



# Exchange of good practices on gender equality

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

Summary Report

ISTITUTO  
PER LA  
RICERCA  
SOCIALE **irs**

**ösb** CONSULTING™

*The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.*

Justice

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

*This programme is implemented by the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in these fields.*

*The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.*

*For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>*

# Measures to fight violence against women

## Summary of the exchange seminar

The exchange of good practices held in Madrid, Spain on the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> April 2013 discussed effective victim support services and treatment programmes for perpetrators of violence against women, based on practices developed in Spain and Ireland. Representatives of the European Commission and of 16 other EU countries participated in the debate.

### 1. The good practices of the host country and the associated country

#### Spain

Spain demonstrates a strong commitment to the eradication of gender violence and this is reflected in a series of measures over the past 20 years based on prevention, protection and assistance, backed up by regulatory actions where necessary. This is based around six 'axes' of action, summarised as follows:

1. Promote the breach of silence and accomplice in abuse by women, their families, their environment and society in general;
2. Provide personalised assistance to women suffering violence and the children under their care;
3. Use on-line resources to fight gender-based violence with resources and public and private systems to combat violence as well as to care for women and children who suffer;
4. Deepen scientific knowledge and see into the size and dimensions of violence against women;
5. Specifically address the needs of particularly vulnerable groups including minors, disabled women, rural women, elderly women, immigrants and women suffering from addictive disorders;
6. Maximise the visibility and the intolerability of all forms of violence against women including female genital mutilation, human trafficking for sexual exploitation, forced marriages and sexual violence.

These key axes recognise the extent of the problem and the need to develop national and local policies and practices but which are only possible through collaboration between the key players. This approach has led to more women coming forward as victims, which is a key step in breaking the silence inherent in the problem. This has further led to more women being able to escape from their situation and more perpetrators of violence being prosecuted.

A new law introduced in 2004, Organic Act 1 – Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence, represented a particularly important step in helping address the problem. It provided for a range of practical measures (summarised below) and the creation of special courts for dealing with cases involving violence against women. In 2011 national legislation was aligned with the EU guidelines

which included the provision of free legal assistance for victims. In all this, Spain has recognised the need to involve all the different stakeholders since collaboration is essential for effective support. However, it also recognises that all cases have to be assessed individually and so require customised support and any effective system needs to recognise this.

The following four specific measures to protect victims of violence against women were presented. They focused on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) which has the advantages of offering wide coverage, rapid response and discretion where needed:

- *Web resource for support and prevention* – provides up-to-date information in one place covering: 1) all state, regional, or local government units or centres offering information and advice; 2) all registered women's associations that are involved (to varying degrees) in prevention of violence; 3) all police and civil guard stations, as well as special units for families; 4) all courts that deal with gender violence; 5) many public or private actors who offer legal advice or advocacy, either paid or free; and 6) NGOs and others that facilitate support for victims or are involved in prevention.
- *A 24-hour helpline* using an easily accessed number (016) – this is a dedicated helpline for victims of violence providing information and advice on a national and unified basis. It is staffed 24/7 by specialist female advisers and can offer resources covering employment support, social services, and financial support for legal advice. The widest accessibility as possible is guaranteed through a special platform for persons with hearing or speech difficulties and the support can be accessed through mobile phones, PDA or text phones in addition to landlines.
- *Telephone service for care and protection of victims (ATENPRO)* – using mobile phone and GPS technology, specially adapted handsets are made available to the most vulnerable victims of violence to enable instant access to support via a dedicated emergency button on the phone. The call enables both case information being available immediately and the location of the caller identified, with appropriate response falling into one of three levels of action ranging from a verbal response to the activation of services such as the police or social services.
- *Telematic tracking system* to monitor restraining orders - this involves the use of two GPS devices, the first being an electronic bracelet worn by the perpetrator of the violence and the second a device similar to a mobile phone. Both continually broadcast the location of the person in relation to the distance set by the restraining order and any contravention is followed up by a warning to the victim and if necessary the mobilisation of the police for protection.

All four measures have been operating for some time and have been subjected to various levels of evaluation. Each has its relative strengths and weaknesses but as a package of measures it is considered to offer an effective support framework for women victims of violence in most situations.

