

# Summary report

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CESIS | Centro de Estudos para a Intervenção Social

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## 1. Introduction

The present document corresponds to the summary report part of Deliverable D2.2 'National and summary reports' of the project Prevent And combaT domesTic violenCe against Roma women with the acronym PATTERN and project number 881731 that started on June 1st 2020, for a duration of 24 months.

PATTERN addresses the call priority 'REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2019 – Call for proposal to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children, young people and women'. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the prevention and combating of domestic violence against Roma women in Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal, Spain, and Romania.

- In order to reach its overall objective, the project has set the following more specific objectives:
- Increasing access to knowledge/data on the phenomenon of domestic violence against Roma women.
- Developing Domestic Violence Protocols for Roma Women that enable professionals to respond to domestic violence comprehensively.
- Enhancing the capacities of at least 350 Roma intercultural mediators and professionals in community centres/other local community services on domestic violence against Roma women.
- Enhancing the capacities of at least 100-150 Roma women on how to recognize and report domestic violence and act as leaders of change in their communities.
- Raising awareness in Roma communities to building healthy & egalitarian relationships.

This deliverable D2.2 forms part of PATTERN WP2 "Research on domestic violence in Roma communities with the involvement of Roma women" which has the objective of increasing access to knowledge/data on the phenomenon of domestic violence against Roma women.

The report has the following structure: in section 2, the national frameworks (in brief) on domestic violence in the Roma communities are set; in section 3, the methodology adopted in the fieldwork is detailed; section 4 is devoted to the characterisation of the participants in the interviews; section 5 presents the main findings of the interviews; finally, section 6 summarises the key conclusions of the research on domestic violence against Roma women in Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal, Spain, and Romania.

This summary report is aimed to facilitate the exchange of knowledge among the partnership and to guide the development of the common tools for advocacy, awareness raising and training.

## 2. National frameworks (in brief) on domestic violence in the Roma communities

The Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority. Out of an estimated 10 to 12 million Roma living in Europe, approximately six million are citizens or residents of the European Union (European Commission, 2020).<sup>1</sup> Roma people were last estimated to represent 1.18 % of the total population in the European Union. This estimated percentage varies greatly among the five participating countries in the PATTERN project: from 0.49 % in Portugal, 1.55 % in Greece, and 1.63 % in Spain, to 8.63 % in Romania and 9.94 % in Bulgaria. (Document prepared by the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues, updated on 2 July 2012.)

Discrimination and other human rights abuses against Roma have been widely recognised all over Europe. "There is a shameful lack of implementation concerning the human rights of Roma, the biggest minority group in Europe, in spite of years of policies and programmes to improve the situation. The Roma population is worse off than any other group in Europe when it comes to education, health, employment, housing and political participation." (Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.)

However, little is known so far on domestic violence in the Roma communities. This section, grounded on the national reports, aims to frame this topic. The following paragraphs offer some introductory insights.

In **Bulgaria** the Roma community is very diverse. There are five big major Roma groups: Horohane Roma, Dassikane Roma, Rudari, Millet and Kaldarashi, and some other groups which are smaller but are unique and mark special levels of modernisation of the Roma community, such as Burgudzhii and Roma-Musicians. More than 60 % of the Roma, though, hide or deny their identity out of fear of discrimination or loss of social status and occupational/professional position. Furthermore, domestic violence continues to be a topic covered by a number of stereotypes both in the majority society and in the Roma community. Until recently, the issue of domestic violence has not even been recognised as a problem, due to deeply rooted patriarchal stereotypes in Bulgarian society.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en).

In **Romania**, the Roma community is very diverse also. Officially there are registers of over 660,000 Roma people, but the unofficial number is way bigger (around 1,500,000 people). Over 60 % of them live in large compact communities (over 600 persons), and over 60 % from the total number of the Roma communities live in poverty. Most of the communities can be found in the rural areas of the country or in the poorest areas of the cities (like the Ferentari area in Bucharest). Even though efforts are made in order to eliminate stigma and segregation, it is very difficult for the Roma people to be integrated due to discrimination. Poverty and lack of access to decent education is the main cause for their situation. They have a very high rate of school drop-outs and also early motherhood. Because of the negative publicity around the Roma people and the maintaining of social stereotypes, together with poor social strategies and policies, women encounter many problems in finding a job, getting education, health insurance and also in getting support when they find themselves in difficult situations. This can be clearly seen in a 2011 sociological study by Asociatia Femeilor Rome din Romania on “The situation of Roma Women in Romania”.

In **Greece**, despite the Government's efforts to improve access to supportive services related to domestic violence for Roma women and girls through the National Strategy for Roma Social Inclusion 2012-2020 (Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2011), there are still high levels of discrimination, exclusion and negative views based on stereotypes. Roma women face serious barriers to accessing basic social services such as housing, employment, education and health care, including cases of educational barriers and poor living conditions (The Greek Ombudsman for Gypsies/Roma, 2020). Roma women have very limited access to labour market opportunities and employment due to early marriage and school dropouts (Asimopoulos C., 2020). The above along with the stereotypical system in their communities have led women into a vicious cycle.

The Roma [Gitano] population has been present in **Spain** since the 15th century. As in the rest of Europe, its history has been marked by systematic persecution, attempts at conversion and social exclusion. However, there was a significant turnaround in the community's situation in 1978, with the modification of the Constitution. While the situation has generally improved in recent years, the Roma community continues to be affected by structural problems in crucial areas, such as employment (high rates of unemployment and difficulties accessing work), accommodation (insecure housing), education (high absenteeism and drop-out rates, segregated schooling), and health (a lower life expectancy than the rest of the population). It is also important to underline the problems with discrimination and the risk of social exclusion suffered by this community, exacerbated by the negative social image and stereotypes perpetuated by the media. In the city

of Córdoba, where there are an estimated 7,500 to 8,000 Roma people living, there are still barriers and difficulties that limit this population, such as the low socioeconomic status that affects over half the Roma population in the city.

In **Portugal**, the Portuguese Roma/Gypsy (cigana) population, whose references point to having arrived in Portugal in the 15th century (the Kale) and which, however, as mentioned in the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (2013-2020) (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2013), only in 1822 the Portuguese Constitution gave them Portuguese citizenship. Even so, neither such a fact, nor even the institution of democracy that took place in Portugal in 1974, was sufficient to put an end to the inequality and discrimination that Roma communities still experience (Magano & Mendes, 2014). Stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination against gypsy communities in Portugal persist, demanding policies and practices continued over time that put an end to them and guarantee the possibility of experiences in shared differences, full citizenship and material equality.

## 2.1 Law and policy

The legal and policy frameworks in all participating countries address, though in different ways, the issue of domestic violence, gender-based violence or violence against women.

The **Romanian** *Law No. 217* from 22 May 2003 that was reedited and published on National Monitor on 15 October 2020 defines the different types of domestic violence and the way they operate.

However, in countries like **Bulgaria**, domestic violence continues to be a topic covered by a number of stereotypes, taboos and prejudices, both in the majority society and in the Roma community. Until recently, the issue of domestic violence has not even been recognised as a problem, due to deeply rooted patriarchal stereotypes in Bulgarian society. For more than 12 years Bulgarian civil society has been striving and advocating for a legislation set that would regulate equality between men and women and would put under punishment violation of women's rights and domestic violence in particular. Finally, in 2016 the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was adopted.

Still, during the last two years, the issue of domestic violence fell in the trap of right-wing populism, fake news and pseudo-traditional values. In 2018, Bulgarian government pulled down

the ratification of the Council of Europe *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)*. To compensate this in 2019 the Parliament adopted legislative amendments in the penal Code to improve the protection of women from violence. New provisions on forced marriages are introduced.

The increasing influence of conservative ideologies is also felt in **Spain**, this though being a country with a diverse policy and legal recent history. Addressing the problem of gender-based violence, on 28 December 2004, Organic Law 1/2004 on *Integrated Protection Measures Against Gender-based Violence* was enacted, which is the measure currently regulating this issue in Spain. The law aims to tackle the current problem of violence against women through a series of integrated protection measures. Similarly, it strengthens the criminal-law framework by modifying and adding new articles to various laws, such as the Law on *Criminal Procedure* and the Organic Law on *the Right to Education*, as well as supporting the creation of public policy, encouraging the specialisation of professionals who work with victims, and promoting participation in and collaboration between organisations, associations and other bodies. Finally, it seeks to guarantee the principle of transversality, to ensure that the specific needs of each victim are met. (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática 29 de diciembre de 2004)

It is important to note that, in the Spanish context, there is a significant difference between the concepts of gender-based violence and domestic violence. Gender-based violence refers to violence or abuse inflicted upon women by their partners or ex-partners, due to the fact that they are women (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática 29 de diciembre de 2004). In contrast, domestic violence concerns any type of violence in the home, directed against any person who lives there (Ministerio de la Presidencia, Relaciones con las Cortes y Memoria Democrática 29 de diciembre de 2004).

The growing influence of conservative ideologies in recent years, along with the founding of the far-right, nationalist political party VOX, have led to increasing dissent about the law in question. In 2018, the leader of VOX proposed to eradicate the Law on *Gender-based Violence* (Álvarez y Valdés 2018). In its place, he proposed creating a bill termed the “Organic Law on Intra-family Violence” (Toscano 2020). Additionally, this party contends that the Law on Gender-based Violence and the cross-party agreement to tackle such violence contravene the Istanbul Convention. As a result, it put forward a non-legislative proposal [proposición no de ley] that called for the amendment of the cross-party agreement against gender-based violence, as well as the repeal of the Law on Gender-based Violence. In response to these measures, the Spanish Constitutional Court confirmed the constitutionality of the Law on Gender-based Violence on all

counts, specifying that an assault against a woman is an aggravating circumstance “simply because she is [a woman]”, there being no need to be in any kind of affective relationship with the aggressor, and stating that the law’s measures are reasonable and proportionate (europapress 2019).

In **Portugal**, the course of law-making and public policies that have to do with violence against women, including domestic violence, has been influenced by the action and the visibility of feminist organisations and movements dealing with this complex social problem (Costa, 2018), when they demanded in the 1990s, that the issue be placed on the political agenda. Additionally, upon Portugal’s membership in international bodies a binding conventional framework influenced the country’s political agenda on this matter, by demanding political and legislative measures to be taken.

A first *National Plan against Domestic Violence* was passed in 1999. Thereafter and up to the present, policy-making in this area has been up-dated and improved and the 6<sup>th</sup> generation of the National Plans is now in effect. Owing to the influence exerted by the *Istanbul Convention*, the Portuguese plan is called “Action Plan on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence” 2018-2021, integrated in the broader strategy, the *National Strategy for Equality and Non-discrimination – Portugal + Equal (ENIND)* 2018-2030 (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2018).

With regard to laws covering domestic violence, the 1982 Criminal Code included the crime of abuse for the first time, and laid the groundwork, even if tentatively, for considering conjugal violence as one of the types of abuse. Subsequent reformulations in 1995 and 1998 of these pertinent laws led to the 2000 recognition of the abuse of a spouse or a partner as a public offence. Nevertheless, it was only in 2007<sup>2</sup> that, in Portugal, the crime called “Domestic Violence”, was laid down in Article 152 of the Criminal Code.

Together with the Criminal Code, since 1991,<sup>3</sup> Portugal has a set of separate laws dealing with domestic violence which today are found in condensed form in the law passing the *Legal System*

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<sup>2</sup> Law 59/2007 of 4 September 2007. Available at:

[http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei\\_mostra\\_articulado.php?nid=930&tabela=leis&ficha=1&pagina=1&so\\_miolo=](http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=930&tabela=leis&ficha=1&pagina=1&so_miolo=)

<sup>3</sup> Law no. 61/91 of 13 August 1991: “Guarantee of adequate protection for women victim s of violence “. Available at:

<https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdf1s/1991/08/185A00/41004102.pdf>

*Applicable to the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection and Assistance to Victims* of 16 September 2009.<sup>4</sup>

The **Greek** legislation for violence against women provides for all women equally, regardless their legal, ethnic or social status. The law, however, recognises the vulnerability of some women as being in a greater risk of being victims of violence. These vulnerabilities are living conditions, limited access to health and social services and formal education. According to the above, Roma women are considered to be more vulnerable cases of victims of violence.

With *Law 4531/2018* the Greek parliament ratified the Istanbul Convention, the ratification of which brought amendments to *Law 3500/2006* to address domestic violence, the Penal Code and provisions.

Greece has thus harmonised also with the European legislation related to domestic violence against women and has been trying to apply all the necessary measures to ensure protection for all women.

