

# RESEARCH REPORT

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Intramural  
Programmes for  
Perpetrators of  
IPV in Europe

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# 1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence can be defined as “any pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It encompasses all physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological actions or threats of actions that have a harmful impact on another person” (European Network for the Work With Perpetrators 2023: 5). Close to one in five women in the EU (17.7 %) have experienced physical violence or threats and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2024: 20) Despite this high number, the percentage of reported Intimate Partner Violence cases, remains relatively low (13,9%), and an even smaller proportion of perpetrators are convicted (Jovanovic n/d: 3), there remains a significant need to focus on treatment programmes for incarcerated individuals. Individuals convicted of IPV offences, which have led to an incarceration, often have committed either multiple crimes or a single high-risk offense, that incorporated e.g. severe harm to, or death of the victim(s). (ib.)

This translates into the need of professional intervention in the prison context (intramural) to ensure the safety of the free society both during and after imprisonment.

In 2023 the European Network for the Work With Perpetrators (EN WWP) published European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes, focussing on interventions in the free community. To discover the current state of intramural IPV programmes, this research was conducted.

This research report aims to provide a comprehensive outline of the research initiative in the context of International Social Work, mapping intramural programmes for perpetrators of IPV and defining practitioner’s challenges and needs occurring while facilitating such programmes. Firstly the current state of research on intramural programmes for IPV perpetrators will be examined. Followed by depicting the research question and objectives, as well as the methodology. Core of this report will be the presentation of major findings. It concludes with recommendations and an overall conclusion.

This research was carried out in partnership with the **European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services** (EuroPris) and the **European Network for the Work With Perpetrators** (EN WWP), whose resources made this fieldwork possible.

## 2. Current State of Research in the Context of Intramural Programmes for IPV Perpetrators

After highlighting the relevance of an evidence-based intervention in the field of IPV programmes in the prison context, the following chapter will outline the current state of research of these type of programmes in community and the specific framework conditions of the penal system in the subjects matter. As the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (The Istanbul Convention) states, a well-established framework is crucial to set up programmes that effectively prevent further violence against women. (Art 16 Nr.1) To ensure women's safety preventative interventions and treatment programmes shall be supported on a legal and policy foundation. (Council of Europe 2024: 14) To realise these objectives, a variety of recommendations and approaches were examined, mainly focussing on the reduction of recidivism of IPV perpetrators in the free society (e.g. Radatz et al. 2021). Although studies deliver mixed outcomes about the effectiveness of IPV programmes in general (McNeely 2019: 4), there is an indication that intramural programmes might have a higher efficacy, then programmes in the free society. (Ferrer-Perez & Bosch-Fiol 2018: 889) While the topic of effectiveness is still under scientific investigation, research has delivered a variety of recommendations providing comprehensive frameworks to improve IPV programmes. (Radatz et al. 2021: 615; Rodriguez-Menes 2023: 3; UN Women / UNFPA 2022: 85ff., European Network for the Work With Perpetrators 2023) Looking at the facilitation of IPV programmes within the prison context, these standards and recommendations need to be reviewed and modified corresponding to the specific characteristics of restrictive institutions and the prison population. Hence prisons face several challenges, such as unstable funding, higher obstacles to implement collaboration with external entities e.g. victim support services or dealing with heterogeneity of groups. (Jovanovic n/d 15f.) The latter not only interrelates with different ethnicities or demographic attributes within the prison population, but also with the disproportionately high occurrence of mental and physical illness or disorders, and the increased propensity of individuals of unprivileged socio-economic status. (Stöver 2016: 251; Rodriguez-Menes 2023: 2) This is particularly incisive for the target group of IPV perpetrators as they are specifically exposed to have high levels of criminogenic risks (i.e. modifiable causes for criminal behaviour, such as substance abuse, anti-social personality, poor relationships, homelessness etc.) in comparison to other offender groups. (Radatz et al. 2021: 613) To achieve long-term desistance from crime, these modifiable causes need to be addressed in the programmes, as well as patriarchal and misogynistic attitudes. Therefore the combination of IPV programmes with other psychosocial and psychological interventions are recommended. (Rodriguez-Menes 2023: 3)