## Ireland

In 2007 the Irish Government set up *The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence* in response to a need for a 'whole government' approach to tackling the problem of violence against women. This body was given the tasks of developing awareness-raising strategies, intervention strategies in line with best international practice, perpetrator intervention programmes, and legislative and policy changes. Subsequently these developments have been underpinned by a National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence covering the period 2010-2014, determined in full consultation with the key stakeholders that sets out key high-level goals and the proposed actions to achieve them. The event focused in detail on one of these objectives, that addressing the behaviour of perpetrators.

The Irish approach to Perpetrator Intervention Programmes principally involves three key actions focused on strengthening measures to:

- Manage the risks posed by perpetrators;
- Deal with sexual violence perpetrators;
- Deal with domestic violence perpetrators.

The rationale for focusing on the perpetrators is based on recognition that reducing violent and controlling behaviour of men through education and awareness-raising provides a better long-term solution to stopping recidivism than custodial sentencing.

The Perpetrator Intervention Programmes operate through the following actions:

- Assess men who are referred and conduct a thorough risk assessment;
- Do one-to-one work with them to prepare them for group work;
- Conduct fixed or rolling group work programmes;
- Work with the partners or ex-partners of the men to improve their safety.

The partner or ex-partner contact involves a range of activities including an initial meeting, weekly contact, group work, reporting and a contract with terms and conditions being agreed.

In implementing and monitoring the approach it is acknowledged that male perpetrators of violence against women are heterogeneous and so no single approach will work with all. Nevertheless some useful typologies have been developed that allows the identification of those most likely to benefit from programmes such as those aimed at education and awareness-raising. Furthermore, by reducing future instances of violence savings can be made on the costs of health care, police time and the costs of court cases, which help make the cost of the programme (currently around Euro 650,000 per annum) appear excellent value for money.

However, the primary aim is to stop abuse occurring in the first place; the second aim is to reduce the incidence of further victimisation; and the third aim is to reduce future recidivism. The approach is relatively new but already has had some success with research showing that most men on the programme do reduce their violent behaviour and women feel less threatened. However, it was stressed that as a therapeutic measure it is not a substitute for interventions aimed at keeping women

and children safe. For the future efforts are being made to improve the data with random assignment and control groups, to feed the findings from the data into revising programmes and to further integrate the approach into the system involving the police, health, social services, the judiciary and others.

## 2. The activities of the Council of Europe in combating violence against women

A presentation of the Council of Europe's *Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (known as the Istanbul Convention<sup>1</sup>) explained the 'holistic' approach taken by it. This convention has taken two years to develop and agree and is the first treaty in Europe setting out legally binding measures to combat violence against women. It rests on the four principles of prevention, protection, integrated policy, and prosecution and is wide-ranging in its inclusion of all forms of violence against women.

Underpinning the requirements of the Convention are real efforts to ensure that countries take appropriate steps to ensure the safety of women victims and their children. In achieving this it calls for a coordinated response from the key players, with the tenet of 'due diligence' applying to them all. This requires that those providing support and protection are adequately trained so that a professional and effective service can be provided.

The Convention is currently in the process of ratification by Member States.

## 3. European Institute for Gender Equality

The work of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in the field of violence against women was presented. The work of the EIGE includes several studies focusing on different aspects of violence against women (including rape, sexual assault, abuse, coercion and harassment), mapping resources and materials available for professionals to use, materials for victims of abuse, and awareness-raising campaigns and the actors involved.

The EIGE database includes around 750 entries on methods and tools for tackling sexual violence plus around 150 resource links. Secondly there is development and testing of the methodology for identifying good practice and this feeds into the third category, offering examples of good practice which currently has 15 spread across the three areas of gender training, awareness-raising, and victim support services.

The EIGE work also the report on the 'Review of the implementation of BPfA in the EU Member States: Violence against women victim support'<sup>2</sup> and the 'Study on international activities in the field of data collection on gender-based violence across the EU' which is due to be published in the summer of 2013. Recent details of the work of the EIGE can be found in the Resource and Documentation Centre<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?CL=ENG&NT=210>

<sup>2</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/content/document/violence-against-women-victim-support-main-findings>

<sup>3</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/content/rdc>

#### 4. The situation in the participating countries

The approaches taken towards combating violence against women in the other 16 countries participating in the event varied and were conditioned by a range of influences, as summarised below.

