



SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL (RE)INTEGRATION OF WOMEN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKING TOGETHER



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#ACTIVproject
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Introduction

ACTIV project

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union, the ACTIV project's – "Acting and Collaborating to Tackle Intimate Violence" – main objective is to improve the socio-professional (re)integration of women facing domestic violence.

According to a study led by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2014¹, 1 in 3 women in Europe will be confronted with gender-related violence, and more than 1 in 5 will experience domestic violence. A situation that was exacerbated during the Covid-19 crisis. In 2017, POUR LA SOLIDARITE -PLS, the Fondation Agir Contre L'Exclusion, and other partners embarked on the CEASE project aiming to highlight the role of companies in supporting employees who experience violence. They wanted to create a European network of companies and organizations committed to fighting against domestic violence.

The ACTIV partnership, having noticed the lack of collaboration between the different actors involved in the socio-professional (re)integration of women facing domestic violence, wanted to improve the process and the synergies between the different actors. Indeed, women have to overcome various obstacles in the process of their return to employment. Companies and other structures must work hand in hand – and not in isolation, as is most often the case – to provide effective help and assistance, support, and guidance to victims of domestic violence.

Through the various outputs developed within the framework of the project, the ACTIV partnership has sought to raise awareness about domestic violence, improve synergies between the actors involved in the socio-professional (re)integration process and improve the conditions for women experiencing abuse. The aim of these resources is to improve the support, guidance and integration that the different actors offer to the women concerned.

Firstly, the project developed a guidebook that outlined the definitions of domestic violence, the national and European contexts, and the legal frameworks in Belgium, France, Romania, and Spain. It identified the limits and positive initiatives that can improve the socio-professional (re)integration of women facing domestic violence. The guidebook also proposed a framework of common indicators facilitating mutual understanding between the actors involved in the return-to-work process.

¹ At present, this is the last large-scale study carried out in Europe.

Based on its experience, the ACTIV partnership identified the lack of collaboration between actors to be a major barrier to providing effective help, assistance and support to women. Thus, the second outcome developed was a learning toolkit for the structures involved in the socio-professional (re)integration process. This toolkit focused specifically on two groups: field workers and companies, both of whom are considered fundamental in the pathway to socio-professional (re)integration. ACTIV strongly believes that, in the interest of providing the best outcome for those who have experienced abuse, specialist structures and businesses must work together.

Finally, this white paper is the last publication of the project. This paper intends to provide concrete recommendations for political decision-makers, actors in the business world, and all organizations working towards improving the support that women receive during their socio-professional (re)integration journey.

ACTIV partnership

The ACTIV partnership is based on the complementary knowledge and expertise of the different actors in the field. The European collaboration enables partners to exchange experiences, close knowledge gaps, and learn from what is currently happening in Northern, Southern, and Eastern Europe.

POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS (BELGIUM)

Founded in 2002 by the Belgian economist Denis Stokkink, POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS is an independent European think & do tank committed to promote solidarity and sustainability in Europe.

POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS takes action to defend and strengthen the European Social Model, which consists of a subtle balance between economic development and social justice. PLS's team is composed of members with multicultural and interdisciplinary backgrounds and works in the public space alongside socioeconomic actors, having as its motto: 'Understand to Act'.

 <https://www.pourlasolidarite.eu/>

LA MISSION LOCALE POUR L'EMPLOI DE BRUXELLES VILLE (BELGIUM)

Mission Locale pour l'Emploi de Bruxelles-Ville (Mloc) is a non-profit organization that helps job-seekers in Brussels to overcome any difficulties they face to find a job. The objective is to ensure their social and professional (re)integration through a holistic approach. Mloc provides individual coaching and guidance with opportunities for training and qualification.

 <https://www.missionlocalebxlville.be/>

LA FONDATION FACE (FRANCE)

The Fondation Agir Contre L'Exclusion (FACE), recognized as an organisation serving the public interest. It brings together public, private, and associative actors in the fight against exclusion, discrimination, and poverty.

For 29 years, it has been a unique meeting place for companies and public actors working in these fields, constituting the largest French network of socially committed companies. FACE is an original ecosystem made of the Foundation, its Network — around fifty local structures run by hundreds of employees and patrons — and forty foundations under its aegis. Its actions benefit more than 350,000 people.

 <https://www.fondationface.org>

ASSOCIATION TOUCHED ROMANIA (ROMANIA)

Touched Romania supports women victims of domestic violence, poverty, and, social exclusion and their children. Touched Romania supports them to stay together and reintegrate into society as independent and productive citizens, through three of its programs: Hagar Home Maternal Centre, Centre for Counselling and Social (re)integration and Transitional Apartments.

 <https://touchedromania.org/>

CEPS PROJECTES SOCIALS (SPAIN)

CEPS Projectes Socials is a non-profit organization based in Barcelona working on EU wide projects. CEPS is responsible for the management and implementation of socio-educational activities for children, young people and adults, and further training for professionals. Expert staff research and develop innovative projects and practices. CEPS promotes a strategic and social view of the use of new technologies. Through participatory practices, new models for strategic partnerships are developed at local and international levels. Social impact and creative activities are blended together into inspiring solutions for the community.

 <https://asceps.org/>



What are we talking about?