### 3. Research Question and Objectives

The central research question is: **"What treatment programmes do European prisons offer for perpetrators of violence in intimate relationships, and what are the systemic challenges and needs in facilitating effective programmes?"** This question aims to determine what types of treatment programmes are implemented within prisons in European countries and to identify the challenges and needs of professionals in facilitating programmes in prisons, focussing on their interpretations and attitudes of efficiency. The findings provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of treatment programmes for incarcerated IPV perpetrators and deliver a foundation for developing tailored programme standards for this specific target group.

### 4. Methodology

To address the research objectives comprehensively, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. The study consists of two main components: 1. A quantitative questionnaire is used to determine whether and what types of treatment programmes for IPV offenders are implemented in European prisons. It includes five open-ended questions on: (1) the type of the programmes, (2) the proportion of IPV offenders within the prison population and of who went through such a programme (3) participants motivation, (4) eligibility criteria, and (5) other intramural treatment options available for this target group. The questionnaire will be distributed through the EuroPris Knowledge Management System (KMS), which is used by correctional services to share and coordinate institutional inquiries. The method ensures broad coverage, potentially reaching 41 jurisdictions in the Council of Europe area. Furthermore, given the specificity of the topic, the KMS system is suitable for ensuring highly qualified responses.

2. To complement the questionnaire, expert interviews were conducted to identify challenges and needs in implementing and facilitating these programmes within the prison context. In addition to the questionnaire topics, the interviews focus on professionals' subjective assessments, particularly regarding implementation barriers and operational difficulties. The aim is to determine what conditions and standards prison practitioners in charge of facilitating intramural treatment programmes consider necessary to deliver effective interventions. The sample was purposefully selected to reflect diversity in prison administration, geographic location, and professional roles within correctional institutions. This research component focuses on the lived experiences and professional perspectives of prison practitioners.

Expert interviews are particularly suitable for exploring such subjective insights, as they allow to capture both systemic and individual-level experiences. This approach acknowledges the importance of expert role knowledge in understanding institutional constraints and operational leeway (cf. Helfferich 2019: 681). Given the complexity of the topic, a questionnaire alone would be insufficient to address these nuanced issues. The two methods result in a mixed methods approach consisting of the quantitative questionnaire and the expert interviews. Methodological triangulation is necessary to answer the two research objectives. It enables a more complete and extended understanding of current prison practice with regard to the implementation of IPV programmes (complementarity) and at the same time creates broad coverage as well as thematic expansion of the research subject (expansion) (cf. Kuckartz 2014: 58). The interviews were transcribed by the software Turboscribe and all data has been coded and categorised using MAXQDA. The inductive coding as well as the analysing process draws upon Philipp Mayrings approach of the Qualitative Content Analysis (Mayring & Fenzl 2019).

## **5. Results**

### **5.1. Overview on Intramural Programmes for Perpetrators of IPV in Europe**

Building on the methodological foundation, this section presents the collected data and summarises cross-national variations.

Overall data from 13 jurisdictions of the Council of Europe area, namely Armenia, Belgium, Catalonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden were collected. The data evaluation revealed substantial variations in terms of the implementation of IPV-based programmes across custodial settings in Europe.

Of the 13 participating jurisdictions, eight reported the implementation of at least one specific programme for perpetrators of IPV or have programmes in which these offenders, among others as e.g. sex offenders, have been explicitly identified as a target group. Among these, three established up to four different IPV-specific treatment programmes within their prison service. In addition, one jurisdiction is currently in the process of developing a tailored intervention for IPV perpetrators, while four jurisdictions (Armenia, Belgium Latvia, Slovenia) do not have any intramural implementations planned.

Regarding the theoretical orientation, one jurisdiction reported an explicit reliance on the criminological Risk-Necessity-Responsivity approach as a guiding principle. The majority of other programmes follow psychotherapeutic models and approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, the Trauma-Informed Approach, or the Good Life Model in their work.

