

Lessons learnt from workshops with internal and external reviewers

Public version of Deliverable D4.4. “Lessons learnt from workshops”



About this document

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1 Executive Summary

Violence against women constitutes a pervasive social and public health problem. It poses a serious threat to the health, safety, and overall well-being of women across the globe, irrespective of ethnic origin, socioeconomic status, education level, religion, or profession. This complex issue encompasses physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, which often leave profound and long-lasting consequences on the lives of affected women.

Despite concerted efforts aimed at its eradication—including judicial reforms, funding for awareness and prevention campaigns, and the establishment of specialised support services—violence against women continues to escalate. It remains one of the most pressing social challenges in Europe today.

Evidence indicates that many women subjected to violence are not fully aware of their legal rights or the mechanisms available to protect them. There is a widespread lack of knowledge about accessible support services, and in many instances, women refrain from reporting the abuse they endure. Consequently, they rarely seek assistance or psychological, legal, or social support.

From the perspective of service provision, the diversity of cases and the multifaceted nature of violence against women create significant challenges. Identifying the wide range of victims and the various forms of abuse—ranging from overt physical violence to more subtle psychological manipulation—remains a persistent difficulty for professionals and institutions. An intersectional lens highlights the particularly acute vulnerability of certain groups of women, including elderly women, women with disabilities, migrant women, and others facing systemic disadvantages. These populations often encounter barriers that limit their access to justice and support services, exacerbating existing inequalities.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of national support systems and protective measures. Lockdowns and confinement measures intensified women's isolation, making both the detection of abuse and the reporting of incidents significantly more difficult. The pandemic thus underscored the urgent need for resilient, accessible, and inclusive support structures capable of addressing violence against women even under extraordinary circumstances.

It is precisely within this challenging context that the Horizon Europe project *IMPROVE – “Improving Access to Services for Victims of Domestic Violence by Accelerating Change in Frontline Responder Organisations”* develops its *“Handbook on Domestic Violence Policy Assessment and Development”*, in order to equip policymakers and managers with a structured framework for assessing and developing responses to DV issues. By providing guidance, practical tools, and evidence-based strategies, the handbook seeks to enhance the capacity of those directly interacting with victims to identify, respond to, and support women experiencing violence, particularly those in situations of heightened vulnerability.

With the overarching objective of ensuring that the handbook not only contributes to strengthening the knowledge and competencies of frontline responders (FLRs) but also effectively responds to the specific needs they may encounter in practice, Deliverable D4.4. Lessons Learnt from Workshops, consolidates and systematises the main contributions, comments, and recommendations formulated by both internal and external reviewers. These insights have been integrated into the document with the purpose of enriching its content, enhancing its practical applicability, and aligning it more closely with the expectations of stakeholders and end users.

The handbook was developed through a collaborative and iterative drafting and reviewing process, coordinated by CNRS and supported by the active involvement of the consortium

partners. This joint effort ensured that the document reflects not only the collective expertise of the partnership but also the diverse perspectives arising from the different institutional, disciplinary, and national contexts represented within the consortium.

Feedback obtained from partners played a central role in shaping both the content and the structure of the handbook. Their contributions provided critical insights into the practical challenges faced by FLRs, as well as suggestions to enhance the handbook's clarity, relevance, and usability. In this sense, the document is the outcome of a co-creation process, designed to maximise its practical applicability and to ensure that it effectively responds to the needs of its intended audience.

2 Introduction

Deliverable 4.4, entitled *Lessons Learnt from Workshops*, provides a detailed account of the processes undertaken to evaluate and refine the content that constitutes the foundation of the *Handbook on Domestic Violence Policy Assessment and Development*, developed within Work Package (WP) 4 of the IMPROVE project.

The decision to pivot towards the handbook format emerged from a combination of expert consultations with specialists in the field of DV and a careful review of the provisions outlined in the consortium agreement. This strategic choice ensures that the Handbook transcends a purely descriptive role to become a comprehensive and practise-oriented resource tailored to the needs of policymakers, managers, and FLRs.

The Handbook consolidates actionable insights, innovative practises, and evaluation methods drawn directly from the project's activities and outcomes. Its purpose is to translate the lessons learnt into concrete tools that facilitate evidence-based policy development, improve coordination among stakeholders, and strengthen intervention strategies. In doing so, it responds to an identified gap in the field by offering a structured, user-friendly, and scientifically grounded instrument capable of guiding decision-making at both institutional and policy levels.

Furthermore, by aligning with recognised academic and professional publication standards, the handbook ensures methodological rigor, coherence, and credibility. It has been designed and reviewed through an iterative, participatory process, which not only guarantees the quality and reliability of its content but also enhances its legitimacy as a shared output of the consortium.

Ultimately, D 4.4 demonstrates how the IMPROVE project translates collaborative research and field-based knowledge into a durable resource that can inform long-term strategies for addressing DV, thereby reinforcing both policy innovation and practical intervention capacities across Europe.

3 Drafting and Structuring the Handbook

The methodological process employed in the development of the *Handbook on Domestic Violence and Policy Assessment and Development* was designed to ensure rigor, coherence, and alignment with the expertise of the participating partners. The process was coordinated through a series of internal meetings involving all partners engaged in the task, thereby establishing a committee board responsible for overseeing and guiding the manual's development.

The process commenced with a draft proposal of chapters and content prepared by CNRS. This initial draft served as a foundation for discussion, upon which the committee board provided detailed contributions, recommendations, and refinements. Based on these deliberations, the distribution of chapters was strategically organised according to the specific areas of knowledge, professional experience, and subject-matter expertise of each partner, ensuring that each section of the manual benefited from informed and specialised input.

Following the drafting of the chapters, the committee board conducted a first round of internal peer review. During this stage, members critically evaluated the content, providing constructive feedback and suggesting improvements to enhance clarity, depth, and relevance. Subsequent to the integration of these initial revisions, a second internal review was undertaken. This stage allowed for a more comprehensive assessment of the Handbook as a whole, facilitating the consolidation of content, refinement of structure, and enhancement of coherence across chapters.

