

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RAPID ASSESSMENT OF GENDER PROGRAMMES UNDER THE EEA AND NORWAY GRANTS 2009-2014**

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### **1. ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW**

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The objectives of this rapid assessment were twofold. First, it was a **summative assignment** in that it sought to document the EEA and Norway Grants' efforts to promote gender equality (GE), reduce domestic violence (DV), and reduce gender-based violence (GBV) in the seven focus countries. Second, it was **formative and forward-looking**. It was formative in that it aimed to generate lessons learned based on an assessment of relevant achievements; it aimed to help improve the design, planning, organisation, and implementation of future interventions. It was also **forward-looking** in that it provided a context-based set of ideas on how things might be done in the future; it aimed to consider current contextual changes that may not have been reflected in the earlier programme experience.

The assessment addressed two aspects of gender – first, mainstreaming GE and promoting work-life balance (WLB), and second, addressing DV and GBV – in seven countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain. Not all countries reviewed have programmes addressing both aspects supported by the EEA and Norway Grants.

The assessment focused on the following three lines of inquiry:

- 1. Relevance** of the programme and projects therein.
- 2. Effectiveness** of the programme and projects therein.
- 3. The bilateral dimension**, focusing specifically on the execution of programme and project partnerships involving the Council of Europe (CoE) and other expert organisations (primarily based in Norway).

### **2. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

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A team of nine evaluators, seven of whom were based in the countries studied, conducted the assignment. The assessment focused on a sample of eight cases (programmes) from each of the seven countries. Five of the eight cases in each country were studied through literature review only, while three were examined in more depth and included interview and focus group data collection. A series of online questionnaires were fielded in order to collect additional data from programme operators, project promoters, donor programme partners (DPPs), and donor project partners (dpps).

### **3. MAIN FINDINGS**

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Here we turn our attention to the main findings of this rapid assessment which focus on relevance, effectiveness, and the bilateral dimension. The highlights of these include that relevance of the interventions is high, levels of effectiveness are dependent on how project interventions are combined, and the bilateral dimension is highly valuable, but has been, at times, underutilized due to an unclear understanding of its potential. More details of this are provided below.



## 4. RELEVANCE

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Both the GE, focusing specifically on Work Life Balance (WLB) and the Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence programmes are well aligned with relevant European and national-level priorities. All countries included in the assessment have national gender strategies and national action plans, and all are required to follow the European Union's *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019*. However, not all programme documents or programme representatives make this explicit.

The majority of interventions focus on women who have experienced discrimination and female victims of DV and GBV; these programmes clearly deal with challenging fields that require additional support in the countries reviewed. It was noted that 2/3 of project operators mentioned that they did not believe they would have been able to secure funding from other sources. From this perspective, it is clear that the efforts funded by the EEA and Norway Grants have met existing needs. However, it is important to underscore that the complexities of the fields being supported mean that the degree to which a single programme is able to address all needs of a beneficiary group is limited. Still, the contribution made by the EEA and Norway Grants should not be overlooked or undermined. As regards the role of the EU, some countries, notably Bulgaria and Poland, were pursuing funding for activities in the field of DV/GBV, however they highlighted that shelters and other forms of direct support to victims were not included in future funding packages. Romania, too, is to gain EU support to work with Roma populations, but this will be exclusively focused on economic integration and not include any aspect of DV/GBV. Estonia and Spain noted that the main focus of the EU would be on GE generally and that efforts to mainstream the issue were underway. Mainstreaming, respondents added, endangered the targeted and specific focus that GE in these countries still requires.

In terms of programme and project design, a clear shortcoming has been the lack of consistent inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, particularly CSOs and beneficiary groups – not least because context is a key factor to ensuring success and hence working with organisations or individuals who have solid field-level experience is important to ensure that interventions are best able to respond to existing needs.

## 5. EFFECTIVENESS

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The assessment found that the interventions that led to the most significant results in DV/GBV and GE/WLB varied. One emerging trend, however, is that success is more likely when several types of activities are combined in the same programme. More often than not, specific combinations of activities perform better than a single (type of) activity. Tied to this, while the intervention logic at the programme level was well aligned with the portfolio objectives and able to achieve its goals, at the project level, intervention logic sometimes overlooked the importance of combined interventions.

Political will and funding availability were additional key contributors to the effectiveness and sustainability of activities in both GE/WLB and GBV/DV. Still, from a technical perspective, replicating interventions is possible. There was limited visible improvement in programme operators' capacity to work on policy issues. However, at the project level, local authorities often improved their ability to develop and implement local-level policy.

Overall the grants have highlighted the importance of addressing DV/GBV and GE issues. In some cases, the grant focused attention on DV/GBV at the national level; in others, the increase in attention happened primarily at the local level. The degree to which this new attention has led to meaningful political discussion has varied. The national actors informing discussions have not consistently capitalised on existing knowledge amongst civil society organisations (CSOs). There is no evidence that the EEA and Norway Grants funding has led to increased funding from the government.



## 6. BILATERAL DIMENSION

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Interviewees from both DPPs and dpps noted that they were most often seen as service providers rather than partners. The DPP and dpp attributed this to a limited understanding on part of the programme operators and project promoters of what partnerships could be. This limited the gains that could be made from the DPP and dpp perspective. Despite this shortcoming, the DPPs and dpps consulted for this assessment (bar one or two exceptions) agreed that the partnership has been useful to them and that as the relationship developed, the partnership's potential increased. Hence although the potential added value was not always capitalised on, the role played by DPPs and dpps led to new perspectives and improved results.

Both programme operators and project promoters noted that securing funding (from other donors) for partnerships of this type is virtually impossible. Therefore, they emphasised the importance and uniqueness of the EEA and Norway Grants.

## 7. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

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Based on its findings, the assessment team provides the following key recommendations for the EEA and Norway Grants:

- The EEA and Norway Grants should support WLB as part of GE efforts, and they should support GBV/DV specifically rather than mainstream gender issues into broader funding portfolios. There is a danger that inadequate attention would be given to WLB and GBV/DV if funding were mainstreamed.
- Working with government structures – as the EEA and Norway Grants do – means that funding is subject to local administrative processes, which are often time-consuming and bureaucratic. This, combined with the modalities of project promoters, means that often there are considerable delays from the time funding is secured from the EEA to the time the intervention starts. These delays can have serious implications for implementation periods; therefore, this should be taken into consideration when choosing interventions.
- The parameters dictating how DPPs and dpps are engaged should be stricter. This would ensure that partnerships maximise their impact not only for the interventions, but also for partners.
- Programmes and projects should be designed with clear complementary objectives – that is, taking into account all of the interventions within a programme to see how they build on each other. This should follow a clear and systematic assessment of what combination of activities works best where.
- The CoE's knowledge and capacity should be used more actively to support a better understanding of European Union priorities and to highlight links between national and European policies.
- All stakeholders with knowledge and experience in the field should be invited to participate in the design of projects and programmes. This will ensure that knowledge gained is capitalised on.
- Interventions should take a gendered approach and, whilst focusing on the needs of women, not overlook the fact that boys and men can also be victims of DV. Likewise, in the field of GE (and WLB specifically), the challenge should be seen as one that affects society as a whole, not only women.
- Ensure that non-predefined projects (those selected through open calls) are well aligned with the overall intervention logic and complement other programme interventions.

