



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Challenging for change: working with perpetrators of GBV and domestic violence

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Comments paper – Czechia



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# The state of the work with the users of violence in close relationships in Czechia

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## Abstract

Czechia is a country where there is still insufficient sensitivity to various manifestations of violence, both on the part of the public and political representatives, which is evidenced by, for example, the non-approval of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. But there are government institutions covering the agenda of gender equality and gender-based violence, and there have even been some groundbreaking changes in legislation to better protect people at risk of domestic and sexual violence. Programmes working with users of violence are mainly implemented by non-profit organisations, but they lack systemic anchoring and stable funding, which leads to the fact that they are not available throughout the territory and have long waiting times. The author proposes a way to stop violence, which she sees in a comprehensive approach to violence with a focus on preventive measures and embedding programmes in the system of protection against violence.

## 1. The situation in Czechia in relation to gender-based violence

### 1.1 Data about violence in close relationships and gender-based violence in Czechia

Approximately one in three women and one in 14 men in Czechia experience various forms of domestic violence during their lifetime. In more than half of all cases of domestic and partner violence, children are exposed to violence<sup>1</sup>. Domestic violence data also entered the COVID-19 pandemic statistics, which saw an increase in the incidence of domestic violence and demand for services from victim support organisations<sup>2</sup>. Violence in close relationships can have fatal consequences. In the spring of 2023, several murders of women as a result of partner violence were

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<sup>1</sup> Action plan for the prevention of domestic and gender-based violence for the years 2019 – 2022. (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Nyklová, B., Moree, D. (2021).

reported in the media. In 2023, the police registered 42 murders motivated by personal relationships<sup>3</sup>.

Violence does not avoid young people's relationships either. 30% of young people aged 16-26 have experienced or are experiencing long-term relationship violence<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding the incidence of sexualised violence, 58% of women in Czechia experience some form of sexualised violence. Even one in five women has experienced rape (20%)<sup>5</sup>.

The data on the prevalence of children at risk is also alarming, according to which 18% of Czech children are at risk of physical abuse, 9.7% of sexual abuse, 37.2% of neglect and 22.1% of witnessed domestic violence<sup>6</sup>.

LGBTIQ people are 2 times more likely to experience physical violence and 3 times more likely to experience sexual violence as a result of gender stereotypes.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2 The state of the socio-political debate on violence

Although there has been a certain shift towards addressing and preventing gender-based violence in recent years, Czechia is still a country with a lower sensitivity to violence, both on the part of the public and especially on the part of political leaders.<sup>8</sup> This was demonstrated, for example, by the public debate concerning the Me Too movement, in which the view denigrating survivors prevailed, and subsequently also by the debate concerning the ratification of the Istanbul Convention or the unacceptability of physical punishment of children. The Istanbul Convention has not yet been ratified in Czechia, although the last vote was quite close. With regard to physical punishment of children, according to a survey by the Psychiatric Clinic of the 1st Faculty of Medicine of Charles University and the General University Hospital in Prague published in 2023, almost 36% of parents surveyed consider physical punishment to be part of education, and 73% of those surveyed disagree with the prohibition of physical punishment by law.

The issue of gender-based violence is communicated in Czechia mainly by non-profit organisations, but also, for example, by the Department for Gender Equality at the Office of the Government, which formulates concepts and strategies at the national level, and by the Government Commissioner for Human Rights. The issue is also communicated by some female politicians who have recently entered the Chamber of

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<sup>3</sup> Source: the Police Presidium.

<sup>4</sup> Adolescent and young adult partner violence. (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Novák Gabrielová, J., Michálková, E., Poláková, J. (2024).

<sup>6</sup> Kaščáková, N., Bednáříková, H., Dobrotková, A., Petříková, M., Hašto, J., Tavel, P. (2020).

<sup>7</sup> The data is based on a meta-analysis of international research

<sup>8</sup> A majority of the adult population (58 %) believes that in certain situations a woman is at least partly responsible for her rape; 43 % of the public think that some women tend to choose aggressors and are therefore co-responsible for their situation. 36% of the public think that if the victim lets everything go, she is responsible for her own situation. Source: Amnesty International. (2018).

Deputies, but they are rather a minority in the Chamber and sometimes even in their parties.

### 1.3 Strategic documents

Czechia has strategic documents that also focus on preventing and addressing gender-based violence: the Strategy for Gender Equality (2021-2030), the Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence and the Strategy for the Prevention of Crime in the Czech Republic until 2027. The main measures of the Action Plan include increasing legislative protection against domestic and sexual violence, ensuring the availability of specialised services for persons at risk of domestic and gender-based violence, including children, ensuring the availability of programmes for working with users of violence, supporting the establishment of specialised centres for victims of sexual violence, and training professions that most often come into contact with persons at risk. An important part of this is the prevention of these forms of violence through awareness-raising activities or education in schools.<sup>9</sup> The problem with the Action Plan is that some ministries repeatedly fail to fulfil their obligations under it. The Action Plan is developed and evaluated by the Committee for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women. According to the Committee, for example, less than a third of the measures in the Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence for 2019-2022 have not been implemented. This action plan contained a total of 88 measures<sup>10</sup>.

