

**Outcomes of the project
Stop to Domestic Violence Among Persons
Coming from Foreign Ethnic Groups –
Implementation of New Methods
and Procedures Within the Scope
of Cooperation with EU Countries**

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OP Human Resources and Employment
GG 5.1. International Cooperation
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The project was conducted within activities of the Intervention Centre Brno, which is operated by the NGO Spondea for the South Moravian Region.

The project target group embraces foreign families living in the Czech Republic who are threatened with domestic violence, children witnessing domestic violence inclusive. The project responds to work experience with the target group, to changes in our society, development of multicultural environment and increasing number of national minorities in the Czech Republic.

Main project contributions include gaining good practice from EU countries where the system of help for foreigners threatened with domestic violence works, naming spheres which need improvement, better awareness in our professional community of the problem's seriousness and of ways it can be solved, transferring democratic values such as equal approach and equal treatment in immigrant communities in the Czech Republic, establishing cooperation with organizations which work with foreigners and can detect a threatened person, knowledge improvement among the organization's employees concerning the so called multicultural empathy skill, knowledge improvement concerning operating methods with persons threatened with domestic violence in social workers who help the foreigners.

Project partners:

- 1) TIYE International, Utrecht, Holland
- 2) APAV Lisbon, Portugal
- 3) Interventionsstelle Wien, Austria
- 4) FIM Frankfurt am Main, Germany
- 5) Spacio Famiglia and Centro Pari Opportunita, Italy
- 6) Crisis Centre for Men Malmö, Sweden

Outcomes of the project

1) Features of the target group

- women in most of the cases – only 2 men (Great Britain, Germany)
- the greater part constituted Czech women in a relationship with a foreigner, mostly older than the man (they had met on vacation abroad in most of the cases)
- female foreigners – often significantly younger than the man (a difficult economic situation in the country of their origin or financial difficulties within the family)
- alcohol as a trigger of aggressive behaviour occurred less often in foreign male perpetrators than in Czech male perpetrators

Most of the clients were women. Workers of the organisation were in touch only with two men during the time; one of them was German and the other came from the Great Britain. A similar proportion was observed also among Czech citizens. In the Czech population mostly women sought help and counselling, which may be influenced by social division of men's and women's roles within the society. Men are ashamed of violence perpetrated by their female partners. This type of violence is typically psychic. It is difficult for men to accept the inequality in their relationship; they are often not aware of the danger and refuse help. On the other hand, for women it is easier to accept the role of weaker victims, which is a result of historical interpretation of their social role.

More than half of the clients were Czech citizens who lived in a relationship with a foreigner. They had met their partners, frequently younger ones, on vacation abroad. They married soon after they had met and moved to the Czech Republic. A marriage of convenience occurred in one of the cases. A foreigner married a significantly older woman with a child from her previous marriage. He stopped to be interested in his new family immediately after the wedding and started to be aggressive. Female foreigners were often significantly younger than their Czech partners. A difficult economic situation in their country of origin played a major role in several cases. The man promised to his partner's family to take care of her and support her financially. After they had arrived to the Czech Republic, men required absolute obedience and gratitude. They tended to isolate their wives and prevented them from meeting friends and other people. Alcohol or drugs were a minor trigger of aggressive behaviour in perpetrators who were foreigners when compared to the Czech society.

2) Reasons why the clients (both foreigners and foreigners' partners in the Czech Republic) sought help

- psychic domestic violence occurred *in all the cases*
- physical and economic violence, social isolation occurred *in most of the cases*
- dangerous pursuit occurred *in one case*

All clients who contacted the Intervention Centre Brno had to face psychic domestic violence. Apart from that the majority of them suffered from physical domestic violence, economic violence and social isolation. A client was in danger of pursuit (domestic violence in the past). Bruises and injuries requiring medical treatment were usual causes of physical violence. Perpetrators attempted to hurt their victims without any visible consequences in some of the cases.

