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Programme (2014-2020)



## **"The Other Side of the Story: Perpetrators in Change" (OSSPC)**

Grant Agreement No. 881684 OSSPC

The Project is co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme  
(2014-2020)

**Public policy recommendations on the needs and importance of developing perpetrator  
programmes in the form of noncriminal justice intervention**

formulated within activity

**Time for Change: Evidence based research for new practice approaches (WP 2)**

Document elaborated by: Centro di Ascolto Uomini Maltrattanti Onlus-CAM, Italy

Activity Coordinated by: DASM Cluj-Napoca, Romania





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## 1. Introduction

**"The Other Side of the Story: Perpetrators in Change" (OSSPC)** project is a collaborative project, **co-funded by the European Union** in the framework of **The Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)**, which aims to prevent further domestic violence and to change violent behavioural patterns by increasing the capacity of frontline workers that will further teach perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt non-violent behaviour in interpersonal relationships and understand the impact of domestic violence on them, their family and the community.

The OSSPC project is being implemented between 1.05.2020-30.04.2022 by: The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family - APHVF, Cyprus, **as coordinator**, and Bournemouth University -BU, United Kingdom, Centro di Ascolto Uomini Maltrattanti Onlus- CAM, Italy, The Union of Women Associations of Heraklion Prefecture -UWAH, Greece, European Knowledge Spot, Greece and Direcția de Asistență Socială și Medicală -DASM, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, **as partners**.

**The Set of Policy Recommendations on domestic violence perpetrator intervention programmes** is part of activity **Time for Change: Evidence based research for new practice approaches (WP 2)**, which aims to map and comparatively analyse the current work with perpetrators in the participating countries; estimate the scale of the problem; provide a needs assessment and discover potential referral routes, suggesting relevant perpetrator programme for professionals in the form of non-criminal justice intervention.

Each partner has formulated a set of policy recommendations on domestic violence perpetrator intervention programmes, taking into consideration the specificities of each country. The specific recommendations regarding policymaking emanate from the national research and comparative analysis which every partner of the consortium has completed.

## 2. Defining the problem and identifying the needs

The analysis of needs carried out as an initiative by *Time for Change for new practice approaches (WP 2)* allowed to provide a general overview on the needs and attitudes of professionals and service operators about the programmes for perpetrators, on the opinions and expectations of





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male perpetrators about the programmes and the attitude of female victims of violence about the different services aimed at preventing gender-based violence and supporting the victims.

The following qualitative and quantitative methodologies have been used: 5 Focus Groups that involved a total of 42 professionals related to the Territorial Services, 5 interviews addressed to male perpetrators attending CAM change groups, and 10 female victims of domestic violence filled out online questionnaires.

According to the Italian legal system the programmes for perpetrators are strategies to prevent domestic violence and are included in the interventions to stop violence against women and children, as per law 119 from October 15, 2013. More specifically, article 5 of the plan for violence prevention "*Piano strategico nazionale contro la violenza maschile sulle donne (2017-2020)*", states that all actions with male perpetrators are part of the measures to be taken to prevent relapses.

## **1. Need to share information and raise awareness on the importance of programmes for perpetrators and the work done to prevent youth violence**

- 1.1 The programs for perpetrators are not very well known by the general public. Both male perpetrators and female victims have expressed their need for better information regarding such initiatives, so that everyone can be aware that such specialized services exist. Sharing information regarding the existence of perpetrators programmes at national, regional, and local level would encourage male perpetrators to reach out to them voluntarily.
- 1.2 To this end, there is also a clear need for more services for male perpetrators, which are still unavailable in many areas, making it difficult for men to start specific programmes. The Information Desks should comply with quality standards established for perpetrators programmes and shared nationally by *Rete Relive, Relazioni Libere Dalla Violenza*, the main network of programmes for perpetrators in Italy ( [www.associazionerelive.it](http://www.associazionerelive.it)).
- 1.3 Violence is intergenerational, i.e., it is transmitted from generation to generation. What emerges from the latest initiatives carried out in schools and focus groups with professionals belonging to different Services, which is also in line with the latest studies, is that abuse is evolving into online forms, especially revenge porn and cyberviolence. Furthermore, it emerged that violence amongst young people is also perpetrated by girls, mainly because of jealousy and possessiveness.





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## 2. Need for stable and adequate funding

2.1 A general need expressed by all centres for perpetrators is the need for stable and adequate funding to provide their services on the territory. Since some services are offered on a voluntary basis, the personnel are often not sufficiently skilled and the availability for men who are mandatorily referred to such services can be limited.

