

The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality


Methodologies and good practices on assessing the costs of violence against women

Finland, 8-9 July 2021

Comments paper – Croatia



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 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.

For more information see: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2014-2020/rec/index_en.htm

Possibilities of assessing the cost of violence against women in Croatia

Maja Mamula

Women's Room

Abstract:

Violence against women (VAW) is a social problem of pandemic proportions. That is why it is important to collect as much information about it as possible, including about the economic costs, to show to which extent the resources from different sectors allocate regularly for the protection of victims and the provision of assistance.

It is difficult to define a uniform methodology on EU level because there are differences from country to country in the way of managing administrative databases, including data related to violence against women (VAW), as well as due to non-existing research on nationally representative samples on prevalence and incidence of VAW. The first step is surely to carry out research in all countries that will be comparable against certain parameters on EU level and at the same time to be sufficiently significant to enable every country to gain at least basic insight into trends considering the price of VAW as one of the steps within combating it.

1. Relevant country context

1.1 Country background

Croatia has a total population of 4,429,078 inhabitants, of whom women are 51.8%. The unemployment rate is 8.4 % (9.3% for women and 7.6% for men). The employment gender gap in Croatia is 11% (18.1% on EU level). Gender Equality Index report by EIGE (2020) for Croatia is 57.9 (67,9 is in EU).

On one hand, arising from the former state, Croatia carries on a certain positive heritage of gender equality (e.g. paid maternity leave for one year, lessened difference in salaries between women and men compared to EU average, legal abortion). On the other hand, a strong patriarchal matrix is still noticeable. There are still consequences of the war and post-war heritage, the country is still in a difficult economic situation. In the society there is a huge polarization on conservative (under the strong influence of the Catholic church) and liberal side. This has all led to the VAW issue being mainly on social margins for years.

Under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the position of women has been additionally aggravated. The civil society organisations and public institutions that provide direct services were warning about the need to ensure the protection of women and children survivors of violence during pandemic (Mamula et al., 2020).

1.2 Treatment of the issue of VAW in Croatia

Since the end of 1990s, several feminist organisations initiated a whole range of positive changes on VAW (e.g. changes of legislation and development of public policies; establishing a large number of specialized services; delivering first inter-sectoral educational programmes on VAW issue and the first researches; carrying out the first public campaigns).

During the last two years, after ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence¹, the Croatian government started giving much more attention to the VAW issue. Two exceptionally significant amendments of the Criminal Code were made considering the field of Domestic Violence (DV) and Sexual Violence (SV). Additional shelters were open in each county², the National call centre for victims of violence is established. The development of the National Plan for combating sexual violence has been started.

Although all these positive changes took place, there is still significant space for improvements: advancing the methodology of data collection, management and reporting on VAW by all competent institutions; establishing sufficient number of specialised services; developing and implementing systemic educational programmes of all relevant professions; encouraging research on VAW; developing and implementing systemic programmes of preventing VAW within the educational system.

1.3 Prevalence of violence against women in Croatia

Domestic Violence in Croatia is punishable according to the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence (misdemeanour) and according to the Criminal Code. The official police data show that, within the meaning of the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence, each year there were between 22,200 to 9,884 (in 2020) victims (women between 6% and 71%).³ In regards to the violent conduct within the family, within the meaning of the Criminal Code (Art. 179A), the official police data show that 1,578 criminal offences (39,2% more than in 2019) were reported in 2020 (women 84%). During the past couple of years, one can notice the trend of increasing number of reported criminal offences of Domestic Violence and reduced reporting according to the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence.

Since 2020 and to date, the number of **femicide** vary from 8 to 39 per year, out of which in 31% to 80% the perpetrators are their close ones. However, 2020 was a year exceptionally specific – out of a total of murdered 36 persons, 19 were women (53%).

¹ Croatia - signature of the Convention 22/01/2013; ratification of the Convention 12/06/2018 and entry into force 01/10/2018.

² In Croatia, by the end of the year, there will be 25 shelters for victims of DV. However, a significant number of them, especially those that counties open as public entities, have a gender-neutral approach.

³ Official police data on number of reported cases from 2003 to 2020.

Out of 19 women, 14 of them (74%) were murdered by their close ones and 9 women were murdered by their intimate partners.⁴

According to the Criminal Code, **Sexual Violence** is covered in two chapters: Chapter 16, Criminal offences against sexual freedom and Chapter 17, Criminal offences of sexual abuse and exploitation of the child. Data related to a number of victims vary from one year to another from 740 to 1,173 victims. Regarding criminal offences against sexual freedom, women are victims in 94% - 95%, and in connection with the criminal offences against the child, girls and young women are victims in 81% - 85%.⁵

According to the available research, data shows that the problem of hidden figures is still highly present. In regard to DV, 21% of women in Croatia experienced physical violence by their partner (Otrocak, 2003). Concerning SV, 17.5% of women experienced rape or attempted rape (Mamula, 2006). According to the FRA report on VAW (2014), 21% of women in Croatia experienced physical or sexual violence.

