

# 2019 REPORT ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN BULGARIA

**Needs Assessment of Bulgarian CSOs Working  
on Gender Equality and Women's Rights**

**2019 Women's Rights Forum, 15-17 April, Bankya**



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

The following report is a summary of the work sessions held during the 2019 Women's Rights Forum organized by the Bulgarian Fund for Women with the financial support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bulgaria. This document provides a snapshot of the current state of affairs of the CSO sector in Bulgaria which works on women's rights and gender equality. The report presents an insight on the key issues and general social trends affecting the development of these topics within the larger political and social context, and points out specific needs for advocacy and lobbying for women's and girls' rights and gender equality in Bulgaria.

The Forum took place on 15-17 April, 2019 in Bankya, and was attended by over 30 representatives from 27 organizations from around the country. The aim of the event, in line with continuing work of the BFW in 2018 on establishing and ensuring gender equality as invariable value of democratic societies, was to research the needs of the organizations working in the field of women's rights and gender equality in Bulgaria, to encourage the cooperation between their representatives, as well as their work with political agents, and to increase the latter's sensitivity and engagement in on terms of topics such as women's rights and gender equality.

The event's program aimed to intertwine interactive discussions with experiential methods and to create an en-

vironment where the participants could share experience and exchange information about the on-field challenges they work with in the local communities they represent. Specific time was allocated to assessing the problems and needs of girls and women in Bulgaria, of their CSOs, as well as for identifying concrete fields requiring systematic advocacy and lobbying efforts. This report summarizes the ideas of the women's CSOs representatives on the four main analytical topics of the event: women's issues (18+), girls' issues (12-18) problems women's CSOs encounter, and main target groups.

The Forum also provided meetings with leading experts and female politicians who discussed topics such as the history of the women's movements, discrimination, present-day policies regarding women and their rights. In the event's final part, the participants exchanged ideas for successful projects and discussed collaboration opportunities to launch prominent, inspiring women as role models in education and public life.

The Forum's analytical work was organized as a group process with several stages and different formats. In small group discussions, the participants outlined the main challenges they face in their work to support women and girls in Bulgaria.



## 2

# ISSUES WOMEN IN BULGARIA FACE (18+)

The **conflict between the established patriarchal model and the dilemma about personal/professional realization** appeared to be the leading issue for women in Bulgaria. The participants described the difficulties of combining their professional and personal life, the lack of important supporting services, such as flexible children's care, flexible working hours, social services and the ensuing economic dependency that often put women in a situation to choose between family, children and professional realization. Such inner struggle is enhanced by public taboos and personal insecurities, and oftentimes leads to double standards, such as the pink tax, pay gaps between women and men, and the glass ceiling when climbing the professional ladder, especially in the business community. Women in leadership positions are often distrusted, underestimated and subjected to pressure both within the family and by the dominant consumer society.

No lesser issue is the **violence against women** in all forms that it manifests itself in everyday life: sexual harassment, domestic violence, gender-based violence, violence against specific vulnerable groups. Refugee camps were particularly pointed as an example, as well as the so-called "invisible" group - trans-women and sexual workers, women with illegal status, lack of income and/or access to healthcare. Violence over pregnant women and women in labor within the healthcare system was also discussed, as well as harassment of women with psychological problems, lack of protection within same sex couples/trans-women, the dominant male aggression in small towns and villages. Another highlight was the toolkit provided by the Istanbul Convention (which was not ratified in Bulgaria and even deemed unconstitutional by the national Constitutional Court) and in particular: the lack of national statistics on women killed by their partners, the number and status of existing crisis centers, access to psychological support, protection services for victims of violence in small towns and villages, physicians' refusals to assist in cases of domestic violence, and lack of qualified medical/police personnel. There is no State standard for providing services to victims of gender-based violence and the system is ineffective on multiple levels - from prevention, through identifying the cases of violence, to actual collaboration (or rather its lack thereof) between the separate administrative units e.g. cases of not complying with restraining orders, and even in cases when the fathers do not pay the court mandated child support.