1. The issue of domestic violence

Domestic violence is a phenomenon that affects all European countries. Any one of us may one day be confronted with domestic violence, regardless of age, social background, economic status, religion, etc.

Domestic violence is the result of the inequalities between women and men rooted in our societies and each of their institutions. This violence is the result of unequal relationships and domination that confine and silence women. Indeed, domestic violence is gender-based as it disproportionately affects women and is mostly perpetrated by men.

Furthermore, in the preamble to the Istanbul Convention, domestic violence is clearly recognized as a continuation of gender-based violence: “Recognizing that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women”².

In 2014, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights³ (FRA) published a study on violence against women in the European Union. The researchers interviewed over 42,000 women in 28 member States⁴. The survey remains the most comprehensive to date. The key findings were:

- 1 in 3 women over the age of 15 has experienced physical and/or sexual violence, including 1 in 5 from a (ex-)spouse;
- 1 in 10 women over the age of 15 has been a victim of sexual violence.
- 1 woman in 20 has been raped;
- 43% of women have experienced psychological abuse or controlling behavior in a romantic relationship;
- To address these issues, a large body of legislation exists.

The figures are alarming, the consequences are disastrous. Despite the large body of legislation, few women dare to denounce the violence they experience. Fear, shame, guilt, lack of trust in the authorities, and the perceptions that others have of gender-based violence can contribute to the reluctance to denounce it. This situation can be exasperated when the violence is perpetrated by someone close to them (partner, spouse, etc.). The consequences for victims are significant in the short and long term. Fear, anger, anguish, and shame are common emotions which are compounded by fears about police and social service interventions, the costs of legal interventions, and the lack of support from employing structures.

² Council of Europe. (2011). Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

³ European Union Agency for fundamental rights. (2014). Violence against women : an EU-wide survey.

⁴ Parlement Européen. (2019). La violence envers les femmes dans l'Union européenne : État des lieux.

2. Why is there not sufficient support for women's re-employment?

In Europe, women confronted with domestic violence are not currently supported at all levels of their socio-professional (re)integration process. This accompaniment is nevertheless important because access to employment is central. However, there are inequalities between women and men in the labor market (training, access to employment, wage inequality, etc.). Women facing domestic violence are often confronted with other difficulties (isolation, unidentified skills, loss of confidence, etc.). The obstacles they face are cumulative and reinforce each other. This problem must therefore be addressed by associations, but also by the public authorities and the working world.

The professionals who work with survivors of domestic violence are considered experts on gender politics, and they must therefore deal with all gender-related issues. The lack of other professionals trained on gender-related issues increases the workload for the specialists. They are often unable to support all the women who need their services, which is why they call for more trained professionals and greater economic investment to train more people in gender issues.

Furthermore, it is fundamental to empower survivors of domestic violence so that they regain their autonomy and independence. Women need to find ways to be financially independent, and the best way to achieve this is to receive employment training in specific areas. However, companies are not sufficiently aware of this. Most businesses only wish to employ survivors of domestic violence for a certain amount of time to receive economic benefits - if any - but don't care enough about them to establish a healthy and sustainable working relationship. Companies and employers need to be educated on gender-based violence to understand the experiences of domestic violence victims.

A white paper about socio-professional (re)integration of women experiencing domestic violence

For whom?

This white paper is intended to provide concrete recommendations for:

- Political decision-makers;
- Actors in the business world;
- All organizations that work towards improving the support for women during their socio-professional (re)integration process.

For what?

The countries of the ACTIV partnership used different methodologies with different groups of actors (women survivors of domestic violence, field workers, and companies) to discuss issues related to the socio-professional (re)integration of women facing this type of violence. Although each country considered the specificities of its context, the general results are transversal. The results highlight those key points, such as lack of investment and support for care structures and companies' lack of interest, are present in all the partner countries. For example, socio-professional (re)integration was identified as an essential step for the well-being and empowerment of women.

In the framework of the proposed European Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence⁵, which aims to support and protect victims/survivors, ensure access to justice, and hold offenders accountable, the ACTIV consortium wishes to propose recommendations that:

- Improve the support for the socio-professional (re)integration of women victims of domestic violence;
- Involve and work with companies;
- Develop synergies between the different actors involved.

⁵ Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on combating violence against women and domestic violence, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022PC0105&from=EN>

Indeed, this directive is an essential first step towards a harmonized approach to the elimination of gender-based violence in the European Union – a key demand of women’s organizations and women’s specialist services – and especially necessary for the Member States that have not ratified the Istanbul Convention. However, the socio-professional (re)integration of women facing domestic violence requires more attention. There is no specific profile of a victim of domestic abuse and since it affects women in different ways, there is no linear path to follow to help them in their socio-professional (re)integration. Moreover, most policies focus on survivors of domestic violence (re)integration but don’t account for external factors such as mental health issues or children.

Thus, this white paper aims to improve the different stakeholders and political decision-makers’ understanding of domestic violence. Its objectives are:

- To improve the support of women experiencing domestic violence through the implementation of the recommendations;
- To increase awareness among institutions and political decision-makers on how to support the structures involved in the socio-professional (re)integration of women facing domestic violence;
- To enable companies to better understand how to engage with the actors involved in the pathway back to employment for victims of domestic violence and how to support these women in their socio-professional (re)integration;
- To highlight the importance of considering the different factors involved in the socio-professional (re)integration process and the necessity of an intersectional approach.

