

INTER-AGENCY COOPERATION AND COORDINATION: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A “GOOD PARTNERSHIP” AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

THIERRY DELPEUCH & FRANÇOIS BONNET

Université Grenoble Alpes, Sciences po Grenoble, CNRS - UMR PACTE,
Saint-Martin-d'Hères, France.

E-mail: thierry.delpeuch@umpacte.fr; francois.bonnet@umpacte.fr

Abstract In the past, the feminist movement exposed a sexist police culture as the main cause for police apathy in the face of domestic violence. This critique led to an ongoing transformation of police organisations. This transformation is composed of two main processes. The first process is a movement to constrain police activity, force police officers to take domestic violence seriously by enacting laws and rules that aim to reduce police officers' discretion. The second process also aims at transforming police activity, not by constraining it, but by improving the skills of police officers and making them work in partnerships with other stakeholders from medical or social service professions in the best interest of the victim. These partnerships may be within the police organisations or between the police and other stakeholders — typically social workers, magistrates, social housing representatives, NGOs, city administrators, etc. This chapter focuses on this second transformation process and aims at drawing comparative lessons from case studies in eight countries to document the characteristics of a "good partnership" against domestic violence.

Keywords:
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Introduction

In the 1970s, the feminist movement exposed a sexist police culture as the main cause for police apathy in the face of domestic violence (Ferraro, 1989, Hirschel & Buzawa, 2002). This critique led to an ongoing transformation of police organizations. This transformation is composed of two main processes. The first process is a movement to *constrain* police activity, to force police officers to take domestic violence seriously by enacting laws and rules which aim at reducing the discretion of police officers (Goodmark, 2018). This was done with policies such as mandatory arrest and no-drop prosecution, under which police officers have to follow strict rules so as to make sure they will be lenient with domestic violence perpetrators. This first process has been widely implemented since the 1990s and aspects of it still are pursued by domestic violence reformers; for instance, risk-assessment tools typically are devices aimed at minimising human error in the treatment by reducing the discretion of police officers.

The second process also aims at transforming police activity, not by constraining it, but by improving the skills of police officers and making them work in partnerships with other stakeholders from medical or social service professions, in the best interest of the victim (Meier, 2003; Mirchandani, 2005; Grant & Rowe, 2011; Horwitz et al., 2011; Myhill & Johnson, 2016). These partnerships may be within the police organizations (such as the psychiatric nurse embedded with Finnish police officers, or the social worker embedded with French police officers), or between the police and other stakeholders—typically social workers, magistrates, social housing representatives, NGOs, city administrators, and so on. The underlying idea of this second process is that police officers need to be educated about domestic violence, and once they are, they can be reliable partners of a wider network of agencies which will help with the multifaceted needs of a given victim (for instance needs related to housing, children, legal services, counselling, etc.). This chapter focuses on this second process of transformation and aims at drawing comparative lessons from case studies in eight countries—Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Scotland and Slovenia—to document the characteristics of a “good partnership” against domestic violence.

Partnerships are inter-institutional structures that bring together fragments of partner organisations. Partners are chosen for their expertise and the resources they can bring to the collaboration to deliver specific services that no single partner would be able to provide on their own. This is to achieve a beneficial change for victims or a more appropriate treatment for perpetrators. The collaboration between agencies serves a greater purpose than any of the individual organisations can achieve by their specific tasks alone. For instance, finding a common purpose, protecting and helping the victim provides a shared mission and identity, bonding various partners together.

