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

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Assessing the costs of violence against women in Slovakia

Olga Pietruchova

Independent Gender Expert

Abstract:

Violence against women (VaW) in intimate partnership is in Slovakia mainly perceived by politicians as a problem that is incompatible with the ideal idea of a "traditional family". In the public, it is discussed mainly as a social problem which solution burdens public finances and drains resources from other areas of social assistance. So far, no view has been presented that would point to a cost-benefit analysis of the efficacy and effectiveness of investing in the prevention of VaW. The debate at EU level could be a turning point where the professional public in the country can demand a holistic approach to the issue of violence against women, especially to strengthen its primary prevention, and to call to a more holistic and multidimensional approach.

1. Violence against women in Slovakia

Violence against women is in Slovakia a well-recognised public issue often discussed particularly by women NGOs and some media who pay more and more attention to the topic. However, the political discussion is pretty much influenced by the conservative movement which was very successful in its effort to hinder the ratification of the Istanbul convention. Consequently, VaW is not framed as a gender based violence but purely reduced to domestic violence presented often in a gender neutral way.

1.1 Incidence of violence against women

A study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) presented in March 2014 shows for the Slovak Republic following results:

- A quarter of women experienced violence from a former partner and 12% from a current partner;
- Every third Slovak woman has experienced violence from any man during her life;
- In the last year, 12% of women in the Slovak Republic have experienced violence from their partner, which represents 140,000 women; about 230,000 women (10% of adult women) experienced violence from any man in the same period;
- Only 12% of women said that the most serious case of violence they experienced was handled by the police.

Similar results were presented within the newest Slovak research on domestic violence performed by the Coordination-Methodological Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women in 2017. The experience of women and men with domestic violence during the adult stage of life varies significantly according to the violent person. While Slovak women experience violent behaviour mainly from their partners, Slovak men experience violent behaviour mainly from other family members – they have more experience with other domestic violence. The experience of partner violence accounted for 36% of all domestic violence for men (9% of the total 25%), for women partner violence exhausts up to 73% of all domestic violence (19% of the total 26%).

According the administrative data, there are annually around 800 to 900 cases of intimate partners violence prosecuted by the police in Slovakia. The conviction rate is relatively high, on the other hand, in 2 third cases imprisonment is imposed with conditional suspension of the sentence, comparing to 36% of unconditional imprisonment.

The number of women murdered or killed by their current or former partner has been for a decade comparing to other EU countries rather low, 5 to 6 cases. However, last year this number has doubled when 12 women died which might be an outcome of the pandemic.

1.2 General policies

In the last 5 years, Slovakia has adopted a number of measures to combat and prevent violence against women. With the aim to establish a comprehensive and systematic response to the problem, the government adopted already the third National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women 2014–2019. A new plan has not been adopted yet.

An important step was the establishment of the Coordination-Methodological Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women (CMC) and the non-stop free of charge helpline for women experiencing violence financed by diverse public money schemes like European Social Fund, Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the state budget of the SR.

The project is a prerequisite for the creation, stabilization and maintenance of an integrated protection and support system for victims of gender-based violence and aligning efforts to reduce and prevent it. It focuses on systematizing and linking the different procedures and measures, both legislative and non-legislative, so that they are coordinated and lead to joint efforts by both public administrations and non-public actors to prevent and reduce gender-based violence while support and protect its victims.¹

¹ Report of Slovakia to the 25 anniversary of Being PoA , 2019.

Feminist NGOs have provided services for women survivors for a long time, often without any public support. The situation has changed in the last decade when most of the services became a part of social services according to The Act 448/2008 Col. on Social Services. Yet, the financial situation has been very unstable; the NGOs were financed by multiple sources as self-governing regions, governmental and EU grants and private contribution. In the last decade, particularly the Norwegian Financial Mechanism following by the European Social Fund have contributed to an effort to set up a network of counselling centres and women's shelters. Nevertheless, the situation of financing the network is still far from stable and satisfying.

1.2.1 The Act on Victims of Crimes

The major development improving the access of women victims of gender based violence, intimate partner violence, or domestic violence to judiciary and law enforcement services was the adoption of the Act on Victims of Crime (Victim's Act, the Act) which became effective from January 1st, 2018. The Act represents the full transposition of Directive 2012/29 / EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 laying down minimum standards on the rights, promotion and protection of victims of crime into the legal order of the Slovak Republic. The law regulates the rights of victims of crime, compensation for victims of violent crime, and a mechanism of supporting organisations providing assistance to victims. Furthermore, the status of victims in criminal proceedings is strengthened.

For the first time in Slovakia, the legal definition of domestic violence is included in the Act. Victims of domestic violence belong according to the Act to vulnerable groups which are entitled to a specific treatment and specialized, free of charge, professional assistance. Since around 90% of those victims are women, the Act has a positive impact on their access to justice. The act also covers rules of compensation provided by the state to victims of violent crime, who suffered bodily harm. Victims of human trafficking and crimes of sexual violence are further entitled to a compensation for "moral damages".

Since 2018, the Ministry of Justice has accredited 14 victim support bodies. In addition to accredited bodies, other organizations focusing on the provision of social services and counselling also provide assistance to victims.

In 2020, the Ministry of Justice introduced an amendment to the Act with an aim to set up a network of intervention centres. This model is based on linking police intervention with crisis intervention and professional assistance provided to the victim of domestic violence. Specially, intervention centres should focus on legal assistance to victims of domestic violence during the period of expulsion of the perpetrator from the shared residence which has been also prolonged to 14 days. In a case of a barring order, the police shall inform the intervention centre within 24 hours of the expulsion of the violent person from the common dwelling. The intervention centre shall then proactively contact the victim of domestic violence within 72 hours and offer her or him a professional assistance.

