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Protection and support for victims of domestic and gender-based violence in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

This paper summarises information about the current situation related to domestic and gender-based violence in the Czech Republic. The introductory chapter presents a short overview of prevalence of domestic and sexual violence in the Czech Republic as well as the results of several studies and research in this topic. The paper summarises information on preparation of legislative changes in protection and support to victims of domestic violence. It presents examples of good practice, including projects of new specialised centres for victims and an example of multidisciplinary cooperation between women specialist services, private sector and the university.

1. Country context – Czech Republic

1.1 Data, statistic, and research

Results of international and Czech surveys show that every third woman in the Czech Republic has experienced domestic violence from her husband or partner. According to the 2016 research results of the Association of Intervention Centre Workers, more than 1/5 of women described themselves as a victim of domestic violence. Children were present in more than half of the ceases of domestic violence.¹

There are no official data about femicide in the Czech Republic. Police statistics work only with the category “murder motivated by personal relationships”, which also includes cases outside of femicide and domestic violence. In 2022, 76 murders motivated by personal relationships were committed in the Czech Republic. In relation to cases of femicide, the organisation ROSA Centre for women, z.s. has been monitoring the press for almost 20 years. In the long term, the number of femicide related to domestic violence varies between 20-30 women per year. In 2022, as result of domestic violence, according to the press monitoring, at least 22 women with 8 children died in the Czech Republic².

¹ Topinka, D. 2016. [Domáci násilí z perspektivy aplikovaného výzkumu. Základní fakta a výsledky.](#)

² [Newsletter-ROSA-3-2022-prosinec-FIN.pdf](#) (rosacentrum.cz)

In terms of data collection of domestic and gender-based violence, the integrated system of collection of comparable and harmonised data (desegregated according to the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator, type of violence and type of relationship) from different institutions and state authorities is missing. In 2022, the Government Office published a Statistical yearbook on domestic and gender-based violence in the Czech Republic³, which includes statistical data provided by the police, courts and child-welfare offices for the year 2021.

In 2021, representative research on sexual violence and harassment, conducted by the organisation proFem showed that 54% of interviewed women had experienced at least one form of sexual violence or harassment during her lifetime. Almost every tenth woman has been raped during her lifetime (9,2%), which translates to about 409 172 women.⁴ However, to the police on average only 650 cases of rape are reported per year, according to available statistics.⁵

Together with domestic violence, rape and sexual offences are one of the most latent crimes. There are various reasons for the high latency of domestic and sexual violence. One of them may be low trust of victims in the effectiveness of the system and implementation of existing policies and measures. For rape and domestic violence, Czech courts impose sentences in the lower half of legal rate in most cases. Up to half of the perpetrators of child rape or rape with serious injury to health receive a sentence below the lower limit of the rate. These findings come from an analysis of 556 judgements of district and regional courts, which was carried out in 2022 for proFem.⁶

The qualitative research by Blanka Nyklová and Dana Moree (2021)⁷, which was created uniquely at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, also drew attention to inconsistent help for victims of domestic violence. The results of the study point to the fact, that the same case is evaluated differently in different places. The inconsistency is due to a combination of many factors (perception of what violence is and what is not, sensitivity to this area, understanding of the gendered nature of violence, professional experience, etc.). The study showed that the system is dealing more with individual incidents of violence, which are dealt by different institutions, depending on the nature of the incident. These incidents are often dealt out of the context of the dynamic of violent relationships and viewed individually and thus do not allow different parts of the system to see the situation in its complexity. This leads to situations that there is criminal prosecution for domestic violence or other related crimes and at the same time, the victim of these crimes is forced to agree with the perpetrator about childcare, etc.

³ [Statistická ročenka.pdf \(vlada.cz\)](#)

⁴ For more information see: [VÝZKUMNÁ ZPRÁVA sexuální násilí 2021 - Copy 1.pdf \(profem.cz\)](#)

⁵ [Statistical overviews of crimes](#)

⁶ [profem prezentace](#)

⁷ Nyklová, B., Moree, D.: [Násilí na ženách v souvislosti s Covid 19](#). Sociologický ústav AV ČR, Fakulta humanitních studií Univerzity Karlovy, 2021.

In 2021, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs published an Analysis of the availability of specialised social services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence.⁸ In terms of counselling, there are Intervention centres in every region and specialised services for victims in several bigger cities. However, the results of the analysis show significant lack of specialised shelters, which are only in two big cities and therefore beds are not available sufficiently in regions. There is also lack of specialised crisis beds and crisis centres, including crisis centres for victims of rape and sexual assaults. In terms of fulfilling the Recommendations of the Council of Europe on the availability of specialised services⁹, the analysis shows that 680 – 3000 beds are needed in specialised shelters for victims of domestic violence, 54 specialised counselling centres, 27 crisis centres for victims of rape and sexual assaults, which would be appropriately distributed regionally.

2. Policy debate

The Czech Republic ranks among the countries that have still not ratified the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). However, the government of the Czech Republic should soon discuss the proposal for the ratification procedure and possibility for discussion and voting by the Czech Parliament. Ratification of the Convention is one of the priorities of Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková, the Commissioner for Human Rights.