However, successful partnerships cannot be taken for granted for several reasons. First of all, partnerships against domestic violence require the collaboration of different professional stakeholders who do not have the same understanding of domestic violence or the same agenda to fight this phenomenon. Depending on the profession, organisation, and institution, each participant tends to defend their own vision of what is problematic, what should be prioritised, and what constitutes an acceptable and effective solution. Such disagreements can lead to mutual mistrust, conflict, reserve or avoidance attitudes. Another obstacle to developing a partnership organisation is partner organisations' reluctance to comply with the constraints involved in engaging in joint initiatives of an operational nature. Indeed, taking part in a collective project to combat domestic violence require that each participant question one's way of seeing things, subordinate their freedom of action to common decisions, adapt practices, accept partners' right to control their activities and take their share of the expenses incurred in the implementation of the project. Some partner organisations reject the interplay of reciprocal obligations, mutual interference and the additional costs associated with partnership action. They are then tempted to withdraw from the partnership. Case studies contain numerous examples of divergent views that lead to conflicts or inability to cooperate: tensions between prosecutors and associations offering educational programmes for violence perpetrators in Slovenia, for example, or conflicts between police and social workers on risk assessment in the case of the Austrian MARAC.

These obstacles to multi-agency cooperation mean that many partnerships decline rapidly once the initial enthusiasm phase is over. In the fight against domestic violence, as in other areas of security policy, few partnership initiatives can become permanently institutionalised to develop and improve their range of services over time. So, what makes a partnership more likely to be successful? In short:

- First, it takes targeted actions with an intended outcome. It targets specific types of perpetrators or acts to mitigate or manage risks posed to victims.
- Second, it has a system for managing its action that is capable of performing a range of functions and imposing its authority on system members.
- Third, information management facilitates inter-institutional sharing and ensures feedback from partner organisations to the partnership mechanism.
- Fourth, the partner organisation has specialised relays in each partner organisation. These specialised units or staff, who represent, promote and implement the partnership in their respective organisations, enjoy high status within their partner organisations.
- Fifth, the partnership mechanism and partner organisations make a significant effort to train the staff involved in the collaboration and codify and produce professional valuable knowledge for the proper functioning of the partnership.

An action that targets priority audiences

The first comparative lesson learnt from the Improdova project is that working partnerships usually take focussed action, aimed primarily at a number of well-defined categories of victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. Such targeting allows the system to focus its attention and resources on a limited range of situations. It helps to set up services suited to the specific nature of the cases handled. It is made necessary by the pressing social demands requiring that the institutional care of domestic violence situations must be a tailored solution adapted to the uniqueness of each case.

Overall, measures tend to focus on those victims most at risk in their physical integrity and on the most dangerous perpetrators. For example, the Scottish Domestic Abuse Task Force (DATF) treats “high-tariff” (prolific) perpetrators, those who commit the most serious crimes and who present the greatest danger to their victims.

The counterpart of this requirement for individualized public action, and the resulting need for targeting, is the risk of leaving out or mismanaging non-priority populations. In fact, in many of the case studies, partnerships paid less attention to victims perceived as being at low risk and less to those who suffer attacks of or

including psychological, emotional and economic abuse than those victims who suffer violent physical abuse.

The most encompassing partnerships, such as the Berlin Initiative Against Violence to Women (BIG), simultaneously pursue several targeted programmes that address various issues such as, for example, domestic violence among migrants and refugees, the protection of children and adolescents who witness violence, forced marriages and honour crimes. Each of these problems is addressed by means of a customised system, which is based on a specific configuration of stakeholders involved, dedicated working groups and appropriate means of intervention. This type of multi-priority, multi-project partnership has the disadvantage of imposing heavy workloads on participating organisations. They no longer keep pace and see partners withdraw from some of the partnership lines of action.

An extended steering body that is an authority

The second lesson is the need for one of the partners to take the lead in coordinating the partnership. In the case studies, the different partners are coordinated by a clearly designated body to establish a strategy and take the lead. The body's authority is recognised by all participants, who agree to follow its guidelines and implement its recommendations, in particular when it comes to assigning concrete tasks to the partners and monitoring their implementation. This is worth underlining, as the consolidation of their authority is a difficult ordeal for multi-agency cooperation against domestic violence.

