**Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls:**

**Submission of the Austrian Ombudsman Board (AOB)**

The Austrian Ombudsman Board (AOB) assists citizens if they feel they have been treated unfairly by an Austrian authority – irrespective of their age, gender, nationality or their place of residence. The AOB reviews every complaint and assesses whether there has been dysfunction in the administration, including in cases of violence against women.

Women often shy away from complaining about the discrimination they experience. The statistics on complaints received by the AOB reflect this: From 21.439 complaints in 2016, 12.052 came from men and 7.011 from women (the rest came from groups of persons); about a third less women than men therefore turn to the AOB. In the last years, the AOB has been working on achieving a more balanced gender distribution among complainants. By organizing events with women-specific topics, women are meant to be encouraged to turn to the AOB to complain about violence, discrimination and other violations of their rights they experience.

Since 2016, the AOB has, for example, been organizing the interdisciplinary lecture series entitled “One out of five”, together with the Department for Forensics of the Medical University of Vienna and with the association “Autonomous Austrian Women’s Shelters” (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, AÖF). It is meant to raise awareness of the fact that one woman out of five is still subject to physical or sexual violence in Austria. Additionally, it is meant to illustrate the effects violence can have on women, both mentally and physically, as well as emphasize the importance of preventing violence by working with male (potential) offenders. On this topic, Austrian Ombudswoman Gertrude Brinek stated, “One woman out of five is threatened by violence in Austria – in the private as well as in the public sphere; prevention of violence is therefore one of the pressing challenges of a contemporary society.”

The subtitle of the 2017 lecture series “One out of five” is “Step by step – ways out of violence”. During seven lectures, the different steps taken by an affected wife and mother of two children will be described on her way to a life free from violence. The different options for the best possible treatement will be presented, as well as the effective help provided by various support facilities. The lecturers come from different fields and offer an interdisciplinary link between theory and practice, focusing on the prevention, intervention and recognition of violence against women. The lecture series is meant to introduce students from various fields of study to this important topic, in order for them to keep the problem of violence against women in mind in their future professional careers. This is particularly important for students of medicine and law, in order for them to recognize the signs of violence against women and to take the appropriate preventive and protective measures.

The AOB is also working on preventing violence against female asylum seekers. After the number of asylum applications had sharply increased in 2015, the AOB started an ex officio investigative procedure on this topic in 2016. All Austrian regions were asked to explain how they are protecting female asylum seekers and their children from violence. The focus was in particular on the measures taken in the Federal Support Facilities where asylum seekers are accommodated to prevent violence and sexual assault from happening. It is the opinion of the AOB that the protection and safety of all persons in Austria, including female asylum seekers has to be guaranteed. The AOB will therefore continue to focus on the protection of women against violence within the framework of the preventive human rights monitoring and during the visits of commissions in Federal Support Facilities.