

# **‘From Street to Home’**

## **Workstream 5 (deliverable: 5.2b)**

### **EU Member States Evidence base**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This report outlines the findings of Workstream 5 of the Daphne *Street to Home* project. Workstream 5 was developed in response to the withdrawal of the partner organisation from the Netherlands: this provided an opportunity to develop the project further.

The aim of this workstream was to situate the *Street to Home* project within the wider European context of policy, research and practice. The objectives of the workstream were threefold: they were to:

1. investigate examples of good practice of integrated housing and social support delivery initiatives in other EU countries not represented in the project partnership;
2. add to the baseline of current activity and identification of best practice, variations, constraints and problems in each partner country relating to the provision of housing and social support to women living with the threat of violence;
3. contribute to the recommendations and the EU Vision document.

Workstream 5 also identified examples of best practice in another two EU countries not represented in the current partnership. The purpose of this exercise was to provide a more in-depth view of practice than was possible in the broad overview of European member states. This also provided another two countries where partners could carry out best practice visits and highlight important work being undertaken. These are outlined in two separate documents.

This addition to the evidence base has increased the knowledge base of activity in other EU states for women with complex needs. By building a broader picture of the context in the European Union, the workstream has provided a firm knowledge base to situate the unique work of the *Street to Home* project. It has also added to the network of practitioners working in the areas of housing and social support for women who have complex needs.

### 1.2 Methodology

Workstream 5 involved a mixed methodological approach, comprising desk-based research and interviews with a range of stakeholders. Desk research explored a wide range of policy documents and research data. Interviews were undertaken with ten key stakeholders in countries that are not represented by the partner countries.

It was necessary to use a sample of member states in the timescale available. The sample comprises the following member states: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, France, Italy, Poland and Portugal. In addition to these countries, best practice examples were selected from Ireland and Romania. These countries were chosen on the basis of a range of criteria. It was important to reflect differences between new and older member states as well as different geographical regions.

## Chapter 2: Policy

This section identifies key national policies on domestic violence, homelessness, social housing and safe accommodation for women with complex needs in the sample countries. It identifies specific policies and common policies, highlights the variety in approaches to these issues in different member states and indicates some of the key recent trends.

### 2.1 Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a particular issue for the European Union. The European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014: 27) notes: 'One woman in three in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15'. In 2013, 13 million women in the EU had experienced domestic violence in the previous year (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014: 33).

There have been a range of recommendations and resolutions on violence against women and girls for many years. All this has been underpinned by the Istanbul Convention, adopted in 2011, which obliged parties to criminalise all forms of gender-based violence against women (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014: 10).

EU funding also contributes to the protection of victims of violence. Supportive action to address violence against women and secure women's rights to equal opportunities is central to economic and social cohesion, a key objective of the European Union (Reingarde et al., 2012). The Daphne Programme has been dedicated to funding projects addressing the issue since 1997 (Eurobarometer, 2010).

While the primary responsibility for protecting women from gender-based violence lies with Member States, the EU also plays a significant role, developing legislative measures in the areas of criminal and civil justice as well as targeted policy initiatives. These initiatives include awareness-raising, the exchange of good practices, and appropriate measures for the empowerment of women (Reingarde et al., 2012: 13).

Domestic violence is addressed by a range of laws in the sample member states. Many of these laws are fairly recent. For example, Croatia adopted its Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in 2009 and it has been amended twice in 2010. In Portugal, domestic violence was not even considered a criminal issue until 1982.

In older established EU members such as Austria, Denmark, France and Italy, domestic violence had been only indirectly addressed by the national criminal codes until the 2000s when it has become more explicitly identified. For example, in France, amendments to the Criminal Code made domestic violence a criminal activity. In Italy, stalking became a separate offence in the Criminal Code in 2009 (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 147).

In several member states, however, laws are not gender-specific. Even where amendments have been made, they are not explicit about the particular issues facing women and children. Indeed, in Poland there are no laws specifically on violence against women (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 211).