Finally, in order to ensure that the Handbook achieved the highest standards of quality, accuracy, and applicability, members of the project's advisory board were engaged to conduct a comprehensive review of all chapters. This stage of external evaluation provided an additional, critical layer of scrutiny, enabling the identification of potential gaps, inconsistencies, or areas requiring further elaboration. These experts assessed the content not only for factual accuracy but also for methodological rigor, relevance to professional practise, and alignment with current evidence-based standards. Their feedback facilitated the refinement of language, the enhancement of conceptual clarity, and the reinforcement of practical recommendations, thereby ensuring that the final Handbook was both authoritative and fully responsive to the needs of practitioners in diverse professional contexts.

4 Handbooks' Content¹

This section presents a summary of the most relevant content from each of the chapters that make up the *Handbook on Domestic Violence and Policy Assessment and Development*. The purpose is to provide a clear and concise overview of the key topics addressed, highlighting the essential information that supports professional practise and facilitates a better understanding of the Handbook as a whole.

4.1 Summary Chapter 2: Victims' Perspectives and Experiences

Victim-survivors who consider disclosing violence and seeking support encounter a wide range of barriers and challenges. These barriers exist at the personal, societal, and structural levels. They may involve not recognising the abuse, a lack of support from one's social network, or difficulties in accessing specialised services. The nature and impact of these barriers are also shaped by the particular vulnerabilities of victim-survivors, meaning that marginalised groups are likely to face additional obstacles. Moreover, general barriers can be intensified by such vulnerabilities—for example, a regional lack of information on support services can become even more restrictive when combined with language barriers that render available resources inaccessible.

When victim-survivors do seek help, their journeys often follow certain common patterns. With the exception of external reports triggered by mandatory reporting duties or interventions by third parties, help-seeking is typically preceded by a prolonged preparation phase. If this phase concludes successfully, victim-survivors may first turn to informal support networks, such as friends, family members, or colleagues. Formal services—such as the police, healthcare institutions, or victim-support organisations—may be sought either after informal help or directly. However, experiences with these formal services vary: while interactions with specialised victim-support organisations are generally reported positively, encounters with the police and with mainstream health and social services often present additional difficulties.

Given the barriers that emerge during decision-making, preparation, and engagement with support services, it is essential to adopt a victim-survivor perspective in addressing these challenges. Overlooking or underestimating such barriers risks leaving victim-survivors' needs unmet. Attempts to seek support that are interrupted or unsuccessful may remain invisible, with the underlying reasons for failure unexamined. Considering the already low rates of reporting in cases of DV, this invisibility represents a serious concern. Potential remedies for these issues have been proposed and are discussed in other chapters of this handbook.

4.2 Summary Chapter 3: Designing and Developing DV Policy Responses

Chapter 3 explores how evaluation can be systematically integrated into DV policies. It examines the ways in which structured evaluation practises contribute to the development, implementation, and adaptation of such policies.

A key focus is the categorisation of evaluation indicators—input, output, outcome, impact, process, context, and perception-based. These categories provide a framework for monitoring resources, service delivery, short- and long-term outcomes, policy processes, contextual influences, and stakeholder perspectives. Together, they enable a more nuanced understanding of policy effects.

¹ The content of Chapter 1 of the Handbook is devoted to the introduction, which primarily serves to provide context and outline the purpose of the document. As such, given its preliminary and referential nature, it has not been included in this section

The chapter also addresses adaptive policymaking, emphasising the value of continuous feedback loops for enabling real-time policy adjustments. Unlike traditional retrospective evaluations, this approach relies on interim assessments and real-time data collection, which enhance policy flexibility and responsiveness in the face of emerging challenges or unintended consequences.

In addition, the concept of scenario planning is introduced as a practical tool for anticipating multiple possible futures. This method equips policymakers to design interventions that remain effective across different projected developments, thereby strengthening resilience and preparedness in uncertain or complex contexts.

On the issue of accountability, the chapter reviews mechanisms such as periodic reporting under international frameworks (e.g., the Istanbul Convention), independent oversight bodies, and the engagement of civil society. It also highlights the practical difficulties these mechanisms face, including data reliability, institutional resistance, and intersectoral coordination challenges.

Ethical considerations are also foregrounded, particularly the need to safeguard survivor confidentiality and avoid re-traumatisation. The chapter advocates for combining qualitative evidence with quantitative indicators to capture a more holistic picture of policy effectiveness, especially in relation to survivors' lived experiences and institutional responses.

Finally, the chapter contributes to the broader literature by setting out a comprehensive framework of indicators, aligned with international standards such as the Istanbul Convention and GREVIO recommendations. This framework integrates both qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate police, judicial, and support service responses, as well as prevention strategies. Special attention is given to service accessibility, quality, coordination, and the long-term wellbeing of survivors.

4.3 Summary Chapter 4: Assessing DV Policy and Evaluation Criteria

This chapter examines multi-agency collaboration as a crucial strategy for addressing DV. It shows how effective responses depend on the combined expertise of police, social services, health professionals, legal actors, NGOs, and advocacy groups. Each sector contributes unique roles—from immediate protection and legal measures to medical care, child welfare, and victim-centred support.

Different collaboration models are discussed: referral systems (connecting victims to services but sometimes fragmented), inter-agency task forces like MARAC (structured cooperation through meetings and information sharing), and integrated teams (co-located professionals offering highly coordinated responses, though resource-intensive).

Core principles include early intervention, victim-centred approaches, proper information sharing, safety, documentation, and coordination. Responses should empower victims, adapt to diverse populations, and rely on trust, communication, and shared goals.

The chapter also highlights the benefits and challenges of partnerships. Advantages include shared knowledge and resource efficiency, while challenges involve time demands, coordination, and compromise. Success requires clear objectives, appropriate partners, action plans, and evaluation mechanisms.

Finally, it stresses the importance of governance, leadership, training, conflict management, and evaluation. Constructive dialogue, professional development, and ongoing assessment help strengthen collaboration and ensure more effective DV interventions.

4.4 Summary Chapter 5: Improving Inter-Agency Collaboration

This chapter examines how DV services can become more visible, accessible, and inclusive by addressing barriers that prevent victims from obtaining effective support.

It first highlights the gap between legal rights and real access, noting obstacles such as psychological distress, language or cultural barriers, geographic isolation, administrative complexity, financial costs, fragmented systems, and lack of inclusive or trauma-informed responses. These challenges are especially severe for marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, older adults, migrants, and those facing economic hardship.

