

What protection and support does the current system guarantee for women experiencing violence and their children?

Report on the state of the protection, assistance and support system



key findings and recommendations

Working together for an **inclusive** Europe

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is one of the most frequent human rights violations in the world. Intimate partner violence against women - violence experienced by women at the hands of current or former spouses or partners - is one of the most serious and widespread forms of violence against women.

According to the European Agency for Fundamental Rights survey in 2012, 34% of Slovak women experience violence in their adult lives, and 23% are abused by their partner. Preliminary data from the latest Eurostat survey suggest that even after ten years, the prevalence of violence against women in Slovakia has not decreased; on the contrary, in some indicators it may have even increased.

Intimate partner violence against women is almost always violence against their children. According to a representative survey of the prevalence and experience of violence against women in Slovakia in 2008, 70% of women who had experienced violence from their partner at the time of the survey were living in a household with children.

According to the results of a representative survey on violence against women conducted by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2012, up to 9% of Slovak women who had experienced violence from a partner also reported experience of psychological violence related to threats and extortion from their partner in relation to their children.

Intimate partner violence against women was common in most countries until the 1970s. It was regarded as a private problem of individual women. In Slovakia, the problem of violence against women began to be understood as a violation of women's rights and a society-wide problem after the first national campaign 'One-In-Five Women'. The campaign was organised by women's NGOs, which came together in 2000 to form the One-in-Five Women Initiative.

Thanks to the national campaign, we adopted the first important legislative changes in Slovakia in 2002. Since then, we have adopted other legislative measures that contribute to a higher level of protection of women against violence, as well as strategic documents and policies. These frame violence against women as a human-rights and society-wide problem that the state is responsible for tackling.

This report presents the key findings and recommendations based on a comprehensive report on the state of the system of protection, help and support for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children entitled "What protection, help and support does the current system guarantee for women experiencing violence and their children?" The aim of the report was to map the current system of protection, help and support and to propose recommendations in the different areas monitored.

A well-functioning system of protection, help and support should be based on clear national policies that are integrated across the system. Policies must be based on administrative and prevalence data on violence against women, providing a holistic picture of the status, development, and trends in this area.

Systematic prevention of violence against women, quality vocational training and continuous training for all professions involved in the protection of women experiencing violence and their children is an integral part of a comprehensive system of protection, help and support.

The State should also ensure the availability of specialist support services for women, such as helplines, counselling centres and women's shelters.

There is also a need for general services such as psychological assistance, legal aid, health care services and financial assistance, as violence has a negative impact on all aspects of the lives of women and their children.

Last but not least, ensuring that women and their children have access to justice and that perpetrators of violence against women are properly held accountable is a key component of the protection, assistance, and support system.

In the report, we focused on four key areas: integrated policies and cooperation with NGOs; campaigns, education, media, and private sector; women's access to protection, assistance and support; and access to justice for women and their children, and procedures in criminal proceedings.

In all sections, we monitored the period 2019-2021, with the exception of awareness-raising and information campaigns on violence against women, where we focused on the period of 2017-2021. As for specialist support services for women and implementation of the police's power to remove a violent person from a shared household, we mapped the year 2022, which is related to the introduction of intervention centres for victims of domestic violence in the legislation in that very year.

The information we analysed was obtained from publicly available sources through desk research, in which we analysed relevant strategic and conceptual materials of the state, as well as policies and laws related to violence against women. We based our analysis on the Slovak Republic's international obligations in the area of violence against women arising from international human rights conventions.

Other data was obtained through requests for information under the Free Access to Information Act. In total, we addressed seventy-one requests for information to various state and public institutions. In formulating these requests, we also drew on our practical experience of working with women experiencing violence, namely providing counselling, legal aid, and legal representation of women in civil and criminal proceedings. In order to map the status of specialist support services for women, we used a questionnaire for organisations that run such support services and with whom we also conducted semi-structured interviews.

For the purpose of clarity and better readability of the text of this report, sources are not listed. All the sources of information we have worked with and on which the key findings and recommendations are based are listed in detail in the comprehensive report 'What protection, assistance and support does the current system guarantee for women experiencing violence and their children?'

We believe that the following key findings and recommendations, as well as the comprehensive report on the state of the system of protection, assistance and support, will contribute to improving its set-up, functioning and effectiveness, so that we as a society can prevent intimate partner violence against women and their children, adequately protect women and their children from violence, and hold perpetrators of violence against women adequately accountable.

Authors

INTEGRATED POLICIES AND COOPERATION WITH NGOS

Introduction

The system for the prevention and elimination of violence against women should be based on **integrated, comprehensive, and well-coordinated policies**. The Slovak Republic is legally or politically bound by several international and European documents that call on it to develop integrated policies with several specific attributes: covering all forms of violence against women, allocating sufficient financial and human resources, and putting the rights of women with experience of violence at the centre of the policies.

In addition, integrated policies should support, recognize, and encourage the work of civil society and **specialist NGOs** and establish effective cooperation with these organizations.

Slovakia should have a **designated authority or several official bodies** responsible for the coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women.

In the area of **data collection and research**, the State is to collect data and relevant statistics, disaggregated **at regular intervals, on cases of all forms of violence against women** and their children. States are to promote research on all forms of violence, with a view to ascertaining its root causes and effects, prevalence, and conviction rates, as well as the effectiveness of measures taken in integrated policies.

States should also endeavour to conduct, at regular intervals, **nationwide surveys on the prevalence** and trends in all forms of violence. State research and data collection should stimulate international cooperation and enable international comparisons.

What did we research?

- Is there a comprehensive and coordinated policy covering all forms of violence against women?
- How and by whom are public policies made?
- Is there a common platform for cooperation and coordination?
- How is the issue of violence against women financed?
- How does the state recognize, encourage, and support the work of relevant NGOs at all levels?
- Is there collaboration between the scientific community, NGOs, decision makers in the field of violence against women?
- What statistical data does the State collect on violence against women and their children?
- Does the State conduct regular nationwide surveys on the prevalence of violence against women and their children?

Key findings

The Slovak Republic **does not have a specific law or a single comprehensive framework** for the prevention and elimination of violence against women. The most current and comprehensive document addressing the issue of violence against women in Slovakia is the National Action Plan (NAP) for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women for 2022-2027. However, the NAP covers violence against women in families or broader

domestic violence in particular. The link between intimate partner violence against women and the impact of such violence on children and the need to address the issue in relation to children is insufficiently articulated.

The Department of Equality between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (hereinafter MoLSAF) is considered to be the main institution for the development of integrated policies and their coordination. **However, the placement of responsibility for the development and coordination of policies on violence against women with MoLSAF has resulted in the issue being perceived as a social issue rather than one of human rights and freedoms.** The change of name and the inclusion of the former Gender Equality Unit under family policy has weakened the society-wide cross-cutting issue of gender equality, including gender-based violence against women as a separate issue.

The implementation of the individual tasks in the action plans is only formal, implemented more or less "on paper", without an in-depth assessment of the impact on the issue.

In the National Action Plan on Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women (NAP) for years 2022-2027 no tasks are assigned to the Coordinating - Methodical Centre for Prevention of Violence against Women (CMC). CMC participated in the preparation of the current NAP by proposing tasks aimed at the development of integrated policies and coordination, which were not reflected in the final version of the document. **CMC was originally intended to function as a coordinating body for the prevention and elimination of violence against women.** However, the process of creating such a coordinating institution as an independent body with policy-making powers has not been completed.

The importance of the Ministry of Interior and its bodies, particularly in protecting women from violence, investigating, and prosecuting violent persons, is not matched by their participation and involvement in the development of integrated policies.

In recent years, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has strengthened its role in the implementation of policies on violence against women, in particular by adopting legislation to establish and fund intervention centres. On the other hand, however, the MoJ has not ensured sufficient transposition of the EU Directive on the protection of crime victims (e.g. by failing to include women experiencing intimate partner violence as particularly vulnerable victims or by failing to recognise that women are disproportionately affected by this type of violence in the context of violence perpetrated in close relationships).

The Ministry of Health does not fulfil its role and competences in the field of violence against women sufficiently, whether it is in identifying violence through regular screening in selected outpatient clinics or through regular training of health professionals in this area.

The Gender Equality Committee (GEC), which also has the status of participating in the preparation of strategic documents, **is considered a common platform** by the integrated policy body, MoLSAF. Over the last five years, a number of institutions and mechanisms that could have contributed to better coordination in the development and evaluation of integrated policies on violence against women have disappeared or, for various reasons, have not been renewed or supported. The low capacity of specialist NGOs and other institutions in this field is a threat to proper functioning of such platforms.

The issue of violence against women does not have systemic and guaranteed funding within the state budget. The financial mechanisms for funding specialist services for women are relatively sufficient in number, but all of them are unsystematic, unguaranteed, and unsustainable, and all of them are set up as supplementary. The

funding conditions for NGOs are discriminatory compared to the funding of state and public organisations. Funding is fragmented and confirms Slovakia's long-standing dependence on public resources from abroad.

The encouragement and support of NGOs by individual state institutions is mainly at the level of grant schemes and other funding, subject to compliance with administrative requirements and strict control of the funds spent. On the other hand, cooperation with state bodies is expected automatically and free of charge, for example in the form of consultations, providing data and documents for reporting the activities of state bodies.

Cooperation between some state institutions and international organisations exists, but is selective and sporadic, and mostly in the context of the implementation of specific programmes or projects. **Long-term and continuous cooperation** with research institutions is also virtually non-existent due to the absence of a specialised criminological research unit or an independent monitoring body.

Slovakia lacks a comprehensive and systematic collection of data for the purpose of thorough evaluation of the measures taken in the field of violence against women. There is no statistical reporting on violence against women and their children. Low level of data processing. The unavailability and non-publication of data is also a barrier. Statistical data on violence against women is not comprehensive, with several indicators lacking even a basic breakdown by gender or age.

There is a lack of longer-term and more comprehensive programming of research activities in the field of violence against women, systematic review studies on the latest research findings in this area, and regular monitoring of the situation of women experiencing violence.

Recommendations

- **To create a unified legislative framework to prevent and protect women from violence.**
- **To conceptually distinguish violence against women from domestic and family violence and consistently apply the concept of violence against women as gender-based violence and human rights violation.**
- **To link the issue of intimate partner violence against women conceptually and substantively with violence against their children.**
- **To transform the existing coordinating body into an independent inter-ministerial body with sufficient competences and capacity to develop, implement and monitor integrated and comprehensive policies on violence against women.**
- **To significantly deepen international cooperation on violence against women and strengthen the exchange of good practice.**
- **To establish cooperation with the scientific community at universities and the Slovak Academy of Sciences or set up a special research unit with a multidisciplinary focus on violence against women, its causes and the effectiveness of the measures taken.**
- **To set up comprehensive statistical reporting on the provision of protection and support to women experiencing violence and their children across relevant departments.**

- **To significantly strengthen production of knowledge in the field of violence against women by setting a long-term research and sustainability agenda.**

CAMPAIGNS, EDUCATION, MEDIA, AND PRIVATE SECTOR

Introduction

Campaigns to raise public awareness and information on various aspects of violence against women, prevention programmes for young people as part of the education system, training for professions that come into direct contact with women experiencing violence are an integral part of the system of protection, help and support for women and their children. The public and private media and the private sector also play an important role in the prevention and elimination of violence against women.

CAMPAIGNS

The State should ensure, through campaigns, that the general public is regularly informed about the causes, manifestations, forms, and impact of violence against women.

Campaigns should be specifically aimed at raising public awareness and understanding of the various aspects of violence against women, including intimate partner violence. At the same time, experience from different countries shows that it is important that they **are not one-offs but repeated**, even for several years in a row, and that they reach as many people as possible.

Information materials or online information on violence against women, which are easily accessible and also ensure the dissemination of information on available services, have a significant impact on increasing the reach of campaigns.

It is beneficial if **campaigns are organised in cooperation with NGOs** working in the field of human rights, gender equality and violence against women.

What did we research?

- Do the State's strategic documents on violence against women contain a commitment by the State to organise public awareness-raising and information campaigns on violence against women, and which department or institution is responsible for their implementation?
- How many and what kind of campaigns has the State implemented in the last five years? What were the objectives of the campaigns and how were the target groups of the campaigns selected?
- Have the campaigns been evaluated in terms of the fulfilment of their objectives and what have been their results?
- What was the total financial cost of implementing the campaigns and from what sources were they funded?

Key findings

The State does not systematically, on a regular basis, implement, monitor, and evaluate awareness-raising campaigns on violence against women, including intimate partner violence and available support services, help and protection.

The Slovak Republic **does not have comprehensive legislation** on violence against women. Primary prevention of violence against women, including campaigns targeting this issue, is not covered in legislation.

Primary prevention and campaigns are only mentioned in some of the National Action Plans for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women **at the level of strategic priorities** and subsequently **in the individual tasks** attached to them.

The Ministry of Justice also has a subsidy for the promotion of human rights and freedoms. Under these grants, it has on several occasions in the past **financially supported campaigns** on the issue of violence against women **conducted by NGOs**, which were mostly local and/or raised awareness and understanding of the issue their social media. However, these are not campaigns implemented directly by the state and with a national reach.

According to our findings, the state has conducted **four** campaigns in the past five years. Two were one-time campaigns, one was repeated in two consecutive years, and one is an annual campaign. The campaigns that the State has implemented have **partially covered the issue of intimate partner violence against women**, but have focused on sexual violence, broader domestic violence, or assistance to victims of crime, including victims of domestic violence in general.

These were mostly **one-off campaigns implemented and funded as activities within national projects, which were not followed up** by other state campaigns to raise awareness or public information on violence against women.

The content of one of the campaigns, the Prevention Campaign of the Police Force, focused on the issue of intimate partner violence against women, was **victimizing**, with information and messages in the videos that **shifted responsibility for violence, its ending and resolution to women** experiencing violence. This communication setup, while perhaps well-intentioned, does not lead to increasing women's trust in the police, and does not fulfil the purpose of communicating the police's clear stance on violence against women as being unacceptable.

Recommendations

- **To ensure that the public is informed through campaigns about the causes, manifestations, forms, and effects of intimate partner violence against women, in accordance with international standards enshrined in the international human rights conventions to which the Slovak Republic is a party.**
- **To ensure that the public and women experiencing violence are informed through campaigns about available support services and other help and protection.**
- **Allocate adequate financial resources from the State budget of the Slovak Republic and regularly implement campaigns focused on the issue of intimate partner violence against women.**
- **To cooperate with NGOs in the field of human rights, gender equality and violence against women in the implementation of campaigns focusing on violence against women.**
- **To regularly monitor and evaluate campaigns on violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.**

EDUCATION

Through education and primary prevention in the field of violence against women, including intimate partner violence, we can prevent the occurrence and serious consequences of violence, reduce the tolerance of violence against women in society, as well as develop the knowledge base, sensitivity and skills of the various professions and the staff of relevant state and public institutions involved in the protection, assistance and support of women and their children.

Primary prevention programmes in schools

Primary prevention of various undesirable social phenomena, including intimate partner violence against women, is important because people's attitudes and patterns are formed at school age. It is therefore important that the State, through state educational programmes and state educational institutions, also ensure systematic primary prevention of violence against women as the most widespread violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms worldwide.

What did we research?

- Does the State have a legislative framework that includes primary prevention programmes for violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?
- Do the State's conceptual materials on education include the area of primary prevention of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?
- What primary prevention programmes on violence against women has the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter the MoESRS) developed?
- Does the MoESRS monitor and evaluate the implementation of primary prevention programmes on violence against women?

Key findings

The State does not have a legislative framework for the primary prevention of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women. Primary prevention programmes for violence against women are completely absent from the Slovak education system. The issue is only partially addressed in the general human rights education, which is insufficient and not in line with the Slovak Republic's international obligations in the field of prevention and elimination of violence against women.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (MoESRS) does not have programmes for the primary prevention of violence against women.

The National Curriculum includes areas such as **education for marriage and parenthood** and topics such as family education, gender equality and building relationships between boys and girls. In this context, **only the role of the mother in relation to childcare is described in the teaching materials.**

Not only does the curriculum not specifically address the issue of violence against women, but some of the teaching materials promote gender stereotypes that place normative expectations on women, primarily as mothers.

The role of the state in the prevention of violence against women **is often substituted by NGOs**, especially at the local level. However, **this is not a systemic measure**, but an attempt by these organisations to make the prevention of intimate partner violence against women at least partly **accessible** to young people.

The Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic has established a subsidy scheme for the promotion of human rights, which is also intended to support education and training of children and young people. The subsidy also supported prevention activities and campaigns of NGOs. However, these are mostly implemented **at the local level and do not have national reach**.

Recommendations

- **To develop a comprehensive legislative framework on violence against women that includes primary prevention programmes, including prevention of intimate partner violence against women.**
- **To develop and implement conceptual materials on education in the field of primary prevention of violence against women, for primary and secondary schools, based on international human rights standards of, as enshrined in the international conventions to which the Slovak Republic is a party.**
- **To ensure that the State cooperates with experts in the field of violence against women, including NGOs working on the issue, in the development of conceptual education materials.**
- **To establish and implement a mechanism for regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of primary prevention programmes on violence against women in schools.**
- **To ensure continuous training of relevant educational staff and school staff on the implementation of the established programmes for the primary prevention of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.**
- **To ensure that the issue of violence against women and its prevention is included in the training of future teachers at relevant secondary and higher education institutions.**

Vocational training

The State should ensure that the issue of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women, is included in the curricula for training of professionals involved in the protection, help and support of women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children.

The aim of the training should be to strengthen the skills and knowledge of students in the field of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women. The information on violence against women provided in the training should be in line with the latest knowledge as well as international human rights standards as contained in relevant international conventions on violence against women and national policy documents.

What did we research?

- Does the State have a legislative framework or strategic documents regarding vocational training (in secondary and higher education) on violence against women, including intimate partner violence?

- Do the conceptual materials on education or educational programmes for vocational training in secondary and higher education include the issue of violence against women?
- Are there methodological instructions or guidelines for the inclusion of violence against women in vocational training in secondary vocational schools and universities? What is their content, and which secondary schools and colleges are they for?
- Does the relevant ministry monitor and evaluate the quality of education on the issue of violence against women in vocational training in relevant secondary vocational schools and relevant fields in higher education?

Key findings

The Slovak education system lacks a conceptual and methodological framework for education on the issue of violence against women in secondary vocational schools and in many relevant universities as part of vocational training of professions that are directly involved in the protection, help and support of women experiencing intimate partner violence.

Although the issue of violence against women is mentioned in some specific university courses, **it is not possible to assess the quality or consistency** of the content of the information provided with international standards.

There are also no uniform standards for education on violence against women in secondary and higher education, and there is **no mechanism for monitoring and evaluating** the quality of education and training in this area.

Secondary schools that train professionals that come into direct contact with women experiencing violence and/or their children or engage in the education of children and young people (e.g., medical staff, teaching professions, police) **lack methodological instructions and guidelines** on teaching courses on violence against women.

In the case of universities, **there is also no systematic approach** to education on violence against women. Courses covering violence against women **are not compulsory**. Individual schools **differ** in their approach to education in this area and the **gender aspects of violence against** women, which is an international standard resulting from several international human rights conventions to which the Slovak Republic is a party, as well as from national strategic documents in this area, **are not universally accepted**.

The State **does not monitor and evaluate the quality of education and training in secondary and higher education in the field of violence against women**, including intimate partner violence against women.

Recommendations

- **To develop a comprehensive legislative framework on violence against women, including education on violence against women.**
- **To develop and implement conceptual materials and standards for the inclusion of violence against women in the training of professionals involved in the protection, help and support of women experiencing violence, based on international human rights standards as enshrined in the international conventions to which the Slovak Republic is a party.**
- **To ensure that the State cooperates with experts and practitioners in the field of violence against women, including NGOs working on the issue, in the development of conceptual materials.**

- **To establish and implement a mechanism for regular monitoring and evaluation of education on violence against women, including in vocational training of professions involved in the protection, help and support of women experiencing violence.**

MEDIA AND PRIVATE SECTOR

The media, especially the public media, play an important role in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women. They **create a space for informing on**, portraying and clearly naming violence, its causes, and its consequences. **By raising awareness and breaking down stereotypes**, the media can contribute to changing society's attitudes and discourse on violence against women.

It is essential that **the state** also **creates conditions and platforms for the involvement of the private sector and private media** in the prevention and elimination of violence against women.

The private sector is an important actor, **not only in relation to its employees**, but also to the general public through its corporate social responsibility activities.

Public service media

Public service media play an indispensable role in informing and educating the public. Through their various programmes, they cover important social issues and influence and shape public opinion and public debate.

Violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women, is a serious problem for society as a whole, and there is no doubt that there is a need to raise awareness of it in the public sphere. Today, this topic is most often dealt with in the crime sections of the tabloid media. However, the way in which they report on violence against women is often biased and promotes various harmful and false myths about the issue.

For this reason, it is also particularly important whether and how violence against women is addressed and discussed in the public media.

What did we research?

- Does the State have a strategy or conceptual material that describes the role of the public media in raising awareness and information on violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?
- Are there guidelines or methodologies for public media staff on how to inform the public about violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?
- Are public media staff trained on how to inform and raise public awareness about violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?
- Does the State monitor and evaluate how the public media contribute to raising public awareness and information on the issue of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?

Key findings

The Slovak Republic **does not have a comprehensive legislative framework for the issue of violence against women**, and thus **no legislative framework that would specifically address the involvement of the public**

media in the prevention and elimination of violence against women. The media is addressed in relation to violence against women in the tasks of some strategic materials of the State.

The employees of the public media do not have regular training on violence against women in the context of informing the public on this issue.

At the same time, **public service media do not have data on the extent to which they provide information on violence against women** in their broadcasts.

Nor does the State have a conceptual material or strategy to promote zero tolerance of violence against women in the media sphere.

The public media **does not have methodologies and guidelines** for staff on how to inform and raise public awareness about violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.

The Coordinating – Methodical Centre for Prevention of Violence against Women (CMC) developed an e-learning course for journalists, but the course has been abandoned and **the topic is treated in an informative form for the media on its website.**

CMC publishes information for journalists on its website. However, these are **non-binding recommendations** on how media employees can inform the public about violence against women in a gender-sensitive manner and promote zero tolerance of violence in society.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MoLSAF), as the ministry responsible for gender equality policies, including violence against women, regularly **monitors all media, but the results of the monitoring are not publicly available.** At the same time, the MoLSAF **does not evaluate** how the public media contribute to raising public awareness and information about violence against women.

Recommendations

- **To develop a strategy or conceptual material that describes the role of the public service media in raising public awareness and information about violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.**
- **To develop and implement guidelines and methodologies for public media staff on how to inform and raise public awareness of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women fairly and sensitively.**
- **To regularly monitor and evaluate how the guidelines developed are applied in practice.**
- **To regularly educate and sensitise public media staff on violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.**
- **To regularly monitor and evaluate how the public service media contribute to raising public awareness on violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.**

Private sector and private media

What did we research?

- Does the State have a strategy, mechanism, or platform for engaging the private sector in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?
- Does the MoLSAF, as the ministry responsible for gender equality and policymaking in this area, issue methodological guides or recommendations for the involvement of the private sector and private media in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?
- Does the MoLSAF monitor and evaluate the involvement of the private sector and private media in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women?

Key findings

The MoLSAF, as the department responsible for gender equality policies, including violence against women, **does not have strategies and policies to engage the private sector and private media** in the prevention and elimination of violence against women. Activities to involve them are part of the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women 2022-2027 at the task level.

The MoLSAF **does not issue methodological guidelines or recommendations** for the involvement of the private sector and private media in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.

The MoLSAF **monitors the prevention and elimination of violence against women** through the preparation of evaluation reports. However, **it is not clear** from the information obtained **how specifically the Ministry focuses on monitoring the participation of the private sector and private media in the prevention and elimination of violence against women**.

The MoLSAF **monitors all media**. However, the outputs are for the internal use of the Ministry and are therefore not publicly available, a measure that does not contribute to the development of a professional debate on the work of the media in raising awareness and informing the public about violence against women.

The potential of the private sector as an employer remains untapped. In recent years, we have seen several examples of good practice where a number of private companies have taken up the issue, either by providing information and a safe space for their female employees to contact support services, or by providing specific forms of help and support, training employees, or even by running their own campaigns.

It is therefore important that the state has mechanisms or platforms in place for greater private sector involvement in the prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Recommendations

- **To develop a strategy, mechanism, or platform for the active and systematic involvement of the private sector and private media in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.**
- **To develop methodological guidelines or recommendations for the involvement of private sector and private media in the prevention and elimination of violence against women, including intimate partner violence against women.**
- **To encourage private sector, as employers, to introduce internal guidelines, self-regulatory standards, and protocols towards their employees on the issue of violence against women.**
- **To monitor and evaluate the involvement of private sector in the prevention and elimination of violence against women.**

ACCESS TO PROTECTION AND SUPPORT

Introduction

In order for the State to provide adequate protection, help and support to women and their children, it needs to **have a clear understanding of violence against women**, including intimate partner violence against women, at a systemic level. The definition of violence against women should be based **on international human rights conventions** in this area and **should be the basis for the development of policies and laws** to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

Violence affects all areas of lives of women who experience abuse from a current or former husband or partner **and their children**. The **impact** of violence is often **severe and has long-term negative effects** on the health of women and their children, on their economic situation and housing opportunities, and on their relationships with other people as a result of social isolation. They therefore need to have **access not only to specialist support services** for women, but **also to other services** such as health care, psychological support, legal aid, and other forms of assistance.

General principles of protection and support

Human rights and gendered understanding of violence against women

International standards for understanding the causes and consequences of violence against women are enshrined in several international conventions on violence against women. Their common denominator is the understanding of violence against women as a serious **violation of women's fundamental human rights and freedoms** and the **perception of violence against women as a systemic phenomenon** resulting from women's historically unequal status in the society and as **violence that disproportionately affects women**.

What did we research?

- Does the state have a definition of violence against women?
- Is the definition of violence against women in line with international standards enshrined in the relevant international conventions to which the Slovak Republic is a party?
- Does this definition, the basic principles and underlying understanding of violence against women translate into laws, other conceptual materials, and strategies, as well as into binding procedures or guidelines for relevant institutions?

Key findings

The State has the basic principles and background of its understanding of violence against women defined in several strategic documents on the issue of violence against women.

A key document is the **National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and in Families**, which, in addition to defining violence against women, also lists the basic principles for understanding the issue and principles for addressing it, such as a human rights-based, gender-sensitive, holistic, and coordinated approach.

The National Strategy also stresses that **"the issue** of gender-based violence against women is so specific and particular in its context and consequences that **it requires specific, particular forms of approach and action** to ensure that it is addressed as effectively as possible. In addressing gender-based violence against women, traditional, standard tools will not work".

The definition of violence against women is contained in the **National Strategy for Equality between Women and Men** and Equal Opportunities of the Slovak Republic for 2021-2027 and is based on the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The **National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women 2022-2027** (hereinafter referred to as the NAP) **lacks a definition** of violence against women. Also, the NAP **does not describe** in its main body of text **the basic understanding of and principles for addressing the issue of violence against women**. It is therefore questionable how effectively and adequately this document can contribute to the prevention and elimination of violence against women and how its priorities will be implemented by the various ministries.

The Act on the Protection of Crime Victims (Victims of Crime Act) defines the term 'domestic violence' in the context of crime and also includes victims of domestic violence among particularly vulnerable victims. **Compared to the EU Victim Directive**, which the Slovak Republic has transposed into national legislation through the Victims of Crime Act, **recognition** in the context of violence in close relationships **that women are disproportionately affected** by this type of violence **is missing** in the Slovak Act on the Protection of Crime Victims.

Neither the definition of violence against women in the State's strategic documents, **nor** the above-mentioned **basic principles** for understanding and addressing it, **are reflected** in most State's conceptual materials, or in its relevant laws, decrees, guidelines, or methodological instructions to the various State institutions involved in the prevention and elimination of violence against women. **Even if the definition of violence against women is included in some methodologies or guidelines, it is not necessarily reflected in the recommended practices and serves more as a formal introduction to the issue.**

Recommendations

- **To align the definition of violence against women in all national strategy documents of the state on violence against women so that it is in line with the international documents on violence against women to which the Slovak Republic is a party.**
- **To align the basic principles and premises of understanding and addressing violence against women in all national strategy documents of the State in line with the international documents on violence against women to which Slovakia is a party and with the principles and the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and in Families.**
- **To ensure that the definition of violence against women is included in the key strategic materials of the State, in all other relevant conceptual materials of the State, as well as in the methodologies and guidelines of the relevant institutions.**

- To ensure that the basic principles and rationale of violence against women, as defined in relevant international conventions and national strategic materials, are included in, and adequately reflected in the methodologies and guidelines for the practices of relevant institutions.

Multi-agency cooperation

Introduction

Multi-agency cooperation can be seen as a tool to improve the quality of services for women experiencing violence and to coordinate and improve the response of state and public institutions, NGOs, and communities to violence against women.

The aim of such cooperation is **to address the problem as a whole by improving the response** to women experiencing violence and their children, by **holding men who perpetrate violence accountable**, and by **awareness-raising and prevention activities and campaigns**. This is based on the recognition that no institution will succeed if it works in isolation.

The **Standards** for the Comprehensive Support and Protection of Women Experiencing Violence state that multi-agency cooperation is "the interconnection of all organisations and institutions dealing with the issue of violence against women and children, so that whatever institution a woman experiencing violence contacts, she is provided with support and protection to ensure her safety."

The UN recommends that "all legislative measures, policies and programmes should be evaluated and developed in cooperation with civil society organizations, in particular women's organizations, including those representing women subjected to intersecting forms of discrimination.

The UN further stresses that States Parties should promote cooperation between all levels and branches of the justice system and organisations dedicated to the support and protection of victims/women who have experienced or are experiencing gender-based violence, considering their views and expertise.

What did we research?

- Does the State have a definition of what multi-agency cooperation on violence against women is?
- Do the relevant institutions have guidelines or recommendations for active cooperation with other institutions and organizations in addressing intimate partner violence against women at the local, regional, or national level?

Key findings

Multi-agency cooperation in the field of violence against women is not legally defined.

The Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic, **the General Prosecutor's Office** of the Slovak Republic, **the Head Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family** of the Slovak Republic and **the Ministry of Health** of the Slovak Republic **do not have any recommendations** or guidelines for the institutions under their authority to actively engage in cooperation with other institutions and organizations in addressing intimate partner violence against women, beyond the legally defined cooperation between some institutions.

Informal multi-agency groups or **platforms** currently exist in some regions at local level, established and coordinated on their own initiative by some NGOs dedicated to assisting and supporting women experiencing violence in partner relationships.

The Coordinating-Methodical Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women (CMC) **implements projects** in which it has defined objectives for the development of multi-agency cooperation.

In 2015, **the Institute for Labour and Family Research** developed the Standards for Comprehensive Support and Protection of Women Experiencing Violence. It has also produced **two other publications** that address multi-agency collaboration. However, these documents **are in no way binding** for the relevant institutions.

Some institutions refer to synergies with other institutions, which they are required by law to have. However, this is a misunderstanding of what multi-agency collaboration is. **Multi-agency cooperation does not need to be necessarily** enshrined in law in the form of statutory cooperation. It can also take the form of **informal** meetings, round tables or working groups composed of representatives of different institutions at local and/or regional level. Such forms of cooperation are common in many countries.

It is important that **each relevant institution** has, if not an obligation, then a clear guideline **to actively engage** also in informal multi-agency initiatives or platforms and also those initiated and/or coordinated by NGOs working in the field of violence against women.

Recommendations

- **At a systemic level, take measures to ensure that each of the relevant institutions involved in helping, supporting, and protecting women experiencing violence and their children has a clearly articulated commitment to active cooperation with other institutions and organisations and allocates resources, both financial and personnel, to this end.**

Prevention of secondary victimisation

Introduction

Secondary victimisation is negative or insensitive behaviour towards a woman who has experienced violence, who experiences such a response as a further violation of her rights. It is most often blaming a woman for the violence she is experiencing or has experienced. Women have experience with such blaming from institutions, but also from close people and family or the media when they report insensitively on cases of violence against women.

People tend to blame women for violence for a number of reasons, and much of this behaviour stems from prejudice, stereotypes and misconceptions about women experiencing violence, about perpetrators of violence, about violence against women in general, and also about the need to feel safe. Men also blame women for the violence they perpetrate. They do so in contact with institutions to avoid being held accountable for their abusive behaviour.

Therefore, if institutions also blame women for the violence they experience, justify the violence, or make light of their experience, they compound the effect of their partners' or husbands' violent behaviour, and women lose faith that anyone will believe them and take their experience seriously.