The participants pointed out another issue within this category - that of **women's sexual-reproductive problems**, including the high prices of in vitro procedure, the lack of maternity care standards, the segregation within maternity wards and the health mafia. Furthermore, there was an emphasis on the **necessity for health and sexual education** and the lack of external trained specialists to present the topic in kindergartens and schools. There are no instruments to support young girls and older women to overcome the shame and discomfort of visiting a gynecologist, as well as to discuss freely topics such as menstruation and the female libido. Even though the new Pre-school and School Education Act of 2017 led to updating the framework for civil, health, environmental and intercultural education, the changes in Regulation 13 of 2018 are purely superficial and do not open opportunities for modern health education, which would combat the unrealistic models of the nature of sexual interactions promoted by mass culture and exerting direct pressure on young girls to follow role models that encourage early sex life, and present women in a passive role, mainly giving pleasure but not necessarily receiving or experiencing it. A noteworthy topic of discussion was the freedom of women to decide to have an abortion, which has to be guaranteed. The issue is ever more present on the nationalist-patriotic agenda, especially in the context of the country's real demographic, and is trending in small remote towns and villages, which puts additional pressure on women, especially those from conservative, religious communities.

Within the context of health education, the participants also commented on the rights of women giving birth and the lack of **modern and supportive maternity** care that would empower women in terms of the choices regarding conceiving, monitoring and completing the pregnancy, and in terms of the actual birthing process. The discussion covered the issue of changing the current practices in the field of maternity care and updating and getting them in line with the global trends in maternity care; the conditions, terms and the services in maternity wards and the postnatal care. Once the focus shifted onto vulnerable groups, the participants discussed the public secret about segregation in maternity wards in big cities, where pregnant Roma women are separated in different rooms, or even different floors, and the medical staff either ignores them, or gives them aggressive/disrespectful treatment.

An equally pressing matter are the **missing healthcare services and medical personnel in the small towns and villages**. The absence of doctors often requires women to travel to larger towns and cities, and that sets financial barriers for access to quality healthcare i.e. additional transport expenses, paying for private medical check-ups, missing work or family responsibilities in order to visit a specialist, etc. In cases of domestic violence, obtaining a medical certificate assessing the physical damage on the victim is paid, with the price becoming an obstacle to visit certain forensics doctors, especially with the increase in price according to the severity of the injury.

Women are also the primary caregivers to old and/or sick family members, which deprives them of the opportunity for professional realization and decreases their income and financial independence. Certain comments of the participants made it clear that the personal assistants do a 4-hour work day for minimal wages, that including a visit of at least three different addresses.

These work conditions are a mockery both for the providers and receivers of these services. There were also plenty of examples of small municipalities that refuse to hire people under the stated conditions, even though they have

the financial resources available. Meanwhile, women with disabilities and elderly women continue to lack access to professional help and services.

The forum discussions drew on the **challenges** women face in **urban environments** by pointing at the ways public transportation is not suited to the needs of women, e.g. the hanging handles in buses and trolleys are not suited to the height of women, public spaces are often inaccessible to mothers with baby strollers or to people with motor disabilities. It is becoming more difficult, especially in big cities, to provide financially accessible public services for women with small children – early daycare, kindergartens, a full day schooling for children from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, as well as assistance to those who take care of elderly relatives.

Further topics which were addressed during the discussions were the **problematics with the women's movement** in Bulgaria, the imbalanced political representation, the lack of successful female role models in media, the fact that same sex marriages are not allowed, the established mass porn culture, and the wide-spread poverty, all these having their implications on a number of vulnerable social groups, including female prisoners and those of minority origin.

