



# **INVOLVEMENT OF COMPANIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

**(National study for Bulgaria)**

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# Presentation of the “CARVE” project

"Companies Against Gender Violence (CARVE)" project (2014-2016), funded by the DAPHNE III programme under the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice is the first European project, addressing violence against women, outside the workplace.

Despite the significant consequences of gender-based violence on the professional life of both victims and offenders, companies still lack resources to deal with this issue. CARVE project aims to investigate it and to establish a global vision of the European state of play, create an European Guide of Good Practices and raise awareness on gender-based violence through an European comprehensive campaign, led by companies.

The first step of the CARVE project is to create a map of stakeholders in the economic, political and institutional spheres and in civil society, to identify transferable best practices in place in five European countries - Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Greece and Spain.

The national studies, held in the project partners' countries are conducted on the basis of a common research methodology, including literature/document qualitative reviews and national Interview Programs. The documentary overviews are of the recent 2005 onwards legislative and policy developments, contributing for the involvement of companies in response to GBV outside the work place at national and at local level. The national Interview Programs are designed to fill in the informational gaps, because of lack of publically available information, and/or to clarify and validate information, provided by the interviewed stakeholders.

The national Interview Programs are based on semi structured interviews with different stakeholders:

- Managers /owners of companies/entrepreneurs;
- Human resources' staff;
- Social partners;
- NGOs/advocacy leaders;
- Institutions: gender equality bodies, national institutions, in charge of prevention and/or protection against GBV;
- University experts, researchers;
- Medical services, social services as for example social assistants and or psychologists, operating in companies;
- Business associations/companies associations.

# Executive Summary

The CARVE project is very innovative as a perspective for discussions on the ways and approaches for involvement of business in Bulgaria in the fight against gender-based violence.

The process of selection and involvement of companies in the national Interview Program and the interviews themselves, held in the period February-May 2015 in Bulgaria, showed that the topic of involvement of companies in fight against gender - based violence, outside the workplace is still a new one for the country. Gender-based violence is still broadly considered to be a private problem or a problem of the families, not a problem of the whole society. Therefore, the workplace is rarely considered to be the right place, where the problematic should be discussed openly, eventhough most often, when cases of gender-based violence were detected, the workplace was the only place, where victims could receive any support and help.

National and international awareness raising campaigns on prevention of gender-based violence are not well-known to the business sector in the country and the topic is not recognised as an issue, part of the corporate social responsibility. The social audits also do not cover the subject and the interviews showed that business involves most often in other social causes, as for example in charity initiatives and in gathering donations for children in need, in initiatives against violence against children, and in providing financial help for people, who need expensive medical treatment and cannot afford it, which are much more recognisable social problems and attract more easily the business' attention in Bulgaria.

However, cases of violence against women were detected directly or indirectly in many of the interviewed companies (especially in the small-sized ones, which are predominant in Bulgaria), and they were fully involved in assisting and protecting their women employees.

Companies still need to learn how they can be useful and helpful in such situations, especially in towns, where there are no NGOs, working on VAW or shelters/crisis centers for victims of VAW nearby and professional help is not available, which is the most typical situation all over the country. Most of the interviewed companies expressed a need of help from psychologists, lawyers and NGOs, working on prevention, protection and resocialization of victims and perpetrators. However the professional help is scarce in Bulgaria and concentrated predominantly in the NGO sector and is still not enough for the size of the country.

In addition to the need of a direct professional help, provided by specialists, some companies expressed also a need of guidelines, containing practical steps, tailored to the size of the companies and to the region of the country, where they operate in. Others preferred to have access to compendiums of good national and European practices, to learn from other business' experiences. There were also companies that expressed willingness to involve in campaigns against gender-based violence, led by or organized in partnership with the NGOs.

The most important factor for the effective interventions of companies in cases of gender-based violence, mentioned in the interviews, was the business culture on the work place, which insures compassion and confidentiality. Almost all of the interviewed representatives of the business confirmed that sharing of personal problems, depends very much on the atmosphere on the workplace, the hierarchy and also on the personality and sex of the staff members and/or management representatives, who are in charged for the personnel. Most often, personal problems of women are more easily shared to women.

## **Overview of the national state of play**

Gender-based violence and violence against women are terms that internationally are often used interchangeably as most gender-based violence is inflicted by men on women. For the purpose of the present national report and in compliance with the common methodology of the CARVE project, we will use the term violence against women (VAW).

### **National legislation on the forms of violence against women**

Bulgarian legislation does not provide for a legal definition of VAW, neither for a definition of gender-based violence (GBV) in general. Definitions on some of the forms of VAW: domestic violence/intimate partner violence, rape, debauchery, sexual assault, sexual harassment and trafficking of human beings are regulated by different laws.

The definition of *domestic violence* which includes intimate partner violence is given by *the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence /LPADV/* of March 2005 (amended in 2009, 2010 and 2015), which defines domestic violence and provides for measures for protection against it, as well as measures for help and support for the victims. The definition is broader, than just intimate partner abuse and it comprises currently any act of physical, mental or sexual violence, emotional or economic violence and any attempted such violence, as well as the forcible restriction of individual freedom and rights and of private life, carried out against individuals, who have kinship ties, who have or have had family relation or are or were cohabiting partners. In addition any act of domestic violence in presence of a child is considered mental and emotional violence against him/her. In 2009 the Penal Code was amended and the protection order under the LPDVA has been strengthened with an amendment of the Penal Code (Article 296, Paragraph 1), introducing punishment for non-compliance with a protection order against domestic violence, issued by the court under the LPADV. Punishment is imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to BGN 5,000.

*Debauchery and rape* are defined by Articles 150 and 152 of *the Penal Code* of April 1968 (last amended in September 2015). Articles 153 and 155 also criminalise the *forced involvement in acts of prostitution of others*, as well as *sexual assault* (forced sexual acts through the use of the official or material dependency of the person). Sentences for debauchery range from two to eight years and three to ten years, when the victim is not able to understand what is happening. The sentences for rape are from three to ten years imprisonment or three to fifteen years in the case of serious injury, and ten to twenty years, when the victim is a minor. There are no specific provisions in the Penal Code, criminalising the *marital rape*.

*The Law on Protection against Discrimination* of January 2004, as amended in August 2012 in Supplementary provisions paragraph 1, item. 2 defines *sexual harassment* as any unwanted conduct of sexual nature expressed physically, verbally or in another way offending the dignity and honour and creating a hostile, offensive, humiliating or impending environment and, in particular, where the refusal or compulsion to accept such conduct may have influence in making decisions affecting the person. The law explicitly recognises sexual harassment as a form of discrimination.