The text stresses the importance of awareness-raising and education to help victims recognise abuse, understand their rights, and seek help. Strategies include public campaigns, targeted outreach, and school-based education, with emphasis on locally adapted, participatory, and survivor-led communication.

A major focus is the development of low-threshold services that are accessible, flexible, and non-stigmatising. Suggested measures include expanding service coverage, extending opening hours, simplifying procedures, reducing costs, offering childcare support, and introducing mobile units or anonymous entry points.

Beyond first access, the chapter underlines the need for coordinated and continuous care that integrates legal, medical, psychosocial, and housing support, ideally through one-stop or co-located models. Sustained assistance via caseworkers, follow-up, and long-term reintegration support is seen as essential to prevent re-victimisation.

Recognising diverse and changing needs, the chapter promotes personalised, victim-centred approaches such as modular care plans, participatory assessments, and co-designed pathways. It also highlights the importance of social networks, peer support, and reducing isolation to foster resilience.

The discussion expands to cultural and social diversity, stressing that services must adapt to the needs of minority and migrant groups. Measures include multilingual communication, professional interpretation, bicultural staff, and cultural mediation to build trust.

Finally, the chapter emphasises trauma-informed practice, urging service providers to create safe, respectful environments that avoid retraumatisation. This requires continuous staff training, empathetic communication, supportive working conditions, and strong professional care systems for practitioners.

4.5 Summary Chapter 6: Improving DV Policy Response

This chapter explores how organisations dedicated to combating DV can strengthen their capacity to provide coherent, accessible, and victim-centred services while adapting to evolving European standards.

It frames capacity building as an organisation-wide, dynamic process that connects long-term strategic vision with day-to-day operations, drawing on the perspectives of victims, practitioners, and stakeholders. The chapter emphasises the importance of strategic governance, highlighting the need to define evidence-based priorities, align resources with objectives, and establish mechanisms for monitoring, accountability, and role clarity across governance bodies, leadership, management, and frontline teams.

It then considers organisational structuring, focusing on the development of specialised units, refined case management processes, and tailored tools, supported by safeguards such as

documented procedures, communication systems, and supervision to ensure both coherence and specialisation.

Professionalisation is presented as a continuous process involving recruitment, skills development, training, and supervision, as well as cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, while also underlining the need for adaptability and innovation through structured change management and participatory approaches. The discussion of resilience centres on preparedness for crises and continuity of services during disruptions like natural disasters or pandemics, stressing the value of risk assessment, contingency planning, flexible structures, inter-agency collaboration, and recovery strategies that incorporate lessons learned into future planning.

Finally, the chapter examines how organisations can anticipate and manage reputational, political, or operational risks through proactive risk anticipation and structured crisis management.

Overall, it argues that sustainable and effective protection requires the integration of governance, professionalisation, resilience, and risk management to ensure organisations remain adaptable, innovative, and victim-centred in complex and shifting contexts.

4.6 Summary Chapter 7: Strengthening protection

This chapter reviews European obligations and best practises for protecting victims of DV, highlighting that safety must remain central throughout every stage of intervention. Effective protection requires safe entry points, continuous risk assessment, proportionate protective measures, and strong governance structures.

Access to justice goes beyond the mere existence of remedies: victims must have multiple safe reporting channels, interpretation services, accessible information, and early legal aid to navigate the legal process. Risk assessment and management must be standardised across agencies, mandatory at first contact and key milestones, and include digital forms of abuse, with risks continuously documented and updated. Protective orders are only effective if issued swiftly, reliably served, and strictly enforced, with structured follow-up ensuring victims' ongoing safety.

Beyond legal remedies, victims also need immediate support such as tailored safety planning, medical and forensic care, safe housing, financial assistance, and psychosocial support, with special attention to children's needs. Protection cannot rely solely on victims; perpetrators must also be actively managed through enforcement of restrictions, monitoring of high-risk behaviours, and, where appropriate, evidence-based behaviour-change programmes. Strong governance underpins the entire system, requiring staff training, harmonised procedures, common data standards, effective information-sharing, regular audits, and sustainable funding.

The chapter concludes that protection is not a single action but a coordinated system. When implemented consistently and collaboratively, these measures place victims' safety and autonomy at the centre and significantly reduce risks, especially after disclosure of violence.

4.7 Summary Chapter 8: Strengthening Organisational Capacity for Service Enhancement and Crisis Readiness

The chapter explores how organisations addressing DV can enhance their capacity to deliver coherent, accessible, and victim-centred services while aligning with European standards. It highlights the need for an integrated approach that combines strategic governance,

organisational structuring, professionalisation, operational resilience, and risk management to ensure sustainable and effective protection.

It begins by framing capacity building as a dynamic, organisation-wide process that goes beyond resource expansion, focusing on aligning governance, structures, and workforce development with strategic priorities. The chapter then details strategic governance, emphasising evidence-based long-term planning, resource alignment, monitoring, evaluation, and clear role delineation across all organisational levels.

Next, it discusses organisational structuring and specialisation, including dedicated units, tailored case management processes, documented procedures, and robust communication to maintain coherence and quality. Professionalisation is presented as ongoing skills development through strategic recruitment, structured onboarding, training, supervision, and inclusive practises, alongside mechanisms to manage change and implement innovations effectively.

The chapter also covers crisis-readiness, service continuity, and resilience planning, including risk assessment, contingency plans, surge staffing, inter-agency cooperation, and integrating lessons learned. Finally, it addresses managing reputational or political pressures, stressing proactive risk anticipation and structured crisis response as key for navigating high-profile incidents or operational challenges.

5 Results of the Expert Evaluations

5.1 Internal Reviewers' Evaluations

5.1.1. Chapter 2: Victims' Perspectives and Experiences

The internal reviewers offered comprehensive and constructive feedback, underscoring several areas in which the chapter could be significantly improved to better serve its purpose within a professional manual on DV. The comments centered on the need for greater academic rigor, contextual specificity, and the inclusion of practical guidance tailored to practitioners and decision-makers.

A central concern raised by the reviewers was the **lack of precise definitions of the key concepts** introduced in the chapter. Without anchoring these concepts in established scientific literature, the chapter risks presenting vague or ambiguous ideas that are not sufficiently grounded in evidence. To remedy this, the reviewers emphasised the necessity of systematically referencing scholarly sources and creating a robust bibliography.

