



European  
Commission

# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality


## Combating domestic violence Romania, 26-27 April 2023

### Comments paper – Sweden



Ein Unternehmen der ÖSB Gruppe.

*The information and views set out in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Commission. Neither the Commission nor any person acting on the Commission's behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.*



*This publication is supported by the European Union Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (2021-2027).*

*This programme is implemented by the European Commission and shall contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected.*

*For more information see: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/cerv>*

# Combating domestic violence in Sweden

Joakim Petersson

Örebro University

## Abstract

The current Swedish policy on combating domestic violence puts an increased focus on preventative measures directed against the perpetrators to end their violent behaviour. This has spurred the development and implementation of several novel measures and collaborative projects between, for example, the police and social services, which could be transferred also to other European Member States. Most of the good practices (or at least similar practices) described by Romania are already in effect in Sweden, but similar challenges exist in relation to implementation and enforcement. To effectively combat domestic violence requires parallel focus on both a victim (including children) perspective and a perpetrator perspective, but also increased and structured forms of collaboration between those agencies and actors that work with victims and perpetrators. Several promising preventative measures have recently been implemented in Sweden, although more rigorous evaluations are needed to assess their efficacy in combating domestic violence.

## 1. Relevant country context

In Sweden, with a population of about 10 million people, 25% of women aged 16-79 report ever being victimized by a current or former intimate partner (National Council for Crime Prevention [NCCP], 2014), but only about 9 000 cases of male-to-female assault in a domestic violence context are reported to the police annually (NCCP, 2019)<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, about 17 women are killed by a former or current partner in Sweden every year. It is also estimated that 150 000 children are living in households where domestic violence is present (NCCP, 2014). Additionally, victims of domestic violence living in rural or remote areas in Sweden report being victimized by more severe forms of violence and display more vulnerabilities than victims living in urban areas (e.g., Strand & Storey, 2019).

The current policy in Sweden on combating domestic violence draws on the Istanbul convention and is embedded within the Swedish gender equality policy (Skr. 2016/17). This ten-year (2017-2026) national policy aims to eradicate men's violence against women (including honour-based violence, prostitution, and trafficking) and to promote equal rights and opportunities between women and men and girls and boys.

---

<sup>1</sup> Since 2019, data on male-to-female domestic violence related assault is not discernible in police data due to inconsistencies in the registration of crime reports.

The policy is divided into four areas: 1) primary prevention, 2) improvements of violence detection and protection of victims, 3) efficient crime prevention, and 4) improved knowledge and development of methods.

## 2. Policy debate

The Swedish government has launched an action programme with a total of 99 measures aiming to combat gender-based violence for the period of 2021-2023. Examples of measures and reforms that are currently being discussed and deemed to be of specific relevance for this seminar's topic include:

- A legal proposition to improve sheltered housing for women and children. Currently, social services are not obligated to provide sheltered housing. Thus, the government has announced that sheltered housing is to be regulated and become a new form of placement that is subject to permit requirements and quality requirements.
- Facilitation of permanent housing after staying at sheltered housing. Due to housing shortage in several Swedish municipalities, women and children have difficulties obtaining a long-term living solution.
- Increased focus on domestic violence perpetrators, where several measures have been initiated aiming to end the perpetrator's violent behaviour. This includes the legal obligation of social services to provide violence-reducing interventions to domestic violence perpetrators, and police measures aiming to deter perpetrators from re-offending.
- Several other legal provisions have been introduced, including: criminalising the act of letting children witness domestic violence (introduced 1 July 2021); based on GREVIO's recommendations in terms of restraining orders, provisions have been made to facilitate the use of electronic monitoring, relocation of the perpetrator from a shared residence, as well as harsher punishments for violation of such orders (introduced 1 January 2022); a legal provision criminalising honour-related crimes (introduced 1 June 2022).

As of March 2023, the Swedish government has initiated the development of a new action programme for measures against domestic violence and honour-based violence for the period of 2024-2026. This action programme will more explicitly include a focus on victimization among the LGTBQ population and among men and boys. Moreover, a legal proposition to criminalise emotional abuse and controlling/coercive behaviour is currently discussed and proposed to be introduced 1 January 2024.