## 3. Need to eliminate stereotypes on male perpetrators

3.1 The professionals who participated in the research highlight that the most common term used in Italian to refer to male perpetrators (*"maltrattante"*, mistreating) while on the one hand does help define the real scope of the problem, can also put off the men who might feel stigmatized. There is also certain prejudice against the word "mistreating" by some of the Services who decide not to include it in the name of the centres.

## 4. Need to differentiate treatment for male perpetrators

4.1 The growing number of men accessing the Services over the last years led to a reflection on the individual needs of men, who, although they all get to the Centres because of their violent behaviours, might have specific characteristics that need to be taken into account to choose the appropriate treatment. Group activities have proven to be one of the best treatments so far, based on both the men's personal characteristics and on the nature of the violent crime or behaviour.

## 5. Training the operators of the Centres for perpetrators

5.1 In order to guarantee a quality treatment to the male perpetrators and meet the minimum standards of quality of the Service, operators must have carried out a personal reflection about their relationship modes, be aware of their own experiences with violence (perpetrated, suffered and witnessed), and taken a specific training to work with perpetrators.

5.2 More and more users have an international background and many of them are migrants who are mandatorily referred to the service. Working with this kind of users requires specific skills and an intercultural approach.





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## 6. Working in a network

- 6.1 Working in a network is necessary to enable the Services to provide assistance to perpetrators. Especially in complex situations, working in a network ensures the protection and safety of the victims, women, children, and the rest of the population. This need is expressed by both the operators of the Centres for perpetrators and the professionals working for the local Services.
- 6.2 Any work done with perpetrators should be carried out in close collaboration with Anti-violence Centres and social and health services.

## 7. Training the Service Operators

- 7.1 The Service Operators need to acquire skills on topics related to violence and, more in particular, they need screening violence tools. Through our focus group we found out that the healthcare service personnel, family mediators, law enforcement officers, lawyers and other professionals involved in the screening process do not have the necessary skills and information, and, when they face cases of violence, they are reluctant to follow up upon them and do not know how to proceed to refer the person to the appropriate institution. It is well known that violence is a complex phenomenon and can lead to consequences such as serious depression, substance abuse, eating disorders, attempted suicide, both for the victims and the perpetrators. The Services are very often dealing with cases of violence, but they have difficulties in screening and following up on the signs of violent behaviours.
- 7.2 The Italian word "*maltratattante*" (mistreating) used for perpetrators, although it allows to specifically define the work done with perpetrators, tends to put off both the male perpetrators and the various Services due to the stigmatization and cultural bias around it. It is therefore necessary to raise awareness on this topic to avoid stigmatization by both the Service professionals and the public.
- 7.3 Raising awareness on the Service's expectations about the men's change: changes can be predicted based on the stages established by *Prochaska and DiClemente*.
- 7.4 It is necessary to do specific work on both the men's and the Services' expectations regarding change. This work should not only be part of the first motivational interviews carried out with the men, but also of the trainings for social, health and law enforcement professionals, to enhance their violence screening skills so that they are able to refer men to the appropriate Centres for perpetrators





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## 8. Protecting minors

8.1 It is necessary to create and implement screening tools to assess the impact of suffered and witnessed violence on minors and to raise the Service professionals' awareness on abusing parents. All work on parenting done by Centres for perpetrators should be carried out in close collaboration with the Services. The underlying need is that the men who participate in our programmes are often parents and are subject to restrictive measures when they meet their children.

## 9. Evaluation of treatment

9.1 According to international research, the men who have completed a Programme for perpetrators show a lower risk of relapse. There is a significant inconsistency between the various studies on the effectiveness of the programmes for perpetrators: initially, only the interruption of physical violence was measured, and it was not until recently that they started taking into account the changes regarding psychological violence. Furthermore, there are still some doubts about which one is the most effective method. It is therefore necessary to identify a standard to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatments within the programmes for perpetrators.

## 10. Consistency of the interventions with perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence on women\* and minors in Penal Institutions

10.1 Need to support (also politically) the work done within prisons and implement consistent and continuous national programmes to work with male perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence against women and children.

## 3. Beneficiaries affected by the effects of the policy recommendations

The following groups are the main beneficiaries of the recommendations we propose in this document: minors/youths, men, women, frontline workers (health and social workers), Misericordia volunteers, law enforcement officers, operators of the Centres for perpetrators and the Anti-violence Centres, penal institution workers.