The amendment to the Act further supplemented the model of financing through subsidies with the possibility of concluding contracts for a longer period, e.g. 3 years, especially for entities that will act as intervention centres. This measure will enable the creation of a network of entities providing technical assistance, ensure the provision of technical assistance on a long-term and accessible basis and also create space for increasing the quality of the assistance provided.

The Act has been approved on 7 May 2021 and it is to enter into force on 1 July 2021.

1.3 Cost of violence against women

Currently, there is no methodology or any effort to calculate the cost of violence against women in Slovakia, nor there are any initiatives to further explore the problem. Some figures were calculated when proposing an amendment to the Victim's Act setting the system of intervention centres in Slovakia. However, those costs were only focusing on the financial cost related to the budget of 8 new intervention centres around whole Slovakia, without any cost-benefit analysis. Thus, the costs of VaW prevention are mainly perceived in the country as a burden for the public finances, not calculating any positive impacts and benefits on the individuals and the whole society.

The only official material declaring some facts about the comprehensive costs of VaW in the country is the *Annual Report on Gender Equality in Slovakia 2017*. The report states as follow:

“SOCIETY CONSEQUENCES AND COSTS

... The research of the World Bank estimates the costs resp. loss-making losses for women at 1.2 to 2% of GDP per year (which is comparable, for example, to total education expenditure). With Slovakia's GDP at the level of EUR 76.1 billion (2016) and a conservative estimate, we can assume that the costs of VaW in Slovakia are at the level of EUR 900 million per year.

In the United Kingdom, it is estimated that almost 13% of the costs of violence against women are also reflected in economic losses, and almost 26% are service costs. Most of the money is spent on the victim's legal services, followed by health care and social security. Less than 3% represents the cost of services related to the protection and support of victims. The UK is estimated at € 28.4 billion a year in total losses and the costs of efforts on women dreams.

Based on the British model, the annual cost of violence against women in the US in the same publication was extrapolated to the results of 2.4 billion. EUR. Although we take into account the difference in average earnings and living costs and take into account only a third of the extra-value value, the losses for the Slovak Republic are still at the level of EUR 800 million per year.

Taking into account the estimated losses and costs of violence against women, prevention activities are highly effective; for every euro invested, € 87 can be saved

on the costs of the long-term consequences of such violence and € 33 on the direct costs of social and health services.”

Thus, the only publicly presented methodology used in Slovakia is based on an assessment of the cost by the comparison of basic economic indicators with the UK and US. However, such an approach is rather limited to show a full picture of the real situation in the country.

No further discussion has been held on methodology or systematic assessment of costs on violence against women. There is a tendency to see only the side of public spending particularly on services for survivors. However, no costs-benefit analysis has been elaborated or proposed yet.

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

The cost of violence against women is estimated to be extremely high. The direct and indirect costs of violence against women and domestic violence affect not only the victims and their immediate surroundings, but also society and its economy as a whole. A multi-layered problem such as violence against women and domestic violence has consequences and represents costs at various levels that are difficult to estimate. These costs are:

- Healthcare costs;
- Judiciary costs including investigation, court proceedings and execution of a sentence;
- Support services as victim's support organisations, social services including accommodation;
- Costs of social and legal protection of children;
- Individual costs for a woman (loss of housing, work, health, psychological damage, legal representation costs);
- Social costs (loss of victim productivity, loss of investment in human capital education and often associated state tax losses);
- Intergenerational costs, as domestic violence also affects the children of victims and has long-term consequences for them.²

The methodology described in the Finnish paper seems to be feasible to use in Slovakia too since the administrative data collected by the health system are rather

² Annual Report on Gender Equality in Slovakia 2017, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of SR, 2018.

accurate. However, there are some problems related to the collection of administrative data, particularly the fact that many women do not provide doctors with the real causes of their injuries, and many doctors prefer to respect the patient's right and not try to find out the real cause of her health problems.

Slovakia tried to collect the statistical data about the number of victims of domestic violence in the health sector. However, because of the situation described above, the data were very limited and the final statistic was not reliable at all, often showing confusing results. A new approach would be necessary combined with an education of health personal to be more sensitive to the victims of VaW.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

Finland has proposed several measures in part 4.2 we can fully agree on. Particularly the focus on multi-institutional cooperation and holistic approach seems to be crucial not only when it comes to the provision of services and professional help to women surviving partner's violence but as well as in the data collection and a comprehensive calculation of costs of violence against women.

Cost of violence against women should be compared in a costs-benefit analysis to illustrate the effectiveness of an early and holistic approach to help and prevention. According some analysis, for every euro invested, it is possible to save EUR 87 on the costs of the long-term consequences of such violence and EUR 33 on the direct costs of social and health services.³

Recommendations:

- European Institute for Gender Equality should develop a common methodology on a comprehensive calculation of costs of violence against women, and cost-benefit analysis;
- Costs of violence against women and benefits of prevention should be more discussed particularly when proposing some new legislation on the EU level, or when promoting the Istanbul convention;
- Financial means to prevent and eradicate violence against women, including means to support services, should be a part of obligatory investments by member states when planning a new programming period for European Structural and Investment funds, of Recovery fund.

³ Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Opinion on an EU Strategy on Violence against Women and Girls, 7 December 2010.