In **Belgium** it was felt to be important to understand the institutional context where the different levels of government have their own responsibilities. The Federal Government, for example, is in overall charge of the justice system and the police force and so is central to tackling the perpetrators of violence and implementing legislation in support of victims. The regional authorities have responsibility for preventative measures in health and social services, for example, and supporting victims financially and the French, Dutch and German speaking communities have responsibility for awareness-raising and the training of educators. This culminated in an action plan covering the period 2010-14 with the main aims of developing knowledge and improving understanding of violence between partners, informing and heightening public awareness, preventing and detecting violence, assisting victims and giving support to perpetrators, and ensuring an appropriate response from the policy and judiciary.

This emphasis on the three different entities means that while there are IT based support measures and perpetrator programmes available, they are fragmented and not available across the whole country, though there are plans to introduce a national website available in French and Dutch. In French-speaking Wallonia and in Brussels, for example, currently there is a call line for those affected by domestic violence but this does not operate 24/7, though there are some localised services that do. Similarly, while perpetrator programmes do exist, they tend to be very localised such as the Time Out project in Antwerp which has been operating since 2003 and brings together different agencies to help adult offenders in cases of gender violence.

Prioritising the fight against violence towards women is proving difficult in countries like **Croatia** where it has to compete for scarce resource with other demands. Furthermore, there has been a strong campaign led by a consortium of organisations opposing measures in schools to inform children through health education provision on gender equality and responsible sexual behaviour. However, this has not prevented a growing public awareness of the problem of violence against women and there are many help lines, counselling centres and shelters available, all of which are contactable by telephone and each has its own website. Furthermore, email contact is also available for those users without access to support locally. More recently, one of the most successful uses of ICT has been in the 'Safe Zone'. This website was launched in 2012 and consolidates all the information relevant to combating violence against women. The law on Protection against Domestic Violence of 2003 included provision for the mandatory psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of violence and to service this requirement, around 120 professionals are now trained to deliver the service. However, as the system has proved effective, so too has the demands on it but this has not been met with adequate funding from government.

An example of a comprehensive legislative framework to combat violence in the family can be found in **Cyprus**, which clearly defines the coverage of the law. However, it is not without its critics who, in particular cite the focus on family situations and not specifically involving women (though highlighted as a potentially vulnerable group alongside children, the disabled and migrants, for example) which

is thought to dilute its effectiveness. There is also some questions about the adequacy of support services for women victims of violence, in particular found in the lack of experience, training and interagency cooperation that are needed for an effective system, but also in facilities (for example there is only one shelter for women and children with a very limited capacity). The principal NGO in providing support, the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence (SPAVO) runs a number of intervention programmes that support victims, including the only helpline for victims of family violence and the only shelter. It is also active in perpetrator programmes running two, the first of which is aimed at men with violent behaviour and the second at women victims, aiming to empower them to make and take the right decisions for themselves and their relationship. However, these measures are limited in scope and relatively weak in terms of the justice system where most cases do not develop into criminal prosecution. Furthermore, all such developments are hampered by inadequate funding.

A key feature of the approach in the **Czech Republic** is the somewhat fragmented range of measures, each aimed at particular aspects of the problem, though domestic violence is the most developed in terms of awareness, prevention and the support for victims. A new act on domestic violence was introduced in 2007 and this included giving powers to the police to remove the perpetrator for a fixed period of time which can be extended by the courts. This was followed by the establishment of a dedicated committee for the prevention of domestic violence which led to the development of a National Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic Violence covering the period 2011-2014, though there has been criticism of its gender-blind stance. Most of the prevention and support services are carried out by NGOs, but over the past few years there has been a more even spread of resources throughout the country including regional intervention centres housing different support services. There is also a dedicated helpline for women affected by violence but it does not operate 24/7 and calls are charged for.