While most jurisdictions offer programmes in all closed prison regimes, one jurisdiction highlighted the implementation of IPV-based programmes in semi-open and open prison regimes as well. Alternative structural arrangements are delivered by Slovakia, where programmes are being offered in 5 out of 18 prisons, or Hungary, where all types of sexual offenders are accommodated within a specialised unit offering targeted interventions.

Regarding the programmes' settings, there is a notable variability in length and group sizes. Group-based interventions range from 5 – 12 participants per group. Finland, Sweden and Hungary exclusively offer individual interventions, while Hungary also is currently developing an additional group-based programme. Duration ranges from five-six sessions up to 52 sessions between 1-2 hours. Individual Programmes vary from 10-100 hours with average of 44,25 hours.

Participation in all jurisdictions is voluntary, yet closely linked to an Individual Sentence Plan which goes hand in hand with attaining sentencing and other benefits e.g. conditional release. Upon admission, professionals elaborate tailored plans based on individual risk and need assessments, though the specific focus of these evaluations varies across jurisdictions. When incarcerated individuals are following the sentence plan comply with institutional rules of discipline and order, they may become eligible for early release benefits. Aside of this extrinsic motivation, individuals often receive preparatory interventions, aimed at fostering participants' readiness to engage with IPV interventions. These preparatory stages are designed to address potential barriers to participation, including low motivation or psychological resistance. Some jurisdictions also mention intramural collaboration, describing efforts between treatment facilitators and e.g. prison officers to detect violent behaviour of prisoners when they are in touch with their families and intervene accordingly.

Eligibility criteria for participation in IPV programmes vary across countries, yet several common themes emerge. A confirmed conviction for an IPV-related offence is a universal requirement, forming the legal foundation for entry into such programmes. In one jurisdiction, eligibility is further restricted to men who were male at the time of the offence, while in another the length of the custodial sentence, for example exceeding two years, plays a role in determining suitability. It is also noteworthy to mention that psychological and cognitive requirements are highly emphasised. Mental stability is regarded as essential across all programmes, ensuring that participants are able to benefit from the intervention. In a similar way, sufficient intellectual capacity is often required to facilitate comprehension of programme material and constructive engagement with group processes. Motivation to participate and willingness to change are consistently highlighted as central eligibility factors. In some

countries, the admission of responsibility for IPV offences is explicitly required, signalling readiness to engage with rehabilitative work. In addition, sufficient language skills are consistently identified as a necessary condition, ensuring that participants can follow the programme and contribute meaningfully. Finally good behaviour in custody and the ability to function appropriately within group settings are often prerequisites for participation.

Taken together, these criteria reflect a balance between legal requirements, psychological stability, behavioural suitability, and practical considerations. While there is some variation across countries, most programmes prioritise mental stability, adequate cognitive ability, motivation, and language proficiency as fundamental conditions for participation.

## **5.2. Practitioners Challenges and Needs**

In order to reach the second objective of this research, prison practitioners were interviewed about their challenges and needs when facilitating intramural IPV programmes. In total, five expert interviews were conducted, complemented by an analysis of the qualitative data from the EuroPris Knowledge Management System (KMS) questionnaires, which also contained references to challenges and needs. Beyond the five countries represented in the interviews, additional insights were drawn from KMS responses in three further jurisdictions.

The following chapter provides an overview of these results. As some of the needs often respond to practitioners challenges, these two main categories cannot be strictly separated. Nonetheless a categorisation process based on the formulation of the interviewees was undertaken. Within the two overarching categories there were 15 different codes determined under “challenges” and 14 under “needs”. To provide a comprehensive overview, the following presentation of findings is organised according the four main topics of (1) Administration and Resources, (2) Prison Environment and Regime, (3) Programme-Specific Barriers and (4) Community and External Links.