There is some tendency towards giving the municipality a role in addressing domestic violence. In Denmark's *National Strategy to Prevent Violence in Intimate Relations*, the municipality in which the woman lives is obliged to pay for her stay at a shelter. In Portugal, a recent government protocol has been issued that gives responsibility to municipalities to provide housing to victims of domestic violence and to provide a full range of support services to them<sup>1</sup>. Poland's, 2005 *Act on*

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<sup>1</sup> Information collected from the CIG IV National Plan. [http://www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Relatorio\\_Execucao\\_IV\\_PNCVD\\_2013.pdf](http://www.cig.gov.pt/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Relatorio_Execucao_IV_PNCVD_2013.pdf).

*Counteracting Domestic Violence* amendment obliges every municipality to create interdisciplinary units involving psychologists, police officers, social workers and probation officers, to work on eradication of domestic violence.

Funding for services is varied across the sample member states. Portugal, Poland and Austria (and Spain, as a *Street to Home* project partner) are highlighted as stipulating in national law that funding for services for survivors of violence or domestic violence should be provided by the State (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 5). The Croatian interviewee observed less positively, that 'several local governments have recently started organising housing for homeless people, and not too many and not with any concrete support for homeless to find a job or do anything meaningful.'

## 2.2 Homelessness

Women who find themselves homeless are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse. There is much evidence of homeless women being victims of domestic violence (Moss and Singh, 2012). A person living rough has no security, no door to lock, no safe place to keep possessions and may be at heightened risk of experiencing theft, violence and sexual crimes (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010: 59).

In some of the sample countries, homelessness has only recently been recognised as a problem. In Croatia, for example, the Social Welfare Act 2012 entitled homeless people to social welfare benefits; previously, many social rights and services were unavailable to them (Šoštarić, 2013). In Portugal, homeless people have only recently been mentioned as a specific target group.

In all the sample member states, in common with others across Europe, there are difficulties in defining homelessness. Changes in survey methods, sampling and simple definitions make it difficult to reliably assess the true scale of homelessness. Indeed, FEANTSA reports highlight that few European countries have regular or reliable monitoring of homelessness (FEANTSA, 2014)

France, Denmark, Portugal and Belgium were amongst a number of member states that 'provided some update on the state of development of strategies to tackle homelessness in their 2014 [National Reform Programme]. All of these Member States specifically cite homelessness as a priority issue' (FEANTSA, 2014).

Approaches vary: Belgium, for example, has a range of approaches, including piloting Housing First projects in cities across the country, improving housing benefit entitlement and introducing integrated support. Portugal's national reform programme focuses on providing financial support and satisfying basic needs.

There is some evidence that more responsibility for homeless people is being placed on municipalities. Croatia's '2014-2020 Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion' is being adopted and will be followed by the creation of a three-year Implementation program, including an obligation for large cities and county towns to fund accommodation and meal services for homeless people.

Lack of affordable housing is a common problem and one that is often cited in relation to the sample member states. Italy has developed a programme of investments in social housing for more disadvantaged families, including an increase in a national fund to support access to homes for rent, supporting tenants in rental arrears through no fault of their own and tenant-friendly rental agreements (FEANTSA, 2014).

## 2.3 Social housing and safe accommodation for women with complex needs

European policy debates indicate that there is an awareness of the potential of social housing to be a sanctuary from domestic violence. At policy level, there is some recognition that the provision of social housing can help transform the lives of women with children leaving situations of domestic

abuse. The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs called on the Commission to provide particular social housing support to women and children attempting to exit situations of domestic violence (European Parliament, 2013).

For the European Union, social housing is a key element in implementing the fundamental right to housing, one of the items in the Fundamental Rights Charter. It is recognised as a 'social service of general interest' and can therefore be supported with state aid (European Commission, 2008). In its Europe 2020 targets, the European Commission has defined improved access to housing as one of the key actions.<sup>2</sup>

Housing support is also included in the EC's Social Investment Package that was presented in February 2013 (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2013). The Commission urged Member States to increase investment in social housing by using EU structural funds (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2013).

For victims of domestic violence, 'housing is not a peripheral issue, or an issue that can be postponed for resolution later on. Rather, for women who fear for their safety and for their lives, housing is an immediate and pivotal issue on which the question of escape itself rests.' (Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2006: 1) Housing is an especially important concern for victims of domestic violence. To escape their abusers, women must be able to obtain alternative housing or to evict the abuser from the home (Advocates for Human Rights, 2013).

Social housing is a concern for all the sample countries. However, there is little at policy level that highlights the specific needs of women, let alone those of women with particularly complex needs. Interestingly, a report on social housing policy in the EU made one reference to women specifically, observing that 'other projects have included special housing for women' (Scanlon and Whitehead, 2008: 137).