### 3

## ISSUES FACING THE GIRLS IN BULGARIA

Girls are not spared the spectrum of women's (18+) problems and issues either, mainly due to the effects from patriarchal culture and restrictive stereotypes, lately intertwined with religious influence. There are a number of limiting practices and gaps in the area of education – civic and gender, professional and career orientation, adequate, up-to-date sexual education and contraception. Within the context of the problems of adolescent girls, the issue of **violence in school** was discussed and the stereotype that aggression is more typical for boys and therefore, when girls commit acts of violence they are perceived as exceptions, more like some sort of a (circus) attraction. Thus, not enough attention is paid to the problem even though everyday life examples reveal that there is more humiliation and psychological harassment/ bullying in conflict situations among girls. At the same time, in schools there is no accessible psychological or legal counselling, and in physical education classes students rarely play sports that are preferred by girls, who also do not always get access to sports facilities, due to the larger number of boys using the equipment in their free time.

In the field of education, the participants pointed out the **lack of accessible feminist literature** in Bulgarian, as well as the lack of time in the students' curriculum to educate and empower girls to get proactively involved in social processes. Furthermore, this discussion covered the establishment of the dominant young female stereotype of the "mutressa" (gold-digger), who is predominantly a consumer of the power and opportunities of her partner, especially within the context of the chalga culture. There is a shortage of role models counteracting the "my work is being beautiful/mutressa" mantra, the "plastic" culture and sexual objectification. The system does not encourage leadership qualities among girls, but rather reinforces the trend "to have a man to take care of me", which on a later stage might lead to, as discussed, limited economic independence and problems with the professional realization of women of mature age.

Within the educational system, young girls of non-Bulgarian ethnic origin are not fluent in Bulgarian, but sometimes they also do not even speak the language. They stay isolated in closed local communities and move formally from one grade to another to serve the delegated budgets in Bulgarian education. They often remain illiterate and are potential victims of human trafficking, violence, exploitation. These issues are also related to dropping out of school early, early marriages and selling of girl brides, early pregnancies, early sexualization of young girls. Furthermore, there are as well taboo topics such as the menstrual cycle, sexually-transmitted diseases, gender, relations, food disorders, abortions, etc.

A noteworthy point made during these discussions was the need to work towards building a strong parental capacity. In order to provide a stable family environment, it is essential to have both parents involved in the care and raising of children. This includes the difficulties with proving fatherhood in cases of civil partnership; enhancing the connection with the other parent (more often that would be the father) in case of separated, divorced, deceased parents; alienation of teenage girls by one of the parents in a situation of separation/divorce; the need of support for members of the extended family, raising children of parents who have gone to work abroad or are temporarily away from home. The latter situation, especially in certain regions where unemployment and extreme poverty are dominant, often leads to involvement in criminal practices, including human trafficking and sexual exploitation (particularly common with girls from institutions), drug abuse, addiction, child labor exploitation. To address these issues, it is important to have a holistic and detailed approach in the creation and development of children-appropriate, juvenile justice, which takes into consideration their young age and tendency to succumb to malicious influence, as well as the potential for positive change in a caring and supportive environment.

Issues such as voting rights and the low political activity, the lack of political education, the need of personal finance knowledge and skills, and the **need of horizontal gender sensitivity within the institutions** were further topics that were identified as needs and problems for the girls in Bulgaria. Attention should also be paid to transphobia and homophobia among

adolescent girls, examples of multiple discrimination of girls with a complex vulnerable profile (ethnic origin, disability, religion, origin), prevention of pedophilia and laying the foundations of a working mechanism and policies, which take into consideration the specific needs of young girls, but also their singularities and future capacity for active citizenship.

# 4

## TARGET GROUPS OF WOMEN'S CSOs IN BULGARIA

The majority of participants in the Forum agreed that one of the most important target groups for future interventions are the **uninformed mainstream women**, who not only do not understand feminism and the concept of gender, but are also against them. There was a consensus that this group is huge and it takes a lot of serious work to engage, inform and change the opinions of the women who are part of it. The participants also talked about the decision-makers and the administrators coining and implementing gender equality policies, including women in politics, journalists (both male and female), business ladies and business men, civil activists (again both female and male) celebrities/influencers.