Improving the socio professional (re)integration support received by women experiencing domestic violence

Addressing peripheral obstacles

1. Issues raised

Domestic violence can negatively impact women who experience it. Not only can it affect their physical, mental, emotional well-being, but it can also have economic consequences. Due to its complex nature, socio-professional (re)integration may take months, or even years. It is of utmost importance to understand the different and sometimes conflicting factors that women confronted with domestic violence face in order to ensure their well-being and (re)integration. These factors and challenges also vary depending on the victims age, education, race, social origin, sexual orientation, cultural and linguistic background, immigration status, marital status, economic situation, disability, and previous experiences in their lives. That is why the (re)integration pathway is different for each person and requires a multitude of services, which first cover basic needs, such as:

- Housing – living in a safe and stable environment;
- Psychological and emotional support and counseling;
- Administrative support – information about their rights and the services to which they are entitled;
- Legal assistance, including representation in court for child custody;
- Childcare and support for children;
- Opportunities for personal, social, and economic development.

It is important to address all these issues to prevent the victim from returning to an abusive home. Other issues that may emerge in victims' lives and relationships during their (re)integration process - for example, losing a job or a home-may increase the risk of a woman returning to the abuser. In the initial crisis phase, victims often require intensive support and extensive services. Their needs may ease during the transition phase and over the course of (re)integration and inclusion.

Some women may only need a single service, for example, legal assistance or psychological support but others need multiple services (for example a combination of accommodation, psychological care,

medical assistance, and educational and vocational training). These specific services can be offered by agencies and institutions or by specialized nongovernmental organizations.

A woman who is successfully (re)integrated experiences well-being in all aspects of her life. This includes safety and security, satisfactory and affordable accommodation; physical and mental health, legal status, and access to services; access to justice; economic well-being; educational and training opportunities; healthy social environment and personal relationships; and the well-being of family and dependents.

2. Solutions

Ensure that women are aware of the (re)integration services available to them and know how to access this support. Provide them with clear and comprehensive information, tailored to their different needs, age, and stages of development.

Ensure that each socio-professional (re)integration plan is also assumed and agreed upon by women. The plan should be in line with their self-identified and individual needs, taking into consideration their age, disability, or other characteristics. Regularly review and revise their (re)integration plan in response to the successes and challenges they encounter during this process.

Involve children in (re)integration planning to ensure their best interests are met. There is no support for a woman without support for her children.

Recognize that not all women victims of domestic violence have the same profile. Women with disabilities, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, immigrant and refugee women and Aboriginal communities may have additional needs. It is therefore important to use an intersectional approach when creating socio-professional (re)integration plans.

Some women cannot find employment because they have young children in their care and sometimes there are not enough places in the kindergarten or day-care centers. Flexible programs adapted to their needs should be offered by companies. Childcare is an issue that has been emphasized by all partner countries and should be addressed as a priority by the public and private sectors.

Good practice

In Romania, Inditex, in partnership with two local NGOs, organizes the [SALTA program](#) to (re)integrate women facing domestic violence into the labor market. Over two weeks, women confronted with domestic violence participate in an intensive personal and professional development program. The program enables the development of personal and work-related skill sets that cover issues such as (re)building self-confidence, occupational therapy, well-being, conflict management, sustainability, and

Diversity & Inclusion. Inditex offers flexible working hours and a mentoring program to support women in their socio-professional (re)integration process. Since the project's launch, SALTA has helped more than 1,400 people from 15 countries enter the labor market.



Women facing domestic violence often cannot find the strength, courage, confidence, and resources to take the first step to leave by themselves, but with the help of specialists, they find the way and have a chance for a new start in life, with a job, a home and support. »

A FIELD WORKER



Women confronted with domestic violence, due to the abuse they have suffered, often see no way out. Rather, they see themselves as trapped and alone in an isolated world, with many existential problems... Seeing solutions can take time, it depends on the woman but also on the environment that surrounds her! »

A FIELD WORKER

3. How policies can help

- **Provide sufficient funds to support the victims of domestic violence**

States should ensure sufficient funds to organize integrated, holistic services for victims of domestic violence and their children. Safe emergency accommodation, qualified counseling and assistance should be ensured not only in urban areas but also in rural areas.

- **Enable access to a stable and safe home**

In many cases, victims of domestic violence remain in vulnerable situations due to an inability to find adequate housing. In some European countries, such as Romania, there are special shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence. However, in other countries, victims are offered social housing. Regardless of the solution, legislation should promote social housing and housing welfare benefits to facilitate housing for victims of domestic violence. As such, prohibiting landlords that refuse to rent to victims of domestic violence. A safe environment should be ensured for all families and the investment

in social housing must be adapted to the needs of families and social renting must also be promoted. States should also allow a survivor to break her lease without penalty in order to seek new housing.

Good practice

In Romania, [The Sensiblu Foundation](#) offers specialized help to victims of domestic violence through legal and psychological counseling. Their program, Casa Blu for women facing domestic violence offers shelter and quality social services to help women overcome the difficult situation they find themselves in and a mentoring program that helps them reintegrate into society.

Moreover, it is vital to consider the geographical and social isolation of women in rural areas. For example, in Romania people with jobs near urban centers are prioritized for the allocation of social housing. The allocation policy should facilitate the socio-professional (re)integration of women victims of violence who are far from urban centers and employment.