“Introduce definitions of the key concepts covered in the chapter that align with the scientific literature. In general, it is essential to provide a bibliography (cited throughout the chapter and referenced in a bibliography section) for the statements made. The chapter, as written in its current version, is too vague and lacks an evidence-based approach.”

It was also noted that while project deliverables, such as Deliverable 1.1, provide useful context, **the text should clearly differentiate between knowledge drawn from the broader body of scientific literature and insights derived directly from the IMPROVE project.**

“The reference to Deliverable 1.1 in the final section is a useful suggestion for providing more bibliographic information to the potential reader, but we must present an evidence-based perspective on the information.”

In particular, **references to Deliverable 1.2 and articles already published by partner institutions should be integrated** in order to lend credibility and transparency to the information presented. This distinction would reinforce the chapter's evidence-based perspective and make explicit the sources of its claims.

“Deliverable 1.2. or the articles already published by the partners that include these results should be quoted.”

Beyond definitional clarity, the reviewers stressed the **importance of geographical contextualisation**. While the chapter currently provides a general overview of DV, it lacks the depth that could be achieved through examples from specific countries. Including such comparative case material would not only enrich the analysis but also offer readers practical illustrations of improvements and solutions already implemented in diverse contexts.

“While a general overview of the problem is presented, it is important to contextualize the information geographically and provide examples from specific countries, both of potential improvements and solutions that have already been implemented.”

In this regard, the reviewers also encouraged the **integration of recent and reliable data**, including the 2024 FRA survey carried out in collaboration with Eurostat and EIGE. If more recent reports are not available, the reviewers suggested that this limitation should be transparently explained (e.g., due to the periodicity of data collection or the discontinuation of

certain studies). This would underscore the manual's commitment to presenting the most current knowledge while acknowledging the constraints of existing evidence.

The reviewers also highlighted the need for **greater attention to the dynamics of seeking support**, particularly with respect to the role of children. Drawing on the Spanish draft of Deliverable 1.2, they observed that children often act as a decisive influence on women's decisions to leave abusive relationships. Citing key studies (Meyer, 2010; Randell et al., 2012; Izaguirre, 2014), the reviewers emphasised that children's unhappiness, the psychological harm caused by exposure to violence, and their use by abusive partners as tools of manipulation all play a critical role in survivors' decision-making processes. Including this perspective would both strengthen the chapter's empirical grounding and more accurately reflect the lived realities of survivors.

Finally, the reviewers noted that the chapter **does not adequately develop practical recommendations for senior FLRs**. For a manual intended to guide professional practise, this represents a significant gap. The reviewers suggested either expanding the section to provide concrete, actionable recommendations or explicitly linking the discussion to other chapters where innovative solutions are more fully elaborated.

"The development of practical recommendations suitable for senior line managers should be improved, or at the very least, cross-referenced with chapters that offer innovative solutions."

This would ensure that readers not only understand the conceptual and empirical dimensions of DV but also leave with practical tools and strategies to apply in their professional roles.

Taken together, this feedback highlights the need for the chapter to strike a careful balance between theory, evidence, and practise. By strengthening its scientific foundation, contextualising its content geographically, integrating the most recent data, addressing the critical role of children in survivors' decisions, and providing actionable recommendations, the chapter could evolve into a more rigorous, comprehensive, and practitioner-oriented resource.

5.1.2. Chapter 3: Designing and Developing DV Policy Responses: A Structured Framework for Inclusive Design and Planning

The internal reviewers highlighted the overall quality and coherence of the chapter, emphasising that it is *"very well written and plausible."* This observation acknowledges both the clarity of the writing and the credibility of the arguments and information presented. The reviewers also expressed gratitude for the effort and professionalism demonstrated. Such feedback reinforces the value of the chapter as a useful and well-prepared resource for professionals working in the field of DV intervention.

In the feedback provided, particular attention was drawn to the **section on policy development**. The reviewers suggested **reinforcing this part by explicitly highlighting the importance of securing funding for activities that might otherwise be perceived as non-essential—such as participatory workshops and survivor panels**. These initiatives, however, are identified as central to the proposed model. The recommendation also includes offering readers practical guidance on how to advocate for and secure budgets to sustain these types of activities.

5.1.3. Chapter 4: Assessing DV Policy and Evaluation Criteria

The internal reviewers' feedback emphasised the chapters' high quality. The feedback highlighted the clarity, depth, and well-organised structure of the content. This positive

evaluation underscores the strong reception of the material and reinforces its relevance for professionals addressing DV.

5.1.4. Chapter 5: Improving Inter-Agency Collaboration

The internal reviewers provided in-depth feedback emphasising **the need to refine both the analytical content and structural design** of the chapter so that it better integrates with the rest of the handbook and offers added value to practitioners.

A key recommendation concerned the **necessity of establishing stronger cross-references**, particularly with chapter 8. The reviewers noted that certain themes overlap with material already addressed elsewhere in the handbook, raising the risk of redundancy. By linking the current analysis to earlier discussions instead of repeating them, the chapter could achieve greater cohesion and contribute to the overall narrative of the manual. This strategy would also underscore how the various chapters complement each other in offering a comprehensive resource for professionals working on gender-based violence.

The reviewers also encouraged a **deeper problematisation of the legal rights of parents in DV cases**. They highlighted the complex contradiction whereby perpetrators—by virtue of being parents—retain legal rights to know the location of their children and to maintain contact, even when the non-abusive parent has sought refuge in a shelter. In practice, this places social workers in the difficult position of having to disclose sensitive information by law, thereby jeopardising the safety of both survivors and children. By explicitly addressing this legal paradox, the chapter could bring to light one of the most pressing systemic challenges faced by practitioners, prompting critical reflection on the balance between parental rights, victim protection, and child safety. Such analysis would not only enrich the chapter's content but also provide professionals with a more nuanced framework for navigating these high-stakes situations.

Another significant recommendation focused on the **need to integrate intersectional perspectives**, particularly with regard to Roma women in shelters for victims of domestic violence.