What did we research?

- Does the State have legislation on secondary victimisation in cases of intimate partner violence against women and their children?
- Do the Ministry of Health and the Head Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family issue methodological guidelines for the prevention of secondary victimisation in cases of intimate partner violence against women and their children?

Key findings

Secondary victimisation is defined in the Victims of Crime Act as harm resulting from the action or inaction of a public authority, victim support body, health care provider, expert witness, interpreter, or lawyer.

The Ministry of Health does not issue methodologies or guidelines for the prevention of secondary victimisation for doctors and physicians, other health personnel.

Similarly, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic does not issue methodologies or guidelines for the prevention of secondary victimisation for the staff of the Child Protection Departments, the Departments of Counselling and Psychological Services and institutions for the execution of measures of social and legal protection of children, the Children and Families Centres (hereinafter referred to as CFCs).

It is essential that the State ensures that the staff of the relevant institutions are sufficiently sensitive to the issue of violence against women so as not to downplay and question the experience of women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children and thus contribute to their secondary victimisation.

We know from our counselling work with women that **if they experience minimisation and questioning it can result in a loss of trust in institutions** and can discourage them from seeking further help. **If staff and workers in relevant institutions approach women's experiences of violence with mistrust, the result will be ineffective interventions and ineffective protection of women and their children.**

Recommendations

- **To develop methodological guidelines for doctors and other health personnel under the authority of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic for the prevention of secondary victimisation in cases of intimate partner violence against women and their children.**
- **To develop methodological guidelines for the staff of the Child Protection Departments, the Departments of Counselling and Psychological Services and facilities for the execution of social and legal protection of children, Children and Family Centres (hereinafter CFC) for the prevention of secondary victimisation in cases of intimate partner violence against women and their children.**
- **To ensure the education of all relevant professions on the issue of violence against women, including prevention of secondary victimisation of women experiencing violence.**

Introduction

In order to be able to provide immediate and effective help, support and protection, it is crucial for the front line institutions to be able to identify intimate partner violence against women and distinguish it from other forms of domestic violence, to identify risk factors in order to assess the level of risk of further violence to the woman and her children (risk assessment), and to develop a safety plan with the woman, which is part of a broader safety management.

As doctors, other health personnel and staff of relevant departments of the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Offices (hereinafter LSAFO) are in direct contact with women experiencing violence and their children, we asked the Ministry of Health (hereinafter MoH) and the LSAF Headquarters about areas related to identification of violence, risk assessment and the development of safety plans.

What did we research?

- Does the Ministry of Health and the Head Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic have a methodology or guidelines for identifying violence and risk assessment in cases of intimate partner violence against women?
- Are safety plans drawn up by the staff of the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Offices of the Slovak Republic who are in direct contact with women experiencing violence and their children?

Key findings

The Ministry of Health does not have a methodology or guidelines for identifying violence and risk assessment in cases of intimate partner violence against women.

In 2008, the Ministry of Health issued a bulletin which contains professional guidance on the procedure for health professionals when providing health care to a woman at risk of violence. It is not clear whether medical doctors and other health personnel currently follow this guidance and whether its application is monitored and evaluated in any way. The National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women 2022-2027 lists the revision of this professional guideline as one of the tasks.

The Head Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic does not have a methodology or guidelines for the identification of violence and risk assessment in cases of intimate partner violence against women for workers in the child protection departments, workers of the Counselling and Psychological Referral Services and workers in institutions for the implementation of social and legal protection of children and social guardianship such as the Centres for Children and Families (CDRs).

Employees of the relevant departments of the Offices of Labour, Social Affairs and Family **do not draw up safety plans** with the woman and her children.

Although the LSAF Headquarters refers to a training manual for staff of the Counselling and Psychological Referral Services and for training new staff on the development of safety plans, the manual is not binding guidance.

In the case of employees of the Child Protection Departments, the LSAF Headquarters did not indicate whether they also have a manual that includes a safety plan. However, if they do not have one, this is paradoxical in view of their authority and position in the context of child custody proceedings, who assess the best interests of the child.

Recommendations

- **In cooperation with women's NGOs, develop binding methodologies or guidelines for staff of child protection departments, counselling and psychological referral services and other entities implementing child protection measures to ensure that intimate partner violence against women is properly identified and that the history of violence is investigated, risk assessments are conducted, and safety plans are prepared.**
- **In cooperation with women's NGOs, develop binding methodologies or guidelines for doctors and physicians and other health personnel under the authority of the Ministry of Health to ensure proper identification of intimate partner violence against women and the examination of the history of violence, implementation of risk assessment and preparation of safety plans.**
- **To develop mandatory procedures and protocols in cases of intimate partner violence against women and their children for identification of violence, risk assessment and safety management, which will be a mandatory part of the case files maintained by child protection departments, counselling and psychological services departments and other entities implementing child protection measures, or medical records in the case of health personnel.**
- **To ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of procedures and the use of the developed binding protocols in cases of intimate partner violence against women.**

Child witnesses of violence

Introduction

Addressing protection of children who witness violence against their mothers deserves special attention and solutions that link violence against women with tools and policies to protect children from violence.

In 70% of households of women who experience violence, one or more children are present. The effects of intimate partner violence against women on children's lives and also on their health are serious and long-lasting, regardless of whether the children have witnessed violence against their mothers or have experienced violence themselves.

According to research by the European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), up to **9% of Slovak women** who have experienced violence from a partner **have also experienced psychological violence related to threats and extortion from their partner in relation to their children.**

Representative research on the prevalence of violence against children in the Slovak Republic also reports the following: of the total number of children participating in the research, **3.19% of children** reported that **they had to leave home against their will because they did not feel safe there**; 1.97% reported that they had people living in their home whom they were afraid of; and **in the group of children exposed to physical violence** (23% of the total sample), **8.8% of the children reported they had to constantly defend one parent from being attacked**

by the other parent. Although the representative research was not specifically aimed at ascertaining whether violence against children is a component of intimate partner violence against women, the above research findings on the prevalence of violence against children may be closely related to violence against women, as women experience such violence disproportionately. This is evidenced by police statistics, which show that women account for more than 90% of victims of domestic violence-related crimes.

Given this data, as well as the data on the prevalence of violence against women, this is a large group of children at risk of or directly exposed to violence, and in order for their protection from violence to be effective, their safety must be considered in the context of violence against their mothers.

In cases of violence against women witnessed by children, it is not possible to address the situation of the woman and the child separately and to view the situation of the child in terms of the degree of culpability of both parents - the perpetrator is always responsible for violence and there is no excuse for it.

What did we research?

- Does the State have a definition of a child witness of violence against women?
- Does the Head Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (the LSAF Head Office) have procedures or guidelines for child protection authority that consider the rights and needs of child witnesses of intimate partner violence against women as a specific group of children at risk of or exposed to violence?
- Does the LSAF Head Office have a methodological guideline or other internal regulation on the interpretation and implementation of the assessment of the best interest of the child pursuant to Article 5(b) and (e) of Act No. 36/2005 Coll.?
- Does the LSAF Head Office have a methodology or other similar document for child protection authority, on the basis of which they assess the risk of violence a child is exposed to?
- Does the determination of the child's level of vulnerability also include determining the presence of physical and/or psychological violence perpetrated by one of the parents against the other parent? Is there a prescribed form or protocol for this?

Key findings

Slovak legislation does not recognise the term child witness of intimate partner violence against women.

The Family Act defines the best interest of the child as the primary consideration in all matters concerning the child. At the same time, according to this Act, the safety of the child, as well as the safety and stability of the environment in which the child resides, and the threat to the child's development by interference with the child's dignity and **the threat to the child's development by interference with the mental, physical and emotional integrity of a person close to the child** are also to be taken into account in determining and assessing the best interest of the child.

However, **it is not clear** from the information provided to us by the LSAF Head Office **what specific procedures the child protection authorities use to consider** the needs of child witnesses of intimate partner violence against women.

It is also not clear from the information obtained **how they assess the best interest of the child in terms of** interference with the child's dignity and healthy development as a result of **interference with the dignity**

and integrity of a person close to the child, in this case the child's mother, and whether the procedures are monitored and evaluated in any way.

The LSAF Head Office **claims that the principle of best interest of the child is a guiding principle that must be considered. In our experience**, the staff of the child protection authorities **often do not consider the history of violence** against the child's mother perpetrated by his/her father. More often than not they **do not ask about the violence**, they stop women and children if they talk about violence, referring to the fact that it is already in the past. It is equally common that when they prepare reports in child custody and visitation rights proceedings, **they do not include information** that women give in contact with the child protection authority about experiencing or having experienced violence on the hands of the children's father.

The child protection authorities assess the situation of the child and the family and determine the level of risk to the child. The determination of the child's level of vulnerability also includes ascertaining the presence of physical and/or psychological violence perpetrated in the past by one of the parents against the other parent. However, the methodological materials made available to us by the LSAF Head Office **do not provide a uniform, binding procedure** for assessing the degree of vulnerability of a child.

The LSAF Head Office **has not made available the questionnaire** used by the child protection authorities to determine the degree of risk to the child. It was therefore not possible to analyse it.

It is also questionable how the staff of the child protection authorities are able to assess and evaluate the level of threat to the child if the LSAF Head Office has not developed procedures for assessing the risk of further violence to the woman - the child's mother.

Recommendations

- **To introduce the term 'child witness of intimate partner violence against women' in all relevant legislation to ensure effective protection of children who witness such violence.**
- **To develop procedures for child protection authorities to consider the rights and needs of child witnesses of intimate partner violence against women as a specific group of children at risk of or exposed to violence.**
- **To develop a binding methodological guideline or other internal regulation for child protection authorities on the interpretation and implementation of the assessment of the best interest of the child under Article 5(b) and (e) of the Family Act to ensure that the presence and/or threat of violence by one parent against the other in the past and in the present is taken into account.**
- **To draw up binding protocols for the assessment of the best interest of the child pursuant to Article 5(b) and (e) of the Family Act by the child protection authorities, which will be a compulsory part of the file documentation of the child protection authorities.**
- **To adopt measures to ensure that when occurrence of violence perpetrated by the father of a child against his/her mother is suspected and/or established, measures are implemented to enhance the protection of women and children in the area of child contact. Subsequently, ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of the measures taken.**

- To ensure that the child's opinion is given consideration by the child protection authority if the child expresses concern about the abusive father, contact with him, or states that they do not want to see their father.

General services

The effects of violence are often severe and long-lasting, and negatively affect women's and their children's health, their economic situation and housing opportunities, and their relationships with other people as a result of social isolation. Therefore, they need to have **access** not only to specialist support services for women, but also **to other services** such as health care, economic assistance and affordable housing, free psychological support, or free legal aid.

Specialized practice and training in health and social services

Introduction

As **health and social services** are often among the first to come into contact with women experiencing intimate partner violence, it is extremely important that they have **methodologies and guidelines in place on how to deal with cases of intimate partner violence against women**. These should respond to the needs of women and their children. They should be **binding, regularly monitored, and evaluated** in terms of their application and use in practice. Health and social service workers who come into contact with women and/or their children should **receive regular training on the subject of violence against women**.

What did we research?

- Does the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic issue methodological instructions or guidelines for general social services on how to proceed in cases of intimate partner violence against women?
- Does the Ministry of Health and the Head Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family have specific internal directives or methodological guidelines on how to deal with cases of intimate partner violence against women and their children?
- Are the staff of the relevant institutions regularly trained on the issue of intimate partner violence against women and their children?

Key findings

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic does not have methodological instructions or guidelines for general social services on how to proceed in cases of intimate partner violence against women.

The Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic and the Head Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic do not have guidelines on how to deal with cases of intimate partner violence against women and their children.

Doctors and other medical personnel under the authority of the Ministry of Health **are not regularly educated** on the issue of intimate partner violence against women.

The training that is implemented is not mandatory, is not prioritized for medical doctors and **only 194 health workers have been trained in 2019-2021.**

The issue of violence in all its forms is defined in the decree that establishes minimum standards for specialization study programmes, certification study programmes and continuing education programmes. **Violence intimate partner violence against women is not explicitly defined in these minimum standards.**

The issues of violence in families and abuse of women are covered **in the scope of theoretical knowledge** in the specialisation in community nursing and in the specialisation in midwifery in the family and community.

Staff in the Departments of Social and Legal Protection of Children and Social Probation (child protection authority), staff in the Departments of Counselling and Psychological Services and staff in the institutions for implementation of social and legal protection of children (Centres for Children and Families) **are not regularly educated on the issue of intimate partner violence against women and their children.**

Recommendations

- **To develop training programmes, in cooperation with NGOs that have long been working on the issue of violence against women, for the staff of the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Offices, which are in line with the principles and solutions proposed in the relevant international conventions in this area and ensure regular training of new staff in the relevant areas.**
- **To develop training programmes, in cooperation with NGOs with a long-standing commitment to the issue of violence against women, for medical doctors and other health personnel under the Ministry of Health, which are in line with the principles and solutions proposed in the relevant international conventions in the field and ensure regular retraining of new staff in the relevant areas.**
- **To introduce compulsory training programmes in the vocational training of all health professions, as well as training programmes on violence against women for those already actively performing the profession, which are in line with the premises, principles and solutions proposed in the relevant international conventions in the field, so as to improve the response of health professionals in the field of protection and assistance to women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children.**
- **To introduce compulsory training programmes on violence against women in the training of social work and psychology professionals, in line with the principles and solutions proposed in the relevant international conventions in the field, so as to improve the response of child protection authority, counselling and psychological services and other bodies implementing measures of social and legal protection of children.**

Access of women to information about protection, help and support

Introduction

Access to information on available protection, help and support is crucial for women experiencing intimate partner violence. From our experience of working on the helpline for women experiencing violence, we know how difficult it is to take the first step and seek help.

If information about protection, help and support is not readily available, or is made more difficult to access because it is located to varying degrees and quality on different websites, this can be frustrating for women and can discourage them from seeking help and support.

If, in the process of seeking help, women receive inaccurate or incomplete information from the staff of different institutions and organisations, they may have unrealistic expectations of the institutions, causing frustration and mistrust of women in contact with institutions. Therefore, a necessary and fundamental measure that the State should take is to ensure that information on protection, help and support is readily available.

It is important that women experiencing violence are able to access information on the protection, help and support available to them, which not only provides them with contacts to relevant institutions and organisations, but also information on what will happen if they are contacted, what procedures and competences these institutions and organisations have, and what women's rights are in contact with them. Such information should be available in a variety of forms, be uniform and be distributed continuously so as to reach women living in rural areas, women with disabilities, women from minority groups and other vulnerable groups of women.

What did we research?

- What government policy documents or laws govern women's access to information on available protection, help and support? What are the State's international obligations in this area?
- How do relevant ministries ensure that women experiencing violence have access to information on available protection, help, and support?
- What information, in what form and content, is available to women experiencing violence on the websites of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of Interior (Mol) and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MoLSAF) on protection, help and support?
- Do the relevant ministries monitor and evaluate how access to information on available protection, help and support is currently ensured for women experiencing violence?

Key findings

The state **does not have** a specifically defined mechanism to ensure access of women experiencing violence to information on protection, help, and support, which is contrary to the international obligations of the Slovak Republic in this area.

The right of women experiencing violence to access to information on protection, help and support **is partially ensured by legislation**, in the provisions of some laws, in particular the Victims of Crime Act, the Law on the Police Force of the Slovak Republic or the Code of Penal Procedure, which impose an obligation on various institutions and services to provide information to women experiencing violence.

There is no mechanism for regular monitoring of the institutions that are legally obliged to provide information to women experiencing violence and whether they actually do so, to what extent and in what quality.

There is also no mechanism for regular monitoring and evaluation of how, and to what quality, extent, and degree of compliance with international standards on violence against women, access to information on protection, help and support for women experiencing violence in partner relationships is granted.

Information on available protection, help and support is **not in one place online**, but is scattered on the websites of several ministries. **The extent to which they are targeted at women experiencing intimate partner violence** and the range of information provided varies. **The quality, accuracy and clarity of the information also varies.**

None of the ministries has a visible link to information on available protection, help and support for women experiencing violence or victims of domestic violence on the homepage of their website, which significantly reduces accessibility of such information.

The websites of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior set up for the purpose of providing information on protection, help and support may not be sufficiently well known to the general public, and it is therefore questionable to what extent they actually increase the accessibility of information for women experiencing violence without being widely promoted and prominently linked to the homepage of the relevant ministry.