## 3. Good practice examples

### 3.1 Evidence-based treatment for perpetrators

The Swedish Prison and Probation Service has recently implemented two new treatment programmes for domestic violence perpetrators. These programmes (Predov for medium-risk perpetrators and RVP for high-risk perpetrators) are based on the Risk Need Responsivity principles (Andrews & Bonta, 2010), which has strong empirical support. Additionally, it is intended that perpetrators can initiate the Predov programme while incarcerated and then continue the programme when released on probation. Evaluations of the programmes' efficacy is currently assessed and expected in 2024.

### 3.2 Risk Reducing Interventions

The Swedish Police have developed a new measure called Risk Reduction Intervention, which was awarded first prize by the European Crime Prevention Network in 2022. The method consists of a combination of risk assessments and conversations with the perpetrator and the victim. By combining the expertise of the witness protection unit and the negotiation unit within the police, the perpetrator's motivation to use violent behaviour is intended to diminish, while simultaneously protecting and supporting the victim. Preliminary evaluations have shown promising results, although more rigorous evaluations are needed.

### 3.3 Multi-agency collaboration projects

A couple of collaborative projects between researchers, social services, and the police are currently on-going. The IGOR project is a collaboration between the social service and the police, where a team of police officers and social workers use an outreaching approach to inform, motivate, and help both victims and perpetrators. This project has recently been evaluated showing promising results, although more rigorous evaluations are needed. In the RISKSAM project, researchers have developed a model which will help actors, such as the social services and the police, who work with risk assessment and risk management of domestic violence to structure the risk management and promote structured forms of collaboration. This project is currently on-going and under evaluation.

## 4. Transferability aspects

### 4.1 Good practice 1: National network of sheltered houses

There is a national network for Swedish municipalities aiming to facilitate the placement of women victims of domestic violence and their children in sheltered housing in another municipality. Currently, about 60 municipalities participate in this network. Additionally, there are a couple of regional networks where municipalities within the same county collaborate in receiving and placing women and children in sheltered housing in another municipality. These forms of structured collaborations

provide victims and their children with a possibility to relocate to another municipality/county. The reliance on documents with guidelines for when and how such relocation is necessary, coupled with structured and regular collaboration meetings, is deemed key to successful outcomes. As in Romania, sheltered houses in Sweden provide several services, including professional counselling and support, help with contacting other agencies (e.g., the police), risk assessments, and physical security measures.

However, there are several challenges with sheltered housing in Sweden, similar to those experienced in Romania. Only about half of Sweden's 290 municipalities can offer sheltered housing within their own municipality. Many victims do not want to accept sheltered living if it means they must move far away from home. Furthermore, only about 60 municipalities have joined this national network and smaller municipalities in rural and remote areas often cannot participate in the network as they cannot offer sheltered housing in return. Other challenges discussed is the problem with finding permanent living solutions for women and children after their temporary stay at a sheltered house. This is due to housing shortage and the economical violence that many women have been subjected to. Thus, the government has emphasized the need to further develop the national networks for sheltered housing and strengthening the collaboration with local housing companies.

## **4.2 Good practice 2: Referral centres for sexual violence/treatment centres for perpetrators**

### **4.2.1 Centres for victims of sexual violence**

Established in Stockholm in 2005, there is currently one emergency clinic for rape victims in Sweden offering integrated and free of charge medical and psychosocial treatment and support, forensic examination to support a legal process, and post-treatment follow-up. This clinic has been highlighted as a best practice both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, Sweden also has 33 children's advocacy centres ('Barnahus') where children victimized by sexual violence or non-sexual domestic violence can receive integrated and co-ordinated support from social services, police, prosecutors, and healthcare (i.e., medical, and forensic).

Plans to create emergency clinics for adult victims in other major cities have not yet been realized and, as in Romania, the creation of similar centres requires a higher level of political involvement and engagement. As of now, victims of sexual violence who are not able to visit the emergency clinic in Stockholm are referred to regular emergency clinics, women's clinics, or local health centres, which lack a multi-disciplinary approach and expertise.