This suggestion underscores the importance of acknowledging the compounded vulnerabilities experienced by marginalised groups. Including this dimension would broaden the scope of the chapter, making it more inclusive and reflective of the diverse realities professionals encounter. Moreover, it would strengthen the handbook's commitment to equity and its responsiveness to the specific barriers faced by minority communities in accessing protection and support.

From a structural perspective, the reviewers praised the chapter for being generally **clear and well-written** *"It's clear and well written"* but identified several areas requiring improvement to align with the standards of the handbook.

The reviewers observed that the current version **lacks sufficient references**, thereby limiting its evidence base, and recommended the inclusion of a conclusive subchapter to synthesise insights and provide closure. Furthermore, it was stressed the importance of harmonising the chapter's structure with the rest of the handbook—specifically, by consolidating the number of subchapters and adopting a consistent numbering format (e.g., 1.1.2).

"it lacks references and a conclusive subchapter. Also the number of subchapters should be merged into (3) the rest of the handbook i.e 1.1.2."

These adjustments would enhance navigability, ensure internal coherence, and strengthen the chapter's overall credibility as a professional resource.

Taken together, the reviewers's observations highlight three interconnected priorities: (1) reinforcing the coherence of the handbook through systematic cross-referencing and structural alignment, (2) enriching the analytical depth of the chapter by problematising legal contradictions and integrating intersectional perspectives, and (3) improving the evidence base and readability through expanded references, a conclusive section, and a standardised structure. Addressing these issues would not only increase the clarity and rigor of the chapter but also maximise its utility as a practical and trustworthy guide for professionals addressing DV.

5.1.5. Chapter 6: Improving DV Policy Response

The reviewers acknowledged the chapter as an outstanding and comprehensive contribution, underscoring its relevance for professionals working in the field of DV. The reviewer particularly valued the depth of the analysis and the clarity of the content. Nevertheless, attention was drawn to the **variation in the use of terminology**, specifically regarding the alternating references to "victim," "survivor," and "victim-survivor." Such linguistic variation, while understandable given the complexity and sensitivity of the subject matter, may present challenges for readers in maintaining conceptual coherence.

"I noticed a slight variation in the language used, particularly with terms like "victim," "survivor," and "victim-survivor."

In order to mitigate potential ambiguities, the reviewer recommended the **inclusion of a brief glossary or an editorial note** at the outset of the chapter. This clarification would not only justify the editorial decision behind the chosen terms but also promote uniformity in interpretation across different professional profiles. By addressing this aspect, the chapter would enhance its accessibility and ensure that practitioners from diverse backgrounds can navigate the text with greater precision and confidence.

"To make sure everything is crystal clear, you might want to add a brief glossary or an editorial note at the beginning to explain the choice of terminology. This would really help the reader navigate the text."

The reviewers provided detailed and insightful feedback regarding the structure, readability, and practical utility of the chapter. The reviewers observed that **the text is densely packed**, presenting a considerable amount of content in a highly condensed form. While comprehensive, this approach may make the reading experience demanding, as it requires readers to navigate quickly between diverse topics, each containing multiple points for consideration. Such density can lead to cognitive overload, potentially reducing the effectiveness of the material for busy professionals who require clear and actionable guidance.

"Perhaps the only thing to consider is that the text is very tightly packed and condenses a lot of content. This makes the reading experience at times a little exhausting (for me), as it can be quite overwhelming jumping from topic to topic - each topic providing numerous items to consider."

To address this, the reviewers suggested **integrating practical examples** within the text. These examples would serve as concrete illustrations of the concepts and strategies discussed, making the guidance more relatable and easier to apply in real-world professional contexts. Furthermore, they recommended enhancing the cross-referencing of the existing text boxes within the main narrative. Improved linkage between the descriptive content and the illustrative examples would facilitate a smoother reading flow, enabling professionals to connect theory with practice more seamlessly.

“The boxes you already have, could be better referred to within the text, so readers have an easier time flowing from information to specific examples.”

Overall, the feedback emphasises the importance of balancing thoroughness with readability, ensuring that the chapter remains both informative and accessible. Incorporating these suggestions would likely enhance the manual’s usability, making it a more effective tool for professionals intervening in cases of DV.

5.1.6. Chapter 7: Strengthening Protection

The reviewers emphasised that the chapter draws extensively on the material contributed by the authors, with particular reliance on the sections addressing technical tools. While this was recognised as valuable, the reviewers also noted that some of this content **overlaps with material already covered in other chapters**. To avoid redundancy and ensure a clearer delineation between sections of the manual, the reviewers suggested that certain parts could be streamlined or reduced.

In addition, the reviewers considered that a degree of **restructuring and rewriting** may be necessary to improve the overall flow of the chapter and to enhance its accessibility for readers. From the reviewers’ perspective, such adjustments would not only eliminate repetition but also reinforce the coherence of the manual as a whole.

Finally, the reviewers pointed out that the current version of the chapter is **heavily text-based**. It was recommended to include additional visual or structural elements, such as boxes or highlighted sections, to diversify the presentation of content. In their view, such features would break up dense passages, offer readers more accessible entry points into the material, and ultimately improve engagement with the chapter.

5.1.7. Chapter 8: Strengthening Organisational Capacity for Service Enhancement and Crisis Readiness

The reviewers praised the chapter as an excellent contribution to the manual, particularly commending its ability to clearly present and break down complex concepts related to interventions in DV. The reviewers highlighted the chapter’s effectiveness in guiding professionals through nuanced material in an accessible and structured manner.

In addition to this positive appraisal, the first reviewer suggested that the chapter could achieve even greater impact by **establishing stronger links** to Chapter 6.

“It could be even more powerful if it linked more explicitly to Chapter 6.”

Specifically, they recommended **incorporating additional cross-references** or connections between the two chapters, which would create a more cohesive and integrated narrative throughout the manual.

“A few more cross-references between the two chapters could create a really cohesive and integrated feel for the whole document.”

This recommendation underscores the potential value of ensuring thematic continuity and reinforcing conceptual links across chapters, thereby enhancing the manual’s overall utility as a practical and comprehensive resource for professionals in the field.

The second reviewer provided an overall highly favourable assessment of this chapter, recognising it as a comprehensive and well-constructed contribution to the handbook. The

chapter is praised for the depth and quality of its content, reflecting a strong command of the subject matter and its relevance for professionals working in the field of DV.

