

FRONTLINE RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SLOVENIA

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Abstract In Slovenia, domestic violence is a common social problem that infringes upon fundamental human rights. Results of a European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey from 2014 showed that, after the age of 15, 22 % of Slovenian women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence, which is 11 % lower than for the EU overall. The European Institute for Gender Equality, in their report from 2017, estimated that the cost of intimate partner violence against women in Slovenia could amount to EUR 440 million annually. Violence against women continues to be underreported and stigmatised. The Slovenian police are one of the main front-line responders that react to domestic violence incidents. A comprehensive protocol is set in place that enables the police to react as effectively as possible. Interinstitutional cooperation is also available to deal with a case of violence in a multidisciplinary team treating domestic violence. Despite the national policy on preventing and eliminating domestic violence, raising public awareness about it, allocating resources to education and training initiatives, an intervention programme for perpetrators, as well as a coordinated system for providing victim assistance – some deficiencies remain in the implementation of these policies.

Keywords:
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interagency
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Description of the country

The Republic of Slovenia is a country in Central Europe that covers 20,271 square kilometres and has a population of 2.1 million. Ljubljana is the nation's capital and its largest city. Historically, Slovenia was a member of former Yugoslavia. In 1991, Slovenia gained independence and in 2004 it joined the European Union. It is also a member of other international organisations/arrangements like NATO, OSCE, UN, the Schengen Area, etc. Slovenia is a relatively economically developed country.

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991) states that Slovenia is a democratic republic governed by the rule of law and a social state that guarantees the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all, irrespective of their ethnicity, race, gender, faith, political or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status, or any other personal circumstance. Under the Constitution, everyone has the right to personal dignity and safety, the inviolability of their physical and mental integrity, while their privacy and personality rights are also guaranteed. The state is responsible for safeguarding family, motherhood, fatherhood, children and youth and creating the required conditions.

Domestic violence is a common social problem that infringes upon basic human rights. It has a considerable impact on victims' physical and mental health, brings immediate and long-term consequences, and imposes a significant cost burden on society. Despite the nationwide policy on preventing and eliminating domestic violence, raising public awareness about it, allocating resources to education and training initiatives, an intervention programme for perpetrators, as well as a coordinated system for providing victim assistance – some deficiencies remain in the implementation of these policies. Such limits were also recognised in the Resolution on the 2009–2014 National Programme on Prevention of Family Violence (Slo: Resolucija o nacionalnem programu preprečevanja nasilja v družini 2009-2014 [ReNPPND0914]) (2009).

Prior to the Resolution expiring, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities began work on a new strategic document in the form of a national programme for preventing domestic violence and violence against women, which is to set out in greater detail the strategic directions in the area of preventing domestic violence for the coming period (e.g. key areas where deficiencies or poor

performance in this field have been detected, and objectives and measures for their improvement) (Association for nonviolent communication, 2019).

Legislation on domestic violence

Slovenia incorporates several international documents and standards concerning domestic violence in its legislation. Mainly, on the EU and national levels, the area of domestic violence is regulated by ‘Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 Establishing Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime, and Replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA’ (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2012) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2014). Slovenia signed this Convention on 8 September 2011 and ratified it on 19 December 2014.

The primary national legislation for regulating domestic violence in Slovenia is the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2008) and the Act Amending the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2016). The amending act added stalking as one of the forms of domestic violence, prohibited corporal punishment of children, and extended the list of those obliged to report violence against children. Domestic violence is defined in the Domestic Violence Prevention Act,¹ with the Act also defining the role and tasks of state authorities, holders of public authority, public service providers and other service providers in the areas of social security, healthcare and education, the competencies of self-governing local communities and non-governmental organisations for dealing with domestic violence and lays down measures for protecting victims of domestic violence.

