



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality


## Preventing domestic violence with Men and Boys: Challenges and Opportunities

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### Comments Paper - Malta



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# Risk Management and prevention of Domestic Violence in Malta by engaging with men and boys

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## Abstract:

There is a drastic discrepancy difference between the approach adopted by Swedish and Maltese authorities. Malta's approach has been one that focuses on changing and improving laws (top-down) and how those laws pen out in practice. That meant leaving primary prevention, education, awareness raising and training in the hands of independent government agencies and NGOs. Whilst some of the work done by these actors is commendable and sometimes excellent, it is usually short-term, project based and not funded for long-term effect (especially with NGOs).

The substantial change can only come from long-term thinking and persistent and consistent funding, that takes in consideration that intimate partner violence and gender based violence is multifaceted issue that requires holistic approach.

## 1. Country Context

Between 2010 and 2018 there have been 9,682 reported cases of domestic violence in Malta, with potential 10,585 victims, vast majority of whom are women<sup>1</sup>. In 2018 alone, there were 1341 reported cases, which represents increase of around 8% compared to previous years although the total number of crimes in general fell down by 7% for the same period<sup>2</sup>.

The Eurobarometer (2016)<sup>3</sup> statistics show that 47% of the population believe that women's claims about domestic violence are lies or exaggerated and 40 % believe that victims bring violence onto themselves by provoking it. Furthermore, research

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<sup>1</sup> The Malta Independent, "1341 cases of domestic violence reported in 2018", 02/04/2019, available at: <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2019-04-02/local-news/1-341-reported-cases-of-domestic-violence-in-2018-6736206084>

<sup>2</sup> Malta Today, "Domestic Violence, money-laundering police reports up last year", 22/02/2019 available at: [https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/93177/domestic\\_violence\\_moneylaundering\\_police\\_reports\\_up\\_last\\_year#.XVFvUOgzblU](https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/93177/domestic_violence_moneylaundering_police_reports_up_last_year#.XVFvUOgzblU)

<sup>3</sup> Special Eurobarometer 449, Gender Based Violence, November 2016, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/75838>

conducted by the Ministry of Justice in 2016 shows that 85% of the population would not report crimes of a sexual nature (sexual assault and rape)<sup>4</sup>.

Domestic violence and intimate partner violence in Malta is culturally seen as a private, behind the closed doors issue that is something that partners involved should deal with between themselves. The culture of silence about domestic violence and violence of women is overwhelming and involves a lot of victim blaming and shame (as statistics above show).

Therefore, it is pertinent to point out that there is no structured, planned, statewide prevention programme about male violence on women that is tackling it by engaging male perspective that is implemented in a cohesive and controlled manner. Most of the work is done on project basis, implemented by NGOs and/or by one of the governmental agencies.

## 1.1 Primary Prevention

There is no state wide primary prevention policy working with men and boys on intimate partner violence prevention.

On the state level, National Commission for Promotion of Equality run a two-year long project 2016-2017 called *Equality Beyond Genders*, targeting boys post-secondary school students. It engaged over 900 boys in commenting and participating in the campaign<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, the Commission on Gender based and Domestic Violence, another state established institution is currently running an EU funded project that has the name 'Breaking the Cycle of Violence' where it involves providing gender equality and violence prevention training to a large number of boys, members of the local Boy Scouts organisation.

There is only one NGO in Malta invested in primary prevention work exclusively with men and boys and that is Men Against Violence. Since it was established in 2014, their work has been mostly in schools, working with boys directly, and with schools and educators by providing training to teachers and staff members. Most recently, cooperating with the University of Malta, it participated in an implementation of a Bystander programme on prevention of Sexual harassment among young people in three Maltese postsecondary schools, providing training to students, teachers and other school staff<sup>6</sup>. Again, all this work is usually project based, dependent on availability of funding and therefore not consistently applied.

<sup>4</sup> Times Of Malta, "85% of Maltese unlikely to report sexual offences", 26/05/2017, available at: <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/85-of-maltese-unlikely-to-report-sexual-offenses.649066>

<sup>5</sup> National Commission For Promotion of Equality, Annual Report 2017, Available at: [https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our\\_Publications\\_and\\_Resources/Annual\\_Reports/Annual\\_Report\\_2017.pdf](https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/Annual_Report_2017.pdf), p.40.

<sup>6</sup> Developing Bystander responses to sexual harassment between young people, details available at: [www.bystanders.eu](http://www.bystanders.eu)

## 1.2 Prevention through criminal justice system

In the period between 2015 and 2018, there were 2256 court cases in relations to domestic violence in Maltese courts. Out of this, 1690 were discontinued (no judgement provided – usually because victim refuses to testify so the merits of the case were considered exhausted). There were only 127 guilty verdicts which involved a fine, 104 cases were time barred and only ten perpetrators received effective jail time.

