well as to facilitate the surrender of the marital home in the event of a separation') which entered into force in January 2002 and contains a clear legal basis for the issuing of personal protection orders by the civil courts such as prohibiting the perpetrator from contacting, coming close to or harassing a person. The evaluation conducted on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Justice shows that the Act is being used by women who are victims of violence. Most of the 16 Federal Laender, which are responsible for the police force have, in consequence, extended their police laws so that the police also have improved possibilities for enforcing an order of eviction or exclusion from the shared residence against the perpetrator.

- the first representative study "Health, Well-Being and Personal Safety of Women in Germany" (*Lebenssituation, Sicherheit und Gesundheit von Frauen in Deutschland*) (published in 2004) for which over 10,000 women between the ages of 16 and 85 were interviewed on issues of violence on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs. The results show that women of all age groups, all social classes and from the most diverse ethnic backgrounds are affected by a high degree of violence in the course of their life.

The main findings in detail:

- 37% of all respondents experienced physical violence or assault at least once from the age of 16;
- 13% of the respondents (that is almost one in seven women) had experienced forms of sexual violence liable to criminal prosecution from the age of 16;
- 40% of the women surveyed – irrespective of the victim-perpetrator context – had experienced physical or sexual violence or both from the age of 16;
- 58% of the respondents had experienced different forms of sexual harassment;
- 42% of the respondents reported having experienced forms of physical violence; and
- approximately 25% of those respondents living in Germany had experienced forms of physical or sexual violence (or both) from current or former intimate partners.

The **basis for the Federal Government's current Second 2007 Action Plan** is the findings produced by these studies as well as the practical experience collected by the different professional groups which are being channelled through the two Federal Laender Working Groups.

The new Second Action Plan takes up where **a special need for action** was identified by the First Action Plan: paying greater attention to women with a migrant background, disabled women and the medical care sector. Additional areas of emphasis are: prevention at the earliest possible opportunity and a better dovetailing of child and youth protection measures with the protection of women and the health sector. Time allows me only to mention a few examples here. One of them is the sponsoring of online counselling for migrant women who live under the threat of forced marriage or other forms of violence; special opportunities will be provided for women in the context of integration courses upon entry into Germany. We are currently examining the possibility of setting up a nationwide 'helpline' for women affected by violence to offer counselling in various languages. We are supporting a pilot project for non-hospital physicians so as to improve the provision of health care for women and children who are victims of violence. We want to provide contact persons for disabled women, and also to assist disabled women who are subjected to violence in facilities for the disabled. We are seeking to improve

the data base through a representative study on violence against disabled women and, in schools, we are currently sponsoring prevention measures against domestic violence.

My conclusion is that, in Germany, the Action Plan has become a **platform, both strategically and in respect of content, a tool** which we can use and further develop in order to achieve a well-grounded, practice-oriented anti-violence policy with the aim of arriving at binding state action in this area.

With this plan, the German Government expects that the 16 German Land governments and the myriad municipalities will likewise continue and intensify their activities to combat violence against women and that the collaboration between public agencies, and non-governmental organisations and/or associations, will effectively support the objectives of the Second Action Plan.

With this Action Plan, our aim is also to send out a **signal to society**. Alongside the improvements in protection, it is, above all, a question of strengthening women and children so that they can lead a life free of violence and stand up for their rights. It is also about encouraging as many people as possible to refuse to tolerate violence and take an active step towards avoiding and combating it.