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#### 4. Public policy recommendations (proposed solutions to solve the identified problems)

Below we propose some recommendations and actions to be taken in order to meet the needs we detected during our analysis. Each recommendation includes concrete measures. Each proposal is articulated at national, regional, and local level.

##### **1. Need to share information and raise awareness on the importance of the programmes for perpetrators and initiatives to prevent gender-related violence amongst youths.**

###### *National level recommendation*

- 1.1 The programmes for perpetrators are still not very well known at a national level. We therefore recommend to promote more awareness raising campaigns. This will undoubtedly contribute to reaching more men who are aware of their violent acts and are motivated to change, but also to encouraging those who are less aware to take responsibility and contact the Centres. Consequently, women will feel safer, and awareness will be raised amongst the general public.
- 1.2 In many areas no Services for male perpetrators are available. We recommend a thorough mapping of the territories to assess which areas do not provide any Services. Research has shown that, in the areas with no programmes, the alleged perpetrators are referred to mental health services, shifting the focus from an ecological, gender and cultural approach to a mental health problem.

###### *Regional and local level recommendation*

- 1.3 The Centres for perpetrators should create local Information Centres to help redirect those who live in areas with no Services so that they cannot use the geographical distance as an excuse. Aside from disseminating the information about programmes on the territory, local Information Desks also help deal with several situations of violence, ensuring the safety of the victims and decreasing healthcare spend.
- 1.4 Hosting free events to share information, raise awareness amongst the general public on gender-related violence and present the work done within the programmes as paramount and complementary to the fight against gender-related violence.
- 1.5 Since violence is intergenerational, we recommend that schools include in their yearly programmes workshops and events for students aimed at raising awareness on gender stereotypes and teen dating violence, with a special attention on cyberviolence.





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## 2. Need for consistent and adequate funding

### *National level recommendation*

- 2.1 The programmes for perpetrators are not consistently and adequately funded. The State should provide yearly funds to support the services, at least partially, in a more continuous and consistent way, and to show their political support and their stance on the work done with male perpetrators of violence.
- 2.2 In this regard, we recommend that financial agreements are established between the Public Health Services and the Services for perpetrators. Such agreements would help decrease the healthcare spend caused by the impact of violence on both the victims and the perpetrators.

### *Regional and local level recommendation*

- 2.3 Establish agreements between the local Services and Centres for perpetrators that include financial help for rehabilitation programmes aimed at male perpetrators of violence.

## 3. Need to eliminate stereotypes on male perpetrators

### *National level recommendations*

- 3.1 In order to eliminate the stereotypes on male perpetrators and promote awareness and responsibility in the community, we propose to carry out more awareness raising campaigns on violence-related topics that include information about the services for both the victims and the perpetrators.
- 3.2 Violence should be presented more as a consequence of power imbalance and not only as the bruises of physical violence, as this image creates rejection and doesn't encourage perpetrators to take responsibility.

### *Regional and local level recommendation*

- 3.3 At a local level we recommend organizing meetings between local Services, perpetrators and Centres for perpetrators. Having a direct contact would contribute to eliminate prejudice and promote the right referral paths to the Centres for perpetrators.
- 3.4 Organize awareness-raising events for the public on the difference aspects of gender-related violence, such as frequency, parenting-related aspects, gender stereotypes, new forms of online violence, etc.





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#### **4. Need for specific treatment for male perpetrators**

##### *Regional and local level recommendation*

4.1 Group activities have proven to be one of the best treatments so far, both based on the men's personal characteristics, and on the nature of the violent crime or behaviour. After a few years of operation and given the increase in the number of users, we deem it necessary for the Centres for perpetrators to offer specific treatments for different kinds of profiles, according to the person's motivation, type of crimes and possible psychiatric conditions. Offering different treatments also paves the way to individual programmes, in case the group activities are not enough.

4.2 In recent years, more and more men from international backgrounds have participated in the programmes, often because of mandatory court or Service orders. Operators who work with foreign participants should have specific skills.

#### **5. Training for operators of the Centres for perpetrators**

##### *National level recommendation*

5.1 In order to guarantee a quality treatment and to meet the minimum standards requested to work with perpetrators, operators should not only be trained in a profession of help and have worked in the field for more than 5 years, but also have reflected and be personally committed to relationships that are free from any violence; have received a specific training on gender-based violence, on the meaning of identity, role, power dynamics and the stereotypes and roles implied and accepted in the relations between genders; have been trained on how to treat male violence perpetrators participating in specific programmes; have a created a framework to have their work continuously monitored.