### 1.4 Protection system for persons at risk of violence in close relationships

The system of protection of persons at risk of violence in close relationships in Czechia is based on three pillars: intervention centres, the police and the courts. Intervention centres for people at risk of violence and dangerous persecution are available in every region and provide social, legal and psychological counselling and care. The police are able to intervene directly at the scene of violence at short notice and set the boundaries of inappropriate and dangerous behaviour through prosecution and other sanctions. They also have the option of using eviction of the person committing the violence. In addition to intervention centres, there are other non-profit organisations in the country that focus on supporting people at risk.

Challenges for the current system include the need for better education of professionals and the public, specialisation (e.g. the Police, Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children...) on the issue of violence in close relationships and the implementation of an approach based more on prevention and sensitivity to violence. There is also often a lack of a comprehensive view of violence in close relationships,

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<sup>9</sup> Action plan for the prevention of domestic and gender-based violence for the years 2023–2026 (2023)

<sup>10</sup> Source: [the Department for Gender Equality](#)

which also includes efforts to stop the transgenerational transmission of violence, which also includes working with users of violence.

### **1.5 Positive changes towards better protection of people at risk from violence**

A positive change was the government's recent redefinition of rape as a crime that does not require active resistance on the part of the victim. The amendment also clearly defines the state of defencelessness, including situations where the victim freezes. It also creates a new offence, sexual assault, which covers less serious forms of sexualised violence.

Another positive development was the opening of a comprehensive centre for victims of sexual violence: PORT. This is an innovative initiative and the first centre of its kind in Czechia to offer a wide range of support services under one roof.

A fresh legislative change is also a better definition of domestic violence in the Civil Code, which ensure better protection for those at risk. This change includes also an extension of the period of eviction of a violent person from 10 to 14 days and the condition of retention of a weapon at the time of eviction. What is missing so far is the embedding of work with users of violence and the need for the police to specialise in the issue of violence in close relationships.

## **2. Work with users of violence in Czechia**

There is still no uniform system of treatment of persons who commit violence in close relationships or gender-based violence in Czechia. The approach to them is highly fragmented, based rather on the focus of the relevant institution dealing with users of violence. Moreover, users of violence are a relatively broad and diverse group, ranging from perpetrators of criminal offences, to those who commit misdemeanours, to the grey area of those who commit forms of violence that do not yet fall within the scope of criminal offences, or those who fear that they might commit violence (e.g. those who themselves experienced violence in childhood). Users of violence may then include not only men, but also women or those in LGBTQ+ relationships.

In Czechia, systematic work with people who commit violence in close relationships has been functioning and developing in recent years, mainly thanks to the initiative of non-profit organisations, with the support and coordination of the Department of Gender Equality and funding from Norway Grants. The Department of Equality is the coordinator of the gender equality agenda at the national level, including the issue of domestic and gender-based violence. Within the framework of activities related to the prevention of domestic and gender-based violence, a working group has also been established to work with users of violence in close relationships. Within this group, the so-called Minimum Standards for Working with Users of Violence in Close Relationships in the Czech Republic were developed in 2018. This is the only more conceptual and generally valid document in the field of work with violent persons so far. These standards contain, among other things, conditional criteria for evaluating

the effectiveness of programmes. Their legitimacy is also anchored in the strategic policy documents of Czechia. There are plans to update these standards in the coming years.

A total of 13 organisations currently offer programmes for users of violence in Czechia (approximately 10.7 million inhabitants). These organisations support approximately 1,200 clients per year. However, the organisations operate only in some regions of the country and most of them are in the two largest cities, so the programmes are not available in every region. Moreover, even in regions where one or more organisations operate, accessibility is not guaranteed. The organisations have limited capacity and the demand for their programmes exceeds them. In Czechia, there are up to 1.4 million people (adult population) who admit to having anger management problems and committing violence and who declare that they would use programmes that work on anger management and stopping violence<sup>11</sup>. Existing programmes are not exempt from waiting periods of up to several months. Work with users of violence in Czechia, unlike work with people at risk, is not, with few exceptions, part of social services, which makes their funding very unstable. The current capacities of the organisations have also been created thanks to grant support from the Norway Funds. This has also enabled a nationwide awareness campaign to inform about the programmes. However, the support from the Norway Grants ended in April 2024, and it is questionable whether the current capacity can be maintained. It is also for this reason that organisations working with users of violence are seeking to anchor their work systemically to ensure stability and accessibility towards clients. The organisations have recently established the Stop Violence Association, which includes the vast majority of organisations working with users of violence in Czechia Republic. The Association should lobby for systemic changes and oversee the quality of the work of member organisations and its further development.

Two organisations (SPONDEA and LOM) working in Czechia with perpetrators of violence are also members of the European Network of organisations working with perpetrators of violence WWP.

The work of Czech NGOs working with users of violence draws in particular on good practice in this area in Norway, which supports long-term therapeutic work that shows the best results. The Department of Gender Equality has also been cooperating with Norway for a long time in this respect, and through projects supported by Norway funds, it has focused on transferring good practice from the Norwegian organisation ATV to Czechia.