## 2.2 Statistics and research results

The accessibility to statistics and research results varies among the five partner countries. A constant finding is the scarcity of data related to domestic violence against Roma women.

In **Bulgaria**, there are no official statistics on the number of domestic violence victims, no imposed State standards for services for victims of domestic violence, and no register on perpetrators of domestic violence. These facts continue to be unaddressed despite the fact that women's organizations have advocated for years the introduction of measures for revealing the scale of this problem and improving social response and coordination.

The available statistics show a significant increase in the number of issued orders for immediate protection from domestic violence under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act. However, the fourfold increase in cases of immediate protection is not equivalent to four times as many victims of domestic violence seeking help from the court. The increased number might be due to

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<sup>4</sup> Revised and updated by Law 125/2015 of 3 September 2015.  
[http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei\\_mostra\\_articulado.php?nid=1138&tabela=leis](http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=1138&tabela=leis)

the increased focus on domestic violence after the rejection of Istanbul convention and the fact that Court and other institutions felt obliged to register more cases as possible.

Furthermore, every third victim of murder in Bulgaria in 2019 was a woman: 25 out of 80 murders. Two-thirds of them were killed by their closest people - spouses, intimate partners or relatives.

In the last couple of months, since the introduction of the state of emergency on the hotline for victims of violence, 408 calls have been received. In the same period of time in 2019 they were 351 calls.

However, still a big number of cases remain unreported. According to the Center for the Study of Democracy, 70 % to 80 % of domestic violence cases remain unreported. According to an April 2016 report by the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation, the rate was as high as 90 percent among Roma women due to fear and lack of family and institutional support.

In **Greece**, the existing research on Greek Roma women mostly focuses on Roma's difficulties in accessing health care services due to social discrimination, bad living conditions and also focuses on school dropout rates due to early marriage. It is remarkable, however, that research on domestic violence specifically among Greek Roma women, does not exist.

Available data show that, among the women who asked for support at the Counselling Centres, 161 (1 %) are Roma, during 2012-2018. For the same period, 40 (2 %) of the total number of women hosted in the safe shelters are Roma.

The General Secretary of Equity published the 1st Annual Report against violence in November 2020 (General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2020) for the period 1st November 2019 till 31st of October 2020, in which there is no data available related to domestic violence against Roma women in Greece but for women in general. According to the report, from all recorded forms of violence in the Counselling Centres throughout Greece, the most prevalent form, for the reporting period, is domestic violence (84 %). Following with lower rates are sexual harassment and rape 2 %, "Other" 4 %, while 8 % did not revealed these facts. During the same period, domestic violence accounted for the largest rate of 88 % of all forms of gender-based violence recorded on the SOS Hotline 15900. In addition, 2 % of the beneficiaries reported sexual harassment, 1 % reported rape, 8 % of the total reported "Other" violence, and 1 % did not disclose this info. More specifically, the main forms of domestic violence during the reporting period were approximately 33.5 % psychological violence, 29.6 % verbal violence and 28.8 % physical violence incidents. It is followed by economic violence against women with 5.4 %, sexual violence with 1.3 % and "Other" form of violence with 1.4 % of the total.

In **Portugal**, studies have concluded that domestic violence in intimate relations affect a disproportionately high number of women. Additionally, “in 2007, victimization owing to physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated against women aged 18 or over in the last 12 months or in previous years in metropolitan Portugal, stands at 38.1 %” (Lisboa, coord., 2009: 115).

Portugal has annual statistical and official data on domestic violence. The last Annual Report on Monitoring Domestic Violence, published in October 2020, pointed out that in 2019, the police registered 29,473 complaints of domestic violence (Secretaria Geral do Ministério da Administração Interna, 2020). Furthermore, “as in previous years, in the category of crimes against people, this continues to be the crime that registers the most complaints, representing 34 % of all crimes entered in the category, and it is the second most reported crime in overall terms in Portugal” (Idem, 2020: 4). These data also reveal that women are the main victims of domestic violence, representing 82 %.

With reference to the place in which the domestic violence happened, it was seen that most of it took place at home (76 %), during the course of the intimate relationship (52 %) or in a past relationship (21 %) and was perpetrated in a variety of ways: physical (68 %), psychological (89 %), sexual (3 %), financial (8 %) and social (22 %). (Idem)

Apart from these types of violence, data issued by the criminal police in surveys on murders happening in a six-year period conclude that: “Looking at the sex of the victim, it is seen that between 2014 and 2019, 316 women were the victims of murder of whom 35 % or 111 of the women murdered were in intimate relationships” (Criminal Police, 2020: 2). This means that the overwhelming majority of people who were murdered while in intimate relationships were women: 87 % of the victims (111 out of 128).

Together with these data, and when talking about domestic violence, each year Portugal has witnessed a growing number of femicides where most of them occur during a current or past intimate relationship. The Observatory of Murdered Women run by the União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta - UMAR (Union of Women Alternative and Answer) reached the conclusion that in 2019, there were 31 women who were murdered, 23 of whom were killed by their intimate partner. There was prior domestic violence in 22 of these femicides.

**Romania** has witnessed an increase in the number of cases of domestic violence since the beginning of 2020, which is an alarm signal on the resurgence of the phenomenon of domestic violence in the country.

Regarding the number of cases of domestic violence registered and gathered together by ANES (Agentia Nationala pentru Egalitatea de Sanse intre Femei si Barbati) based on reports submitted by the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection, institutions subordinated to county councils and local councils of the sectors of Bucharest, the number of victims who have benefited from specialised social services in recent years is as follows: 2017 - 13,201 people, 2018 - 13,182 people, the first semester of 2019 - 6,731 people. Notified criminal acts: 2017 - 36,245, 2018 - 38,445, 2019 (7 months) - 23,830.

Protection orders (POs) (valid for up to 6 months) issued: 2017 - 2,894, 2018 - 3,775, 2019 (7 months) - 4,166. Offences of non-compliance with OP: 2017 - 1,011; 2018 - 1,424; 2019 (5 months) - 766. Provisional protection orders (OPP) (valid for 5 days) issued: 2019 – 7,986, 2,958 being transformed into protection orders. Offences of non-compliance with the OPP: 2,019 (5 months) - 236. Between 1 January and 31 July 2020, at the telephone line with no. 0800,500,333 for victims of domestic violence, discrimination on the grounds of sex and trafficking in human beings, within ANES, a number of 1,977 calls were received. From the 1,607 answered calls, 829 were calls in the field of domestic violence.

Regarding the types of violence that have been reported (including in the case of return of the caller), in cases of domestic violence and for situations in which the appellant has expressed her/his willingness to provide details in this regard, the following data have resulted: 345 acts of verbal violence; 460 acts of psychological violence; 465 acts of physical violence; 16 acts of sexual violence; 8 acts of economic violence; 25 acts of social violence. In the case of a call, several types of violence are usually reported.

In **Spain**, according to the Large-scale *Survey on Violence against Women* (Ministerio de Igualdad 2019), conducted by the Spanish Government Delegation Against Gender-based Violence [*Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género*] in 2019 to determine the percentage of women who had suffered or were currently suffering any kind of violence because they are women, 11.0 % (2,234,567 women) of all women aged 16 or over and resident in Spain had suffered physical violence from a current or past partner at some point in their lives. With regards to sexual violence, 17.1 % had suffered this type of violence from one or more of their partners over the course of their life. Women who had suffered psychological violence from one or more of their partners at some point in their life similarly accounted for 17.1 %. Finally, 17.1 % had been victims of economic violence from one or more of their partners in their life. Overall, considering all forms of violence against women, 17.1 % had suffered some kind of violence from a partner in their life.

Similarly, Spain's National Institute of Statistics [Instituto Nacional de Estadística] produced a Statistical Report on Domestic Violence and Gender-based Violence in 2019 (Insituto Nacional de Estadística 2019), which presented data on gender-based violence showing that 31,911 cases<sup>5</sup> of such violence were recorded in 2019, representing a 2.0 % increase on the previous year. According to this report, almost half of gender-based violence victims (47.1 %) are aged between 25 and 39 years. Victims of this form of violence had an average age of 36.6 years. The greatest increases in numbers of victims in 2019 were recorded among women aged 75 or over (25.0 %), and between 70 and 74 years (15.6 %), while the largest decrease was seen in women aged between 65 and 69 years (-8.9 %).

What is apparent in all five partner countries is that there are limited or no available data linked directly to domestic violence against Roma women. All relative data, in each respecting country, refer to domestic violence against women in general. This could be either because Roma women do not seek support or because they do not mention themselves as Roma. The most possible scenario according to our research findings is that they do not seek support from the specific services, either because they do not trust to disclose or because they are not ready to leave their family and the broader Roma community.

### 2.3 Specifics of domestic violence in the Roma communities

As illustrated in detail in the national reports for Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, domestic violence among Roma women is very much associated with the prevalent patriarchal organisation of Roma families and communities.

In **Bulgaria**, Roma women perception of domestic violence is closely related to the gender perception in the Roma community. At the same time, it is not a unique concept but a whole range of concepts dependent on different factors, such as group affiliation, level of modernisation, and so on.

Based on our work experience with Roma communities, discussions with other professionals in the field (social workers, psychologists, mediators, teachers etc.) and from our research findings it appears that some characteristics of Roma communities are contributing factors in reinforcing domestic violence. In the Roma community, control over women is particularly strong because it

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<sup>5</sup> Obtained from the statistical exploitation of the Central Register for the Protection of Victims of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence. This statistic is carried out by the INE under a collaboration agreement concluded with the Ministry of Justice, the body holding that Register.

is women who are perceived to pass on the identity, values and norms of the group to the younger generations. Gender perceptions in the Roma family are subordinated to the patriarchal understanding for the leadership of man. In the community, the only legitimate form of power has always been only the power of men over women. As in other communities with a preserved patriarchal structure, the honour of men and the family does not depend on men's achievements in the economic, political or cultural spheres, but on women's behaviour.

Early marriages and dropping out of school are among the safest means of keeping young Roma girls in the community. While compliance with the group's norms is rewarded with public recognition, non-compliance is severely punished.

Furthermore, discrimination from outside society and institution also adds to the problem: if a Roma woman decides to complain to the police about her husband's systematic beatings, she risks being rejected by everyone else for her "treacherous behaviour" and so on. It will most likely be rejected by the institutions themselves with the words "This is how things happen with you".

Another contributing factor that has been identified by our field experience is that Roma men are increasingly failing to assert their role as breadwinners, as persistent poverty, unemployment and the inability to earn a stable income. Unemployed Roma men feel that they have failed as men, husbands and fathers. As a result, the authority of men within the family is eroding. Those who are strongly attached to traditional values about the role of the sexes increasingly feel that they have lost their position in society. The decline in the authority of Roma men within the family is one of the main reasons for the high levels of stress in households and the feeling of increasing domestic violence.

Roma women are highly economically dependent on their husbands and their parents. The lack of own funds completely limits their opportunities for contacts and movement outside the neighbourhood or village. Even if a Roma woman victim of domestic violence decides to seek protection and support, she will not be able to reach another settlement.

The **Romanian** national report highlights similar features. Roma is not a homogeneous social group. There are different Roma communities, grouped on socio-professional and linguistic criteria. Many Roma communities though experience severe problems: poverty, social exclusion, violation of human rights, lack of identity documents, lack of access to medical services, low level of employment, multiple discrimination, social and spatial segregation.

“Roma are defined either by negative stereotypes, derived from selective judgment over the centuries of social exclusion and institutionalized racism, or through a positive

stereotype derived from the romantic view of literature and popular culture.” (Consiliul European, 2014: 15)

The value of the individual is seen from the perspective of the value of the family and the role it has in society. Everything related to personal interests is subordinated to family decisions and the future of the community is more important than any life project of an individual. Fidelity and respect for tradition are popular behaviours that allow individuals to be recognised as part of the community.

“The value of the individual is viewed from the perspective of the value of the family and the role it plays in society. Individual choices are strongly influenced by social norms.” (Fundacio Surt, 2012: 10).

Within the Roma communities the patriarchal system is strong and has an important role in creating both social and individual identities. Roma identities are correlated with traditional gender roles. The result is the definition of gender social roles that are especially limited and restricted for women.

The Roma family is a place of belonging, self-preservation and protection. But the family is also a place where there is strong social control that limits women's freedom and autonomy. Preserving the family's prestige is a capital duty for Roma women.

“In Romani families, women have the most important place. Women stand on the front line — they are the first to shout to protect their children and families. This is the structure of the Romani family and if some part is missing — for any reason — it threatens the cementing force holding it all together.” (European Roma Rights Center, 2000).

Marriages are established by families, with young people not having a say in choosing a partner. “Undocumented” marriages predominate and at an early age (sometimes even 12-13 years old).