There is some concern at national level to address the lack of shelter spaces highlighted by the 2012 WAVE report. However, there seems to be very little policy on providing safe housing in its broadest sense in any of the sample member states. The situation appears to be worsening in some of the sample countries. Recent reports highlight closure of more shelters in Croatia and Italy<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See webpage: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=961&langId=en> [Accessed 17/04/2015]

<sup>3</sup> See WAVE website: <http://www.wave-network.org/content/wave-observatory> [Accessed 13/03/2015].

## Chapter 3: Women and domestic violence

### 3.1 *Scale of Domestic Violence in the Sample Countries*

The scale of the problem of violence (physical and sexual) against women in the European Union is difficult to identify, although data is now being more effectively and rigorously collected. The scale of the problem, it is emerging, is vast and the recent *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey* by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) has highlighted the continuing scale of abuse of women across the EU.

The report notes: 'One woman in three in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15' (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014: 27). The report also estimated that 13 million women in the EU had experienced domestic violence in the previous year and 3.7 million women had experienced sexual violence in the same period (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014: 33).

In Belgium and Denmark, distinctions have been made between experiences over the course of a lifetime. In Belgium, according to a 2010 prevalence of violence survey, nearly 13% of women aged 20-49 have experienced physical violence in their lifetime. According to a prevalence survey of 2003, '20% of women in Denmark experience physical violence in their lifetime, while 6% have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime committed against them by their male intimate partner' (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 91).

In Croatia, data indicates a difference in the numbers of women who experience domestic violence frequently and those who experience it occasionally. A survey conducted in 2011 indicated that 31% of women have experienced domestic violence frequently, while 44% have experienced it occasionally' (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 74).

For other countries in the sample, there is data only for general experience of domestic violence. The inquiry *Cadre de Vie et Sécurité* in France (2012) revealed that about 2.5% of the interviewed women aged 18-75 (estimated number of declared victims: 567,000 women) have been victims of physical or sexual domestic violence in 2010/2011' (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 102).

In Italy, according to a survey published in 2006, data indicates that 12.2% of women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime and 1.7% in the last 12 months: 6.1% of women have experienced sexual violence in intimate partner relationships in their lifetime and 1% in the last 12 months (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 146). In Poland, a survey carried out in 2004 found that 4.4% had experienced physical violence in the last year, 11.2% in the last five years, and 18.1% in their lifetime (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 210)

In Portugal, 38% of women have experienced physical, psychological and/or sexual violence since the age of 18, according to a survey published in 2008. Nearly 30% of women in Austria have experienced sexual violence and similar percentage have experienced domestic and intimate partner violence (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012).

Some countries have data on cases of domestic violence that have been brought to the attention of the police. In Belgium, national criminal statistics on domestic violence show a total of 57,122 cases (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 60). In Portugal, National criminal statistics indicate that there were 27,507 crimes of domestic violence against women in 2011.

### 3.2 *Women with multiple needs*

Much less easy to identify is the scale of women with multiple needs. Definition is key: a combination of two or more of the offender pathways is regarded in the UK as being 'complex' needs. The reality is that many of the women have a wide range of issues, including poor family and



intimate relationships, unresolved mental health issues, drug use, inability to cope with finance and housing, and often, as we have seen, histories of violence and abuse.

One indicator of the scale of multiple needs is the number of women in prison. Usually, they have a number of inter-related needs. The number of women prisoners, based on Walmsley's (2012) figures, varies hugely between the sample member states although the percentage of the total prison population is relatively small. Noticeably, Denmark and Croatia have very low numbers of women in prison (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Women prisoners in the sample Member States**

Country	Number of female prisoners	Percentage of total prison population
Austria	585	6.7
Belgium	419	4.0
Croatia	236	4.6
Denmark	179	4.4
France	2411	3.5
Italy	2808	4.2
Poland	2529	3.1
Portugal	696	5.5

Source: Walmsley, 2012

Problematic drug use is another indicator of multiple needs (as well as being a need in itself) in the sample member states as in others. The relationship of gender and drug taking is complex. EMCDDA's 2009 report *Women's Voices* (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2009) highlights the individual tragedies in eight sample countries. The sample of this study included French and Portuguese women.