*Stalking* is not regulated by the Bulgarian national law. The Bulgarian legislation regulates instead the *harassment*, which is any unwanted conduct on the discrimination grounds including sex, expressed in a physical, verbal or any other manner, which has the purpose or effect of violating the person's dignity or creating a hostile, degrading, humiliating or intimidating environment, attitude or practice.

The Penal Code criminalises the *human trafficking* under offences against the person under section IX in Chapter II. *The Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Act* (CTHBA) from May 2003 and introduces measures for the prevention and protection of the victims of human trafficking.

Bulgarian legislation do not provide for special measures that encourage private companies to involve in prevention, protection and reintegration of victims of VAW outside the workplace.

Law on Protection Against Discrimination (Art.17) provides for protection measures *for sexual harassment on the workplace* - and regulates, that an employer who has received a complaint from an employee or a worker who believes that he/she is subject to harassment, including sexual harassment, in the workplace, shall be obliged to immediately hold an inquiry, take measures to stop the harassment, as well as to hold disciplinarily liable another factory or office worker if he/she caused the harassment.

In addition to the legal definitions it is worth mentioning the phenomenon of "honour related violence" in Bulgaria. It has been brought to light thanks to the study on the subject prepared by the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation within the framework of the European project "*Prevention of violence against women and girls in patriarchal families*"<sup>1</sup>. The authors of the report on Bulgaria have identified the most spread forms of such violence which are: *marital sexual violence, seclusion, arranged and forced marriage and bride sell*.<sup>2</sup>

## **Shelters and women centers**

There are only six women's shelters in Bulgaria with maximum 60 shelter places available. The shelters are run predominantly by the NGOs and are in Sofia, Varna, Burgas, Plevna, Silistra and Pernik. The shelters are specialized in accommodating survivors of domestic violence. Based on the Council of Europe Taskforce

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<sup>1</sup> European Resource Book, developed under the project, available online at:

<http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/hrvresourcebook.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Awareness raising activities to fight violence against women and girls United Kingdom, 7-8 February 2012, Comments paper - Bulgaria, Maria Prohaska Center for Economic Development, available online at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange\\_of\\_good\\_practice\\_uk/bg\\_comments\\_paper\\_uk\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/exchange_of_good_practice_uk/bg_comments_paper_uk_2012_en.pdf)

Recommendations, approximately 759 shelter places are still needed in Bulgaria. Thus, an estimated 699 shelter places are still missing. As a result, in Bulgaria a great number of victims of VAW has no access to any other crisis help, than help form families, friends and workplace.

There are no women's centers for survivors of sexual violence in Bulgaria. Based on the Council of Europe Taskforce Recommendations, approximately 20 women's rape crisis centers are needed in Bulgaria.<sup>3</sup>

## Prevalence of violence against women in Bulgaria

The official state statistics on violence against women (VAW) are difficult to obtain, because they are not collected for all of the forms of VAW and not for the purpose of a national overall policy on combating VAW, but rather for the purposes of monitoring of the policy on combating criminality and with exception of the statistics on convicted and sentenced persons for rape, debauchery and sexual assault are not publically available.

Non-administrative data sources (NGOs, crisis centres, help-lines etc.) collect their own statistics, for example on the numbers of services, provided to victims of VAW, mainly for victims of domestic violence. Between January 2009 and September 2011, the members of the *Alliance for Protection against Gender-Based Violence*, announced that its members have provided social services to 14,204 victims of domestic violence<sup>4</sup>. According to the Alliance, 1500 services were provided to victims of domestic violence only for the first half of 2015<sup>5</sup>.

There is only one recent sociological study in the country on "Sexual violence against women in Bulgaria", carried out by the Alpha Research Agency in 2010, which studies the opinion on seriousness of the problem and experience of sexual violence in lifetime. The research, published in 2012, shows that between 100,000 and 250,000 Bulgarian women (11%) were sexually abused. In 80% of the cases, the assailant is an acquaintance of the victim. According to the study, victims of sexual violence in Bulgaria remain silent, because in 76 % of the cases the assailant was known to the victim and in just 5 % of the cases the perpetrator was convicted.

According to the recent Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey on violence against women in EU<sup>6</sup> in Bulgaria 28 % of the women respondents, declared that they have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner and or a non-partner since the age of 15 and 39% of them, declared that they have experienced any form of psychological violence by a partner since the age of 15. On the question „In general, how common do you think that violence against women is in your country? “ 22 % of the women respondents replied that it is very common and 38% - fairly common.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Substantive Equality and Non-discrimination in Bulgaria, Shadow report submitted to the CEDAW Committee for the 52nd, Session in July 2012, presented by the Gender Alternatives Foundation in June 2012, par. 135, page 25, available at:

[http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/GAFfor\\_the\\_session\\_Bulgaria\\_CEDAW52.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/GAFfor_the_session_Bulgaria_CEDAW52.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Albena Koycheva, Alliance for Protection against GBV, 10.8.2015, TV7, Good Morning Bulgaria

<sup>6</sup> Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, Fundamental Rights Agency, March 2014, Available on line at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/vaw-survey-results>

It is worth to compare these findings with the results of the 2010 Special Eurobarometer survey on domestic violence against women, which interviewed a representative sample of women and men in 27 EU Member States and found that only 6 % of male and female respondents in Bulgaria have heard about domestic violence through colleagues or other contacts at their workplace. The above can be explained with the fact that people in Bulgaria hear considerably less from colleagues about domestic violence, but they hear more from friends and it is an indication that the matter is considered to be private in relation to the workplace. In this regard, it could be suggested that in Bulgaria, the subject of violence against women could be considered as something you do not talk about in certain settings and with certain people, which we have also the intention to check in 2015 during our national Interview Program.

## **Particular policies on prevention, protection and reintegration of women victims of violence**

Specific overall national governmental policy on combating all forms of violence against women is still in process of development.

Responsibilities of institutions on prevention, protection and development of programs for help for the victims only for two of the forms of VAW - domestic/intimate partner violence and trafficking of women are regulated by the LPADV and the CTHBA.

Under the LPADV, since 2009 every year the Council of Ministers shall adopt a *National Programme for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence*. Measures included in the program are proposed by different ministries, including the Interior, Justice, Labour and Social Policy, Protection of Children, Health, Social Aid, Education and others, but the National Programmes have never involved private companies.

The CTHBA regulates co-operation and co-ordination between the bodies of state and the municipalities, as well as between them and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with a view to preventing and defying trafficking in human beings, and developing the national policy in that area, but also do not involve private companies.