The success of policies towards awareness-raising and the reporting of violence against women in **Estonia** has meant that the legal and support services have been put under pressure to cope with an increasing workload. National action plans and strategies exist for tackling family violence and domestic violence (the latter also being part of the Guidelines for Development of Criminal Policy 2018) and the current Development Plan for Reducing Violence for Years 2011-2014 is reviewed annually. The Ministry of Justice is the overarching government department dealing with these issues, though there is a high degree of collaboration with other departments and agencies. However, there is no comprehensive web-based assistance available at present and helpline assistance is focused on that provided by the Estonian Women's Shelters Union which responds to women suffering physical, emotional, economic or sexual abuse.

In **France**, specific legislation aimed at combating violence against women has a long history dating back to the 1970s but it was following extensive research in 2000 that the extent of the problem became transparent and this encouraged a policy response. This led to the government instituting a three-year plan (since 2005) to combat violence against women that diagnosed the extent of the problem in local areas and marshalled resources to deal with it. The law of 2010 was another landmark in terms of recognising and supporting the fight against violence to women and led to the introduction of measures such as emergency phones, a helpline and educative material for use in schools and other locations. In addition protection orders and electronic tagging devices have been used to protect victims from the perpetrator of the violence. Overall, the measures outlined in the 2010 law are



gradually being introduced, though the lack of adequate funding appears to be slowing down the spread across the country.

In the **FYR of Macedonia** there are established resources for the support and prevention of violence against women, including a web-based advice system, a 24 hour helpline and a telephone service for the care and protection of victims. However none of these are funded by government, with resources to run them coming from the NGOs themselves, supplemented in some case by international donor funds. This is not to suggest a lack of interest or action on the part of government, though with funds scarce there has been little money put into these activities. As a result they are underdeveloped, for example only being available in Macedonian and not accessible for those with speech or hearing impediments. Also, little is done to either prevent further violence by the perpetrator through the use of restraining orders and electronic tagging, or in rehabilitating offenders through education and support programmes.

By contrast, **Germany** has recognised the issue of violence against women for over 35 years and has had the resources to develop a raft of policies to help prevent and deal with it. Much of this activity is focused on the regional governments and the NGOs operating in the field since the Federal Government does not normally directly fund or manage services for either victims or perpetrators, though has been very active in researching the matter, publishing guidelines on effective measures, and encouraging multi-agency cooperation. Support services such as 24 hour help lines have been operating regionally for some time, but in March 2013 there was for the first time an intervention from the Federal Government establishing in law (with appropriate funding) a national help line for women affected by violence. Another main part of policy includes police bans and protective orders whereby perpetrators can be removed from the scene and prevented returning through temporary restraining orders which can be extended through the courts. There are also perpetrator programmes offering a range of measures to educate offenders and reduce recidivism.

Like many countries, in **Greece** gender equality is a constitutionally protected right but this does not necessarily guarantee equality in practice. Furthermore, the existing policy infrastructure is under pressure from budget cuts in this period of austerity. From 2006 there have been a series of specific measures aimed at combating gender violence beginning with the Family Violence Act of that year and this enabled the legal recognition of specific forms of violence against women such as marital rape. However, other provisions such as rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of violence have not been implemented. Similar lack of implementation surrounds the National Programme for the Prevention and Combating Violence against Women 2009-2013 which, despite setting out a comprehensive plan covering such areas as legislation, support services, preventative action and training of the key players, has for the most part remained in the planning stage. However, a 24 hour helpline for victims of gender violence is available, though this is not multilingual (though is available in English as well as Greek) and there is no special provision for those with disabilities. Web-based information is also available, though is not easy to find even using a search engine and in any case, is of limited use because many victims do not have internet access.

Some aspects of violence against women in **Latvia** are comprehensively covered by the legal framework, in particular domestic violence. In addition, the Ministry of Welfare has presented a three-year plan for enforcing gender equality that focuses more on gender roles and stereotypes and discrimination in the labour market.

However, in terms of actual provisions to help women in violent situations, the country is lacking. There is no national helpline, no women's shelters and no dedicated rape crisis centres, for example. There are plans to introduce social rehabilitation programmes for victims of violence and for the perpetrators, but these have been postponed due to financial constraints and so are unlikely to be implemented until 2015 at the earliest.