Types of psychic violence

- *in most of the cases* humiliation, abusive language, offences, perpetrators threatened to take away children from their wives, excessive control, inappropriate manifestation of jealousy, absolute obedience and orders, children as witnesses of violence – social isolation is typically connected to this type of psychic violence (the victim is prevented from meeting their family, friends and having a job), victims were often kept locked at home
- **frequently** death threats (perpetrators threatened they would slit their throat, murder the whole family or maim the victim), they threatened to harm the victim physically (burning), they destroyed their belongings (clothes, mobile phones, laptops, furniture), they accompanied their victims wherever they went leaving them never alone, they prevented them from learning Czech, searching for a job or gaining education, or accused their wives and partners of infidelity without any reason
- *rarely* the perpetrator spat in his victim's face, attempted to buy children from his wife (care of children), lied about the country of origin and about his previous marriage, forced his partner to marry him, threatened that he would have his wife certified, threatened with suicide, solved private problems with the victim's employer or parents, perpetrators treated their wives as a thing, accused them of their own business failure or problems at work, prevented them from entering their common dwelling or forced them to leave without children, tried to make them commit suicide, threatened that they would murder their children, threatened that they would report their wives' aggressive behaviour to the police, or acted like they were to hit their wives

A part of the perpetrator's family (a brother, mother...) or the whole family often stands by the abuser and takes over his role when he is absent, e.g. when imprisoned. Children often witness aggressive behaviour and violence is frequently targeted at them as well (at children from the wife's previous marriage or at own daughters, exceptionally at sons too). Rare violence of fathers-foreigners against their own sons may be interpreted in connection to cultural habits of the country of their origin (different educational methods and ways of raising girls and boys in Arabic countries) and to gender variations in the attitude to women and men in the particular country (unequal status and fixed social roles).

There are major differences in relationships with perpetrators who are foreigners and Czech perpetrators. Foreigners often require their victims to adapt to their culture (women and men have various powers within their society). Czech women refuse to adapt such cultural habits; perpetrators force them to obey through violence. They often need to have power and control over their partners and need to decide for them, which leads to domestic violence. On the other hand, Czech perpetrators do not often require their wives to adapt to Czech culture and Czech habits. Social isolation occurs however in both groups. The victim is locked at home, is prohibited to stay in touch with her family, friends, is prevented from finding a job or gaining education. The isolation creates barriers which may prevent victims from seeking help or solving their difficult situation.

3) **How the clients learnt about services provided within the project**

- the Police of the Czech Republic informed them in most of the cases (eviction of the perpetrator put into effect or submitting a report of the commission of a crime)
- they found information on the Internet or their (Czech) friend told them
- a helpline worker, doctor, workers of another intervention centre or family members informed the victim in a few cases

The clients learnt about services provided within the scope of the project mostly through the Police of the Czech Republic after eviction of the perpetrator had been put into effect or when submitting a report of the commission of a crime. The process of contacting foreigners or foreigners' partners by intervention centres does not differ from contacting Czech citizens when the perpetrator is evicted. The clients could read about services of the project in English, Russian and Vietnamese thanks to various language versions of our website. A number of clients used the possibility to have a consultation in Russian and English. Such a service is offered in the Intervention Centre Brno as a standard procedure. A client communicated with a lawyer in German.

4) Obstacles which the clients had to overcome when solving their difficult life situation

Obstacles:

- language barrier (most of the cases when foreigners were in danger)
- difficult financial situation (as a result of social isolation and language barrier)
- lack of social background in the Czech Republic (often when foreigners were in danger)
- the perpetrator's a high social status in the Czech Republic
- victims were afraid that leaving the perpetrator would be perceived as child abduction (in female victims who were foreigners)
- bad experience with the police (in foreigners in danger)
- fear of threats, shame
- the perpetrator's family took over his role in his absence, e.g. the perpetrator's mother or brother
- illegality or residence in the country based on the marriage with a Czech citizen (in victims who were foreigners)

Clients who were foreigners had to face *a language barrier* in most of the cases. It made all attempts to contact authorities or other institutions more difficult or impossible. Czech being the official language in the Czech Republic, foreigners did not have enough knowledge of the language to explain their situation properly and to cooperate with the institutions further. Owing to social isolation and economic violence they found themselves *in financial troubles* and had no means to pay for an interpreter. Perpetrators prevented them from having a job so that they had no own income. As the situation was not often solved through a lawsuit they were not entitled to have an interpreter provided by the state free of charge.

The clients encountered the language barrier when they contacted some of the shelter institutions, the Institution of Social-Law Children Protection (OSPOD), job centre, some of the police departments and others. A client was even refused by police officers who did not believe her that she had been attacked since the officers did not speak her language and she was not able to explain in Czech what had happened. The perpetrator, her husband, used the situation and blamed her for attacking him. The client claimed that the police officers had believed the perpetrator since he had spoken Czech.

