

National Report - Portugal

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1. Introduction

The present document corresponds to the national report on Portugal, part of Deliverable D2.2 'National and summary reports' of the project Prevent And combaT domesTic violEnce against Roma women with the acronym PATTERN and project number 881731 that started on June 1st 2020 and has a duration of 24 months.

PATTERN addresses the call priority 'REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2019 – Call for proposal to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children, young people and women'. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to the prevention and combatting of domestic violence against Roma women in Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal, Spain, and Romania.

In order to reach its overall objective, the project has set the following more specific objectives:

- Increasing access to knowledge/data on the phenomenon of domestic violence against Roma women.
- Developing Domestic Violence Protocols for Roma Women that enable professionals to respond to domestic violence comprehensively.
- Enhancing the capacities of at least 350 Roma intercultural mediators and professionals in community centres/other local community services on domestic violence against Roma women.
- Enhancing the capacities of at least 100-150 Roma women on how to recognize and report domestic violence and act as leaders of change in their communities.
- Raising awareness in Roma communities to building healthy & egalitarian relationships.

This deliverable D2.2 forms part of PATTERN WP2 Research on domestic violence in Roma communities with the involvement of Roma women, which contributes mainly to the specific objective of increasing access to knowledge/data on the phenomenon of domestic violence against Roma women.

This report has the following structure: in section 2, the national framework (in brief) on domestic violence in the Roma communities is set; in section 3, the methodology adopted in the fieldwork is detailed; in section 4, the participants in the interviews are characterised; section 5 presents the

main findings from the interviews; and finally section 5 summarises the key conclusions from the research on domestic violence against Roma women in Portugal.

2. National framework (in brief) on domestic violence in the Roma communities

In Portugal, although the size of the Portuguese Roma/Gipsy (*cigana*) population is not stabilised, the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (ENICC) indicates that it will represent 0.4% of the Portuguese population, in a total of 37 thousand individuals (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2018). A community, whose references point to having arrived in Portugal in the 15th century (the Kalé) and which, however, as mentioned in the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities (2013-2020) (*Estratégia Nacional para a Integração das Comunidades Ciganas (ENICC) 2013-2020*) (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2013), only in 1822 the Portuguese Constitution gave them Portuguese citizenship. Even so, neither such a fact, nor even the institution of democracy that took place in Portugal in 1974, was sufficient to put an end to the inequality and discrimination that Roma communities still experience (Magano & Mendes, 2014).

At the level of public policies and action by the Portuguese government in this matter and in a more structured way, we found it in the mid-90s of the 20th century, with the creation of the single person of a High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (ACIME), reconfigured in 2002, passing the interdepartmental structure with the same designation, a structure for consultation and support from the Government in these matters (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2002). With the objective of promoting social integration policies and combating and preventing exclusion and discrimination based on race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin and even though this body has undergone changes in nomenclature, ACIME, ACIDI - High Commission for Immigration and Dialogue Intercultural (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2007) and, since 2014, ACM - High Commissioner for Migration (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2014), the continuity of work is recognised and, more recently, greater acuity in relation to people and Roma communities, also translated into a framework of specific national strategies, which aim at their integration and which meet the framework of public policies defined at European level.

Even so, it is certain that stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination against gypsy communities in Portugal persist, demanding policies and practices continued over time that put an end to them and guarantee the possibility of experiences in shared differences, full citizenship and material equality.

For this to be achieved, and adhering to the thought of Maria José Casa-Nova, it will be essential that the political power shows particular interest to this social-cultural group in what concerns the promotion of an effective knowledge of their ways of life and the development of a *non-subordinate integration process*, as well as studies and scientific knowledge. (Casa-Nova, 2009)

2.1 Law and policy

Violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1993). Today, it is commonly acknowledged that its causes and outcomes lie in the unequal power between women and men (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020), in gender discrimination and in determining political, social, cultural, economic and educational factors (World Health Organisation, 2014).

In Portugal, the course of law-making and public policies to do with violence against women, including domestic violence, has been influenced by the action and the visibility of feminist organisations and movements dealing with this complex social problem (Costa, 2018), when they demanded in the 1990s, that the issue be placed on the political agenda. On the other hand, upon Portugal joining international bodies and a binding conventional framework, demanded that political and legislative measures be taken, anchored in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979.

Applying this and other instruments influenced Portugal's political agenda regarding this matter; we may mention the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action*, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on 25 June 1993, and the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 December 1993, and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, on 15 September 1995. Furthermore, scientific knowledge produced in the 1990s and in 2000 about violence against women was gained, mainly by way of the 1995 National Survey on "Violence against Women" promoted by the Portuguese Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) and the 2007 "National Survey on Violence exercised against Women and Men", also promoted by the CIG.

This situation led Portugal to pass its first *National Plan against Domestic Violence* (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 1999). Thereafter and up to the present, policy-making in this area has

been up-dated and improved and the 6th generation of the National Plans is now in effect. Owing to the influence exerted by the Council of Europe *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (the *Istanbul Convention* - Council of Europe, 2011), the Portuguese plan is called “Action Plan on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence” 2018-2021 integrated in the broader measure, the *National Strategy for Equality and Non-discrimination – Portugal + Equal (ENIND) 2018-2030* (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2018).