In contrast, **Norway** has a long history of addressing gender-based violence, with the first National Action Plan launched as far back as 1983. This has led to a highly developed set of measures in place to assist those women subject to violence, though the incidence is relatively low and in part attributed to the country's long tradition of social and economic equality and a highly developed (and adequately funded) welfare state. Nevertheless, attention to gender-based violence has increased and has led to a range of national and local institutions, NGOs and others working in the field, including the provision of 46 crisis centres, 22 centres against incest and sexual assault, and several treatment programmes addressing the rehabilitation of the perpetrators of violence. From 2010 all local communities must provide a helpline for victims of violence open 24/7 and more recently the government has taken the decision to institute a new website resource that will overcome some of the disparity in the current provision. Mobile violence alarms have been available since 2004 and electronic tagging of perpetrators is used, though only as part of sentencing. However, in 2013 the government issued a White Paper on gender-based violence that acknowledged that even in the most favourable circumstances, violence against women persists.

Relevant legislation on preventing domestic violence became effective in **Poland** in 2005 and subsequently amended in 2010 to include enhanced protection for victims, for example. This legal framework underpins a National Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence 2006-2016 which is currently being reviewed to form a programme for 2013-2020. Responsibility for implementation of the measures is dispersed among state agencies and municipalities (local and regional) with funding partly from central government and partly from local sources. However, the level of funding is too little for the scale of the task and so even though there are measures in place (including help for perpetrators), the use of ICT to assist victims of violence is relatively underdeveloped.

In **Romania** the first law to directly address family violence appeared in 2003, though this does not explicitly isolate violence against women. However, subsequent years have seen greater transparency in the extent of the problem (largely through surveys) and were to some extent set out in the 2012 National Strategy to Prevent and Fight the Phenomenon of Family Violence. Support services have increased as a result, with NGOs providing information centres and raising awareness, and a combination of public institutions and private sector or NGOs providing a network of shelters and victim support centres. However, the use of ICT in providing support is rather limited and recent financial constraints have affected the whole social protection system so it is unlikely that such activities will attract funding soon.

Gender equality issues came quite late in the widespread reforms that have been implemented in **Serbia** in the past decade. Relevant gender equality institutional and policy frameworks have emerged over the past few years, with overarching laws on gender equality and anti-discrimination enacted in 2009 with domestic violence recognised as a criminal act for the first time. This was followed by the development of a National Action Plan for Preventing and Combating Domestic and Intimate

Partner Violence against Women but subsequent activities have been hampered by poor support from a variety of quarters. As such any support available is of variable standard and limited in scope. For example, there is a 24 hour helpline but its location (in the police service) makes it less appealing to some users and its long (10-digit) telephone number and lack of services in minority languages and for the disabled further limits its potential. Other services provided by specialist agencies have also suffered through the focus switching to provision by local communities with a resultant drop in accessibility and quality of provision. Furthermore, while there has been some limited piloting of perpetrator programmes, attempts to mainstream them face issues such as funding and entrenched social attitudes that are likely to limit take up.

Creating awareness of the extent of gender-based violence in **Slovakia** was instrumental in establishing the first National Action Plan for Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women (2009-2012). This gave grounds for optimism that a comprehensive support structure (involving specialist advisory centres, training of experts and a national network of support services) would be established throughout the country. However, in reality progress has been much slower than desired and implementation of such measures as the use of ICT-based actions and programmes for perpetrators are still being reviewed and planned. Nevertheless, NGOs in particular are working in the field with what resources they have to provide such support as crisis lines and some perpetrator programmes, though provision tends to be concentrated in certain urban centres.

Despite a long tradition of addressing violence against women in **Sweden** (beginning with the 1998 *Violence Against Women bill*), the debate has intensified recently, principally due to some high profile cases of violence even when the victims have previously sought help from the support services. In 2007 the government launched an Action Plan for Combating Men's Violence against Women, Violence and Oppression in the name of Honour and Violence in Same-Sex Relationships, which was backed up by substantial funding for a range of measures aimed at supporting victims and helping the rehabilitation of perpetrators of the violence. A comprehensive range of support measures is available including a national 24/7 helpline funded by government but run by a specialist national centre (NCK). Calls to the helpline are free and it is widely publicised and the support is given by specialists from different fields. A comprehensive website complements the helpline where all the information is available in Swedish and English but with summaries in 25 other languages and with adaptation for those with impaired vision.