The identity of Roma women is based on the intersection of several types of discrimination. Roma women suffer discrimination both within the community, because they are women from the patriarchal system and outside it, because they are part of a stigmatized and socially excluded ethnic group.

“The report clearly and convincingly shows that Romani women constitute the most deprived category of the Romanian population due to the discrimination and social

exclusion they experience as a result of the intersection of race, gender, and class. Within Romania, Romani women are the ones who are most likely to suffer from inadequate health care and housing conditions, poor quality of education, and lack of job opportunities.” (Surdu, 2006: 8)

The National Roma Integration Strategy 2012-2020 recognises the structural inequalities that Roma women face in terms of patriarchal norms, gender inequality and discrimination. However, at municipal levels, these priorities remain unaddressed. So, do they in terms of real actions both at local and national level. As a result, Roma (women) continue to be at the periphery of social and institutional interest.

Also, in Greece, Roma communities are characterised by a range of different languages, customs and means of ethnic self-identification. However, wherever they reside, Roma populations are more exposed to social exclusion processes than the general population. These social exclusion processes negatively influence access to resources, social opportunities and the exercise of basic rights, resulting in poorer outcomes in terms of health and well-being.

“In Roma families, women and men’s roles are strictly defined by patriarchal norms. The expectations related to being a woman and being Roma are intimately linked to one’s position in the family. The importance of marriage in addition to the fact that Roma women bear children at a young age (child mothers) can contrast with life aspirations in terms of education, the labour market and economic independence. Furthermore, the real possibilities of breaking with one’s traditional position can be impaired by the fact that the Roma population does not, in general, participate fully in the society.” (Carmen Vives-Cases, 2017)

Briefly, the above form some of the most characteristic features of Roma communities. Both from unofficial data and from our research findings, it can be derived that some characteristics of Roma women can constitute factors that can lead to and reinforce domestic violence. These characteristics, which are analysed in depth in the Spanish and Greek reports, relate to:

- Limited access to education.
- Low employability, their main responsibility being to look after their children and keep their household; limited access to work and thus restricted financial independence.
- Patriarchal gender discrimination within their communities.

- Poor living conditions, often living in camps or Roma neighbourhoods, in overcrowded, substandard and segregated housing conditions, with lack of access to basic services, including specialised services for preventing or combating domestic violence.
- “Cultural blaming”: violence against women is often portrayed as being part of ‘a Roma culture’. The fact that Roma women are faced with discrimination from the dominant population but also from the authorities, has as a result Roma woman hesitating to ask for support and disclose domestic violence. Domestic violence cases continue silently without being recorded.
- Early marriage; when early marriage occurs, it has wider human rights consequences by exposing girls to the risk of domestic and sexual violence, increased school drop-out, future unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

The above factors are considered to be connected with incidents of all types of domestic violence against Roma women and girls. The control over every aspect of a Roma woman's life (i.e., right of seeking work, attending school, having a cell phone or social media going out) further increases their isolation and dependency on the husband or further more on their community.

The national reports on Spain and Portugal adopted a different approach on this subsection.

The **Spanish** report focuses mainly on how gender-based violence affects Roma women. There is no organisation in Spain that collects data on the number of deaths of Roma women that are attributable to their gender. However, information available from the media and other organisations that work with the Roma community enable some specific cases of gender-based violence towards women of this ethnicity to be identified.

Gender-based violence is a problem suffered by women of all nationalities, cultures, social classes, ages and ethnic groups, which therefore inevitably affects the Roma population as well. By reviewing the news items published by the media (while noting that most were sensationalist in tone), we were able complete a survey of the cases of gender-based violence specifically directed towards women of Roma ethnicity by their partners or ex-partners, thereby identifying five specific cases that occurred in distinct regions of Spain: Galicia, Extremadura, Mallorca, Santa Cruz del Retamar (Toledo) and Madrid. Details about these cases can be found in the national report.

Some of the instances reported in the media demonstrate that the situation regarding gender-based violence also affects women of Roma ethnicity and may result in the most extreme forms of violence, such as being murdered by their partners or ex-partners. In light of these

circumstances, non-governmental organisations that work with the Roma community, including KAMIRA, have engaged in a range of actions to tackle this situation.

The **Portuguese** report highlights that the available data and studies on the incidence and the prevalence of violence against women, gender violence and annual data pertaining to domestic violence in Portugal do not allow us to single out concrete cases of domestic violence committed against Roma women (mulheres ciganas).

Be that as it may, the data available, as well as scientific studies carried out at home and abroad, show that violence against women, where domestic violence is included, occurs transversally regardless of race, ethnic group, skin colour, or the social, economic, political or religious status of the women. Therefore, as far as global scientific evidence goes, we may assume that Roma women are not an exception owing to the fact that they are also affected by domestic violence and violence in their intimate relationships.

Nevertheless, we know that some groups of women experience greater difficulty in making a complaint about the domestic violence targeting them and are in positions of greater dependence upon their aggressors (Perista, coord., 2016). This may occur owing to a variety of reasons, mainly socio-cultural, economic or religious factors or the belief that making a complaint would only heighten the danger, or even mistrusting the victim support services and disbelieving the police and legal system (Cerejo, 2014).

Some of the Roma women could be included in some of the above-mentioned situations; nevertheless, we would add that stereotyping and prejudices already current, and explicitly so, in the social representations projected of the Roma (Mendes, 2007) are likely to cause them to clam up even more about intimidation, domination and submission (Magano, 2010) when faced with violent behaviour in their intimate relationships. We may speak of two and three-fold victimisation and the way violence becomes a habit; this not only places the support services further out of reach but also makes it more difficult for Roma women to appeal to them.

In Portugal, available studies about Roma communities confirm that domestic violence happens in Roma communities where women have been identified as the victims (Magano et al., 2014). Likewise, the NGOs that support and protect women victims of domestic violence signpost every year, Roma women who experience episodes of domestic violence and try to find alternative ways of living free from violence, even if these organisations recognise that only a very small number of the women request help from them.

It is very rare for women living in Roma communities to turn to the police to stop domestic violence (Martins, 2019). “In the light of their culture, this is a private matter and for this reason must be solved within the family” (Neves et al., 2018).

However, the subject of domestic violence has started to appear on the agenda of NGO and the NGO run by Roma women, and is included in community action projects that are working within the framework of public policies to combat domestic violence and integrate Roma communities.

Since 2013 in Portugal, the National Roma Integration Strategy 2013-2020, has been a policy instrument in this field. The measure was passed by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 25/2013 of 17 April (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2013) and revised in 2018 whereby the deadline was extended to 2022. As one of its specific aims, this measure foresees the enhanced prevention and combat against all kinds of violence against Roma women and girls.

### 3. Methodology

This section will provide details about the process followed in undertaking fieldwork and gathering data on the perceptions, knowledge and experiences in the sphere of domestic violence among the Roma women participants in the interviews.

By 'domestic violence' we have adopted the definition as per the Istanbul Convention, Article 3b): "(...) all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the aggressor shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Council of Europe, 11/05/2011).

However, in Spain it was agreed to use the term "gender-based violence" [violencia de género], rather than "domestic violence" [violencia doméstica], in the interviews. The aim was to be consistent with the terminology employed in the Law on Gender-based Violence within the Spanish legislative framework, and also to avoid entering into the debate generated by parties of a conservative ideology, which are attempting to invisibilise violence directed towards women because of their gender.

The five partner countries adopted the common methodological guidelines agreed by the partnership and the project's field research protocol (Deliverable D2.1).

The field work research was carried out between October and early December 2020; the qualitative analysis of the interviews and the drafting of the national reports took place in the period December 2020 - January 2021. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were felt in different ways: difficulties in identifying and recruiting women willing to participate in the interviews; difficulties in scheduling the interviews, notably in contexts of schools closure; restrictions to mobility; fear/concerns about conducting face-to-face interviews; the need to adopt sanitary safety measures, such as social distancing and the use of personal protective equipment; and cases of SARS-COV-2 infections in the partner organisations' teams, constraining the ability to comply with the initially agreed deadlines.

All partners conducted 40 interviews with Roma women in the respective country (41 in Bulgaria). In some cases (e.g., Greece and Portugal) with the support of other organisations/persons in the recruiting of participants and the practicalities of the interviews; in other cases (e.g., Spain,

Bulgaria and Romania) the partner organisations, having direct work with Roma communities, made use of their own channels and resources.

In four of the participating countries the interviews took place in a region, a city or a neighbourhood: in Greece, mostly in the region of Attica; in Portugal, in two municipalities in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area; in Spain, in Córdoba; and in Romania, in the Ferentari neighbourhood. In Bulgaria, taking into account the very diverse profile of the Roma community in the country the project team has made very careful selection of interviewees in order to reflect diversity, both in geography and group specifics. They covered the five big major Roma groups, as well as some of the groups which are smaller but are unique and mark special levels of modernisation of the Roma community. In every national case, though, special attention was given to the participation in the interviews of Roma women with a diverse profile, particularly in terms of age, education, marital status and settlement type.

All respondents have been carefully explained the aims of the project and the research and how the results from the interview would be used. They have been assured that confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. Participants then proceeded to sign the consent form or provide the corresponding oral consent which was audio recorded. They were also asked to give prior permission for audio recording. The large majority of the women agreed to be recorded; in the few cases they refused, the interviewer wrote down the answers. General Data Protection Regulations have been adhered to. The respondents were given the opportunity to receive a copy of the consent form although hardly any of them requested to have one. In all cases, the checklists were filled in and signed by the interviewer. When the interviews were conducted with the support of mediators or interpreters, they also signed confidentiality and privacy forms.

The profile of the interviewers varied among the five partner countries; nevertheless, these were all women.

- In Portugal, the interviews were conducted by two non-Roma members of the research team. The need did not arise for any interpreter or intercultural mediator.
- In Spain, the interviews were also conducted by the project team, but in this case by Roma and non-Roma members, with the support of a Roma mediator.
- In Greece, a non-Roma researcher conducted the interviews. The researcher was always accompanied by the local mediators, in order to facilitate better communication. All the interviews were in Greek, with the exception of three women who asked for interpretation support during the interviews for specific words or meanings.

- In Bulgaria, both Roma and non-Roma women acted as interviewers. At some places, the interviews were done by community and educational mediators. Prior to the conduction of the interviews, the mediators were duly trained, on-line, by the project team.
- In Romania, the interviews were done by the community Roma mediators. These were also trained in advance.

The interviews lasted between less than 15 minutes and about 1 hour, this duration very much depending on the experiences of the woman as well as on willingness and openness of the respondent to share her thoughts.

The Project team took the necessary measures to protect the safety, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected in the interviews, thus trying to provide the most adequate setting for its completion.

Most of the interviews were, as initially anticipated, done face-to-face. However, due to the COVID-19 situation some of the interviews were done by phone, Skype, Zoom or Messenger. There were cases where the interviews by phone or using online communication platforms raised specific concerns, as in Greece, while in others phone interviews were seen as a successful alternative, as in Spain.

Almost all interviews were audio recorded, as mentioned above, and later transcribed in full. Transcripts of the statements and simple coding to analyse the data was used. Word-for-word evidence from the Roma women, to the extent possible, was ensured. A qualitative exploration of the interviews was made based on discourse analysis. All answers from the interviews were matched with answers with the relevant question, commonalities were identified, and any other unique information was taken into account. The first-person discourses of the Roma women participating in the interviews were organised around a set of topics and sub-topics prompted by the empirical material that served as the basis for this study and structured for the reporting in each thematic section proposed by the research protocol.

## 4. Characterisation of the participants in the interviews

The profile of the participants in the interviews was diverse and varied among the partner countries. This reflects the specificities of the Roma communities and the Roma women in these countries.

This section addresses some of the main characteristics of the participants in the interviews. Further details may be found in the national reports.

### ✓ Type of settlement:

In Bulgaria: (41 women included in the research) 2 live in district cities; 25 live in municipal towns and 14 live in villages.

In Greece: 21 live in a house; 12 live in a camp; six live in a camp within residences; one lives in a shack without electricity.

In Portugal: 27 live in flats in a social housing neighbourhood; one lives in a free-standing house outside the social housing neighbourhood; and two live in shanty houses; all live in mixed neighbourhoods.

In Romania: 24 live in one room apartments; 16 live in houses; all live in mixed neighbourhoods.

In Spain: most live in working-class neighbourhoods or in neighbourhoods that are socially marginalised; some live in neighbourhoods they described as upper-class; two live in the city centre, which is considered a middle to upper-class district; a minority stated they live in “normal” areas that are middle-class.