There is also a high rate of recidivism and the judgements are inconsistent and lenient. The Criminal justice system therefore does not act as a deterrent and is ineffective in prevention repeated violence.

Prior to 2018, there was no risk assessment policies firmly in place. Risk management has just been introduced towards the end of 2018 and it is still way too early to state with any confidence if it has made any difference. The introduction of risk assessment necessitated large-scale training for professionals in the field, which was done through another EU con-financed project “*Full cooperation: Zero Tolerance*”, implemented through Human Rights and Integration Directorate, another state agency.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.3 Post criminal justice system

Working with perpetrators post criminal justice system is available in Malta since 1999. It is a 22 weeks long group programme, where perpetrators are first assessed on individual basis prior to joining. This can be court mandated, although it does not happen often.

There is no research that shows efficacy or success rates of this programme in Malta.

## 2. Policy Debate

The major legal/policy change in Malta took place in May 2018 through the implementation of the Istanbul Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence). This has brought about a number of changes most notably by improving the definitions of different forms of violence, including a better and more comprehensive definition of domestic violence and increased punishments. Worth nothing however, is the implementation process has brought about gender neutral and mainstreaming approach, which has detracted from the original scope of the Istanbul Convention.

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<sup>7</sup> Zero Tolerance: Full Cooperation, details available at:  
<https://meae.gov.mt/en/ZeroViolence/Pages/Zero-Violence.aspx>

The implementation of the new laws hasn't been without problems and the government is already proposing new amendments since a number of state stakeholders have highlighted that some of the current protective measures are causing a situation whereby men (given that for the majority, perpetrators are male) are being discriminated against. It is still too early to see how this will affect women. However, a local legal women's rights NGOs has already warned the government against implementing further changes because they seem to be, in their opinion, going against the spirit of the convention and against best interest of the victims.

Coupled with the changes in the law, the state also introduced Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence action plan<sup>8</sup>. The action plan does not include and does not mention any particular initiative that involves work with men and boys, at least not at primary prevention level.

In early 2017, the government proposed four-year crime prevention strategy, covering 2017-2021 period. It included proposal on primary prevention on violence on women and girls in schools, among others good initiatives. Yet, these proposals were not implemented and all is mum.

### 3. Good practices

The major preoccupation at the state level has been (and still is) the effort to change the laws and implement practices at service level (police, justice and social services) in order to provide better and more thorough protection to victims. Whilst this is much needed and commendable, less has been done in terms of long-term prevention policies.

Two of the government agencies (NCPE and Commission on Domestic and Gender Based Violence) have carried a bulk of activity, mostly by applying for EU funds and using them to implement awareness raising and training programmes in the country, often (but not always) in cooperation and coordination with NGOs involved in the field.

What is missing in Malta (compared to the situation in Sweden) is long-term engagement and financing of the NGOs that have expertise in the field.

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<sup>8</sup> Gender Based violence and Domestic Violence Strategy and action plan Vison 2020, available at: [https://meae.gov.mt/en/Documents/GBV\\_DV%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%20publicati%20on.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/Documents/GBV_DV%20Strategy%20and%20Action%20Plan%20publicati%20on.pdf)

## 4. Transferability Aspects

The most obvious transferable aspect of Swedish practice to Malta has to be in implementing MVP<sup>9</sup> practices as a primary prevention policy in Maltese educational system. There is already an ideal vehicle for this purpose, which is Maltese PSCD (Personal, Social and Career Development) curriculum that is compulsory and obligatory part of Maltese educational system. Adapted and adjusted to fit Maltese culture, implemented as a long-term programme, with regular reinforcements throughout boys (and girls) education, it is one of the probable game changers.

## 5. Recommendations

There has to be a concentrated effort on improving policing, social work and judicial systems. Most of the country's effort is in this area, which is understandable: the protection of the victims is paramount. Financing and improving in this area has to be and it has to remain in the core of our efforts.

Yet, parallel to that, the long-term solution lies in applying a more standardised approach to working with men and boys in primary prevention field. That effort, concentrated, planned, financed and executed across EU is what, in the long term, can create a drastic drop in the rates of violence on women and create healthier, more violence free societies.

This could be achieved by the following:

- 1) Finance creation of a core group of experts from NGOs that have knowledge and experience in working with men and boys on gender equality and violence prevention together from experts from ministries of education from EU countries.
- 2) The work of this group would result in a proposal of a general primary prevention programme that should/could be implemented in the educational systems across EU.
- 3) Experts would be made available to countries in order to adopt and adjust the programmes to suit countries' cultural and other settings and/or to train teachers and other professionals in implementing these programmes.
- 4) Parallel to the above three, encourage Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Budgeting policies at every level.

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<sup>9</sup> Mentors in Violence Prevention - a programme developed in the USA by Jackson Katz (mvpstrat.com).