- **Invest in more social housing and promote social welfare for victims of domestic violence and their families**

Guarantee immediate and unconditional safety for all women who request it, based on the model of the emergency shelter system available in France which also recommend reinforcing sectoral policies that have an impact on the pathways of women victims of violence, such as evicting their spouses, regularizing the status of foreign women, and providing access to social housing.

Good practice

In France, the model of the [Abri d'urgence](#) (emergency shelter) system - set up in France by the [Fondation des Femmes](#) and the [Fédération Nationale Solidarité Femmes](#) - finances and provides associations specialized in supporting women victims of violence with quality hotel rooms for emergency and short stays for women and their children. The Fondation des Femmes finances the rooms as well as providing a financial contribution for the associations consisting of material aid and a contribution to the specialized support (legal, psychological and social, etc.), which must enable the women to leave the situation as quickly as possible and find a lasting solution. The program relies on a hotel reservation platform of the Accor group (known as "CEDA") where rooms are offered at cost price.

- **Apply measures to address multiple discriminations**

The state should protect all women without discrimination on the basis of age, education, race, social origin, sexual orientation, cultural and linguistic background, immigration status, marital status,

economic situation or disability and recognize that women's experience of violence is influenced by these factors and include measures targeted at particular groups of women, where appropriate.

Addressing issue related to self-esteem

1. Issue raised

Women facing domestic violence often lose confidence in themselves and in the world around them. They may be isolated, have lost their sense of direction, and experience low self-esteem. Often, administrative services are not adapted to women's needs and can even re-victimize them. These problems may be amplified for migrant and refugee women, who face additional barriers (immigration status, language barriers, and social isolation) that can increase their vulnerability.

Women experiencing domestic violence need short and long-term access to health care and support services to meet their immediate and long-term needs. In many countries, these services are not provided by the State, but by non-governmental organizations. Because these organizations are financially constrained and lack public funding guarantees, women facing domestic violence may not receive sufficient long-term support. The State plays a vital role in creating funding channels for these specialist services although it is not the most appropriate institution to manage them. Therefore, where possible, these services should be managed by independent and experienced non-governmental organizations that provide reliable gender and empowerment support and place women at the center of their actions.

2. Solutions

Empowering survivors of domestic violence to regain their agency and independence is a fundamental step in the socio-professional (re)integration process. Indeed, women should be encouraged to explore or develop their areas of interest - for example, join a club, or participate in new activities. Participating in such activities may help to reduce isolation and improve self-esteem. These skills are essential in the pathway towards socio-professional (re)integration because they help women to envisage a secure future, develop a personal development plan, and equip them with the necessary skills to achieve their ambitions.

Field workers can offer psychological counseling and group coaching sessions to help women understand the mechanisms of domestic violence and define their future goals. These sessions can empower women to realize their capabilities and achieve their goals.

Companies can develop support for women facing domestic violence by joining a network of businesses engaged in the fight against domestic violence. They can put measures into place to help their employees: for example, they may define a trusted person who acts as a link between the

employee and the company management team. By working together, companies can create a widespread movement. They can communicate widely and externally about the measures they have implemented and encourage other companies to get involved. Such networks enable companies to collaborate with peers and share their good practices.

Good practice

In Spain, the pioneering initiative in the field of labor insertion: "ArtE: Scenario for Empowerment," promoted by the [Ana Bella Foundation](#) and UpSocial, with the support of the "la Caixa" Foundation can serve as an example of enhancing women survivors of gender violence empowerment through theater. The Foundation also promotes personalized pathways of digital empowerment for the labor market insertion of survivors of gender-based violence.



I am going to tell you about a situation. I happen to know a young woman, about 25 years old, whose husband forced her to leave her job. She was a sales assistant in a bakery. She ended up staying with us because there was a lot of violence. It took her almost a year and a half to get out of the situation but today she has moved on. Although she was well integrated and had all the skills to do so, it took her a year and a half to rebuild herself and regain her self-confidence. It is a long road to reintegration. »

A FIELD WORKER

3. How policies can help

- Provide free psychological counseling for victims offered by state institutions

A list of psychologists who offer free counseling should be available on institutional websites dedicated to women, gender equality, and the fight against domestic violence. For example, in January 2023, the French government will pilot the "New Start" program, offering psychological support to women experiencing domestic violence in certain towns and cities.

- Enable equitable access to services

Any service offered needs to ensure that it is accessible to urban and rural populations. It is essential to provide holistic, accessible, and inclusive support to all women.

- Offer vital services

Women experiencing domestic violence should be able to access the following services:

- 1) A 24- hour, free national domestic violence helpline.
- 2) Specialized women's centers that can support women through a crisis and offer them long term support (legal advice, understanding the mechanisms of domestic violence, counselling, immigration support, etc.)

- Create an action protocol for the care of migrant women victims of gender-based violence

Developing a special protocol for this population will facilitate their access to specialized and institutional support, thus empowering them in their journey towards socio-professional (re)integration.

Addressing professional barriers

1. Issue raised

The mechanisms used by aggressors negatively impact the health and well-being of victims and their pathways to (re)employment. Regarding socio-professional integration, women victims of domestic violence face personal (self-esteem, confidence, emotional and material instability) and professional obstacles (lack of qualifications and experience, unsuitable employment opportunities). Other barriers include a lack of a social network and isolation.