¹ (Domestic) violence denotes any form of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence inflicted by one family member on another, or the neglect or stalking of the victim regardless of age, gender or any other personal circumstance of the victim or the perpetrator of the violence. It also prohibits corporal punishment of children article (*‘Act Amending the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (Slo. Zakon o Spremembah in Dopolnitvah Zakona o Preprečevanju Nasilja v Družini [ZPND-A])’*, 2016; *‘Domestic Violence Prevention Act (Slo. Zakon o preprečevanju nasilja v družini [ZPND])’*, 2008).

According to Article 11 of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2008), the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia in 2009 adopted the Resolution on the 2009–2014 National Programme on Prevention of Family Violence. This strategic document stipulated the objectives, measures and key policymakers for preventing and reducing domestic violence in the Republic of Slovenia for the 2009–2014 period, prepared by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in cooperation with other ministries. The document's fundamental objectives were to connect the measures of various sectors and ensure that activities to reduce domestic violence are efficient on the levels of identification and prevention.

In its first report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities reported that a working group established by the Ministry for Labour, Family and Social Affairs was then preparing a new Resolution on the National Programme on Preventing Domestic Violence and Violence against Women 2020–2025 (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence [GREVIO], 2019).

The fact domestic violence is a common social problem that infringes basic human rights has seen it being criminalised in Slovenian legislation. The first Criminal Code of the Republic of Slovenia (1994) did not include domestic violence as a standalone criminal offence, although violent conduct in the family setting was penalised. In the substantially amended Criminal Code of 2008, domestic violence is stipulated as an independent criminal offence in the chapter on criminal offences against marriage, family, and children.²

² More precisely, Article 191 of the Criminal Code – Official Consolidated Text (2012) states:

1. Whoever within a family treats another person badly, beats them, or in any other way treats them painfully or degradingly, threatens with a direct attack on their life or limbs to throw them out of the joint residence or in any other way limits their freedom of movement, stalks them, forces them to work or give up their work, or in any other way puts them in a subordinate position by aggressively limiting their equal rights shall be sentenced to imprisonment of no more than 5 years.
2. The same punishment shall be imposed on whoever commits the acts under the preceding paragraph in any other permanent living community.
3. If the act referred to in paragraph 1 is committed against a person with whom the perpetrator lived in a family or other permanent community, which fell apart, however this act is connected to the community, the perpetrator shall be sentenced to imprisonment for no more than 3 years.

Under the Protection of Public Order Act (2006), domestic violence can also be considered a misdemeanour against public order and peace and be classified as violent and offensive behaviour (Article 6). If the violence bears signs of both a criminal offence and a misdemeanour, according to the Minor Offences Act (2011), the criminal prosecution holds priority. This means that a perpetrator convicted of a criminal offence with signs of a misdemeanour cannot be subjected to proceedings/sanctions related to the minor offence. Domestic violence is usually treated as a criminal offence when it comes to repeated violent acts by which the perpetrator puts the victim in a subordinate position. If the violent behaviour is a one-off act (and does not meet the legal requirements of any other criminal offence), it is typically treated as a minor offence (Filipčič et al. 2021).

The Slovenian Criminal Procedure Act was also adjusted to correspond to the growing awareness of the damaging consequences of domestic violence and its complexity while tackling it, especially when it comes to protecting the victims. The biggest improvements were seen in the Act Amending the Criminal Procedure Act (2019), which gives the police powers as well as an obligation to conduct a risk assessment of the victim(s)' safety.³

The Slovenian police do pay special attention to domestic violence problems, reflected in its core legislation – the Police Tasks And Powers Act (2013). Under the Act, police officers must be especially considerate while interacting with victims of domestic violence. The Act also gives police officers the ability to issue a restraining order against the perpetrator. In general, the police is seen as giving special emphasis to vulnerable groups, and displays zero tolerance for all forms of violence, as demonstrated in goals contained in the Resolution on the National Programme for the Prevention and Suppression of Crime 2019–2023 (2019). This resolution also lists key risk factors and other factors important for improving the detection of

³ Article 143 č introduced into the Act Amending the Criminal Procedure Act (2019) states:

1. The competent authority in the pre-trial or criminal proceedings in order to establish the existence of special protection needs already at the first contact with the victim, if possible, to assess the level of exposure of the victim's secondary and repeat victimisation, intimidation and retaliation (individual score).
2. Where an individual evaluation to examine in particular the personal characteristics of the victim, the nature, severity and circumstances of the offence, the conduct of the accused and the victim in police or criminal proceedings and outside, take into account the opinion of the victim, especially if the victim expressly rejects in advance the possibility of special protection. The police especially takes account of the age and any disability of the victim and all other circumstances of the offence, executed due to prejudice, discrimination, exploitation or hate crimes with elements of violence or of a sexual nature and crimes with elements of terrorism, human trafficking and crimes committed in a criminal organisation.

domestic violence, peer violence and online violence against children (Police, n.d.-a).

Reporting levels of domestic violence

Two types of data sets are available for monitoring domestic violence: official statistics and victimisation studies. However, the full extent of violence against women is hard to estimate. Violence against women continues to be underreported and stigmatised, meaning that what is actually reported is only a fraction of the reality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013).

The Slovenian Police in its annual work report for 2020 shows the number of criminal acts of domestic violence was comparable with previous years (Police, 2021). Criminal offences of domestic violence are among the 10 most frequent offences in the category of general crimes.

Table 1: Criminal offences in the category of general crimes [10 most frequent offences]

Type of criminal offence	Number of criminal offences					Share of criminal offences investigated [in %]				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Larceny	20,397	19,045	18,496	16,688	15,170	25.8	25.2	26.5	30.0	30.9
Grand larceny	11,508	10,010	9,350	9,362	9,039	16.1	20.0	20.4	19.6	20.2
Damage to third-person property	3,011	3,197	3,377	3,330	3,705	23.4	23.2	21.1	23.6	25.5
Fraud	2,629	2,407	2,706	3,134	2,662	82.4	78.5	78.1	77.2	69.5
Threat	1,399	1,455	1,543	1,610	1,917	90.5	91.6	89.6	88.8	87.6
Domestic violence	1,347	1,274	1,371	1,336	1,477	95.0	96.5	97.6	97.1	98.7
Unlawful manufacture of and trade in narcotic drugs, illicit substances in sport and precursors for manufacturing narcotic drugs	1,470	1,650	1,517	1,252	1,366	93.5	94.0	92.4	92.7	93.0
Light bodily harm	1,346	1,256	1,399	1,425	1,312	88.9	89.2	90.4	88.6	90.8
Misappropriation	1,371	1,440	1,502	1,478	1,307	39.3	37.5	35.8	36.1	39.1
Counterfeiting documents	1,300	1,573	986	1,301	855	95.2	94.0	93.5	93.4	91.9
Other criminal offences	5,907	6,104	6,054	6,119	6,757	82.5	80.9	78.2	80.2	76.7
Total	51,685	49,411	48,301	47,035	45,567	42.1	43.7	43.9	46.4	47.0

Source: Police (2021, p. 101)

More data concerning subtypes of offences related to domestic violence and against marriage, family and children are presented below. Over 2,000 cases of such offences are recorded per year, and domestic violence is the most prevalent type of offence, representing more than half of all criminal offences against marriage, family and children.

Table 2: Criminal offences against marriage, family and children

Type of criminal offence	Number of criminal offences					Share of criminal offences investigated [in %]				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Abduction of minors	279	330	653	375	604	85.3	72.1	60.0	85.1	81.1
Domestic violence	1,347	1,274	1,371	1,336	1,477	95.0	96.5	97.6	97.1	98.7
Neglect and maltreatment of a minor	507	471	543	657	642	94.5	93.4	95.9	94.2	95.8
Non-payment of child support	337	238	216	176	205	94.1	97.1	96.8	98.9	98.0
Other criminal offences	8	5	8	7	4	87.5	100.0	100.0	85.7	100.0
Total	2,478	2,318	2,791	2,551	2,932	93.6	92.5	88.4	94.7	94.4

Source: Police (2021, p. 103)

The geographical spread of offences against marriage, family and children per police directorate [PD] is shown in Figure 2. A total of eight police directorates covers Slovenia. The highest levels of domestic violence (per 100,000 inhabitants) are observed in the Savinjska and Dolenjska regions, and overall more domestic violence is reported in the eastern part of Slovenia, also characterised by poorer social circumstances.