Frequent references are made to problematic family relationships. The scale of drug taking within family situations is highlighted in EMCDDA's (2012) report *Pregnancy, Childcare and the Family: Key issues for Europe's response to drugs*. According to this report, more than 14% of women receiving treatment for problematic drug use are living with children in France, Italy, Croatia and Denmark; between 10% and 14% in Portugal and Belgium and between 8 and 10 % in Poland and Romania.

## Chapter 4: Perceptions of domestic violence

Perceptions on domestic violence are highlighted in surveys such as the Eurobarometer report (Eurobarometer, 2010). The huge variety in popular perceptions of the issues highlights the difficulties in promoting good practice for women survivors of domestic violence in general, let alone promoting integrated supported housing initiatives for women with complex needs.

### 4.1 *Growing awareness of domestic violence*

There is clearly a general growth in awareness of domestic violence. The percentages of respondents from the sample countries for this project who thought that domestic violence was fairly common are as follows: Belgium 53% up 11% since the earlier, 1999 Eurobarometer survey; Denmark 16% (up 1%); France 32% (up 8%); Italy 53%; Poland 49%; Portugal 50% (down 3%). The percentages of respondents from the sample countries for this project who thought that domestic violence was very common are as follows: Belgium 24% (down 3%); Denmark 48%; France 57% (up 8%); Italy 38% (up 10%); Poland 17%; Portugal 36% (up 9%) (Eurobarometer, 2010).

For several of the sample member states in this report, awareness of the legislation on domestic violence has grown. 75% of respondents from Portugal (up from 31% in the 1999 survey) 'now think that their country has laws to punish those who commit domestic violence against women', as do 85% in Belgium (up from 48%). However, in Denmark, the growth in awareness is negligible (84%, up from 82%) (Eurobarometer, 2010).

### 4.2 *Perceptions of causes of domestic violence*

Interestingly, perceptions of the causes of domestic violence indicate that many people think that it is the result of individual choices. Furthermore, victim blaming attitudes are common. In several of the sample countries, a noticeably high proportion of respondents agreed that the 'provocative behaviour of women' was a cause of abuse against them. For Belgians, this was 52%; for Danes, 44%; French, 45%; Italians, 47%; Polish, 69%; Portuguese, 55% (Eurobarometer, 2010).

In all but two Member States, at least 90% of respondents see alcoholism as a cause of violence (100% of people in Denmark blame alcoholism). In comparison, at least 90% of respondents in 21 EU Member States see drug addiction with Poland (89%) one of the six exceptions (Eurobarometer, 2010).

However, three countries reported significant falls: Luxembourg (80%, down from 95%), Spain (91%, down from 98%) and Belgium (92%, down from 97%), mirroring the results for alcoholism, which seems to point to societal changes in those countries when it comes to the link between domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse (Eurobarometer, 2010).

The third and fourth most commonly cited causes of domestic violence against women across the EU are poverty or social exclusion (77%) and unemployment (75%). In Denmark, 89% of respondents cited poverty or social exclusion as a cause. Denmark (87%) and Portugal (84%) are amongst those countries with the highest number of respondents that see unemployment as a cause. 67% of respondents from Italy regard lack of education as being a factor in domestic violence (Eurobarometer, 2010).

### 4.3 *Perceptions of the seriousness of domestic violence*

In the 2010 Eurobarometer report, 93% of respondents from France considered sexual violence as very serious. Ten other member states concurred with this. Poland and Portugal are amongst the nine member states in which sexual violence was considered by at least 20% of respondents to be 'only fairly serious'. In Poland, 24% of respondents described it thus; in Portugal, 26% of respondents described it thus (Eurobarometer, 2010).

## Chapter 5: Women, homelessness and safe housing

Homelessness appears to be increasing in some countries. A recent article on the situation in Croatia indicated that the problem was growing. Increasing homelessness has been highlighted in France in recent years. France had seen an increase, estimated as up to 50%, between 2001 and 2011. However, in Denmark, where trend data are available, the share of women has only increased marginally from 20% in the first national homelessness count in 2007 to 22% in the latest count from 2013 (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014: 10, 62).