Only the website operated by the **Coordinating-Methodical Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women (CMC)** clearly identifies violence against women as a violation of their human rights, and the information provided includes a **clear stance** on violence against women as being unacceptable. The information on this website is also the most comprehensive and the most targeted in the context of intimate partner violence against women.

The potential of the National Helpline for Women experiencing violence, which is 24/7 and free of charge, is **untapped**. In many countries abroad, the existence of a national helpline is also linked to the existence of a national helpline website, which also serves to increase women's access to information on protection, help, and support.

The police also provide information to victims of crime during criminal proceedings. However, we know from our experience of working with women that the information provided is **often inaccurate or incomplete** and is provided in a language that is difficult for the average person to understand. **Contacts** for victim support organisations are **not clearly organised** by region, which is confusing for many women, and it causes many of them to call more than one organisation when seeking help, which can affect their trust.

Recommendations

- **At the systemic level, take measures to ensure that information on protection, help and support for women experiencing intimate partner violence is easily accessible and regularly updated, including up-to-date contacts to support services, a description of what assistance and support is provided, a description of the procedures and competences of relevant institutions in dealing with cases of violence against women and the rights of women experiencing violence, written in a language comprehensible to the general public and also in minority languages most commonly used in the territory of the Slovak Republic.**
- **In the case of an online information source, ensure that it is a single online resource where all relevant information for women experiencing violence is available.**
- **To ensure the continuous wide dissemination and distribution of information on protection, help and support for women experiencing violence to the general and professional public.**
- **To develop uniform information materials for women experiencing intimate partner violence on protection, help, and support to be used by relevant institutions and organisations.**

- To ensure the continued availability and systematic distribution of such uniform information materials at relevant institutions and in local communities.
- To establish a uniform mechanism for training staff of relevant institutions and organisations to provide information on protection, help and support to women experiencing violence in partner relationships.
- To establish a mechanism for regular monitoring and evaluation of whether and to what quality relevant institutions and organisations provide information on protection, help and support to women experiencing intimate partner violence.

Access of women to financial support

Introduction

Experience of intimate partner violence often have a **serious impact on women's financial situation**.

This includes time when they still live with the abusive partner who **exercises financial control** over them in various forms - women describe how their partner or husband **doles out money to** them, forces them to spend their income first so that he does not have to spend his own money. Women also describe how they **do not have access** to the family finances and **the abusive partner or husband decides how to use them**, and how they have to beg him for money to cover their basic needs and the needs of their children, which is humiliating for them.

Many **women describe** how their **abusive partner or husband has put them and/or the family in debt** through various loans from banks or non-banking institutions, or by borrowing money from other people for their leisure time or expensive hobbies, **the consequences of which are often borne by the women** for years after the end of the abusive relationship.

Similarly, the economic situation of women experiencing violence **is worsened after ending** the relationship, when they have to provide for their children having only one income.

Often, they also have to deal with the physical or psychological impact of violence on their health or that of their children, which **can make it difficult for them to enter the labour market**. Last but not least, their economic situation, like that of other women, is negatively affected by gender inequalities in terms of pay, status and opportunities in the labour market.

What did we research?

- Is women's access to financial assistance to mitigate the impact of intimate partner violence defined in legislation?
- How is access to financial assistance for women – survivors of violence ensured?

Key findings

The state has no defined mechanism to ensure that women have access to financial support to mitigate or eliminate the economic impact of intimate partner violence.

Although some of the State's **strategic materials** in the area of employment explicitly refer to the impact of gender inequality on women's economic status in society, the measures implemented in this area **do not**

consider women with experience of intimate partner violence a vulnerable group that needs to be addressed due to the economic impact violence.

In the section on gender equality and reconciliation of family and work life, **the National Employment Strategy of the Slovak Republic** up to 2020 describes significant differences between men and women in the employment structure or income. The National Strategy makes it clear that the presence of children under the age of six in the family has the opposite effect on employment for men and women. While it increases employment for men, it reduces it for women: 'the employment rate for women aged 25-49 with a child under six is less than 40 %, but for men of the same age group and at the same stage of parenthood it is more than 83 %. The pay gap between men and women becomes increasingly pronounced after the birth of each child'. At the same time, according to this strategic document, the gender pay gap is greatest in the 35-39 age group and the 40-44 age group, where the difference in average gross monthly pay between men and women is more than 300 EUR.

Although some of the State's strategic materials place emphasis on women with parental responsibilities who care for children under the age of six, as well as on single parents, **women with experience of intimate partner violence are not their specific target group.**

Specific **measures** to mitigate the economic impact of violence on the lives of women and their children **are not part of the State's strategic documents** on violence against women.

Recommendations

- **To adopt systemic measures to ensure data collection and evaluation on the impact of intimate partner violence on women's economic situation.**
- **Based on the data on the impact of intimate partner violence on women's economic situation, take measures to ensure that women who have experienced such violence have access to financial support to mitigate the impact of violence on their economic situation.**

Access of women to affordable housing

Introduction

Affordable housing for women experiencing violence and their children is one of the tools **to mitigate the economic impact of violence on their lives.**

Women who have experienced violence at the hands of a partner or husband often say that the question of whether they will be able to support themselves and their children and find affordable housing after leaving the abusive partner is one of their concerns when considering ending the abusive relationship.

As a result of the threat of violence, some women need to go **to a women's shelter** that specialises in protecting and supporting women experiencing violence and their children. Women's shelter services are not free-of-charge. If a woman is also unemployed or in an unfavourable economic situation, **she is not able to** rent an apartment or otherwise secure affordable housing in a shorter period of time.

Other women, **as a result of violence**, leave the abusive partner and go to live with their parents or other relatives, along with their children. Most of them are **not able to secure** independent housing for themselves and their children **even after the end of the proceedings** for the settlement of the joint possession of the flat or house they shared and owned with the abusive partner. Not to mention the fact that these **proceedings often take several years**.

In both cases, for the women and their children, this means also **the loss of home** and the need to cope with such a loss.

Research from abroad also shows that there is a high incidence among homeless women of women who have experienced violence as a background to their loss of home.

Therefore, access to affordable housing is an important part of the help and support system for women experiencing violence.

What did we research?

- Does the State have a systemic approach to ensuring access to affordable housing for women experiencing intimate partner violence?
- How is access to affordable housing for women experiencing intimate partner violence ensured?

Key findings

The state **does not have** specifically defined access to affordable housing for women experiencing intimate partner violence at the system level as a tool to mitigate or eliminate the economic impact of violence.

Although **four of the eight regional capitals** we monitored **have generally binding ordinances** in which the experience of intimate partner violence or domestic violence is grounds for the allocation of council housing, there is an **acute shortage** of such housing in Slovakia.

At the same time, in most cases, **a woman** who has experienced intimate partner violence **must also meet other requirements**, such as, for example, that she meets the income criteria, together with the persons assessed, or that she must not own or rent a property intended for housing. Many women do not meet this requirement because of the length of court proceedings relating to the settlement of the joint property.

None of the four regional capitals surveyed **has any other ordinance or regulation** for the case of assigning a council housing to a married couple or a couple living in an informal relationship in which, after a while, it turns out that the husband/partner therein treats his wife/partner violently.

Threatening or committing violence against the spouse or partner **is not a ground for unilateral termination of the tenancy agreement**. However, **practical experience shows** cases where a woman experiencing violence from a spouse or partner with whom she was living in a council flat **had no possibility** to deal with the situation of violence because she did not want to lose the flat and **the municipality had no mechanism** to ensure her and her children's safety within the framework of the existing regulations.

Income is the determining factor for the allocation of council housing, despite the fact that even some of the State's conceptual materials on housing policy state that this is an approach that does not reflect the realities and the needs of different groups of people.

Recommendations

- To take action at a systemic level to increase the availability of affordable housing for women experiencing intimate partner violence as a tool to mitigate the economic impact of violence on their lives and the lives of their children.
- At local government level, adopt a mechanism to ensure that the threat and/or experience of intimate partner violence is taken into account as a reason for the allocation of council housing. At the same time, define other requirements so that they are not a barrier to obtaining such housing for women experiencing violence and take into account their reality (e.g. do not impose requirements such as the requirement to prove experience of violence by filing a criminal report; do not assess the level of income so that a woman will be considered together with her abusive husband if she has left him and is not yet divorced, etc.).
- To define and introduce in the relevant legislation and/or in the relevant municipal ordinances and regulations a tool to ensure that the municipality can terminate the tenancy contract to council housing on the grounds of intimate partner violence against women.
- To establish a system at the local government level to collect data on the incidence of intimate partner violence against women and to regularly monitor the need for affordable housing on the part of women experiencing violence. At the same time, establish a record of applications for council housing on the basis of threat or experience of intimate partner violence and the number of council housing units allocated on the basis of such applications.
- On the basis of monitoring of the need for affordable housing on the part of women experiencing violence, take measures at both national and municipal level to improve their access to affordable housing.

Access of women to free-of-charge psychological help

Introduction

Intimate partner violence has a negative impact on the mental health of women who experience it, as well as on the mental health of their children.

Many women need quality and professional help and support, including psychological support, both during and after the abusive relationship, to mitigate the impact of violence on their mental health and/or to process the experience of violence.

The situation of violence, **as a result of power and control** exercised by the abuser over all aspects of the woman's and children's lives, is similar to a situation in which a person is held hostage for a long period of time and **has no control** over his or her own life. It is therefore not surprising that such an experience often has **long-term effects** on the mental health of women or their children. Women often suffer from various psychosomatic problems, headaches, insomnia, anxiety, and other mental health issues.

In the same way, **women's children** may experience witnessing violence against their mothers in different ways - some children may have behavioural problems, difficulties concentrating and preparing for school, problems

establishing and developing relationships with other children, or anxiety and other issues. **These difficulties often persist** even after women end the abusive relationship to protect themselves and their children.

What did we research?

- Does the State have defined at system level the provision of free psychological help to women experiencing or survivors of intimate partner violence?
- How is the access of women to free psychological help ensured?

Key findings

The State **does not have a specific legislation or regulation** to ensure access to free psychological help for women experiencing or survivors of intimate partner violence.

Access to free psychological help for particularly vulnerable victims of crime, including women experiencing violence, is regulated in the Victims of Crime Act. This is provided by the entities providing assistance to victims of crime and, as of November 2021, also by intervention centres for victims of domestic violence on the basis of accreditation under this Act and subsidies from the Ministry of Justice.

Free psychological help and support for women and/or their children is also provided by **specialist support services** for women.

The relevant ministries, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MoLSAF), **do not have data** on how many women - survivors of intimate partner violence and their children have received free psychological help from services and organisations under their authority. Nor do they have data on whether the provision of free psychological help to this target group is sufficient.

The Coordinating-Methodical Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women (CMC) monitors the availability of specialist crisis intervention and obtains data at weekly intervals on the capacity of social service providers whose target group is only women experiencing or survivors of intimate partner violence and their children. The CMC also **monitors** the provision of social, psychological, and legal counselling in the activities of intervention centres for victims of domestic violence.

The MoH does not currently monitor and evaluate how access for women experiencing or survivors of intimate partner violence is ensured by the relevant services under its authority.

Recommendations

- **To take measures at systemic level, including systemic funding, to ensure that women experiencing, or women - survivors of intimate partner violence and their children have access to free psychological help, including long-term psychological help for them and their children.**
- **To establish a mechanism at systemic level to ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of access to free psychological support for women experiencing or women - survivors of intimate partner violence and their children and relevant aspects of the provision of such support, including its availability and quality.**

Access of women to free-of-charge legal aid

Introduction

Women – survivors of intimate partner violence need access to free legal aid, which is an essential and key component of the system of protection, help and support.

Women may need legal aid **in connection with criminal proceedings or civil proceedings** such as urgent measures to increase their protection, divorce proceedings, proceedings concerning minor children or property settlements.

Many women also need to deal with **several** of the above-mentioned proceedings **simultaneously** when dealing with violence, in an effort to protect themselves and their children and to seek justice.

Slovak legislation today includes **a number of measures** that serve as protection from violence, including protection of women from intimate partner violence and their children. To protect themselves and their children through legal options, women **need professional legal aid**.

Some proceedings, such as criminal proceedings, are **complex** and it can be exceedingly difficult for women to navigate what is happening, how law enforcement authorities will proceed, how many times they will have to testify, or what rights they have in the process.

Other proceedings, such as those for protective and barring orders, are **quick**. However, they are **temporary measures** and are mostly followed by court proceeding, where women have to file a lawsuit with the court and go through a due process of law .

Many proceedings **take a long time** and are mentally, physically, and financially demanding for women.

Therefore, without access to affordable and quality legal aid, women will not be able to achieve effective protection of their rights and the rights of their children.

What did we research?

- Does the State have a systemic approach to ensuring access to free legal aid for women experiencing intimate partner violence?
- How is access to free legal aid for women experiencing intimate partner violence ensured?

Key findings

The State does not have specific measures to ensure that women experiencing intimate partner violence have access to free legal aid so that it is available to all women who need it.

Access to free legal aid in **civil proceedings** related to intimate partner violence against women is defined **by the Law on the Provision of Legal Aid to Persons in Material Need**. However, it is evident from the information published on the **Legal Aid Centre's website** that the high demand for personal bankruptcy solutions has **significantly reduced its capacity** to deal with the provision of legal aid in civil proceedings such as divorce, proceedings concerning minor children or property settlement proceedings.

Under the **Victims of Crime Act**, victims have the right to professional assistance, including free legal aid for at least 90 days.

Intervention centres for victims of domestic violence, which are established under the Victims of Crime Act at county level, **provide** victims with proactive specialist professional assistance, **including free legal aid**, in particular in civil proceedings following the police intervention banning a violent person from entering the shared home for 14 days, but also in criminal proceedings.

Not all women experiencing intimate partner violence who need legal aid have access to free legal aid - for example, women who do not meet the eligibility criteria for legal aid from the Legal Aid Centre but for whom commercial legal aid is also unaffordable and/or who need legal aid in civil proceedings not covered by the Victims of Crime Act.

Legal aid is also less accessible for women who live in districts and municipalities that do not have specialist support services for women experiencing violence providing free legal aid.

The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family **do not monitor and evaluate** how access to free legal aid for women experiencing intimate partner violence by entities and organisations under their authority is granted.

Recommendations

- **To take action at systemic level to improve access to free legal aid for women experiencing intimate partner violence so that it is available to all women experiencing violence who need it and to remove the barriers that currently prevent this.**
- **To ensure the collection of relevant data at a systemic level on access to free legal aid for women experiencing violence in partner relationships.**
- **To establish regular monitoring and evaluation at a systemic level of how access to free legal aid for women experiencing intimate partner violence is granted.**

Specialist support services

Introduction

Specialist support services provide help and support that can respond to the immediate and specific needs of women experiencing different forms of violence and their children.

These services provide both short-term, crisis assistance and long-term help, support and protection to women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children. They should be adequately geographically dispersed so as to be accessible to women and their children.

Specialist support services have in-depth knowledge of the dynamics of violence and the dangers of violence and can therefore provide protection and support to the majority of women in their efforts to protect themselves and their children from the serious consequences and impact of violence, as well as in their efforts to escape from situations of violence. They can respond quickly to their needs and provide a range of specialist services.

The aim of such specialist support is to provide safety, empower women and their children, overcome isolation, and promote social change. The objectives of specialist support services are based on the needs of women experiencing violence and their children.

The specialist support services in Slovakia as well as in other countries have their origins in the non-governmental sector. Experience and practice suggest that services provided by specialised NGOs are most relevant to the needs of women who have experienced violence and their children, and therefore NGOs should be recognised and supported by governments. They should be the main providers of such services and key partners of state institutions, in particular the police and the courts. Specialist support services are a key component not only in the system of help and support, but also in the system of protection of women and their children from violence.

The Council of Europe minimum standards for support services define a minimum level of service provision:

- **One 24-hour national helpline** covering all types of violence against women or one 24-hour helpline covering all types of violence against women, except sexual violence, and one helpline dedicated to women with experience of sexual violence.
- **One family place in a women's shelter per 10,000 population.**
- **One counselling centre for 50,000 women** to provide long-term assistance in dealing with the consequences of violence against women.
- **One centre for women with experience of sexual violence per 200 000 women.**

What did we research?