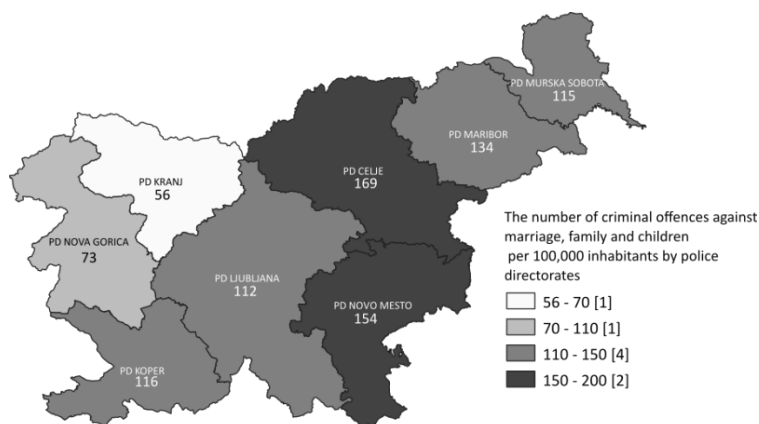


Figure 1: The number of criminal offences against marriage, family and children per 100,000 inhabitants by police directorates [PD]
(Police, 2021, p. 103)

Statistics also show that domestic violence is one of the top ten categories of criminal offences where injured people withdraw from the prosecution.

Table 3: Criminal offences, prosecuted upon the proposal, where injured people withdrew from the prosecution* [10 most frequent offences]

Type of criminal offence	Number of criminal offences							
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Damage to third-person property	3,379	4,090	4,302	4,312	3,656	3,695	3,886	3,419
Larceny	5,678	5,954	5,662	5,110	4,067	4,184	3,924	3,025
Fraud	319	476	435	365	371	461	457	423
Threat	53	68	104	244	260	303	309	312
Misappropriation	302	376	342	312	355	433	456	309
Light bodily harm	275	260	274	234	193	268	322	193
Violation of inviolability of dwelling	117	132	96	114	117	103	196	115
Abuse of personal data	6	11	13	10	5	20	29	33
Stalking	0	0	4	6	18	22	27	23
Domestic violence	14	14	6	11	8	10	20	18
Other criminal offences	90	103	90	78	94	140	131	99
Total	10,233	11,484	11,328	10,796	9,144	9,639	9,757	7,969

* Data are shown by date of detection since 2013.

Source: Police (2021, p. 98)

Official police statistics on the state of recorded misdemeanours show domestic violence is the second-most prevalent type of minor offence, representing around 10 per cent of all misdemeanours recorded (Table 4).

Table 4: The number of offenders under the Protection of Public Order Act [ZjRM-1] (2006)