### 5.1 *Women and homelessness*

Women are increasingly counted in homelessness statistics. 24% of homeless women in Denmark are staying with friends or relatives. Women are more often recorded in the homeless populations of France, representing 38% of the homeless population (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014: 60). There is some evidence from France that homeless women may actively avoid homelessness services and be present among the harder to count groups of homeless people living with friends or relatives (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014: 62)

Increasingly, the homeless include foreign migrants. An increased number of homeless immigrants was reported, particularly in France (along with Spain) (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014: 57).

Rough sleepers are particularly difficult to identify. A significant proportion of rough sleepers appears to be women. In France, 21% of rough sleepers are women. In Denmark, 15% of rough sleepers and 19% of shelter users are women, whereas amongst homeless people staying temporarily with family or friends 24% are women (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014: 62).

Women are often made homeless because of domestic violence. One report on homelessness in Belgium notes that women have 'often become homeless as a consequence of domestic violence' (FEANTSA, 2007). Domestic violence is stated as being the significant factor for homelessness amongst women in Croatia (Šoštarić, 2013).

### 5.2 *Homelessness, mental health and substance abuse*

Homelessness is often associated with mental health issues. In 2009, a third of homeless people in France had a severe mental illness. In 2012, 4,600 out of 66,300 homeless adults (7%) were claiming a welfare benefit for disabled adults, which is three times the rate found in the general population (2.4%) (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014: 80).

Homelessness is also often associated with problematic substance use in the sample countries. A now decade old report on homelessness in Austria highlighted increasing problems with homeless young people with problematic drug use (Schoibl, 2005). The Croatian interviewee observed: 'Among homeless people are also former drug addicts.' In France in 2009, nearly a third of homeless people had problematic drug use (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2014).

### 5.3 *Housing First Approach*

Of particular relevance in the context of the Street to Home project is the 'housing first' debate. 'Housing first' advocates that housing should be offered independent of whether residents are abstinent or in treatment. These projects also tend to impose fewer house rules upon residents, often including the possibility of 'opting out' of receiving any support (Sumnall and Brotherhood, 2012).

In the context of drug users, transitional housing projects can be distinguished more generally according to whether housing is offered as a reward for abstinence ('treatment first' approach) or as a necessary condition for recovery ('housing first' approach) (Sumnall and Brotherhood, 2012).

The best known example of a 'housing first' project in Europe was funded by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Security. The Housing First Europe project involved five different European cities and sought to place vulnerable individuals in accommodation with flexible support services. However, the project participants were largely male (Busch-Geertsema, 2013).

The project has eight principles focusing on homeless people with mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse: housing as a basic human right; respect, warmth, and compassion for all clients; a commitment to working with clients for as long as they need; scattered-site housing in independent apartments; separation of housing and services; consumer choice and self-determination; a recovery orientation; and harm reduction (Busch-Geertsema, 2013). Clearly, this project has a bearing on the Street to Home project, which argues that supported housing is a vital first step for women with complex needs.

## Chapter 6: Services for women with multiple needs

There is very little data emerging from any of the sample member states on safe housing for women with complex needs. Much of the concern is about shelters (or the lack thereof) as reported by WAVE (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012).

### 6.1 *The nature of shelters in the sample member states*

The 2012 WAVE report highlighted the general lack of shelter spaces for women experiencing domestic violence. All of the sample member states, in common with most other states, fell short of the number of shelter spaces required by the European Union. France, Italy and Poland had a particularly large shortage (See Figure 6.1).

**Figure 6.1: shelters available in the sample member states**

Country	Number of shelter spaces	Available places	Places needed
Austria	30	759	837
Belgium	26	1,067	460
Croatia	19	444	342
Denmark	45	552	430
France	42	1,563	6,262
Italy	60	500	6,019
Poland	1	26	3,815
Portugal	37	1,064	623

Source: WAVE, 2012

There is some variation in the conditions of stay. In Denmark, for example, the stay is unlimited. In five of the Austrian shelters, women can stay for a period of four to six months, while in the remaining shelters women can stay up to 12 months. In Croatia, shelters offer a stay of no longer than six months.

In Denmark, the majority of the shelters are run by independent women's NGOs, some by the State and at least one by a religious based NGO (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 91). However, in most of the sample countries, shelters receive a level of funding from the state. The shelters in Belgium are predominantly funded by the State. Twenty of the shelters in Romania are run by the State and 15 are run by NGOs.