- Does the State have specialist services for women experiencing or survivors of intimate partner violence defined in legislation?
- Does the State have a funding mechanism for specialist services for women experiencing or survivors of intimate partner violence?
- Has the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family developed quality standards for specialist services for women experiencing or survivors of intimate partner violence?
- Does the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family collect data on specialist support services for women experiencing violence or survivors of intimate partner violence and their children?

Key findings

The state does not have a legislative framework that comprehensively defines crisis and long-term specialist support services for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children.

In Slovakia, specialist support services for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children have been established and developed over the last 30 years. There are currently **twenty-eight counselling centres, eight women's shelters and a 24-hour National Helpline** for women experiencing violence. Currently, specialist services are more evenly spread geographically, making them more accessible to women and their children. However, there are still **regions where women do not have access** to such services.

Specialist support services are not systemically regulated in legislation in the form and extent to which they actually provide help and support to women and their children. **Their operation and funding is partially**

regulated in several laws and their activities are often subject to several accreditations granted by different ministries.

Organisations that provide specialist support services need **two or three different accreditations to cover the range of support services they provide** to women and their children, taking into account their specific needs. Accreditations need to be renewed at different intervals, depending on the number of years for which the organisation is accredited. Meeting the requirements under each accreditation often also means different ways, structures, and scopes of collecting and processing data on service provision.

Funding for specialist support services for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children is fragmented, not systemic, it does not cover all types of services and is not set up to meet the need for sustainability of long-term services.

The State funds counselling centres and women's shelters, as well as a national helpline for women experiencing violence, mainly **on a project basis or through ministerial grant schemes and subsidies**. These grants, funds or subsidies have to be applied for annually or are otherwise time-limited and there is no certainty that the applicant will be awarded a grant or subsidy and in what amount. In addition, **none of the existing grants or subsidies cover funding for the full range of specialist support services** that are needed to meet the needs of women experiencing violence and their children.

For example, the State also uses European and other funds (e.g., the European Social Fund or the Norway Funds), which are co-financed by the State budget, to fund specialist support services. **However, this is neither systemic nor sustainable funding**. Moreover, these are forms of funding that are often **administratively very demanding** and **subject to complicated reporting rules**.

Operating under different accreditations, with different conditions and requirements that specialist support services have to meet according to several legal provisions, coupled with non-systemic financing, **leads to exhaustion** of organisations providing specialist support services and **to reduction of their capacity for the actual provision of services and the implementation of other activities**, such as public awareness campaigns, educational activities, developing cooperation with institutions, or advocacy activities aimed at promoting systemic change, which is also one of the important roles of specialist support services.

How do the organisations providing specialist services perceive the current set-up of such support services at system level?

We also asked the NGOs providing help and support to women experiencing intimate partner violence about accreditation, collecting and processing data on service provision and funding. Information was provided by twenty-two organisations. **In the area of accreditation, organisations described a lack of consistency and coordination, making it more difficult to obtain funding. Funding is fragmented under different laws.**

It is also more complicated to report on activities because each law has its own terminology and covers different activities. Organizations suggested unifying accreditation by target group and so that it covers all services provided to women experiencing violence with respect to their needs.

Fragmentation is also perceived in **reporting of data** on the services they provide. They have to provide data several times a year, to different institutions and in different structures. **Organisations quantified that**

20%-60% of their capacity is devoted to project administration and reporting including processing data on service provision. **Therefore, they propose unification of data collection, the specific categories to be monitored, the reporting period and the collection interval.**

They also addressed **fragmentation of funding**, which entails the need for multi-source funding. **They proposed the creation of a unified, comprehensive funding system, from a single funding source, which would cover all the services provided by the organisations and ensure continuity of operation.**

Although the state does not explicitly define specialist services for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their systemic funding in legislation, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family has **quality standards for specialist services for women experiencing violence**. The Coordinating-Methodical Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women monitors the implementation of standards.

The purpose of the monitoring is to obtain regular information on the number of services meeting the standards and their quality, to ascertain the regional distribution of services and to identify reserves in accessibility and quality. The collection of data on specialist support services is the responsibility of the Institute for Labour and Family Research and the Coordinating-Methodical Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women.

Recommendations

- **To develop a comprehensive policy and legislation on violence against women that defines and recognises crisis as well as long-term specialist support services for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children as a specific type of service in line with the Council of Europe Minimum standards for support services.**
- **To establish a single systemic, comprehensive, and sustainable funding mechanism for specialist support services for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children that takes into account the need for both crisis and long-term comprehensive specialist support and is set up in a way that does not cause an excessive administrative burden for the organisations providing these services.**
- **To harmonise the system for reporting data on the provision of specialist support services. To harmonise the data structure and the categories to be monitored, which will be unambiguous and to the minimum extent necessary. To harmonise the reporting period and collection interval so that it is not an administrative burden for organisations operating specialist support services.**

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Introduction

Ensuring access to justice for women and their children is a key part of ensuring that they are protected and that their abusive current or former partners or spouses are held accountable. In this regard, the State has a positive obligation under international law to ensure that women and their children are protected from violence by enacting appropriate legislation and ensuring that it is consistently applied in practice by responsible State institutions such as the police, courts, and prosecutors. Effective remedies should be available to women experiencing violence and their children, and appropriate sanctions should be imposed on perpetrators of violence. At the same time, the State has a duty to investigate such violence effectively and to hold those who perpetrate violence accountable. In order to do so, the responsible state institutions need to have specific procedures, methodologies and measures in place in criminal and civil proceedings (including those involving minor children) that enable them to identify violence, assess the level of risk and vulnerability of women and their children and take violence and its history into account in their decision-making, collect relevant administrative data, and provide continuous training to legal professions, the police and the public prosecutor's office, and other relevant state institutions.

Current legislation and its implementation

Introduction

Legislation is an important part of protecting women and their children, whether they experience violence directly or witness violence against their mothers. The State, through its institutions, in particular the police, the courts and the public prosecutor's office, is responsible for ensuring that it is applied consistently in practice, so that perpetrators of violence are held accountable and appropriately sanctioned.

What did we research?

- What is the current criminal and civil legislation in the Slovak Republic on violence against women perpetrated by a current or former partner or spouse?
- What forms of violence does the current legislation of the Slovak Republic penalise (criminalise)?
- Does the perpetrator's relationship with the victim affect the assessment of the criminality of his/her actions?
- How are aggravating circumstances defined in the case of offences involving violence against women?
- What sanctions can be imposed on perpetrators of violence against women under the current legislation of the Slovak Republic?

Key findings

At the national level, the Slovak Republic **does not have specific legislation providing women experiencing violence and their children with effective legal protection and access to justice**. A specific law providing protection and support specifically for women experiencing violence and their children **has not yet been adopted**. Our legislation does not take into account the specificities of violence against women and subsumes it under the general concept of domestic violence. EU law, namely **Directive 2012/29 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of crime victims also explicitly states that women** victims of gender-based violence

and their children often require special support and protection due to the high risk of secondary and repeated victimisation, intimidation and retaliation associated with such violence.

Women experiencing violence can thus seek legal protection in our country by means of institutes that are enshrined in various legal provisions, which, however, **are not aimed specifically at women experiencing violence and their children**, but more broadly at all victims of crime or victims of domestic violence. In particular, **the Penal Code**, which has general provisions, but which also covers the punishment of cases of violence against women. **In the area of civil law, violence against women is not defined**, but it is taken into account in certain types of litigation, such as the exclusion or restriction of the use of a dwelling or house. Also, **the Family Act** takes into account the safety of the child and the threat to the child's development and integrity by interference with the dignity, mental, physical, and emotional integrity of a person close to the child when taking into account the interest of the minor child in so-called custody proceedings. **Act No 274/2017 Coll. on victims of crime**, which regulates the rights, protection, and support of victims of crime, including women experiencing violence, is a separate legal framework.

As regards the forms of violence, Slovak **legislation criminalises almost all forms of violence**, such as psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, including rape (including sexual violence by a former partner or spouse). The Penal Code also punishes **incitement and encouragement** to commit a crime. However, **Slovak legislation does not criminalize** one of the forms of violent behaviour, **which is control or monitoring of daily activities by the abusive person (coercive control)**, which **should be added** to the crime of battering of a close and entrusted person or defined as a separate offence.

Under Slovak legislation, **the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim does not affect the assessment of criminal liability of his or her actions**.

Aggravating circumstances are considered if the act is committed against a protected person, including children, a pregnant woman, a close relative, or a dependent person. Whether the offender has committed the offence in a more serious manner, which is considered to be, inter alia, if the offence is committed with a weapon, over a prolonged period of time, in a brutal and torturous manner, by violence or the threat of imminent violence or the threat of serious harm, also has an impact on the level of the penalty.

In criminal law, it is possible to impose **sanctions** such as punishment and protective measures on the perpetrator of violence. For offences relating to cases of violence against women, one of the possible punishments is imprisonment, which may be suspended by the court with a probationary period. Courts may also impose educational measures such as protective supervision of the offender or protective treatment. A prison sentence may also be suspended by the court with probation supervision. An offender who has been placed under probation shall be obliged to tolerate control by a probation and mediation officer and to be controlled by technical means if such control is ordered by the court. Deprivation or restriction of parental rights on the grounds of a parent's violent behaviour towards a child as a possible sanction can only be decided by the courts in so-called guardianship proceedings, not in criminal proceedings. However, violence perpetrated by a child's father against the child's mother is not considered a reason for the court to deprive the father of his parental rights to the minor child or restrict his parental rights.

Recommendations

- To adopt comprehensive legislation providing protection and support for women experiencing violence and their children in the form of a specific law.
- To ensure that Directive 2012/29 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of victims of crime is thoroughly transposed in order to enshrine specific protection for women experiencing violence and their children in our legislation.
- To criminalise the control or monitoring of daily activities by the violent person (coercive control) – include it in the merits of the crime of abuse of a close person and entrusted person as another form of abusive behaviour or regulate it as a separate offence.
- To ensure that the adopted legislation is consistently implemented in practice so that women are protected, and perpetrators are held accountable and appropriate sanctions are imposed, which would have a preventive function, i.e., a detrimental effect also for potential perpetrators of violence.
- To ensure that sanctions imposed on perpetrators of violence are closely monitored by the relevant institutions and their effectiveness assessed on an ongoing basis.

Mediation, reconciliation, and out-of-court settlement of disputes

Introduction

Mediation and reconciliation or settlement of disputes are nowadays considered one of the means that can lead to expediting court proceedings and, as such, are often given preference. This is particularly the case in child custody proceedings concerning the rights and obligations to minor children. However, in order to protect women experiencing violence and their children, the State has a duty to take measures to ensure that, in practice, women experiencing violence are not forced to undergo mediation, reconciliation or out-of-court settlement in, for example, divorce and custody proceedings. These methods must be excluded in cases of intimate partner violence.

What did we research?

- How does the current legislation in the Slovak Republic ensure that women experiencing violence are not subjected to mediation and reconciliation or out-of-court settlement of disputes?

Key findings

Current Slovak legislation does not explicitly prohibit mediation, reconciliation or out-of-court settlement in disputes related to violence against women. Thus, it has virtually no mechanisms to ensure in practice that women experiencing violence are not forced to undergo mediation or reconciliation in, for example, divorce and child custody proceedings.

In the current decision-making practice of the courts and the procedures of child protection authorities, there has been a greater focus on reaching agreement and cooperation between parents in the provision of care and upbringing of minor children. **This primary emphasis on the parents' "ability" to reach an agreement**, combined with the practice of child protection authorities and the courts of **not using knowledge and methodologies to identify whether violence is or has been occurring in a particular case**, often results in the resulting

arrangement regulating the rights and responsibilities to the minor child **leading to escalation of violent behaviour and reinforcement of the abusive man's power and control over the lives of the woman and the children.**

Recommendations

- **To adopt legislation or procedures that make it mandatory to take violent behaviour or the threat of it into account in mediation or reconciliation, and out-of-court settlement of a dispute.**
- **To automatically exclude various measures to improve communication between parents, mediation and other similar methods, or conciliatory settlement of disputes in cases of suspected violence from one parent towards the other parent.**

Remedies

Introduction

In order to achieve effective access to justice, the State is **obliged to ensure that women experiencing violence and their children have access to adequate remedies for the violence perpetrated against them**, both against the perpetrator of the violence and against the State. The State is therefore required to provide adequate financial compensation to women and their children for violence in certain circumstances.

What did we research?

- What remedies are available to women experiencing violence under current Slovak legislation?

Key findings

In cases of intimate partner violence against women, women **do not have specific civil remedies available to them in relation to perpetrators**. Women may seek **compensation for personal injury or interference with their right to protection of personality** under the relevant provisions of the Civil Code, on the basis of general legislation. Even in cases where women victims claim damages against the perpetrator **in criminal proceedings**, the courts usually refer them to civil litigation.

Women can also seek compensation for violence perpetrated against them from the responsible State institutions. They can do so under the Victims of Crime Act.

Remedies available to women experiencing intimate partner violence – legislative framework

	From the perpetrator	From the State
General remedies in civil proceedings	yes	-
Specific remedies in civil proceedings	no	-
Remedies in criminal proceedings	yes	yes

We were interested in the application practice related to ensuring access to remedies for women experiencing violence. Information on what statistical data the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic records and is able to evaluate on available remedies for women experiencing violence by a current or former spouse or partner is compiled in the table below.

Remedies available to women experiencing intimate partner violence – administrative data

Variables to identify women experiencing violence	Criminal proceedings	Civil proceedings	Victims of Crime Act
Victim - woman	yes	no	no
Perpetrator - man	yes	no	no
Relationship b/w perpetrator and victim – husband/partner	yes	no	no
Statistical data	Criminal proceedings	Civil proceedings	Victims of Crime Act
Compensation from the perpetrator	yes	no	-
Compensation from the State	-	-	no
Period in which the compensation is due	-	-	no
Compensation amount	-	-	no

Recommendations

- To ensure that women have effective access to financial compensation for violence against them by their current or former spouse or partner.
- To adopt specific legislation in this regard specifically addressing cases of violence against women by their current or former spouse or partner.
- To introduce categories in the data collection systems that will make it possible to process statistical data on the remedies that women experiencing violence by their current or former spouse or partner have pursued against the perpetrators in civil proceedings, including whether they have been awarded, the time limit for payment and the amount of compensation awarded.
- To introduce in the data collection systems to Act No. 274/2017 Coll. on victims of crime, categories that will allow for the processing of statistical data on compensation claimed by women experiencing intimate partner violence, including whether it was awarded, the time limit for payment and the amount of compensation awarded, by individual offence.

Criminal proceedings

Administrative data collection

Introduction

One of the types of proceedings through which the State provides protection to women and holds perpetrators of violence accountable is criminal proceedings. The State has an obligation under international obligations to conduct effective investigations in cases of violence against women and their children. The administrative data of state institutions such as the police, courts and prosecutor's office show us how these institutions are able to respond to the needs of women who have experienced or are experiencing violence and their children. It is therefore necessary to monitor the application of legislation in practice and to collect relevant data in this regard.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation of laws is an important tool for monitoring the effectiveness and quality of the work of the police, prosecutors, and courts in providing effective protection for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children, access to justice and holding perpetrators of violence properly accountable

The police, prosecutors and courts should therefore ensure systematic collection of statistical data disaggregated by gender, by type of violence, as well as the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim in all areas.

What did we research?

- What administrative data related to cases of violence against women are collected and evaluated by the police, prosecutors, and courts?
- What is the number of women who have reported violence and how many cases have been prosecuted on the basis of such reporting?
- In how many cases did the prosecutor's office supervise the investigation and in how many cases was an indictment filed by the prosecutor?
- How many cases were decided by the courts and how many perpetrators were legally convicted for violent behaviour?
- What sanctions were imposed on the perpetrators of violence and what was the length of the sentence imposed?

Key findings

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) **does not collect and evaluate data on reports filed and prosecutions initiated in cases of women experiencing intimate partner violence**. Within the framework of crime statistics, it **records the number of detected crimes, which are broken down by the sex of the victim and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim**.

A total of **537 offences were identified in cases of women experiencing intimate partner violence for the years 2019-2021**. Violence against women was most commonly classified and investigated as dangerous threats (59.61-61.64%). The offence of abuse of a close person and an entrusted person accounted for only 22.53-25.29% of all detected offences in cases of violence against women by a current or former spouse or partner.

However, the overall number of cases is exceptionally low in relation to the actual prevalence of intimate partner violence against women and speaks volumes about the ineffectiveness of the police system in uncovering cases of violence against women by a former or current partner or spouse.