### **5.2.1. Administration and Resources**

A recurring theme across several countries was the identified under the category “Lack of Staff” and “Other Priorities”, which professionals described as one of the most significant barriers to programme delivery. Too little personnel inevitably translates into high workload and not having sufficient time for the facilitation of the IPV programmes. Professionals report about legally binding priorities and other urgencies in their daily work life, which are causing limitations in their ability to prioritise IPV programmes.

Apart from their personal prioritisation of tasks, professionals also identify the a lack of respect from other levels of This lack of interprofessional respect often manifests in the inadequate protection of time reserved for group sessions, as one Hungarian practitioner illustrated:

*“Okay. For me, it would be nice if the group time would be strictly respected. So when I want to have a group, then other things don't bother it.”* (Interview Hungary, Pos. 160)

Three jurisdictions reporting staff shortages and time constraints also cited budgetary restrictions as a major obstacle, with reduced funding affecting both the facilitation of programmes and the availability of supervision or professional training. As a Finnish interviewee explained: *“And for the past nearly two years, our government's been cutting back very big time. And so it's also showing to us that we've been cutting even more now, like the prison and probation service. So here on the ground, we have less people”* (Interview Finland, Pos. 200). This again reflects in the lack of staffing resources, as mentioned above.

A further issue identified in multiple contexts was the “Lack of Trust in Administration”. Practitioners highlight their concerns about limited reliability of higher levels of management. Interviewees reported a practise that is characterised by empty promises and inadvertent follow-up measures after the implementation of the programme.

As a consequence, professionals feel the need of taking over this responsibility, as the following quote indicates: *“Here in the ground level, we have to find ways to make it work, find ways to pass on the information. I think a lot of the responsibility gets laid on the facilitators themselves”* (Interview Finland, 221-222)

To mitigate such issues, respondents from Finland and Slovakia emphasised the need for implementation plans and centralised supervision mechanisms to ensure consistency, accountability, and long-term effectiveness of IPV programmes: *“I wish that they were led like very, very strongly from somewhere that somebody or some group would have like a total understanding on the issues that need to be taken care of. And they would coordinate it and make sure that any changes or new things, they actually get implemented in prisons. Because I think we have a lot of this, that we have this, we get guidelines, we get like instructions, we get even like orders to do something. But then there's no follow up for those.”* (Interview Finland, Pos. 267-268).

*“We need to have a basically properly written programme, we need to train professionals for that, because people who are in charge sometimes want to do things, but they want to do it the quick way or the way that is easier for them.”* (Interview Slovakia, Pos. 90)

In order to lower the mistrust between front-line staff and administrative personnel, interviewees from Hungary also highlighted the need for increased appreciation towards professionals as an important factor.

### 5.2.2. Prison Environment and Regime

In such restrictive settings as in prisons, certain circumstances cannot be neglected when IPV programmes are being facilitated. This also reflects in the following chapter, which is spotlighting the specifics of the prison environment and regime.

Many of the mentioned challenges were linked to the “Prison Regime”. To mitigate such issues, respondents from Finland and Slovakia emphasised the need for implementation plans and centralised supervision mechanisms to ensure consistency, accountability, and long-term effectiveness of IPV programmes: *“(...) this is a prison, so first of all, it has to be secure all the time, everywhere. So if there is something, something happens in a prison, anything, or we're just thinking about that in each and every day, security is the first. So the first thing that they think about not to do is a group because it can be a risk.”* (Interview Hungary, Pos. 147). Strict security guidelines also limit usage of technologies, that would bring great value to IPV programmes.

Another disadvantage of the prison regime is that lacking engagement from prisoners can cause neglect. As stated in the first part of the research, every jurisdiction is operating through individual sentence plans, that are being developed at admission of every person. As a result of the poor staffing, prisoners, who fail to express interest in participating may easily be overlooked.

