



MARVOW 2.0

Coordinated Multi-Agency Response
to Violence against Older Women

Policy Recommendations

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Deliverable 4.2: MARVOW 2.0 Policy Recommendations

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Recommendations

Background: The definition of domestic violence and the respective roles of competent authorities for protection of the victims are given in the Civil Protection Against Domestic Violence Act /PADVA/ from 2005, with the latest amendments in 2023. It regulates the rights of persons who have suffered from domestic violence, protection measures, and the procedure for the application of the latter. The Law aims to give quick and effective protection and to provide help and support to persons who have suffered from or are at risk of domestic violence, and to exercise a preventive and deterrent effect on the perpetrator of the violence. (Art 1a). The basic principles on which the PADVA is built are: rapidity and even urgency of protection; instant separation of the abuser from the victims; a variety of safe measures; combining judicial protection with social protection and rehabilitation measures; cooperation between public authorities and the non-governmental sector.

Violence against older women is within the scope of the law in two ways:

- violence in intimate relationships
- violence from children, grandchildren, and other relatives (including blood relatives and relatives-in-law)

The changes in the Act show greater attention to the problems of older people who are in a situation of violence and their limitations in asking for help. However, the Act is gender neutral and does not specifically treat women as more affected by violence. Legal protection can be requested by the victim of violence, but also by:

- the director of the Social Assistance Directorate, when the victim is helpless due to severe disability, illness, or old age.
- the prosecution, when the victim cannot protect himself due to helplessness or dependence on the perpetrator

When the victim is a minor or is helpless due to disability, illness or old age, the court may decide to grant legal support and engage a free lawyer.

1. National

1.1. In the strategic national documents concerning demographic and social issues, special attention should be paid to older women, victims of violence, emphasizing their specific vulnerability and their specific needs for protection and support. For this purpose, it is necessary to collect data to analyze the scope and severity of the problem in order to plan adequate prevention and action measures. The research of the National Statistical Institute on gender-based violence can be used as a resource for collecting information. The last such was done in Bulgaria from November 2021 - February 2022. among 6,000 women aged 17 - 84 years. Its data show that the relative share of women who experienced physical or sexual domestic violence in the age group 65-74 is 6.8%. In approximately 70 percent of cases, the perpetrator is a child or a spouse/partner. The National Information System, launched in early 2025 and maintained by the Ministry of Interior, is a resource for data collection and analysis. It covers all cases of domestic violence and contains information on who the victims are, the type of violence, what measures have been taken, and which institutions are responsible in each specific case.

1.2. The National Strategy for Active Living of Older People in Bulgaria (2019-2030) should include a new priority concerning protection from violence and abuse in the family. Accordingly, prevention and intervention measures should be planned to provide accessible, timely, and quality support for those affected. It is relevant, based on existing data, to pay special attention to domestic violence and gender-based violence against older women, considering the risk of femicide in this target group.

1.3. The National Strategy for Poverty Reduction and Promotion of Social Inclusion by 2030 should address the risk of social exclusion, poverty, and deterioration of the quality of life of older women who are in a situation of violence. The uneven distribution of social services across the country and their concentration in bigger cities is identified as a major challenge, and in order to overcome this disproportion, innovative practices and new models of work should be sought, including through the use of modern information and communication technologies.

1.4. In the field of social and health care for older people, home-based services and patronage care should be developed, as well as the provision of hourly mobile integrated health and social services in their homes.

1.5. A Coordination Mechanism for Assistance and Support to Victims of Domestic Violence should be adopted as soon as possible, to define clear responsibilities, rights, rules for handling cases, and coordination between competent authorities. This mechanism should pay particular attention to older women, in terms of identifying, reporting cases, assessing, and managing their risk. In this way, systems that are currently not actively involved, such as the prosecution and the health system, can be included in the process of coordinated cooperation.

2. Regional

2.1. Staff of existing social services targeting older people should be trained on the topic of recognizing violence against older women. The MARVOW 2.0 a training program, can be used to apply to frontline professionals in these forms of support: day care centers, hourly services, home care assistants, home helpers, and food delivery. This is a valuable resource of people who have access to a large number of older women and, with the necessary knowledge and skills, can be used to uncover hidden cases that have not reached any system.

2.2. Social services should be encouraged to develop internal rules and procedures and to implement reliable tools for identifying cases of violence against older women and their reporting, so that frontline professionals do not feel confused.

2.3. Public authorities should be trained on what to do if a victim reports domestic violence and how to help her obtain a court protection order. Following the recent changes to the Domestic Violence Protection Act, state and municipal authorities, medical institutions, and legal entities are committed to supporting the victim. When they receive a request for judicial protection, they are obliged to send the request for a protection order to the relevant district court within 24 hours. This is to help older women who do not have access to the court. They can seek help from public authorities in their community, municipality, or social services.

3. Local

3.1. To organize specialized training for police officers to identify cases of violence against older women and a mechanism for referral to support services. The police have invested significant resources in combating domestic violence in recent years. In all local departments, coordinators on the topic of domestic violence have been appointed, and they are engaged in the prevention and overcoming of domestic violence and in inter-institutional work. The police have an officially certified risk assessment tool that is used in the field by police inspectors. Additional competencies regarding the specifics of violence against older women can be added to the already built capacity.

3.2. To establish a local coordination mechanism for the prevention and protection from DV and GBV against older women, with the participation of all stakeholders. To sign inter-agency agreements for coordinated actions based on the experience of MARVOW 2.0. case meetings.

3.3. To conduct an advocacy campaign to increase the scope of social services at homes. Municipalities to include more older women for assistant support, food delivery, and patronage care.

MARVOW 2 highlight 1. To offer coordinated support to older women in a situation of violence or at risk of violence and abuse-health, social, financial, to work to correct the behavior of perpetrators. To establish a practice of multi-agency cooperation on cases of violence against older women at the regional and local levels.

MARVOW 2 highlight. Building the capacity of frontline professionals to recognize violence against older women. Raising awareness among professionals about the phenomenon, the specific needs and limitations of older women. Acquiring skills for communicating with victims.