

# INNOVATIVE PROPOSAL CONCERNING THE HUMAN FACTORS SHAPING INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – THE IMPRODOVA PROJECT

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**Abstract** The introductory chapter of this book presents the book's structure as a whole and gives a brief overview of its single chapters and their interrelatedness. The aim of IMPRODOVA - Improving Frontline Responses to High Impact Domestic Violence was to deliver recommendations, toolkits and collaborative training for European police organisations and medical and social work professionals to improve and integrate the institutional response to high-impact domestic violence. IMPRODOVA had two main components: analysis of current institutional responses to high-impact domestic violence and the development of effective solutions to improve those responses. Efforts were made to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and contextualise our solutions, tools and guidelines to make them applicable to a wide range of societies.

**Keywords:**

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IMPRODOVA<sup>1</sup> – Improving Frontline Responses to High Impact Domestic Violence – was a research and innovation proposal concerned with the human factors that influence institutional responses to domestic violence, the behaviour of an intimate or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, and psychological abuse and controlling behaviour. As one of many frontline responders, police organisations may be expected to feature among the greatest providers of support for victims of high-impact domestic violence (HIDV). Yet, World Health Organization figures show that less than 10 % of victims of domestic violence actually turn to the police for help. Whether victims instead seek support from other frontline responders still has to be investigated. One reason for this is the perceived or actual inadequacy of the police’s response. Here, we encounter the first important human factor. Police officers are accused of being insensitive to victims’ concerns. However, the low overall number reported by the WHO conceals the wide variety of response rates in different settings where the response of police and the victim support agencies have managed to provide low-threshold access to victims of HIDV. Across Europe, one can find positive examples of best practices from which IMPRODOVA sought to learn. IMPRODOVA focused on improving and integrating the responses of police, social work, non-governmental organisations, and other actors that make up the ecosystem of frontline responders to increase the reporting of domestic violence. Reporting rates to the police, which are typically the only agency available to citizens on a 24/7 basis, might serve as an indicator of the overall ecosystem’s successful performance.

IMPRODOVA’s operational definition of high-impact domestic violence includes serious and reported violence within the family, against the children, partners and the elderly. Here, “serious” can refer to the intensity, duration or consequences of the violence.

IMPRODOVA sought to design and provide solutions that would form part of an integrated response to HIDV based on comprehensive empirical research into how police and other frontline responders (e.g. medical and social work professionals) respond to domestic violence in European countries. IMPRODOVA aimed to

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deliver recommendations, toolkits, and collaborative training for European police organisations and medical and social work professionals to improve and integrate the institutional response to HIDV. The intention was to use the positive feedback loop to increase HIDV reporting rates to police, the medical profession, community and social work practitioners who act as the first responders and agents of risk assessment. All of the project results are freely available on the Internet<sup>2</sup>.

IMPRODOVA had two main components: 1) analysis of current institutional responses to HIDV; and 2) the development of effective solutions to improve those responses. The first component entailed an in-depth qualitative study of frontline responders' ecosystems in eight European countries.

In these eight countries in Europe (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Portugal, Scotland/UK, Hungary and Slovenia; and with regard to some themes, a ninth country, Bulgaria), institutional responses to HIDV were studied within the IMPRODOVA project. This involved comprehensive fieldwork, following social workers and police officers during their shifts, interviewing field operatives and staff from relevant professions and organisations, along with collecting the views of management and policymakers. As part of this investigation, we documented the work routines and forms of cooperation engaged by frontline responders to HIDV. We also revealed multiple human factors that might constrain their daily work and cooperation and developed a better understanding of why the frontline responders' local ecosystems have developed in the way they have, identifying gaps and deficiencies and documenting practical solutions that emerge in day-to-day life collaborative work.

We mapped the frontline responders' conflicting interpretations of HIDV, as shaped by cultural and professional frames, different moral boundaries and other human factors. We also analysed organisational factors like resources and management. The focus was on how these human factors influence the response of police and inter-agency cooperation, how e.g. police cooperate with women's shelters, community organisations, medical experts and others that make up the local response ecosystems.

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<sup>2</sup> recommendations: <https://improdova.eu/results/reports/index.php>; toolkits and training materials: <https://training.improdova.eu/en/>; publications: <https://improdova.eu/results/publications/index.php>

Throughout, IMPRODOVA highlighted the needs of domestic violence victims. For two reasons, special consideration in this research was paid to communities of underprivileged populations and ethnic minority backgrounds: 1) high-impact domestic violence is often more prevalent in these neighbourhoods; 2) victims from ethnic minorities are often less likely to report to the police or seek help from outsiders due to mistrust, prejudice or a fear of being deported. IMPRODOVA intended to research the most concerning aspects of HIDV.

IMPRODOVA's *second component* considered solutions to improve institutional responses to high-impact domestic violence. While different institutions and agencies have issued a range of recommendations to improve institutional responses to high-impact domestic violence, effective and sustainable implementation is still lacking.<sup>3</sup> Several reasons can be pointed to for this gap between the lofty ambitions and the actual outcomes: the lack of human resources, insufficient training and resources, low morale, political resistance, bureaucratic overload as factors on the side of institutions and, on the side of clients or victims, mistrust, fear, prejudice, and a lack of knowledge and information.

The research and analysis of frontline responders' ecosystems in IMPRODOVA's first component highlighted the mentioned gap between the ideal and the actual. This gave researchers an in-depth understanding of the human factors that influence the work of frontline responders in practice. Building on this foundation, IMPRODOVA prepared for the second component to develop solutions that will have a sustainable impact by adapting existing recommendations and offering new ideas for better cooperation and an effective, low-threshold, multi-agency response to high-impact domestic violence. This entailed solutions that were validated bottom-up to help victims more effectively. The solutions developed by IMPRODOVA may be expected to improve inter-agency partnerships by integrating stakeholder knowledge from NGOs and frontline responders. The in-depth research fed into innovative policy recommendations, giving local, national and European policymakers guidance on strengthening low-threshold responses and designing preventative measures in this field. The output of IMPRODOVA's second component was a set of policy recommendations addressing local, national

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<sup>3</sup> Council of Europe: Istanbul Convention – Action against violence against women and domestic violence, Council of Europe Treaty Series – No. 210, URL: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e> (2017-08-24).

and European policymakers; risk-assessment tools with a high level of interoperability among different professions; practical toolkits for all frontline responders involved and training materials focused on improving interagency cooperation and interacting with different types of victims.

The evidence-based output from IMPRODOVA's first component was evaluated and validated by stakeholders and IMPRODOVA's partner organisations: Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and other representatives of the ecosystem of frontline responders in the IMPRODOVA consortium. They performed limited local field tests of the newly proposed approaches and solutions.

Drafting workable solutions requires Europe to be viewed as comprising societies with different living standards, levels of institutional efficacy, and national cultures and identities. Efforts were made in the IMPRODOVA project to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and contextualise our solutions, tools and guidelines to make them applicable to a wide range of societies. This avoided the problems of high-level policy guidelines being drafted too generally while ignoring the obstacles and constraints of the many human factors that appear along the way from policy to practice.

This book presents a comprehensive view on the research and findings of IMPRODOVA and locates this in relation to state-of-the-art research. The most pressing topics regarding how to manage domestic violence in the twenty-first century are addressed, stressing international policies, the assessment of the maturity of HIDV-related policies, recommendations for a good partnership in inter-agency cooperation, and HIDV risk assessment and victim support during COVID-19-related lockdowns. These topics are accompanied by a presentation of the status quo and best practices of HIDV frontline responses in various European countries. Based on these findings, developing domestic violence response protocols via a European platform is proposed and highlighted.