1.4 Research on assessing the cost of VAW in Croatia

There is no research in Croatia for assessing the direct cost of VAW. The only research that tackled the topic was in 2003 (Otrocak) titled: **Economical aspects of domestic violence: societal costs of ignoring and tolerating VAW**. It tackled the topic in a way that it pointed more to potential sources of costs and not really assessing the costs. Data coming from the research show that the VAW issue was not by then 'expensive' for the state bodies and institutions. Women contacted competent institutions very rarely considering the violence they experienced (court 8%, social welfare centre 10%, police 17%). As the authoress said, "victims are silent and suffer" – even without trying to get help of institutions. In connection with physical consequences of the violence, it was most often the case that women did not look for help of medical doctor either (78% never visited GP, 89% psychologist/psychiatrist, 92% medical specialist, 93% dentist, 97% gynaecologist). Because of the consequences of physical violence, they were almost never kept in hospital (96%). Because of the consequences of physical violence, the majority of women were not absent from their work (77%). In regard to everything listed above, the authoress concluded that women survivors incur minimal costs to the state considering their usage of health services, police services, court, social welfare or considering the impairment of work performance. They tried to solve the problems individually or on the family level. Although there were numerous methodological problems (e.g. the focus was only on physical, economic and psychic IPV, based on self-reporting of participants; a small number of questions related to costs), this is the only research and, in a certain way, a guidance about specifics of women survivors of DV in Croatia.

⁴ Official police data on number of reported cases from 2002 to 2020.

⁵ Official police data on number of reported cases from 2000 to 2020.

According the EIGE (2014) evaluation, the estimated annual cost of Intimate partner VAW for Croatia is 924 762 954 EUR and cost of GBV against women is 1 913 814 248 EUR.

However, parallel with being concerned, we can state that the state bodies did not either carry out, initiate or co-finance the carrying out of a national research concerned with this topic, treating it comprehensively. Furthermore, in public discourse on the highest level (such as the National Team for combating VAW and Domestic Violence as well as belonging Counties' Teams), the topic of costs of VAW was not tackled.

2. Methodologies for assessing the direct costs of violence against women

Research on the economic costs of VAW started in 1988 and to date there have been a number of research that differ in implemented methodology and included variables. One can notice a tendency to achieve the higher accuracy in assessing costs, especially those that are complex to measure (intangible costs) which is done by using multiple methods exactly for the aim of higher quality assessment. Yet, as Siltala & Hisasue (2021) stated, there exists no 'gold standard' for estimating the costs of VAW.

The described methodology in the Finish discussion paper (Siltala & Hisasue, 2021) lists two most frequently used models: top-down and bottom-up approach. Besides, they include also a new model – various measures for health services use.

Each of the listed **methodological approaches** has its advantages and shortcomings. Bottom-up studies focus on case study of a small number of individuals, gathering information about the effects of violence in women's lives, measuring personal costs to individuals. They are not representative of the whole population and it is not possible to hypothesize national costs of VAV (Day et al., 2005). Top-down studies begin with ragggregate national data, based on aggregate statistics from governments, institutions and agencies. Still, for such research there is a pre-condition to have in place a strong database, which is principally possible for economically highly developed countries that provide the funds to finance national statistics agencies and good record-keeping by government (Day et al. 2005).

Apart from the approach, it is important to take also into account **which variables are included into the research** (how many goods and services are included in the matrix). This refers to: whether the research will include only variables that are easier to estimate (e.g. direct tangible costs as salaries for staff in a shelter and indirect tangible costs as lower earnings, lost personal income) or it will also include costs related to long-term consequences (e.g. direct intangible costs such as pain and suffering, and indirect intangible costs as negative psychological effects on children).

Furthermore, it must be assessed what systems in the country own representative aggregate data (e.g., justice, health, social services, business and employment).

Yet, what is underlined in the majority of methodological discussions on estimating of economic costs of VAW is that the pre-condition for carrying out such research are existing data on the prevalence and incidence of VAW and its consequences.

Difficulties in Croatia, and why it is complex to replicate examples from the discussion paper from Finland, but also other methods for research on costs of VAW, include:

- We have no recent research of the incidence and prevalence of VAW on nationally representative sample;
- Women survivors of DV, IPV and/or SV report violence very rarely and do not seek assistance of institutions, because they mistrust them (according to research, 72% of population has no trust in judiciary, 38% have trust in police)⁶;
- Women survivors rarely ask for medical help and when they do, they do not want to disclose they survived IPV, DV and/or SV;
- Professionals, in particular in the health sector, lack awareness and sensitivity and are insufficiently educated as well, to recognize VAW (e.g., in the health sector it is hard to imagine that the usage of codes related to VAW);
- Systems have severe problems in recording data (all except police). Even when keeping records in place, they report publicly very rarely;
- There are no data how many reported cases of VAW lead to an offense report. There is no unified monitoring of cases of VAW starting from reporting police to the final judgment;
- Services for women survivors work with women who did not report violence to official institutions. This happens not in the aim to break the law but this could be the only way to help women who are not ready – at any price – to report violence;
- There are almost no data, neither through research nor through official reports. about marginalised groups of women (women with disability, women migrants, ethnic minorities or LGBT+ community) and the violence they survived.

