
DETAILS REPORT WRITING ORGANISATION

Country: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Organisation writing report: NGO Budućnost – Modriča, website: <http://www.buducnost-md.com/>

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Gordana Vidović holds a law degree from the University of Sarajevo and passed the bar exam in Belgrade. She founded the “Budućnost” NGO in 1996, and continues to run the organisation to this day. For 20 years she has been actively involved in different peace and human rights initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Vidović has had important roles in a range of expert groups. In 1998 Vidović was involved in the gender reference group for Republika Srpska aimed at establishing gender mechanisms. She has worked as a consultant for developing a multi-disciplinary approach for suppressing domestic violence, as a national rapporteur for the position of women in political parties, and as a member of the BiH Children’s Council Team of Experts, a group addressing education, children’s rights, the business sector and social protection. Vidović is also an expert consultant in the field of political participation of women, gender-based violence and programmes for offenders. She has created an innovative model of referral mechanisms for institutions and local communities, related to the prevention of gender-based violence.

Representing any other organisations? No

1. ORGANISATIONS/PROGRAMMES

WHAT TYPE OF ACTIVITIES RELATED TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION HAS YOUR ORGANISATION CARRIED OUT DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS?

Citizens Association Future is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1996 with the objective of preventing and ending violence against women. Since the establishment of the organisation, we have provided a variety of consulting services to women, and in 2000 we established safe houses for women victims of violence. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and beyond we are recognised for our advocacy activities related to the adoption of laws and policies on gender equality.

Through our work with victims, we began to realise the importance of providing men with opportunities to develop their communication skills, stress coping skills, and self-control, in order to adequately address domestic violence, and achieve good results for victims. In this way repeated violent patterns of behaviour can be prevented. This was the motivation behind the first men's centre in BiH. This step is of crucial importance, because violence against women cannot be reduced unless men as perpetrators or potential perpetrators are involved in the entire process. Further, it must be recognised that many men have problems that are rarely addressed, and there are few social support services to assist them in finding solutions.

This approach is new within the region, and the experiences of the men's centre are thus extremely valuable for institutions in this field. The men's centre was established on 25 November, 2010 as the fourth organisational unit of the Association of Citizens Future Modrica. This is the first project in Bosnia and Herzegovina to be directed towards perpetrators of violence, in order to address the causes of violence and to foster rehabilitation. During the pilot phase, professionals from the humanities and health sciences were trained in the implementation of psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence. Vocational training has been carried out by the Croatian Society for Psychological Assistance (Prof. Dean Ajduković). The men's centre has been slowly gaining

the confidence of the local community, as well as the wider social community. Over time, the number of clients who have asked for help without the prompting of a mediator has increased, indicating that domestic violence is becoming more and more demystified.

The men's centre is conceived of as a counselling and therapy centre for men who have problems with violence, but it is also a place where men can gather, get informed and socialise in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. The most important component of the centre is its structured psychosocial treatment for perpetrators of violence, which assists men to stop their violent behaviour and take responsibility for violence.

The treatment is preceded by an initial procedure, during which a professional evaluates the possibilities for the perpetrator to achieve change, and the probability of them completing the goals of the treatment. This stage also involves an explanation of the treatment process. For those candidates who satisfy the criteria set in the initial procedure, the treatment then begins, and continues through at least 16 group meetings of two hours each. Treatment can also be undertaken through individual work if the team believes that such work would give better results. Group psychosocial treatment is a protective measure whose goal is to prevent further violence by achieving positive changes in behaviour. Perpetrators of violence who are involved in this structured treatment, are able to achieve insight into their own violent behaviour, adopt self-control over this behaviour, learn a number of social skills, and change harmful beliefs that contribute to their violent behaviour. In this way, psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of domestic violence can be said to contribute directly to the protection of victims of domestic violence and increase their safety.

This approach encourages perpetrators to take responsibility for their own behaviour, and teaches alternatives to violence in solving problems or conflicts. These positive changes are necessary to prevent relapses of aggression and domestic violence. The therapeutic work is undertaken in a group environment, with two male counsellors. If, in the team's estimation, the perpetrator requires additional motivation or sensitisation, individual work can be undertaken alongside group work, in order to avoid disturbing the group. If the

perpetrator still does not manage to adapt to the group, he will be appointed individual work only.

The organisation has a particular focus on negotiating and cooperating with public institutions. Formally, the state has adopted relevant legislation, however this measure is still not ready to be implemented in practice. With a lack of formal possibilities, cooperation with relevant professionals has been established, and perpetrators of violence are sent to the men's centre in order to start the initial procedure of evaluation for inclusion into psycho-social treatment.