With regard to laws covering domestic violence, we may say that 1982 marked the beginning of an on-going process allowing advances to be made in, and the entrenchment of, the rights of victims of domestic violence in Portugal. In fact, the 1982 Criminal Code (Council of Ministers, 1982) included the crime of abuse for the first time, and laid the groundwork, even if tentatively, for considering conjugal violence one of the kinds of abuse. Subsequent reformulations in 1995 and 1998 of these pertinent laws led to the 2000 recognition of the abuse of a spouse or a partner as a public offence. This meant that, from then on, criminal proceeding could be commenced if the Public Prosecutor’s Office was notified of the crime, thereby relieving the victim of the responsibility of her complaint.¹ Nevertheless, it was only in 2007² that, in Portugal, the crime called “Domestic Violence”, laid down in Article 152 of the Criminal Code, was couched in the following terms:

“1 – Anyone who, whether repeatedly or not, inflicts physical or mental abuse, including corporal punishment, deprivation of freedom and sexual abuse on:

- a) A spouse/partner or former spouse/partner;
- b) Another person, whether or not of the same sex, with whom the aggressor has or has had an intimate relationship or a relationship akin to that of spouses even if not cohabitating;

¹ Law 7/2000 of 27 May 2000. Available at:

http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=113&tabela=leis&ficha=1&pagina=1&so_miolo=

² Law 59/2007 of 4 September 2007. Available at:

http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=930&tabela=leis&ficha=1&pagina=1&so_miolo=

- c) A common, first degree progenitor; or
- d) A particularly defenceless person namely due to age, incapacity, illness, pregnancy or economic dependence with whom the aggressor resides;
 - will be punished with a term of imprisonment of between one and five years provided that the most severe punishment is not handed down owing to another legal provision.

2 – In the case foreseen in the above number, if the aggressor:

- a) Inflicts the act on a minor, in the presence of a minor, in the common home or in the home of the victim; or
- b) Disseminates on the internet or other means of diffusion used by the general public, personal data namely images or sounds pertaining to intimate private life of one of the victims with or without her/his consent;
 - will be punished with a term of imprisonment of between one and five years.

3 – If the acts foreseen in No. 1 results in:

- a) Serious bodily harm, the aggressor will be punished with a term of imprisonment of between two and eight years;
- b) Death, the aggressor will be punished with a term of imprisonment of between three and ten years.

4 – In cases foreseen in the above numbers, the accused may face additional punishments forbidding any contact with the victim and forbidding the use and carrying of weapons for a period of between six months and five years, and the compulsory attendance of special programmes on the prevention of domestic violence.

5 – The additional punishment, which forbids any contact with the victim, should include staying away from her/his place of abode or work place and the movements of the accused should be monitored technologically by remote control.

6 – Whosoever is condemned for any crime laid down in this Article may, according to the seriousness of the act and its bearing upon the duty undertaken by the aggressor, be forbidden to exercise his/her paternal power, guardianship or care-taking for a period of between one to ten years.”

Together with the Criminal Code, since 1991,³ Portugal has a set of separate laws dealing with domestic violence which today, are found in condensed form in the law passing the *Legal System Applicable to the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Protection and Assistance to Victims* of 16 September 2009 (Assembleia da República, 2009).⁴

2.2 Statistics and research results

Studies based on the Portuguese situation have concluded that domestic violence in intimate relations affect a disproportionately high number of women (Lisboa, coord., 2009). We are talking about gender violence against women (*Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, 2011). In Portugal, the survey on “Violence exercised against Women and Men” concluded: “In 2007, victimization owing to physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated against women aged 18 or over in the last 12 months or in previous years in metropolitan Portugal, stands at 38.1 %” (Lisboa, coord., 2009: 115).

Portugal has annual statistical and official data about the crime of domestic violence. We may mention the Annual Report on Internal Security (*Relatório Anual de Segurança*) drawn up by the Department for Internal Security (*Serviço de Segurança Interna*) (SSI, 2020) and the Annual Report on Monitoring Domestic Violence undertaken by the General Secretariat of the Home Office

³ Law no. 61/91 of 13 August 1991: “Guarantee of adequate protection for women victims of violence “. Available at: <https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdf1s/1991/08/185A00/41004102.pdf>

⁴ Revised and updated by Law 125/2015 of 3 September 2015.
http://www.pgdlisboa.pt/leis/lei_mostra_articulado.php?nid=1138&tabela=leis

(*Secretaria Geral do Ministério da Administração Interna*) (SGMAI, 2020). According to these reports, domestic violence is one of the crimes that is most frequently reported to the police.

The Annual Report on Monitoring Domestic Violence, published in October 2020, pointed out that “In 2019, the police registered 29,473 complaints of domestic violence” (*Secretaria Geral do Ministério da Administração Interna*, 2020: 7). Furthermore,

“(…), as in previous years, in the category of crimes against people, this continues to be the crime that registers the most complaints, representing 34 % of all crimes entered in the category, and it is the second most reported crime in overall terms in Portugal, following robbery which covers 9 % of the crimes registered by the criminal police” (Idem, 2020: 4).

