



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, A WAY OUT OF VIOLENCE:

Policies and practices to promote
women's economic empowerment
to be able to leave violent relationships

Executive summary

WE GO! Women Economic-independence & Growth Opportunity
JUST/2014/RDAP/AG/MCT/7365

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WE GO! Women Economic-independence & Growth Opportunity- JUST/2014/RDAP/AG/VICT/7365

THE WE GO! PROJECT: EMPOWERING WOMEN TO COME OUT OF VIOLENCE

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a widespread problem in the European Union: according to the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) almost **one in four women** (22%) experiences physical and/or sexual violence in a relationship with a man¹.

Anti-violence centres (AVCs) are key actors in providing women with the support they need in order to come out of intimate partner violence. Their interventions cover a variety of activities including emergency protection measures, legal and psychological support, guidance to build a life free from violence. AVCs throughout Europe have for many years pointed out that one of the major **difficulties that women face when trying to leave a violent relationship is the lack of economic independence** and hence of immediate and long-term solutions to their financial needs. Their situation is even more complicated when women have children.

WE GO! (Women Economic-independence & Growth Opportunity)² is a two-year project co-financed by the European Union focusing on this specific issue affecting survivors of intimate partner violence: the lack of economic independence which prevents women from leaving a violent partner and ensuring sustainable alternatives for themselves and their children. The project has been implemented by 15 partners based in 7 EU countries (Italy, Spain, Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus, United Kingdom and Sweden).

The **overall objective** of WE GO! is to strengthen support services for women undergoing IPV and in particular the activities run by anti-violence centres aiming at empowering women. The project builds on the experiences and practices developed by **AVCs** in the European Union in

order to identify and spread promising practices to help women come out of IPV through the attainment of economic independence. The project starts from the belief that **AVCs have developed meaningful experience in this field which needs to be valued, exchanged and systematised in order to spread knowledge and strengthen services available in Europe.** IPV survivors' economic empowerment and independence is in fact an issue largely recognised by AVCs, but not enough explored in policies and interventions to prevent and combat IPV.

The main project activities consisted of:

- » capacity building of practitioners and AVCs operators through **mutual learning activities and exchange of experiences and practices** among operators and experts from various European countries;
- » production of one **training toolkit**, targeting practitioners and AVCs to enhance their capacity to respond to survivors' needs;
- » **training of trainers (TOT)** on the content and tools of the training toolkit targeting social workers and practitioners of the AVCs involved, as well as external practitioners;
- » **implementation of training paths (training of women - TOW)** for women supported by AVCs involved in the project for promoting their personal and economic empowerment and fostering their capacities and possibilities to attain economic independence. **Mentorship activities** were also implemented to provide guidance to women to build future projects and economic opportunities.

¹ European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey*, 2014

² More details about the WE GO! project available at: www.wegoproject.eu

Key preliminary outputs informed the implementation of the project activities, namely:

- » a **literature review**³ focused on analysis of the content of relevant international Conventions, EU directives and other official documents;
- » the **identification of promising practices**⁴ in the EU for promoting survivors' economic empowerment and independence.

In addition, a **data collection** was carried out by the AVCs involved in the project to produce relevant statistics related to the profile of women assisted during the project implementation. Common tools for partners - in particular a questionnaire and a database - were developed for this purpose.

The main output of the WE GO! project is the **training toolkit for anti-violence centres operators**, aiming at both strengthening practitioners' knowledge and methodologies and at providing them with concrete tools to reflect on their existing practising and to support women in developing their personal and economic empowerment. The toolkit is the result of exchanges among practitioners of partner organisations and external experts. It will be widely disseminated to anti-violence centres across the EU and to institutions at all levels, with the aim of promoting knowledge and spreading effective practices on the the issue of women's economic dependence.