## **Sponsorship and philanthropic involvement of companies and NGOs in response of violence against women**

The desk research and the Interview Program identified some examples of small projects, sporadic donations, and examples for practical help for resocialization of victims of VAW, initiated by the business sector:

- *The charity campaign "Choose to Help"* of Raiffeisen Bank Bulgaria, financed in 2009, 2011 and in 2013 three projects (at the amount of between 1 900 and 4 200 EUR per project) of two NGOs, working on prevention, protection and reintegration of victims of VAW. One of the projects was on partial repairs in the crisis center for women, victims of VAW in Sofia, and the others two on prevention of violence among young people and rehabilitation programme for victims, accommodated in the crisis center in Pernik<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Information about the financed projects under section Social projects is available at the website of the Raiffeisen bank campaign for the respective 2009, 2011 and 2013 years at: <http://izberi.rbb.bg/>



- *The H&M fashion company* in Bulgaria also donated a small amount in 2015 for the crisis center for women, victims of VAW in Sofia<sup>8</sup>.
- Only in one of the interviewed companies, was identified a training, internally initiated to tackle gender based communication problems, but only on the workplace. Gender based violence, outside the workplace was not still discussed there. However, there is an interest to the training and most probably it will be organized again and may be it will include the topic if participants express interest.
- Two main retailer store chains in Bulgaria - *Billa and Piccadilly*, were mentioned<sup>9</sup> as companies, which offer jobs for women, victims of violence, because they have been sensitized and convinced by the NGO sector. The NGOs normally guarantee that they will be a mediator in that process and will provide psychological support to the women, victims applying for the jobs.

The desk research also showed that since 2005 there were two initiatives for collaboration between the NGO and the business sector on prevention and protection against trafficking of human beings as follows:

- In 2005 an *Ethical code on prevention of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children (girls and boys) in tourism* was elaborated within the project "Cooperation of public and private sector for prevention of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in tourism", financed by the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Austrian Development Cooperation Programm*. The aim of the Ethical code was to introduce new approach in fighting trafficking of girls and boys in Bulgaria and motivate the private sector and especially the touristic business to undertake measures for prevention of sexual exploitation of children by Bulgarian and foreign tourists<sup>10</sup>.
- *NGOs&Co* is a project for NGO - business engagements in addressing human trafficking, financed by *Prevention of and Fight Against Crime Programme of the European Union*, implemented in 2014-2015 by the Animus Association in Bulgaria in partnership with La Strada International. It aimed at addressing the issue of (employers' and consumers') demand and supply for products and services that involve the use of forced and trafficked labour. In order to achieve this aim, the project objective is to strengthen the cooperation between grassroots organisations and the business sector in effectively preventing and addressing the human trafficking<sup>11</sup>.

Women business associations, interviewed, also confirmed that they also have had some, even rare initiatives on the topic - mainly few internal discussion forums and roundtables.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Animus Association, Sofia, held in March 2015 under the Interview Program

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Information available on the State Agency on Child Protection website:

[http://www.stopech.sacp.government.bg/?sid=professional\\_bg&pid=75-0000000076](http://www.stopech.sacp.government.bg/?sid=professional_bg&pid=75-0000000076)

<sup>11</sup> Information, available at Animus Association website at: <http://www.animusassociation.org/?p=2252>

# Interview Program

## Identification and involvement of companies in the Interview Program

The Interview Program was held in Bulgaria in the period February – May 2015.

Interviewees were identified on the basis of a preliminary desk research (of national legislation and policies, the national and European studies, the internal rules of companies and media for the period 2005-2014) and by recommendation of the interviewed representatives of the companies and NGOs, working on VAW, the women business associations and the gender equality experts in the state administration who CWSP works in cooperation with.

CWSP sent to all interviewees letter, informing about the Daphne III programme, the CARVE project aims and the methodology of the study (semi structured interviews, giving open space for additional comments and information). Phone calls following the correspondence were held to explain the Interview Program in details and the purpose of the study. During the interview process, the CWSP's researchers informed the interviewees, that the results of the study will be announced and discussed on a national workshop in Sofia in autumn of 2015 and all recommendations would be taken into account to enrich the content of the report. The National workshop in Bulgaria was held in the EU Parliament Information Office in Bulgaria (House of Europe), on the 16th of September 2015.

The reactions of the companies in reply of the CWSP's correspondence were diverse. Some of the contacted companies, were reluctant to participate, because were not sure how business might be concerned to the topic. Some of them declared that they will not participate, because they have no employees, victims of VAW and that discussion is not relevant to them. Others, were very promising, but postponed the interviews, because they needed more time and information to prepare for the interviews. Most of the arrangements were made after additional explanations and motivation by the CWSP's researchers. Most often the companies were won to participate in the interviews with the argument that the Interview Program was designed by the research team also to contribute for the awareness raising on the social and economic cost of VAW and to clarify some of the reasons why the business is concerned, therefore the interviews will be a possibility for the companies to learn about experiences from other companies and countries. However, there were also some companies that agreed easily to participate and to share their experience and lessons learned. Among them were those that are *branches of global offices*, implementing gender equality at work policies and measures on women career development and on reconciliation of work and family life and some *small companies*, which have identified already cases of victims of VAW among their personnel.

The interviews started from the large sized companies, because we expected, that those companies which implement some gender equality policies, might have more awareness and understanding on the topic of involvement of business in fight against

VAW. Although our expectations were not fully met for reasons, we will explain further in the report, the positive outcome for the research was that the interviewed people in large sized companies recommended other colleagues in other companies and gave us valuable information and contacts for some possible stakeholders to be interviewed as for example the representative of employers' associations.

CWSP made twenty one interviews in total in eleven companies, four NGOs (three NGOs, working on VAW and one NGO, working on gender and economic development), two trade unions, two women business associations and two employer's associations.

The companies were chosen in the production and the services' business sectors: six in production sector (IT, engineering and manufacturing in health and energy industry, tailoring and production of seedlings) and five in service sector (cosmetics, private education, telecommunications, confectionery, financial and insurance services, professional cleaning, and textile industry).

Interviews were held in four large sized companies, branches of international/global offices, three medium sized companies, and four small sized, nationally founded companies. Fourteen interviews were held in Sofia and seven in other towns in the country - Varna, Veliko Tarnovo, Pleven, Silistra, Etropole and Pravets. Only one interviewee was a man (representative of a trade union) and twenty were women, because most often in Bulgaria, the human resource managers and other managers, in charge of the personnel and also leaders and employees in NGOs, dealing with VAW and gender equality were found to be predominantly women.