	Number of violations									
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Provoking or inciting fighting [6/1 ZjRM-1]	4,976	5,090	4,790	4,668	4,474	4,665	4,813	5,132	5,004	4,909
Domestic violence [6/4 ZjRM1 in connection with 6/1, 6/2 and 6/3 ZjRM-1]	3,789	3,535	3,355	3,125	2,859	2,823	2,979	2,885	2,786	2,786
Disregarding the order of an official [22/1 ZjRM-1]	2,887	2,690	2,070	1,888	1,662	1,681	1,680	1,745	1,629	2,043
Indecent behaviour to an official [7/2 ZjRM-1]	3,452	2,908	2,515	2,255	1,823	1,696	1,844	1,748	1,581	1,797
Causing noise with acoustic devices [8/2 ZjRM1]	1,569	1,300	1,205	1,190	937	848	971	1,112	1,265	1,659
Quarrels, yelling or indecent behaviour [7/1 ZjRM-1]	5,041	4,371	3,533	2,890	2,350	2,101	2,064	1,890	1,722	1,594
Hitting [6/2 ZjRM-1]	2,501	2,547	2,423	2,280	1,960	1,820	1,724	1,797	1,472	1,152
Disturbing night peace with noise [8/1 ZjRM-1]	867	754	786	638	756	777	734	755	840	1,073
Intrusive or offending harassment by begging in a public place [9 ZjRM-1]	538	501	479	420	344	581	345	257	294	192
Sleeping overnight in a public place [10 ZjRM-1]	298	181	192	127	99	119	143	125	109	186
Battery [6/3 ZjRM-1]	567	468	517	438	287	287	279	314	267	174
Provoking intolerance [20 ZjRM-1]	60	56	57	44	45	42	48	56	56	60
Vandalism [6/16 ZjRM-1]	131	131	92	79	69	67	61	43	74	56
Prohibition of entry of persons under 16 years of age to hospitality facilities at events [20 ZjRM-1]	11	10	13	3	3	3	3	7	1	3
Other violations	1,966	1,671	1,739	1,261	1,216	1,165	1,146	1,154	1,202	975
Total	28,653	26,213	23,766	21,306	18,884	18,675	18,834	19,020	18,302	18,659

Source: (Police, 2021, p. 121)

In addition to official statistics, victimisation studies are available and provide some insights into domestic violence. However, in the past, very few such studies were carried out in Slovenia.

Results of a survey from 2014 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2014) showed that, after the age of 15, 22 % of Slovenian women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence; which is 11 % lower than for the EU overall (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). Further, 14 % of women in Slovenia have been stalked; 44 % of women in Slovenia have experienced sexual harassment. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2017) estimated that the cost of intimate partner violence against women in Slovenia could amount to EUR 440 million annually.

A nationwide survey carried out in Slovenia in 2010 (Leskošek et al., 2010) on the incidence of violence in the private sphere and in relationships included 3,000 women aged 18 to 80 years. Based on 750 returned questionnaires, the analysis showed that after the age of 15 over one-half (56.6 %) of women had experienced one form of violence, with 49.3% experiencing psychological violence, 23 % physical, 14.1 % economic and 6.5 % sexual violence. In most (90.8 %) cases, the perpetrators were men, showing violent behaviour at a very early age (from the age of 14). The research showed that violence can begin at any time – in early childhood to a late age, and in some cases, it lasts a lifetime. Victims are afraid of speaking out due to traditional reasons; namely, this is still a taboo subject because victims hope the perpetrator will stop with their violent behaviour and will change and not repeat their violent behaviour. Other victims remain silent because they are afraid the perpetrator will take their children away due to the perpetrator's influence in society (Leskošek et al., 2010). One disadvantage of this research is that it focused solely on violence against women and thus neglected men and boys as victims of domestic violence.

In Slovenia, research was also conducted on domestic violence cases resulting in the murder of a partner. The study analysed the profiles of perpetrators and victims between 2000 and 2007. During this time, a total of 48 murders occurred. The results showed that in 37 cases the victims were female, while the perpetrators were men in equal numbers. In 23 cases, alcohol or drugs were detected, 22 cases occurred inside the house, and 16 were inside apartment buildings. Most homicide victims were in

the age group 35–45. In 23 cases, the motive was jealousy, and in 7 cases revenge. In 34 cases, the police had already intervened before the murder (Mušič, 2010).

Recently, Filipčič et al. (2021) investigated how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected domestic violence report rates by investigating and comparing pre- and post-pandemic police statistics. They found that the police recorded slightly higher levels of domestic violence as a criminal offence compared to the pre-pandemic period, while reported cases of domestic violence as a misdemeanour as well as police restraining orders declined during the pandemic. They conclude that these results call for further investigation into the actual reasons for such observed declining reporting levels since experience from other countries has shown reverse trends during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The frontline response

The Slovenian police are one of the main frontline responders that react to domestic violence incidents. A comprehensive protocol is set in place (Police, n.d.) that enables the police to react as effectively as possible. A domestic violence incident can be reported by anyone – a victim, child, minor, NGO, private entity or state agency. Some occupations and actors (preschools, schools and healthcare agencies, e.g. doctors, therapists, psychiatrists, etc. or where persons are acting in an official capacity) are obliged to report such an incident when children are the victims. This can be done in several ways, including calling the police lines, online forms, or visiting police precincts, social work centres, or prosecutors' offices.