### ✓ Age:

There is a wide age range among the respondents: the youngest woman interviewed is 18 years old and the oldest is 74 years old. The age profile of the respondents varies in each of the countries participating in the research:

In Bulgaria: one third of the respondents belong to the age group 31-40, 27 % are aged 21-30 and 22 % are aged 41-50 (or above).

In Greece:

Age group	Number of women
20 to 29 years	17
30 - 39 years	13
40 - 49 years	8
50 - 59 years	1
60s	1

In Portugal: the ages of the interviewees range from the youngest at 19 years of age to the oldest at 74, although most of the women taking part in the interviews are aged between 19 and 54 (n=33). A significant portion (n=16) are about 30 years old or younger.

In Romania: the age varies from 20 years old until 70 years old.

In Spain:

Age group	Number of women
18 to 23 years	8
26 to 29 years	7
30 - 35 years	6
36 - 40 years	5
41 - 46 years	6
47 - 51 years	6
52 years or over	1

### ✓ Education:

The education profile of the respondents also shows diversity, Greece and Portugal being the countries where lower educated, including illiterate, women were involved in the research while in Spain and Bulgaria a large part of the participants have post-secondary education:

In Bulgaria: 32 % of women with primary education; 39 % of women with secondary education and 20% of women with university degrees.

In Greece, 14 women were illiterate, 17 had completed compulsory education, five interviewees had finished High School, and four were at the university level.

In Portugal: seven interviewees do not know how to read or write; 18 completed primary school (1st cycle); and three completed the 9th grade (3rd cycle in compulsory education).

In Romania: women's education varies starting with only two grades finished, up until University Level Degree. Most of them finished 8 grades to get married; around 10 % went back to school and finished 10 grades or 12 grades (depending on the programme) on the "Second Chance" School Programme.

In Spain: approximately half of the respondents had post-secondary-level training, whether on vocational or higher-education programmes. Of the other women, 10 had completed compulsory secondary education (of these one had completed upper-secondary education); seven had completed primary-level education and two described having left school at a very young age.

#### ✓ **Marital status:**

Most women involved in the research live in a couple, either married under "Roma law" (having had a traditional wedding ceremony) or in de facto partnerships / cohabitating.

In Bulgaria: most women live in a couple without official marriage just committing with a community one; few of the women however do have official marriage according to Bulgarian legislation. One of the respondents is a widow; four are single, and several have separated from their husbands.

In Greece: 26 are married, three are engaged, eight are single, two are divorced and one is a widow.

In Portugal: the majority is cohabitating (in de facto partnerships) or married under "Roma law" (n=23) although single women (n=3), widows (n=7) and separated women (n=6) also participated. Another woman is having a long-term relationship with a man without living with him.

In Romania: only one woman was never married; the rest of them were either widow, married or cohabiting or divorced (and cohabiting).

In Spain: most of the women who participated in this research (40 %) described themselves as married, while six cohabit with their partners.

### ✓ Employment status:

In Portugal and Romania, most of the women said they were housewives while in the other participating countries many women are employed. The unemployment among the participants in the interviews has been exacerbated by the context of the pandemic which, according to these women's testimonies, both in Spain and in Portugal, caused them (and/or their husbands/partners) to lose their jobs.

In Bulgaria: almost two thirds of the women are employed and about one third are housewives; two women still study and one is a pensioner.

In Greece: 18 women are employed; 18 are unemployed; and four are students.

In Portugal: most of the women said they were housewives, taking care of their homes and families. Six women said they were unemployed, five said they were working while another five said they had retired. About half the Roma women interviewed are beneficiaries of the minimum income scheme (Rendimento Social de Inserção, RSI).

In Romania: over 80 % of the respondents are housewives and their main occupation is to take care of the house and the children.

In Spain: most of the women interviewed were working; six of the participants were studying and, of this group, four worked alongside their studies. However, the proportion that was unemployed was high, 22.5 % of the women being out of work. Finally, six of the women stated that they worked in managing the home (housewives).

## 5. Findings

In this section, we shall be presenting our main findings obtained by analysing the interviews held with Roma women.<sup>6</sup> In the following pages we shall be handing over the floor to the women themselves to hear in their own words, what they have to say about domestic violence.

The transcripts of the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis to identify the shared themes across the participants. An inductive form of thematic analysis was used in order to address the exploratory aims of the study. Five themes were identified that address the aim of exploring domestic violence among Roma women.



Figure 1: The five themes about the domestic violence against Roma women

<sup>6</sup> In some paragraphs of this summary report, especially in this section, sentences from the national reports are fully or partially replicated. Since this document is the outcome of collaborative work developed in partnership, the option was not to include these sentences as quotes, rather to include the national reports in the references.

## 5.1 Roma women's perceptions of domestic violence

Most of the Roma women participating in the interviews showed to be aware of **domestic violence and its different types**. However, the types of violence emphasised show some differentiation among the countries where the research was conducted.

In Bulgaria it became clear that in many cases domestic violence is still identified mainly with physical violence.

However, still in Bulgaria in some cases this physical violence tends to be minimised: "I don't think one or five slaps are violence, when you beat her up – then yes" (BG, G., 45 years old, small town, Dasikane Roma, Roma Musicians).

This kind of perception was also observed in Portugal (although in a very limited number of interviews) and especially in Greece, when the majority of the respondents think that violence can be divided into serious and non-serious, "big" violence occurring notably "when the husband beats the wife every day" (GR, 713\_0162, 63 years old).

The women interviewed in this research (in Greece, Portugal, Romania and Spain) understand the concept of domestic / gender-based violence in a relatively homogeneous way, most of them considering it an act of aggression towards the partner which is manifested in two main forms: physical, and psychological and verbal violence. According to the responses, these forms of violence are exercised through behaviour involving prohibition, humiliation, insults, abuse, control and disrespect.

However, it is notable that no mention was made of sexual violence as a form of domestic / gender-based violence in most of the countries, with the exception of Greece.

Domestic violence is perceived as a serious problem in the national societies by many Roma women participating in the interviews. This was mostly apparent in Portugal, Romania and Spain, particularly when it concerns violence against women.

"Yes, indeed, it's a serious problem in our country. Because, practically, the ones who suffer the most violence are us, women. It's a very serious problem. We, women, also need to be happy so why do we have to be abused?" (PT, Luana, 22 years old)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The national reports adopt different approaches in what concerns the characterisation of the respondent, when including a quotation of the respective interview. For instance, the Portuguese report includes a fictitious name and the age of the respondent in each quotation; the Spanish report included the number of the interview; etc. The option was, in this summary report, to respect

However and interestingly, some Roma women interviewed in Greece and Portugal argue that the problem of domestic violence is more serious among non-Roma, compared to the Roma communities. In these cases, Roma women seem to argue that indeed, violence exists in their communities but it is not so serious and does not cause so much damage compared to violent actions that exist in non-Roma societies. Non-Roma men may cause harm, like murdering women, which does not happen in Roma communities:

“Violence occurs more in non-Roma people. [In Roma communities] there are no cases of drowning one’s wife, of killing her, of hanging her. [...] In Roma, I have not heard of anyone to have killed his wife. [The husband] can beat her but not kill her.” (GR, 713\_0148, 50 years old)

It was widely agreed in all participating countries that when it comes to domestic /gender-based violence, it is women who are the most affected.

Nevertheless, it is striking that in Spain and Portugal, the respondents often alluded to there being many men who also suffer violence at the hands of their partners, albeit to a lesser degree. According to their responses, abuse towards men is an issue that is hidden, for reasons such as the shame of reporting such abuse from their female partners. At the same time, it was stated that most violence towards men is primarily psychological. On this point, an interviewee said:

“I think that there probably are more women who are abused, I don’t deny it. But I believe that there are many men who are abused too, but because of shame or what people will say, they don’t report it” (ES, interview no 23).

Domestic violence, though being perceived as harming mostly women, is also seen as affecting children and the whole family. This sort of negative impact is stressed mostly in Bulgaria and Portugal.

“I think it very bad to do things they [men] shouldn’t do. Everybody suffers. It’s the woman who suffers; they beat up their wives and after, when the children come, they also suffer. I think it’s very bad and I’m against it. Sometimes, I watch television and it shocks me to see these things. It’s beating up [women] and doing harm to the children and the children see their mothers suffering, they see everything that’s going on.” (PT, Norberta, 50 years old)

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the way the excerpts of the interviews are quoted in the different national reports. To facilitate international comparison, the two-letter country abbreviation, according to ISO-3166 Alpha-2, was added.

In the Roma women's discourse on domestic violence, words like "control", "ill treatment /abuse", "suffering" and, above all, "there is no respect" are mentioned very often. For these women, respect and appreciation ("holding dear") are, to their way of thinking, essential qualities so that domestic violence and all the suffering associated with it do not happen.

Domestic violence is generally identified as a crime by Roma women. Moreover, in Spain all agree that gender-based violence is a crime, given that nobody has the right to abuse another person.

Some Roma women, in Bulgaria, Portugal and Romania, argue that domestic violence is a crime because it is a violation of human rights.

"Yes, because it violates my human rights. Second, because it kills everything in me. Maybe because it closes the door for my future development, because after such violence I would close in myself. As I have experienced it." (BG, G. 25 years old, small town)

Still on the subject of their perception about domestic violence and its outcomes, all the interviewees in Portugal regard it as breaking the law, basing their opinions on the consequences it causes. In this respect, most of the interviewees emphasise the fact that domestic violence could cause either a woman's injury or her death, generally referring to non-Roma women murdered by their husbands. Alluding to suicide or femicide when speaking about episodes involving domestic violence is a recurring topic in the interviews. "It is, yes sir, it's a crime. Because sometimes domestic violence can lead to death." (PT, Luana, 22 years old). "I think it should be considered a crime because so many women have died..." (PT, Gabriela, 46 years old).

Another type of violence that Roma women in Greece name it a crime is that of forcing a child of 12, 13, 14 years old to get married. However, there are many cases, where the daughters run off with their partner, whom they assume they love, so parents from both sides are forced to marry them and save their family from being discredited. It is remarkable that although many of them acknowledge the severe problems caused by these early marriages still, some follow them, as part of their traditions and customs, in order to maintain their family honour. Below one example that demonstrates the current situation.

"Yes, this is happening here, it is a form of violence because they are children, to tell them to drop out school, to get married at a very young age and to have children, this is violence. This is happening because they live in miserable camps, they have to stand out and create their own family, everyone acts according to what he is hearing from the other and that is why he continues acting like the others." (GR, 713\_0173, 29 years old)

When during the course of the interview, the Roma women were invited to think about the **reasons** why women are particularly affected by domestic violence, many of them showed their uncertainty, or they queried it and were perplexed. Some of the main reasons put forward, in different countries, were:

- Roma men's jealousy, in Portugal and Romania;
- Alcohol and drinking problems, in Bulgaria and Romania;
- Roma men think they have the right to beat women (in Greece, Portugal and Bulgaria) just because they are men and it is natural for a man to hit a woman. "He can slap me because he is a man [...] Maybe it was my fault because of a mistake in the household, for instance. Respectively, it is a shame for a woman to slap a man." (GR, 713\_0154, 23 years old).
- Roma men (in Romania and Portugal) consider themselves as "gods", as "kings" and as having ultimate power upon a woman. They decide everything that goes on in the woman's life and the woman has no right to reply. Her only solution is to keep her head down to avoid confrontation.

However, none of the Roma women interviewed in Portugal, Romania or Spain consider there to be any reason that justifies a man abusing a woman. In Portugal, they unanimously believe that "nothing warrants" (PT, Agnes, 40 years old) a man insulting or hitting a woman; "there's nothing like sitting down and talking" (PT, Juno, 37 years old). In Romania, they said that people should be able to talk things through and if they decide that the relationship is not working anymore, they should then go their separate ways, and never use violence to settle conflicts inside the family. In the same line, many Roma women interviewed in Spain concur that if a man is not happy with his partner, or if he doesn't agree with what she does, he should leave her but in no circumstances abuse her.

Nonetheless, some Roma women in Bulgaria, mostly women with low education level, who have married early and who had no social experience outside of the family, usually perceive violence as normal and part of *modus vivendi*. This is just the way things are according to them.

In Greece, some women voiced that Roma women being victims of violence is a matter of tradition, inherited and transmitted intergenerationally and among families and relatives.

"All behave the same way. Their father, their uncles, their cousins. A woman may be beaten even because she did not wake up in the morning to offer coffee to her husband." (GR, 713\_0158, 41 years old)

Furthermore, concerning the question if they consider women as being responsible for domestic violence, the vast majority of respondents in Greece believes that in most cases, it is the woman's fault if she is treated violently. Conversely, 73 % of the Roma women in Spain and 80 % in Romania concurred that women are in no way and under no circumstances responsible for such violence; this opinion is also shared by most respondents in Portugal.