*“Yeah, but if the prisoner himself doesn't contact staff about their need or motivation to work on something, sometimes nobody picks up on them or picks up on them too late or something”* (Interview Finland, Pos. 163)

While participation is voluntary, it is often linked to extrinsic motivations such as eligibility for parole or conditional release. Some practitioners expressed concern that such incentives may compromise genuine engagement: *“(...) because sometimes perpetrators only go to the programme to actually get some advantages, for example, like being able to go on parole after a while or conditional release, (...)”* (Interview Slovakia, Pos. 48). Conversely, others such as practitioners in Malta described this as a starting point for intervention, whereby external motivation is used to initiate internal change.

As practitioners of different jurisdictions have recurrently stressed the need of preceding interventions, another challenge is disclosed here. Aside from motivational assessments, professionals are also asked to evaluate and analyse the readiness of each prisoner for an IPV programme. Different states of mental stability and intelligence, but also the high number of people struggling with addictions or suicidal tendencies within the prison population limit the ability to participate in complex programmes. Their needs must be addressed first to guarantee sufficient preparation.

*“But if the prisoner has a lot of different problems, their situation is very demanding, then we have to individually think that is this like a suitable me for PREDOF or should he first like stabilize himself with psychiatric help or something like that.”* (Interview Finland, Pos. 80)

A further institutional constraint involves sentence length. Short custodial sentences frequently preclude participation in longer-term programmes: *“Let’s say, the violence that’s exerted, it’s convicted with, let’s say, less than two years. That’s a problem, because, you know, by the time they, once they enter, once we get to know them, they cannot participate, because they don’t stay in prison enough time, (...)”* (Interview Spain, Pos. 73).

A responding need mentioned is the implementation of individualised and/or timely flexible programme scopes that can be adapted to the perpetrators sentence duration and needs.

*“(...) like a freestyle, like individual work where we don’t go like according to a specific programme, but like more like a tailor-made, tailored individual work with people who maybe don’t have enough time to go through (the IPV Programme).”* (Interview Finland, Pos. 56).

Both, the variety of mental preparedness and motivational states of participants, as well as sentence duration as a limiting factor are causing very complex group settings. This was mentioned by the interviewees as a barrier in their daily work. As a Maltese practitioner states: *“So that is I think the largest the biggest challenge. I would say that different level of preparedness in order to organise a group so you have to have the timelines and the level of preparedness being too much.”* (Interview Malta, Pos. 113).

Given these complexities, practitioners emphasised the importance of specialised training and supervision for all staff involved in prisoner rehabilitation. Such training not only enhances facilitators’ competence but also promotes a more collaborative and interdisciplinary culture within prisons. As interviewees from Slovakia and Finland observed, better-informed staff are less likely to undermine the progress achieved in therapeutic interventions: *“The problem is that when we are working on somebody’s attitudes towards women and towards violence, and then we try to make some progress with such a person, but the other professional (prison officers) and other person would somehow, not damage the progress, but somehow minimize.”* (Interview Slovakia, Pos. 120)

*“And I think we should have a lot more training for all of our staff members about IPV and how to bring it up with prisoners, how to spot the like warning signs, like for guards or especially specifically because they are the ones who can see the prisoners in everyday life. They should be very well trained in the theme.”* (Interview Finland, Pos. 233)

Finally, practitioners expressed a strong desire for enhanced professional networks within their jurisdictions. Opportunities for knowledge exchange between institutions operating under similar legal frameworks were considered highly beneficial for developing shared practice standards: *“Yeah, so it would be great to meet with the same positions that we are, so we have a common ground to build on it. Otherwise, it’s hard because we talk about the basic key points, we try to agree on them and we don’t go nowhere with that. So, we can’t talk about the specifics.”* (Interview Hungary, Pos. 181-182)

### **5.2.3. IPV Programme-Specific Barriers**

After the complexity of the specifics of intramural work was depicted, the following section focuses on challenges and needs of practitioners that are closely related to the subject of IPV perpetrators and programmes.