Perpetrator programmes are mostly based within the prison and probation service and use evidence-based treatment programmes following the IDAP (Integrated domestic abuse programme) model developed in the USA. All this is supplemented by a state funded National Centre for Knowledge on Men's Violence against Women, charged with the task of carrying out research, developing new methods, and providing professional training to those working in the field.

## 5. Summary of the discussions at the seminar

There was a consensus among the participating countries that the measures introduced in Spain to combat violence against women were impressive, all the more so given the current crisis and limited availability of state funding. Furthermore, it was felt that there is much to be learned from the approach which opened up possibilities for transferability in some countries, though the potential for this would be conditioned by the different national economic and social contexts.

However, underpinning all actions was a need for effective national plans and strategies directly addressing the issue of violence against women. It was not considered satisfactory to conceal actions within more general policies aimed at domestic or family violence since the potential problems are more extensive and have their own complexities. Understanding and transparency of the issue was felt to be essential to both encouraging women victims to come forward for help and to developing adequate measures to deal with the problem. Here the crucial role of NGOs in lobbying and pushing for change was mentioned, as well as their role in delivering services. To be effective in reaching the target group, plans to tackle violence against women should be implemented using a multi-level approach, with regions and municipalities crucial in delivery, though a national policy framework is essential in order to make things happen.

### ICT-base measures

In terms of the use of ICT-based measures, the need was for an integrated website incorporating a chat line facility, though it was accepted that usage would vary according to the individual user's circumstances. According to an EIGE report<sup>4</sup>, the Spanish helpline for women victims of violence is one of 17 among the EU27 plus Croatia but only eight of these (including Spain) that offer a 24/7 service throughout the year. Furthermore, only 12 of the 17 are free of charge to the caller. Both factors were considered essential to the provision of an effective service but there were other factors to consider in this context. For example, to be most effective the helplines needed to offer multilingual services (according to the needs of the country) and the ability for those with speech and hearing impairments to use it. It also helps if the telephone number is short and easily recognisable (as the 116 number being widely advocated).

The provision of dedicated websites to provide advice and guidance to women victims of violence (or their advisers/ helpers such as relatives and friends) has been growing, with the Spanish example providing a model of how it should work. However, while it was felt that such provision was essential, its reach to all victims would depend on the individual's access to the internet and it was clear that this was often very low in rural areas of many countries. It suggests that alternative means need to be considered in such situations with the telephone helpline offering some support to victims but less able to deliver more widespread information on the help available.

The general consensus at the seminar was that services such as a website and helpline need not be expensive and should be seen in the context of their wider reach compared to other more costly approaches that may ultimately be less effective. Furthermore, in these current times of austerity the relative costs and benefits of different approaches are crucial to take into account.

Switching the focus of the problem of violence against women to one of prevention was a recurring theme in the seminar and one that is being addressed in various ways. For example, the importance of getting the correct message across to young people was felt to be an essential starting point in this process and here the education systems are the focus. This is all to do with changing attitudes towards

---

<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EIGE-Study%20to%20identify%20and%20map%20existing%20data%20and%20resources%20on%20sexual%20violence%20against%20women%20in%20the%20EU-2.pdf>

violence against women and in the post conflict societies this was inevitably proving more of a challenge.

### **Perpetrator programmes**

In terms of the perpetrator programmes, the example from Ireland was well received by participants, especially when backed with evidence that it was proving to be effective in cutting recidivism and making women feel safer. However, in looking to apply the approach elsewhere, there are certain obstacles that need to be addressed such as the availability of accommodation for men barred from the family home. This is a particular problem when there is use of restriction orders on the perpetrators through the use of electronic tags, for example, which were being used by some countries (as in Spain) though was not yet widespread. Furthermore, in those countries using such methods, the number of perpetrators sanctioned was relatively small. Some of the limitations on the use of these restrictive measures relate to how they are applied. In most countries the use of electronic tags is part of the sentencing carried out by the courts and this can be a lengthy process or one that is hampered by concerns over the general use of such methods.