This is related to the fact that the authority of the steering body of a partnership in this field—its ability to ensure that partners comply with its directions and decisions—is inevitably fragile. Indeed, the means of intervention of such a partnership generally depend on participating organisations. The steering body has no hierarchical power over the organisational actors expected to implement the partnership action. The piloting team depends on each partner's political choices and decision-making processes. The requests addressed by the steering body to participating organisations often compete with the priorities and missions set by these same organisations' management, resulting in ongoing tensions and negotiations between the intra-organisational and partnership work and priorities, often against the favour of partnership efforts.

The cases we have reviewed show that several factors are likely to strengthen the authority of a steering body: openness; quality and equity of the deliberation procedures that prepare the decision-making process; concern for rational argumentation and consensus-building in decision making forums; enjoying financial independence from partners, for example through budgets allocated by national programmes or international donors; precise agreements that define participants' rights and duties with regard to the partnership mechanism; the existence of protocols that clearly and in detail determine the modalities for implementing the most common partnership actions. The most developed partnerships in our sample, such as the Berlin Initiative against violence to women German (BIG) and Hanover's Intervention Project Against domestic violence (HAIP), combine all these features.

There is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the openness of the steering system to all the organisations involved in partnership actions—which is a necessary condition for all to agree to participate in collective efforts—and, on the other hand, this system's ability to take strategic and operational decisions within a reasonable time frame. A contradiction between broad participation in partnership management and decision-making effectiveness is partly resolved by the multiplication of steering bodies, some of them broadened and others restricted. Such juxtaposition can be found between plenary committees—generally plethoric—and restricted committees in several of the mechanisms studied. For example, the governance of the German HAIP is ensured by a complex structure of decision-making committees which includes a strategic “round table” involving the 40 partners, operational committees (called “building blocks”) where only the stakeholders directly concerned participate, and thematic working groups involving actors recognized for their expertise on the issue. This management method promotes the cohesion of the partnership, insofar as each actor feels that they have a say in the decisions that affect them, but it forces partners to spend considerable time in meetings and entails significant coordination costs between committees. This puts organisations that have smaller resources in a tight position. Bigger organisation can, for instance, find different individuals for each committee, but for a small organisation, one individual may have to serve in several roles.

One of the main determinants of the effectiveness of piloting partnerships is the quality of the leadership exercised by the people responsible for facilitating dialogue between partners, coordinating joint activities and resolving conflicts. In all the systems studied, these people are distinguished by a higher hierarchical position in their home organisation. In other words, they have a rank of some seniority in their own institution to impose their leadership on an inter-institutional scene. These people are also characterised by a great deal of experience and recognised expertise in the field of combating domestic violence. In short, they combine social status and functional authority. In addition, these people have skills – often acquired through training – in inter-organisational diplomacy. For example, they have learned to bring together different professional perspectives; reconcile conflicting organisational interests; harmonize agendas; prevent and manage conflicts; facilitate negotiations; promote and monitor collaborative projects. Mastering such skills is absolutely essential for the coordinator because, as already pointed out, this individual does not have control over the resources needed to implement partnership activities and strategies.

The clarification and formalization of the main intervention methods are necessary, insofar as they make it possible to avoid conflicts between partners at the stage of the concrete implementation of multi-agency cooperation programmes. Indeed, partnership work is conducive to mix-ups and misunderstandings, especially when the participants do not share the same thinking frameworks or the same action rationales. This is why partnerships that strive to clarify, shape and rationalize their “ground rules” derive many benefits from it: increased steering efficiency; better integration and complementarities of the contributions made by the various participants; a higher degree of partner satisfaction with the collaboration.

In this respect, one of the most crucial working processes is the organisation and conducting of decision-making forums, in particular those during which partners agree on responses to concrete cases of violence. Good practices in this area are defined by compliance with preparatory procedures, such as the collection of information and the compilation of files on cases on the agenda, or then again maintenance of a record to monitor developments and partners’ responses from one time to the next. They also stand out for their use of meeting facilitation techniques that promote inter-professional dialogue, the formation of a common vision of situations and the joint development of operational solutions. Finally, each

participant recognizes that others have a right of control over their actions – accepting, for example, that compliance with commitments made in one meeting be monitored at a subsequent time.