As to the situations in which women may be considered responsible for domestic violence, such situations may be linked to certain types of behaviour of the women themselves.

According to the perceptions of the Roma women interviewed in Greece and Portugal, mostly to cases when there is "betrayal", (i.e., when women have a sexual affair with another man); and also, to cases when women are neglectful with the household and the children, failing to live up to her "responsibility": "the man arrives home and things haven't been done, there's no lunch or the clothes haven't been washed" (PT, Paulina, 31 years old).

In Bulgaria, Portugal and Romania some Roma women believe to be cases when women provoke the violence: "I am not sure if women are responsible about domestic violence, but in some way, they provoke it" (BG, M, 34 years old, small town, Millet Roma); "there are women who answer back" (PT, Leontina, 21 years old); there are some women who "are asking for it" and "looking for fights" (RO).

Additionally, some of the participants in Bulgaria, Portugal, Romania and Spain expressed the belief that **women have a degree of responsibility** in situations of domestic / gender-based violence. This is not for provoking the violence but for putting up with the situation of abuse and not stopping their partners or directly breaking the relationship off:

"We're not guilty because I seek it out or [because] I deserve to be beaten. He can't beat me because a meal doesn't taste good. Though, more shocking things have been known. Not that, but I do think that if you know that someone is abusing you, why do we forgive it? I'm guilty for not breaking things off, or because we never get to the point of breaking things off completely" (ES, interview no 9).

Though, a Portuguese Roma woman, who used to be the victim of domestic abuse and is now 37, with three children, separated and with a job, highlights how difficult it is to break things off:

“some [women] allow it, I know because I’ve been through it. (...) It’s very difficult to get out of a situation like this” (PT, Juno, 37 years old).

The type of settlement revealed as an important factor impacting on Roma women’s perceptions on domestic violence. This was especially the case in Greece and in Bulgaria.

Living in camps in Greece means a more isolated life, not at all integrated, away from any kind of contemporary civilisation, sometimes without electricity, without school or service provisions, which makes Roma’s life more difficult and perpetuate their difficult living circumstances.

In addition, in Bulgaria it was concluded that the type of settlement the woman lives in, as well as her educational level and her occupation are even more important than the group affiliation and the specificity related to each group.

## 5.2 The range of domestic violence commonly occurring in Roma families

The great majority of the participants, if not all in Spain and Romania, acknowledge that cases of domestic violence exist among Roma women.

However, in Portugal, even though the women interviewed do not hesitate about classing domestic violence as a reality and a social problem in the country, when they were asked whether it occurs in the Roma communities, their answers do not deserve the same consensus. The answers obtained in this research differed, as much as among the young women as among the older women, which means that they deny the fact that domestic violence exists in Roma communities, or at least they plead ignorance: “No, no, no. I’ve never heard about it. Among the Roma, never I’ve never heard anyone speak about violence” (PT, Eudora, 55 years old). “The Roma man doesn’t kill, he doesn’t abuse [rape] his children, he doesn’t commit domestic violence against women” (PT, Agnes, 40 years old).

Likewise, in Greece some respondents claim that violent actions happen in other camps, not in their resident camp.

In every participating country, though, many respondents recognise domestic violence as affecting all communities including the Roma communities going so far as to assert that there is a lot of violence within the community.

In Bulgaria, some of the women who belong to one of the most conservative groups of the Roma community (the Kaldarashi Roma) have shared during the interviews that the husband should be nice and kind to his wife and should never beat her... “unless she has not deserved it” (BG, Y., 72 years old, village, Kaldarashi Roma). In these cases, she has to be punished. And this is recognised as something that happens in many families.

And women had to bear with it simply because they are women:

“My husband used to have many lovers. Everybody knew it, it was a public secret. But I had to stay at home and bear everything. I had to be patient when he was coming home in the evening after leaving his lover, I had to be patient when he got drunk and started shouting and insulting me. I had to do everything he wanted and could not do anything I wanted. Because I am a woman.” (BG, M., 52 years old, village, Kaldarashi Roma)

In Spain, when it comes to gender-based violence among close contacts or acquaintances, it is notable that 34 out of the 40 interviewees, or 85 %, were familiar with cases of women who have suffered or are currently victims of some form of violence. They often pointed out that this situation also occurs outside the Roma community, given that it impacts women in all cultures and does not affect Roma women because they are Roma, but because they are women: “Yes, as I said, this isn’t about Roma people, this extends all over, like an illness” (ES, interview no 38).

Further, on numerous occasions the interviewees in Spain mentioned abuse towards Roma women, of which they described themselves as victims, caused by a triple discrimination that is rooted in their gender, ethnicity and economic situation. In this sense, Roma women are abused for being women, for being Roma, and for being poor. These conditions generate violence not only from their partners or ex-partners, but also from public and national institutions, reaching the level of structural abuse.

Remarkably, different attitudes towards the acknowledged violence were disclosed. In Romania, even though all the women condemned the acts of violence against other women, more than half tried to find a reason and to excuse the aggressor. In Spain, naturalisation of the various forms of violence was also a common factor in the responses of the women interviewed. They also pointed out that it is difficult to recognise violence when you grew up in a home where your father abused his partner as well as his children.

Part of the respondents expresses the belief that domestic violence is more common in the Roma community. This is particularly the case in Bulgaria, where many share this opinion not because

of Roma culture but because in some conservative groups of the community traditional patriarchal practices are still preserved from one side, and from another, because due to the conservative attitude to women they are less informed, have low awareness of their rights and less support and instruments to react.

In Greece, some of the participants reported violence from other relatives, such as a brother-in-law or a mother-in-law.

Roma women participating in the interviews were also invited to identify the types of domestic violence more prevalent in their communities.

In Romania it became apparent that most Roma women even now, cannot really identify all forms of domestic violence manifestations, but if explained to them they can come up with examples that illustrate the different types of violence.

Regarding the kinds of domestic violence committed against women in the Roma communities, physical violence and psychological, including verbal, violence are the most common forms pointed out and are often inter-connected.

“I have already seen many things like it, and it was physical and verbal [abuse]. Swear words said in front of the children. I’ve never seen any use of weapons. I’ve seen her being punched; her hair pulled (...) I’ve seen it. (PT, Hélia, 39 years old)

One of the respondents in Romania said that she had to put up with psychological violence for years. Her self-esteem dropped to the minimum and she was terrified to go home. She tried to talk to her friends and with her family but all of them told her that her husband is a good man because he never hits her, so she should be pleased and thankful.

There are very few, almost negligible, cases of economic abuse reported. As shown in the interviews conducted in Romania, most of the respondents do not recognise this type of violence as being a problem or a crime.

Views about the occurrence of sexual violence differed among the countries.

In Portugal, the Roma women interviewed agreed, generally speaking, that they did not know about any cases of this kind of abuse happening in the Roma communities: “No, sexual not! It’s out of the question” (PT, Luana, 22 years old).

Also, in Spain only in some cases the women mentioned sexual violence, being striking that this phenomenon was mentioned so infrequently in the research. That does not necessarily mean that

it does not exist, as there may be other variables, such as: that the people interviewed may not have wanted to share this information during the interview; that sexual violence in affective relationships may not be identified, or that this act may have been naturalised.

Conversely, in Romania 30 % of the respondents were able to recognise and condemn the sexual abuse; however, most of the women consider this as normal.

Be that as it may, even among the interviewees (in particular in Portugal, Spain and Greece), who acknowledge that domestic violence happens in Roma communities, they perceive that it happens to different extents, that it is less prevalent today than it was 'before' because now "women react more".

"It's there, of course it happens. Not so much as before; there's not so much of it now. Today, women react more." (PT, Hélia, 39 years old)

Some respondents in Greece report a change in the mentality as women know their rights:

"However, many men do not beat their women nowadays because they know that women have the same rights with men and the police will intervene. [There was a case where] the woman had been beaten by the man; they broke up. The woman with her mother denounced the case to the police, they went to the court and finally, before the court, the woman returned back to her husband." (GR, 713\_0162, 63 years old)

Likewise, in Spain, a thought frequently expressed in the responses was that "times have changed", referring to the fact that women did not use to report such violence, as customs were more entrenched and traditional in nature, meaning that filing reports was looked upon in a very bad light.

In the face of this issue, the ways in which situations of violence were said to be commonly resolved in the Roma community are interesting. It is important to underline that the difficulty with generalising was consistently noted, mostly in Spain but also in Portugal, given that each family is a world into itself and there is no single way or means to resolve this situation; rather, circumstances vary for each case, family and woman. As several Portuguese respondents said, "each case is a case".

While still considering the way in which Roma women seek help in situations involving domestic violence, most of the times incidents of domestic violence are resolved (or continue) within their families. This solution is clearly identified in the Greek and Portuguese national studies as the most common way of resolving a situation of violence. This would involve families attempting to

mediate between the partners, to resolve the conflict through internal reconciliation and without having to turn to legal authorities.

In Portugal, thus, most of the interviewees singled out the family, turning to the parents or to the older women in the family, thereby abiding by the customs and rules of so-called “Roma law”.

“I’m always hearing people talk about Roma Law, when these things put our Roma race to shame, and are solved at home. Call on the mother-in-law or an aunt, but the mother-in-law is better, so that things are sorted out.” (PT, Paulina, 31 years old)

Family intervention, although still recurrent, is the second most common way of resolving a situation of serious violence, according to interviewees’ comments in Spain.

Albeit less frequently, the mediation of the person of respect in the community, those who make the Roma law, is also mentioned in Spain and especially in Portugal.

“It’s our law-makers. Men worthy of respect. Older men, and these older men are [best] for troubled marriages, such as in situations involving domestic violence”. (PT, Luana, 22 years old)

In case a Roma woman is facing violence, the most frequent strategy adopted in Portugal is “to mark time”, a “separation”, or in other words, the wife temporarily leaves home with her children and goes back to her own family for a few days or even for one, two or more months, in the hope that “they [husbands] get their heads around it” (PT, Isaltina, 24 years old).

Also, in Greece it is very common that she will go to live with her parents for some days; afterwards, families from both sides will discuss what happened within the couple. However, such situations will be happening again and again, it is a vicious circle as the wife usually returns to her husband and it is very common that she will also be a violent mother-in-law in the future as many of the participants claim (for instance GR, 713\_0157, 38 years old).

This means of resolving such situations, although cited less frequently, is for the woman in Spain to go to her parents’ or parents in law’s home for a few days as a way of punishing her partner or letting the conflict calm down, and moving back in with him after a few days. If the woman does not want to go back to her partner, the participants said that she leaves him, and that solves the problem: “Leaving your partner. In the Roma [community], we always prefer to leave our partner or husband than report him” (ES, interview no 40).

However, the women in Spain described how the most common way to get out of a situation of violence today is to go to the police to file a report of violence: “Nowadays, I think filing a report and [taking] legal action is the order of the day. They’re increasingly using those means” (ES, interview no 12).

Reporting to the police is not as common in the other participating countries. In Portugal, some women said that only when the immediate strategy laid down by “tradition” is not an adequate answer, sometimes, although not at all often, Roma women resort to “a 21st -century way of thinking”; they resort to “the misters’ law”<sup>8</sup>, that is the legal rulings and procedures enforced to protect victims of domestic violence in mainstream society.

“One way of solving [domestic violence] if we act according to our tradition, is to call someone older in the family and explain what’s happening and he/she tries to solve things. (...) If we see things from a 21s -century way of thinking? We give the authorities an account of it and say what has been happening. There. This is today’s way of thinking. Not dependent on tradition.” (PT, Susete, 37 years old)

In most of the countries involved in the study, in cases that violent actions are indeed reported officially, Roma women feel that these will not take them seriously and they will not get the same treatment by the police or the social services due to racism and discrimination against them. In many cases, the police officers are biased against them because they are Roma and thus violence is common among them. It is true that in many cases Roma women are ignored by the police due to the fact that many of them will eventually reconcile with their husbands.

At an institutional level, participants in Spain noted the lack of people to turn to, the difficulty of identifying where to go or how to act, added to the lack of cultural mediators or people of Roma ethnicity working in such institutions that can understand their context, culture, customs and specific issues, which are distinct to those of the majority population. Moreover, the individual and institutional-level discrimination within state agencies that specialise in this topic creates a lack of willingness among Roma women to use these services. Added to this is the fact that the police have persecuted and harassed people from this ethnic group throughout their history, making it common to consider the police an institutional enemy of the community.

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<sup>8</sup> “A lei dos senhores”, in Portuguese; *senhores* is a common term used by Roma to refer to people who are not Roma.