The Ministry of Interior also records the number and percentage of crimes cleared in crime statistics. **However, it does not process the clearance of crimes according to the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim**, only according to gender; therefore, it is not possible to assess the clearance rate specifically in cases of women experiencing intimate partner violence.

The General Prosecutor's Office (GP) does not have information on the number of proceedings conducted in cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or husband in which the prosecutor's office has supervised the investigation and in which the prosecutor has filed an indictment.

The Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic (MoJ) collects and evaluates administrative data on how many cases of violence against women by former or current partners or husbands have been decided by the courts, how many perpetrators have been legally convicted, what sanctions have been imposed on them for the violence and what the average length of the sentence was.

Information on what administrative data related to intimate partner violence against women is collected and evaluated by the police, prosecutors and courts in criminal proceedings is compiled in the table below.

What administrative data related to intimate partner violence against women perpetrated by a former or current partner or spouse is collected and evaluated by the police, prosecutors, and courts in criminal proceedings?

		Intimate partner violence against women	Victims - women	Relationship b/w perpetrator and victim – husband, partner
Ministry of Interior	Criminal reports filed	no	no	no
	Criminal prosecutions initiated	no	no	no
	Criminal offences detected	yes	yes	yes
	Criminal offences cleared	no	yes	no
General Prosecutor's Office	Investigations supervised	no	no	no
	Indictments filed	no	no	no
Ministry of Justice	Court decisions	yes	yes	yes
	Convicted offenders	yes	yes	yes
	Types of penalty imposed	yes	yes	yes
	Protective measures	yes	yes	yes
	Length of sentence	yes	yes	yes

Information on what administrative data related to homicides and attempted homicides of women by current or former spouses or partners are collected and evaluated by the police, prosecutors and courts in criminal proceedings is compiled in the table below.

What administrative data related to homicides and attempted homicides of women by current or former spouses or partners are collected and evaluated by the police, prosecution, and courts of justice?

		Intimate partner violence against women	Victims - women	Relationship b/w perpetrator and victim – husband, partner
Ministry of Interior	Number of offences	yes	yes	yes
	Number of offences - attempts	no	no	no
	Number of offences where institutions had knowledge that a woman was experiencing intimate partner violence	no	no	no
	Criminal offences cleared	no	no	no
General Prosecutor's Office	Indictment filed	no	no	no
Ministry of Justice	Convicted offenders	yes	yes	yes
	Penalties imposed	yes	yes	yes
	Protective measures	yes	yes	yes

	Length of sentence	yes	yes	yes
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We also specifically asked about **administrative data related to murders and attempted murders of women**. The Ministry of the Interior provided us with the following data.

Number of offences in which women were murdered by a current or former spouse or partner

	2019	2020	2021
Premeditated murder under Section 144 of the Penal Code	0	2	0
Murder under Section 145 of the Penal Code	6	8	10
Manslaughter under Section 147 – 148 of the Penal Code	1	2	0
TOTAL	7	12	10

Percentage of women murdered by current or former husbands/partners out of all women murdered?

	2019	2020	2021
Murders of women	21	31	23
Murders of women committed by husband/partner	7	12	10
	33,3%	38,7%	43,5%

The Ministry of Interior **does not have statistics** on the number of offences where a woman has been killed in which the institutions had knowledge that the woman was experiencing intimate partner violence.

The Ministry of Justice provided us with information that in 2019-2021, **eight offenders were legally convicted of murder or manslaughter of a spouse or partner** and **three offenders were legally convicted of attempted murder or manslaughter of a spouse or partner**. The average sentence in these cases was 20-21 years for premeditated murder, 17 years for murder and 9-11 years for manslaughter.

Recommendations

- Introduce into the statistical data collection of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic indicators enabling monitoring and evaluation of the number of reports filed in cases of violence against women by a current or former spouse or partner.
- Introduce into the statistical data collection of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic indicators enabling monitoring and evaluation of the number of prosecutions initiated in cases of violence against women by a current or former spouse or partner.
- Introduce into the statistical data collection of the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic indicators enabling monitoring and evaluation of the number of crimes in which attempted murder or killing of a woman by a current or former husband or partner has occurred.
- Introduce into the Ministry of the Interior's statistical data collection indicators to track and assess the number of cases of murder or manslaughter, or attempted murder or manslaughter of a woman by a current or former husband or partner, in which the institutions had knowledge that the woman had been experiencing violence.

- **Introduce indicators into the statistical data collection of the General Prosecutors Office to enable the tracking and evaluation of criminal offences in cases of violence against women by a current or former spouse or partner in which an investigation has been supervised.**
- **Introduce indicators into the statistical data collection of the General Prosecutors Office to track and evaluate criminal offences in cases of violence against women by a current or former spouse or partner in which an indictment has been filed.**
- **Introduce indicators into the statistical data collection of the General Prosecutors Office to track and evaluate crimes in cases of attempted or completed murder and manslaughter of a woman by a current or former spouse or partner in which an indictment has been filed.**

Procedures, institutional arrangements, and staffing

Introduction

The procedures and actions of State institutions such as the police, prosecution and courts in criminal proceedings are an important tool to ensure the effective application of the law in practice in protecting women experiencing violence and their children, preventing secondary victimisation of victims, and holding perpetrators of violence accountable. We know from our long-term experience of providing help and support to women experiencing violence that the practice of institutions in the Slovak Republic is not uniform and there are considerable differences in the protection that women experiencing violence and their children have access to from the police, prosecutors, and courts.

What did we investigate?

- Do the police, prosecutors and courts have internal procedures or measures to follow when investigating cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or spouse?
- Does the Presidium of the Police Force have any methodology or tool for male and female police officers to distinguish whether it is intimate partner violence against women or whether it is another relationship or family level issue for male and female officers?
- Have they been trained to use the methodology or tool?
- Does the police have designated police officers, investigators who specialize in intervening/investigating cases of violence against women by current or former partners or spouses?
- Does the Public Prosecutor's Office have designated prosecutors who specialize in prosecuting cases of violence against women by current or former partners or spouses in criminal proceedings?
- Does the police have specialised teams to intervene/investigate cases of violence against women by current or former partners or husbands?

Key findings

The police, prosecutors and courts proceed in criminal proceedings in cases of violence against women by a current or former spouse or partner in accordance with applicable law. As regards internal procedures and measures, we have summarised our findings in the table below.

Do institutions have internal procedures and arrangements in criminal proceedings that they follow when investigating cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or spouse?

	Police	Prosecutor's Office	Courts
Internal procedures and measures	Yes	No	No
Are these procedures and measures binding	No	-	-
Evaluation of internal procedures and measures	Yes	-	-
Updating internal procedures and measures	Yes	-	-
How often are they updated	Ongoing	-	-
A methodology to distinguish whether the violence against women is partner violence or another relationship or family problem	No	No	No

POLICE

The police is the only institution which, in addition to binding legislation, has **specific internal guidelines and measures on procedures in criminal proceedings in cases of domestic violence**. In particular, the **'Methodology of the police procedure in cases of domestic violence'**. The Methodology is **only of a recommendatory nature** for first contact police officers, as well as for investigators and authorised officers of the Police of the Slovak Republic and is **not binding**. It serves as a methodological guide in dealing with cases of domestic violence, which may also include cases of women experiencing violence at the hands of a current or former husband or partner.

Police officers' practices in terms of methodology of investigation of individual types of crime **are evaluated by the Criminal Police Department of the Presidium of the Police Force** within the framework of methodological activities, which, **however, are only of a recommendatory nature and are conducted as necessary**.

The methodology is continuously updated on the basis of legislative changes and application practice. Issued in 2006, it has been updated twice since then, in 2015 and 2017. The Methodology describes the aim, concepts, forms and cycle of violence, specific procedures within the framework of receiving a report, on-the-spot verification of the incident, clarification of the offence, investigation of the offence, possibilities to prevent further perpetration of domestic violence. The methodology also describes cooperation with the child protection authorities, with NGOs and victim support organisations, and also provides contacts for victim support.

Violence against women is not mentioned once in the entire methodology, it is framed in the context of domestic violence. **There is a lack of data on the prevalence of intimate partner violence against women and domestic violence in the Slovak Republic**. Such framing ignores the fact that women experience intimate partner violence disproportionately, as well as the specificities of violence directed at women by current or former husbands or partners. The methodology is also **inconsistent in its use of the unambiguous definition of violence. Instead, terms such as conflict, disturbance, disruption, quarrel or 'domestic disagreement' are used**. The confusion of violence with an argument, conflict, disagreement contributes to its downplaying and also points to the fact that there are no procedures to identify violence and distinguish it from an argument or a conflict. The theoretical sections on domestic violence **do not cite any sources**, so it is not clear where the information is drawn from. In the section on cooperation with the child protection authorities, NGOs and victim support organisations, **inaccurate and insufficient information is given, and the 24-hour national helpline for women experiencing violence and specialised counselling and intervention centres are not mentioned at all**.

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR’S OFFICE

The General Prosecutors Office of the Slovak Republic has stated with regard to internal procedures or **measures supervising criminal proceedings** in cases of intimate partner violence against women that **prosecutorial supervision in criminal proceedings is conducted on an individual basis.**

COURTS

The courts do not have specific guidelines or measures to be followed by judges and magistrates, senior judicial officers and clerks, probation and mediation officers and clerks in criminal proceedings involving violence against women by a former or current partner or spouse.

Regarding the activities of probation and mediation officers, the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic has provided us with information that they are conducted on the basis of a court decision, where it is already specified whether it is violence against women. They only come into contact with a perpetrator of domestic violence sporadically **if the ESMO technical device for protected persons is used or if the perpetrator has a restraining order.** Probation and mediation officers, when necessary, contact entities that provide interventions for these cases, i.e., professionals are contacted.

The Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic has provided us with information that it is currently implementing the project **"Increasing the efficiency of the judiciary through the protection/empowerment of victims and vulnerable parties"**, within the framework of which it is preparing methodological materials and manuals for courts, law enforcement authorities and professions related to criminal and family disputes with elements of domestic violence: the methodology **"Protection of particularly vulnerable victims in criminal proceedings"** and the methodology **"Protection of victims of domestic violence in family law disputes"**.

None of the institutions have specific guidelines, measures, or methodologies to differentiate between intimate partner violence against women and other relationship or family issues.

Violence experienced by women at the hands of current or former partners or husbands is often repetitive and long-lasting, escalating over time, often at the very times when the woman begins to address the situation, during criminal proceedings, as the man loses control over his wife or partner. Women are often subjected to extreme pressure, intimidation and threats during criminal proceedings, the aim of which is to get them to withdraw the criminal complaint, change their statement, enter into a conciliation agreement, etc. The nature and character of the violence experienced by women makes it important for the institutions involved in criminal proceedings to consistently identify cases of violence and take specific measures to ensure that women and their children have effective access to justice in criminal proceedings and are better protected from violence at all stages of the investigation and to prevent secondary victimisation .

Do institutions have specialised teams or individuals to intervene and investigate cases of violence against women by current or former partners or husbands?

	Police	Prosecutor's Office	Courts
Specialised teams	No	-	-
Specialised individuals	No	Yes	No

Specialisation of police officers, prosecutors, judges, and magistrates in criminal proceedings would also contribute to more effective and efficient protection of women and their children from violence by their husbands or partners. In the case of the police, it would be advisable to consider the **creation of specialised police teams to deal with cases of domestic violence and violence against women by former or current partners or husbands. Continuous in-depth training on this topic is particularly important.**

Recommendations

- **Adopt specific procedures, methodologies, or tools to ensure that police, prosecutors, and courts distinguish in criminal proceedings whether they are dealing with an intimate partner violence case or a different issue within the family.**
- **Update the "Methodology of the police procedure in cases of domestic violence", adding to it (definition of violence against women; data on the incidence of intimate partner violence against women and domestic violence in the Slovak Republic and to emphasize that women experience violence disproportionately, as well as the specifics of violence directed against women by current or former spouses or partners). Ensure that violence is clearly and consistently referred to as violence and not as conflict, disorder, altercation, argument or 'domestic disagreement'; in the theoretical sections, add sources so that it is clear where the information is drawn from; in the section on cooperation with child protection and social welfare bodies, NGOs and victim support organisations, distinguish between general victim support services and specialist services for victims of domestic violence and violence against women; add information on the 24-hour National helpline for women experiencing violence and specialist counselling and intervention centres.**
- **Ensure that following the "Methodology of the police procedure in cases of domestic violence" is binding for police officers and is regularly evaluated.**
- **Ensure that the "Methodology for police action in cases of domestic violence" is regularly updated.**
- **Develop specific guidelines and measures for prosecutors and courts to follow in criminal proceedings to ensure effective implementation of the legislation in practice, to protect women experiencing violence and their children at all stages of the investigation, to prevent secondary victimisation of victims and to hold perpetrators of violence properly accountable, and to ensure that they are regularly updated and regularly evaluated.**
- **Ensure thorough training of police officers, prosecutors, judges, and magistrates in criminal proceedings on the use of the measures, methodologies and tools adopted.**
- **Ensure the specialisation of designated police officers, prosecutors, judges, and magistrates on intimate partner violence against women to investigate cases of violence in criminal proceedings where the victim is a woman experiencing intimate partner violence or her children.**
- **Create specialised police teams to deal with cases of violence against women by former or current partners or spouses and domestic violence.**

Institutional procedures and arrangements and staffing

Introduction

Women experiencing violence are often litigants in various civil proceedings. These are proceedings related to the ordering of various protective measures prohibiting their current or former violent partner or husband from entering the shared flat/house, workplace, approaching the woman at a certain distance or contacting her by telephone, etc. protective measures are often followed by proceedings on the merits, such as proceedings to exclude the violent man from the use of the shared flat/house, proceedings for the settlement of the shared matrimonial property, etc. Also in these **civil proceedings**, it is important for women that their **experience of violence is considered by the courts** and that the courts are able to properly **identify** violence and its forms in order to ensure justice and safety for women.

What did we investigate?

- Do the courts have methodological procedures or measures or specific guidelines that they follow in civil proceedings (including proceedings for urgent measures) in order to identify and consider violence against women?
- Does the Ministry of Justice have any methodology or tool for judges and magistrates, senior judicial officers, and clerks to distinguish whether violence against women is a partner violence issue or whether it is another relationship or family level issue?
- Are these procedures or measures evaluated on an ongoing basis ?
- Are the relevant professions working in the courts trained to apply the methodological procedures or measures?
- Do courts have designated judges who specialise in cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or spouse in civil disputes, including proceedings for interim measures?

Key findings

The courts **have no specific guidelines** or internal procedures or measures on how to proceed in civil proceedings so that intimate partner violence is considered. Nor do they **have any tools used to identify violence**.

The courts do not have, nor do they have, specialist judges or senior court officers or clerks who specialise in civil proceedings in which a woman experiencing violence at the hands of her current or former spouse or partner is a party to the litigation.

However, the adoption of such procedures and measures would ensure effective access to justice for women experiencing violence as a litigant in civil proceedings, including proceedings for urgent measures under the Code of Civil Procedure. Particularly as in some types of litigation the courts have a legal obligation to take violent behaviour into account, and in many cases this violent behaviour may not rise to the level of a criminal offence.

This makes it all the more important that the courts **are able to identify violence, distinguish between it and other problems at the level of the relationship or family**, and have **internal procedures and measures in place**.

Recommendations

- **Adopt specific legislation to ensure that violence against women is considered in civil proceedings in which the woman experiencing violence and her current or former partner or husband who is or has been perpetrating violence against her are parties to the dispute.**
- **Adopt specific guidelines for courts in this regard, compliance with which will be regularly assessed.**
- **Adopt methodologies or tools for courts to distinguish in civil proceedings whether the violence is from a former or current partner or spouse, or whether it is another issue within the relationship or family.**
- **Train judges and magistrates, senior judicial officers, and clerks to use the adopted methodologies and tools.**
- **Ensure specialization of designated judges and magistrates, senior judicial officers, and clerks in intimate partner violence against women, who will be parties to civil cases in which a woman experiencing violence is a litigant.**

Child custody proceedings

Legislative framework, procedures, institutional arrangements, and staffing

Introduction

Women experiencing violence and their children are often parties to court proceedings in which rights and obligations in relation to minor children are decided. This can be either together with proceedings for the dissolution of the marriage of the child's parents or in separate proceedings. In this type of proceedings, the minor child is represented and his or her interests are promoted by an appointed child protection officer, in most cases an employee or an employee of the Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office. **The responsible State institutions must understand that violence and its investigation are not only a matter for criminal proceedings and must also take it into account in custody proceedings.** We know from women's experience that violent men often use these proceedings to regain control of women's and children's lives so that they can continue their violent behaviour towards them. **The courts, the public prosecutor's office and the child protection authorities can prevent violence from continuing in this type of procedure and ensure that women and children are effectively protected from it.**

What did we investigate?