The most developed partnerships are characterised by possessing their own management and human resources. They are staffed, as appropriate, with a coordinator and a secretariat; they also provide comprehensive action programmes and reviews; activity and results indicators; digital tools for internal and external communication; means for training speakers; feedback procedures; quality procedures to improve services; research and development projects to renew working methods and tools. Partnerships that benefit from such capacities are marked not only by their better management of joint activities and greater versatility to the target audiences' needs, but also by their steering body's greater weight vis-à-vis partner organisations, and hence by a better capacity to implement partnership decisions. Finally, very large partnerships, such as the German BIG or HAIP, have also acquired political and media lobbying capacities that enable them to promote legislative or regulatory changes, launch awareness campaigns aimed at the general public or targeted audiences and increase their chances of obtaining government subsidies. In addition, these partnerships have developed an advice and expertise proposition to promote the action models they have devised.

Partners in leadership positions in the cooperation system may differ from place to place. The police still play an important role in steering since they detect the largest number of violent situations. Indeed, emergency calls, police interventions in the home, and the reception of victims at the police station are still the main ways domestic violence cases come to institutions' attention. Depending on the case, the structure that takes the greatest part in the coordination – and bears a large part of both the costs and responsibilities thereof – may be a municipality, an NGO, a state administration, or a national programme, or then again the police. Each of these institutions has strengths and weaknesses in achieving leadership. Cities have more financial resources and are experienced in multi-agency project management, but they are vulnerable to electoral uncertainty. NGOs have greater political independence and activist support, but they have no guaranteed resources and enjoy less professional legitimacy. According to most of our case studies, the police are the first entry point of a large proportion of domestic violence victims in the partnership organisation and have more complete information on violence

perpetrators (via criminal records and event registers), but they are overwhelmed by many and diverse demands (from road safety to terrorism) and are therefore struggling to keep domestic violence as a priority in a sustainable manner.

An extensive organisation for information sharing and use

Partnerships are based on procedures for collecting, sharing, managing, analysing and making decisions based on information on domestic violence cases. Successful partnerships develop information-sharing systems that seek to ensure, as far as possible, early identification of victims and perpetrators, particularly in the context of serious violence. These systems are also intended to gather the information necessary to analyse the situations that have been detected, to choose the course of action and to monitor victims' and perpetrators' trajectories.

Establishing "good management" of information in a partnership framework is no small task, because it does not only mean organizing the circulation and sharing of information between partners, but also modifying and rearranging all participating organisations so their representatives in the partnership are supplied with the required data in a timely manner. In other words, it is not good enough to implement information sharing arrangements within the partnership. Each partner must also agree to carry out adjustments so that its own information system can properly feed the partnership information system.

Three major challenges justify making efforts to improve information sharing between the system stakeholders. First, cases detected by one partner are quickly reported to others, allowing each partner to take appropriate action in their own area of expertise in a timely and informed manner. Secondly, it avoids victims having to repeat their story several times to the succession of workers they meet: sharing a file containing what each partner needs to know –and has the right to know – about the situation being treated reduces this form of "secondary victimization" due to being constantly re-interviewed. Finally, sharing a variety of data allows for a more detailed analysis of the cases discussed in partnership meetings (all case studies concur on these matters).

From the point of view of information management, a common point of practices studied is the intensive use of tools and procedures helping decision-making, intended to provide steering bodies with both multidisciplinary and in-depth knowledge of cases handled.

These instruments include, in particular, devices to diagnose the extent of domestic violence in a given territory (such as the French “observatories”), expert committees to better understand its underlying logics and dynamics (such as the think tanks set up under the Berlin initiative); working groups to bring closer together the different partners’ professional views (such as in the German HAIP programme or the Slovenian Association for Nonviolent Communication); and procedures to assess particular situations from the perspective of the risks faced by victims.