Terms that frequently crop up in the discourses of the Roma women interviewed are “silence”, “shame” and “fear”, particularly when speaking about the difficulties that Roma women have to face when they are victims of domestic violence.

In Bulgaria, one of the respondents argues that women “live in silence”:

“Women, victims of violence live in silence. Sometimes, even their relatives are not aware of the situation”. (BG, E, 30 years old, small town, Burgudjii Roma)

Another respondent in Portugal explains why Roma women keep their “mouths shut”:

“Sometimes, we keep our mouths shut because a wife has a lot of Roma blood in her. I don’t know about other ethnic groups. But the Roma ethnic group is mostly made up of the value she places on her husband, husbands must be respected. But, it’s like this, when there’s domestic violence, there’s no respect, there’s no nothing, it’s like that. Why? We are Roma, we are what we’ve always been, we feel the pain in our skin, it’s as simple as that. Whatever it is. But there’s a lot of silence and there’s a lot of domestic violence swept under the carpet; many women are afraid to stick their heads out of the window and speak about what they should be speaking about, and act as they should be acting and get things straight. Because they’re afraid of reprisals. And so, they suffer in silence. Which is even worse. They don’t tell anyone. It even makes it worse and harder to bear.” (PT, Núria, 47 years old)

Furthermore, a third of the interviewees in Spain believe that, generally, women do not do anything and keep such situations quiet.

The most common and formidable barrier identified by the women in this context is the family. In Spain over a third of the interviewees confessed to fearing that their family would not believe their account of being in a situation of violence, or would pressure them not to report their partner.

Breaking the silence would mean, in the view of many Roma women, bring shame to the family and the community, and disrespect their customs and tradition. As one respondent in Portugal expresses, it is a question of “honour”:

“They’re ashamed. Because in traditional Roma marriages, to be well seen, we have to be fine, the couple has to get on well, the children.... It’s all very important. It’s all a question of honour.” (PT, Susete, 37 years old)

Shame is thus often mentioned; the fear of society's rejection, disdain and "what everyone will say". They noted how, in conservative communities, above all, marriage is very important for a Roma woman, as is their role as wives. This means that separating from one's partner is a failure and therefore, not looked upon well. In such circumstances, there is the possibility of being negatively judged by Roma society.

Some women in Spain and Portugal described how it is not viewed favourably in their community for a woman to end up "alone" or to have been "left" [dejada, in Spanish, or deixada, in Portuguese], the latter term being used to refer to divorce or separation.

"It's very difficult because, look, when a Roma woman gets married, it's meant to be for life. If you leave that man, it's like a disgrace. You keep quiet to avoid creating a problem." (ES, interview no 6)

"Eh, it's very hard. Everyone points at you because you were left; you can't interact with other women; they gossip about you... it's very ... a woman comes out much more bruised than what she was before. You can't imagine what it is to have the Roma community point at you. You can't imagine it. And afterwards, having to bring up children alone, my God, it's even worse. It's complicated." (PT, Luana, 22 years old)

This Portuguese Roma woman, Luana, was married at 13, became a mother at 14, and separated at 15 and, in her own words, has a son "who doesn't know his father".

In Bulgaria, several of the women related domestic violence with the phenomenon of early or forced marriages. They do not speak only about early marriages as domestic violence, but state that in the cases when the age of the bride was 14-15 the relations between the spouses have later transformed into situations of domestic violence.

"Since I got married when I was 15, my occupation was to clean and cook: do homework. When we sat down to make a decision, he did not consult me, because I looked stupid to him and I could not give wise advice. Who am I to give him advice? To ask how much money is left? My task was to cook, clean and look after children. When the holidays came, I did not receive any gifts, no flowers. When my birthday came, I received a slap as a gift. He never told me "you are beautiful, I love you". Never. Every woman wants her husband to tell her that she is beautiful, something to make her happy. I felt like a slave. I didn't feel like a real woman." (BG, M, 31 years old, village, Horohane Roma)

One of the most common difficulties is related to the economic dependence from the husband so the woman cannot actually abandon him and live a better life. As pointed out in the Greek national report, circumstances become much more difficult when each woman has 3, 4 or 5 children and does not have a job to support her. Even when, like in Portugal, they work in sales along with their husbands, women have no control over the income from that work.

Furthermore, due to the lack of material autonomy many Roma women do not manage to acquire accommodation for themselves and their children, preventing them from breaking off abusive relationships. Most of these women do not have any other place to go, a place where they feel safe.

The need for safety was often voiced by the participants. Living in fear, being afraid from the partner, notably fear of retaliation if they report any violent action against them, is a common feeling.

As one woman in Greece testified, they are afraid. "I have seen many times the dread in their eyes and when the man beats you, he manipulates you so you are scared to go for any action" (GR, 713\_0172, 40 years old).

In Portugal, jealousy of Roma men as a drive for violence is another common reason for a Roma woman being afraid of her husband:

"It's difficult because she's afraid to go out into the street. She's afraid of looking around, at someone else because he could think she's looking at another man or another person. Jealousy is like that. It is where most of the domestic violence comes from. (...) She's always afraid. She sleeps with her heart in her mouth." (PT, Juno, 37 years old)

It is, nevertheless, striking that the main concern Roma women described, both in Spain and in Portugal, was the fear of confrontation between the families, whether because the woman's own family goes to the other to protest or, more commonly, because the partner's family reacts violently. This fear of "reprisals", of pitting family against family, is apparent in the words of one of the interviewees in Spain: "That my family will get into a fight with him, that he'll kill my brother, he'll kill my uncle, that he'll kill my children, that he'll kill me if I let him." (ES, interview n°5)

Among Roma women, children may either be a reason to bear with the violent and abusive relationship, as argued by some women in Bulgaria, or a reason to break free from the life of domestic violence. One of the respondents in Portugal, who after several attempts finally got

separated six years before the date of the interview noted the important role that her children played in her decision to “take the first step”, without neglecting to point out the personal price she paid for her decision, as a Roma woman, ostracised by her community:

“But before I was able to take this step, I had to become another person, outside my community, open wide my mind, my eyes, and I forced myself to see things because it wasn’t only me who was suffering, it was also my small children. It’s like this, I think that a mother always puts the happiness of her child in first place and this is what made me take the first step because my children didn’t deserve to live through that but deserved a better future. Thank God, they have it now. And all the steps I have taken, I don’t care about the consequences they have caused, I don’t care. There were consequences. Being excluded, I don’t care one bit. The only thing I care about are my children, their well-being. I know I’m badly seen by the community.” (PT, Madalena, 49 years old)

### 5.3 The level of knowledge Roma women possess in regards to domestic violence, their rights, and how to seek help for themselves

The level of knowledge Roma women possess in regards to domestic violence is not the same in the five partner countries.

In Spain, the vast majority of interviewees believed that information was available, and consequently were well informed about where to go if they needed help. Failing this, if they did not know the exact telephone number, they said they would know where to obtain the information if they needed it. The few women interviewed who were not aware of the information said this was because they had not needed it, and therefore had not been concerned about informing themselves on the matter.

However, the interviewees in Spain with training in social work thought that the information on the available support network for this issue could be much improved. The creation of an up-to-date document was proposed, including all the centres and services focused on providing a solution to this issue.

Also, in Romania, 70 % of the respondents declared that they are well informed about what they should do in case of a domestic violence episode but when asked what the steps are, 90 % of them could only name the Police as the authority to deal with domestic violence.

On the other hand, in Portugal, the level of knowledge about the support services to women victims of violence varies among the Roma women interviewed. Many say that they know they exist and are well-informed about the aid and services available to them: “Yes, yes. I know about them. Yes, of course I do.” (PT, Otilia, 48 years old). Other interviewees had little or no information about such aid and services: “No, it happens that I don’t know about them” (PT, Emiliana, 28 years old).

Some of the women interviewed in Portugal think that the information about domestic violence is scarce in Roma communities. Other women stated that domestic violence information campaigns aimed at the Roma community are really needed, including up-and-running services and resources as well as their dissemination among the Roma communities.

“It’s very important that they know this support exists. The messages given out are very important, even if they know at first hand that they need to solve matter between themselves; but it’s very important because the messages that are sometimes aired in soap operas, or even in outdoor publicity, and the projects already in action about gender violence in Roma communities and also domestic violence in the Roma communities, are very important; very important because there, they know that if they can’t solve it one way, they can solve it another way.” (PT, Rosalina, 70 years old)

Interestingly, in the Bulgarian national report, it is noted that the fact that many respondents agree that domestic violence exists does not necessarily mean that this leads to real actions. Just the opposite: there are still a prevailing number of women who have not and would not take any actions. Nevertheless, it is already an important step: domestic violence is at present considered wrong.

Still in Bulgaria, most of the women perceive domestic violence as violation of human rights and agree with the need to react. In this respect, a significant change in attitudes during the last months, especially after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic is noticeable. One of the reasons for it is that during the emergency state and after it, the level of public discussions on domestic violence has raised in macro society. This is due to the fact that during the pandemic the cases of victims of domestic violence (even death cases) have increased. As a result, the awareness in majority society about the issue has risen, as well as in the Roma community.

“It can be said that in many cases of domestic violence, victims feel alone and isolated and do not have access to information or support services. Nowadays, however,

people are more aware of domestic violence and this is more visible in the news, television programmes, etc.” (BG, R, 27 years old, small town, Roma Musicians)

Similar importance is accorded to TV programmes and the internet also in Romania, Greece and Portugal.

All of the respondents in Romania agreed that nowadays, things have changed for the better and women have better chances to find out more information about their rights and how they can get help even being abused. Even though the access to information should be at hand, some of the women in Roma communities have no access to television or internet because their husbands do not allow it or because their level of education and digital literacy is too low.

In Portugal, regarding the way in which the interviewees get to know about the support services or how to contact them or how they would contact them in the event they are needed, and how to obtain information about them, it seems that digital technology is a possible source and one to make use of.

“I think that this [referring to isolation] is a little more difficult [to find] today as with cell phones and the internet, we can all obtain access to everything. (...) Yes, I think so. Even if you don't know a lot of information, it's like I say, it's easy to gain access, it's easy to get in touch. You may not know things by heart, but... yes.” (PT, Susete, 37 years old)

The role of social media was also pinpointed in Greece:

“Women have the right not to tolerate violence. I think that many years ago, circumstances were worse. Now, we have social media, Facebook and there are also some social services where you can address the problem.” (GR, 713\_0159, 37 years old)

Nevertheless, television is generally referred to by Portuguese respondents as being the channel through which most of the information and knowledge about domestic violence is obtained, helping to publicise it and break the silence about domestic violence, as well as increase the coverage of available aid. “Since it started appearing on the television and that call line, I think that things have changed. People are more informed now and don't accept certain things.” (PT, Gabriela, 46 years old).

Still concerning the Portuguese case, among the interviewees who say they already know something about the way the services and aid work, for most of the them, the police act as the

most recognisable form of aid and they would resort to them or they would advise other women to do so: “The police station, right away, the police” (PT, Isis, 24 years old).

In Spain, of all the interviewees, 58 % claimed that they would advise their friends to report such a situation, and 25 % would suggest that they turn to professional services and support. On the same topic, 35 % would advise that their friend leave her partner, 23 % of whom would advise doing so without reporting him. Only three interviewees said that they would tell her to ask for help from her relatives. Six mentioned the importance of listening to the victim, learning about what she wants, and giving her emotional support and resources. What was present in all the responses was that the women would tell their friend not to keep it quiet, not to carry on in that situation.

Nevertheless, the difference between the advice the interviewees would give and their answers about the ways in which cases of violence are resolved is striking, notably in the Portuguese and Spanish. When it comes to actually resolving situations of abuse, the use of mediation between the families is much more common.

In Bulgaria, when asked what they would advise a friend who is suffering from domestic violence to do, 30 % of the respondents said that they will advise her to go to the authorities. The rest said that the best piece of advice they could give is to get away from that toxic relationship but they were unable to give advice on the methods how to do it.

“Yes, I know what it should be done! If somebody comes to me and asks for my advice, I would tell them: go away from that relationship, and never look back, come on... go go!” (BG, B.S., 29 years old)

Advising other Roma women victims of domestic violence to resort to the policy or ask for help raises concerns and prevents intervention in Greece.