Another main target group identified in the working process during the Forum were **women, victims of domestic violence** and children who grow up in violent families. Furthermore, the participants put an emphasis on the need to work with women, who have been victims of violence and human trafficking, including young LGBTI+ people, who are often subjected to homophobic aggression. The necessity of a wide spectrum of support services is palpable and it includes crisis intervention, psychotherapeutic consultations and support for the internal resilience of women and children victims of violence, those living in violent families, children in conflict with the law, the youth of the so-called NEETs group and the need for investing in their social skills and their independent life skills. In cases of couples in a situation of domestic violence and/or complicated separation, the emotional background is intense and it involves not only the immediate family members but also relatives and members of the extended family of the people who have suffered violence. It was particularly mentioned that it is crucial to engage the institutions and those responsible for the implementation of protection measures, especially in the widespread practice of abusive men to not attend consultations regularly, as currently there is a limited set of tools to oblige them to carry out their treatment and / or punishment.

Another challenge for women's CSO activists is the work with women in vulnerable position – refugees, women of ethnic minorities, of different religion, with disabilities,

addictions, mentally ill, homeless, illiterate/uneducated/without social or health insurance, women in institutions, women prisoners, female sexual workers, elderly/retired women. A number of examples were given in regard to **Roma women** and women of different ethnic origin, including **migrants and refugees**. Following the withdrawal of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria from Bulgaria, there has been an increase in the number of people in Roma communities who were infected with or have contracted one or more of the above-mentioned diseases, especially among sex workers. During its mandate in Bulgaria, the Fund provided free condoms and supplies for the sex workers, a service no longer available. The state has committed itself to take over the functions of the Fund's following its withdrawal, but has not entered into its role to date, which puts at risk a huge percentage of groups that are generally in a vulnerable position. Furthermore, it is equally important to continue the work of installing free intrauterine contraceptive devices (coils) and providing examinations to uninsured pregnant women from risk groups.

The participants identified as a separate target group the **adoptive mothers**, who were part of the foster care services and are in need of qualified psychological help in the process of transition and re-adaptation after adopting the children for whom they have cared for as a foster parent.

Other target groups deserving attention and investment on the part of the active women's CSOs include:

- Highly educated young women up to 35 years of age;
- Female university students, female scientists and researchers, and women from marginalized groups in the university;
- Pregnant women, women who have recently given birth and women with reproductive problems;
- Women taking care of a relative with disability, or of elderly people;
- Working poor single mothers and women who are denied access to their children;
- Underage mothers, mothers with many children and women who do not wish to have children.



## 5

# PROBLEMS OF WOMEN'S CSOs IN BULGARIA

In 2019, women's civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bulgaria work in an environment of **hostile public discourse**, lack of sensitivity about women's issues, online and real life physical attacks and assaults. There is a deficit of trust in the society towards the CSOs, even among their main target groups; the business does not support activists' field work, which raises the issue of professionalization vs. volunteering and hence, burn-out and stress, staff turnover and fluidity, the inability for expansion and creating a network (national and international) in the civil society sector.

Women's CSOs work in a situation of **serious bureaucracy and state repression**: there is absence of state support for developing different services on a local level, the organizations have to comply with donors' agenda and to combat a series of internal contradictions, stemming from the lack of community consolidation, low political activism (and shortage of courage and political leadership); absence of strong women's movement and prominent role models, insufficient number of personal stories in the public domain, which oppose the dominant patriarchal -conservative model of thinking and structures.

The participants shared challenges of **both logistic and purely intra-organizational nature**. For example, some CSOs do not have facilities to hold their meetings and work with their target groups; others need administrative support to create and implement rules and procedures to strengthen their capacity. There are organizations that fully rely on volunteers and have difficulties gathering at one place active people with different profile. CSOs often have troubles motivating and retaining already engaged activists and volunteers. Lately, preserving participants has been even more difficult due to the declining trust in the CSOs work and its palpable results for the general public who sees the sector's efforts as imported and irrelevant to the Bulgarian society.