- Whether our legislation obliges courts and other institutions that enter into custody proceedings to consider the experience of women and their children of violence perpetrated by their fathers.
- Do the responsible state institutions, such as the courts, the public prosecutor's office or the child protection authority, have specific guidelines established by which they proceed in custody proceedings so that violence against women by a current or former partner or spouse and/or their children is taken into account?
- Are these specific guidelines evaluated on an ongoing basis?
- Are the relevant professions in the courts and labour offices trained to apply the specific guidelines?

- Do courts have designated judges who specialise in cases of violence against women in custody proceedings, including proceedings for interim measures and enforcement of decisions under the Civil Procedure Code?
- Do the employment offices have such specialised employees in the social protection of children and probation departments?

Key findings

Our legislation **does not specifically require** courts, prosecutors, or child protection authority to specifically **take into account violence against mothers by their fathers** in proceedings relating to the regulation of rights and obligations towards minor children. However, the fundamental basis which the courts are obliged to consider in these proceedings is the **best interest of the child**.

The Family Law defines it as "**the primary consideration in all matters affecting him**." In determining and assessing the best interest of a minor child, particular consideration shall be given to the safety of the child, as well as the safety and stability of the environment in which the child resides, and the threat to the child's development by interference with his or her dignity and the threat to the child's development by interference with the mental, physical and emotional integrity of a person who is close to the child.

The responsible state institutions have no internal procedures for courts, prosecutors, and child protection authorities to follow in custody proceedings, including enforcement proceedings, so that violence against women and their children is taken into account.

At present, **they do not even have any methodologies or other tools** to distinguish whether it is violence by a former or current partner or spouse or another problem within the relationship or family. The Ministry of Justice has indicated that it is preparing methodologies for the courts, but it is questionable whether these will be specifically targeted at violence against women or whether they will apply to victims of domestic violence in general.

The responsible state institutions **do not have dedicated specialists or specialized teams** for cases of violence against women. This specialization would also mean more qualified decision-making in custody proceedings involving a woman experiencing violence and her children.

Recommendations

- **Adopt specific legislation to ensure that violence against women and their children is considered in child custody proceedings, including proceedings for interim measures and their enforcement.**
- **Adopt specific guidelines in this regard for courts, prosecutors, and the child protection departments of the Office of Social and Legal Protection of Children, compliance with which will be regularly evaluated.**
- **Adopt methodologies or tools for institutions such as the courts, prosecutors, and the Office of the Public Prosecutor to distinguish in custody proceedings whether the violence is violence by a former or current partner or spouse, or whether it is another problem within the relationship or family.**
- **To train judges and magistrates, prosecutors and prosecutor's offices and employees of the child protection departments of the Office of Social Protection of Children and Probation to use the adopted methodologies and tools.**

- **Ensure that designated judges, prosecutors and prosecutors and employees of the child protection departments of the Office of Child Welfare and Probation specialize in violence against women by former or current partners or spouses or create specialized teams to address cases of violence or to advocate for the interests of minor children in custody proceedings.**

Risk assessment and application of protective measures

Introduction

In this section, we were interested in how risks related to recurrence of violence, serious threats to the life or health of women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children are assessed in criminal proceedings, and how these risks are taken into account at all stages of the investigation of violence to ensure the safety of the victim and her children, including protective measures and decisions on urgent measures. How the police, prosecution and courts ensure the protection of women and their children throughout the investigation. What measures have been taken to prevent the most serious forms of violence, which are murder or attempted murder. Each such case should be thoroughly analysed in order to identify failures of protection with a view to improving and developing further preventive measures.

What did we investigate?

- What measures have been taken by the police, the prosecution and the courts to ensure that the lethal risk, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence in cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or husband are assessed for the purposes of police intervention and investigation of such cases and to ensure the safety of the victim and her children at all stages of the investigation and in the application of protective measures?
- Does the Presidium of the Police Force have any methodology or tool for assessing and evaluating the particularly serious level of threat to the life and health of a woman, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence by a current or former partner or husband for members of the Slovak Police Force?
- Have members of the Police Force been trained in the use of a methodology or tool for assessing and evaluating a particularly serious threat to a woman's life and health, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence by a current or former partner or husband?

Key findings

We have summarised our key findings in the table below.

Do institutions have measures in place to ensure that the lethal risk, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence are assessed in cases of women experiencing violence in criminal proceedings, and that the safety of the victim and her children is ensured at all stages of the investigation and in the application of protection measures and in the decision-making process on urgent measures?

	Police	Prosecutor's Office	Courts
Internal procedures and measures	Yes	No	No
Evaluation of internal procedures and measures	Yes	-	-
Updating internal procedures and measures	Yes	-	-

How often are they updated	Ongoing	-	-
Risk assessment questionnaire	Yes	-	-
Is the use of the questionnaire binding	Yes	-	-
Have people been trained to use the questionnaire	Yes	-	-

POLICE

When conducting on-duty interventions in cases of domestic violence, police officers use a method for **qualified risk assessment** in the form of the "**Questionnaire for risk assessment**". The questionnaire is **binding on the officers of the district departments of the Police Forces, and they are obliged and to fill it in**. In the event that violence and threat to a person is immediately apparent from the situation (e.g., death threats to a wife with a knife, visible serious injuries to the person threatened, etc.), the questionnaire need not be completed, but the procedure as in the case of an immediate risk of serious threat must be followed." The risk assessment questionnaire **is not intended for the use of criminal investigators of the Police and is not included in the case file**, as it is not a means of evidence within the meaning of the Code of Criminal Procedure or any other law. The procedure for using the "**Questionnaire risk assessment**" is **not evaluated**.

The training of **the police officers of the district police departments** was carried out by the immediate superior by familiarising them with the order of the President of the Police Force on the procedure of police officers, where they were obliged to use a questionnaire to assess the risk in line with the methodological guidelines for the examination of each report filed, which indicates that it may be a suspicion of domestic violence in its entirety. **Investigators** are regularly **retrained by their superiors in the** generally binding legislation and internal regulations on the subject, **including the order of the President of the Police Force** on the Questionnaire for risk assessment.

Another measure to mitigate the threat of recurrence of intimate partner violence against women is the **institution of expulsion from the common home**, which provides the person at risk with immediate protection of his or her life and health, which is also related to the reduction of the risk of the perpetrator committing the act or preventing the perpetrator from continuing his or her violent actions. In order to ensure the safety of the victim and her children, she is provided with **information on the activities of intervention centres** and organisations to help victims of crime and domestic violence, as well as the **phone number of the National Women's Helpline**. If the person at risk is a child, the police officer immediately sends the information to the child protection and social welfare authority.

According to the Ministry of Interior, investigators of the Police assess each case individually in accordance with the legislation in force and take the necessary **measures** in each case **to protect the victim from secondary victimisation and repeated victimisation**.

In order to **ensure a thorough risk assessment and to ensure protection of victims, the duties of the police officer are defined** in cases where an attack on life, health, liberty, or a particularly serious attack on the human dignity of a person can be expected. These duties include, in particular, ascertaining or establishing the identity of the suspect, his/her place of residence or place where the suspect is staying, whether the suspect is in possession of a weapon and whether he/she is in illegal possession of such a weapon, seizing a weapon, ammunition, a weapon licence, a weapon card or a weapon accompanying certificate, ascertaining whether the conditions for banning a person from a common dwelling are met, or

whether the conditions for granting short-term protection to a person pursuant to a special regulation are met.

Police officers' practices in terms of methodology of investigation of individual types of crime are evaluated by the Criminal Police Department of the Presidium of the Police Force within the framework of methodological activities, which, **however, are only of a recommendatory nature** and are **conducted if necessary**. In the event of **identified deficiencies** in specific cases, **these are reported to the relevant superiors for the purpose of taking measures to improve the quality of police officers' work** in the investigation of a specific type of crime. The Police Presidium **continuously monitors and evaluates the use of the institute of the authority to remove a person from a common dwelling**.

The knowledge gained through methodological activities is generalized and used in the creation and updating of methodological recommendations to improve the quality of investigation of specific types of crime and the adoption of measures to protect the victim.

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

According to the General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic (GP SR), the use of the institution of detention may be considered among the measures to ensure the assessment of lethal risk, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence in cases of women experiencing violence **in the event of a threat of recurrence of violence**. However, information on how the threat of recurrence of violence or the assessment of lethal risk is conducted is not apparent from the GP SR's response.

COURTS

Criminal courts have not taken any measures to assess the lethal risk, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence in cases of women experiencing intimate partner violence.

Assessing the level of risk is an important tool for assessing what measures need to be taken to protect women and their children from violence and to prevent the killing of women and their children. It is for these reasons that its implementation should be compulsory for every police officer and should be part of the case file, so that other institutions, such as the prosecution, the courts and the child protection authority, are aware of the level of risk and can take effective measures to protect women and their children.

Recommendations

- **Take measures to ensure that the lethal risk, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence are assessed in cases of women experiencing violence in criminal proceedings and that the safety of the victim and her children is ensured at all stages of the investigation and in the application of protection measures and in the decision-making process on urgent measures.**
- **Ensure that the assessment of the lethal risk, the gravity of the situation and the risk of recurrence of violence in cases of women experiencing violence and their children is compulsory and that information on the level of vulnerability and the risk of recurrence of violence is included in the case file as well as in the information provided to the social welfare and child protection authority.**
- **Ensure that the information and training of police officers includes the information that in the case of a high level of threat to the woman and/or children, banning the perpetrator from the shared home is**

not an appropriate means of protection, but that it is necessary to take the perpetrator into custody and, in the event of his release, to inform the woman of his release without delay.

- Ensure that measures to assess the lethal risk, the gravity of the situation and the threat of recurrence of violence in cases of women experiencing violence in criminal proceedings are taken and to ensure the safety of the victim and her children at all stages of the investigation and in the application of protection measures and decision-making on protective measures are regularly evaluated.
- Ensure thorough training of police officers, prosecutors, judges, and magistrates in criminal proceedings on the use of the measures, methodologies and tools adopted.

Prompt and appropriate institutional response in interventions and investigation

Introduction

It is important that cases of intimate partner violence against women are given high priority in investigation and judicial proceedings, that the responsible institutions intervene swiftly, hold the perpetrators of such violence accountable and, as far as possible, avoid aggravating any harm experienced by women and their children during investigation and judicial proceedings, and provide them with adequate and immediate protection.

What did we investigate?

- What measures have been taken to ensure that the police respond promptly and appropriately to intervene in and investigate cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or husband, including by providing adequate and immediate protection for women experiencing violence and their children?
- What measures have been taken to ensure that the prosecution responds promptly and appropriately in investigating cases of intimate partner violence against women, including providing sufficient and immediate protection for women experiencing violence and their children?
- What measures have been taken to ensure that the courts respond promptly and appropriately in deciding cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or spouse, including by providing sufficient and immediate protection for women experiencing violence and their children?
- In how many cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or husband have the police intervened? Please indicate the number of cases for 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Key findings

We have summarized our findings in the following table.

Do institutions have measures in place to ensure that in cases of violence against women by a former or current partner or spouse. respond promptly and appropriately in interventions and investigations, including providing adequate and immediate protection for women and their children?

	Police	Prosecutor's Office	Courts
Internal procedures and measures	Yes	No	No
Evaluation of internal procedures and measures	Yes	-	-

Updating internal procedures and measures	Yes	-	-
Collecting and evaluating data on the number of cases in which they have intervened	No	-	-

POLICE

Measures taken by the police to respond swiftly and appropriately in interventions and investigation in cases of intimate partner violence and domestic violence against women, including the provision of adequate and immediate protection for women and their children, are:

- **Police officers of the basic units of the Police** are obliged to register all reports, findings and observations concerning domestic violence and **are obliged to be sent to check every report, even repeated ones.**
- On the basis of the information obtained on receipt of the notification, **vetting is performed in the information systems of the police in relation to the rapist.**
- Their **supervisors monitor the data in question on a daily basis.**
- In the event of discovering that a new event has occurred in the territorial district of the police unit, with the attribute "domestic disagreements", **they shall immediately inform their subordinate police officers about this fact in order to take measures to increase supervision, whether a similar event is repeated.**
- **Supervisors' activity in criminal cases with an element of domestic violence has intensified.** The supervisor conducts an ongoing review of criminal domestic violence case files no later than thirty calendar days after the last review.
- **Introduced the obligation for law enforcement authorities to mark investigation files with the label 'Domestic violence'** in order to ensure the administrative importance of these files.
- When ordering prison sentence, the introduction of an **information obligation for the court to inform the competent institution of the fact that domestic violence is involved, as well as of the victim.** This information is important for the subsequent informing of the police by the members of the Prison and Court Guard Corps about **the upcoming release of the perpetrator of domestic violence from the prison sentence.** The police are thus able, if necessary, to take timely measures to protect persons at risk in the event of the release of such an offender.
- **The Police Force has also developed a Methodology of the Police Procedure in Cases of Domestic Violence, which is of a recommendatory nature.**
- When taking measures to protect victims of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as other victims, **police investigators also apply the provisions of Victims of Crime Act.**

The procedures of police officers conducting investigation in terms of compliance with the relevant substantive and procedural legal norms as well as internal regulations are evaluated by the Criminal Police Department of the Police Presidium within the framework of methodological activities, which, **however, have only a recommendatory character** and are **conducted as necessary.** In the event of **deficiencies detected** in specific cases, **these are reported to the relevant superiors for the purpose of taking measures to improve the quality of police interventions.**

The knowledge gained through methodological activities is generalised and used in the creation and updating of methodological recommendations to improve the quality of investigation of this type of crime and the adoption of measures for the protection of the victim.

The Police Force does not keep and evaluate in the crime statistics system the **number of cases of** intimate partner violence against women and domestic violence in which the **police intervened**, and therefore it is not clear how the Presidium of the Police Force or the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic evaluates whether the police response in cases of intimate partner violence against women and domestic violence was prompt and adequate in intervening in and investigating these cases.

PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

The General Prosecutors Office **did not provide us with an answer to the question of whether it has taken measures to ensure that the prosecutor's office responds promptly and appropriately** when investigating cases of violence against women by a former or current partner or spouse, including providing sufficient and immediate protection to women experiencing violence and their children.

COURTS

In criminal proceedings, the courts have not taken any measures beyond the general rules to ensure that in cases of violence against women by a former or current partner or spouse, they react promptly and appropriately when deciding these cases.

Recommendations

- **Take measures to ensure that cases of violence against women by a former or current partner or spouse are given high priority in investigation and court proceedings, that the police, prosecutors and courts respond swiftly, hold perpetrators of such violence accountable and, as far as possible, avoid aggravating any harm experienced by women and their children during investigations and court proceedings, and provide them with adequate and immediate protection.**
- **Ensure regular and systematic evaluation of the use of these measures in police, prosecution, and court practice.**
- **Ensure thorough training of police officers, prosecutors, judges, and magistrates in criminal proceedings on the use of the measures, methodologies and tools adopted.**
- **Ensure the specialisation of designated police officers, prosecutors, judges, and magistrates on intimate partner violence against women to investigate cases of violence in criminal proceedings where the woman experiencing violence, or her children are parties to the dispute.**
- **Create specialised police teams for cases of violence against women by former or current partners or husbands and domestic violence.**

Extraordinary measures in situations of imminent danger

Legislative framework, procedures, institutional measures, and administrative data

Introduction

The State is also obliged to protect women and their children in situations of imminent violence by adopting protective and restraining measures in its legislation. These measures must be accessible to women experiencing

violence and their children. In Slovak legislation, such a measure is the **power of the police to remove a violent person from a shared house, flat or other premises**. If these measures are effectively applied by the police, the women and their children remain at home and it is the violent person who is obliged to leave the house, flat or other premises.

What did we investigate?

- What restraining and protective measures are available to women experiencing violence and their children under Slovak legislation?
- What are the police procedures in relation to the removing a violent person from the shared home in practice?
- What administrative data does the Ministry of the Interior collect?

Key findings

Under the existing legislation, **a police officer is entitled to remove from a common dwelling a person** who, on the basis of the facts established, may be expected to commit an attack on the life, health, liberty, or dignity of another person, in particular in view of previous such attacks.