CWSP arranged meetings with general managers/executive directors/owners (mainly of small sized companies) and human resource managers or other staff members (in medium and in large sized companies). For example in three of the companies the meetings were held with production managers, because they have had specific role and relationships with the staff. Production managers are normally involved in the everyday production process and often initiate one to one meetings with people from the staff or have regular personal talks with them in order to build closer relationship. One of the production managers in a big size company shared that she also represents the staff in the European structure of the company and is an initiator and a member of a self organized women's group within the company, which was the reason to contact her.

Interviews begun with a general question about what is the understanding of the interviewed on the term gender-based violence. The purpose was, to discover to what extent the interviewees from the business sector are aware about its forms. Most of the interviewees were aware that violence against women could be not only physical, but also psychological and gave many examples for both forms. One of the interviewee mentioned also the emotional form and no one the economic form, which is a signal that latter two forms are less recognisable and less discussed. One interviewee identified several possible forms of VAW that might happen to a woman during a working day, starting with a violence on the workplace by her colleagues and by clients and on her way back to home - robbery, assault, and finally she identified many examples of psychological and physical violence at home. She spoke about vulnerability of women to many forms of VAW in her lives and confirmed that violence is widespread and tolerated in Bulgarian society and in families. Four interviewees identified the sexual

violence as a form of VAW, but not mentioned examples they know about. One interviewee identified as a psychological violence in family not allowing women to develop professionally - restrict them to take decision making positions or participating in professional trainings, conferences and events, organized after their working time, which their husbands do not approve, because they think their spouses do not need to or will embarrass the cares for the family.

The answers on the first question gave us information about interviewees' ideas what is considered by them to be a gender-based violence and why. Our impression is that interviewees understand well the gender nature of the physical and the psychological violence, but few of them have ever heard about the emotional and economic form and few dared to discuss the sexual violence outside the work place.

## National legislation and companies' involvement

Bulgarian national legislation does not provide for any special legal provisions, concerning involvement of the companies in the fight against VAW. The internal rules and ethical codes of all interviewed companies neither incorporate the topic.

Most of the interviewees shared the opinion, that the business in Bulgaria is still not ready for binding legislation that will create some obligations in the field of prevention, protection and reintegration of victims and perpetrators of VAW, because business is not willing to be imposed policies and legislation from outside, which it is not still discussed by the business internally.

Interviews, held in small<sup>12</sup>, nationally founded companies, showed, that they have had so many financial and administrative problems, especially after the economic crisis, that they did not even had time to think and to relate the consequences of VAW to productivity and losses for the business.

Large sized companies shared that the topic looks for the moment a little bit far from their policies on social corporate responsibility and not known in details. They concentrate more on developing gender equality in career development policies on the workplace and focus on creating measures for better reconciliation of work and family life, which increases the level of loyalty and satisfaction of the employees (men and women) on the workplace on one side and is considered to be a preventive measure against violence in family, on the other. In some large sized companies were shared opinions that legislation imposed without any idea what are the needs and the organizational culture in those companies, will not be effective and will stay only on paper. Many social causes in large and medium sized companies are initiated and led by employees themselves and in case they do not recognize the VAW as a social problem, they will not support and will not involve in initiatives, dedicated to fight against

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<sup>12</sup> According to the National Statistical Institute, the number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in 2013 in Bulgaria was over 300 000, which represents 99.8% of all businesses in Bulgaria. Medium sized companies are only 1.3% of them; the 98.5 % are small and micro enterprises.

VAW. Interviews discovered that widespread practices are employees to initiate and to support donations for expensive medical treatment of colleagues and/or other people in need, to initiate organization of charity bazaars or to collect money for donations for abandoned or ill children, but initiatives against violence against women for the moment are out of public interest and are still considered to be personal/family issue.

The common opinion of all interviewees in small, medium and in large sized companies, was that legislation, providing for involvement of companies in fight against VAW, should be based on a preliminary broader analysis of the needs of the business and deeper research on the business organizational culture and opportunities for effective internal interventions by companies, when cases of VAW are detected. Draft legislation, should be consulted in any case with all types of business because the organizational culture, hierarchy and internal communication channels in companies of different sizes and in business sectors differ very much and legislation should be smartly tailored to the needs and practices in companies in order to be effective.

## **Companies' commitment in response of violence against women**

The experts from the NGO sector interviewed summarized that on their observation employers become closely concerned and committed, when they have an emergency case in their company and are near the victim and can see her suffering. In these cases the employers are reacting spontaneously and most often they are searching for professional help, depending on the need and on the wish of the victims.

The NGO sector also confirmed, that there are many Bulgarian employers, who are informed about the national help line for victims of VAW and the crisis centers in the country (in towns where, they exist). In towns, where there are no NGOs, neither crisis centers or shelters, the employers are doing whatever they consider right for the moment – try to help with advice or psychological support, ask for help from friends, relatives, or call the police, hide the victim, help her to escape the perpetrator, keep her job position free for a long time and very often offer financial support.

However there were also negative answers to the question *"Should the employers involve in helping victims of VAW?"*. One general manager in middle sized company, shared the opinion that the employers should not intervene too much, if they are not asked directly for support, because as she explained: *"...people have the right to have their personal lives and they should decide by themselves what and when to say and we don't have the right to push them too much"*. One reason for that statement, confirmed by the NGO sector, especially working outside the capital, is that the problem is still broadly considered by the Bulgarian society to be a problem of the family and not a problem of the whole society and people prefer not to be involved too much in situations, which might cause them any unexpected troubles. But, there is also another explanation. Sometimes employers are not feeling prepared to react and even afraid, that they might not be informed adequately about what is happening in reality and might be misled. There were opinions in the interviews that in family conflict situations, both parties might be violent and it is difficult to decide how to proceed and which story to

believe. Sometimes situation of violence is not very clear and employers have doubts whether and how to intervene.

Another point of discussion in many of the interviews was *"Who should initiate a conversation about the problem?"* One of the opinions of a woman, general manager in a middle sized company, was that the victims should do the first step. She explained: *"I could not insist too much and urge them to share and to do something, because I have not the right to ask them about personal problems. I know for women, who have been victims of violence for years, but never asked me for support directly or indirectly. That is not our work at the end; this is work for psychologists, for NGOs, not for general managers, because we are not allowed to intervene in people's personal lives on the workplace".*

The interview with the same woman further discovered that in companies, where clear cut subordination is established and personal life is something that employees rarely discuss in working environment, there is a barrier for both parties - the staff and the management to cooperate in situations of VAW outside the work place.

The general manager did not exclude at all options to intervene if she is asked directly, but confirmed that this rarely happens and it never happened about a VAW case.

