



# Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Measures to fight  
violence against women  
Spain, 16-17 April 2013

Comments Paper - Croatia

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*This publication is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).*

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# Measures to fight violence against women

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## 1. Introduction

This Comments paper aims to present the Croatian general context concerning measures to fight violence against women (VAW) with a specific emphasis on the use of ICT in combating VAW and domestic violence perpetrators programmes, current policy debates relevant for Croatia as well as transferability issues of good practices from Spain and Ireland.

### 1.1. Background and general context of Croatia

Croatia is a country in southern Europe, with a total population of 4 429 078 inhabitants<sup>1</sup>, 2 292 847 of whom are women (51.8%). Out of the total number of women, about 1.3 million are adults (older than 18). Today, women comprise 26% members of the Croatian Parliament and women lead four out of 20 ministries<sup>2</sup>.

Croatia is in a very difficult situation, due to the effects of war and post-war transitional periods that have been marked by privatisation and poor political decisions. Not surprisingly, since their election a year ago, the Croatian government still did not find solutions to most of these problems. At this moment, Croatia is facing a serious economic crisis and uncertainty, with annual inflation greater than 5% and unemployment rate of 22%. The Employment Service has 375 400 registered unemployed persons, of whom 52.4% are women<sup>3</sup>. The most economically vulnerable categories of women are pregnant women, mothers, women older than 50, but also women between 17 and 34 years of age. The average salary in Croatia in December 2012 was 723 EUR net pay<sup>4</sup>. Women as a group have on average lower salaries than men by 10.6%<sup>5</sup>.

The area of violence against women again fell low on the list of priorities, which is evidenced by the fact that contracts for regular co-financing of autonomous women's shelters remain unsigned, and counselling and SOS phones are still awaiting a decision whether already signed three-year programmes shall be continued.

For the past few months, there has been a strong public campaign organised by the Catholic Church and numerous religious and right-wing organisations opposing newly implemented Health education in primary and secondary schools, especially its module 4: "Gender Equality and Responsible Sexual Behaviour".

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<sup>1</sup> Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2011) „Woman and men in Croatia 2011“

<sup>2</sup> Croatian Parliament web site (2013) <http://www.sabor.hr/Default.aspx?sec=4579>

<sup>3</sup> Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2013) [http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/system/first\\_results.htm](http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/system/first_results.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2012) [http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/system/first\\_results.htm](http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/system/first_results.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2011) „Woman and men in Croatia 2011“

## 1.2. Violence against women and girls in Croatia

Violence against women has become publicly recognised problem only in the past 15 years, and significant changes have occurred since then. These changes are noticeable predominantly in the area of the protection of women victims of violence (greater number of shelters, counselling services and SOS phone lines), significant legislative changes (e.g. series of changes to the Criminal Code, adoption of the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence), establishment of mechanisms for gender equality (e.g. Law on Sex Equality, Ombudsperson for Sex Equality, Governmental Office for Sex Equality), education of representatives of relevant bodies and institutions, development of cross-sectoral cooperation, implementation research on of VAW and sensitisation of the general public.

The official police data shows that, within the meaning of the Law on the Protection from Domestic Violence (2003), each year there were between 14 500 and 22 200 victims, of whom women were victims in between 64% and 71% of cases (Mamula, 2010). In regards to the violent conduct within the family, within the meaning of the Criminal Code (Art. 215A), the official police data shows that each year there are between 1 500 and 2 100 victims, of whom women were victims in 75% to 80% cases (Mamula, 2010). Data on reported sexual violence shows that each year between 461 and 761 cases were reported. The most frequent offences were lewd acts (91% women) and rape (94% women) (Mamula et al., 2011).

According to the available research, data shows that the problem of hidden figures is still highly present. In regards to domestic violence, 21% of women in Croatia experienced physical violence by their partner (Otrocak, 2003) and concerning sexual violence, 17.5% of women experienced rape or attempted rape (Mamula, 2006).

## 1.3. The use of ICT in the fight against gender-based violence

Similar to other countries, the use of ICT can serve as an additional tool for committing various forms of VAW, while at the same time it can allow victims of violence easier access to the necessary assistance and support.

The most common use of ICT in the fight against VAW in Croatia is related to the work of many help lines, counselling centres (more than 30) and shelters (19), which are available by phone and have their own informational websites with important information and contacts of relevant institutions. Also, a great number of these services also provide advice to victims by e-mail, which is extremely important for people from parts of Croatia where services are not available.

Furthermore, modern technology is also used for raising visibility of VAW (e.g. putting videos on Youtube against VAW), dissemination of information, networking, and women's organisations often use the Internet, radio, TV, and e-newspapers to bring attention to some current topics related to VAW. Such actions have proved useful, given the fact that there are 5 115 140 mobile phone users in Croatia and about 58% of Croatian citizens (about 2 million people, mostly between 15 and 44 years of age) use the Internet (HAKOM, 2012).

At the same time, there is an evident low level of awareness about the use of ICT and its abuse in association with VAW, and there are problems with the legislation

and prosecution of violence such as online harassment and cyber stalking (constant phone calls, photo manipulation, spoofing, creating fake profiles etc.).