Furthermore, the shelters do not include any requirement to provide gender specific counselling or other services. Very few of the shelters mentioned in the WAVE report refer to such services. Interestingly, the only shelter that exists in Poland also offers gender specific counselling to women survivors of violence (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012: 210).

France is one of a few countries (including other member states covered in the Daphne Street to Home project: Austria, Germany and the UK) that have set up women-only emergency accommodation facilities to protect homeless women with or without children from violent environments. However, the demand for safe emergency housing environments for homeless women and their children probably far exceeds the available offer (EMCDDA, 2012).

A key problem is that shelters are often ill-equipped to address the needs of women with complex needs. In one report, an Austrian NGO worker observed that '[our clients who are women with drug use] are not stable enough to adapt to the structures of a women's shelter' (cited in EMCDDA, 2009: 13).

## 6.2 *Women's centres*

The 2014 WAVE report refers to a range of women's centres. These are centres that provide a range of support and advice for women experiencing domestic violence. The number of centres varies across the sample. There are nine women's centres in Austria, three in Denmark, between 120 and 130 in Italy and seven in Portugal (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012). However, none are specific to women with complex needs.

All of the centres provide information and advice, independent domestic violence advice and legal advice. In Italy, the centres offer counselling, independent domestic violence advice and information, while most provide intervention safety support, legal advice and resettlement support. In Austria, all the centres are run by NGOs and offer specialized legal advice and psychological support for all women, including women survivors of domestic violence (Stelmaszek and Fisher, 2012).

## 6.3 *Existing services*

Key to addressing violence against women is the provision of specialised services which take a gender-sensitive approach. Support services need to be designed to meet the needs of all survivors of violence, recognising the very different and specific needs of groups such as migrant women, young women and women with disabilities. Skilled staff and adequate resources and funds are prerequisites of a high-quality service (Reingarde et al., 2012).

The Council of Europe has developed guidelines relating to the type of support services required. Basic provision should include: national helplines; advocacy and outreach services; psychological counselling; shelter places; medical services; services for women suffering multiple grounds of discrimination and services for children as victims or witnesses of DV (Council of Europe, 2011: 22).

Existing services are primarily aimed at women fleeing situations of domestic violence. There are exceptions: in Austria, there are 10 centres for migrant, minority ethnic, Roma and asylum seeking women as well as undocumented migrant women. However, women with particularly complex needs are not given much, if any, attention at policy level.

## 6.4 *Examples of good practice*

There are relatively few examples of good practice across the sample. In part, this may be because projects are often very small scale and engage with only small numbers of women. Indeed, because the women are often fleeing from abusive partners, the projects naturally prefer to keep a low profile. As such, they may go un-noticed.

Projects tend to focus on specific groups of women. In Croatia, a new project has been established that supports migrant women; in Portugal, 'Transition House' in Oporto supports women who are released from prison and 'Casas Primeiro' supports foreign women and their children who have come to Portugal for health reasons (Busch-Geertsema, 2012). The Danish Exit College provides support services within a safe residential setting to foreign women trying to exit the sex industry. A large proportion of the women are victims of human trafficking.<sup>4</sup>

In the Netherlands a project provides social housing for young mothers and adolescent girls cohabiting with elderly residents in an 'assisted living environment'. A construction company, Habion, builds a residential block with 17 housing units and rents them out to the charity, Stichting Timon. Thirteen apartments are intended for young mothers and adolescent girls who can no longer live with their family of origin and need assistance to live independently, for various reasons, while

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<sup>4</sup> See the project website: <http://redeninternational.dk/content/exit-kollegiet> [Accessed 11/03/2015].

the remaining four housing units are rented on a permanent basis to ‘coaches’ selected from elderly people (CECODHAS (2012)).

In Romania, the *Casa Ioana* organisation provides a wide-range of support services for women and children experiencing domestic violence and family homelessness. Their network of services supports vulnerable women and children to regain control of their lives and move forward positively.

In Ireland, there are a number of organisations that work in collaboration to support particularly vulnerable women experiencing domestic violence. A number of examples of good practice in Ireland have been highlighted:

- *Ruhama* is a women’s centre that supports women working in and exiting the sex industry;
- *Sonas Housing* supports and houses women escaping domestic violence;
- *Focus Ireland* works to provide support to homeless people;
- *Daisyhouse* is an organisation that supports women who have become homeless, especially through trauma such as addiction, abuse, break down of relationships;
- DePaul Ireland has a service called *Tus Nua*, which provides supported accommodation to women coming out of prison.