In companies, where cases of VAW were not found, but the atmosphere was described as very friendly and supportive, was shared the opinion of the owner, that colleagues and owners might help and would help if they are asked to also in cases of violence in the family, but most probably only with personal advices and conversations and they definitely need special professional help to be effective in supporting the victim.

Sometimes employers intervene not only in cases, when they have a staff member - victim of violence, but also employees who are perpetrators. In these situations eventhough the employers know that they have not the right to intervene directly in the personal life of the employees, the good image of the company becomes leading argument especially in smaller towns and in service oriented companies. The example, shared during the Interview Program, was about a small pastry shop, where clients told to the owner, that they know about an employee, who is a violent husband and they were complaining of him in non formal talks. The image of the owner of an employer who does not tolerate violence was a strong reason to initiate talks with the employee perpetrator of domestic violence.

However there are cases where employers choose not to intervene, because they feel helpless. One of the interviewee expressed honest regrets that even though she helped a woman to escape her violent husband, after a while the woman came back and was bruised again and again and the employer could not do anything. That case happened in a very small town, where there is no NGO, working on VAW around and campaigns against VAW have never been organized to sensitize the local community. On the opinion of the interviewee, campaigns will not be easily understood, because the topic is still a taboo. Women feel ashamed, but at the same time not strong enough to stop the violence and to escape, they do not want to call the police, because the whole town will know what is happening in the family. The role of the employers in this situation is very difficult - on one side they must keep confidentiality about the case, on the other, they should help adequately, and at the end very often the woman decides to stay with the



violent husband and the violence starts over and over and all efforts turned to be in vain.

Sometimes the workplace and the people who are responsible for the staff in companies in small towns, where there are no NGOs and services on protection of VAW, is the only place, where the victims may ask for support, even in emergency situations and receive support - practical and psychological. In one very severe case, shared during the Interview Programme, the production manager told us that the victim asked her for help after an attempt for a murder by his drunken husband. The production manager reacted immediately, hid her and helped her through relatives to escape from the town and to find another job and place to live, far from the perpetrator. Even though the woman came back after a while, this first reaction and the practical and psychological help from the production manager encouraged the woman to believe, that she can really escape forever and stop the everyday violence and the most important - she is not alone. There is someone who will help her. Some months later, the woman planned better and left her husband and now she lives with her child in another town of the country. The role of the production manager in this situation was crucial for the woman's decision to stop the violence and to find courage to escape the situation, which looked without an exit for years.

In another case in the same company, the production manager was contacted again by another woman and informed that she will escape and hide from her violent husband. The woman did not ask for help, just called to inform the manager and ask for confidentiality. The woman hid only for twenty days and then came back to the perpetrator. The production manager did not intervene and explained delicately to the owner that the employee has some family problems and will come back to work again, so it will be better that the owner keep her job position. The opinion of the production manager was that she really did not understand what were the reasons for the woman to escape and then go back. She added: „*May be she needed more money to survive or lacked courage to keep on living without him; and she already started to consider this situation as normal.*” In this company, this was the second case of a woman, married with children, with low income, who was abused by her husband physically and psychologically for years. In both cases in this small company in a small town, victims shared that the workplace is for them the only place, where they feel almost safe and comes to work only to escape the everyday harassment at home, where they are treated as servants. In both cases the production manager should find any solution and did not know whether she is doing the right way. In both cases, she did what she has been asked by the victims and there were two different outcomes of the situations - one good and one bad. Unfortunately no professional help, neither from lawyers, nor from NGOs, working on that topic was available at the town and the production manager is still wondering does she reacted and did all right, especially in the second case.

## **Detection of cases of victims of violence in companies**

The interviews showed that a system for reaction in cases of VAW, detected in companies is not formally established. Detection depends on the size of the company, hierarchy established and relationships in the team and with the management.

The question of the interviews *"Do you think that among your women staff might be victims of VAW?"* provoked variety of reactions, starting from denial, assumptions who might be a victim, doubts, suspense and stories about evident cases of VAW and sharing of different strategies for internal communication on the cases and help provided.

Two interviewees answered that they are sure, that there are no such cases in their companies, because they have never heard about and never such cases were commented in the companies. One of them (in large-sized company in the IT sector) stated that their women employee, are economically independent, they have very good salaries, they are well informed, well-educated and they will not let it happen. At the same time the interviews with the NGOs, providing services to victims of VAW, confirmed that there are women, victims of VAW from all professions, some of them with high incomes, working in all sectors and in all industries, including in the IT sector, which make us think that may be in some companies with many employees, detection of the cases is not easy and there are some assumptions that economically independent women could not be victims.

In some companies information about possible cases of VAW was shared. One interviewee answered that she has heard for one case of psychological violence from other colleagues, but can't be sure; maybe it was only a rumour. The information reached the HR manager (of a large sized company) none formally; no one came to talk and to share with her personally. The interviewee expressed thoughts that what happens in the family is rarely shared easily outside of it and professional environment is not considered to be the right place personal problems to be shared.

In another case, the interviewee replied that there might be some cases, but also was not quite sure at the beginning of the story. There was information in the company of a psychologically abused woman, but the interviewee (a production manager in a medium sized company) also had the information on the case not directly. A signal for a problem was the long lasting sick leave of the woman. Even not immediately, the colleagues and later on, the production manager, understood that the woman might be a victim of psychological violence from his husband, suffering from alcoholism. The production manager was not sure how to react on the case, but she eventhough undertook steps to inform and involve the general manager and they initiated together private conversations with the woman to understand much about the case and the woman's needs.

Some of the companies interviewed shared that they have had obvious cases of victims of VAW among its staff and realized that these women could not manage to find way out alone. As one of the interviewee said: *"People are most of the time at work and if they do not have support from colleagues and from the management, they will be lost. The pain should be shared! Most often in smaller teams the whole working process is disturbed, when a victim comes to work. VAW concerns everybody. People around the suffering woman are not concentrated too, they are upset and wandering what is happening and how to help. Sometimes the violent man could not be stopped to call and disturb the woman even during the working process. We should do something and stop it together!"*

