




# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

**Preventing domestic violence with Men and Boys: Challenges and Opportunities**  
Sweden, 16-17 September 2019

Comments Paper - Slovenia



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*This publication is supported by the European Union Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).*

*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.*

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# Preventing domestic violence with Men and Boys

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## Abstract

The paper is introduction of Slovenian current situation as it concerns prevention of domestic violence, especially concerning perpetrators. The major changes in the field of policy and changes of legalisation were done concerning work with perpetrators. First domestic Violence Prevention Act entered into force in 2008, and then changes were made in 2016. There were also important changes in the penal code in 2015. At the national level, Slovenia does not have national standards for working with perpetrators of violence, although several documents mention that perpetrators have to change their behaviour. It is mentioned that this issue should be covered by at least three Ministries: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and Ministry of Education and Sport. There is no prevention strategy concerning domestic violence, but some initiatives exist for work in schools. There is still a big need for development of new specialised programmes for working with perpetrators of violence, especially with men and boys. But we can also see good practices in NGO organisation, Association for Nonviolent Communication. As we can see in the paper latter on, there is a lot of space for new programmes for perpetrators and prevention in the field of measuring, risk assessment methods and raising awareness and in the field of judge system (specialised court departments for domestic violence, training of judges) police work and governmental standards as well.

## 1. Introduction

In Slovenia, the most important step in the legal field was the adoption of the DVPA (Domestic Violence Prevention Act) in 2008. The Act defines domestic violence and the family members and determines special protection for children, including the situation when they witness violence. The DVPA was amended in 2016 introducing a more detailed definition of domestic violence, broadening the definition of family members and improving the coordination and communication between all competent institutions and authorities as well as the procedures addressing domestic violence. It also determines the role, tasks and cooperation of various state authorities and non-governmental organisations when dealing with domestic violence. According to DVPA non-governmental organisations cooperate with authorities and other organisations when dealing with individual cases of victims and perpetrators of violence.

Slovenia has made three important changes to legalisation concerning work with perpetrators of violence. The first occurred when the DVPA was passed in 2008. It introduced the Coordinated Approach in the field of domestic violence prevention. The second important legislative change happened with the 2009 amendment to Article 191 of the penal code, which criminalised domestic violence as an independent offense. Amendments to articles that specify sanctions, especially the suspended sentence under protective supervision are also important for referring individuals to programmes for perpetrators. They enabled the court to specify the appropriate instructions (obligatory treatment/therapy, attending psychological counselling or social skills training etc.). There is one non-governmental organisation in Slovenia called Association for Nonviolent Communication, which focuses on work with perpetrators. They noticed that issuing such instructions in combination with suspended sentences has become increasingly frequent since 2010 and they were consequently able to document a great increase in users referred by court. In this way, most of these perpetrators get external motivation to cooperate in the programme, as they fear that their suspended sentences might otherwise be revoked.

There were also important changes in the penal code in 2015, for example stalking was criminalised as an independent offense.

And the third important change of legalisation was made in 2016 when the second Domestic Violence Prevention Act was passed (DVPA-A). With this Act, amongst other changes, Slovenia prohibited corporal punishment of children. Additionally, non-participation in court-ordered programmes has negative consequences for the perpetrator in all procedures under the Family Violence Act.

## 2. Description of the policy

At the national level in Slovenia, the work in the field of prevention of domestic violence is not defined and developed, what also concerns the preventive work with men and boys. We do not have national standards for working with perpetrators of violence, but several documents mention the need to ensure the safety of the victim of domestic violence and the need to enable programmes for perpetrators of violence where perpetrators will have the opportunity to change their behaviour. DVPA focuses not only on the victim, but also on the perpetrator of violence, who as well needs professional help to change behaviour patterns. The perpetrator may be barred from entering the common apartment by the court upon the victim's proposal.

Pursuant to the 11th article of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, the National Assembly adopted the Resolution on the National Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence 2012-2014, which as a strategic document sets goals, measures and key policy makers for the prevention and reduction of domestic violence in the Republic Slovenia from 2009 to 2014. The basic objectives of this document are to increase the actions of the various departments and to ensure effective activities for reducing domestic violence at the level of recognition and prevention. The specific tasks and activities for achieving the goals and implementation of the measures are

elaborated in the Action Plans, which should be drafted every two years, but so far there was only one, namely the Action Plan for Preventing Domestic Violence 2012-2013. Zero tolerance for violence against women is one of the strategic goals of gender equality policy.

Violence prevention refers to the various areas covered by: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education and Sport.

Various programmes should be devised to work with perpetrators of domestic violence and to promote inclusion in existing programmes.

