https://www.eeagender.org/the-synergy-network/news/violence-does-not-recognise-political-or-geographical-boundaries/

Violence does not recognise political or geographical boundaries

Despite the fact that Norway has a three-decade head start on Slovakia's efforts to combat domestic violence, researchers see a number of common challenges in terms of coordinating services and following up those affected. This is revealed in a research project that compares the role of shelters in Slovakia and Norway.

BY THE NORWEGIAN CENTRE FOR VIOLENCE AND TRAUMATIC STRESS STUDIES (NKVTS) | PUBLISHED 15 AUG 2024 | LAST UPDATED 20 AUG 2024



Solveig Bergman has been in charge of the Norwegian part of the project that recently completed a report that explores the similarities and differences between shelters in Norway and Slovakia. (Photo: Kristoffer Sandven from NKVTS)

“We especially see that the services lack knowledge and understanding of the dynamics at work in an abusive relationship, which gives rise to challenges in both countries,” says researcher Solveig Bergman at the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS).

Promotes democracy and equality

The research project is part of a cooperation programme on domestic/gender-based violence, and is funded by the EEA and Norway Grants. NKVTS cooperates with a Slovak institution called the Coordinating Methodical Centre for gender-based and domestic violence (CMC). Bergman has been in charge of the Norwegian part of the project.

See also: New research on shelters in Norway and Slovakia

“This type of cooperative project is important, not only for giving researchers the ability to test methods, concepts and theories with researchers in other countries, but also for ensuring that national policy development is evidence based,” says Bergman.

As the five-year programme draws to a close, she is concerned about the efforts to combat gender-based violence in some Central and Eastern European countries.

“There is a right-wing populist movement in Europe that is critical of giving the subject of violence against women a public platform. International cooperation is useful for the continued operation of shelters, and also for the research,” says Bergman.

She believes that the support from the EEA and Norway Grants and the research cooperation help improve conditions for victims of violence in Slovakia.

“The situation of marginalised and abused women will improve, which is in our interest and is important for stability in Europe,” says Bergman.

Knowledge exchange strengthens services

The researchers recently completed a report that explores the similarities and differences between shelters in Norway and Slovakia. The report provides insight into how these two countries address the problem of domestic violence and provides important perspectives on what is effective and where there is room for improvement in the services offered.

“By learning from each other’s experience and challenges, both countries can work toward strengthening their support services and protecting victims of domestic violence more effectively,” says Bergman.

Read the report: Shelters and intimate partner and domestic violence support services: Arenas for help, interventions and empowerment (PDF)

Decades ahead

Norway has a long history of developing political measures to combat domestic violence, with the first shelters established in the late 1970s.

Slovakia only began developing policies to tackle domestic violence after the fall of the Soviet Union. The country is still struggling to establish an adequate regulatory and legislative framework for such services.

Disparities in funding

Another difference is the funding and resources available to the shelters. In Norway, access to shelter services is a statutory and universal right, and public funds support the operation of the shelters.

“In Slovakia, however, resources are scarce, and funding often depends on temporary grants from international bodies, leading to instability and uncertainty when it comes to operations and planning,” says Bergman.

Voluntary organisations are vital

In both Norway and Slovakia, voluntary, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a crucial role in raising awareness about domestic violence and providing services that complement public initiatives. These organisations not only provide temporary shelter and counselling, but they also run awareness campaigns and influence policy development.

“Even though we say that the state and municipalities in Norway have taken over the operation of welfare services, civil society remains important for the provision of services to, for example, victims of violence.” Good cooperation between civil society and the public sector is important,” says Bergman.

She refers to a similar trend in Slovakia, where NGOs often operate at a grassroots level and perform important work that pushes the public sector to take more responsibility.

“Unfortunately, both countries suffer from challenges related to funding and sustainability, as NGOs often rely on temporary grants that do not provide long-term stability,” says the researcher.

Common challenges with collaboration

Norway and Slovakia both face challenges in terms of coordinating services and following up those who have stayed in a shelter.

“In both Norway and in Slovakia, users seem to be satisfied with the shelters. On the other hand, when it comes to cooperating and coordinating with other services, such as the police, the child welfare services and family counselling services, both countries are experiencing challenges,” says Bergman.

The researcher says there is a need for better cooperation and coordination at a national and local level to ensure that users – both adults and children – receive comprehensive and holistic support after their stay at a shelter.

She hopes that the findings from the report will help raise awareness of the importance of strengthening both state and non-state services to combat domestic violence.

“It is clear that both countries have a way to go to improve the coordination of services and ensure sustainable funding for shelters. I hope that the report will help inform policy development and resource allocation in order to support victims of domestic violence in both Norway and Slovakia even more so than today,” says Bergman.

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