In several “best practices” cases, the central element of cooperation is the risk assessment procedures and instruments: the risk posed by the perpetrator in the case of law enforcement oriented collaborations; or faced by the victim in the case of victim-oriented partnerships.

In Scotland, Multi-Agency Tasking and Coordinating (MATAC) meetings are organised and hosted monthly by the police in each of Scotland’s 13 police divisions. They bring together social and health services, housing associations, public prosecution representatives, specialised police staff, as well as NGOs in some areas. The purpose of these meetings is to share information on the violence histories of individuals suspected of being domestic violence perpetrators and intelligence of their relationships, criminal activities, and people they associate with. Participants share information and analysis to assess risks and jointly develop action strategies to disrupt the activities of individuals identified as “high tariff” perpetrators. This may involve judicial or administrative proceedings unrelated to suspected domestic violence offences, but which deal with other offences committed by them, such as rent or tax arrears, lease contract violations, tax or social security fraud, or traffic offences.

Furthermore, during the MATAC, participants assess this danger to determine whether the case should remain for investigation at a divisional or national. Perpetrators considered particularly threatening (prolific abuse, and/or multiple partners) are passed to a national investigation unit – the Domestic Abuse Task

Force (DATF) – that has a specialized domestic violence remit. DATF officers screen the suspect’s life for evidence of past violence to increase the prosecution’s burden. An assessment is carried out using a scoring system that takes into account criteria such as recent developments (recency), the repetition and severity of violence (frequency) and the number and profile of victims (gravity) to create an “RFG” score, as well as undertake the examination of information shared by the suspect on social networks; worrying elements and warning signals identified by the various partners.

Similar systems – i.e. organised around a partnership-based risk assessment procedure – are used to improve the safety of victims in Scotland, Austria and Finland. These countries implement a system called Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC), which aims to identify victims who are at serious risk by combining information from a wide range of partners. The system involves the following services: police, social, childcare, educational, health, integration probation, social housing, victim support and access to rights. The central element of MARAC is a partnership meeting during which participants share information and compare their professional expertise to complete or supplement a risk analysis questionnaire (DASH/DAQ) and define a series of action points to manage and mitigate the risk based on this questionnaire.

In Scotland, there is also a mechanism to warn potential victims of their current partner’s history of abuse, known as the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS). This scheme responds to requests of a spouse, partner, friend or family member, NGO worker, or statutory worker who wishes to check an individual’s history of domestic violence (Right to Ask), or at the initiative of a police officer (Power to Tell), where there is a concern or belief of domestic violence history or activity. Following such applications to the scheme, verifications are conducted by the police, and where there is evidence or concern, a multi-agency decision-making forum is held to decide whether or not to disclose a perpetrator’s violent past to their current partner.

Of course, the more sophisticated the partnership systems for information sharing, situation diagnosis and risk assessment, the more work they require from partner organisations upstream. Increasing the quality of decision-making in partnership bodies is costly and may lead some participants to disengage or withdraw from multi-

agency cooperation, particularly when the issue of domestic violence becomes less prominent in the media and political debate.

The presence specialization in each partner organisation

One of the most effective ways of extending cooperation within a partner organisation involves a specialised unit or staff, i.e. a staff member specifically responsible for dealing with domestic violence, with instructions to carry out tasks related to partnership actions as a priority. There are specialized domestic violence units that have been set up within a large organisation with more a general mission, such as law enforcement agencies, hospital centres or municipalities (local government). In our sample, specialization and partnerships are often intertwined and complementary. Organisations – police departments, courts, hospitals, city administrations, social services, victims’ aid association, etc. – that participate in inter-institutional partnerships often do so through their specialised domestic violence units. All the partnerships in our sample use specialized units as the main communication channel and grassroots implementer of their actions against domestic violence. Conversely, all the specialised units in the same sample participate in one or more multi-agency cooperation(s). This configuration makes it easier to integrate the staff concerned into the partnership network as well as teaching them the practices that enable cooperation to work. More broadly, it promotes their professionalization in dealing with domestic violence.