Further topics of discussion were the absence of strategic planning capacity, as well as the missing network on a local level that could allow the scaling of future interventions; the challenges faced in the planning and attracting of financing, and their organizational capacity for estab-

lishing sustainable financial model and ensuring independent existence.

Another challenge women's CSOs face in direct correlation to the topics listed above is the **financial sustainability** and capacity for ensuring stable organizations that have the resources to address the identified problems. The participants commented on the dependence of their organizations on project and donor financing, as well as the possible ways to diversify the portfolio of financial income for the organizations through donations, merchandising and social entrepreneurship. It was also mentioned that some municipalities allocate a budget for supporting the civil society sector, i.e. cities of Varna and Sofia, yet the access to these instruments is strongly influenced by the political climate in the respective city. Also, there are some big and popular women's organizations, but they are mostly charitable, and they do not represent the full variety of the sector. In order to underline and enhance the visible part of their work, the representatives of women's CSOs have to be able to tell their stories better, to engage popular faces for their causes and to increase the level of their public presence and presentation.

A focal point for women's CSOs is the opposition between **professionalization and volunteering**. Organizations that provide salaries to their permanent team of experts / analysts and work on the so-called think-tank basis vs. entirely voluntary initiatives that are driven by personal commitment. The topic here has a direct link to the financial sustainability of organizations and strategic planning in the sector, which, if properly planned and managed, can significantly change the image of the sector in the long run.

Last but not least, women's CSOs should work towards developing their **communication policy and capabilities** to counteract the black PR in a situation of 'de facto' lack of media coverage, external interference and hybrid war. This further challenges the sector and requires systematic efforts towards the building of capacity for community organization and CSOs consolidation and the creating of a common platform, coordination meetings (CSOs + institutions) and active advocacy.

# 6

## CONCLUSION

In 2019, women's rights and gender equality in Bulgaria continue to face obstacles and challenges related to social prejudices and stereotypes, political and administrative inaction, lacking financial and organizational support for a shrinking and weakening CSO sector.

The undertone of the Forum's discussions has been the state's inability and unwillingness to really address pressing issues which not only hold back the improvement of women's rights and the democratic development of the country, but in effect threaten the lives of women and children in the country. Lacking/underperforming support services and legislative and administrative absences for the victims of domestic violence, deficiency of proper medical care for pregnant women, women in labor and for women living in remote areas, segregation and discrimination of women from minority groups and lack of access to quality and up-to-date education, bureaucratic challenges for CSOs – all these are just a few examples of the inadequate operations of the political and institutional establishment. Sadly, these obstacles are even more difficult to battle in an environment which is ever more hostile to the CSO sector due to orchestrated media campaigns, hybrid attacks against its image and ever louder populist voices against liberal values.

The government's hesitation to take the necessary actions against systematic problems, as well as the lack of support for CSOs to tackle pressing issues slow down Bulgaria's movement towards equality, and create a growing gap between the EU's objectives and the local reality. The traditionally conservative and patriarchal climate in the country, as well as the limited representation of women in the government, the absence of guiding principles on all levels to promote and guarantee equality, and the missing female role models, add up to the grim picture.

However, these challenges must be addressed with a uniform and specific course of actions. Believing that a strong and inclusive alliance of a large array of stakeholders is the single effective strategy, the Bulgarian Fund for Women is

stating full readiness to continue working with the government, local and international authorities towards the achievement of equality between men and women and against violence in all its forms, and thus calls for:

- Improving policies and legislation related to overcoming inequalities and violence against women;
- Developing an approach towards government budgeting, based on the gender equality principle;
- The EU ratifying and implementing of relevant international instruments, and in particular of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention);
- Commitment to combat all forms of discrimination on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, disabilities, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, etc.;
- Promoting gender equality initiatives in the media industry, especially in the advertising and gaming industries, which are intensive carriers of gender stereotypes;
- Preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism in education, introducing health and sex education in school;
- Promoting equal participation in the labor market and economic independence for women;
- Promoting equal sharing of unpaid domestic work and care for dependent family members between women and men;
- Formalizing and compensating women's work when they are the only ones caring for sick and dependent family members;
- Ensuring equal access to economic and political decision-making positions;
- Preventing and combating gender-based violence, including workplace violence;
- Guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive rights;
- Adequate and humane pre- and post-natal health care as well as availability of health care in small settlements;
- Creating a sustainable funding model for CSOs working for women's rights.