However, the reviewer notes that the chapter is **considerably longer** than previous contributions, containing roughly twice the usual amount of text. While acknowledging the richness of the content, the reviewer suggests that the extensive length may hinder readability and accessibility. It was recommended adopting a more concise and focused approach, reducing the degree of programmatic detail in favor of a clearer, more streamlined narrative. This suggestion aligns with the principle that “less is more”, which may help readers engage more fully with the material without feeling overwhelmed.

Specific attention is drawn to the first 35–40 pages of the chapter, which are identified as the sections most in need of review and potential reduction. Some content here is described as unnecessary or overly expansive, potentially detracting from the chapter’s overall clarity and impact. By refining these sections, the chapter could become more targeted, coherent, and user-friendly for practitioners.

In contrast, the final section—covering topics such as the pandemic—is highlighted as particularly effective, relevant, and well-written. This portion is commended for its practical value and readability, demonstrating the chapter’s potential to deliver critical insights to professionals in the field when structured effectively.

Overall, the reviewer’s feedback suggests that the chapter’s quality and depth are strong, but its length and occasional overextension could be optimised to enhance readability, accessibility, and practical applicability. Streamlining the content, especially in the early sections, would likely improve the reception of the chapter among its intended audience.

The third reviewer provided a thorough and constructive evaluation of the chapter. Overall, it was recognised that the chapter is **well-written and contains a rich amount of information** relevant for professionals working in the field of DV. While they offered a few minor recommendations, they emphasised that these suggestions are mostly optional and do not detract from the overall quality of the chapter.

A key observation from the reviewer concerns the chapter’s highly condensed style. Although this approach allows for the inclusion of substantial content within a limited space, it can, at times, make the reading experience more demanding and less fluid.

“I think the main issue, again, is how this very condensed style of writing at times makes the reading experience a bit difficult for me.”

The reviewer noted that while the chapter includes a relatively higher number of illustrative examples compared to other sections, these examples are generally presented in isolation and are not seamlessly integrated into the narrative.

“While this chapter has more examples, they are usually not integrated in the text.”

The reviewer suggested that integrating these examples more closely with the surrounding text could enhance the chapter’s readability by creating a smoother narrative flow. Furthermore, strategically placed examples could serve as brief, cognitive “breathers,” giving readers a moment to process complex information before moving on to the next dense segment. In this way, the reviewer indicates that a balance between dense content and illustrative, contextually embedded examples could improve both comprehension and engagement for the intended professional audience.

“I think integration might help by streamlining the reading flow. Furthermore, these interspersed mentions can serve as a small reprieve between content rich segments.”

5.2 External reviewers' evaluations²

5.2.1. Expert Evaluation: Chapter 2. Victims Perspectives and Experiences

The external reviewer highlighted that the chapter contains a **great deal of valuable information**. This comment indicates that the content is perceived as relevant and useful for professionals working in cases of DV. The reviewer's appreciation suggests that the chapter successfully provides knowledge and practical tools, demonstrating that its structure and focus are appropriate for the target audience. However, since the feedback is general, it may be helpful to supplement this positive note with more specific comments on areas for improvement, clarity, or practical examples to further enhance the manual's usefulness.

The external reviewer emphasised that the **effectiveness of this chapter depends heavily on how the content is presented**, in relation to the specific audience it intends to reach. Professionals in medicine, law, policy-making, and related fields often face significant time constraints and high workloads, limiting their capacity to engage with lengthy or densely written material.

“Your presentation method has a lot to do with who you are trying to reach. Professionals in medicine, law, policy and many other fields do not have the time to read lengthy materials and they might quit if it will take too much of their time.”

Also, this reviewer highlighted that certain sections of the chapter contain **more information than the reader strictly needs**. This overabundance of detail risks overwhelming or disengaging the reader, potentially reducing the practical impact of the manual for professionals working in the field of DV. The reviewer recommends a careful editorial approach that prioritises essential content, emphasising clarity and relevance. Streamlining the text in this way would likely enhance comprehension, maintain reader engagement, and ensure that the manual effectively supports practitioners in applying its guidance in real-world interventions.

“More than what the reader needs often ends in losing the interest of the reader. Editing down to the essential content would help a great deal.”

These observations have several implications for the handbook.

² Although the handbook comprises a compendium of eight chapters, this section presents only the reviews received by the submission deadline established for the deliverable.

Table 1: Feedback from the evaluation of Chapter 2.

Theme	Reviewer's Feedback	Proposed Improvement
Overall value of the chapter	The chapter contains a great deal of valuable information, which is perceived as relevant and useful for professionals addressing DV.	Preserve the richness of the content while supplementing general praise with specific improvements, such as adding clarity or more practical examples to maximise usefulness.
Audience considerations	The effectiveness of the chapter depends on how content is presented to time-constrained professionals (e.g., medicine, law, policy). Lengthy or dense material risks discouraging readers.	Tailor the format to the needs of busy professionals by streamlining information, ensuring clarity, and prioritising brevity.
Overabundance of detail	Certain sections contain more information than strictly necessary. Excessive detail may overwhelm readers and reduce the manual's practical impact.	Apply careful editing to focus on essential content, maintaining clarity and relevance. Streamlined writing will enhance comprehension and engagement.
Presentation style	Long and dense paragraphs make key points less visible and harder to retain. Bold or concise statements would be more impactful.	Reorganise content into concise bullet points or short sections. Use bold statements to highlight main ideas, improving readability and retention.
Organisation of key information	Important points are not always clearly structured or easy to identify.	Organise information systematically, presenting each point concisely to improve accessibility and support quick reference.

5.2.2. Expert Evaluation: Chapter 3. Designing and Developing DV Policy Responses.

The external reviewer's feedback underscores the relevance and quality of the chapter within the manual. The reviewer stressed that engaging with the material allowed her to acquire knowledge she did not previously possess, which highlights the chapter's capacity to generate new insights even for professionals already familiar with the field.

"I have learned a lot of things I didn't know. I find the chapter very comprehensive and detailed at the same time."

However, it was also highlighted that the **chapter presents considerable complexity**, noting that it was not easy to read and required significant time to work through. This observation suggests that, while the content is valuable, its density and structure may represent a challenge for readers, particularly for professionals who will need to engage with the material in applied contexts.