#### 6.5 Gaps in provision of services

It has proved extremely difficult to identify examples of good practice across the EU. Within the sample member states, some examples have emerged through extensive exploration. Interviews indicate that professionals working with women with particular needs are unaware of such projects, suggesting that they are rare indeed.

In some national cases, studies have been made. For example, the Casa Ioana Association in Romania has mapped domestic abuse support services across the country, although many of the public sector services often do not offer a dedicated service: the person responsible for providing support also provides support in other areas outside domestic abuse.<sup>5</sup>

According to most of the interviewees who work with women with complex needs, the main problem is lack of funding to provide adequate services. According to a Romanian interviewee, ‘in 2013, Casa Ioana was unable to accept 198 families throughout the year because they had no room. Many domestic abuse services refer to advocacy and not necessarily to in-service provision.’

There are indications that where projects exist, they are focused on specific groups of women. Hence, there are projects that provide supported housing for women who are leaving prison; there are projects that support women exiting sex work. However, there are few, if any, projects that provide supported housing to the broader group.

There are also indications that where such projects exist, they are usually created and managed by NGOs rather than by the state. An interviewee from Croatia observed that ‘in Croatia only Church organisation[s] have such integrated housing programmes, and only for drug addicts while they are in the process of healing.’ Recently, all non-governmental providers of space and support to homeless people (NGOs and Church organisations like Caritas have formed a network and are approaching decision makers jointly).

There is some evidence that there is more provision for men with complex needs than for women. For example, a Portuguese interviewee observed that ‘supported housing initiatives addressing

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://casaioana.org/useful-links/> [Accessed 17/04/2015]

people with complex needs have mainly been geared towards [the] male population (namely men leaving prison or with drug issues).'

There is a lack in support for women released from prison. In France and Italy for example, many women released from prison find that they cannot work unless they have managed to solve a series of issues relating to their family, health, drugs and housing (Cruells and Igareda, 2006: 61). According to the prison administration in France, 10% of prisoners leaving prison do not know where they will live (Crétenot and Liaras, 2013).

In these two countries, there is a lack of legal obligation to women released from prison. In fact, there is a general lack of support in Italy and France. In Italy, it is particularly difficult for foreign women prisoners to gain housing on their release if they do not have citizenship (Cruells and Igareda, 2006).

Indeed, instead of being provided with a distinct approach of supported safe housing, women with complex needs are treated in shelters with other women fleeing domestic violence situations. The Portuguese interviewee observed: 'For women experiencing domestic violence, the 'typical solution' has been domestic violence refuges.'



## **Chapter 7: The need for integrated services for holistic support**

Much of the discussion at levels of European policy, strategy and practice highlights the value of an integrated approach to supporting vulnerable people holistically. This applies to combatting violence against women and housing vulnerable people.

### *7.1 Multidimensional approach to violence against women*

There is some legislation which takes a multidimensional approach to violence against women, regulating criminal, civil, family and procedural law aspects as well as service provision in one 'package'. This indicates a recognition that violence against women affects many (if not all) aspects of the lives of those affected and that a joined-up approach is helpful (Hagemann-White et al., 2006: 24).

Some of the items that are mentioned specifically are particularly pertinent to women with complex needs: awareness-raising and intervention measures; protective, preventive and punitive measures; provision for women's safety by separating the offender from the victim; safety of children; rapid-process protection measures; legal measures against violence; intersection of different legal areas; and counselling and advocacy resources as part of the legislation.

### *7.2 Integrated support for women*

There is evidence of recognition across the EU that supporting women with complex needs requires an integrated approach. This is particularly true in the literature on women drug users but it is apparent in the literature on women prisoners, homeless women and on mental health.

EMCDDA has argued in relation to drug users that 'providing drug treatment alone without additional support or services had only limited and inconsistent effects on employment outcomes' (Sumnall and Brotherhood, 2012: 16). Supporting problem drug users to access secure housing, education (including vocational training) and long-term employment are crucial elements of preventing social exclusion and promoting social reintegration.