# 7

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

**Animus Foundation, Sofia**, aims to achieve healthy communication between people, as well as gender equality in Bulgarian society. Works actively for nurturing tolerance toward differences, respect for suffering and rejection of violence in Bulgarian society; availability of affordable psychotherapy services and programs offering competent professional assistance to the needy; understanding and accepting the values of psychodynamic psychotherapy.

**Bilitis, Sofia**, strives to eliminate all forms of discrimination and achieve full equality of LGBTI people in Bulgaria by: working for changes in the legislative framework and policies that will increase equality of LGBTI people; by partnering with and forming coalitions with other CSOs, activists, donors, institutions and citizens. At the community level, it works to activate and empower LGBTI people.

**Bulgarian Association for the Promotion of Citizens Initiative- BAPCI, Burgas**, works to encourage active citizenship and empower people to participate directly in governing the country.

**Bulgarian Association of University Women, BAUW, Sofia**, is one of the oldest civil society organizations in Bulgaria. BAUW aims to unite female university professors and researchers and to encourage their active inclusion in both the academic and the public domain.

**Bulgarian Helsinki Committee - BHC, Sofia**, encourages respect and protection of human rights, lobbies for legislative changes in order to harmonize Bulgarian legislation with international standards, fosters public debate on human rights issues and promotes the human rights idea to the general public.

**Bulgarian Lawyers for Human Rights, BLHR, Sofia**, works for establishing and effectively enforcing

the international standards in the field of legal defense of human rights in Bulgaria in two main directions: 1) legal assistance and strategic litigation of specific, recurrent human rights violations before Bulgarian and international courts and revealing inconsistencies of Bulgarian legislation and case law with international standards. 2) publications and other information and educational activities directed at the legal community on international instruments and standards in the field of the legal protection of human rights

**Crocus Foundation, Burgas**, works for the equal acceptance of every person and in particular of LGBTI people. They support youngsters banished from their families, due to not accepting they are different, youngsters who have been bullied at school due to homophobia, which is quite common in the Bulgarian education system; people who have been excluded from public life, fired or hurt due to their different sexual orientation.

**Fine Acts, Sofia**, offers creative ways to make people care and act for the causes important to them, and create novel avenues to empower activism. It nurtures collaborations, produces powerful art, creates effective campaigns, supports CSOs by training them in creative thinking, utilizing art and embracing play as a tool for social change.

**Forum for Glocal Change, Gabrovo**, aims to improve the conditions for democratic participation of all members of society, to encourage intercultural dialogue and active citizenship, which could link global and local phenomena to the benefit of communities.

**Foundation for Media Democracy - FMD, Sofia**, aims to build independent and effective monitoring of the Bulgarian media environment through: diagnosis of key problems of publicity and initiation of

public debates; promotion of civic actions in cooperation with Bulgarian and foreign institutions in the media sphere; encouraging self-criticism of the Bulgarian media.

**Gender Alternatives Foundation, Plovdiv**, assists building balanced civil society in the country by working for equal opportunities and equal representation of men and women, and different ethnicities in both the public and private sectors; encourages active participation of young people in communities' life by protecting and promoting their rights; carries out research in all spheres of public and private life, related to gender; supports people in difficult social and economic situation, people who have suffered violence, etc.

**Gender Education Research and Technologies Foundation - GERT, Sofia**, encourages and carries out, independently or/and in partnership with other CSOs, activities aiming to achieve gender equality, social justice and equality in all spheres of life, including accessing new technologies.