One of the examples of successful use of the ICT is the web site "**Safe Zone**" that was launched by the Women's Room - Centre for Sexual Rights (2012) with the financial support of the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth and the City of Zagreb. The idea for the development of this web page arose from the recognition of the need for the existence of a unique site that would consolidate all information relevant to the issue of combating VAW. The primary goal was to make it easier for women victims of violence to access information they need, starting with the contact information of all the relevant institutions, bodies and civil society organisations that can provide them with assistance and support. Therefore, the part of the web site designed for women victims of violence includes the option to search for the closest institutions and organisations that provide assistance with respect to the specific issue and the county in which the victim of violence resides. It also includes information on the types of violence, prevalence, consequences, and other important information that can help victims in the process of making the decision to end the cycle of violence and finding adequate assistance and support. In addition, the goal of the "Safe zone" is to contribute to the fight against VAW and to make a step towards improving the cooperation between all relevant actors since their successful cooperation is a necessary precondition for achieving necessary changes pertaining to the issues of VAW. Consequently, a part of web site designed for state bodies, institutions and civil society organisations is, besides listed contact information, open to the exchange of information (e.g. current events, trainings), and improves the cooperation between all services that provide help and support to women victims of violence. To maximise the outreach of the website, we have established the cooperation with most libraries throughout Croatia that advertise this website through offering free Internet services in their premises. In less than a year, the site has had more than 10,000 visits.

#### **1.4. Domestic violence perpetrator intervention programmes**

In Croatia, the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence from 2003<sup>6</sup> includes 6 protective measures aimed at prevention of violence and protection of the family members. One of these measures is mandatory psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of violence. In 2004, the Society for Psychological Assistance, in cooperation with the Dutch organisation ADMIRA, developed education for the providers of psychosocial treatment for perpetrators of domestic violence. In 2005, the Croatian Government adopted the Code on the method and place of conducting psychosocial treatment<sup>7</sup>, which includes standards for the implementation of psychosocial treatment for perpetrators of domestic violence. Mandatory psychosocial treatment has been recognised as an important component in combating violence and has been included in the National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence<sup>8</sup>.

Since then, more than 120 professionals in Croatia have been professionally trained and the treatment is being implemented in 16 centres (legal and natural persons). Treatment includes intensive individual and group work for a period of 6 months, 20 sessions, at least 36 hours of direct treatment work, and includes meetings with

<sup>6</sup> National Gazette 116/03, 137/09

<sup>7</sup> National Gazette 29/2005, 78/2006

<sup>8</sup> National Strategies for Protection from Domestic Violence 2005-2007; 2008-2010; 2011-2016

victims of violence. Through a structured cognitive-behavioural treatment perpetrators develop insight into their behaviour, accept responsibility for the committed violent behaviour, adopt behaviours for self-control and change beliefs about the partner (male-female) relationship.

Although the implementation of psychosocial treatments is designed and carried out in an excellent way, today it is characterised by numerous problems. Namely, there is a striking imbalance between the number of final court judgments that proscribe psychosocial treatment for perpetrators and funding provided by the Ministry of Justice and local governments. More specifically, the cost for treatment per user determined by the Department of Justice does not represent an adequate cost of treatment as formulated in the Standards for the implementation of psychosocial treatments. Therefore, for a series of judgments statute of limitations have expired, which sends a wrong message to the perpetrators, the victims, the institutions and the society at large (Ajdukovic et al., 2013). Lack of funds has resulted in the suspension of the implementation of the treatment by some of the most experienced implementers (e.g. Society for Psychological Assistance). The above stated is evident from the data for 2012, in which the courts proscribed psychosocial treatment for 1300 perpetrators, of whom only 415 were included in the treatment, while the other 900 "were waiting," because not enough capacities were ensured for their implementation (Ajdukovic et al., 2013). Similar data is found in the Rainbow House, Zagreb during 2012 where the treatment was proscribed by the courts for 235 perpetrators, and treatment was successfully completed only by 58 people (34 have not responded to an invitation to the treatment centre, and 89 were rejected during the assessment phase).

During 2012, the first evaluation of the psychosocial treatments was conducted, and data indicates that the perpetrators who have undergone treatment commit significantly less recidivist acts of violence than those who did not complete such treatment.

This whole area has opened a series of pertinent issues: there is no official data on the total number of perpetrators referred for the psychosocial treatment and the number of those who have completed it, there is no reliable information on whether treatment centres regularly inform the police that the perpetrator did not respond to treatment in legally binding time, there is lack of information about the perpetrators who completed the initial conversation and are waiting for inclusion into the treatment. Also, there is a growing number of women who are involved in the treatments as perpetrators, as the police often takes into custody women who have used violence in self-defence.

## 2. Policy debate and measures

In the past year there have been some positive trends regarding VAW in Croatia. First of all, the government has adopted the Code of conduct in a case of sexual violence, which has been developed by the Governmental Office for Gender Equality. It is the first document in Croatia related to issues of sexual violence and we believe it will eventually result in the increase in the number of reports of sexual violence, as well as greater protection for victims. Furthermore, in 2012 Croatia signed the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against women and domestic violence, which will have an important effect on the whole range of existing mechanisms for the protection of victims. Also, it is noticed

that in the last several highly publicised incidents of domestic violence in which the relevant institution failed, there were severe sanctions for persons from these institutions (dismissal, criminal charges). These are the first cases in which responsible persons were not only reprimanded, but also sanctioned for not doing everything in accordance with their obligations and capabilities in order to protect victims.