Women confronted with domestic violence may also encounter structural barriers in their socio-professional (re)integration process: a labor market that is not, or is poorly, adapted to vulnerable people, the entrenchment of extremely stereotyped jobs, the inflexibility of employment, and the employer's "profit motivation." Structural obstacles place victims in a situation where they are unable to find employment. Additional barriers include a lack of qualifications, gaps in their CVs (lack of experience), housing, and childcare difficulties. The impacts of domestic violence can also manifest during the job-seeking process: inability to cope with administrative tasks, exhaustion, lateness, and absences from appointments with employment assistance and control bodies.

It should be noted that to receive social assistance, jobseekers are subject to certain obligations. The job-seeking process must be justified (copies of applications, replies from employers, etc.). Frequently, victims of violence see their social welfare blocked because of failure to attend appointments, produce relevant documents, refuse an offer without explanation, etc...

Finally, domestic violence can also represent a danger to the preservation of employment for women victims. The workplace is often considered a safe place for victims because it is time spent away from the perpetrator and a source of financial autonomy and independence. However, the consequences

of violence have a direct impact on a victim's work: physical and emotional fatigue, sick leave, intrusion of personal concerns into work life, etc.

2. Solutions

To promote the retention of survivors in stable employment, employers and field workers need to understand the complexity of violence against women, its mechanisms, and the consequences on victims. Being trained on such issues makes it easier to understand the obstacles and difficulties faced by survivors and enables field workers to propose appropriate solutions. Additionally, being aware of the mechanisms of domestic violence can facilitate the identification of victims among the supported public.

It's also important to note that the journey to re-employment of survivors can be challenging if done alone. It is advisable to co-construct this process with the women and to listen empathetically to their needs.

While it is important for women to be (re)employed, it is important to ensure that employment is sustainable. Women who have experienced domestic violence should receive social and/or psychological support during their socio-professional (re)integration process. It is advisable to work with specialist organizations that promote a return to sustainable employment. Specialist charities and structures offer multi-faceted support to victims to break the cycle of violence (legal, social, psychological, medical, housing, etc.) Consult the guide and the pathway developed in the ACTIV project to discover local initiatives that can help you in the (re)integration of women.

Maintaining stable employment can also be achieved by encouraging professional development. Employers can create training and development opportunities for employees. When a company is engaged in the fight against domestic violence, it can create a safe working environment. Indeed, we spend one-third of our lives at work, so it is essential that we feel supported and listened to. A return to work is more likely to be successful when a former victim feels protected.



A professional goal is important to support the escape from violence, but it cannot be the only answer. Women confronted with domestic violence must benefit from a multi-faceted support developed by - and involving - different types of actors: charities, specialized organizations such as guidance structures and companies. »

FONDATION AGIR CONTRE L'EXCLUSION



It would be great if women could have access to social housing, a flexible work schedule, a salary to support their family, and easy access to day care and kindergarten for their children. »

TOUCHED ROMANIA

3. How policies can help

- Improve the variety and quality of jobs offered

Survivors of domestic violence must find stable, meaningful employment that promotes economic independence. To improve the variety and quality of jobs offered to women, they should be available to access immediate and ongoing training. Equally, orientating women towards jobs in high demand may enable them to find stable employment and avoid gender-stereotyped jobs (domestic, socio-sanitary, and administrative work). It is equally important to enhance the value of "care" jobs.

- Offer long-term support programs

Once employed, it is important to continue to provide psychosocial support to survivors to ensure sustainable employment. To this end, we recommend long-term support for victims.

- Unblock access to unemployment benefits

When a case of violence is proven, we recommend that access to unemployment and social assistance be immediately and unconditionally unblocked for unemployed women. The aim is to simplify the procedure, to ensure that the case is processed, and that the unemployment benefit is paid out quickly so that there is no risk of leaving these women destitute when they leave home. Financial independence is an essential condition for breaking the cycle of violence and enabling victims to reintegrate. This allows women victims to address their primary needs first (security, housing, finance, psychology...), and focus on their reconstruction later (job, career, training...).

- Protect victims' employment rights and prevent dismissal

It should be prohibited for employers to discriminate against or penalize survivors for the consequences of their assaults. For example, some survivors of violence against women have lost their jobs because they missed work due to injuries and other consequences of violence, including the need to find housing or go to court. Article 21 of the Spanish Organic Law on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence (2004) establishes several labor and social security rights for survivors of violence, including the right to reduce or rearrange working time.

Addressing field workers difficulties

1. Issue raised

Field workers are often unaware that they are in contact with women experiencing domestic violence. Yet, it is important to be able to detect and understand the impacts of domestic violence in order to effectively support victims. With little training on domestic violence, field workers do not always know how to react when they suspect a woman is in a violent relationship or when there is a disclosure of violence.

Moreover, while employment may alleviate some barriers in housing and administrative procedures, field workers still need to provide comprehensive support to address a woman's needs. Field workers often lack the necessary funding to deliver a long-term specific support program tailored to each woman's individual needs. The ACTIV project has shown that such programs need to be implemented to support those confronted with domestic violence during their journey towards socio-professional (re)integration.