"It is not an easy chapter to read and has taken me some time to get through it."

Furthermore, the reviewer pointed out that **the text achieves a difficult balance**: it is comprehensive in scope, covering a wide range of essential aspects related to interventions in cases of DV, while also being sufficiently detailed to support practical understanding and application. This dual quality—breadth combined with depth—was perceived as particularly

valuable, as it ensures that the content is not only informative but also usable for professionals seeking guidance in real-world scenarios.

The external reviewer highlighted an issue regarding **formatting consistency** in the introductory pages of the manual, specifically in the way chapter descriptions are presented. They noted that brackets are used inconsistently—appearing in some chapter titles or descriptions and omitted in others.

“a little more consistency on the first pages when describing the chapters, sometimes brackets and sometimes not.”

Although this may seem like a minor detail, such inconsistencies can affect the perceived professionalism and clarity of the manual. For practitioners working in sensitive areas such as DV, clear and consistent formatting helps ensure that information is easily navigable and immediately comprehensible, reducing cognitive load and minimising potential confusion.

The external reviewer highlighted the overall quality and clarity of the chapter, noting that the information presented requires little improvement. Particular emphasis was placed on the **usefulness of the grey summary boxes**, which were described as especially helpful for providing a clear overview of the key points. This positive evaluation underscores the effectiveness of the chapter's structure and the added value of visual elements in facilitating comprehension for professionals working in the field of DV.

“On the whole I find very little to improve when it comes to the information presented, The grey boxes with summaries are very helpful when trying to get an overview.”

The external reviewer emphasised that the chapter demonstrates a **high degree of descriptive richness and detail**, which reflects the thoroughness and expertise of its authors. However, this same level of detail results in a chapter that is considerably long and, at times, difficult to navigate. The reviewer raised the concern that, although conciseness is desirable, it is not evident how the text could be shortened without risking the omission of essential content.

“The text is very descriptive and very detailed and it is a very long chapter but I am not sure on how to make it shorter without missing out on essentials.”

To address this challenge, the reviewer suggested that the text might benefit from a more explicit structural differentiation between sections that provide contextual or background information and those that present practical proposals or recommendations. Establishing a clearer separation of these two functions could enhance the chapter's accessibility, particularly for practitioners who often need to retrieve specific information rapidly in the context of their professional interventions.

“Maybe making a more marked difference in the text when describing backgrounds and information to future proposals could make the chapter more accessible.”

As the chapter currently stands, **its density and length may hinder quick consultation**, potentially limiting its usability as a practical tool. Therefore, the feedback points to the need for strategies that preserve the comprehensiveness of the content while improving its organisation, navigability, and practical applicability.

The following recommendations were given:

Table 2: Feedback from the evaluation of Chapter 3.

Themes	Feedback	Proposed Improvement
Audience Awareness	Professionals in medicine, law, policy, and similar fields have limited time. Dense or lengthy materials risk losing their attention quickly.	The goal is to match your presentation style to the needs and constraints of your audience.
Relevance and knowledge contribution	The chapter is comprehensive, detailed, and provides new knowledge.	Maintain the depth and comprehensiveness of the content, highlighting its value for both new and experienced professionals.
Complexity and readability	The chapter is not easy to read and requires significant time to work through.	Simplify structure where possible and integrate supportive elements (e.g., summaries, examples, visuals) to improve readability.
Breadth and depth balance	The chapter achieves a valuable balance between comprehensive coverage and sufficient detail for practical application.	Preserve this balance, ensuring that usability for real-world contexts remains central.
Formatting consistency	Inconsistencies in the use of brackets in introductory chapter descriptions.	Standardise formatting across the manual to ensure clarity and professional presentation.
Use of summary boxes	The grey summary boxes were considered especially helpful in providing overviews of key points.	Expand or replicate the use of summary boxes to facilitate quick reference and reinforce comprehension.
Length and descriptiveness	The chapter is highly descriptive and long, making it difficult to navigate, though cutting content risks losing essentials.	Differentiate more clearly between background/contextual information and practical recommendations to improve accessibility without reducing content.

In sum, the reviewer's assessment affirms that the chapter succeeds in enhancing expertise, consolidating knowledge, and offering practical utility for those working in the complex area of DV intervention.

5.2.3. Expert Evaluation: Chapter 4. Assessing Domestic Violence Policy and Evaluation Criteria.

As highlighted by the reviewer, the subchapter on data-driven advocacy would be **strengthened by explicitly addressing the need to establish clear protocols for improved data collection and the systematic sharing of information on common cases.** This observation underscores a structural challenge faced by many institutions: the lack of harmonised indicators and unified procedures for gathering and integrating data. When each institution applies its own criteria and maintains isolated databases, the result is often fragmented knowledge that hinders comprehensive understanding of cases. Such

fragmentation has serious consequences, including the risk of repeat victimisation for survivors and the development of risk assessments that are uncoordinated, inconsistent, or even contradictory across institutions. By introducing shared protocols, common indicators, and mechanisms for data exchange, institutions can not only reduce duplication of efforts but also strengthen collaboration and ensure more accurate and holistic approaches to risk management. This, in turn, would enhance the effectiveness of data-driven advocacy, making it a more reliable tool for informing policy, improving service provision, and safeguarding the rights and protection of those affected by gender-based violence.

“I feel the need to introduce somewhere in the data driven advocacy subchapter also the need for establishing protocols regarding better data collection and also data shared around common cases. The lack of common indicators among institutions in data collection and unification of data leads not only to repeat victimisation, but uncorrelated risk assessment of the cases implemented separately by different institutions.”

In the same vein, the reviewer refers to the **need to include good practise examples**. More specifically, the reviewer refers to the work of the Commission for Monitoring and Analysis of Cases of Femicides carried out in the Republic of Moldova. This suggestion emphasises the importance of incorporating concrete, context-specific experiences that could enrich the manual by offering practical insights and comparative perspectives on effective mechanisms for addressing DV.