Psycho-social work with perpetrators of violence has been the most important area of the men's centre's work since its foundation, because it obliges men to take responsibility for the violence they commit against their family members. The process of referring perpetrators from other institutions is slow, thus the organisation has developed a strategy for including men whose wives are users of the safe house. The organisation has developed a programme that is appealing for men from the community, in order to demystify the men's centre. Over time, interest in counselling services has increased, due to men's various issues relating to social protection, family legal protection and psychological counselling. These are direct indicators that men's attitudes are changing.¹ Providing men with possibilities and strengthening those men who belong to sensitive social groups increases their opportunities to actively and productively participate in society. These activities are thus very important, because they are often a way of preventing violence. In several cases, male users of different men's centre services have voluntarily applied for inclusion into psychosocial treatment.

The men's centre has developed a "mixed" approach to its programme that aims to gain men's trust and encourage their readiness for change. However, the focus needs to be on the prevention of violent behaviour throughout all activities, and it needs to be clear that there is no tolerance of violence in any form.

¹ Association of citizens „Budućnost“ – 2010 - Research carried out before opening the men's centre showed that men have problems too, but they rarely ask for professional help because they believe no one understands them.

2. COUNTRY

PLEASE GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF GENERAL SITUATION IN YOUR COUNTRY REGARDING WORK WITH PERPETRATORS.

Governmental institutions on all levels in BiH have been taking comprehensive measures to raise awareness of different types of gender-based violence, and to create an institutional frame for combatting it. Nevertheless, women in BiH are still exposed to a high risk of violence both in their immediate family environments, as well as in the wider community. Gender-based violence, unfortunately, remains a widespread form of basic human rights violation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is caused by deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes regarding the roles of women and men within society, and exacerbated by the commonly accepted attitude that this type of violence is a private problem between victim and perpetrator. These attitudes result in the state's unwillingness to implement laws and strategies.

Violence against women persists in Bosnia and Herzegovina and there remains a lack of significant progress in recognising the different forms of violence to which women of different ages are exposed on a daily basis. Despite a commitment to the implementation of international standards through the ratification of key international conventions, relevant regulations and public policies in BiH do not recognise violence against women as a specific form of gender-based violence. Further, these policies use gender-neutral definitions, which functions to minimise the degree of social danger and violence which women are exposed to in both private and public spheres of life.

Government institutions in BiH have not provided mechanisms for the continuous, accessible and sensitised provision of information on women's rights, nor on the support and assistance available for women exposed to violence. Permanent campaigns need to be implemented to inform the public about the causes and consequences of domestic violence, and the legal or punitive measures that can be taken against the perpetrators of violence, in order to raise public awareness and general prevention. Women subjected to violence are still not ensured unhindered access to the system, or efficient and sensitised

support and assistance.² Further, women are faced with various forms of prejudice and discrimination, both in their immediate environments, as well as from professionals working in institutions whose duties and powers are directly regulated by laws and regulations.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, legislation has addressed domestic violence through the development of certain protection measures, among which the psycho-social treatment of perpetrators of violence is the most significant. This area of legislation has so far proved to be unenforceable in practice because it lacks requirements for the imposition of protection measures that would allow the competent courts to impose these measures. Further, in cases where the request is submitted and the measures imposed, problems arise in its application. The implementation of treatment is lacking because not all municipalities have enough resources and trained experts to carry out the measures. Representatives of local institutions have stated that they do not have sufficient knowledge, clear instructions, or adequate funding necessary to implement this law.

Activities in this field remain sporadic, and vary depending upon the region or the canton. According to FBiH, the psychosocial treatment of perpetrators is carried out in all cantons.

² **Judiciary** has a key role in protecting the human right of women to live without violence. The project “**Realisation of sex and gender equality through monitoring judiciary**”, was undertaken to independently monitor criminal proceedings in cases of gender-based violence. The monitoring was performed by the Association of Citizens “**Centar za pravnu pomoć ženama**” Zenica (for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Foundation „**Udružene žene**” Banja Luka (for Republic of Srpska), in partnership with the Association of Citizens “**Budućnost**” Modriča, Association of Women “**Most**” Višegrad and Foundation “**Lara**” Bijeljina. The results of the one-year monitoring project indicate that criminal sanctions for acts of sex- and gender-based violence are generally lenient, often on the statutory limit, and sometimes even under it. Lack of determination of safety measures, as well as protective measures, was also evident. The monitoring did not record a single case in which a protective measure was imposed, despite the fact that conditions suggested that imposing such a measure would be practical, since the cases involved violence committed under the influence of alcohol, by people with certain psychological disorders, repeated crimes, domestic violence, etc. Furthermore, a large number of probations were imposed. In none of the recorded cases was a defendant put under protective supervision, nor was the measure of psychosocial treatment imposed. This lenient punishment, and lack of mandated protective measures such as psychosocial treatment, sends the wrong message to perpetrators, and does not force them to face the consequences of their behaviour.