Key tasks:

- Establishing a network of programmes to assist perpetrators of violence;
- Where domestic violence occurs in connection with excessive alcohol consumption, the perpetrator is referred at the treatment of alcohol addiction and programmes in the field of violence;
- When domestic violence occurs in conjunction with drug abuse, it is appropriate to refer the perpetrator to drug treatment and to violence programmes;
- Increasing the amount of funds from the state budget for the public tender for work programmes with perpetrators of violence;
- Establishing programmes to help abused children and adolescents in schools to end violence and stay in the school system and finish school.

The other key law regarding Domestic Violence is the Police Tasks and Powers Act (2013) which replace the Police Act. The new Act amended the police enforcement of restraining orders and enables the police to detain offenders who do not respect restraining orders. Additionally, harassment and sexual harassment were included as crimes to the Protection against Discrimination Act (2016).

## 2.1 Policy framework

Slovenia has approved several strategic documents, which define programmes for the prevention of violence and the measures for the protection of victims. In 2009, the first Resolution of the National Programme of Family Violence Prevention 2009-2014 was approved as a result of the adoption of DVPA 2008. The Resolution determined the objectives, strategies, activities and the main authorities in charge to prevent and reduce family violence. The objectives of Resolution 9-14 were to:

1. decrease family violence and violence in society in general;
2. increase sensitivity towards the problems of family violence;
3. ensure harmonised operating of competent authorities and organisations;
4. encourage variety, uniform accessibility, development and quality implementation of programmes for helping victims;

5. encourage variety, uniform accessibility, development and quality implementation of programmes for working with the perpetrators of violence;
6. ensure systematic awareness of children, youth and adults of their fundamental human rights and obligations as well as education for life in a society without violence, for harmony of all generation and respect of all individuals;
7. encourage awareness of those who are exposed to family violence about the possible forms of assistance and ensure their accessibility across the country;
8. ensure regular financing sources for assistance programmes;

In order to improve existing preventive and protection measures, the Government is preparing the new Resolution on the National programme on Prevention of Family Violence and Violence against Women 2020-2025 that will be more focused on multi-agency approach, prevention programmes and on education of experts, working in the field of domestic violence and violence against women and children.

Other strategic documents:

- Resolutions on the national social assistance programme 2006 – 2010 and 2013 – 2020, which define programmes for the prevention of domestic violence, support for victims of violence and work with perpetrators of violence.
- The Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2005 – 2013 that included the issue of violence against women, trafficking in women and sexual exploitation (for purposes of prostitution and pornography) and sexual violence;
- The Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 2015 – 2020. In this document it is specified that in order to avoid unnecessary duplication with Resolution 09-14 on Family Violence, the area of violence against women is only covered by the general objective of prevention, (i.e. reducing the incidence of violence against women, which includes measures aimed at improving awareness and the provision of information about all forms of violence against women). Differently from Resolution 09-14 that refers to 'family violence' avoiding any gender-based reference, the Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 2015 – 2020 focusses explicitly on 'violence against women'.

### 3. Opportunities and Challenges

The Slovene legal and policy framework treats domestic violence mostly as human rights and criminal justice issue but not as a specific gender equality problem, avoiding the structural gender inequality causes of violence. The lack of multi-agency approach brings out the issue of a prevention, protection and prosecution approach. The lack of such approach influences negatively the cooperation between various governmental and non-governmental actors. Furthermore, there is still a lack of

awareness and regular and substantive professional training of the various professionals working with domestic violence, especially in the field of preventing domestic violence with boys and men.

### 3.1 Prevention

The most important task is to increase preventive work, especially workshops and lectures for youth to decrease the overall tolerance and normalisation of violence in the family and intimate partnership violence. There is no prevention strategy concerning domestic violence for young boys and girls. Schools do not have any regulation that they should include education about domestic violence and work with boys in their programmes. There are some initiatives, mainly from NGOs who try to educate schoolchildren, but it is not financed from the government and for this reason this work is small-scale and cannot meet all the needs.

With the help of external experts, the Education Institute in 2016 issued “Guidelines with a Handbook for Addressing Peer Violence in VIZ (education)”, which was based on the “Guidelines for Analysis, Prevention and Treatment / Management of Violence in the School Space” (2004). The instructions are a useful list of procedures for how to deal with violence.

Recently, an emphasis on initiatives to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls has grown in Slovenia. In order to better understand the fundamental causes of men and boys’ violence including social and structural ones as well as men and boys’ gender role socialisation, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities launched several awareness-raising campaigns on power relations and distribution of resources between women and men and has implemented project on work-life balance and the role of men as carers and agents of change in fighting against gender stereotypes (“Active.all”).

One of the recent national campaign is the Vesna – living a violence-free life project (2013-2015). The Vesna project was a two-year national campaign (2013–2015) carried out by the Directorate for the Family at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of the Interior/ the Police, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health and the State Prosecutor General of the Republic of Slovenia. The key objective of the campaign was to draw attention to the problem of violence against women and girls and to raise awareness of both women with experience of violence (and potential victims) as well as the professional and the general public.