The most dynamic partnerships in our sample (BIG and HAIP in Germany, BPF in France, GAIV in Portugal, OKIT in Hungary, ANKKURI in Finland, the Inter-institutional Group for Prevention of domestic violence in Slovenia) are those that can rely on a small core of highly involved cooperation relays. These partnerships have developed a strong sense of belonging and loyalty to the system, and the specialized stakeholders play a leading role vis-à-vis less involved actors.

The case of victim protection units in Austrian hospitals illustrates the multiple advantages of building cooperation as an assembly integrated contact in organisations. These dedicated units tend to advocate for better care for victims by the organisation as a whole, namely through the creation of procedures and tools common to all services or the training of non-specialist colleagues. In addition, these units become internal “competence centres”, whose expertise is sought whenever

the organisation or one of its components is confronted with a domestic violence-related problem. These units constitute, in addition, an easily identifiable point of contact for external actors who wish to contact the organisation regarding domestic violence. Their most important contribution is currently the strengthening of the medical sector sensitivity for cases of domestic violence, improving its unique potential for early detection and as an entry point for specific types of victims not entering the networked response system via the police or social services (i.e. domestic violence victims experiencing neglect or heavy coercive control).

The more complex a partnership, i.e. the more numerous and varied its partners and the more it provides a diversified range of services, the more it needs to have specialised and professional contacts in each participating organisation.

These “partnership relays” are all the more motivated to invest in multi-agency cooperation as their respective organisations give them high status and adequate resources. In this respect, one of the main status symbols is access to means of action that are usually reserved for cases considered important. For example, dedicated Domestic Abuse Investigation Units, which are present in some police divisions in Scotland, can use the same tools and working methods used to investigate organized crime, anti-fraud, serial crime, or homicide. This requires that the organisation managers regard this type of unit as very important and have given the unit a real mandate. Most likely, there is also strong political pressure behind it.

To make a useful contribution to cooperation, partnership relays must have operational autonomy and influence with their management. They must ensure that their organisation works in a spirit of multi-agency cooperation and plays its part in the implementation of partnership services. When they receive a justified request from an external partner, they must be able to activate their organisation to respond satisfactorily.

By contrast, a partnership is unlikely to work effectively when partnership relays are saturated with tasks unrelated to combating domestic violence when the work they do for the partnership is less rewarded than what they do for their organisation, or when they have no leverage to ensure their organisation fulfils its partnership obligations.

An effort to train professionals and produce knowledge

The comparison of multi-agency cooperation's "good practices" reveals another similarity: the organisations involved make substantial investments in training their staff responsible for carrying out partnership missions.

This training effort is multi-faceted. One is the transmission of knowledge about domestic violence as a criminological fact, a legal notion that gravely affects victims' well-being physically, psychologically, and socially. A second is training staff to learn skills to support and protect victims and their children, provide care and treatment for perpetrators, and develop policies to combat domestic violence. A third is learning methods designed to facilitate inter-organisational cooperation, such as communication in meetings, working-group facilitation, project design, promotion and management, and shared evaluation of results. The actors who are given priority training are those with a coordinating role and those who ensure the coupling between the partnership mechanism and partner organisations (and often are the specialized staff mentioned above).

Different methods are used to strengthen partnership relays' skills. In addition to training, some schemes encourage their members to read professional journals and scientific publications, participate in symposiums and seminars, engage in dialogue on specialised online forums, visit organisations known for their good practices, meet associations, etc. (This is particularly the case in German practice, French BPF and the Inter-Institutional Group for Prevention of domestic violence in Slovenia).