Firstly one of the most prominent challenges mentioned are related to eligibility criteria for participation. While practitioners would like to target as many perpetrators as possible, mental instabilities, addictions and a lack of motivation is limiting participation. Many emphasised the value of low-threshold access combined with preparatory support to enhance readiness. As one Maltese facilitator explained: *“For instance, another adaptation that we had made specifically to a correctional facility, which I believe was initially a criteria, was that the female victim of IPV was required to be alive originally”* (Interview Malta, Pos. 62)

This criterion, however, limited participation among unsentenced but known perpetrators: *“Now that posed a little bit of a challenge, a big challenge for us to find participants because to find, we have a lot of persons in prison who are known perpetrators of domestic violence with an extensive history, be it current offenses, charges, or past, but are awaiting trial. So they would have charges maybe, or not have charges, but not be sentenced or convicted on them.”* (Interview Malta, Pos. 43)

Language barriers also emerged as a recurring challenge, particularly in multicultural prison populations. While translators were occasionally employed, practitioners noted that translation costs were not always covered.

Lastly three levels of “lack of assessment” could be identified. Firstly, some jurisdictions are not obliged to assess IPV in the initial evaluation and development of the sentence plan. To implement this as a standard, is one of the responding needs. Secondly, there is limited capacity to evaluate programme outcomes, making it difficult to advocate for continued funding. Thirdly, the absence of reliable community-level data on IPV offences impedes the ability to measure recidivism or broader societal impact.

Practitioners highlight that the estimated number of unreported IPV cases is still very high and perpetrators should be exposed much earlier to prevent the necessity of incarceration and to intervene at an early stage in order to provide a safe community.

#### **5.2.4. Community and External Links**

Intramural work underlies a variety of restrictive measures. The last main topic brings together barriers and bridges between prison and the society that affect the facilitation of IPV programmes.

One limiting factor elaborated was a lack in connection with the free community. Especially after release, practitioners report about low opportunities to stay in touch with offenders.

*"So, when someone is released from prison, we cannot make a connection with him or her, you know. So, we don't have too much possibility to look after the person who is released from prison."* (Interview Hungary, Pos. 188)

Building connections with professionals in charge e.g. from probation services or NGO's that could follow-up on the work during incarceration was considered helpful, but at the same time very time consuming.

*"So, it (collaboration with external entities) would be useful, but we need more space, more time to deal with this aspect."* (Interview Hungary, Pos. 196)

To exchange knowledge and best practices professionals have wished for not only improved collaboration within their prison service but also on an international level.

*"Well, it would be great if different nations could work together and we could see other nationalities' groups and programs and manuals and we could share our experiences in these different countries and different settings and we could talk about those and improve ours as well."* (Interview Hungary, Pos. 174)

An overarching challenge in the penitentiary field is not only harm reduction and providing a safe community, but also to protect offenders from societal stigma. Perpetrators of IPV are facing not only unreflected prejudices from society, but also from other offender groups and even from prison professionals.

Prisons often are seen as institutions of punishment where people belong because they have committed certain crimes. Prisons are frequently perceived primarily as punitive institutions, rather than as spaces for rehabilitation and social reintegration. This negative connotation of punishment and depriving people's liberty because they deserve it was seen to be a challenging factor working with perpetrators. Practitioners mention their dependency on the societal perception on offenders and support programmes. As one Hungarian practitioner explained:

*“There’s not a huge motivation to care for them (prisoners) as well, if you know what I mean. And the care system outside of prison has impact as well. So if you cannot get help in the society, it’s very hard to validate that you can get help in the prison.”* (Interview Hungary, Pos. 210-212)

Respondents highlighted that stigma within the prison population can cause disruptive behaviour and aggressions between prisoners, which then is effecting the overall prison security.

Taken together, these findings illuminate the multifaceted challenges faced by practitioners delivering IPV treatment in prison contexts. Resource constraints, rigid institutional structures, and societal stigma interact to shape the daily realities of rehabilitation work. Yet, despite these obstacles, practitioners’ reflections reveal a strong professional commitment to fostering transformative change and advancing the rehabilitative mission of correctional systems.