Since both the Criminal Procedure Act (2012) and the Police Tasks and Powers Act (2013) demand that a form of risk assessment be made and, if needed and/or possible, the perpetrator is removed from the residence and a restraining order is issued. First orally, then within 6 hours in written form. The order is valid for 48 hours and its legitimacy is automatically checked by an investigating judge (court), who issues a special decision thereon and can also extend the restraining order's validity to 15 days. The order can on the victim's request be extended to 60 days. In the restraining order, the allowed distance from the victim's place is specified (places where the victim lives, works, studies or moves about on a daily basis are so protected), while the perpetrator is also prohibited from intimidating the victims through means of communication (Police, n.d. - b).

Under the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2008), victims of violence can ask for a restraining order or ask the court to prohibit perpetrator to enter victim's residence, keep a certain distance away from her/his home, or stay a certain distance away from places where the victim regularly visits. Courts can also order the perpetrator to leave the residence in which the victim lives (or lived) with the perpetrator. These measures include prohibitions on the perpetrator from encountering, intimidating or interfering in any way with their or solely the victim's children, with this including all means of communication. Overall, the restraining order can be imposed for up to 12 months. The courts treat these requests for protective measures as a matter of priority (Police, n.d.b). Based on the specifics of an individual case, the police will perform several tasks ranging from purely safety and administrative (documenting the incidents, issuing the restraining order) to investigative ones (searches of premises, documenting injuries etc.). They will do so in cooperation with other bodies (e.g. non-governmental organisations and healthcare service providers), among which the main partners are the Social Work centres (Police, n.d.c).

Social Work centres

Rules on the organisation and work of multidisciplinary teams and regional services as well as the activities of social work centres for dealing with domestic violence were adopted within the scope of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the Act Amending the Domestic Violence Prevention Act. The coordination of interinstitutional cooperation is managed by a Social Work Centre (SWC), which is the local authority for handling a case of domestic violence. Interinstitutional cooperation is also available to deal with a case of violence in a multidisciplinary team treating domestic violence.

When domestic violence is detected, all authorities in Slovenia are obliged to notify the SWC of such incidents and, especially when the circumstances allow the conclusion that a child is a victim of violence, the authorities must inform the nearest SWC, the police or the state prosecutor's office (Domestic Violence Prevention Act, 2008). The SWC and the police immediately exchange information about the notification according to the competencies and rules of the profession, coordinate the initial activities (Domestic Violence Prevention Act, 2008).

Within 24 hours of receiving the notification or the perception of domestic violence, the police notify the SWC. The police, and particularly the SWC, may convene a multidisciplinary team to address the domestic violence. A representative of the police is involved in the team's work, especially to:

- exchange the information needed to clarify the circumstances of providing victim protection and assistance;
- obtain information relevant to the professional actions of the police;
- provide information relevant to the actions of other bodies and organisations, particularly about who is suspected of having committed a crime;
- in accordance with the terms of reference and rules of the profession coordinate police activities with those of other bodies and organisations;
- provide assistance to the SWC in the implementation of emergency measures under the law; and
- participate in the formulation and implementation of the plan to give assistance.

In order to assist victims of violence, intervention services, to help coordinate the activities of authorities and organisations, and to monitor and analyse the occurrence of violence in the area of the SWC, within each SWC a service for coordination and victim assistance is formed. This service acts pursuant to the law on social security, and enforces urgent measures for protecting the child's interest under the law on family relationships. Each service includes an intervention service and a crisis centre.