2. Solutions

To improve cooperation between field workers, active awareness-raising measures that deliver reliable information and promote existing initiatives should be implemented. Field workers should know who to contact and the resources to use when in contact with a woman facing domestic violence. The creation of a directory of specialized organizations and resources in the field of domestic violence by local and national authorities could be useful to all those who work with the general public OR those who work in the reemployment sector.



The basic strategy we follow is : assess the situation and identify the resources. The objective is to empower the person so that they can regain the control of their life. For example, deal with administrative hurdles, get information from the right place, gain respect, etc. »

A FIELD WORKER

3. How policies can help

- Build an online platform that is a central reference for actors in the field of domestic violence and socio-professional (re)integration

The creation of an official online platform that regroups all the information on domestic violence could help raise awareness and promote cooperation between field actors. The platform could include information on European and national policy initiatives, funding opportunities for projects related to the socio-professional (re)integration of women victims of domestic violence, be a place to disseminate useful tools and share good practices, such as the ACTIV toolkit.

- Build a training program for those working in the domestic violence or socio-professional (re)integration sector

Field workers - social workers, employers, socio-professional (re)integration actors, etc. - would be better able to identify and help victims if they received training on domestic violence. In France, for example, it is mandatory (according to the law of August 4, 2014⁶) for all professionals involved in supporting victims of violence to receive training in domestic violence, violence against women, and the mechanisms of psychological control. However, the law does not concern employment structures or companies. If all workers received training on domestic violence, they would be better equipped to support women experiencing domestic violence.

- Increase funding to foster initiatives in the field of domestic violence

At the local level, few initiatives and programs are implemented to help victims of domestic violence to (re)integrate into the job market. The sustainability of these initiatives and programs depends on available funding. Allocating specific, national, and European funding opportunities dedicated to the subject would ensure the viability and longevity of such projects and encourage the development of new programs.

Good practice

An example of a successful local initiative is the "[Nouveaux Départs](#)" project in Brussels implemented by the Mission Locale pour l'Emploi de Bruxelles-Ville. The three-month program is composed of different workshops aimed at boosting self-confidence. Throughout the program, participants receive group coaching aimed at helping victims of domestic violence define and implement a career plan.

⁶ Loi n° 2014-873 du 4 août 2014 pour l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes

Involving and working with companies

1. Issue raised

In Europe, one woman in three has been physically or sexually abused, most often by a partner or ex-partner⁷ and 62% of these women are employed⁸. Every employer therefore has been, is, or will be in contact with an employee who has experienced gender-based violence, whether it happens at work or in the private sphere.

However, it is not easy for companies to talk about domestic violence. It is often assumed that it is a private matter, and the employer need not intervene. Yet, female employees spend more than a third of their time at work. For those experiencing domestic abuse, it may be their only place of social interaction outside the home and the only time they spend away from their abuser. The workplace is a key place where women can take steps to escape the violence.

Beyond the personal and social impacts, violence also has economic consequences. Multiple studies have shown the extent to which such violence affects the victim's ability to work (reduced productivity, increased absenteeism, turnover, and resignation without notice⁹) and also, that of her colleagues.

Reintegrating women who have experienced domestic violence into the workplace can also be daunting for companies. Indeed, many are of the assumption that to have a stable job women must first have left their abusive partner - a reasoning that few studies have documented. However, the ACTIV project has observed that employment is a vector of emancipation and independence. Thus, a woman facing domestic violence who has a stable job is more likely to break out of the cycle of violence in the long term. However, securing and maintaining a job is sometimes a struggle, as it requires adaptations that not all employers are ready to make.

⁷ OMS : Devastatingly pervasive : 1 in 3 women globally experience violence. (2021, 9 mars). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence>

⁸ OneInThreeWomen. (2019, novembre). Survey held in 6 companies : « How does domestic violence impact the workplace ? » https://www.fondationface.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/FACE_-ProjetOneInThreeWomen.210x297_UK.pdf

⁹ *ibid.*

2. Solutions

It is important to communicate widely on the role of the employer and the place that companies can take in the fight against domestic violence. Indeed, positioning the workplace as a safe place where victims can find support and referrals greatly increases the impact of the measures put in place.

Corporate campaigns can highlight the economic aspects of violence against women and its impact on the operation of a company. While taboos prevent victims or perpetrators from raising these issues, company and union representatives may feel uncomfortable discussing them and believe that they should not interfere in private matters. Campaigns should aim to clarify the role of companies and explain how they can intervene without being patronizing or intrusive. Businesses can, for example: disseminate and display information on violence against women, establish support systems and structures (e.g., hotlines, shelters, counseling programs), and promote specialized organizations in their communication with employees - on the company intranet or by placing posters in strategic locations within the company's premises.

Good practice

As part of its partnership with communications group Publicis, the OneInThreeWomen network created a [campaign on LinkedIn](#) to mobilize companies for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 2022. This campaign highlighted a series of warning signs that could indicate that a colleague is experiencing domestic violence. It also served to remind companies of their role on the subject. A second phase of the campaign will take place in January 2023 and will highlight the network's best practices and show companies how they can commit to the fight against gender-based violence.

Good practice

The [SET THE TONE project](#) (Social Economy Tackling the unfair Treatment of wOmen iN Enterprises), funded under the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship program, aims to have an impact on the mind-set and day-to-day behavior in the workplace towards gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, including cyber-harassment. It promotes the active engagement of employers and employees as positive key players in preventing and reporting sexual harassment cases in Belgium, Italy, Spain, Poland and Slovenia.



