

Feminist Responses to Sexualised Violence

Policy Paper from *medica mondiale* for the
2021 German parliamentary elections (short version)

GERMAN
FEDERAL
ELECTION
2021

#ONTHE
AGENDA



Combating sexualised violence needs to be put on the agenda

The overall situation of women and girls worldwide has deteriorated during the pandemic. In many countries, violence against women and girls has increased severely, particularly sexualised and domestic violence. In spite of early warnings and evidence of an increase in violence against women, governments have failed to sufficiently respond to the situation of women and girls. *medica mondiale* is calling on politicians to stand up for women's rights and actively address the issue of sexualised violence during and after the election campaigns. The next legislative period has to include measures against sexualised and gender-based violence as well as discrimination-free assistance for survivors as core priorities.

Sexualised and gender-based violence

medica mondiale understands sexualised violence to be one form of gender-based violence. Other forms include forced marriage, domestic violence, and female genital cutting. Sexualised violence affects women and girls much more often than males. This is because this form of violence is an expression of underlying societal inequalities. So sexualised violence against women is a form of sexist discrimination and is recognised as such by the World Health Organisation and the Istanbul Convention. Sexualised violence does also affect men and boys, but in this paper we concentrate on sexualised violence against women and girls.

Appeal to the German government

The Covid-19 pandemic has made gender injustice across the world extremely visible. The worldwide increase in violence against women is actually a manifestation of pre-existing discriminations in gender relations. The unjust distribution of often unpaid care work and the multiple burdens borne by women, as well as their financial disadvantages – none of these are new developments, either.

With a view to the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Germany, *medica mondiale* is appealing to the future government to face the task of working with international partners to develop short- and long-term solutions for dealing with the pandemic in a gender-equitable manner. Furthermore, long-term strategies are needed to bring an end to (sexualised) violence against women, discrimination and gender inequality.

It is essential to consider the causes of gender-based violence in order to ensure the measures tackle this problem at its roots.



Photo: © Jessica Girvan / Shutterstock

I. Anchoring Gender Justice in Measures to Deal with the Covid-19 Pandemic

We are calling on the federal German government to analyse the gender-specific impacts of the pandemic, to implement gender-equitable measures for dealing with the pandemic, and to make available the necessary financial resources for this.

» Supporting women's rights organisations

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, many women's rights organisations, especially those in war and post-war areas, reacted extremely quickly and adapted their work accordingly. They secured supplies of sanitary products for women's houses and social centres, distributed foodstuffs and conducted public health information campaigns. However, despite their enormous efforts, women's rights organisations receive very little financial assistance. So we are appealing to the German government to fund women's rights organisations in a flexible and transparent way, ensuring their political participation.

Furthermore, we are calling for an analysis of the gender-specific impacts of the pandemic, gender-equitable measures for dealing with the pandemic, and the necessary funding for this.

» Gender-aware crisis planning

Across the world, crisis committees are overwhelmingly male. Female experts and women affected by violence need to be involved in order to guarantee a gender-sensitive composition of measures. Many aid projects also ignore the fact that women affected by violence frequently suffer multiple forms of discrimination, making it difficult or impossible for them

to access the support measures. For example, until now, refugee and displaced women have hardly benefited from protection and assistance measures.

The German government needs to ensure that all crisis response plans incorporate protection against sexualised and gender-based violence. Crisis committees need gender-balanced staffing.



Photo: © Medica Liberia

II. Providing Support for Women and Girls Affected by Violence

» Assistance for women in war areas

Women in war and post-war areas are struggling to deal with both the impacts of the pandemic and the devastating consequences of war. They live in countries where the basics of everyday life are lacking even in non-pandemic times. We are calling on the German government, as part of its foreign and development policy, to promote local, long-term provision of trauma-sensitive, integrated support in the form of medical care, psychosocial and legal counselling, as well as income-generating measures, and the establishment of sustainable protection infrastructure. This includes legal access to safe pregnancy termination, emergency contraception and other services for sexual and reproductive health of all survivors.

» Implementation of the Agenda “Women, Peace and Security” in Germany

It was twenty years ago that the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325. We are calling upon the government to finally implement this resolution in full, as well as the associated Agenda “Women, Peace, Security”. This requires provision of the staffing and financing required for the Third National Action Plan. For institutional anchoring of this Agenda, we are also calling for the creation of relevant departments in ministries, contact positions in diplomatic missions abroad, and appropriate training for staff.

»» Implementing the Istanbul Convention in Germany

Another legally binding international agreement is the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Known informally as the Istanbul Convention, this document came into force in Germany in 2018 and clearly names the oppression of women in an unjust, misogynist system as a cause of gender-based violence.

We are calling on the German government, as part of its policies on women and asylum, to develop an overall strategy for implementation of the Istanbul Convention and to include in this an appropriate consideration of the different forms of structural discrimination. This implementation needs to be overseen by a monitoring body.



Photo: © Ivan Gener/Stocksy

III. Recognising Causes of Violence and Combating Them

Traditional or stereotypical gender roles and rape myths are fertile ground for gender-based violence in all of its manifestations. Political measures against sexualised and gender-based violence can only succeed if the causes of the violence are looked at and dealt with in a targeted way. For this, sexualised and gender-based violence needs to be recognised as structural discrimination. Knowledge about the causes of sexualised violence and its structural character has to become part of the basis of all prevention concepts, as does an awareness of multiple discrimination.

»» Funding research on gender-based violence

Prevention can only succeed if the structural causes of sexualised violence are considered. During the development of prevention measures it is essential to adopt an intersectional perspective in order to take into account the varied realities of women's lives and to counter multiple discrimination. Rape and physical or verbal harassment are human rights violations facilitated by a misogynist system and its impacts at individual, cultural and institutional levels. In practice this means: The perpetrator of sexualised violence is responsible as an individual person, but acts within a system. This system does not sufficiently condemn or punish

violence against women but it does tolerate discrimination against women and misogynist language, for example. At an institutional level, the judicial process against the perpetrator often fails because of legislation which has been formulated in a gender-unequal or even misogynist way. In Germany, too, analysis of legal judgements in rape cases has shown that gender stereotypes and rape myths are playing a role in courtrooms.

We call on the future German government, as part of its foreign and development policy, to develop and strengthen the prosecution of sexualised and gender-based violence via the International Criminal Court as well as prosecuting authorities in Germany. For this, financial and staffing resources need to be made available. Gender and trauma expertise also needs to be built up within the judicial and security authorities. We are calling on the German government, as part of its policies on women and asylum, to fund research into the causes of gender-based violence in order to develop and implement prevention efforts in an evidence-based way. This includes mandatory training of all relevant occupational groups on the measures included in the Istanbul Convention as well as sexist and racist stereotypes, rape myths, and the consequences of trauma. Furthermore, the connections between racist and anti-feminist worldviews need to be considered conceptually within measures designed to prevent and protect against violence.

Additionally, regular data needs to be collected on gender-based violence as well as sexist, homophobic, trans-phobic and racist hate crimes. This is needed to cast light on the unreported figures.



© *medica mondiale*, February 2021

Published by: *medica mondiale*,
Hülchrather Str. 4, 50670 Cologne, Germany
Legally responsible for content under
German press law: Monika Hauser

Design: Franziska Becker, Nicole Riegert
Illustration: © Nicole Riegert