Detection of cases in small companies is quite easy in comparison to detection in the large and medium sized ones. In two small companies, there were answers that they have detected cases, because they have seen evident signs on the face and on the



body of the women; or some signals in their behaviour - lack of concentration, abstention, difficulties in communication and work with clients, bad mood around coming family holidays – Christmas, Easter. In many small companies colleagues of the victims also informed the employer that they have detected a case and insisted employer to do something urgently. Reactions of the owner/employer were inevitable. As a woman, owner of a small company said in the interview: *"I reacted, as my heart told me"*. She shared two different examples about her reactions. First example was for a case of an employee who came to work very upset and she advised a colleague of her to go for a walk together and to understand what has happened and if necessary to go for a doctor together. The owner understood that the employee needs time to speak out and she needs first to overcome the psychological pain. Therefore she did not ask her for details immediately. The owner somehow guessed by intuition, that if the woman shares with someone closer the problem and receives advice from a colleague with more life experience, she will feel better and maybe she will find a solution. In another case in the same company, a woman employee was very frightened for her daughter, who has been stalked and menaced by an ex-intimate partner to be murdered. In this case, the employer reacted urgently and advised the mother to contact immediately the police. The owner also helped the mother to file a complaint to the police. These two cases showed us that the employers in small companies are often confronted with personal problems of employees and should make decisions how to help and what to advice. In small companies employees are as one big family and they often address the owners with different requests for personal help. The owners almost always should do something and they are doing the best they can. However in most of the cases they needed support and professional help, especially in emergency cases. For example there were shared cases (again in small companies), when victims asked directly the employer for support, especially when it was a woman employer. Most often they asked her for emergency help, advice or for a psychological support - someone to share with the pain.

The women to women sharing also was mentioned in some other interviews. For example in one of the company interviewed, eventhough there were not cases of VAW detected, was shared an example of an employee, addressing the deputy manager with a request for financial support for a personal problem - she needed money for an expensive gynaecological treatment. The interviewee (owner of the company) shared that in her small company hierarchy is not very strict and it is not difficult for the employees to ask for help or advice for personal problems either deputy manager or the manager and she expressed opinion that most often women address the deputy manager who is also a woman, especially in cases they have medical problems, or problems in the family.

The same was confirmed by other interviewee, who added that in teams, composed mostly or entirely of women in small companies, where there is no clear cut subordination, women are sharing almost all of their personal problems and support each other.

One more interesting example of women to women solidarity was shared by the women business association „*To Preserve the Woman*“, working in Varna. The interview with the chairwoman confirmed that the association's women members feel safe and share personal and family problems with each other, because they have very close personal relationships, established trough many common initiatives - empowerment trainings,

everyday voluntary work. The aim of the association since its establishment in 1997 was to give support and to establish solidarity between members that will help them in economic crisis. First initiatives of the association were dedicated to the prophylactic medical checks for prevention of breast cancer. The next years the association focused on developing and strengthening the women entrepreneurship to address the huge unemployment in the country during the transition period. The reason for such stable solidarity and compassion is to some extent the fact that members are already sure that they can rely on each other and they will receive some real support and help. Other reason, mentioned by the chairwoman, was the organizational life of the association. The association has been organizing many events, not only for the members, but also for their families. Families know each other already very well, as the chairwoman said: „ *They are like one big family now - a community of people that stands behind every one of us and we can trust each other*”.

Trust and ability to keep confidentiality was mentioned many times in this interview and in many others, where the question about detection of cases of VAW was asked.

The confidentiality was commented from different angles. Some of the interviewees said that in cases of VAW, victims do not share, because they do not want everybody to know about their situation. They feel ashamed and they worry about their professional image. Some of the victims prefer even to quit the job, because they feel uncomfortable and worry about how they are perceived, what people might think about them on the workplace. However, the interviews discovered that it is difficult confidentiality to be preserved for a long time on the work place, because sometimes the situations worsen, signs become evident, sometimes the owners/management need to know what are the reasons for the long absence. Thus the question of when and how employers keep confidentiality is one of the most mentioned by the interviewees. On one side employers do not want to embarrass more the abused woman, but on the other hand, some actions are required by them, and they should do something, which not always let them to preserve confidentiality.

## **Concrete actions to support women employees**

Actions to support female employees are depending very much of the situation and of the particular case. There are no formal internal guidelines or professional guides known to be developed for the business in Bulgaria.

Concrete actions vary: some employers support financially their employees - pay travel expenses to the capital or cities, where there are crisis centers and shelters. Others contribute to medical treatment of the bruised women or bear the expenses for professional consultations with psychologist and even often agree to pay the apartments' rents of employees, when they take a decision to leave the perpetrators. In many cases, employers show understanding and agree to offer flexible working time, additional paid leave and keep the job position free as long as it needs.

The Interview Program showed that the actions of employers are depending mainly on the needs of the victims if identified or shared by them and on the personality of the staff member or owner of the company, who is in charge of the personnel. When the case is detected by the employer, most often employers react as human beings – they show compassion and are ready to help, when they see the pain and suffering of the woman closely.

For example in one of the cases of psychological violence, general manager and production manager, held personal conversations with the victim and gave her time to decide when she will be able to come back to work. The woman was given freedom to decide should she stay on her current managing position or she prefers to change it with position with fewer responsibilities. After her decision that she will give up from the managerial position and will come back in production, other staff members were trained and successfully substituted her. The management offered also support in case she decides to leave her husband - to assist her in finding a new home, help for caring about her child and assured her, that she is not alone in this situation and she could be calm that she can come back to her job whenever she is ready. In that specific case, it took two months of the woman to decide, but the employer was patient and waited. The patience and understanding of employers in many cases, when they witnessed the suffering, were confirmed by the NGOs, working on VAW.

Patience and reactions of the colleagues are the second main factor for solutions in crisis situations and for smooth reintegration of the victims.

One example of adequate reactions of colleagues, when a woman victim of psychological violence was back to work after two months in hospital, was given in the Interview Program. The interviewee told us that the management talked with the whole team and asked them to be patient and to help the woman to reintegrate, without insisting to understand more about her situation. The frank conversation with the personnel and the personality of the direct manager were of great importance. People understood that they just need to behave as normal and not to overburden the woman, nor with their special attention to her, neither with too many stressful tasks, especially in the first couple of months. In this situation confidentiality about her situation was not kept by the management, but the position of support of the management and the direct talks with the staff about how they are expected to react gave results. The woman came back and still work in the company, two years after the incident.

## Persons in charge of detecting victims of violence

Outside the work place, business has not developed any formal structure to deal with violence against women. Therefore, no special experts or staff members are in charge of gender-based violence cases. Nevertheless, there are many structures and systems for reactions against violence, happening on the workplace: company Ombudsman, on line tools for communication and complaints, including for cases of sexual harassment on the workplace, or compliance ambassadors, none of them never have been used for communication of violence outside the workplace.

However interviews showed that some of the staff members might be or are the first people to know about the cases due to different reasons.