**Hope for Antonovo Association, Antonovo**, aims to unite the community's capabilities in order to work together for increasing the wellbeing of its citizens. It organizes and hosts public events; educational activities for young people, who are isolated by society due to their specific ethnic, religious, age and social status; actively works with the local and state authorities in order to achieve its goals.

**LGBT Deystvie, Sofia**, provides assistance and support to young homosexual, bisexual and transgender people, works towards developing a self-confident LGBTI+ community and fights homophobia and lack of education in society.

**LevFem, Sofia**, a Left queer-feminist organization that opposes any form of violence against women, trans and queer people and strives for a united front between feminist, antiracist, anticapitalist and anti-fascist causes

**Mission Wings, Stara Zagora**, supports, encourages and contributes to unlocking the full potential of vulnerable children and adults, so that they could achieve success in different spheres of life (mainly in Stara Zagora region of Bulgaria)

**Modern Maternity Care Network**, Sofia, works to change current maternal health practices and bring them in line with global trends, both in practi-

cal terms at the level of women's consultation, maternity wards / units, postnatal care and follow-up, and globally, in terms of policy and required professional levels standards.

**Peace Research Institute Plovdiv / Ekaterina Kravelova Academy, Plovdiv**, works towards development and promotion of peace, education, science, culture, civil society, supports and encourages the training of young people, promotes and supports the role of young people in peace and security issues, develops research and advisory activities, raises awareness of citizens on global issues and their response worldwide.

**PULS Foundation, Pernik**, strives to build and establish an effective care program in the Southwestern Bulgaria for adults, youngsters and children, as well as their families, who have suffered violence. The Foundation works in 2 main directions in regard to violence – prevention and rehabilitation.

**Riviera Day Center for Adults with Disabilities, Varna**, offers day care to adults with intellectual disabilities. The center's specialists organize and carry out different activities and events aiming to integrate as much as possible their clients in the city's public life, as well as to increase their independence.

**Rodopchanka Women's Club, Smolyan**, supports the social integration and personal realization of women; protects the human rights of women and children; participates actively in the development and establishment of the civil society in Bulgaria.

**The format She – Plovdiv, Plovdiv**, shows and tells the stories of women who make incredible things happen every day but are not famous. Sharing their stories, they give confidence and inspire other women to pursue their goals, while at the same time they receive well-deserved acknowledgment. Already, there is She-Varna and She-Gabrovo, the format is to be introduced in Sandanski and Veliko Tarnovo soon.

**Students' Equality Community with SU, Sofia**, opposes discrimination and violence within the community of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

**Women's Roma Association "Hayachi", Novi Pazar**, works in support of the most vulnerable and risk groups in the local marginalized communities. Its goals are social inclusion, prevention of dropping out of school, prevention of early marriages, increasing

health culture, motivating youngsters to develop personally and creating opportunities for realization.

**The informal group You are not Alone – Together against violence, Sofia,** strives to support the thousands

of women in Bulgaria who are victims of violence. The goal is to build public, political, media and personal intolerance towards any form of domestic violence, to accumulate public support for the victims, to provide practical information to the victims and their close ones how to find a way out.

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#### **ABOUT BULGARIAN FUND FOR WOMEN**

Bulgarian Fund for Women (BFW) is the only foundation in Bulgaria that supports local civil society organizations working for the rights of girls and women and the achievement of gender equality in all spheres of life. BFW's vision is a world free of violence, discrimination and inequalities, where each girl or woman can reach her full potential, have equal opportunities and access to resources and is free to make informed choices about her own life and body. The mission of BFW is to develop the women's movement and philanthropy for women's rights in Bulgaria by mobilizing resources on a national and international level.

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#### **ABOUT FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG**

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) was established in 1925 as a political heritage of the first democratically elected German President - Friedrich Ebert. It is committed to the values and basic ideas of social democracy and works actively with non-governmental organizations, political actors and trade unions throughout the world. Dedicated to the principles of freedom, justice and solidarity, in Germany and in more than 100 countries, the foundation contributes to the development of democracy, political culture, the strengthening of peace and social change.

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