Workers of the project provided clients with assistance services and interpreting when necessary, e.g. appointments at the Institution of Social-Law Children Protection (OSPOD) regarding care proceedings. The Intervention Centre Brno offers social-law counselling in English and Russian, psychological counselling in English and exceptionally also counselling on legal matters in German after an appointment is arranged in advance. Social workers of the project met a foreign client who had been denied a stay at a shelter with a secret address because of the language barrier even though she was in danger. Her husband who had been aggressive and violent for several years pursued her at that moment.

The language barrier was the most common problem when the clients attempted to communicate with local institutions. Foreign clients had to face **lack of social background** in the Czech Republic and were not supported by their social surroundings in majority of the cases. Regarding the fact that the victims were in most of the cases socially isolated and were under excessive control of their partners, they had no chance to make friends with other people. In addition, since their original family lived in the country of their origin they had nobody with whom they could share their feelings and solve the situation. They had nowhere to leave. The lack of social background was one of the obstacles which hindered them from solving their difficult life situation when compared to Czech victims who could search for support among their family members or friends. Foreign victims felt isolated in the Czech Republic, misunderstood and neglected owing to the above mentioned obstacles.

Fear of the victim's husband's high social status was another problem which workers of the project encountered when fighting domestic violence. The perpetrator's social status was usually connected to a glamorous job, they were well-connected and had a fortune. The perpetrators threatened that they would bribe lawyers, courts of justice or psychiatrists and deprive their wives of their children or have them certified. The clients were frequently afraid that their children would be taken away from them, which related also to lack of knowledge of the Czech legal system. The husbands threatened that they would take their revenge if their wives reported them to the police and presented an information on the crime. The clients attempted to avoid contacting the police and tried to find other solutions. They usually left secretly with their children, filed a petition for divorce and started proceedings to entrust children to their care in cooperation with the Institution of Social-Law Children Protection (OSPOD). Although the workers of the project were aware of the women's need to take care of their children on their own without their violent partner or husband, they encouraged them to cooperate with the Institution of Social-Law Children Protection (OSPOD) and as a future prospect also to cooperate with their children's father in order not to prevent a contact between the child and his father, especially when children had not been exposed to the violence.

A marriage of convenience occurred in one of the cases. A foreigner (the perpetrator) had married a Czech woman with the intention of gaining residence in the Czech Republic. The victim did not admit that her husband had married her with the above mentioned intention and she was not willing to admit the danger she was in either, which complicated the case significantly. The client did not want to leave her husband and exposed herself constantly to danger. She aimed to change her partner's behaviour. As the Intervention Centre Brno and the project focused on victims of domestic violence, it was not possible to work with the perpetrator. Regardless the target group of the Intervention Centre the husband did not want to change and after his eviction period had terminated he left his wife without any explanation.

Life quality of victims' children is the main motivation to solve the problem of domestic violence both in foreigners and Czech clients. If there is no way to come to an agreement about divorce and care proceedings in advance and the victim leaves with her child secretly, she risks being reported to the police for **child abduction**. Perpetrators very often threaten that they will report such an act to the Institution of Social-Law Children Protection (OSPOD) if the victim decides to leave with children or to travel with them to the country of her origin. Such threats constitute a significant hindrance. Mostly women are afraid of losing their children completely then.

Another frequent obstacle is *negative experience with the police and their procedures* which victims used to encounter in the country of their origin. Eastern countries and countries of the former Soviet Union were concerned the most. The clients had experienced situations in which the police arrived but did not solve the problem at all. They just advised the perpetrator to cease to act aggressively and violently. This made him even more aggressive and the violence escalated after the police had left. Moreover, the victims did not know the law of the country their partner came from and where they had married him properly. They did not know how much influence a divorce in the Czech Republic had since a number of perpetrators (mostly from Arabic countries) claimed that a divorce in the Czech Republic was invalid.

Many victims were *afraid that the perpetrator would fulfil his threats*. They threaten that they would harm or kill victims and their children too. Child care was another often repeated theme when mentioning threats. Many victims were *ashamed*. They did not leave their partner due to religious beliefs since they did not want to break home. Some of them believed that their partners were right when they humiliated them. They believed that they were incapable of doing anything right, that they were not able to take care of their children and themselves without their partner. Their self-confidence was seriously damaged as a result of long-term violence in the relationship with their partner.

The perpetrator's family (mother, brother) *took over his violent role* in his absence sometimes. There was no difference between Czech and foreign families. Although the perpetrator was evicted for 10 days, the mother-in-law or brother-in-law watched the victim and the violence within the family continued. The victims were afraid to report also those people since the rest of the family members would take their revenge.