Regional department for coordination and victim assistance provides services under the law governing social protection and emergency measures to protect the child's interests under the law regulating family relations. The regional service includes service intervention, crisis centres and a regional coordinator for the prevention of violence. In Slovenia, shelters are developing as part of the social work and NGO fields. According to the Women against Violence Europe [WAVE] (2016, 2018, 2019) reports, Slovenia has made a big improvement in expanding the provision of shelters for domestic violence victims and is now one of only 5 countries in the EU (out of 26 that WAVE has data for) which meet the minimum standards of shelter-provision as specified in the Istanbul Convention. These countries are Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway and Slovenia. According to the Association for

nonviolent communication (2019), in 2018 a total of 15 maternity homes for mothers and children's units, and 28 units of safe houses, women's shelters and crisis centres were available in Slovenia, all co-financed by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with and protecting against violence in the framework of their programmes provide protection and psycho-social assistance to victims, organise programmes for the perpetrators of violence to teach them non-violent behaviour in interpersonal relationships to prevent further violence and change violent behavioural patterns, and cooperate with authorities and organisations in various fields like the police, the State Prosecutor's Office, courts, social work centres, health organisations and educational institutions.

One prominent NGO in this domain is the *Association for Nonviolent Communication* (Slo: Društvo za nenasilno komunikacijo) (2021). The Association for Nonviolent Communication is a nongovernmental, non-profit and humanitarian organisation dedicated to the prevention and reduction of violence and its consequences. It was founded in 1996 when it was the first NGO in Slovenia with programmes for both victims and perpetrators of violence. In addition, some other NGOs are available to help victims of domestic violence. Women experiencing rape and sexual assault and/or domestic violence can access a specialist service for women.

The Društvo SOS (n.d.) (which may be translated as *SOS Helpline for women and children – victims of violence*) runs a national helpline, and female victims of domestic violence can also obtain help by email and online. It is anonymous and free of charge, but not 24/7. Run by an NGO, it has been operating since 1989. Overall, Slovenia does not meet the Istanbul Convention standards for national women's helplines but, as noted, it does meet the standards for women's shelters provisions and exceeds the recommended number of shelters per head of population and beds needed according to the WAVE (2019) report.

Slovenia also has specialised services for the victims of human trafficking, the Društvo Ključ (n.d.), which is a centre in the fight against human trafficking. *Društvo Ključ* and *Karitas* (n.d.) can provide crisis accommodation with intensive support, as well as traditional accommodation.

Healthcare sector

An important frontline responder to domestic violence is the healthcare sector. Health professionals play an important role in intersectoral cooperation and teams. They are compelled to become involved with combating domestic violence for both ethical and legal considerations, given that the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2008) requires them to take action and report domestic violence. The CSWs, police and health professionals are bound by the Act to appropriately respond to victims of domestic violence, prevent domestic violence and cooperate with other sectors. While the police and the CSW have adequately implemented the provisions of the law, this has not been the case with healthcare services (Bradley et al., 2021).

Although the *Rules on the Regulations and Procedures for Responding to Domestic Violence in Healthcare Services* entered into force in March 2011, it is still rare for health professionals to report domestic violence incidences in practice. Intersectoral cooperation with NGO representatives, the SWC and the police remain highly inadequate (POND, n.d.). The absence of a systematic response to domestic violence in healthcare services remains a grave problem in Slovenia, explaining why the project “POND” (which stands for ‘Recognising and treating domestic violence victims in healthcare settings: guidelines and training for health professionals’) was developed. It was supported by Norway Grants under the Public Health Initiatives programme in Slovenia. The project’s main objective was implementation of the Family Violence Prevention Act in the health sector in order to make health workers more competent to recognise domestic violence. Unfortunately, this problem still exists. According to the IMPRODOVA field interviews in Slovenia (Bradley et al., 2021), healthcare professionals do not routinely screen for health risks such as domestic violence or abused or neglected children. They usually do not ask about or identify domestic violence, even in instances when it is obvious. They are more focused on treating the injuries and often disregard the violence that caused those injuries (Bradley et al., 2021).