These data also reveal their consistent nature, where the 2019 data are a good example, showing that women are the main victims of domestic violence: “the feminine sex (82 %)” (Idem, 2020: 9).

In giving a few more details about the kind of victims, the same Report concluded that more than four in every ten women victims are married or living in *de facto* partnerships (41 %), their average age is 42 and they do not financially depend upon the aggressor (84 %) (Idem, 2020).

With reference to the place in which the domestic violence happened, it was seen that most of it took place at home (76 %), during the course of the intimate relationship (52 %) or in a past relationship (21 %) and was perpetrated in a variety of ways: physical (68 %), psychological (89 %), sexual (3 %), financial (8 %) and social (22 %). (Idem)

Apart from these types of violence, murder/femicide perpetrated in domestic violence in an intimate relationship has also been witnessed, and not all that infrequently; it is one of the kinds of violence against women. Data issued by the criminal police in surveys on murders happening in a six-year period conclude that: “Looking at the sex of the victim, it is seen that between 2014 and 2019, 316 women were the victims of murder of whom 35 % or 111 of the women murdered were in intimate relationships” (Criminal Police, 2020:2). This means that the overwhelming majority of people who were murdered while in intimate relationships were women: 87 % of the victims (111 out of 128).

Together with these data, and when talking about domestic violence, each year Portugal has witnessed a growing number of femicides where most of them occur during a current or past intimate relationship. The Observatory of Murdered Women run by the União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta - UMAR (Union of Women Alternative and Answer) reached the conclusion that in 2019, there were 31 women who were murdered, 23 of whom were killed by their intimate partner:

“Similar to previous years as regards the relationship that exists between the victims and the murders, we continue to see that 52 % (n=16) of the murdered women had an on-going intimate relationship with their killer as compared with 23 % (n=7) who had terminated their relationship (a previous or past relationship that had ended in a de facto separation, divorce, ...)” (União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta, 2020: 4).

The fact that there was prior domestic violence in 22 of these femicides should also be mentioned: “(...) we see that most of the women who were killed to date (71 %, n=22) had been a victim of violence in her relationship” (Idem, 2020: 15).

2.3 Specifics of domestic violence in the Roma communities

As we have pointed out above, Portugal has available studies on the incidence and the prevalence of violence against women, gender violence and annual references data pertaining to domestic violence. Nevertheless, the data and studies do not allow us to single out concrete cases of domestic violence committed against Roma women (*mulheres ciganas*).

Be that as it may, the data available, as well as scientific studies carried out at home and abroad, show that violence against women, where domestic violence is included, occurs transversally regardless of race, ethnic group, skin colour, or the social, economic, political or religious status of the women.

Therefore, as far as global scientific evidence goes, we may assume that Roma women are not an exception owing to the fact that they are also affected by domestic violence and violence in their intimate relationships.

Nevertheless, we know that some groups of women experience greater difficulty in making a complaint about the domestic violence targeting them. This may occur owing to a variety of

reasons, mainly socio-cultural, economic or religious factors or the belief that making a complaint would only heighten the danger, or even mistrusting the victim support services and disbelieving the police and legal system (Cerejo, 2014).

The literature and some studies indicate that the delicate situation in which women in immigrant communities also live, as well as incapacitated women and elderly women among others, place them in positions of greater dependence upon their aggressors. This makes them additionally vulnerable namely where lodging a complaint is concerned, seeking help and contacting the services (Perista, coord., 2016).

Some of the Roma women could be included in some of the above-mentioned situations; nevertheless, we would add that stereotyping and prejudices already current, and explicitly so, in the social representations projected of the Roma (Mendes, 2007) are likely to cause them to clam up even more about intimidation, domination and submission (Magano, 2010) when faced with violent behaviour in their intimate relationships. We may speak of two and three-fold victimisation and the way violence becomes a habit; this not only places the support services further out of reach but also makes it more difficult for Roma women to appeal to them.

In Portugal, available studies about Roma communities confirm that domestic violence happens in Roma communities where women have been identified as the victims (Magano *et al.*, 2014). Likewise, the NGOs that support and protect women victims of domestic violence signpost every year, Roma women who experience episodes of domestic violence and try to find alternative ways of living free from violence, even if these organisations recognise that only a very small number of the women request help from them.

Owing to the fact that data and nation-wide studies about domestic violence against Roma women are scarce, they and the scientific literature conclude that “Roma women are reticent about talking about or taking a stand against violent situations because, in the light of their culture, this is a private matter and for this reason must be solved within the family” (Neves *et al.*, 2018).

Perhaps, with regard to the age-old tradition of solving domestic violence according the community’s own rules, turning to the family, to the older people in the community, makes lodging a complaint something that is only done by a very small minority. It is very rare for women living in Roma communities to turn to the police to stop domestic violence (Martins, 2019).