In some large sized companies there are experts, connecting the human resources' directorates with the production teams, the so called HRBP (human resource business partners), who participate in the team meetings and everybody from the teams knows them very well. Most probably they will be the first persons to learn about cases in large sized companies and to be asked for help. In some multinational companies, there is also a special representative of the staff to the European/Global mother company, who also establishes very close relationships with the personnel and many personal problems are shared there. The company commissions for organization and analysis of the prophylactic annual medical checks also could be a channel for detection of cases, although those medical checks are only once per year and cases of VAW may be missed.

Most often in small companies the owner and the colleagues are those who are informed first and are involved. It is not possible owner to stay isolated. Every tension and bad mood of the employees is evident, it disturbs the working process and owner is very concerned to calm down the situation and to intervene by conversations, advices, by practical help and if necessary by helping and redirecting the person to professional help or to an NGO, if there is one that she/he knows about.

Production managers also shared that they can detect changes in the behaviour and concentration of the employees, especially in medium and small sized companies and often consider the changes as signals that some personal problems might happen. Sometimes signals are evident – on the women's faces and bodies. Production managers are those who in small towns even advice the victims and communicate the cases to the owners/general managers, because they should explain why the employees are missing from the workplace. In most cases, when informed, general managers/owners show understanding and are searching for solutions.

There was also a self-organized women group, identified in one of the large sized international company, which is dealing with gender equality topics. The main idea for the group is to identify the problems and to decide what kind of initiatives, they could and want to organize for their members. Up to the moment the group worked on topics

like gender and education, women and leadership, career development of women and reconciliation of work and family life through discussion forums, awareness raising and sponsored lectures. The understating of the group is that the information and the possibilities for professional development provided and the assuring of financial independence of women are the most effective prevention against violence. The group have never talked about VAW directly, but stays open for any kind of proposals, or needs to be addressed, if they are coming directly from the members.

## Communication on violence against women

There are four main factors that have been identified in the Interview Program to influence the internal communication on violence against women: size of the company, atmosphere on the workplace (relationships between colleagues and with management) and personality and sex of the person in charge of the personnel as well as the level of confidentiality that could be kept.

In smaller towns, confidentiality was even more important. The main barrier for communication of the topic in small towns was the fear that many people on the working place will know about the case and victims will be stigmatized in the town they live in.

The topic is very difficult and still not discussed in working environment also in large sized companies. Some of the reasons mentioned by the interviewees were:

- Women do not want to discuss it, because no one wants to be recognised as a victim on the workplace. Most probably confidentiality on workplace about VAW incidents will not be kept.
- Gender stereotypes - sometimes women are not working well together, and do not show compassion, especially in male dominated sectors, where they are competing and criticizing each other and even reinforcing by themselves the gender stereotypes about their professional skills.
- Women do not believe that someone will help them, because they do not believe that there are effective instruments and institutions that will intervene adequately.

Internal communication on cases of VAW is different from any other internal communication on personal problems with the staff. One of the cases that happened in a medium sized company urged the management to think about how to improve the company internal communication in similar situations. Eventhough in every team the company had employees, who normally communicate with the management the problems and the risk situations, related to the staff, in this particular case of a woman, victim of VAW, these employees were silent and not knowing how to react. The company came to the conclusion that management should do more to inform people that the topic, could be communicated without fear, because if the management knew in advance that their employee is violated, may be they would think about how to help her more adequately, or at least they would not offer her at the same moment to move in a position under so many stress, which made her health situation worse.

Internal communication depends also on the atmosphere in the working teams and to some extent on the sex of the employees and the managers. In small teams, composed mainly of women, it was shared, that communication on that topic would be easier. It will not be the same in mixed teams and may be such information would not be shared to

men decision makers. The question about the role of men decision makers was also discussed on the National workshop in Sofia, where participants agreed that there is still need to involve men more actively in the topic, through special trainings and campaigns and through broadening the scope of the studies targeting this specific group.



# Best practice examples

## AVON Bulgaria Speak Out against Domestic Violence Campaign

To help bring the issue of domestic violence out of the shadows, in 2004 the U.S. *Avon Foundation for Women*, launched the *Speak Out Against Domestic Violence* campaign, an initiative to build awareness, educate, and improve prevention and direct service programs. The Foundation makes grants to outstanding non-profit organizations, working to end violence against women and serve victims and their families, with a focus on those that provide education and awareness, offer critical support, and develop prevention programs.

In Bulgaria, the *Avon Speak out Campaign*, which is part of the global Campaign, is organized in partnership with the *Alliance for Protection against Gender Based Violence*. It was launched in 2011 and continues to be regularly re launched every year. The focus of the campaign is domestic violence, but all other forms of VAW are also mentioned and explained in the campaign messages.

In 2011, the campaign started with a press conference and involvement of one inspiring woman - a TV star and an ex MP to speak out against domestic violence in series of interviews, articles and internal informative materials for the Representatives of *AVON Bulgaria*.

In 2012, *AVON Bulgaria* decided to involve also men. Ambassador of the campaign was a well known MMA fighter. The message of the 2012 campaign "Hit me, not her!" was chosen to show that men are also concerned and they support the cause.

In 2013 the campaign involved popular Bulgarian families – journalists, artists, sportsmen - to give the positive example of families speaking out against violence at home in media. Since 2013 the campaign started to donate financial resources to support shelters and services for victims through sales of branded jewellery and other *AVON* products of the blue series.

In 2014 the campaign message was based on the shocking picture of a well known Bulgarian actress, famous for her TV role of a domestic violence victim. She took part in a daring photo shoot, showing her with a blue eye on one side of the poster and wearing the new product of the campaign – a pair of earrings – on the other. The main purpose of the campaign was to provoke talks about what is domestic violence and why we should speak out about it to prevent it. The message was „Put an earring on your year. Let's stop domestic violence together!” and would serve to remind society not to look away from the problem. The message of the campaign was widespread broadly through 30 media partners and over 200 publications in media, 5 TV interviews and over 20 interviews in on line and other media channels and specialized women magazines, through posters in the metro and bus stations. The campaign was also supported by 4 of the most popular Bulgarian artists for the period, who took part in black and white photo shoot holding or wearing the earrings.

This photo shoot was used in a special Facebook application, containing a gallery, every 1 in 4 photos of which were of bruised women. All of these photos were of *AVON* Employees, who volunteered for the campaign. The Facebook application (which

reached 450 000 participants) urged people to upload pictures with the campaign branded jewellery and thus support the campaign. The more pictures were uploaded, the more the pictures of the bruised women faded and disappeared. The main lesson was - the more people speak out against domestic violence, the more it will disappear.