An essential issue highlighted in the feedback concerns the **absence of unified protocols for data collection and information sharing among institutions working in the field of DV**. Currently, the lack of common indicators and standardised procedures results in fragmented datasets that are difficult to consolidate and compare. This fragmentation has significant implications: it may lead to repeated victimisation, as survivors are often required to recount their experiences multiple times to different services, and it undermines the consistency of risk assessments, which are frequently conducted in isolation by separate institutions. Without coordinated practises, the capacity to identify patterns, monitor trends, and respond effectively to cases is severely limited. Establishing shared protocols and indicators would therefore not only improve the quality and reliability of available data but also strengthen inter-institutional collaboration, reduce the burden on survivors, and ensure that interventions are guided by comprehensive and coherent information.

Table 3: Feedback from the evaluation of Chapter 4.

Theme	Feedback Provided	Proposed Improvement
Data collection and sharing protocols	Need to explicitly include in the data-driven advocacy subchapter the importance of establishing protocols for better data collection and systematic information sharing on common cases. The lack of common indicators and unified procedures leads to fragmented data, repeat victimisation, and uncoordinated risk assessments.	Introduce a section that highlights the importance of shared protocols, harmonised indicators, and mechanisms for inter-institutional data exchange to ensure coherent, consistent, and survivor-centred practises.
Consequences of fragmented data	Fragmentation of information across institutions results in serious consequences: survivors may face repeat victimisation and risk assessments may become inconsistent, contradictory, or incomplete.	Emphasise the risks of fragmented data and illustrate how unified protocols reduce duplication, support comprehensive case understanding, and improve coordinated risk management.
Good practise examples	Include good practise examples, specifically referencing the work of the Commission for Monitoring and Analysis of Cases of Femicides in the Republic of Moldova.	Incorporate case studies or best practises (e.g., from the Moldovan Commission) to provide practical illustrations, enrich the manual with comparative perspectives, and demonstrate effective mechanisms for addressing DV.
Structural challenge	The feedback underscored a systemic issue faced by many institutions: the absence of harmonised indicators and standardised procedures for data collection and integration.	Present this as a broader structural challenge and propose the adoption of common frameworks, shared databases, and inter-institutional collaboration to overcome systemic barriers.

6 Methodological Limitations of the Evaluation

This section of the document is dedicated to examining the limitations arising both from the review process and from the handbook's content itself. On one hand, it considers the constraints that reviewers may have faced when providing feedback, such as the limited time for thorough analysis. On the other hand, it acknowledges the handbook's intrinsic limitations, including aspects such as its restricted thematic scope, the need for continuous updates to reflect new evidence or practises, and potential gaps in the information presented. Recognising these limitations not only allows for a better understanding of the feedback received but also provides transparency regarding the handbook's scope, facilitating a more informed and critical use of its content and fostering future improvements and constructive dialogue between its users and developers.

- Lack of Clear Review Criteria

One key methodological limitation in reviewing chapters of a manual is the lack of detailed guidelines specifying which aspects should be evaluated, such as accuracy of information, clarity, relevance, or integration of a gender perspective. Without these clear criteria, reviewers may focus on different elements, resulting in inconsistent or even contradictory feedback that is difficult to reconcile.

- Limited Time for Review

Reviews often take place under tight deadlines, and reviewers with heavy workloads may have limited time to dedicate to each chapter. As a result, important errors, omissions, or inconsistencies in the gender perspective can be overlooked. For example, a chapter on crisis intervention might not be thoroughly examined, leaving certain procedures unclear or even contradictory.

- Difficulty in Evaluating Evidence and References

Reviewing manuals requires ensuring that all recommendations are based on up-to-date and relevant evidence. However, not all reviewers have access to or familiarity with every source, which can lead to the inclusion of outdated, unreliable, or biased information. For example, a protocol for assisting victims of sexual violence might reference international guidelines that are no longer current in practise, potentially affecting the quality and effectiveness of the manual's guidance.

- Complicated Format

A format complicated to read in a manual can significantly hinder its practical use. Diagrams, tables, practical examples, or step-by-step instructions may be poorly designed, featuring confusing structures, excessive information in a single element, or ambiguous symbols, which makes it difficult for professionals to quickly identify key information. As a result, professionals may misinterpret procedures, spend unnecessary time trying to decipher the content, or make errors when applying protocols, ultimately reducing both the efficiency and safety of interventions.

- Delays in Feedback

Delays in feedback can affect the overall review process of a manual. When reviewers are unable to submit their comments on time, the schedule for updates or publication may be impacted, which could limit the timely availability of the resource for professionals. Such delays can arise for several reasons. Reviewers often have multiple responsibilities and may need to prioritize other tasks. Additionally, without reminders or a structured tracking system,

deadlines may occasionally be overlooked. Coordination challenges can also occur when multiple chapters depend on different reviewers, as a delay in one section may slow the integration of feedback across the manual. Finally, if deadlines or priorities are not clearly communicated, reviewers may submit comments later than anticipated, further affecting the review process.

7 Conclusions

The development of the *Handbook on Domestic Violence and Policy Assessment and Development* of WP4 followed a rigorous and collaborative methodological process, ensuring that each stage—from initial drafting to internal peer review and advisory board evaluation—was carefully structured and guided by the expertise of the participating partners. This systematic approach not only strengthened the quality, coherence, and accuracy of the content but also ensured that the manual reflects current knowledge and best practises in the field of DV.

The handbook represents a significant and valuable resource for professionals, providing practical guidance and evidence-based recommendations to support their work. Its comprehensive and carefully reviewed content enhances both professional competence and the capacity to respond effectively to cases of DV, underscoring the handbook's relevance and utility in real-world practise.

Following the successive review processes to which the chapters of the handbook have been subjected, and incorporating the feedback provided by both internal and external reviewers, it can be concluded that the current version of the document embodies a thorough integration of these contributions.

The revisions carried out in response to this feedback have reinforced the academic rigor of the text by ensuring the inclusion of evidence-based definitions, up-to-date data, and references to both scientific literature and project deliverables. At the same time, the integration of contextual examples, best practices, and practical recommendations has significantly enhanced the handbook's usability and relevance for professionals working in the field of DV.

This iterative and collaborative process of critical review has not only improved the clarity, coherence, and consistency of the chapters but has also ensured that the handbook achieves a balance between theoretical depth and practical applicability. As a result, the current version can be considered a more robust, comprehensive, and practitioner-oriented resource, reflecting the collective expertise and insights of all those involved in its development.