However, the subject of domestic violence has started to appear on the agenda of NGO and the NGO run by Roma women, and is included in community action projects that are working within the framework of public policies to combat domestic violence and integrate Roma communities. They allow a preview to be had of Roma women obtaining greater and better citizenship and exercising their rights, while also impacting upon strategies to prevent and fight against domestic violence in Roma communities.

As an example, we will mention an intervention conducted by the Association for Family Planning (APF) with women from the gipsy community of the Biquinha social housing neighbourhood, in Matosinhos, which, specifically about their perceptions regarding domestic violence, concludes that “It is noticeable that gypsy women, even the youngest, continue to circumscribe domestic violence only to physical violence, which is the justifying factor for divorce” (APF, 2019), some of which do not recognise other manifestations of this as violence, or, recognising them, devalue them, concluding, therefore, by the need for continuity and deepening in terms of prevention, gender equality and the themes surrounding violence against women and domestic violence towards women in gipsy communities.

Since 2013 in Portugal, the National Roma Integration Strategy (*NRIS*) 2013-2020, has been a vital instrument in this field. The measure was passed by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 25/2013 of 17 April (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2013) and revised in 2018 whereby the deadline was extended to 2022. As one of its specific aims, the *ENICC* foresees the enhanced prevention and combat against all kinds of violence against Roma women and girls, and works in harmony with other national strategies.

3. Methodology

This section will provide details about the process followed in undertaking fieldwork and gathering data. It will be looking in depth at 40 semi-structured interviews conducted with Portuguese Roma women about their perceptions, knowledge and experience in the sphere of domestic violence against Roma women.

By 'domestic violence' we have adopted the definition as per the Istanbul Convention, Article 3b): "(...) all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the aggressor shares or has shared the same residence with the victim" (*Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, Council of Europe, 11/05/2011).

The process of identifying the Roma women to be interviewed showed itself to be very lengthy and difficult. Apart from having contacted a large number of organisations working with Roma communities in different parts of the country, as well as Roma associations, the emergency health crisis we are living through did not help to materialise contacts. Many of the organisations are working with extremely limited teams, that in various cases are teleworking at home and are hard pressed to respond to other priorities more urgent than ours.

This being the case, fieldwork ended up by being carried out between October and the first fortnight of December 2020, covering an area that includes a few municipalities in Greater Lisbon (as will be seen in detail in Section 4); however it involved women who were born and lived in different parts of the country.

Called for here, are our very special thanks to *CooperActiva – Cooperativa de Desenvolvimento Social*, a social organisation that has long been active in a social housing neighbourhood in the Amadora municipality where numerous Roma families reside. *CooperActiva* rounded up a large number of women to take part in the interviews. Another group of women that was contacted on the south bank of the Tagus River, was thanks to Olga Mariano, a Roma woman, held in high

esteem as a leader of Roma associations and who is a consultant to the Portuguese team's PATTERN project.⁵

The profile of the women granting the interviews obeys the methodological principles governing a selective or purposive sample (Crossman, 2020).

The interviews with the Roma women were conducted according the guidelines for fieldwork research laid out for the PATTERN project (see *Field Research Protocol*), and duly translated into Portuguese. The interviewers were Elisabete Brasil and Heloísa Perista, members of the project team; they are mature women with prior experience gained in working in the field of domestic violence, and with Roma women.

The interviews were carried out face-to-face in an atmosphere than ensured the safety and the privacy of the women taking part in them. The place where the interview was to take place and the time it would be held was previously agreed upon with each interviewee.

All but one of the interviews were recorded and later transcribed in full. One woman participating in the interview withheld permission to tape what she said.

In all cases, the informed consent form was signed by the interviewee, and the checklists filled in and signed by the interviewer. It should be mentioned that despite the fact that some of the women did not know how to read or write, in general, they all knew how to sign their names (except in one case where it was not possible to obtain a signature so the woman's informed consent was given verbally and recorded).

The need did not arise for any interpreter or intercultural mediator in order for the interviews to go ahead.

The interviews lasted between 17 and 52 minutes, where the average length was between 25 and 30 minutes.

⁵ Grateful thanks, although of a different nature, also go Maria José Casa-Nova, a well-known academic from the University of Minho, the coordinator the Roma Community Observatory (*Observatório das Comunidades Ciganas – ObCig / ACM*). As a scientific consultant – free of charge - to the PATTERN project in Portugal, she read and commented upon the first draft of this Report.

The Project team took the necessary measures to protect the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of the data collected in the interviews.

Analysing the outcomes of the interviews was done by the team, by following a qualitative methodology based on discourse analysis and by parsing and interpreting respective feelings and meanings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The first-person discourses of the Roma women participating in the interviews were organised around a set of topics and sub-topics prompted by the empirical material (Caulfield, 2020; Nowell *et al.*, 2017) that served as the basis for this study.

4. Characterisation of the participants in the interviews

The sample on which the study has been based, is composed of 40 Roma women living in Greater (Metropolitan) Lisbon, more precisely the municipality of Amadora in the Lisbon district and in the municipality of Seixal in the Setúbal district.

