

Risk assessment and risk management by police

Areas for improvement

Risk assessment tools across EU Member States and implications for risk management

The police use a variety of tools for risk assessment across EU Member States, which has implications for risk management actions. Three key considerations will support improvements in risk management by police.

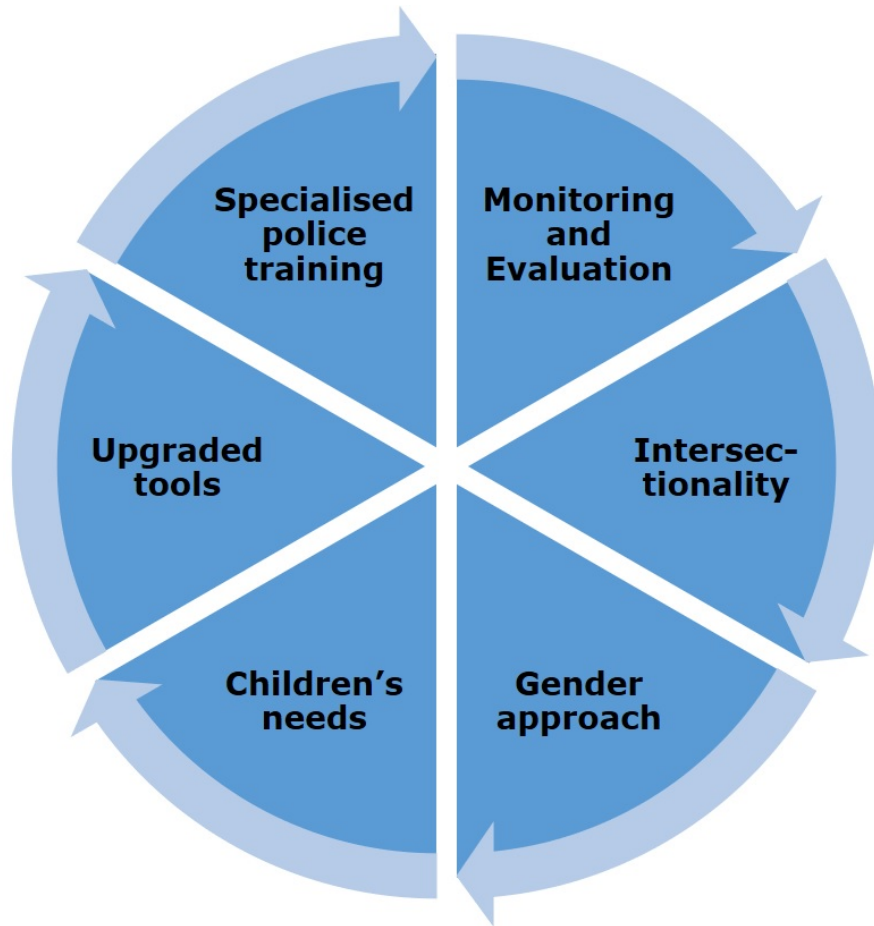
Risk assessment of intimate partner violence as a strategy to prevent future violence.

Efforts to improve risk management by police may benefit from a shift in emphasis from risk prediction to addressing the specific risks posed to victims of intimate partner violence and thereby preventing intimate partner violence (79).

Victims' individual assessment of their own risk. Recent research indicates that the assessment of risk by victims themselves is an important source of information, which should be systematically obtained and considered by those involved in risk assessment and risk management (80), as this information improves the accuracy of structured risk assessment tools. Information from victims' assessments of their own risks is broadly included in risk assessment processes across Member States, but it is unclear to what extent this factor has an influence on final risk scoring (e.g. when police are deciding whether a case is standard, medium or high risk) or on risk management processes.

Risk related to psychological violence and coercive and controlling behaviours. It is important that risk factors included in risk assessment tools be as comprehensive as possible and applied in all cases of intimate partner violence. However, it is important to take into account the evidence-based and emerging research on risk factors and their relevance for effectively assessing risk and informing risk management strategies. Studies have shown a strong association between male perpetration of physical violence and psychological abuse, such as emotional and verbal abuse (81). As the Council of Europe recommends, EU Member States could benefit from developing risk assessment and risk management that reflect the risk of psychological violence (82). Reframing risk assessment tools and practices to take into account coercive control should help police to more effectively identify and

manage 'the dangerous patterns of behaviour that precede domestic homicide' (83).



Specialised police training on risk assessment and risk management

Consistent provision of specialised training and the development of specific guidelines to support front-line police in conducting risk assessment and delivering relevant risk management interventions for intimate partner violence would be beneficial. Assessing the level of risk and identifying and implementing the appropriate risk management strategies require specific skills and knowledge that would enable police to understand, identify, assess and manage risk. Such specialised training is necessary even where standardised tools and checklists are being used. Risk assessment also requires an appropriate implementation infrastructure, such as training strategies that are resourced and sustainable, and standardised procedures outlined in regulations.

Monitoring and evaluating risk assessment and risk management practices

Monitoring and evaluating information about how risk assessment leads to risk management strategies is lacking across Member States. An assessment of police practices revealed that officers generally had 'low levels of appreciation as to why [risk assessment] is important, and a poor understanding as to what officers should do beyond the completion of the DASH (84) form' (85).

Monitoring and evaluation systems are crucial in supporting quality assurance of risk assessment and risk management processes, and in identifying weaknesses and areas for improvement. At the same time, they are also an important element in the process of ensuring that the police are accountable in carrying out their obligations to assess risk and respond to intimate partner violence within a multiagency framework.

Gender and risk assessment and management of intimate partner violence

Systematic attention to the role of gender in intimate partner violence is evident in countries where risk assessment and risk management of intimate partner violence are embedded in a gendered policy and legal framework (Spain and Sweden) but less evident in other Member States.

Understanding the gendered dynamics of intimate partner violence generally, and coercive control specifically, will help police (and other agencies involved) to respond more effectively and prevent intimate partner violence and homicide.

Intersectionality in risk assessment and risk management

Intimate partner violence is experienced differently by women and children according to their race, disability, age, religion, immigration status, ethnicity and sexual orientation (86).

The personal characteristics of a victim (87) are crucial in identifying victim's individual safety needs and possible barriers to accessing support. For example, female migrants and asylum seekers may face increased risk of violence and negative impacts of abuse, not because their ethnicity causes an increase in the risk in itself but because they have uncertain legal status, language difficulties or limited knowledge of their rights, or because they suffer prejudice and stereotyping.

The value of adopting an intersectional approach is the ability to develop tailor-made risk management and prevention strategies that will address those factors that render some women disproportionately more vulnerable to intimate partner violence. Understanding intersectionality helps to ensure that responses to intimate partner violence are appropriate and effective for all women.

The capacity of the police to take such an intersectional approach will depend on the policing infrastructure as well as the provision of specialised police training in the Member States. Working in partnership with victim services that serve specific categories of victims can improve risk management processes and their outcomes.

Children’s experiences of intimate partner violence against women

There is a large body of research identifying the high level of harm experienced by children living with intimate partner violence against their mothers, but this literature tends to focus on physical violence as the main source of harm, with relatively little attention paid to children’s experiences of coercive control and its harmful consequences (88). Despite this research, risk assessment practices in most Member States do not systematically include information provided directly by children about their experiences of intimate partner violence. Given the evidence on how intimate partner violence negatively affects child outcomes, it is important that the issue of children living with intimate partner violence be recognised as a matter for concern in its own right.