A professional qualification/job stability is important to get out of the cycle of violence because it can increase the abused person's self-esteem. It can increase the prospect of a normal life, and she can at some point call on someone she trusts in her professional environment, to guide her to specialized help or even help her out of this situation. »

A WOMAN FACING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



We are asking for more companies to be involved in the social and professional (re)integration of women, more funds to develop this type of project and more housing to stabilize the situation of these women. »

FONDATION AGIR CONTRE L'EXCLUSION

3. How policies can help

- Support networks of companies committed to the fight against domestic violence

For example, the [CEASE network](#) (Belgium) and the [OneInThreeWomen network](#) (France) support companies to implement policies and procedures that ensure an effective response for employees experiencing domestic violence. They also allow companies to share best practices, develop their network of stakeholders and deploy a common voice.

- Enable victims of domestic violence to access appropriate provisions to protect them from adverse action or discrimination

Companies should make accommodations for employees experiencing domestic violence. Allowing victims to take extra days' leave ensures that they maintain their employment, financial security, and it allows them to attend necessary appointments (court appearances, seeking legal advice, etc).

States should explore ways to implement this measure in both the private and public sectors, considering the direct and indirect consequences of domestic violence in the workplace and job retention.

- Provide tax benefits to employers who create jobs for vulnerable people, such as women facing domestic violence

States should support businesses, especially in terms of funding since not all businesses have the ability and means to do so.

- **Provide an appropriate institutional framework**

Legislation on violence against women should be modified to include a section that specifically recognizes the role of companies. The legal framework could include an obligation of confidentiality for victims of violence in the workplace, incentives for the professional integration of women victims of violence, the right to special leave, etc. Innovation and collaboration between the public and private sectors should be encouraged to address this issue effectively and comprehensively. National action plans should encourage the participation of businesses and ensure their ability to act as intermediaries. By integrating the actions of companies into national action plans, their needs could be better identified, their commitments valued, and an evaluation of practices systematized.

- **Encourage companies to consider the subject of domestic violence and to raise awareness among their employees**

In France, the gender equality agreement is mandatory for all companies with more than 50 employees. This annual agreement also covers the quality of life at work. If businesses do not fail to implement an agreement on gender equality, they must produce at least one action plan to avoid a financial penalty. In this agreement, a minimum of 3 objectives must be retained for companies with less than 300 employees, and 4 objectives for companies with more than 300 employees, among the 7 objectives: elimination of pay gaps (mandatory), access to employment, vocational training, career development and professional promotion, working and employment conditions, job diversity coverage of old age insurance contributions of part-time employees.

Developing synergies between the different actors involved in the process

1. Issue raised

Based on its experience, the ACTIV partnership identified a lack of collaboration between actors in providing effective help, assistance and support to women facing domestic violence. Field workers and companies are two essential stakeholders in the pathway to socio-professional (re)integration. ACTIV strongly believes that guidance structures and businesses should work hand in hand and not separately as is, unfortunately, most often the case at present.

2. Solutions

Domestic violence and the need for a better network and infrastructure to improve the socio-professional (re)integration of women who have experienced this type of violence should be a public concern. The ACTIV project aims to contribute to this issue.

The partners of the project developed the toolkit “[interactive pathway for \(re\)integration at work of women facing domestic violence](#)” to draw on the knowledge and expertise of field workers and companies in the fields of domestic violence and socio professional (re)integration. It aims to guide field workers and enterprises by giving them tools to raise awareness and improve their involvement in this field. It also aims to create synergies between the different actors involved in the process. The guidebook provides recommendations for research and practice. We encourage field workers and businesses to use the information in the guide to support their work with the women victims of domestic violence.

The main objectives of the ACTIV project and this toolkit are:

- To increase synergies between stakeholders and improve collaborations;
- To provide learning tools to improve the services provided by stakeholders, so that they can develop a caring environment;
- To leverage the knowledge and expertise of stakeholders and companies by involving them in the socio-professional (re)integration of women facing domestic violence.



Partners don't understand the association's specific support. We don't force anything, and we don't impose appointments. We must adapt ourselves to the different situations as best we can. Women facing violence must receive this personalized support. »

A SOCIAL WORKER

3. How policies can help

- Develop partnerships between stakeholders and increase the number of collaboration agreements between institutions

In Spain, the DIE NETWORK aims to recognize and encourage the work of companies committed to equality. The "Equality in the Company" (DIE) label is regulated by Royal Decree 1615/2009, of 26 October. The DIE award - a mark of excellence granted by the Ministry of Equality- is granted to companies and other entities that excel in the development of gender equality policies in the workplace. These policies aim to implement equality plans and measures in areas such as access to employment and working conditions, reconciliation and co-responsibility measures, equal pay, inclusive communication, company organization, model, corporate social responsibility, etc. Both public and private companies are eligible to receive the award. More information [here](#).

Similarly, the Spanish Government Delegation for Gender Violence has recently launched the initiative "Companies for a society free of gender-based violence". This initiative promotes the involvement of companies in achieving a society free from violence against women and, therefore, equality between women and men. This is a public initiative that aims to raise companies' awareness of gender-based violence and improve public-private collaboration and corporate social responsibility. More information [here](#).