In the following paragraphs, the main elements of characterisation of these women are presented. Attached is a table that systematises these elements in relation to each of the women who participated in the interviews, identified by a fictitious name, in order to preserve their identity. These fictitious names are used in the excerpts of the respective interviews cited throughout the report.

The ages of the interviewees range from the youngest at 19 years of age to the oldest at 74, although most of the women taking part in the interviews are aged between 19 and 54 (n=33). A significant portion (n=16) are about 30 years old or younger.

As regards their **marital status**, the majority is cohabitating (in *de facto* partnerships) or is married under “Roma law” (n=23) although single women (n=3), widows (n=7) and separated women (n=6) also participated. Another woman is having a long-term relationship with a man without living with him, and by whom she has a daughter and is pregnant by him again (the reason for this is the man’s inability to have his own house while the woman is still living in her parents’ house although occasionally, she spends a few days with him).

Most of the women interviewed started their marital life when they were between 16 and 18 years old (n=30). However, 10 of these women started their marital life when they were younger: three of them married when they were 13 years old, another three when they were 14 and four when they were 15 years old. Regarding the ages of the women interviewed in relation to which this precocity of entering into conjugality was observed, we note that two are 19 years old, three are 22 years old, and the others, with a record at each age, are currently 23, 28, 47 56 and 59 years old.

Concerning their **schooling**, we noted that seven interviewees do not know how to read or write, where the youngest among this group is 37 years old. The rest of the women we interviewed had generally completed primary school (1st cycle) (n=18), only three out of the 40 interviewees having finished their schooling after completing the 9th grade (3rd cycle in compulsory education).

In cross-checking the indicators “Level of schooling”, “How old were you when you left school” and “How old were you when you got married”, we see that only in three cases, did the end of their school life coincide with the age at which they started their marital life.

In terms of **professional life**, at the time we interviewed them, most of the women said they were “housewives”, taking care of their homes and families. Six women said they were unemployed, five said they were working while another five said they had retired. When speaking about their present or former **professions** and/or jobs, we found a hotel employee, a factory worker, a cashier in a supermarket, a kitchen help, a general services help, a domestic cleaner, and above all, street vendors or vendors in fairs/markets. As regards the housewives, seven of them had previously worked as vendors in fairs/markets or as street vendors, helping their husbands or partners who were also earning their living in this field. The minimum income scheme (*Rendimento Social de Inserção, RSI*) is the source of household income for about half the Roma women interviewed.

The **professional activity of the husbands/partners** of the married women who were interviewed, shows that at the time of the interview, 13 were unemployed, four were employed, one was retired and another one was identified as doing odd jobs in the collection of clams, an activity carried out in addition to the RSI. The rest were noted as not having pursued at the time or in the past, any professional or economic activity: in one case, the husband is surviving on the old-age pension of his wife being interviewed, while the others are living on the RSI allowance going towards the family up-keep.

As regards the husbands/partners who are currently unemployed, it is understood that the most frequent prior activity involved street vending or selling in fairs/markets. However, the interviewees also referred to the following former professions (one in each case): road-building, hypermarket employee, cook, warehouse foreman, and in two cases, factory workers. It should be pointed out that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the job market were mentioned as being the reason causing unemployment in several cases and, as a result, a loss in the family income, thus making the RSI allowance an alternative, compensating the lack of income otherwise earned from work.

Still on the subject of the jobs that husbands/partners have, seven men are working in the following areas: one in the collection of clams, four street vendors or vendors in fairs/markets; one in an airline company and another was just beginning a job as a self-employed UBER taxi-driver.

Where **conjugal relationships** or similar relationships are concerned, it was possible to see that two of the interviewees had constituted a family with men outside the Roma community, and in both cases, the men had Cape-Verdean origins.

In terms of the number of **members in the family household**, there were different answers ranging from one (only in two cases) to eight members. Families comprising five members (n=8) and four members (n=8) should be pointed out here. Nevertheless, there is a predominance of large household which have five or more people in them (n=18).

As for the **family typology**, we likewise have a variety of answers, although nuclear families with children (n=14) come in first place, followed by single female parent families (n=10). In 16 cases, there are extended or large families of different generations living in the same household.

Regarding the **locality** and type of the interviewees' dwellings, generally speaking the Roma women have been resettled in flats in a social housing neighbourhood, with the exception of one woman who lives in a free-standing house outside the social housing neighbourhood and of another two who live in shanty houses. Several of the interviewees previously lived in make-shift shanty housing, having been resettled many years ago. In some cases, following their marriage, some women moved to the social housing neighbourhood where they are living today after joining their husband and his family who were already residing there.

Concerning their **place of residence**, the feeling of belonging to the vicinity and the social housing neighbourhood where they are living today, is note-worthy. Many of the interviewees say they feel good, they like living there and they feel safe and integrated, describing it as a good place to live in. Nevertheless, about one in every four women reckon that there are problems due to different ethnic groups all co-existing in the same place, and although they are resigned to it, they expressed the wish to live somewhere else.

5. Findings

In this section of the Report, we shall be presenting our main findings obtained by analysing the interviews held with Portuguese Roma women. In the following paragraphs we shall be handing over the floor to the women themselves to hear in their own words, what they have to say about domestic violence.