The new Finish model, carried out through several data sets is surely very well conceptualised and owns a well-planned approach for the identification of victims and assessing the costs of health service. However, identically to the above listed problems in replication of such type of research in Croatia, I emphasise in addition the following:

- In Croatia, Health care system is not networked as in Finland;
- Women survivors rarely disclose the reasons to visiting a medical doctor;

⁶ Standard Eurobarometer 90 (2018).

- Health professionals are not willing even to write down the reason why woman came because, according to our law, it is mandatory for them to file the report automatically for DV, IPV and/or SV;
- Services for women and child survivors (e.g. shelters, SOS helplines) are not ready to a full extent to share personal identification numbers of victims with the state institutions (unless obliged by the contract related to financing). This is the case for a significant mistrust in personal data protection system.
- The Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy which collects data from social welfare centres, shelters and counselling centres, does not issue public reports on annual basis considering VAW and/or Domestic Violence. The only bright spot is the police that keeps records that are gender sensitive and recognise the data on relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

I find that in Croatia, with a certain effort, it could be relatively easy to assess some of immediate costs of VAW as well as all direct consequences. At the same time, I find that both in Croatia and other EU countries it is methodologically difficult to estimate the price of long-term impact of VAW. This refers to psychological health of women and children as well as to the fact that physical consequences can worsen in time. Besides, it is important to keep in mind that the violence does not affect women only – but also children, family and the community and this makes assessing the real price of VAW even more challenging. I find that the first step in assessing costs of VAW in Croatia could be the combined methodology – bottom-up study combined with available police data. In that way, data would not be comprehensive but they would provide a certain insight, at least a starting one, about the price of VAW.

Still, there is a question whether assessing the economic price of VAW is really the way to combat VAW? What is exactly the use of this assessment of costs? It could be to have the state allocate funds from the budget for services that provide long-term assistance and support as well as to allocate sufficient funds for quality programmes for prevention of VAW. There is a key dilemma about constant 'proving' to decision and policy makers how prevalent the social issue VAW is, how many girls and women are constantly affected by violence, how this impacts their lives as well as the lives of their close ones, and how to divide the funds between prevention and intervention. This constant convincing decision and policy makers triggers concern that we miss from the picture as a whole that VAW is the most extreme form of violation of women's human rights and that the state is directly responsible to prevent it. Without persuasion. Or without constantly asking attention for evidence why VAW is important to prevent. Will the numbers with which we indicate how cheaper it is to prevent VAW really help us reach the necessary political will for change?

3. Conclusion and recommendations

VAW is a social problem of pandemic proportions. Exceptionally large number of girls and women are affected. That is why is important to collect as much as possible information about it, including about the costs of VAW, to show to which extent the

resources from different sectors (government, businesses, agencies, the community groups and individuals) allocate regularly for the protection of victims and the provision of assistance. All key forms of VAW should be considered including DV, IPV, but also SV.

Knowing the costs of violence allows decision and policy makers to ensure funds for effective programmes of preventing VAW. Methodologically, this is quite a demanding goal and especially on EU level. There are huge differences between countries regarding some fundamental issues, starting from the legislation and definitions of VAW to different level and number of research on the incidence and prevalence of VAW. It concerns countries with different levels and approaches toward aggregate national data and it is rare to have fundamental quality data in all relevant systems. In such a system, it is difficult to come to an assessment of costs of VAW. And while certain immediate costs of VAW could be relatively easy to assess, and also all direct consequences, there are significant groups of variables which are exceptionally difficult to assess. The same is valid for impact of VAW not only on women but on their children, family and community, too. That is why is exceptionally challenging to assess the real cost of VAW which is generally always rather underestimated.

References:

Day, T., McKenna, K. & Bowlus, A. (2005) The Economic Costs of Violence Against Women: An Evaluation of the Literature Expert brief compiled in preparation for the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. United Nations.

European Commission (2019) Report on equality between women and men in the EU. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2014). Estimating the costs of gender-based violence in the European Union. Publications Office of the European Union.

European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2020). Gender Equality Index 2020 - Digitalisation and the future of work.

FRA. (2014). Violence against women: An EU-wide survey. Main results. Publications Office of the European Union.

Mamula, M. (2006) (ed). Status of Women's Sexual Rights in Croatia – research results. Zagreb: Women's Room.

Mamula, M., Hojt Ilić, A. & Mihaljević, K. (2020). Working with women and children victims of violence in the times of COVID-19 pandemic. Women's Room and UNICEF Croatia.

Otrocak, D. (2003). Economical aspects of domestic violence: societal costs of ignoring and tolerating violence against women. Zagreb: Autonomous Women's House Zagreb.

Siltala, H. & Hisasue, T. (2021). Assessing the costs of violence against women in Finland. Discussion paper – Finland. The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality. Methodologies and good practices on assessing the costs of violence against women.