

KOSOVO

During the Kosovo war from 1998-1999, thousands of Kosovo Albanian women and girls and men became victims of sexual violence. Rape and other forms of sexual violence were used as a weapon of war and instruments of systemic “ethnic cleansing”; rapes were used deliberately as an instrument to terrorise the civilian population, extort money from families and force people to flee from their homes. On 30 December 2015, Kosovan authorities approved a new regulation that will allow survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to be identified and given official status as civilian victims of war eligible for survivor benefits that include a monthly pension.

1. What are the issues surrounding the stigma faced by survivors of sexual violence, their families, communities etc.

- The issue of sexual violence both during and following the 1999 conflict is rarely discussed within victims’ families.
- The social stigma that surrounds such crimes prevented the rehabilitation, the access to justice and the social-economic re-integration of the survivors.
- Social attitude, patriarchal relationships, lack of anonymity and support, difficulties in reaching authorities and women’s organisations are elements with an impact on survivors.
- A safe place to share a story, respect for privacy, availability of information and resources to get help enable the victims to gain power and reduce stigmatisation.
- Education of professionals and media through training and workshops, sensitising the audience through campaigns and public debates and a committed political body equipped with necessary resources comprise the steps in recognition of the status of women and reduces their stigmatisation in society.¹

2. Who is doing something already in these countries incl. FCO, DFID, Champion countries, local initiatives (NGO, government, leaders)

- **UK (FCO)** has funded projects to improve the overall social, psychological and economic well-being of the survivors of CRSV and their family members through ensuring access to justice, rehabilitation and other reparation programmes.
- PSVI experts supported the capacities strengthening of Kosovo local actors (capacity building for therapists dealing with CRSV, (two training modules 2013/2014) and legal expertise on drafting the application format as well as guidelines for the process of documentation and investigation of CRSV in Kosovo.
- **UK (FCO) and local NGO** held a 2-day stigma workshop to tackle the stigma surrounding the survivors of sexual violence.

3. Specific activities that need doing e.g. access to legal or medical care, judicial reform, evidence gathering etc.

¹ Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims – workshop 2016

- The level of investigations and prosecution related to the sexual violence during the conflict remains low.
- Maintain the pressure on the Government to meet its commitments to support survivors of CRSV.
- The access of survivors to rehabilitation, justice and other reparation programmes is the responsibility of the Government and they should have ownership of the process in addressing the needs of survivors and their status in society.
- The Government Commission for recognition of the status of the victims of sexual violence during the war should be established as soon as possible. The Government should provide maximum institutional support for its functionality. The Commission should have 9 members; 5 institutional members already appointed and the other 4 in the process. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is aiming by the end of November to have the Commission formed.
- Increased cross-section collaboration is required to address stigma surrounding the survivors and increase their trust in the process of achieving justice.
- Responsible government institutions should undertake information and awareness campaigns on the importance of identification and verification process of the victims/survivors of sexual violence, their rights, access to justice etc.
- Civil society organisations should support the work of the Commission through provision of medical and psycho-social services for survivors while the cases are treated and continue its fight against stigma together with religious groups and media outlets.
- National media outlets should appoint a journalist per medium to continuously follow and inform the public about access to justice for victims of sexual violence during the war in Kosovo and the efforts made by institutions and civil society in fighting stigma and improving their status in society.
- The Kosovo Inter Religious Council should be engaged in fighting stigma and addressing the issue of victims of sexual violence during the war for all individuals belonging to different religious communities.
- Religious leaders should address the issue of shame and guilt and other related issues concerning victims/survivors during the regular prayers and other religious rituals.
- Woman department at the Kosovo Islamic Community (BIK) should increase its efforts in addressing the issue of victims of sexual violence during the war.
- Better collaboration between religious communities and civil society organisations providing psycho-social services is needed in order to better reach the victims in the community level and ensure adequate treatment of cases.