The Norway funds also supported the project "ViolenceOff", implemented by the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention, which focused on applied research aimed at formulating recommendations for the treatment of perpetrators and support for victims in cases of domestic and gender-based violence in Czechia.

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<sup>11</sup> Research by the LOM organisation, 2023.

The Department of Gender Equality will also, in cooperation with the Association to Stop Violence, present a concept for work with users of violence, which should include a systemic anchor for this work. The Government's Strategy for Gender Equality in the Czech Republic (Strategy 2021-2030) also envisages activities aimed at conceptually anchoring the system of work with perpetrators of violence. The Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence for 2023-2026 has among its key measures to ensure the availability of programmes for working with perpetrators of violence.

Although Czech organisations working with users of violence have similar visions, their clientele is different. Some organisations work mainly with voluntary clients, while others have clients referred by courts and other institutions. The aim is to stop or reduce the intensity of violence and protect those at risk.

Some work with clients on an individual or group basis, others focus more on working with the whole family, and some organisations include users of violence among the clients of their broader services, such as crisis intervention. Some programmes are for men only, others are open to women or LGBTQ+ people. A large number of the programmes are based on a voluntary basis, but many can also be attended on the recommendation of institutions or court order.

Programmes are primarily evaluated by the organisations that implement them. LOM is probably the furthest along in this respect, using the IMT tool used by the European association WWP. SPONDEA is in the process of preparing to use this tool. According to LOM's research on clients in their programme, up to 73% of clients and their partners report that they do not commit physical violence 6 months after therapy. The intensity of psychological violence decreased by up to 64% after therapy.

The extent to which existing programmes address gender stereotypes is not yet clearly mapped. The LOM organisation, which also trains other male and female professionals across the country, addresses the topic of gender stereotypes and attitudes in its group work with men, where one of the group meetings is dedicated to the topic. The organisation's own Minimum Standards define violence in close relationships as gender-based violence.<sup>12</sup>.

The issue of work with users of violence is cross-cutting in Czechia – it affects the activities of several ministries. Some of them have grant calls for work with users of violence (e.g. Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice). However, these calls do not cover the costs of the current programmes.

In 2022, legislation was passed to require police officers to provide information to a person evicted from their home due to domestic violence about available therapeutic interventions for violent persons. However, the unavailability of programmes and their long waiting times remain a problem in practice.

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<sup>12</sup> Trávníček, Z. (2018).

In addition to the programmes offered by NGOs to users of violence, there are also programmes that offenders sentenced to an unconditional prison sentence can participate in directly in prisons. These are standardised programmes, some of which are aimed at working with violent people in general (not just specifically with those who commit violence in close relationships). It was also planned to include a programme specifically aimed at perpetrators of domestic violence. In addition to these programmes, the Good Lives Model programme, also targeting perpetrators of violence, is being piloted in prisons.

### **3. The transferability of the reviewed LV and PT practices**

Latvia's experience of working with users of violence shows that it is possible for the state to commit to supporting and funding work with users of violence, and that it is possible for this cross-cutting theme to be coordinated by one ministry and for work with users of violence to be a solid part of social services. I also see it as a practice worthy of inspiration that the state in Latvia supports and finances the training of other professionals in this area. In Czechia, professionals are usually trained from their own funds or from the funds of the non-profit organisation in which they work, which depend on obtaining resources for training.

But I believe that in order to stop violence, work with users and work with those at risk must go hand in hand, including treating the impact on children if they are in relationships.

The practice in Portugal shows Czechia the way the courts can go towards ordering programmes. However, I believe that while it is important for the court system to work with the possibility of redress, it is even more important to focus on the prevention of violence and to offer programmes for users of violence more in the context of prevention, when the crimes have not yet occurred but the first incidents have occurred. I also see the voluntary nature of the programmes as a key element in motivating people.

### **4. Conclusions and recommendations**

Violence in close relationships and gender-based violence is strongly present not only in Czech society, but also in other European countries. If we want to stop violence, it is necessary to approach it comprehensively and within the framework of a multidisciplinary co-operation. Violence does not usually occur as one isolated incident between two people. It is often part of a wider family history. A number of studies have shown that 60 to 80% of men who perpetrate violence against their partners have experienced violence in childhood. Violence in families has a profoundly negative impact on children, affecting their future development, their mental and physical health and the kind of relationships they will form. By working with users of violence, we work to stop violence and to stop it from spreading further.

If programmes of work with users of violence are well set up, they lead to a reduction in the level of violence or even to its complete cessation, including its transmission to the next generation. As good Norwegian practice shows, long-term therapeutic work that takes into account developmental trauma, gender roles and expectations, and which includes acceptance of responsibility for violence, is a prerequisite.

It is also key to have systemic anchoring of programmes that allows stable funding and availability of programmes in each county, and sufficient capacity to reduce waiting times as much as possible.

I see prevention, early detection of the first signs of violence and follow-up measures to stop the violence as key.

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