5.1 Roma women's perceptions of domestic violence

The Roma women we interviewed generally perceive domestic violence as a serious problem in Portuguese society, particularly when it concerns violence against women.

“Yes, indeed, it’s a serious problem in our country. Because, practically, the ones who suffer the most violence are us, women. It’s a very serious problem. We, women, also need to be happy so why do we have to be abused?” (Luana, 22 years old)

They also express their clear perception of the negative impact that domestic violence has on their lives, including on witnesses to it and mainly, from an intergenerational point of view; all them are unanimous in condemning violence.

“I think it very bad to do things they [men] shouldn’t do. Everybody suffers. It’s the woman who suffers; they beat up their wives and after, when the children come, they also suffer. I think it’s very bad and I’m against it. Sometimes, I watch television and it shocks me to see these things. It’s beating up [women] and doing harm to the children and the children see their mothers suffering, they see everything that’s going on.” (Norberta, 50 years old)

“I’ve witnessed several cases of domestic violence. Not now, but when I was little. It has always stayed in my mind. It’s something that should be punished because women need to be respected. Whether the woman or the man. There needs to be respect. If there’s no respect, then there’s nothing. Appreciating what a woman is. Holding her dear. There are lots of men who abuse their wives, mistreat their children. The children grow up in the atmosphere of abuse, domestic violence, attacks. I’m against it. It really has to be punished.” (Gabriela, 46 years old)

It is worth mentioning here, that one woman who had been married for 28 years said that her husband has never laid a hand on her because she says “yes” to everything in fear of getting a beating and that she could go through the same life of physical violence she had always seen her mother suffer:

“Because in our ethnic group, we marry very early, I also got married when I was 15 years old. But as I say, I was never beaten up by my man. Why? Because every time he says something, I [and she says her own name] say yes. That everything’s just fine, yes, great. Because if I don’t say yes, he’ll probably hit me. And we don’t want that. I’m always afraid, as I said, of being on the receiving end. I had a very violent father. He also used to hurt my mother, he was always beating her up. I don’t have the words to describe it. I never understood why, it doesn’t make for understanding. Is it madness? If it’s in his head, then I don’t know. And I don’t have words to describe it. Only, the anger festers inside us and we grow up with this anger. And we also grow up with this fear. (...) Today, I’m a chronically depressed woman. (...) Because one gets traumatised. I saw my mother always getting beaten up and always in front of us. Over nothing. Nothing at all.” (Teodolinda, 43 years old)

Regarding the notion that the interviewees have about what domestic violence is, most of them define violence as a problem happening in marital life, and particularly affecting women – although some of the interviewees stress that there are also cases of domestic violence against men; whatever the case, it is violence that affects the whole family.

“Domestic violence is a problem between the couple, among those who live at home. It’s completely against everything I think – if I live with a man, it’s to be loved.” (Agnes, 40 years old)

“Bad. It’s a very bad thing. The question is not being a man or a woman here, sometimes it’s in peoples’ natures, the ones who are more able, who have more authority over a person, and that’s what I think is so bad. As much the husband against his wife, as the wife against her husband. For me, domestic violence is not only beating up the other, there’s verbal violence; more than the verbal, there’s authority, ordering about, the psychological [aspect] that’s upsetting. Sometimes it’s not only I want, I can, and I order, it upsets the children, it upsets the family... For me, apart from the beating, there’s the psychological, the authority over the other person. Also, for me, I think it’s awful, it’s

cruel when the children are caught in between, or when families are caught in the middle; I think that's cruel. I think that this sort of violence is very brutal." (Otilia, 48 years old)

In these women's discourse on domestic violence, words like "control", "badly treated /abused", "suffering" and, above all, "there's no respect" are mentioned very often. For these women, respect and appreciation ("holding dear") are, to their way of thinking, essential qualities so that domestic violence and all the suffering associated with it does not happen.

One of the interviewees expresses herself more clearly about gender issues, unequal rights between women and men, and the way they are connected with episodes of domestic violence:

"Without a shadow of a doubt, for me, domestic violence is the same as gender violence, human violence and mainly, a violation of rights. (...) Not only in the sense of the male/female genders but also the position that this woman occupies, and where this man comes. So, it's 'I'm the boss'". (Rosalina, 70 years old)

However, when during the course of the interview, the Roma women were invited to think about the reasons why women are particularly affected by domestic violence, many of them showed their uncertainty, or they queried it and were perplexed. In the words of one of them, "It's weird because, in fact it's true" (Solange, 26 years old). Some of the reasons put forward about this "fact": men's jealousy; women being weaker; men being stronger; men thinking they have the "authority to beat up women" (Isis, 24 years old), and some women accepting that men have this authority; "(Roma) men think that they own [us]... that we're their property" (Teodolinda, 43 years old).

