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Action Needed to Confront Domestic Violence in Central Asia

Governments Need to Improve and Enforce Laws, Increase Aid for Survivors
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December 10 marks the end of the annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. The global statistics are alarming, and the situation is deeply concerning for women across Central Asia, where domestic violence remains a serious and pervasive issue.

Deeply ingrained patriarchal norms hinder survivors' access to justice and aid across the region, and impunity for family abuse is the norm. Although governments have made some important strides in recent years, including changes to legislation, women across Central Asia continue to face violence – and are even killed – by their partners on a regular basis.

International human rights law mandates that states take effective measures to prevent and respond to domestic violence, but most Central Asian countries do not view domestic violence as a distinct criminal offense.

In April, Kazakhstan adopted legislative amendments that advanced women's rights and strengthened protections for women and children, including domestic violence survivors. But the laws still failed to explicitly criminalize domestic violence as a stand-alone offense.

In July, Kyrgyzstan enhanced protections in law for women against rape, sexual assault, and bride kidnapping. However, laws still fail to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and girls with disabilities who are victims of domestic violence.



Activists hold a rally to support women's rights on International Women's Day in Almaty, Kazakhstan, March 8, 2023.

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Tajikistan has no legislation explicitly criminalizing domestic violence, and although some legal protections exist in the criminal code, lack of state services and shelters blocks women's access to support and safety.

Turkmenistan does not have a domestic violence law, and family abuse is mainly addressed through the country's criminal and administrative codes, and other laws that experts say "lack adequate protection for victim-survivors of domestic violence".

Uzbekistan made domestic violence a stand-alone criminal offense in April 2023. However, gaps remain and the authorities need to do more to stop widespread victim blaming and to bring perpetrators to justice.

The lack of sufficient state support for victims across Central Asia, including shelters, especially in rural areas, exacerbates the challenges for survivors of domestic violence. States should also invest in specialized training for police and judiciary in survivor-centered response.

Improving, strengthening, and enforcing laws is paramount to ensuring accountability and creating safe environments for women and girls, as is more action to challenge social stigma.

Only through a comprehensive approach can governments make real breakthroughs to truly end the scourge of domestic violence in Central Asia.

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