- Organize working groups between different stakeholders

The development of working groups between non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and businesses can create opportunities for stakeholders to exchange information and experiences on the best way to support women. As previously mentioned, the CEASE network is a notable example of different institutions working together to tackle intimate partner violence.

- Cover basic needs

In order to make a fresh start in life and look to the future, women need to cover their basic needs and know their rights. They need to be aware of specialist services that can accommodate them and their children. The challenges are to ensure women's safety, privacy, and anonymity, and to provide a caring and supportive environment.



Good practice

During the meetings developed within the ACTIV project, the stakeholders presented an idea for a project called "One Place, One Chance". The project proposed a concrete solution for covering basic needs. It proposed to enhance a network of nursery places for women facing domestic violence, by working with local /national structures to reserve a place for their children. The objective was for survivors to have child-free time so that they could reintegrate into employment. This project focused on one aspect of socio-professional (re)integration and addressed a specific and consequent obstacle: childcare.

- **Improve working conditions and equip companies to support women**

In the framework of the European project WeGo!3, the Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion (FACE) deployed a local trial in Allier with the club FACE Territoire Bourbonnais. The objective of this local experimentation was to participate in the improvement of the conditions of entry or return to employment of women facing domestic violence by:

- Raising awareness among companies about domestic violence - in particular the importance of maintaining employment and socio-professional (re)integration;
- Raising awareness of organizations that can cover several fields in access to rights (health, family, retirement, law, housing, tax, job search, digital support) for women confronted to domestic violence.

The organization of this awareness campaign is part of an overall objective to increase the capacity of structures supporting women victims of domestic violence to promote their socio-economic independence through the design and adoption of gender sensitive labor policies in the Allier region. Learn more about the project [here](#).

Recommendations

Provide sufficient funds to support the victims of domestic violence

Enable access to a stable and safe home

Invest in more social housing and promote social welfare for victims of domestic violence and their families

Apply measures to address multiple discriminations

Provide free psychological counseling for victims offered by state institutions

Enable equitable access to services

Offer vital services

Create an action protocol for the care of migrant women victims of gender-based violence

Improve the variety and quality of jobs offered

Offer long-term support programs

Unblock access to unemployment benefits

Protect victims' employment rights and prevent dismissal

Build an online platform that is a central reference for actors in the field of domestic violence and socio-professional (re)integration

Build a training program for those working in the domestic violence or socio-professional (re)integration sector

Increase funding to foster initiatives in the field of domestic violence

Support networks of companies committed to the fight against domestic violence

Enable victims of domestic violence to access appropriate provisions to protect them from adverse action or discrimination

Provide tax benefits to employers who create jobs for vulnerable people, such as women facing domestic violence

Provide an appropriate institutional framework

Encourage companies to take into account the subject of domestic violence and to raise awareness among their employees

Develop partnership between stakeholders and increase the number of collaboration agreements between

Organize working groups between different stakeholders

Cover basic needs

Improve working conditions and equip companies to support women

Conclusion

The isolation and decentralization that characterize many state-level responses to social problems extend to the approaches used to tackle domestic violence, as many programs and schemes focus on specific objectives and outcomes and thus only address a problem in isolation. Advocates for legislation to increase reemployment of the long-term unemployed, for example, may not consider the circumstances of victims of domestic violence: women who leave their jobs because of violence may need additional support.

The ACTIV consortium, therefore, recommends using a holistic approach when planning programs for survivors of domestic violence. To improve the socio-professional (re)integration process, all actors involved in developing and delivering such schemes and programs must consider the various problems that victims encounter. When seeking to improve the socio-professional (re)integration process, one must consider the peripheral barriers to employment and seek appropriate solutions. Indeed, peripheral obstacles can complicate the socio-professional (re)integration of victims of domestic violence if policies and systems do not take them into account.

The consequences of domestic violence on the victims' self-confidence and self-esteem need to be understood by all actors involved in the socio-professional (re)integration process. Women who experience domestic violence are often encouraged to return to work without necessarily receiving the support they require to overcome their self-esteem issues.

While employment can be a stepping-stone and may help women leave a violent relationship, specialist domestic violence support services in urban and rural locations must receive sufficient funding to support survivors throughout this process. Furthermore, States must support the companies and structures that accompany women in their journey toward socio-professional (re)integration. States must provide all the organizations involved in the process with the necessary resources as a successful socio-professional reinsertion process is a timely and lengthy process.

In addition, the ACTIV consortium has documented that companies have an essential role in the socio-professional (re)integration process: as the last link in the chain, politicians must involve and support companies in this process. Some companies - specifically those without the means to invest in the subject - may need additional help. While several companies have already committed themselves to act - notably in line with their engagements in specialist networks - domestic violence remains a taboo for most European companies. It is essential to remind companies that domestic violence is a societal problem and that they have a specific role to play.

Finally, the actors involved in the process must improve synergies, and foster coalitions and networks. Indeed, it is necessary to share information, pool resources, and coordinate policies and programs at local, national, and European levels - the actors involved cannot continue to make progress if they work in silos. Furthermore, no single actor involved in the process can remove all the obstacles identified in this white paper. Cooperation between actors is therefore vital.

For these reasons, the ACTIV consortium recommends that States consider the different measures proposed in this white paper to improve the social and professional (re)integration of women victims of domestic violence.

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