The *Professional Guidelines for Responding to Domestic Violence in Healthcare Services* were developed in 2014. These guidelines entail a collection of recommended conduct while responding to child victims of abuse and violence and adult victims of violence. They seek to equip health professionals coming into contact with domestic violence victims with basic skills and know-how for identifying and responding to

such victims (POND, n.d.). Since around 2009, domestic violence content has also been included in curriculums at the Faculty of Medicine in the specialisation for family doctors. The inclusion of domestic violence content was also an outcome of the POND project and certain highly motivated persons/researchers who recognised the need for such content at the medical faculties. These guidelines were approved by the Slovenian Medical Council and are publicly available (POND, n.d.).

Good co-operation practices between police and other first-line responders

The Shadow Report by Slovenian NGOs indicates the cooperation of the authorities and organisations in multidisciplinary teams to deal with domestic violence cases is generally evaluated as satisfactory. NGOs noted that mutual cooperation in Slovenia not only means the better identification of cases and more efficient help for victims, but also the possibility of speeding up the processes, obtaining additional relevant information, preventing the negative effects of the procedures introduced and, in particular, protecting the most vulnerable victims (Association for nonviolent communication, 2019).

The IMPRODOVA field study (Bradley et al., 2021) also shows that police and social work professionals found the cooperation to be very good, although these good practices vary across the country depending on the individuals involved rather than institutions. This is especially the case in the northeast of the country (e.g. Murska Sobota), where the police and the SWCs have established good informal relationships, the meetings are regular, and protocols are in place. Good practices of cooperation can be found in all sectors, but they are not unified. There seem to be some gaps in local capacities/attitudes or approaches. Domestic violence should be reported by preschools, schools and healthcare institutions (doctors, therapists, psychiatrists etc.), whereas persons acting in an official capacity must report it *ex officio*, although this is often not the case. Taking the victim's interests into account requires a high degree of professionalism from all relevant professional groups and in all areas of action (such as schools, nursery schools, general practitioners in medical professions, and courts).

Main challenges

Even though the Republic of Slovenia has, especially in the last decade, already adopted important legislation, conducted numerous awareness campaigns and placed greater emphasis on the training of professionals, the situation concerning domestic violence in the country remains unsatisfactory. Ratification of the Istanbul Convention does not necessarily result in actual realisation of its standards. This makes it necessary to ensure understanding of the key causes of violence against women and to continuously implement activities to eliminate them.

One of the concerning gaps between ratification and effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention remains the requirements to provide a national women's helpline (e.g. for several years already, Slovenia has not met the standards of operating a helpline both free of charge and 24/7). In addition, some NGOs report they are still unable to rely on the state for sufficient support (WAVE, 2019). On the other hand, Slovenia is one of only four countries (Slovenia, Malta, Latvia, Luxembourg) of the 28 EU countries currently meeting the minimum requirement in the Istanbul Convention to provide shelter and bed spaces for victims (WAVE, 2019). The IMPRODOVA field study (Bradley et al., 2021) noted that the medical profession and the judiciary must still strengthen their efforts. Especially the judiciary does not consider the characteristics and dynamics of domestic violence and its consequences for the victims of violence. Therefore, it is important to create greater opportunities for education and training.

Like other countries, Slovenia is committed to reviewing and, where necessary, adjusting its national legal and policy frameworks to ensure that actual implementation of the Istanbul Convention's provisions has been appropriately translated into the national legislation. Despite the aforementioned limitations, having kept this issue high on the political agenda, the country has made significant progress in prevention and response.

Slovenia committed itself to the overall goal of eliminating domestic violence when it adopted several strategic documents which define programmes for the prevention of violence and the measures for the protection of victims. Comprehensive normative measures have contributed to the improvement of the systemic regulation of preventing and combating domestic violence (Grevio, 2019). (Association for

nonviolent communication, 2019). Building high-quality, diverse and widely available programmes of assistance and protection for domestic violence victims; improving the protection, treatment and position of victims of this type of violence; providing highly competent professionals and experts; and building greater awareness among society of these problems are just a few of the future ways of reducing domestic violence in the country.

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List of legislation

Provisions of the key acts were presented in the text, while full texts of legislative documents are available at <https://www.pisrs.si>