### **5.3. Best Practices**

To conclude the presentation of results, the following chapter is dedicated to give room for good examples and best practises of overcoming the specific challenges that come along with the specifics of facilitating programmes for incarcerated perpetrators of IPV. It is important to mention, that best practices were not specifically inquired during data collection. It is likely that further exemplary practices exist within the participating jurisdictions; however, the instances presented here were identified by practitioners themselves as particularly valuable in overcoming structural and operational barriers.

In general the majority of jurisdictions provide additional programmes which target IPV perpetrators and/or enhance victim’s safety, such as sex and gender education, emotional management, communication and interpersonal skill training, community life preparation, motivational programmes, personal development, aggression reduction, anger management and conflict management programmes, parenting courses and interventions to develop prosocial cognitive, emotional and behavioural skills.

In Sweden and Hungary there can be found prisons with special units targeting people convicted for IPV or sexual crimes.

Another outstanding approach was reported from Catalonia, where IPV programmes are supported with Immersive Virtual Reality devices to increase empathy and personal responsibility.

Facing the challenge of lacking national collaboration, the Finnish example offers a compelling example of effective systemic organisation. The Finnish prison service has built a nationwide network of certified trainers, who are eligible to facilitate IPV specific programmes. Although practitioners have wished for improved communication and collaboration between the prisons, they also highlighted the relevance of having sufficient professionals with such a qualification. Being able to provide training to practitioners all over Finland, was perceived to be a great benefit.

Apart from IPV-specific programmes Finnish practitioners also reported to work on the national collaboration by participating in national meetings organised by the prison service to interact and work together with professionals from other prisons. A similar approach was also mentioned from a practitioner from Spain, who viewed such interprofessional and interinstitutional collaboration as essential for building cohesive practitioner networks and promoting innovation.

To overcome the challenge of inactive people becoming overlooked in the prison system and targeting perpetrators with short sentences, practitioners from Malta report to have great success with the implementation of an Offender Management System. This digital tool facilitates the systematic collection and coordination of information on inmates' needs, ensuring that services are provided in a timely and structured manner.

While being the jurisdiction with longest-standing experience with the facilitation of IPV programmes, Spain underscored the necessity continuous adaptation of the programme standards in accordance to modern scientific evidence and social phenomenon. Additional short-term interventions were developed to address the problem of prisoners having short sentences.

Moreover, both Spain and Slovakia reported strong collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that continue to work with IPV perpetrators following their release. Such partnerships enhance the continuity between intramural interventions and post-release support, thereby contributing to long-term desistance from violence and promoting safer community reintegration

## **6. Recommendations**

The findings presented in the preceding chapters reveal high heterogeneity in the implementation, accessibility, and conceptual foundations of IPV-focused interventions across European custodial settings. While the diversity of approaches reflects the adaptability of national prison systems to local conditions, it also exposes critical gaps in consistency, sustainability, and evidence-based practice. The following recommendations are formulated to enhance the effectiveness as well as long-term impact of IPV rehabilitation efforts in prisons across the Council of Europe region.

### **6.1. Strengthening Structural and Administrative Support**

A recurrent theme emerging from practitioners' perspectives concerns the lack of resources, limited staff availability, and inconsistent administrative backing. It is recommended that prison administrations and ministries of justice adopt a strategic implementation framework that safeguards the continuity of IPV programmes through dedicated funding, staffing, and supervision.

Establishing centralised coordination units within national prison services could ensure that programme standards, training materials, and evaluation procedures are consistently applied across facilities. This would also foster accountability and enable systematic follow-up on newly introduced practices.

In addition, transparent communication channels between frontline staff and higher management levels are essential. Mechanisms for bottom-up feedback should be institutionalised to ensure that programme facilitators' insights inform policy and procedural adjustments. Recognition of facilitators' professional expertise and consistent protection of allocated programme time are relevant to maintain motivation and trust among practitioners.

### **6.2. Enhancing Programme Accessibility and Flexibility**

Given the variation in sentence lengths and mental health profiles among incarcerated IPV perpetrators, programme adaptability must be prioritised. Prison services should promote flexible models, allowing for modular interventions that can be adjusted according to sentence duration and individual readiness.