“We have such friends [victims of violence] but we cannot intervene. I know that social workers exist, I know that police exist. We know where to address the problem but we don't say anything and do not go to further action because we are afraid. The first is this. If it is revealed that we advised a woman to go to the police, then the two families will fight with each other.” (GR, 713\_0158, 41 years old)

Many of these women in Greece are advised by their families or friends to resolve violent cases inside their families or to separate from their husbands. Below there are some relevant examples from both sides:



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“[I would advise a woman] To be patient and tolerant, not to destroy her family (...) For me, it is wrong to destroy your family. It depends on the kind of violence.” (GR, 713\_0162, 63 years old)

“A woman should be patient, should discuss the issue with her husband and persuade him that he was wrong (to exercise violence against her). But if a relative of mine tells me that she is beaten, even if she has one or two children, I would say to her to denounce the case and abandon him. She is not compelled to tolerate all that.” (GR, 713\_0162, 63 years old)

However, what this woman later explained is that usually Roma women do not report incidents of domestic violence except in cases where the incident is really violent.

What may also happen in some of the cases is that there are women who do not want to help themselves. This is reported in the Greek and the Spanish reports, in particular. In some responses, the women in Spain noted that it is not a problem of a lack of information about services providing assistance and access, saying that when women do not call these services, it is not because they do not know who to call, but because they do not want to. The issue lies rather with fear of reporting violence, services that do not provide an adequate response to situations of violence, and other variables, regarding the barriers Roma women face when trying to escape situations of violence.

#### 5.4 The experiences of Roma women in accessing, or not accessing, support services

One could argue that in many cases of domestic violence, victims may feel alone, isolated and have no access to information or support services. However, nowadays, people seem to be more aware of domestic violence and this can be due to more awareness campaigns on the news, TV and social media. The influence of the TV, social media and the internet, was acknowledged particularly in Portugal and Greece.

However, in Greece, some respondents also mentioned that Roma women are not always allowed by their husbands to have mobile phones, access to Facebook and other social media because they believe that Facebook can be a way to flirt with other men.

In Bulgaria, the awareness and knowledge about the institutions that are supposed to help in cases of domestic violence already exists, more or less. It is higher in the communities which are more modernised, which have more intensive contacts with the macro-society: most of the women work, they have at least secondary education, use social networks, etc.

Concerning the actual use of support services, by own experience or because they know about the situations that their friends or family members have gone through, while in Spain half of the women interviewed declared that they have needed the information and services for themselves or for a woman close to them, in Romania and Portugal, most of the Roma women said that they have never needed to resort to this kind of services.

As far their experience in accessing community services is concerned, the women interviewed in Portugal said that the local community support services provide adequate information and the necessary referrals.

“They gave me information, gave me the names. They told me... I had already left home several times before, taken the van with my children; I slept in the van several times. They [meaning the technical staff of a community support organisation] knew about it because other people knew about it, almost the entire neighbourhood, not so? And so, they gave me some information about who to contact, including the time I was living inside the van with my children when I lodged my first complaint.” (PT, Madalena, 49 years old)

In Bulgaria, it is also noticeable if there is someone, they trust they have more courage to react. This supporter can be a community mediator or a non-governmental organisation that works on the field and that they trust.

Still in Bulgaria, the other big institution that has been mentioned during the interviews as one of the supporters is the Protestant church or rather the different denominations of the Protestant churches. A number of women who have been through heavy forms of violence declared that the Protestant church they visit has given them strength to overcome this and courage to react.

In Portugal, the evangelical church is also widely widespread in Roma communities and some of the women who participated in the interviews made a point of declaring their religious beliefs and regular attendance of the evangelical church. However, none of these women identified the church as a relevant source of support for women victims of domestic violence.

The figure of intercultural mediators deserved a lot of recognition in most countries.

It is though interesting to notice that in Portugal hardly any of the interviewees knew about the role of an intercultural male or female mediator. In the cases where the women being interviewed mentioned them, they were mainly associated with educational mediators and not as people actively helping in situations involving domestic violence.

In Bulgaria, the figure of the community mediator, educational, health mediator appears to be a beam of hope in the community. This is a person that is from the community, a person who has high credentials from Roma women. Furthermore, the mediator has all the characteristics that ordinary women lack – she (usually a woman) generally has an education, high self-esteem, connections with the institutions.

“I think the mediators could be very helpful. Especially if they are people respected by the community, something like leaders whom people trust.” (BG, E., 30 years old, small town, Burgudjii)

Also, in Greece Roma women acknowledge the very important role that cultural mediators play in assisting them in their problems. This includes violence cases, for instance as regards early marriages.

Most of the women in Romania consider that it could be very helpful to have mediators around but even if they are, they cannot interfere without being asked first.

On the other hand, some testimonies given in the interviews in Spain concerning use of support services identified cultural divides that hindered communication and access for Roma women, so they suggested that cultural mediators should be present in all these care and support services.

The need for cultural mediators stood out clearly, their absence amounting to a significant gap in services. In response to this question, many women were not aware of the existence or role of a mediator or cultural mediator. This is due to the fact that no such figure exists in the public services in Córdoba and in the autonomous region where this city is located; in other autonomous communities in Spain, agents called civic-community coordinators (coordinadores cívico-comunitarios) have been introduced to fulfil the mediation role. According to some of the Roma women interviewed in this research, the presence of this figure in support services and centres is vital, as they are the necessary cultural link between the Roma ethnic group and support services:

“I work with an intercultural mediator but I believe that mediator figure should be extended to more places: in the city council and in the various service departments of the social centres. Because I might be explaining something but you don't understand

me because of a cultural divide. The mediator figure would facilitate getting help” (ES, interview no 15).

On the other hand, some testimonies given in the interviews in Spain told of the substantial help they received from the authorities, when the aggressors were put in jail. There are also cases in which shelters enabled the victims to find a place of refuge and protect their lives and those of their children, as well as receiving emotional support. These women added that they were looked after well.

Also, in Portugal, the assessment made about the follow-up procedures made by the *services* attending and supporting domestic violence victims is that it has been adequate and meets their needs.

“I was received well. Yes, me and my children. They gave me support, and in fact they gave me very good support. They gave us a shelter, they gave us food, children’s clothing. At the time, when my boy was just a baby, they went to the chemists to buy him medicine because he was running a temperature, and they bought him nappies... Yes, I was received well, yes I was.” (PT, Penélope, 46 years old)

In other countries, the experiences with social services are not so positively assessed. This is the case of Bulgaria where the respondents often shared that the staff from institutions makes Roma women feel guilty for what has happened and victimise the victims. Also, in Greece, one respondent said:

“Social services are not objective; I am sorry to tell that. Because services know Roma’s problems and they assume that Roma couples will conciliate. And this is the truth unfortunately. So, the police will focus more on non-Roma women.” (GR, 713\_0159, 37 years old)

The lack of trust in the police and the negative assessment of their intervention are transversal to all participating countries.

In Portugal, regarding the work carried out by the police, their expediency and efficiency in terms of support going to Roma women who were victims of domestic violence, the respondents gave negative feedback about the delay in receiving police help and they complained about the fact that sometimes, the police failed to show up at the place where the call was made.

The way in which Roma women are attended by the police also deserves the disapproval of some of the interviewees. They reckon that the prejudice held against Roma people is responsible for police activity when confronted with episodes involving domestic violence against Roma women.

“It happened again. This was some weeks ago. I called the police again (...) Do you know what the police officer answered? ‘In your race, don’t you have an understanding with your elders?’ I said: ‘No, my race, no. My ethnic group. No, we don’t have an understanding. I’m doing this according to our law, because I’m Portuguese and I have this right’. And he replied: ‘Ah... but you usually solve things among the older people’. ‘It’s nobody’s business knowing anything about my father. I want to follow our law, your law as a policeman and my law. Because I have the right’. But he failed to record the incident. He only said: ‘If I come here again, then I’m going to arrest him’. Till today, I haven’t received any letter, nothing. The situation has stayed as it was.” (PT, Berta, 30 years old)

The pre-conceived idea that this sort of problems should be handled by the Roma community, among themselves, coupled with the assumption that “this is what you Roma people do; you fight and then you make up; this is how you are” (as stated in the Romanian national report), seems to find an echo in the police all over, regardless of the national case, according to the testimonies collected in the different countries.

In Bulgaria none of the women interviewed has shared a positive experience with institutions and the police in particular. The few women who had decided to call the police had a negative experience. The situation becomes even more difficult in the small places, where everyone knows everybody; women are afraid that when they go to the police the information would immediately spread around.

And the police if fact does nothing to protect them, as the following quote from an interview conducted in Romania illustrates:

“Yes, I needed help, and I called the emergency number. The Police came and they told me they have no power ...and I have to go back home and wait for a Court order. Only the Judge can give that order. So, they did nothing...and they sent me back to him. He could have killed me that night! Nobody cares!” (RO, D.D. 41 years old)

Trust in the police is extremely low among the interviewed women in Romania, and most of them do not have examples of good practice in which the police intervened and sanctioned the

aggressor according to the victims' expectations, which consolidates the distrust in the public authorities.

The women interviewed in Greece also seem to have a lot to say concerning their experiences in using the services of the police:

“The police discriminate Roma. I had gone with my sister because she was a victim of severe domestic violence and the police just reported the incident. They said they know us, Roma women, and that we will conciliate with our husbands again. They directly told us that we are Roma.” (GR, 713\_0158, 41 years old)

Regarding the likelihood of it being more difficult for a Roma woman to receive help, the Roma women interviewed in Portugal indicated discrimination and racism as well as factors leading to differentiated treatment.

“It’s more difficult because there’s a lot of racism. There’s a lot of racism against the Roma people. It’s different [if they go to the police], they don’t give us such good attention. We’re not that important.” (PT, Gabriela, 46 years old)

However, the answers obtained to this question vary. Other participants in the interviews in Portugal consider that there are no particular difficulties facing Roma women and point out equality in treatment: “I think it’s the same thing. I think so. It’s equal for everyone, obviously.” (PT, Doroteia, 58 years old).

Similarly, in Spain, when speaking of the challenges faced when asking for help, most of the women interviewed considered it to be more difficult for a Roma woman to get help and access services or information about their rights. Only one thought it would be easier for them to achieve this. The main reason identified was the discrimination they receive from institutional bodies.

Hand in hand with racism comes discrimination because of the preconception that Roma women are more problematic, or are used to a certain way of living. Therefore, the treatment they receive is worse than that a woman from the majority population would receive. This is how the participants explained it:

“I don’t know, sometimes I think that, because of the question of racism, it’s more difficult for Roma women. Maybe, as they don’t see me as a Roma woman, they tell you they don’t think of you that way, but the thing is, that’s what I am. Or when [Roma women] file a report, they think that we, Roma women, are used to our husband hitting us. So, I do think that, because of the question of racism, [Roma women] have

more problems because they don't pay them as much attention, in that sense." (ES, interview no 17)

Likewise, some described a feeling that the resources are not for them that the resources are not for their community:

"I think it can often be more difficult because of the perception that Roma women have of the services, and that sense of otherness the Roma woman has about the services, like, this doesn't belong to me, this is a service that exists for Payos. I'm not going to use it; they're not going to accept me as just another regular user." (ES, interview no 36)

Those who, in Spain, considered it to be more difficult for Roma women to access resources believed that this is related to a lack of education, which makes it impossible for a woman to obtain information. Finally, almost half thought that access to resources, services and information would be the same for a Roma woman as for a woman from the majority population in Spain, given that the challenge isn't related to ethnicity or culture, but to each woman's income and economic situation. The worse a woman's socioeconomic situation, the more difficult it will be to inform herself, find out about the resources and assistance available, and learn about her rights.

In Romania, the main aspect that stands in the way of Roma women is the lack of knowing their rights. Every time there is a scandal in the family and when the woman wants to file a complaint, the aggressor tells the victim that the authorities will take her children away if she calls them. And being afraid to lose her children, the woman has no trust in the local authorities and again, the aggressor is the one who is "winning the fight".

"They [men] keep them to be all dependent. The woman believes everything her husband says. He is like a second God to her. She has no education, so she only knows what he tells her." (RO, G.M. 39 years old)

Finally, it should be mentioned that many of the difficulties that Roma women victims of domestic violence experience in obtaining support, according to the research in Portugal, are due to the concerns with preserving the image of the own community and, judging from the interviewees' comments, to the community closing in on itself around its "traditions".

"It's more difficult for the Roma community to ask for help because it is an environment that is closed around its traditions." (PT, Quitéria, 39 years old)

## 5.5 The skills Roma women may lack in order to claim their rights

At this point, we should stress the need for conditions that support and enhance the exercise of rights of Roma women. In particular strategies that advance their potential, favour their access to information as well as facilitate the mobilisation of their skills and influence the way they feel ought to be developed. Furthermore, through these strategies, Roma women should be informed about their rights and be empowered, in the face of system failures, to claim and exercise them effectively.