5.2 In recent years, more and more men from international backgrounds have participated in the programmes, often because of mandatory court or Service orders. Operators who work with foreign participants should have specific skills. We therefore propose that the Centres for male perpetrators also offer trainings for operators from other Centres.





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### *Regional and local level recommendation*

5.3 The operators of the Centres for perpetrators should constantly refresh their knowledge and they should be connected to their area network. They should participate in seminars and workshops offered by the local Services so they are familiar with the way they work, and they can promote operational protocols.

## **6. Working in a network**

### *Regional and local level recommendation*

6.1 Organize introductory meetings between the local Services and the Centres. We know that there are a lot of complex, high risk situations that require a network of entities to create successful programmes. Working in a network makes it easier for operators to take on new cases promote interventions for the safety of the victims and the whole population.

6.2 Better communication amongst the judges who apply the “Code red” law and the Centres.

## **7. Training for Service operators**

### *National level recommendation*

7.1 We found that the social and healthcare operators from the Services belonging to public institutions (psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, etc.) have little training and violence screening skills, although there is a clear co-morbidity between violence and depression, eating disorders, general anxiety and several male perpetrators are often treated for one of these reasons at the same time. We recommend compulsory trainings for the social and healthcare workers on violence screening and referrals of victims to the anti-violence Centres.

7.2 When episodes of domestic violence occur, Law Enforcement Officers are often called to intervene, and they are the ones the victims report the crimes to. We deem it necessary to introduce compulsory training for Law Enforcement Officers on topics related to violence, raise awareness on secondary victimisation and provide information to avoid the normalization of domestic violence (or its resolution in the case it is mistaken for a conflict).

7.3 Introduction of capacity building programs on violence screening that involve the role of family mediators.





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### *Regional and local level recommendation*

- 7.4 Implement specific capacity building trainings for local Services. The following roles would benefit from such trainings: social workers, healthcare operators, Misericordia volunteers, etc. The trainings should be promoted by the local Centres for operators to improve their relationship, raise awareness and facilitate the referrals of male perpetrators to the Centres.
- 7.5 Carrying out specific work on both the men's and the Services' expectations regarding change. This should not only be part of the first motivational interviews carried out with the men, but also of the trainings for social, health and law enforcement professionals, to enhance their violence screening skills so that they are able to refer the men to the appropriate Centres for perpetrators.
- 7.6 Better communication amongst the judges who apply the "Code red" law and the Centres.

## **8. Protecting minors**

### *National level recommendation*

- 8.1 Implementing guidelines between Relive and C.I.S.M.A.I to provide tools to work with abusive parents in compliance with standards.

### *Regional and local level recommendation*

- 8.2 With better interventions with parents and a better collaboration with the Services, the Centres could provide better assistance programmes.

## **9. Evaluation of treatment**

### *National level recommendation*

- 9.1 According to international research, the men who have completed a Programme for perpetrators show a lower risk of relapse. There is, however, a significant inconsistency between the various studies on the effectiveness of the programmes for perpetrators: initially, only the interruption of physical violence was measured, and it was not until recently that they started taking into account the changes regarding psychological violence. Furthermore, some doubts still exist on which one is the most effective method. It is therefore necessary to fill this gap with standardized tools to measure the effectiveness of the treatments.





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### *Regional and local level recommendation*

9.2 Introducing a regional protocol for all Centres for perpetrators to evaluate the treatments for male perpetrators to gather and share standardized data on the effectiveness of treatments.

## **10. Consistency of the interventions with perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence on women\* and minors in Penal Institutions**

### *National level recommendations*

10.1 Promoting training for Penal Institution Workers on restorative justice and on the importance for inmates for gender-related and sexual violence against women and minors to receive treatment in order to reduce the risk of relapse after the end of their sentence.

### *Regional and local level recommendation*

10.2 Promote intervention protocols and establish agreements between Penal Institutions and Centres.

10.3 Trainings for prison guards

## 5. Authorities that can initiate/promote/implement/support public policy recommendations in Italy

Among the Authorities that can initiate and support the recommendations we propose at national level, we include:

- Ministries (Equal Opportunities, Family and Justice)
- Professional Bodies in charge of training on screening and treatment (psychologists, lawyers, judges, social workers, psychiatrists, etc.)
- Law Enforcement Officers (Carabinieri, Police, Penal Institution Workers, etc.)
- Police Headquarters





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Among the Authorities that can initiate and support the recommendations we propose at regional and local level, we include:

- City and Province Councils
- Healthcare centres
- UEPE (Offices for the Execution of Sentences in the Community)
- Courts and Juvenile Courts
- Public Prosecutor's Offices

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