In 2016, in the framework of the project “Towards Equalising Power Relations Between Women And Men” awareness raising media campaign was launched. Part of the website of the campaign was also the Museum of stereotypes. Visitors of the website were invited to send what they perceived as gender stereotypes, which were then published in the virtual museum.

With the aim to promote the roles and responsibilities of men and boys as allies and agents of change, leading officials in Slovenia have joined the HeForShe campaign in 2015. In 2016, Slovenia joined UN Orange the World campaign for the first time. As part of the campaign, some public buildings in the capital were illuminated with orange light. Men at the highest political level were actively involved in supporting the campaign and conveying the message that any form of violence against women and girls is highly unacceptable and will not be tolerated by the society. The Slovenian president of National Assembly became the White Ribbon ambassador, joining the White Ribbon campaign, one of the world's largest male-led campaigns to end men's violence against women.

As the role of media is crucial when tackling this issue, many debates, round tables and seminars have been organised in the recent period. In 2016, a project "With the Media Towards Non-Stereotypical Reporting about Violence against Women and Domestic Violence" was implemented under the NGOs support programme, co-financed by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The aim of the project was to raise awareness of the media on appropriate reporting about VAW and domestic violence and to highlight their important role in creating the public opinion and influencing the general public's tolerance towards VAW and gender stereotypes. Specific guidelines for the media and expert public have been developed in order to achieve more appropriate reporting on VAW and domestic violence.

In 2016, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities also organised a thematic meeting 'Let's put gender equality in the media'. The aim of the event was to present and share knowledge on different approaches in promoting women and gender equality in the media, in particular by combating gender stereotypes and misrepresentation of women and men in the media.

In the same year, The Association SOS help-line for women and children victims of violence organised a seminar "Violence against women and domestic violence – How to report". The aim was to talk about appropriate media reporting of all forms of violence against women. Also Online guidelines for media and other relevant professional were prepared.

In 2019 in the scope of the project Click-Off a seminar "Online While Female: The Disproportionate Risks Females Face Online - And What the Media Can Do To Change It" was organised. The aim of the seminar was to improve the knowledge and awareness about the importance of gender-sensitive approach while reporting of it. At the seminar, different categories of online violence have been explained through practical examples; image-based sexual abuse was presented: and solutions to make the internet a safer place and what is media doing to contribute to it was discussed. By the end of the year 2019, a set of recommendations for journalists and media professionals will be prepared to address the issue of safety on the internet from a gender-perspective.

Besides media representation of gender-based violence there are other issues that needed to be addressed and remain a challenge to be further explored, such as male



perception of masculinity, sexual consent and violence against women, male experience of violence and abuse, working with men perpetrators and preventive activities for boys, and the role of men in campaigns against violence against women. In 2015, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities opened the widespread public debate on the necessity of active involvement of men and boys in the public debates on gender equality and violence against women in Slovenia by organising an international seminar “Gender equality – what men have to do with it”. Men experts and NGOs in the field of gender equality were invited, focusing on the importance of building together gender equal societies that are fundamental for having fewer women as well as men as victims of violence.

In 2017, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities organised a conference “Men and women in a vicious circle of violence” with the aim to open a public debate on common actions to tackle sexual assault against women and men and to prevent and combat domestic violence. The event brought together policy makers, the Police, social workers, NGO and civil society activists, students, researchers, professionals and media representatives to discuss. The event brought both a chance to participate and learn, as well as it offered an opportunity to network together with relevant stakeholders dealing with the issue.

The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities each year co-finances projects of nongovernmental organisations that implement awareness-raising campaigns and education programmes for schools. In the period 2014-2019 co-financed projects tackled gender based violence. Among others, the issues of consent, pornography and media reporting were debated. Projects also concentrated on the role of boys and men in preventing and executing violence against women and girls. Projects, granted in 2019, focus on dating violence.

### **3.2 Needs for working with perpetrators in Slovenia**

There is still a big need for developing new specialised programmes for working with perpetrators of violence, for example specialised programmes for perpetrators with addictions, specialised programmes for perpetrators with mental health problems or different disabilities, as well as programmes for perpetrators of criminal offenses against sexual integrity of children under the age of 16.

Increased collaboration with institutions (courts, prosecutors) is required for information exchange, as well as better collaboration between NGOs and Centres for social services and probation service. Collaboration with centres for education within judicial system in the field of education of judges is needed as it concerns domestic violence. Increasing programme standards for creating better environment for safety of victims: better collaboration between programmes for perpetrators and programmes for victims of violence with the goal of information exchange, preventing manipulation and better victim protection.

There is also a need for adequate budget to be allocated for intervention specific to domestic violence and violence against women, protection and support services,

systematic training of professionals, coordination activities and monitoring and evaluation.