In the words of an older, widowed Roma woman, connecting the traditional gender roles in the family:

"Because even [being in] love, being wanted, has to have a beating. 'Let no one come between a man and his wife'. That's what I've always heard ever since my grandparents' day. The man is the one who makes the house inhabitable because he brings the money home, and so we women have to obey him and we have to agree to keep the home clean and tidy, get his tea for him, have dinner ready when he arrives, take the children to school; we have to be mothers, wives, housewives, we have to be everything. Our role was very well-defined. It

was well-defined. The man is our master and our lord. We are his slaves. And violence happens in this setting because 'I've arrived home and dinner's not ready yet', because 'you haven't washed my shirt', because 'the kids are dirty, you haven't given the children a bath, what have you been doing all day?'... And then violence happens". (Rosalina, 70 years old)

Domestic violence is generally described by referring to the different acts and activity in which it is materialised, mainly in the way that women are deprived of their freedom.

"There are men who lock their wives up at home. (...) The women are not allowed to go out. (Isis, 24 years old)

However, references to physical violence and different kinds of psychological violence are mentioned more frequently.

"I think it's hitting her. I don't think it's good. I've always heard it said that domestic violence means beating and abuse." (Eudora, 55 years old)

"It's not respecting the woman. It's not only beating her up but, also, the words that are said." (Gabriela, 46 years old)

"In my opinion, domestic violence can be as much verbal as physical, not so? Sometimes, for some people, I think, the verbal hurts a little more because it is like psychological torture in some cases." (Susete, 37 years old)

And with this in mind, one Roman woman who is separated and has experienced domestic violence, adds:

"Being possessive is psychological violence, a lot, a lot. I think that psychological violence, for me, is much worse than physical violence (...) It causes other inner wounds, much deeper than the outside ones, because outside wounds heal. But the inner ones stay here. They stay here for ever." (Madalena, 49 years old)

Are there situations in which women may be considered responsible for domestic violence? According to the perceptions of the Roma women we interviewed, the answer is usually not.

Nevertheless, according to the opinions of some of the women, such situations may be linked to certain types of behaviour of the women themselves: when there is “betrayal” - “if the woman plays around ... has other men” (Quitéria, 39 years old); when a woman “provokes” - “there are women who answer back” (Leontina, 21 years old), “are rude” (Juvelina, 19 years old), when the woman fails to live up to her “responsibility” – “the man arrives home and things haven’t been done, there’s no lunch or the clothes haven’t been washed” (Paulina, 31 years old).

Or according to some of the other interviewees, woman can be “blamed” for domestic violence happening, because “they don’t demand respect” (Carmo, 42 years old); because “poor things (...), they think that it’s normal” (Madalena, 49 years old); because “unfortunately, many end up by being submissive (...) ‘Ah! He’s my husband, he’s got the right’” (Madalena, 49 years old). One woman, who used to be the victim of domestic abuse and is now 37, with three children, separated and with a job, acknowledges the fact that “some [women] allow it, I know because I’ve been through it. (...) It’s very difficult to get out of a situation like this” Juno, 37 years old).

However, all the Roma women we interviewed are unanimous in believing that “nothing warrants” (Agnes, 40 years old) a man insulting or hitting a woman. “Violence is never admissible whatever the case” (Susete, 37 years old). “Nothing justifies a beating. Because it’s like this, things aren’t sorted out by a beating. They’re sorted out by talking about them” (Leontina, 21 years old). “There’s nothing like sitting down and talking” (Juno, 37 years old).

Still on the subject of their perception about domestic violence and its outcomes, all the interviewees regard it as breaking the law, basing their opinions on the consequences it causes.

“It’s a terrible crime, yes indeed. Anyone who lends a hand to these women, should do so before it’s too late.” (Dénia, 53 years old)

“It is, it’s a crime. Because you shouldn’t hit anyone, you shouldn’t hit anyone. You shouldn’t give a woman this kind of life.” (Carmo, 42 years old)

“Yes, it certainly is a crime. Because it cancels a person out, it makes this person feel completely inadequate in her society; she hides away because she’s ashamed, because she was the one causing this abuse.” (Rosalina, 70 years old)

In this respect, most of the interviewees emphasise the fact that domestic violence could cause either a woman's injury or her death, generally referring to non-Roma women murdered by their husbands. Alluding to suicide or femicide when speaking about episodes involving domestic violence is a recurring topic in the interviews. "There's domestic violence that even goes as far as taking a life" (Agnes, 40 years old). "It is, yes sir, it's a crime. Because sometimes domestic violence can lead to death." (Luana, 22 years old). "I think it should be considered a crime because so many women have died..." (Gabriela, 46 years old)

5.2 The range of domestic violence commonly occurring in Roma families

Even though the women we interviewed do not hesitate about classing domestic violence as a reality and a social problem in the country, when they were asked whether it occurs in the Roma communities, their answers do not deserve the same consensus.

The answers we obtained differed, as much as among the young women as among the older women, which means that they deny the fact that domestic violence exists in Roma communities, or at least they plead ignorance: "I don't know. I never saw it." (Cristal, 28 years old). "It's like this, if it does exist, if it exists, then I don't know about it: I don't know about it." (Emiliana, 28 years old). "But I've never heard anything about it. Among our ethnic group, no. It never happens among the Roma. But it could. We don't know about it. But it rarely happens in our ethnic group." (Isis, 24 years old). "No. It's like this, you see the news on the TV, and you don't hear any mention of the Roma people." (Brenda, 54 years old) - "No, no, no. I've never heard about it. Among the Roma, never. I've never heard anyone speak about violence." (Eudora, 55 years old). "The Roma man doesn't kill, he doesn't abuse [rape] his children, he doesn't commit domestic violence against women." (Agnes, 40 years old).