Claiming rights demands, indeed, skills and abilities that are sometimes not easy to mobilise. First and foremost, it means knowing and acknowledging one's rights and being aware of the fact that they are being threatened or jeopardised.

In recognising that **domestic violence** means a violation of women rights, the overwhelming majority of Roman women in Portugal stated that it was a breach of their rights. They said so mainly in terms of the rights denied them during the acts of violence that happen, particularly the right "to be happy": "It's violating a person's right to be happy; it's violating a person's right to be independent; it's violating a person's right in many facets of life" (PT, Carmo, 42 years old).

Furthermore, they indicated that not knowing about their own rights and the lack of information about the available resources are allied to domestic violence.

"(...) we don't know a lot about this situation, or other situations where we, or even I, need help. There's a lot of things that we don't know and sometimes, we put our foot in it because we don't know our rights and we don't know who to ask for help, who we can turn to. Sometimes, there's a bad situation that becomes worse at times because there's no correct information or no correct help. Or we don't know our rights. We have the law [on our side] in every situation. Often, we don't look for it or we don't look for it because we don't know about it." (PT, Núria, 47 years old)

Along the same line, most of the women in Bulgaria perceive domestic violence as violation of human rights and agree with the need to react. However, many of them still do not know their rights or do not know how to react.

"Many of the women do not know their rights. They think that the woman is subordinated to the man and they should obey. They do not know that nobody has the right to torture them, to do harm. Nobody tells them this. No institutions help." (BG, M, 38 years old, village, Rudari)

Most important is, as several of the respondents in Bulgaria have outlined, that the majority of the victims do not have the self-confidence to react and to stand for their rights. They do not even know that it is possible to react.

Some of the women in Greece support that extreme violence is a violation of women's rights, however a slap may not be considered as violence. Some others recognise all the types of violence and believe that all should be reported to the authorities or at least do not be accepted and leave the perpetrator.

In Romania, when asked if domestic violence is breaking the rights of women, they all agreed with this statement, but not many were able to give an example or to explain why this is happening.

Most of the interviewees in Spain agreed that gender-based violence directly affects and violates the rights of women, as a form of humiliation, abuse and a restriction of freedom. Frequent mention was made of this type of violence being a way to crush women and deprive them of their dignity: "The thing is, it's a humiliation: you feel inferior, humiliated. It crushes you" (ES, interview no 12).

Finally, in every country, some Roma women had difficulties understanding the question, which leads us to believe that they are not familiar with the concept of women's rights.

Many of the women taking part in the interviews, if not all in Spain and Romania, recognise that domestic violence is a crime (as mentioned earlier in this report).

In Romania, although as mentioned above, all respondents agreed upon the fact that violence against women is a serious crime, they consider that only physical violence is a crime. All the examples given by them were related to beating.

Some women in Portugal highlight the fact that domestic violence is a public offence (as detailed earlier in this report), a crime that anyone can report, as a relevant, positive development; these respondents consider that it favours women who, as victims of domestic violence, are able to make a complaint and seek specialised services and "seek her rights as a woman".

"I think that all women who are subject to domestic violence should seek support and help. (...) Because if there's help in this field, we have to put it into practice, it has to be, and a woman should seek her rights as a woman. No matter what kind of violence. Seek her rights because she has the right to survive, she has the right to choose what's best and she has the right to bring up her children." (PT, Núria, 47 years old)

Another positive sign of change mentioned by the interviewees in Portugal is the fact that some Roma women resorted to asking the services for help, and other women supported her in her decision – “she’s a winner”.

“Almost no Roma woman would ask the police to come to the community. And she left the house with the police. She’s a winner. (...) A Roma is forbidden to do practically everything. Nowadays, it’s changed a lot, yes. (...) Little by little, they manage to do things; ‘Oh, they’ve got no shame’. They gossip about them. But they do things and afterwards, others do likewise. And so, things gradually change.” (PT, Juno, 37 years old)

In order to see this change effected, as highlighted by some of the women, it is crucial that Roma women feel less cut off, safer, informed and supported.

These conditions would support them building the most important skill to react and oppose domestic violence for a woman: her internal strength, as voiced by the Roma women who took part in the research outstandingly in Bulgaria. A woman would have internal strength to take a step against the tradition (in some communities) and the community itself (sometimes) if she has enough self-confidence and self-esteem. Very rarely she could achieve this if she was alone. In order to believe in herself she needs somebody to support her: a friend, a mediator, a professional in the community.

“Will. Will and desire in yourself. Strength that she could cross barriers. She could break that fear. She could say ‘Stop the violence’, she could say ‘Stop, I’m a woman, I have rights’. She could. As long as she wants, as long as she wishes. As long as she has support, someone to help her. She might say, ‘Yes, I will help myself’, but somehow there must be support next to her, people to help her get back on her feet in the beginning and make sure she can”. (BG, M., 31 years old, village, Horohane Roma)

Illiteracy and poor schooling which are so evident even among the younger women (notably in Portugal), are referred to in all the partner countries as constraints for Roma women who are victims of violence, holding them back from resorting to social services or making a complaint when they believe their rights have been violated.

“(…) there are many [Roma women] who don’t know how to read, they don’t know... if they sign a paper, they don’t know what they’re signing and in what terms. They could be signing a paper that they shouldn’t.” (PT, Úrsula, 29 years old)

**School and education** are the first and foremost factor, according to the respondents particularly in Greece, that can help Roma get knowledge on their rights and information on how to seek help for themselves.

Also, **employability and the economic independence** that comes along would be critical contributing factors for those women to put a stop on the abusive relationships. Discriminatory attitudes from potential employers towards Roma women and men although represent an actual constraint at this level, as expressed in Portugal and Romania.

Low education levels and lack of material autonomy are coupled with, in Romania, another obstacle that is the lack of personal freedom. Most of Roma women are not allowed to use the internet or to go out in public much. They have to wear certain clothes, or they are not allowed to go out with friends. So, for this reason, they have very limited access to information.

“They are not allowed to go out at all. They have to wear those long skirts and they are not allowed to wear any makeup. They cannot even stop and chat with friends. If the man says no... is no. You have to obey.” (RO, A.P., 24 years old)

This also makes it very difficult for NGOs who try to organise workshops and to inform the women about their rights, because the women are not allowed to come to those sessions.

Furthermore, a lot of Roma women in Romania do not have official papers like ID cards and birth certificates, which is a formidable obstacle for them in order to find a way out of their current situation, especially when they are victims of domestic violence.

## 5.6 Any other significant findings

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of domestic violence against women, including Roma women, are still to be duly assessed. However, the results of the research revealed effects of the pandemic with different meanings in the participating countries.

In Portugal, COVID-19 was mentioned as being a determining influence on the drop in the income of the families to which the Roma women interviewed belong; any income they had usually came from their occupations as street vendors or vendors in fairs/markets, but also from their jobs that ceased to exist as a result of the economic crisis aggravated by the pandemic. The situation, as

pointed out by these Roma women, has given rise to negative impacts on the relationships between people, on family dynamics and between couples.

The risk of an escalation of domestic violence has been particularly feared during lockdowns and confinement, imposed in order to try to contain the spread of the disease.

Conversely, in Bulgaria, the COVID-19 pandemic has played the role of a catalyst. The increase in the numbers of domestic violence, in the last months, and the amplified public debate and awareness in relation to this problem in macro society also affected the status of the issue in the Roma community (as mentioned earlier in the report). This last year has revealed the problem of domestic violence and its scale in the Roma community and a significant change in attitudes on the topic is observed notably of Roma women.

## 6. Conclusions

Little is known so far about the incidence or the characteristics of domestic violence against Roma women. The interviews within the sphere of the PATTERN project held in the five participating countries with Roma women, where some of them are the survivors of domestic violence, therefore make an important contribution to producing more knowledge in this field; knowledge that has been revealed all the more crucial as it prepares the groundwork for action in the way of preventing and fighting domestic violence against Roma women.

A wide range of conclusions have been obtained through this research, thanks to having been able to collect the perceptions and experiences of the women who decided to participate, thus breaking the taboo vis-à-vis domestic violence in Roma communities.

In analysing the interviews, what emerges is the gender inequality, the marked difference in the social roles attributed to women and men in the Roma communities, where “culture” and “tradition” join together to keep Roma women in relationships that victimise them, and create a deep divide between what they (or at least part of them) understand as their rights and the power to exercise their rights in freedom. However, the perception of domestic violence by Roma women has many colours and nuances: from justifying it by victimising the women to an outraged reaction.

Fear, shame, silence, honouring “tradition”, the fact that a breakdown in the marriage is not easily accepted in the Roma community, the responsibility thrust upon women and absorbed by them to keep the family peace and the harmony between families, are all pointed out as factors preventing women from breaking free from the domestic violence which they experience.

Roma women face multiple vulnerabilities that put them at risk of experiencing gender-based domestic violence. Factors like poverty and living conditions, education level and access to labour market, social network to act as a support system, discrimination based on their class and ethnicity, not only contribute to the occurrence of domestic violence but also lowers the chances for a victim to escape this circle of violence.

What was described by many women we talked with is that Roma communities are closed communities. Women have been raised under specific stereotypes for their role as women, restricted to family care and with very limited access to the overall society; the chances for a woman to shape her own opinion are slim. For a Roma woman the first obstacle is to understand and recognise what is violence. For many Roma women violence is yet something acceptable, a

typical way of communication between the family members, in which usually men are those who are aggressive and women should respond with calmness and understanding.

Therefore, many Roma women are held “hostage”, they keep “trapped” in abusive relationships, in a community where the family is central.

Whereas the social structure based on family relations provides the Roma community with a support network operating on multiple levels, this can also create significant barriers for women who find themselves in situations of gender-based domestic violence. In this regard, the main difficulty the women expressed was fear of internal family conflict, such as the confrontation between families that can arise from reporting violence or from women sharing their situation with their family members. Such is the scale of this problem that the interviewees expressed greater concern and fear of reprisals from families than from their own partner. As a result, they often prefer to keep situations of violence quiet, so as to avoid generating greater conflict. On the other hand, mediation between families is very common as a means to avoid entering into legal proceedings, but it is not always objective or favourable towards the woman who has suffered from the violence. Through the interviewees’ statements, we may therefore identify a need for agency, enabling Roma women to make decisions about their own lives without social or culture pressure.

What has also been confirmed from this research is the diverse situations and the heterogeneity of Roma communities, and Roma women, between countries as well as within each national case. The need for an intersectional approach, considering mostly the influence of type of settlement and level of formal education, as well as age, marital status, social class, etc., became also apparent in the study.

In order to combat gender inequality and to prevent domestic violence in a comprehensive manner in Roma communities, few recommendations rose from the compilation of the present report. At a general level:

- ✓ It is necessary to understand the dominant gender norms in Roma communities and to take under consideration the aforementioned restrictions and specific social and cultural characteristics.
- ✓ It is imperative for the state to incorporate protection strategies into its standard procedures that consider the customs and social structures of the Roma community.
- ✓ Public authorities and civil society organisations need to find the best way to make sure that the right information reaches out to exactly the ones in need.

- ✓ At an educational level, education and training for Roma girls and women should be fostered in order to promote their employability and financial independence;
- ✓ Awareness-raising campaigns should be launched, adopting a multilayer approach: to sensitise the majority community on Roma communities' rights and fight racism and discrimination; to raise the awareness of Roma communities on domestic violence as crime and violation of human rights; as well as to inform and empower Roma women about their rights as women and how to access them, notably when affected by domestic violence;
- ✓ Additionally, at a societal level, it is crucial working to give Roma women the autonomy and agency to make decisions about their lives with self-determination, and to exercise their right to have a life free from violence and to be happy.

At a more specific level the partners of this project will contribute to the prevention and combating of domestic violence against Roma women, by:

- ✓ Developing *protocols* that enable professionals to respond to domestic violence against Roma women in a comprehensive way.
- ✓ *Enhancing the capacities of Roma intercultural mediators and professionals* in community centres/other local community services on domestic violence against Roma women.
- ✓ Enhancing the *capacities of Roma women* on how to recognise and report domestic violence and act *as leaders of change in their communities*
- ✓ *Launching awareness-raising campaigns that will adopt a multilayer approach: to sensitise the majority community on Roma communities' rights and fight racism; to raise the awareness of Roma communities on domestic violence as crime and violation of human rights; as well as to inform Roma women about their rights as women and how to access them, notably when affected by domestic violence.*

By raising awareness within the Roma communities, informing women about their rights and the available support mechanisms and enabling professionals to respond efficiently to domestic violence, Roma women will be empowered and enhanced in their integration and full participation in society.

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This summary report builds on the [national reports](#) on each of the five partner countries (listed below according to the alphabetical order of the authors):

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