The discussions stressed the importance of coordinating multiagency victim support services. Ideally, this should be a single supervisory body ensuring this coordination, following guidelines that ensure minimum standards for all services to victims. Participants felt that there is a real need for initial and continuous training of all those involved in helping victims of violence and the perpetrators of it and to do this properly takes time – several years in most cases. Such training should be obligatory for the policy and judiciary, otherwise the poorly trained can make bad decisions at the expense of women victims of violence. In particular the Spanish example showed the value of specialised courts or an alternative would be close coordination between the civil and criminal courts. Importantly, it was felt that this needed a political will to make it happen.

The issue of the sustainability of programmes introduced to tackle violence against women was a concern for some countries as they grappled with the current economic and financial crisis. This was particularly evident in the post conflict societies where both the incidence of violence against women tended to be significant but where the infrastructure to deal with it was least developed. Lack of adequate funding had curtailed implementation of national action plans in many countries and while funding from the European Commission and international donor agencies helped, it was never enough to fill the gap in domestic financial support. However, in broad terms it was felt that where there was a political commitment to tackle violence against women, then prioritising resources would help ensure that services are maintained and ultimately extended.

### **Further research and evaluation**

Finally the importance of on-going research and evaluation was stressed by many participants as a way of fully understanding the issue and of testing the efficacy of existing approaches. In particular, evaluation of policies to determine the most cost-effective methods was especially relevant in a period of economic and financial crisis.

## 6. Conclusions

The good practice exchange seminar brought together a diverse range of countries at various stages in developing and implementing policy to combat violence against women. The detailed examples of measures in Spain and Ireland proved to be at the upper end of good practice and only some of the countries participating could claim to have similar approaches in place. Nevertheless, while there was no likelihood of the systems being wholly transplanted into other countries, there were elements that could prove transferable with the right will and support. In particular the ICT-based solutions offered the benefits of wide accessibility and relatively low cost, though tended to work as a package of measures (comprising website, helpline and telephone rapid response) rather than one single element. Furthermore, the effectiveness of such measures partly rests with the quality of the ICT infrastructure in countries and the ability and willingness of women victims of violence to use it.

The following general conclusions emerged from the seminar:

- There is a need for effective national plans and strategies directly addressing the issue of violence against women and these should not conceal actions within more general policies aimed at domestic or family violence.
- NGOs fulfil a crucial role in lobbying and pushing for change as well as in delivering services but tackling violence against women should be implemented using a multi-level approach, with regions and municipalities working together though a national policy framework.
- ICT-based measures have proved effective but should comprise the three elements of helpline, dedicated website and emergency telephone for the most vulnerable victims. They should be available 24/7 and offer services in different languages and for the disabled.
- It should be recognised that ICT solutions will not reach out to all victims since access to the internet and support services will vary especially in rural areas so alternative services need to be available.
- The importance of getting the correct message across to young people was felt to be an essential starting point in changing attitudes towards violence against women and in the post conflict societies this was inevitably proving more of a challenge.
- The perpetrator programmes (as exemplified by Ireland) had a proven role in preventing further violence and making women feel safer but there are certain obstacles that need to be addressed such as the availability of accommodation for men barred from the family home.
- A single supervisory body should oversee the coordination of multiagency victim support services following guidelines that ensure minimum standards of all services for victims of violence.
- The provision of initial and continuous training of all those professionals involved in helping victims of violence and the perpetrators of it is essential to ensure a quality service.

- While the current economic and financial crisis has proved challenging in sustaining and developing services, where there is a political commitment to tackle violence against women, prioritising resources should ensure that services are maintained and ultimately extended.
- Further consideration should be given to the establishment of a European-wide helpline to ensure coverage in all Member States.
- Continuing research of the issue and evaluation of the efficacy of existing approaches to tackle violence against women is essential to determine the most cost-effective methods for implementation.

While the seminar focused on all types of violence against women (such as physical and psychological) and in all situations (such as the household and workplace) it was clear that vulnerability could vary according to the situation women find themselves in. In reality, women in work and those with wider social networks tend to be less vulnerable to violence in the home and this illustrates the importance of the broader gender equality issues, in particular the need for increased employment opportunities for women.