The most developed partnerships have knowledge production activities. Such initiatives may consist of setting out, specifying and codifying the practices of actors in the system, in manuals, practical guides, and operations blueprints. This is designed to clarify, stabilise, rationalise and systematise working procedures necessary for good cooperation between stakeholders and properly handling the cases under treatment. Standardising partnership relays' practices is a way of integrating the system's activities into the operating routines of participating organisations, which are then less likely to question them. In addition, codifying practices makes it easier for newcomers to learn their role in the partnership. In addition, codification work requires implementing reflexivity approaches, such as identifying and analyzing dysfunctions, pinpointing shortcomings in provisions (e.g.

through victim satisfaction surveys), devising outcome evaluation programs, etc. On the other hand, this kind of standardization renders partnership and practices public, formal and official. It may set a path on which the future of the partnership will be dependent. It is more difficult to change and reform structures and practice once they have become official.

Knowledge production can also take advisory and expert activities, participation in studies and research projects, contribution to professional or scientific publications, invention and experimentation with new instruments or new methods, as do the German, Austrian and Hungarian systems.

Conclusion: The development of “good cooperation” is not just an organisational matter

This chapter has shown that police action towards domestic violence can be improved not only by forcing police officers to take domestic violence seriously but also by educating them about the subject, specializing them on it, and above all make them work in partnerships with other professions—magistrates, social workers, city administrators, etc.

Identifying five organisational features found in all “good” inter-agency partnerships against domestic should not suggest that these features would be sufficient to set up the “right organisation”, i.e. to generate dynamic, productive and sustainable inter-institutional cooperation.

The analysis of the 18 case studies in 8 countries for the IMPRODOVA project suggests that the consolidation of a partnership against domestic violence depends on many factors that have nothing to do with the partnership organisation’s design and management. By consolidation, we mean the institutionalisation and systematic use of working procedures by which partnership bodies and partnership relays contribute together and in an integrated manner to provide efficient partnership services. These factors include:

- The existence of a legal framework or public policy that encourages or even forces partner organisations to engage in the partnership and to consider it a priority. These incentives can be negative (regulatory obligation,

hierarchical order, etc.) or positive (granting of subsidies, allocation of additional resources, etc.).

- Increased social, political and media pressure to do something about domestic violence. These pressures are often linked to highly publicized media stories, advocacy or the adoption of international standards.
- Strong involvement of institutional entrepreneurs and change agents in the design and promotion of the partnership mechanism, and their ability to build alliances with influential partner organisations' members.
- Securing political support, especially from local authorities.
- Reference to models applied elsewhere – on the national territory or abroad – that are already acknowledged as “good practices”. Such recognition is rarely linked to the availability of rigorous evaluations of “good practice” effectiveness. It often results from the fact that well-known institutions have pioneered the practice or are working to disseminate it. For example, the MARAC approaches applied in Austria, Scotland and Finland are modelled on a model advocated by the European Union, and the work of the Slovenian Association for Nonviolent Communication is based on an American approach.

One of the most decisive factors seems to be how long a partnership has been in existence. Indeed, the long-standing nature of a device allows a whole set of incremental changes to produce their effects. For example, partnership practices are gradually being integrated into participating organisations' culture and structure. In the long run, they become constitutive elements of partners' identity and routine functioning. Members appropriate partnership work to the point of no longer differentiating it from their own practices. These partnerships are enshrined in their organisation chart, internal regulations, official procedures, management and work tools, recruitment and training plans, etc. As a result, partner organisations build capacity, standard operating routines, and interests in their ranks to contribute to the partnership, leading to institutional inertia or even to irreversible involvement in the partnership mechanism.

Other positive effects of the longstanding nature of a scheme are linked to socialization dynamics that gradually strengthen social ties between participants. This ensures that they all have realistic demands and expectations from each other, which limits grounds for conflict. On the other hand, the multiplication of personal

relationships and the establishment of a climate of trust between stakeholders are conducive to the informal circulation of information as well as quicker and concrete solutions to urgent situations (typically: the issue is immediately resolved by telephone exchanges, rather than waiting for the next meeting). Finally, the sense of mutual respect that binds partners promotes the expression of mutual criticism in a constructive way rather than “passing the blame onto others” or dismissing it altogether.

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