An argument has also been made for increasing emphasis on a case management approach. Case management includes those strategies in which a single case manager is responsible for linking patients with multiple relevant services. Basic activities include assessment, planning, linking, monitoring and advocacy (Sumnall and Brotherhood, 2012).

### *7.3 Integrated housing support*

The discussion of social housing also highlights a need for integrated services in providing effective support to victims of domestic violence who have been made homeless. FEANTSA (2007) argues that tackling DV implicates a range of actors and requires political support and commitment, in order to develop an effective approach that can have a real impact on reducing and eliminating violence and supporting those who have been victims of it. The Committee on Women's rights and Gender Equality encouraged 'Member States to provide integrated social services for families [which experience] domestic violence' (European Parliament, 2013: 17).

Organisations that work with homeless people have an important role to play in relation to women fleeing domestic violence, as part of an overall strategy. The Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion calls on Member States to develop integrated homelessness strategies focused on: prevention; 'progression'; 'housing first' approaches and improved support for people living under threat of violence (European Commission, 2010: 82).

Supported housing has resulted in a decrease in homelessness. FEANSTA cites Finland, Scotland and the Netherlands as countries where homelessness has decreased as a result of the adoption of

integrated solutions, with a particular focus on housing-led approaches being successful. It also confirms that a growing number of countries are offering immediate access to supported housing as a means to tackle homelessness (Inside Housing, 2014).

## Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

### 7.1 Conclusions

This review indicates that whilst the European Union does not specifically address the issue of women with complex needs, an integrated approach to their housing needs clearly fits within a wide range of agendas. In particular, that of reducing violence against women, that of addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, developing supported housing and encouraging an integrated approach to supporting vulnerable people.

The contemporary European position on ending violence on women is well established and as such, a holistic, integrated approach to housing support for women with complex lives is potentially possible. However, the variation in progress amongst the Member States is problematic. The variation in awareness of the issue of violence against women, noted in some European-wide surveys is particularly worrying. Of note are reports of poor availability of services for women in general experiencing domestic violence.

The lack of any general recognition of the *Street to Home* target group of women with complex needs leads to significant overlap in the literature. This rather suggests that there is both a danger of duplication of work and of misunderstanding the issue of women with complex needs. In many cases, abuse and violence is an underlying experience that leads to women becoming homeless, engaging in sex work, substance abuse and contact with the criminal justice system.

There is no doubt that the EU as a whole values social housing in all its variety, although it is clear that the variation between member states is problematic. The literature indicates that the EU recognises the value of social housing as an important element in facilitating the escape of women and their families from domestic violence. Of particular interest is the development of a limited 'housing first' approach in a European context, viewing accommodation as a vital first step in supporting vulnerable people. However, the 'housing first' project has focused on vulnerable people of both genders (indeed, mainly male), rather than identifying particular issues facing women with complex needs.

The literature highlights that the EU encourages an integrated approach to provision of housing and associated support for vulnerable people, especially women fleeing domestic violence. The literature also highlights the value of such approaches and that European strategies increasingly emphasise a joined-up, multi-agency approach to supporting vulnerable people. However, this literature tends to speak of vulnerable people as a whole rather than allowing for the specific needs of women with complex needs.

It is clear that the picture across Europe is varied. Some countries simply do not have any examples of supported housing interventions for chaotic and particularly vulnerable women. The lack of responses from professionals in the field may well reflect this. Others have interesting projects which would benefit from evaluation.

However, it is also clear that the impetus for developing such interventions does not come from governments at either national or local level: rather it is from small, poorly funded and often charitable organisations that have a particular passion to address this issue. In many of the reports on even the mainstream shelters, NGOs are frequently mentioned as providing key support. All the examples of good practice are projects run by NGOs.

## 7.2 *Recommendations*

The key recommendations are as follows:

- Integrated supported housing projects for women with complex needs should be promoted at European and at national level.
- Multi agency working is a key element in supporting the housing needs of the target group: this needs to be affirmed at all levels.
- The focus has largely been on men with complex needs and women have largely been ignored: the focus needs to change.
- Good practice needs to be recognised, promoted and shared widely.
- The work done for men needs to be at least replicated for women.
- European policy needs to promote the value of integrated housing support for women with complex needs.
- Integrated housing support needs to be given surer footing than the current approach which relies on good will and volunteering.

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