Illegality or expired residence permit to stay in the Czech Republic based on marriage with the perpetrator were another obstacle in solving the problem of domestic violence. The victims were afraid to divorce since they would lose the right to live in the Czech Republic automatically and they would be expelled. They were afraid of losing their children who were Czech citizens. The perpetrators used the fears to strengthen their power and control over their victims and to keep them in the violent relationship.

5) How victims proceeded when solving their difficult life situation

The clients solved the problem of domestic violence in a number of ways. Workers of the project aimed to seek individual solutions for each victim as well. The workers offered various possibilities how to solve the situation and made the victims aware of all possible dangers which they might encounter after each step and they created individual safety plans together with them.

If the victims decided to leave their violent partner, they did so secretly in most of the cases. They had planned the leaving and gathered all necessary information. Generally it was unimaginable for the victims to come to an agreement on child care or divorce with their partners.

Most of the clients used social-law counselling (care and divorce proceedings, international law, maintenance issues, residence in the Czech Republic, etc.). Some of them had regular psychological consultations, several of them stayed in the Intervention Centre (together with their children). A number of clients preferred counselling on the phone and via email and one client chat counselling. Providing contacts to other institutions, e.g. regarding accommodation issues, was a part of the counselling. The workers provided support, enabled the clients to share their negative experience and to give vent to their feelings. They provided crisis intervention in some of the cases too.³

6) **Recommendation for the future**

Children were present at violence within the family in majority of the cases. Some of them were even directly exposed to it. In spite of that most of the victims refused psychological support for their children. Some of the victims saw a psychologist of the project on regular basis, yet they did not perceive the need of psychological support for their children. Workers of the project explained how important it was for the children to cope with the negative experience resulting from their parents' violent relationship in order to avoid any possible consequences which might arise in the future (their future relationships, their self-confidence or ways how they would solve difficult situations). The clients were not aware that children witnessing domestic violence might experience same feelings such as helplessness like victims themselves. A reason why the clients were not interested in psychological support for their children might be mistrust which they felt towards institutions and experts. The parents could not supervise or monitor the process of psychological support even though they would have been familiarised with all procedures.

7) Victims and labour market

Activity at the labour market varies in both groups (victims and perpetrators) in many aspects depending on the type of relationship they have (the foreigner is the victim or the perpetrator or both of them are foreigners). Following examples may illustrate basic types of relationships, however, not every relationship can be categorised so easily. Yet majority of the cases corresponded to the models:

- perpetrator – a foreigner + victim – a Czech citizen

The perpetrator is a man in most of the cases. The woman is usually a few years older, they move to the Czech Republic after they married. The woman earns money, her husband has no job and lets her wife to support him. He often makes excuses that he cannot find a job, nevertheless, he is not searching for one at all. The wife hands over money to him.

On the other hand, if the perpetrator comes from Arabic countries, he often insists that his wife quit her job. He often isolates her socially and prevents her from meeting her family and friends. The wife is required to take care of children and maintain the household. The victim depends on her husband economically and it is almost impossible to find a job again. The perpetrator frequently demands that his wife should accept his religious beliefs and cultural values and standards.

- perpetrator – a Czech citizen + victim – a foreigner

The perpetrator is a man in majority of the cases. The woman is usually younger. They move to the Czech Republic, they have a baby short after the wedding. The perpetrator isolates his wife socially. He prevents her from making friends with other people. She is prohibited to have any contact with others. He does not support her in learning Czech and he does not want her to have a job. The woman depends on her husband economically and it is almost impossible for her to find a job.

8) Conclusion

Foreigners who were clients of the project had been living in the Czech Republic for various periods of time ranging from a year to 20 years. Most of them had to face a language barrier and did not know the legislation and legal system of the Czech Republic properly regardless the length of their stay in the country. Due to social isolation they were denied any contact with other people, they were unable to form a social background (friends) and they were prevented from learning Czech. As a result of long-lasting domestic violence their self-confidence was severely damaged. They did not trust themselves and blamed themselves for the situation they had to confront. It was difficult for them to find a job since they had to focus on their safety and safety of their children first. Starting a job required a mental and physical capacity which they lacked owing to domestic violence. They concentrated on care proceedings, finding safe and secret accommodation, gaining financial means to support them and their children (in the form of welfare payments). The period of time during which the victims endured domestic violence within their relationship or within the family without searching for proper solutions depended on the family situation, the victim's traits and other aspects such as a possibility to leave the violent partner. A severe physical attack was the impulse for some of them, death threats or violence against children for others of them.