However, despite these positive developments, we are still faced with a variety of problems in the area of VAW. Throughout the country, the main focus is on the economic and political problems, and combating VAW is again low on the list of priorities. Judging by the statements of the authorities, one gets the impression that Croatia met all of its obligations in this regard, and that this government has no interest in civil society organisations (CSOs) that have operated in Croatia for more than 20 years, possess an extensive expertise in working on VAW and are main initiators of all positive changes regarding combating VAW. Indeed, one gets the impression that most efforts are directed at closing CSOs and replacing them with public institutions. At the same time, public institutions and religious organisations that run shelters and/or counselling centres very obviously lack gender perspective and understanding of gender inequality as the foundation of VAW.

One of the main indicators is the aforementioned lack of financial support from local government and relevant ministries, and consequently the work with women victims of violence depends to a great extent on foreign funds. The law on financing of autonomous women's shelters (7) has still not been passed, so shelters and counselling centres use their already scarce capacities not only to advocate for necessary changes in public policies related to combating VAW, but also for continuous fundraising and ensuring funds for their core activities and services they provide. Meanwhile, Croatia still lacks a sufficient number of support services for women victims (shelters, counselling centres, rape crisis centres) that provide long-lasting and free help and support for exiting violence and coping with trauma.

New changes to Criminal Code came into force in January 2013, according to which violent conduct within the family has been removed, and is now covered by the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence (misdemeanour) and by some special articles of the Criminal Code (e.g., marital rape became a qualified form of the act of rape with higher punishment proscribed). However, due to a number of significant changes to the Law on the Criminal Procedure and the Criminal Code, the impression arises that some of the institutions at this point do not exactly know what to do in some cases of domestic violence. This will further lead to problems with the justice system, which is unfortunately known for its inertia, but also for the lack of sensitivity for VAW. In addition, the Ministry of Justice is unable to provide the necessary funds for the implementation of psychosocial treatment for perpetrators of domestic violence.

### **3. Transferability issues**

These examples of the use of ICT in the fight against GV from Spain and domestic violence perpetrator intervention programmes from Ireland are certainly valuable and interesting experiences, not only because they include new perspectives in this area, but also because of the results they achieved, and important questions they raise about the above-mentioned issues.



### 3.1. Use of ICT in Spain

Spain serves as a great example of the use of ICT in combating VAW through comprehensiveness in the use of different strategies, which seems to be a result not only of the political will, but also investment of considerable financial resources.

A segment of the Spanish experience that could be transferred to Croatia in its entirety is the 24-hour help line 016 in the case of GV. In Croatia, we still do not have such national line and the entire assistance largely relies on the work of CSOs that provide such services, but which do not have capacities to cover the entire Croatia. Furthermore, the use of telephone service for care and protection of victims of GV is an example of the practice which has already been discussed on several occasions in Croatia, mostly at the level of CSOs, but without the response of competent institutions. Telematic tracking system to monitor restraining orders would be an important step in monitoring the implementation of protective measures and decreasing VAW and domestic violence.

What appears to be an excellent practice in Spain is the focus on different target groups according to ethnicity and use of different languages to address the victims of violence. In Croatia almost all materials (including web sites) are made exclusively in the Croatian language, with few English translations. In this way, some specific groups, such as the Roma, remain excluded.

Furthermore, the excellent practice of Spain, which would be important for us is inclusion of the support and assistance for persons with disabilities. Although Croatia has a special helpline for people with disabilities, only a small number of shelters are equipped to accommodate disabled women. Furthermore, there are almost no counselling services or web sites that include the possibility of communication with persons with hearing or speaking disabilities.

### 3.2. Perpetrator Intervention Programmes in Ireland

Based on the available data we can conclude there are significant similarities in the work, primarily in the methodology and number of programmes. Comparison also yields the lack of financial resources and political will to establish a sufficient number of treatment centres to work with perpetrators and to provide funds for their work.

As pointed out in the example of practice from Ireland, Croatia should introduce a systematic evaluation of implemented treatments, bearing in mind clear indicators for the assessment of their usefulness and impact. Such information could also be useful in ensuring the necessary financial support, but also in the development of better and more efficient approach to work with perpetrators.

Another extremely important part of the Irish experience is highlighting the importance of ensuring the balance between the funding required for work with perpetrators and services that are working with women survivors of violence. For example, in Croatia, at the onset of work with perpetrators, CSOs that work with victims perceived programmes for perpetrators as a direct competition and taking up already scarce funds, accompanied by a high level of distrust for understanding the real reasons that lie in VAW. Overall, we can say that good cooperation has not



been established between organisations working with victims and those working with perpetrators, apart from few exceptions. The misunderstanding still exists in regards to the importance of both types of services and their integral part in combating domestic violence.

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