KEY ACTIVITIES OF THE WE GO! PROJECT

Research and analysis	Strengthening practitioners' knowledge and anti-violence centres' support services	Promoting women's economic empowerment and independence	Assessment of results
Literature review and identification of good practices	3 Mutual learning events with practitioners and external experts	Individual and collective training paths involving women survivors aiming to empower them economically (training of women - TOW)	Focus group to evaluate the training of trainers (TOT)
Preliminary collection of information on services provided by AVCs and their data collection systems	Production of the training toolkit Training of trainers (TOT)	Mentorship	Focus group with women survivors of IPV involved in the project to assess the results of the TOWs
Common data collection on the socio-economic profile of women survivors involved in the project	Testing of project methodologies and tools		External project evaluation

Elaboration by ActionAid, November 2017

³ IRS (Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale) and MIGS (Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies), *Women's economic independence, a way out of violence. Theory and practice in the EU*, 2016: www.wegoproject.eu/sites/default/files/media/Comparative-Research-Analysis_Intermediate-Report.pdf

⁴ An interactive presentation of the promising practices identified is available on the WE GO! opendata platform *Women that count* at the link: <http://womenthatcount.org/blog/way-out-violence-promising-practices-europe-empower-women-economically#.WfsF9VvWyM8>

OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The WE GO! project allowed to systematise and produce relevant knowledge and results on the issue of promoting the economic independence of women survivors of IPV that can be summarised under the following areas:

Antiviolence centres' response

AVCs have **different levels of expertise and knowledge**. Often due to lack of funding some AVCs find themselves in the position of not being able to implement stable and effective strategies or even to set up and manage key collaborations with institutions providing essential services in terms of building survivors' economic independence. WE GO!, through the mutual learning events, has highlighted how the exchange of experiences among practitioners should be encouraged and promoted in order to reinforce the quality of the services provided as well as to scale-up the knowledge available within the European context. **AVCs are key actors in the provision of support services to survivors of IPV and are at the forefront of knowledge development in this field**. As such, they should be valued and put at the centre of structured interventions involving different institutional and private actors with complementary skills and capacities. A **multi-agency approach** is in fact considered by project partners as essential to respond to the different needs of survivors. AVCs' network building is therefore an essential part of strategies aimed at strengthening economic support services in Europe.

Women survivors' needs to attain economic independence

Survivors' needs are **multidimensional** and cannot be reduced to the need of accessing income generating activities. **Safe housing and childcare services** are examples of other essential needs to be taken into account when structuring effective responses. **Personal empowerment and self-esteem** are other crucial needs that cannot be overlooked as they are a precondition for women's economic empowerment.

Moreover, **short-term and long-term solutions** are equally important to address women's economic needs. Immediate responses can in fact provide women with rapid alternatives that allow them to leave a violent partner. At the same time, it is important to elaborate and implement sustainable solutions to effectively support women in building true economic independence and reduce the risk of being forced to go back to violent domestic contexts because of lack of alternatives. In order to respond to survivors' economic needs, **different measures should be envisaged at different times** and include, for instance, welfare and access to quality and affordable services, training programmes, job placement. **Interventions should be embedded in broader strategies to fight gender inequalities and promoting women's rights**: structural gender inequalities and gender-based discriminations can in fact have a disproportionate negative impact on IPV survivors, making it more difficult for them to gain economic independence. The gender-division of labour, gender pay gaps and the lack of decent work opportunities are among the areas where interventions are required to support the building of an economic and social context able to provide IPV survivors with real alternatives.

Knowledge gaps in the EU

An important gap identified by the WE GO! project is the **absence of a universal definition of economic support services** at the institutional level. This gap has a negative impact on AVCs' abilities in providing adequate services across Europe. On the contrary, specific and dedicated attention to bridging this gap would very positively impact on the quality of services provided by AVCs and would significantly strengthen responses to IPV. **In this sense tertiary prevention should be more valued** since it is often neglected compared to secondary prevention even though it is essential to build response to the long-term needs of IPV survivors. WE GO! has highlighted how women's personal and economic empowerment requires time and long-term interventions. Valuing tertiary prevention interventions would certainly contribute to building knowledge in the EU on effective strategies to respond to survivors' needs.

Data is also a key aspect of knowledge development. Hence, the systematic collection of socio-economic data on women undergoing IPV should be promoted at EU level to contribute to understanding the complexity of the problem. The WE GO! data collection and its results could in this sense be taken as an example.