- As such, the transferability of the good practice 2 to a Swedish context is not fully possible until more similar centres have been established.
- However, the creation of children's advocacy centres (Barnahus) for children victimized by sexual or non-sexual domestic violence could possibly be investigated by the host country.

#### 4.2.2 Treatment centres for perpetrators

The National Association of Swedish Crisis Centres for Men is a national network of 26 centres specialised in the treatment of domestic violence perpetrators. These centres provide treatment to those perpetrators who seek help on a voluntary basis and are primarily referred by social services or healthcare services. Lately, this area has received increased attention due to an amendment to the Social Services Act, obligating social services from 1 August 2021 to provide such treatment for perpetrators of domestic violence.

This national network of centres specialised in treatment of domestic violence perpetrators could act as a good practice for other Member States. Through regular conferences and dissemination of information and research, the network supports their member organisations and acts a resource centre and a referral body.

#### 4.3 Good practice 3: National plan of measures regarding the protection and inclusion of displaced persons from Ukraine

The main measures described by the host country have also been implemented in Sweden, providing displaced persons from Ukraine with basic necessities, housing, support, schooling, and integration measures. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency has also developed and distributed flyers and posters in Ukrainian, Russian, and English, informing displaced persons about their increased risk of being victims of prostitution, human trafficking, and other forms of violence. This information also contains contact information to the police and the national women's helpline for domestic violence.

Challenges with identifying displaced Ukrainian women and girls who have experienced, or are at risk of experiencing, gender-based violence include:

- To facilitate applying for temporary protection, the in-person meeting with a case manager at the Swedish Migration Agency has been replaced with an automated, digitalised, process.
- Few displaced persons from Ukraine have utilized the proffered services available (e.g., healthcare, and other support measures).

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The current Swedish policy on combating domestic violence puts a greater emphasis on directing preventative measures against the perpetrators. As such, the intention is to address the root of the problem rather than forcing the victims to adjust or change their lives in order to decrease the risk for re-victimisation. Thus, more focus on evidence-based, preventative, measures against the perpetrators is recommended on both a national and European level. This includes both treatment interventions as well as deterrence interventions. With regards to the later, there are some measures in Sweden that show promising results. However, these measures need to be

evaluated using a more rigorous methodological design before a fair assessment of their merits can be made. Furthermore, the increased focus on the perpetrators should be parallel to the focus on supporting and helping victims, and thus not be made on the expense of the victims.

Recommendations on a national and European level include:

- Continued implementation and evaluation of evidence-based measures aiming to combat domestic violence on a primary prevention level;
- A greater focus on designing, implementing and evaluating measures aiming to prevent domestic violence perpetrators from recidivating;
- Evaluation of the efficacy of current criminal justice interventions, using a rigorous methodological design;
- Promoting increased multi-agency collaboration between agencies and other actors that are working with victims (including children) and perpetrators in relation to risk assessment and management of domestic violence;
- Increased availability of data from criminal justice actors, enabling the evaluation of current measures used to combat domestic violence;
- Continued promotion of arenas for the EU Member States to disseminate and share best practices and results from evaluations of measures that are deemed effective in preventing domestic violence;
- The importance of including a rurality perspective, from both an academic and a practitioner perspective, when studying or working with risk assessment and risk management of domestic violence.

## References

Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). Rehabilitating criminal justice policy and practice. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 16(1), 39-55

National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP). (2014). Brott i nära relationer: En nationell kartläggning (Brå-rapport 2014:8) [Offences in close relationships: A national survey]. Retrieved from [www.bra.se](http://www.bra.se)

National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP). (2019). Kriminalstatistik 2019: Anmälda brott slutlig statistik [Reported crimes during 2019: Final version]. Retrieved from [www.bra.se](http://www.bra.se)

Skr. (2016/17:10). En nationell strategi för att förebygga och bekämpa mäns våld mot kvinnor. (National policy for ending men's violence against women). Retrieved from [www.regeringen.se](http://www.regeringen.se)

Strand, S., & Storey, J. E. (2019). Intimate Partner Violence in Urban, Rural, and Remote Areas: An Investigation of Offense Severity and Risk Factors. *Violence against Women*, 25(2), 188-207. doi:10.1177%2F1077801218766611