The 2014 campaign had established also a partnership with *Pro Credit Bank*, which bought 200 sets of the campaign products and used them as a gift to their women clients for the *International Women Day*.

Thanks to the donations of all people, in November 2014 AVON made the biggest donation for the cause in Bulgaria – 50 000 BGN, to the Crisis Centrum in Southwest Bulgaria.

Trough face to face distribution of more than 30 000 leaflets for the campaign in 2014, the AVON team realized that a hotline for domestic victims, working 24/7, is a great need. That is why in 2015 AVON announced that all of the raised funds will finance a hotline.

In 2015 the campaign once again relies on provocative visual images with strong message - *“Till Death Do You Part? Violence Has No Place in Your Home”*. Portraying a blatant image of domestic violence, “Speak Out” sets the ambitious purpose of attracting people’s attention to the essential topic, which experts define as a true terror at home. In order to emphasize on how important it is for the victim to realize their problem and put an end to it on time, the campaign chooses a daring image of a couple, where the women is seemingly a victim of violence and her partner is pointed as the abuser, wearing a face mask. Thus the campaign wants to show how often the victims accept domestic violence and refuse to acknowledge it as a problem for themselves and the people around them. The vivid extremity of the main visual also highlights the completely different personality the violator has behind the walls of his home. The “Violence has no place in your home!” message is a strong call for women’s right to live in violence happy and loving family.

To support the cause, everybody can buy a charity product from the company’s blue products line throughout the whole year. 100% of the profit from every product will be spent for the opening of a hotline for domestic violence victims. The hotline aims at providing a constant access to professional help – psychologists, lawyers, and social workers, for victims throughout the country. Specialists will consult and advise the victims through the first steps of the process on the phone, as well as to direct them to the nearest crisis center in the country. This way, the long-time partner of “Speak Out” and a beneficent to the donated funds – *Alliance for Protection against Gender-Based Violence* – will be able to provide a complex service for the affected.

The campaign was evaluated internally trough a survey on the opinion of the Representatives of AVON in the country. Some of the ideas about the campaign messages came directly from them.

Since “Speak Out” launched in 2011, AVON has donated a total of 75, 000 BGN in support of the cause. The raised funds provided more than 1000 free psychological and legal consultations for victims of domestic violence.

The campaign also was presented on the National workshop, and provoked many discussions on the factors and ways for maintaining successful awareness campaigns



on VAW by private business. The discussions confirmed that the topic is really difficult, because domestic violence is broadly considered to be a private problem, not a problem of the whole society. Violence in family is still widespread in Bulgaria and a taboo topic outside home and changing the social attitudes and norms and urging society to speak out against it, was a big challenge. Avon Bulgaria gave examples of the different strategies and approaches to attract the attention of the society during the 5 years' lifetime of the campaign.

Main factor for success of the campaign, identified by the company, was the cooperation between all actors involved - the company, the media, the supporters and the ambassadors of the campaign. Most important was the personal involvement of the AVON's employees and regional representatives to the campaign, who voluntarily participated in creating ideas and in the elaborating of the campaign tools and also in distributing of the campaign materials and messages to their friends, family and clients on local level.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Conclusions and recommendations of the present national study are based on the desktop research, the national Interview Program and the discussions, held on the National workshop in Sofia on 16th of September 2015.

The national Interview Program provoked the interviewed people and urged them to think about and speak out on VAW, outside the work place and drew the attention on the idea that violence in family is not and should not be only a personal problem. The presented AVON campaign also aimed at provoking the public debates and confirmed our understanding that initiatives like the study and the campaign should be developed most in numbers and most regularly in Bulgaria, because they are changing the social attitudes by showing examples of successful practices of involvement of business in the fight against violence against women.

The Interview Program and the discussions on the National workshop opened a new page in exploring the measures and the strategies for combating VAW outside the workplace and we are on the opinion that such kind of studies should be broaden and enriched by enlarging the scope of the interviews and by adding interviews with working women, victims of VAW and their opinions on how the company reacts on their cases in comparison with the opinions of the decision makers in same situations. One more idea that came from the NGO sector is to include the cases of family violence that ruins the whole common family small business. The NGO sector also recommended exploring the business policies on having husbands/partners employees, working together and especially strategies for involvement of companies in situations of violence between them.

Women business associations recommended enriching the studied topic with examples for VAW, not only from husbands and intimate partners, but also from other family members - fathers, brothers, and uncles and how psychological violence from other

male family members may influence women careers and what challenges business might face in these situations.

We are thankful to all participants in our Interview Program and the National discussion workshop for their openness and willingness to discuss the violence against women outside the workplace by adding their life experiences, opinions and proposals that helped us to make our national study coherent and objective and to offer perspectives for further work and discussions. Based on their support, we may outline two main area of future common work on the topic:

## **1. Strengthening the cooperation between private business, national state institutions and NGOs**

The discussions on the cooperation between main actors in the field, was opened to explore whether the business initiates or is willing to cooperate with the other actors as for example with the national institutions and funds on VAW awareness raising campaigns in the country, or on the contrary, business measures the achievements and success only on its own account. The example, discussed on the National workshop was the presented AVON Bulgaria campaign. The discussion showed that business prefers to consult its initiatives mainly with the NGO sector as it was in the case of AVON Bulgaria. The company consulted the campaign with the Alliance for Protection against Gender-Based Violence, but never cooperated directly with the state institutions. One of the reasons was the guides and requirements of the global mother company for philanthropic and sponsorship initiatives, which recommends direct work with and support to NGOs and crisis centers. Trough the consultations with the NGO sector, the business learned how to comply with the national policies and legislation and identified many allies. However, the discussions showed that direct state-business cooperation has not been established yet and there is a space to be further developed. Both, business and institutions have much to learn from each other and regular cooperation between them will only be of benefit of the cause.

## **2. Sharing of good practices and practical guides**

The NGO sector supporting the victims of VAW added that indeed the study is really necessary and on time, because victims are most of the time at work. It is true that employers are supportive and willing to help, when they see the bruised and suffering women and it is also very true that they search for professional help. Crisis centers in the country are few with limited capacity on one hand, on the other hand, cases are many and all of them are tightly connected with the professional life of the victims. Therefore, the help of the business to victims is of utmost importance. The involvement of business is crucial and that perspective should be systematically developed and enriched by further and deeper studies and by developing of practical guides for the business. In reality there are many employers in Bulgaria that have to deal with VAW cases outside the work place every day, they want to help, but very often they do not know how to. Sharing of practical helps and exchange of good practices between companies in Bulgaria and with other EU countries will be very useful for Bulgarian business and the NGOs working on combating VAW.

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Co-funded by  
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