During the removal from the common dwelling, **the person removed is obliged not to approach the person at risk of violence at a distance of less than 50 metres**.

The removal from the shared home **ends 14 days after the removal**. If, during the period of removal, the person threatened files an application for an urgent measure with the competent court, **the period of removal shall be extended until the court's decision on the application becomes enforceable**.

The police are legally obliged to **check compliance with** removal from a shared dwelling.

The police officer is obliged to **instruct** the woman experiencing intimate partner violence as a person at risk on the possibility of filing a petition for urgent measures and to provide her with **information on victim assistance organisations and intervention centres, including information on the services they provide and their contact details**.

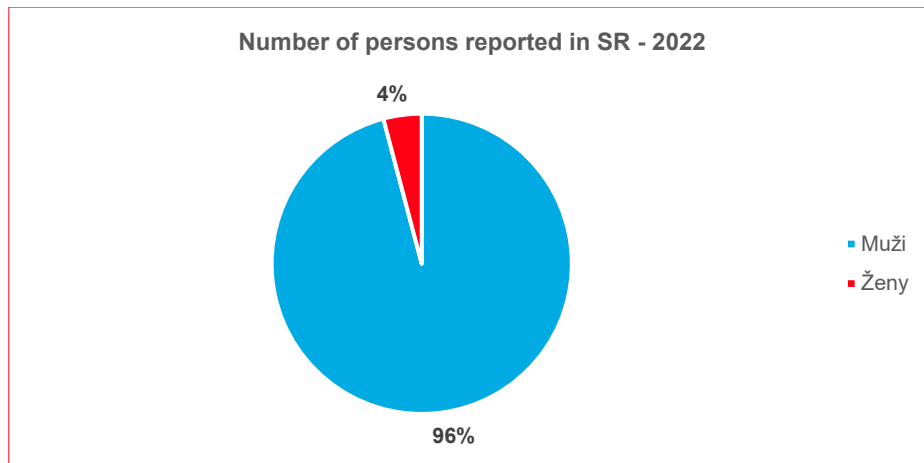
Within **24 hours of the removal**, the police officer shall send a copy of the removal record electronically to the relevant intervention centre. If a child lives in the shared accommodation or if the child is a person at risk, a copy of the record shall also be sent electronically to **the child protection authority within 24 hours**.

Within 72 hours of the receipt of the official report by the police, **the Intervention Centre** shall offer the victim of a crime of domestic violence (including a woman experiencing intimate partner violence) the **provision of crisis intervention and professional assistance, including the drafting of a motion for a protective order**.

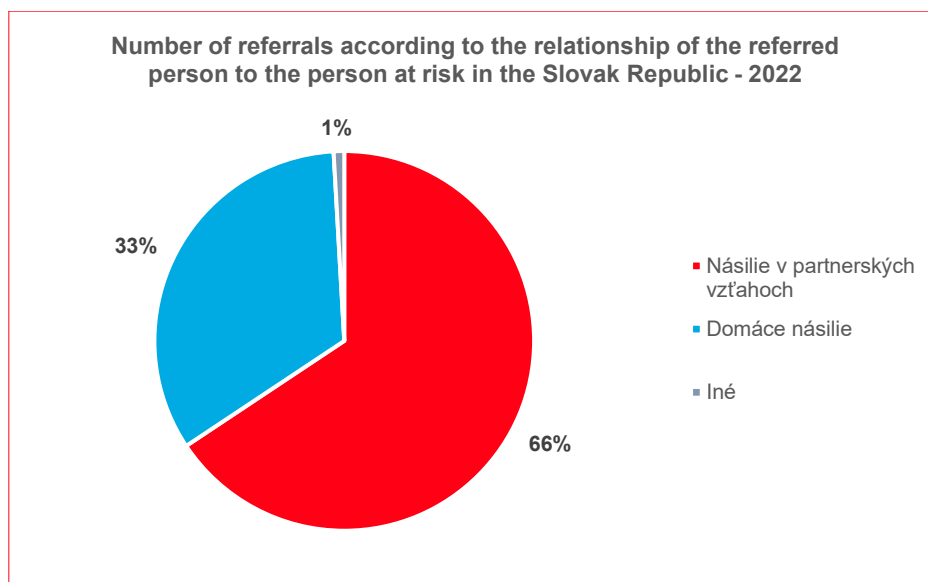
We asked the Ministry of the Interior to provide us with administrative data on the number of expulsions in cases of violence against women. The Ministry stated that it **did not have the requested information in the requested data structure**. **There is no specific monitoring of whether a man removed from shared home has committed violence against a woman**. Nor does the Ministry specifically record the number of cases of violation of the removal by the removed person or the sanctions imposed for this.

However, the Presidium of the Police Force records statistics on the number of removals from shared home by gender, which show that in 2021 the number of cases of removal of a person from a shared home in Slovakia was 961 persons and in 2022, it was 997 persons.

Of the 997 persons removed from a shared home in 2022, 956 were reported to be male and forty-one were reported to be female. Males accounted for 96% of all persons reported.

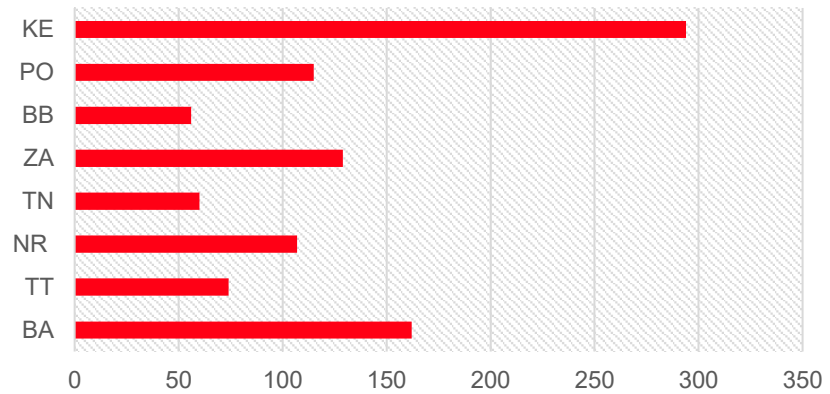


Also, the Presidium of the Police Force records statistical data on the number of removals of persons from a shared home according to the relationship between the person removed from shared home and the person at risk. It shows that **removal due to violence in partner relationships accounted for 66% of the total number of all removal orders.**



The highest number of persons reported by the police in 2022 was in the Košice Region, 294 persons. The fewest persons were reported by the police in the Banská Bystrica Region, fifty-six persons.

Number of cases of removal of a person from a common home by county in 2022



■ Number of cases of eviction of a person from a common dwelling by county in 2022

	BA	TT	NR	TN	ZA	BB	PO	KE
	162	74	107	60	129	56	115	294

Recommendations

- Ensure that the police have consistent procedures for reporting domestic violence specifically targeting women experiencing violence from a former or current partner or husband.
- Provide disaggregated administrative data on the number of removals of persons from shared home, violations of removal orders and sanctions imposed specifically in relation to incidents of intimate partner violence against women.

Restraining and protective measures

Legislative framework, procedures, institutional measures, and administrative data

Introduction

The protection of women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children has the potential to be ensured by **urgent measures issued on application by the courts in civil proceedings**. The State has a duty to ensure that these are enshrined in national legislation and that they are **effectively applied in practice** by the courts to provide protection for women and their children from a violent spouse/partner.

What did we investigate?

- What restraining and protective measures does our legislation provide for?
- How are they implemented by the courts in practice, including monitoring compliance ?
- What administrative data does the Ministry of Justice collect in this area?

Key findings

Our legislation provides for several types of restraining and protective measures which a woman may seek to have ordered in a civil court. The courts may order a violent person, in particular, to:

- not temporarily enter the house or flat in which the person in relation to whom the person is reasonably suspected of violence is living;
- has not entered or has only limited access to the house or apartment, workplace, or other place where the person whose physical integrity or mental integrity is threatened by his or her actions resides, stays, or regularly visits;
- has not, in writing, by telephone, electronic communication or other means, wholly or partially, contacted a person whose physical integrity or mental integrity may be compromised by such conduct;
- does not approach, or only approaches in a restricted manner, within a specified distance, a person whose physical integrity or mental integrity may be endangered by his or her actions.

The court shall decide on the application for a restraining or protective order within **30 days** of receipt of the application. The court shall decide on the application for an injunction to prohibit entry into the flat/house in which the person in relation to whom the person is reasonably suspected of violence resides within **24 hours** of receipt of the application.

Neither of the restraining and protective measures specifically concerns only women experiencing violence in partner relationships. However, **in many cases** they are the **only effective legal means of protecting them from a violent current or former spouse or partner.** If a violent person is removed from a shared home by the police and the intervention centre is informed of the removal, it can provide the woman with expert legal assistance in drawing up a petition for restraining or protective measure to the relevant court, as well as psychological assistance and counselling.

The court may order that **compliance with the restraining or protective order be checked by technical means of control.** In practice, however, this possibility is more likely to be used in criminal proceedings.

The police shall also, at the request of the person at risk in cases where the violent person has been removed from the shared home, ensure compliance with the restriction imposed by a restraining order of the court.

The Ministry of Justice **does not record statistics specifically in relation to cases of violence against women by current or former partners or husbands on the number of applications for protective or restraining orders, the number of protective or restraining orders issued, the number of cases in which the protective or restraining orders ordered have been violated, nor on the sanctions imposed in these cases, their type and number in relation to the prohibition of access to the house/apartment and the restraining order.**

Recommendations

- **Ensure effective implementation of the legislation in cases where urgent measures are ordered by the courts.**
- **Ensure close monitoring of the interim measures ordered by both the courts and the police, including ordering their technical control.**
- **Introduce indicators in the statistical and record-keeping systems to evaluate the number of proposals for urgent measures in cases of intimate partner violence against women and domestic**

violence, the number of urgent measures issued, the number of cases where urgent measures ordered have been obstructed and the sanctions imposed in these cases.

Ex officio and ex parte proceedings

Introduction

Part of ensuring effective protection of women experiencing violence and their children by the police, courts and prosecutors in criminal proceedings is that investigations into cases of violence should be **initiated** ex officio, i.e., **without a criminal complaint being filed**, and that criminal proceedings can continue **without the victim joining them** (ex parte).

What did we investigate?

- Does our legislation allow for the initiation of criminal proceedings ex officio without filing a criminal complaint?
- Is it possible under our legislation to proceed with criminal proceedings without the victim joining in?
- Does the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic collect administrative data on the number of such cases?

Key findings

Law enforcement authorities and courts **act ex officio**. Thus, in cases of violence against women, the police, the prosecutor's office, and the courts are **obliged to act even in cases where no criminal complaint has been filed**. This applies to all crimes related to violence against women. In practice, however, it is common for the police to file a criminal complaint when questioning a woman experiencing violence.

In cases of violence against women, criminal proceedings may **continue without the victim's consent**, and law enforcement authorities are obliged to investigate these cases even if the victim does not consent to prosecution and to procure evidence.

The Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic **does not record the number of cases in which criminal prosecution has been initiated** in cases of violence against women by a current or former partner or husband ex officio without the victim filing a criminal complaint.

Recommendations

- **Collect and evaluate data on the number of cases where an ex officio investigation has been ordered and the offences for which it has been conducted in cases of partner violence against women.**

NGO support and assistance in investigation and court proceedings

Introduction

Women experiencing violence and their children are often parties to criminal investigations or court proceedings that are conducted to investigate violence against them and/or their children. The State is obliged by law to ensure that they receive adequate support and assistance in these proceedings.

What did we investigate?

- Under our legislation, what support and assistance can be provided to women experiencing violence in investigation or court proceedings by NGOs, counsellors, or other civil society actors?

Key findings

In criminal proceedings, women experiencing violence as victims may be represented by **an attorney**. The proxy may also be an **authorised representative of a victim support organisation**. A woman experiencing violence as a victim also has the right to be accompanied by a **confidant** during criminal proceedings.

Under the conditions set out in the Victims of Crime Act, women experiencing violence and their children have the right to legal assistance from a victim support organisation called an **intervention centre**. The period of free legal aid is limited to 90 days.

Legal aid can also be provided by **the Legal Aid Centre**, which, if a woman meets the conditions, can represent, or appoint a lawyer or advocate to represent her in both civil and custody proceedings.

Women's organisations also provide free legal assistance to women experiencing violence and their children through their cooperating advocates or lawyers. **However, there is no comprehensive specific legislation that would ensure** long-term provision of legal aid by women's organisations providing support and assistance (including legal aid) to women experiencing violence at the hands of their current or former spouse or partner **on a long-term and sustainable basis**.

Recommendations

- **Adopt specific legislation to ensure the long-term provision of legal aid by women's organisations providing support and assistance (including legal aid) to women experiencing violence at the hands of their current or former spouse or partner on a long-term and sustainable basis.**
- **Extend the duration of legal aid provided by intervention centres to women experiencing intimate partner violence and victims of domestic violence and provide funding for it.**
- **Ensure the provision of legal assistance to women experiencing violence and their children, including in civil and custody proceedings, whether through intervention centres or Legal Aid Centres.**

Legislative and other measures to protect the rights and interests of women victims

Introduction

The State has a positive obligation under international law, through its legislation and other measures, to ensure that the rights and interests of women victims are protected at all stages of the investigation and judicial proceedings. Only in this way can it ensure effective access to justice for women and their children.

What did we investigate?

- What legislative and other measures are in place to protect the rights and interests of women victims at all stages of investigations and court proceedings in our legislation?

Key findings

Our legislation **grants women experiencing violence and their children certain procedural rights** to ensure their protection during criminal investigations and court proceedings. These are procedural rights that **all persons have by virtue of a certain procedural status in these proceedings**, so they are **not specifically procedural rights granted to women experiencing violence by a current/former spouse or partner and their children**.

In civil and juvenile court proceedings, women experiencing violence and their children do not have specific rights granted to them by law providing protection of their rights and interests. Depending on the type of proceedings, they have general procedural rights and obligations, whether as a litigant in civil litigation or as a party in civil non-litigation proceedings.

Under the Victims of Crime Act, women experiencing violence as particularly vulnerable victims have the right to professional assistance, which consists, inter alia, of legal assistance to exercise their rights under the Victims of Crime Act, but also to **exercise their rights as victims or witnesses in criminal proceedings**. As part of the right of a woman experiencing violence to be **protected from secondary victimisation or re-victimisation**, law enforcement authorities and the courts should act in such a way that their actions do not cause secondary victimisation of the woman and her family members and take effective measures to prevent re-victimisation.

In practice, it is still **not common for law enforcement agencies and courts (including civil and juvenile courts) to take specific measures to prevent the victimization of women experiencing violence and women's contact with perpetrators during hearings or trials**.

Recommendations

- **Adopt specific and effective measures by the police, courts, and prosecutors to protect women from secondary or repeated victimisation, such as measures to prevent women and/or children from coming into contact with the perpetrator.**
- **Increase the number of special interrogation rooms for women experiencing intimate partner violence and their children in police, prosecution, and court buildings.**
- **Take targeted measures to increase women's safety during hearings and interrogations and to eliminate their contact with the perpetrator in police, court, and prosecution buildings.**

- **Record interrogations of women and their children by technical devices so that they do not have to be repeated at later stages of the proceedings.**
- **Conduct interrogations of women and their children in courts via video conferencing equipment to prevent their contact with the perpetrator in the courtroom.**

Available protection for women's children in court proceedings

Introduction

Women experiencing violence at the hands of their current or former husband or partner often have children who usually witness or directly experience violence against their mothers. The State has a duty to provide protection for these children in criminal and other legal proceedings.

What did we investigate?

- What protection is available in proceedings for children of women who witness or directly experience violence?

Key findings

There is no legislation providing protection specifically for children of women experiencing intimate partner violence in Slovakia. Protection for children of women who witness or directly experience violence is provided only through the **general provisions** of the Criminal Procedure Code, depending on the procedural status of the child in the proceedings, or results from the Victims of Crime Act. In child custody proceedings, children as witnesses of violence do not have a specific procedural status; their interests in the proceedings are promoted by a child protection officer, usually a worker the child protection authority.

Recommendations

- **Adopt legislation providing protection specifically for children of women experiencing intimate partner violence as witnesses of violence and defining the term "child witness of violence against women".**
- **In criminal and other judicial proceedings, consider the experience of children as witnesses of intimate partner violence against women and provide them with effective protection to promote their interests and to prevent their secondary and repeated victimisation.**

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