Professionals who work in centres for social work, including social workers and psychologists, do not recognise the social danger of all types of gender-based violence against women, and therefore do not provide consistent, coordinated and adequate support and help and nor do they recommend urgent protective measures. This contributes to the feelings of insecurity experienced by victims. They have no trust in the system's institutions and find it hard to report violence.

In procedures responding to acts of violence against women and children, there is a lack of overall cooperation between the court, public prosecutor, police and authorised professionals who are obliged to provide support and protection to women victims of violence, whether they are adults or minors.

Courts and prosecutions are obliged to ensure that criminal proceedings in this area are initiated and conducted with no postponements, in order to provide women who have suffered violence fast and efficient access to justice, and protection against repeated crimes. As a first step, it is necessary to provide an optimal environment where injured adults and minors can feel safe to report violence. This is achieved most efficiently through the urgent action of authorised institutions and through **imposing proper protective measures and implementing consistent and efficient penal policy.**

However, this treatment is uneven and depends greatly on the professionals involved and their specialised training in their home institutions. These institutions are mainly centres for mental health that operate within health centres and that are, according to regulations, the appointed structures to implement treatment. There is also uneven psychosocial treatment of perpetrators in the Republika Srpska (RS). The Doboj-Modriča region is the most active in this regard. Here, treatment is carried out under the scope of the Modriča Men's Centre.³ Unfortunately, the formal intervention system is unregulated and the courts do not compel perpetrators to attend treatment. Rather, perpetrators are referred to treatment by different institutions and their engagement in treatment is voluntary. Because these measures are not imposed by the courts and are not implemented, the psychosocial treatment of perpetrators in other regions of the RS remains at an alarmingly low level.

The activities of government institutions at all levels, particularly entity, state and Brcko District level, indicate slow progress towards meeting the international standards and obligations that BiH is committed to respect including the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*.⁴ Mutual cooperation, coordination and partnership activities with NGOs are also hampered by the absence of measurable and sustainable progress indicators in the area of preventing and combatting violence against women. One of the entities in BH, Republic of Srpska, has currently frozen all activities related to the Council of Europe convention.

³ The male center is part of the organisation BUDUĆNOST

⁴ On 7 November 2013, Bosnia and Herzegovina ratified the Convention (Official Gazette no. 15/13). The country is thus committed to undertaking a series of legislative and other measures aimed to prevent violence against women, provide support and assistance to women survivors of violence, and punish the perpetrators of violence.

3. BEST PRACTICES

TELL US ABOUT BEST PRACTICES IN WORK WITH PERPETRATORS IN YOUR COUNTRY.

Various initiatives within Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the men's centre, self-help groups, and centres involved in mental health, prove that professionals in the country have created a solid base upon which to build further developments.

4. NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WHAT HAS TO BE DONE TO PREVENT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN YOUR COUNTRY (REGARDING WORK WITH PERPETRATORS)?

Inconsistent legislative norms and their lack of implementation still pose considerable challenges to organisations working with perpetrators. There are also various difficulties related to integration into the system, and recognition by the relevant institutions.

- 1) Bosnia and Herzegovina's experiences in terms of ending gender-based violence are not so different to those of other states, and BiH is not lagging behind with solutions and practices.
- 2) The need for multi-sectoral cooperation has been reiterated. Protocols on cooperation do exist, but need to be revised to include work with perpetrators, and need to be harmonised across entities and cantons.
- 3) The protection measure of compulsory psycho-social treatment in BiH is implemented in a very limited way. Positive examples include the Centre for Mental Health in Siroki Brijeg, and the Mann centre.
- 4) There needs to be continuous lobbying towards the adoption of the bylaw regulating the implementation of the measure in FBiH.

- 5) The bylaw on the implementation of compulsory psychosocial treatment in the RS is inadequate and is not being consistently implemented.
- 6) Professionals working with perpetrators (either individually or within an institution) need to have relevant experience (as social workers, psychologists, social pedagogues, or psychiatrists for example). They should be provided with additional training, as well as with supervision and adequate protection.
- 7) Campaign work is essential in spreading information about treatments for perpetrators of violence. Media presence, hotlines and public spaces are also important fields for awareness-raising.
- 8) International organisations can put pressure on the government to commit more strongly to implementing the Istanbul Convention and adopting all associated bylaws.

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