### **3.3 Good practice**

#### **3.3.1 Training programme of Association for Nonviolent Communication**

Association for Nonviolent Communication is successfully working in the field of domestic violence, with perpetrators, victims and young boys since 1996. In the last 4 years, it succeeded in expanding the Social skills Training programme in Slovenia. Alongside Ljubljana, the programme is now carried out in 8 more cities in Slovenia. The Association also succeeded in developing more efficient programme, where perpetrators need to cooperate for longer time. In 2016, the programme engaged 580 perpetrators from all over Slovenia. It is recognised as the most prominent national programme in the field of working with perpetrators of domestic violence. The programme includes group and individual work and comprises 24 group meetings and intermediate individual discussions. The Association have established cooperative relationships with all state institutions, which have been referring an increasing number of perpetrators to the programme. Courts are now ordering conditional convictions with instructions to attend the Training of social skills. One of greatest achievement is Coordinated Approach, which is obligatory when dealing with situation of domestic violence. This approach aims at increasing victims' safety, holding perpetrators responsible for their actions and confronting them with the consequences for their actions. Enrolment in the programme is open to adults and exceptionally minors from the age of 15 who have perpetrated or perpetrate violence. They are referred to the programme by various institutions and organisations within the scope of their powers and competences (social work centre, court, prosecution office, etc.) or they decide to enrol themselves in order to acquire new social skills and change violent behaviour.

#### **3.3.2 Project Click-Off**

In 2017, a project Click-Off: Stop Cyber Violence and Harassment against Women and Girls co-founded by EU REC programme, started. General objective of the project is to address online violence and harassment as a form of violence against women and girls and manifestation of historically unequal power relations and to develop a systematic gender sensitive approach to prevent gender-based online (cyber) violence and harassment (cybervaw). The focus of the project is on prevention of gender-based online violence and harassment as a form of violence against women and girls. With the proposed projects' activities gender stereotypes and norms that contribute to the problem are challenged, violence against women and girls combatted and gender equality promoted, including by encouraging men and boys to be actively engage in the fight against violence against women. The project is implemented in partnership between Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (leading partner), The University of Ljubljana, Ministry of the Interior – the Police and Ministry of Justice – Judicial Training Centre (JTC). The target group are members of the inter-governmental group for monitoring the implementation of

the Istanbul Convention, national policy makers, esp. police and justice, journalists and media professionals, media representatives, experts from academia and NGOs, as well as young boys and girls. The project's objective are achieved through media campaign that raises awareness on combatting and preventing gender based cyber violence and harassment; by organising and implementing systematic awareness raising and education programmes for pupils, teachers, head teachers, school counsellors, social workers, and representatives of non-governmental organisations, for police and justice; by developing tools for informing (potential) victims about their rights and available support services; with introducing special measures and activities for preventing and combating gender based cyber violence and harassment into National Action Plan on preventing and combating domestic violence and violence against women; and by organising events to share experiences and good practices to learn about the different practices/approaches for preventing gender-based cyber violence and harassment in selected European countries.

## 4. Transferability aspects

In the Slovene context, the DVPA specifies that a court may issue prohibition orders to a perpetrator of violence for not more than 12 months. The victim may propose an extension of the measures before the expiry of the period. In practice, the fact that the perpetrator of violence is at the same time the father of a child is an important factor in sanctioning violence in criminal procedures. Sanctions are often less strict. Also, there is still a lack of analysis of restraining orders and their impact on domestic violence. There are also gaps in the field of sexual harassment; there is no specialised court or specialised judges or court experts from this field. The knowledge in that field is very poor. Therefore the Swedish model of having specific laws targeting IPV and enabling the courts to impose longer prison sentences would help in the field of prevention.

It is also important aspect for police to use structured risk assessment methods when assessing risk for IPV in order to give the victim the most effective risk management. It should be obligatory and consisting of a checklist of the most common risk factors for the assessed risk, such as prior violence, attitude problems, substance abuse, general criminality and mental health problems.

At last, transferability aspect can be used in the field of prevention. Prevention programmes from government agencies for promoting programmes regarding violence among youth seem to be necessary, especially targeting boys. It would be necessary to include such programmes in education and raising awareness of violence among youth and for decreasing number of future perpetrators. It is necessary that Swedish model of MVP is recognised in our country as well.

## 5. Recommendations

On national and European level, it is necessary that domestic violence is not treated only as a human rights issue, but also as a specific gender equality problem. It is

necessary to follow Istanbul Convention where there is multi-agency approach and a focus on the prevention measures rather than tackling the issue from a prevention, protection and prosecution approach. There is still a lack of professional training of the various professionals working with DV. Secondary victimisation is still a problem. On the national and European level it should be ensured that awareness raising campaigns have a clear definition of violence against woman and it is necessary that media as well take an important part in raising awareness.

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