To address the widespread issue of low engagement and motivational barriers, preparatory and motivational modules should be formally integrated into sentence planning. These modules should address offenders' ambivalence, denial, or resistance and prepare them for participation in more intensive therapeutic work.

Additionally, low-threshold entry mechanisms that allow the inclusion of individuals awaiting trial or serving short sentences could contribute to early intervention.

### **6.3. Promoting Professional Training and Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

Continuous and high-quality professional training is a prerequisite for the delivery of effective IPV interventions. National prison administrations should ensure that facilitators and general prison staff receive training not only in IPV dynamics and trauma-informed practice but also in gender-sensitive communication and risk assessment.

Such training should be mandatory for all staff involved in offender management, including prison officers, psychologists, and social workers. The development of interdisciplinary collaboration frameworks linking treatment teams, case managers, and custodial personnel can further ensure that therapeutic goals are not undermined by institutional inconsistencies. At the same time, international exchange platforms among European jurisdictions should be strengthened. Regular knowledge-sharing events, workshops, and study visits could help disseminate best practices and foster a shared understanding of effective intervention methodologies.

### **6.4. Integrating Evaluation and Evidence-Based Practice**

Systematic evaluation remains underdeveloped in most jurisdictions. It is therefore recommended that all IPV-related interventions include built-in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms based on clearly defined outcome indicators.

Partnerships with academic institutions could facilitate the development of research-informed evaluation tools, which are essential for validating programme efficacy and guiding future reforms. Furthermore, harmonised data collection standards across the Council of Europe region would enable comparative analyses and cross-national learning.

### **6.5. Strengthening Continuity of Care and Community Integration**

A key challenge identified by practitioners concerns the disruption between intramural and post-release support. To prevent relapse and enhance reintegration, continuity of care frameworks should be prioritised. Establishing operational links with probation services, NGOs, and community-based counselling organisations can ensure that offenders continue to receive therapeutic and social support after release.

Developing secure data-sharing systems can facilitate a seamless transition between custody and community supervision. Finally, public awareness campaigns and professional training initiatives should aim to reduce the stigma surrounding IPV offenders' rehabilitation, promoting a more constructive, reintegrative approach to correctional work.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of IPV perpetrator programmes within European custodial settings demonstrates both innovation and persistent structural limitations. While several jurisdictions have made substantial progress in institutionalising therapeutic interventions grounded in psychological and criminological theory, others remain at the developmental or conceptual stage.

The study underscores that effective IPV intervention within prisons requires more than programme availability. It necessitates a comprehensive, multi-level commitment encompassing adequate resources, institutional support, staff training, and post-release continuity. The challenges ranging from administrative constraints and insufficient staffing to motivational barriers and inadequate evaluation highlight the need for systemic solutions rather than isolated programme-level adjustments.

Importantly, the research reveals that practitioners across Europe share a deep professional dedication to fostering change among IPV offenders despite often adverse working conditions. Their insights underline that behavioural transformation can only occur within a supportive institutional culture, where rehabilitation is prioritised and acknowledged.

Looking forward, the harmonisation of standards, the enhancement of evidence-based practice, and the establishment of sustainable inter-institutional networks will be crucial for advancing IPV rehabilitation across European custodial systems. Investing in structured collaboration both nationally and internationally will not only enhance the effectiveness of prison-based interventions but also contribute to greater public safety and gender equality in the long term.

To sum up, this research illustrates that the treatment of IPV perpetrators within custodial settings is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge due to the complexity of offender profiles, institutional limitations, and societal stigma. Yet it also represents a significant opportunity to intervene at a pivotal point in the life course of offenders, transforming punitive confinement into a rehabilitative process that fosters accountability, empathy, and non-violence. By implementing such interventions within coherent policy frameworks, European prison systems can move closer to the overarching goal of rehabilitation: reducing reoffending and promoting safer, more just communities.

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