On the basis of the WE GO! project's results and learnings, we address the following recommendations aiming at strengthening the response to the economic needs of women survivors of IPV in the EU:

To the European Union:

- » **Ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.** The signature of the Convention was a positive step that needs to be followed-up by a rapid process leading to its ratification.
- » **Establishing an EU coordination office against violence against women,** responsible for improving coordination and coherence among EU institutions, EU agencies and Member States and for developing EU policies to address gender-based violence.
- » Promoting **data collection on the socio-economic profile** of women undergoing violence, including IPV, in order to develop knowledge on specific aspects of violence against women.
- » Providing, in collaboration with the Council of Europe and with the involvement of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), an **agreed definition of economic empowerment support services,** ensuring the **inclusion of this services in minimum standards** of service provision for survivors of gender-based violence, including IPV. Consultation with anti-violence centres and relevant civil society organisations should be ensured in this process.
- » Ensure that European programmes and structural and investment funds **value the implementation of tertiary prevention interventions** on the same ground as primary and secondary prevention, in order to develop knowledge and promising practices on the three types of violence prevention. Adequate EU funding for transnational projects combating violence against women should be secured in the framework of the current debate on the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework.

To National governments:

- » Ensuring periodic surveys to estimate the magnitude of all forms of violence against women and include in national statistics **data collection and analysis on the socio-economic profile of women** undergoing gender-based violence, including IPV.
- » Providing anti-violence centres with **adequate funding** in order to ensure that they can implement sustainable programmes and provide adequate services. Funding should allow AVCs to plan activities at least on a three-year basis.
- » Ensuring that IPV survivors have access to both **shelters and long-term temporary safe housing solutions** and providing AVCs with adequate funding to offer such services. This will ensure survivors can count on safe housing and on adequate time to build their independence.
- » Ensuring that at the local level **children of IPV survivors can access quality and affordable childcare services** so that their mothers can engage in their personal and professional development by providing AVCs with adequate funding for developing these services.
- » Including in action plans and policies to fight violence against women measures for promoting the **building of networks** at the local level aiming at strengthening anti-violence centres' abilities to respond to women's economic needs. AVCs should be at the centre of such networks to ensure a gender-sensitive and woman-centred approach to the problem.
- » Introducing **temporary income support measures** to ensure that women survivors

of IPV can count on a minimum wage for at least 2 years when they decide to come out of violent relationships.

- » Include in **programmes for social and economic inclusion, including those supported by the European Social Fund, a dedicated intervention stream to support survivors' of IPV** in accessing training and job opportunities in order to build their economic independence.

To Regional and Local institutions:

- » Implementing positive discrimination measures to ensure IPV survivors are given priority in professional education programmes and job placements, by ensuring public employment offices and professional training institutes have **specific programmes and places reserved** for IPV survivors.
- » Ensuring that strategies to prevent and combat IPV include interventions to **strengthen regional and local networks** aimed at reinforcing antiviolence centres' response to survivors' needs, including their economic ones. Within these interventions, training on gender-sensitive and woman-centred approaches should be foreseen for all actors involved.
- » Introducing measures aiming at ensuring that women IPV survivors can access **shelters as well as long-term temporary housing**

to provide them with adequate time to build their economic independence. Public housing could be used to respond to the long-term housing needs of women.

- » Ensuring that children of IPV survivors can access **quality childcare services** so that their mothers can engage in income generating activities and have time to dedicate to their personal and professional development. These services should be provided for free or at affordable prices.

- » Including in **programmes for social and economic inclusion a dedicated intervention stream to support IPV survivors** in accessing training and job opportunities in order to build their economic independence.

To companies, foundations and other public and private sector actors:

- » Introducing and implementing policies to prevent and combat violence against women in the workplace and to ensure that both women and men workers have the same opportunities and rights.
- » Introducing and implementing programmes in partnership with anti-violence centres to provide women survivors of IPV with opportunities to access professional trainings and job placements that can contribute to building their economic independence.

WE GO!, KEY NUMBERS:

Number of anti-violence centres involved: **17**

Number of experts involved in exchanges of knowledge and practices: **78**

Number of practitioners and operators trained: **139**

Women survivors involved in the WE GO! empowerment trainings: **250^A**

^A This number includes women who took part at least in one session of a TOW. As some TOWs are still being implemented, the final number of women involved will be updated after all TOWs are finalised.

WEGO!

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The WE GO! final report is
available at this link:
www.wegoproject.eu/documents
or scan the QR code
to access the report