At the same time, a draft of a new legislation is being prepared in cooperation with the Coalition NeNa and the Department of Gender Equality of the Government Office. The proposal for legislative changes is based on the practical experience of helping organisations associated in the NeNa Coalition and on findings and recommendations from various studies and analysis, some of them are described above. The proposal, which should be discussed in the interdepartmental comment procedure soon, introduces a unifying definition of domestic violence in the Civil Code, extends the possibility to evict a violent person from the household for a period of 10 days to 14 days, introduces the obligation of the police in case of eviction to confiscate weapons held by the perpetrator and other legislative changes so that the protection and support for victims is more effective.

Recently, a change in the definition of rape in the criminal code has also been discussed. The current wording states that physical or psychological coercion must be used during the rape. Changes to the definition of rape are discussed also in the

⁸ [Analýza-dostupnosti-specializovaných-sociálních-slужeb-pro-oběti-DN-a-GNP-v-ČR_finální-čistopis.pdf \(mpsv.cz\)](#)

⁹ COUNCIL OF EUROPE. [Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services](#) [online], Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2008 [cit. 2020-12-05].

Subcommittee on Domestic and Sexual Violence which was established in the Chamber of Deputies in 2022.

The Action plan for the prevention of domestic and gender-based violence for the years 2023-2026 was approved by the Committee for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women and will be discussed for approval by the Government of the Czech Republic soon. The Action plan includes 3 main areas of measures: 1. prevention of domestic and gender-based violence, 2. protection of victims and availability of support services, 3. Systemic solutions to domestic and gender-based violence and ensuring access to justice for all victims of these forms of violence.

3. Good practice examples

3.1 The creation of new specialised services for victims of domestic and sexual violence

Within the Programme Human Rights, call HROVA3 – Establishing new specialised services for victims of gender-based violence, which is funded by Norwegian Financial Mechanisms, the establishment of 5 new centres for victims of domestic and gender-based violence has been supported. The allocation of this call was 1 946 471 EUR. The projects started at the end of 2021 and will be finished by 04/2024. The Call responds to the long-term shortage of specialised services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence by its aim to promote accessibility of the specialised services.

Supported projects included e.g. a new crisis centre with crisis beds, a free of charge 24/7 hotline for women and victims of gender-based violence and a new centre for victims of sexual violence.

3.2 For a Safe Home – Cooperation between the non-profit sector, private companies, and the university

This cooperation took place on several levels:

- Awareness raising campaign on types of domestic violence and stereotypes and prejudices that make it difficult for the victim to leave the perpetrator aiming at the public (2 video spots, mural) and internally for employees of the IKEA company (realised in CZ, SK and HU).
- Internal training for managers and team leaders at the IKEA company (how to recognise and respond to domestic violence).
- Preparation of an internal policy for the protection of victims of domestic violence at the workplace.
- Direct support for women's specialised services to increase their capacity.
- Research/data collection on prejudices and stereotypes (representative data collection in CZ, SK, HU).

- Advocacy work with the aim to improve systematic support for victims of domestic and gender-based violence.
- Education: In cooperation with Charles University in Prague, a new subject “Violence in partner relationship” was introduced. The subject is for students from all faculties of Charles University with experts from various professions (psychology, sociology, law, social work, etc.) participating in the teaching. Generally, there is not sufficient space devoted to the issue of domestic and gender-based violence at universities and this subject fills a gap in the education of future professionals. The interest of students exceeds the capacity of the course.
- Cooperation with regional governments – signing a Memorandum of cooperation. The main aim is to implement on regional level Quality standards of specialised social services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, that were approved by the Government Council for gender Equality in 2021 and setting up internal policies to support employees, victims of domestic and gender-based violence.

4. Transferability aspects

An accessible network of specialised centres for victims of domestic violence and sexual violence, assistance to women at risk of violence from Ukraine, these are topics that are very present in many countries, including the Czech Republic and Romania. To ensure effective support for victims of domestic and sexual violence, the state cooperation and involvement of women’s specialised services, whose interventions are based on the needs of the victims and are aimed at increasing the safety and empowerment of the victims and their children is necessary.

Experience from the Czech Republic shows that the involvement of employers, whether from the private or public sector, the education of employees about domestic and gender-based violence and setting up internal processes and policies for support and protection of employees who experience domestic or sexual violence can be very important in terms of prevention and help for victims.

Multidisciplinary education in the field of domestic and gender-based violence at universities can significantly contribute to bridging gaps in interdisciplinary cooperation in dealing with cases of domestic violence in practice.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Victims of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, including sexual violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion, contraception and sterilisation, sexist harassment, hate crimes on the grounds of gender and of various forms of cyber violence, as well as children of victims of femicide, shall be provided with support and assistance offered by specialist support

services. Specialist support should offer victims support tailored to their specific needs and irrespective of any official complaint. Such services must be provided in addition to general victim support services. General victim support services should cooperate with women's specialist support in providing services and develop clear, commonly agreed referral pathways between general and specialist support services to refer victims of violence against women and girls to services.

Data collection and quantitative research of existing measures and needs of victims should be supported by adequate financial means.