In the words of a 37-year-old Roma woman:

"No. In ours [referring to the Roma community], we don't have this. Because husbands, and I say this because our ways are like this and that's what I know best, traditional Roma husbands like women a lot." (Mariposa, 37 years old).

On the other hand, the answers given by other women show that they recognise domestic violence as affecting all communities including the Roma communities: "Yes, as in all of them."

(Solange, 26 years old). “Yes, it happens a lot, a lot. I think that its more hidden in the Roma community, they’re afraid there’ll be reprisals.” (Juno, 37 years old).

In other words, domestic violence happens in Roma communities and these women know about many cases. “There’s a lot of it.” (Luana, 22 years old). “There have been [victims of domestic violence], yes, a lot of them. Roma women, too.” (Quitéria, 39 years old). “Of course, there are. [She knows about cases where Roma women were victims of domestic violence]. Throughout my life.” (Rosalina, 70 years old).

Be that as it may, even among the interviewees who acknowledge that domestic violence happens in Roma communities, they perceive that it happens to different extents, that it is less prevalent today than it was ‘before’ because “now, women react much more”.

“There used to be but I don’t think it’s so much today, at least not among the Roma people.”(Eufena, 24 years old)

“As much as in our race as in yours [referring to the interviewer who is a not a Roma], it’s less today; before it was worse. In our race, the husbands used to beat their wives more.” (Flôr, 74 years old)

“It’s there, of course it happens. Not so much as before; there’s not so much of it now. Today, women react more.” (Hélia, 39 years old)

And in terms of reporting domestic violence to the police, it happens much less often, even rarely. “They speak about it, not to the police, no, not this. But with colleagues and suchlike; they tell each other about it.” (Florinda, 28 years old).

Regarding the kinds of domestic violence committed against women in the Roma communities, physical violence and psychological violence are the most common forms pointed out and are often inter-connected. Below are some of the many references to physical violence and psychological violence:

“I think it’s more in the way of physically abusing her, that’s it! I think it happens more in this area. It is more in the area of beating. In our ethnic group I think it’s more to do with bashing

her around. Up to now, this has been the most usual kind. Maybe there are other kinds and they are more hidden and we don't know about them but it's usually this kind." (Núria, 47 years old)

[Referring to her father's abuse of her mother] "he used to kick her. With his shoes on. When he didn't like what he was eating, he used to hurl the plates into the air." (Berta, 30 years old)

"I have already seen many things like it, and it was physical and verbal [abuse]. Swear words said in front of the children. I've never seen any use of weapons. I've seen her being punched, her hair pulled (...) I've seen it. (Hélia, 39 years old)

"Physical kinds... Punching, kicking, even beating. With his hands, with objects, anything that comes to hand. [And in psychological terms?] Swear words – 'you're [expletive] around with that [expletive]; curses: 'you're a [expletive] – these kinds of names; 'you're [expletive] around with all the men'; 'you're doing this, you're doing that'; insults: 'you're ugly', 'you're this, you're that'." (Juno, 37 years old)

In some cases, physical abuse also occurs by wanting to exert control: "Because his wife goes to the shop and dallies a while, she gets a slap when she gets home because she took too long: 'what were you doing all that time...'" (Penélope, 46 years old).

There are very few, almost negligible, cases of economic abuse:

"But there are others that I already know about, and I've already seen husbands with a lot of money and they don't want to give any to their wives to buy food with, nor to their children." (Penélope, 35 years old)

"When I was a small girl, my mother received an RSI allowance. My father was always on a disability pension owing to a problem he had. I don't know what the problem was. Something to do with his health. He used to commandeer my mother's allowance. He used to manage everything. Even nowadays, my mother doesn't know how to cope, she doesn't know how to go shopping if I'm not with her, because he used to control everything." (Berta, 30 years old)

Concerning sexual abuse, the Roma women we interviewed agreed, generally speaking, that they did not know about any cases of this kind of abuse happening in the Roma communities: “I think sexual [abuse] never happens in our ethnic group, I’ve never seen anything like this.” (Otília, 48 years old). “No, sexual not! It’s out of the question.” (Luana, 22 years old). Only one 43-year-old woman who has been married since she was 15, admitted that she knows some violent Roma husbands forcing their wives to have sexual relations with them:

“They don’t think women are important, they are quite capable of beating them up the whole day long, and afterwards, at night they want a woman there in bed with them. And they [their wives] have to be there. Much against their own will. I think that a woman who is abused the whole day long doesn’t want to be with her husband.” (Teodolinda, 43 years old)

It is also worth mentioning that some of the Roma women tend to play down abusive behaviour and fail to recognise it as domestic violence. This is particularly so among the older Roma women: “Being slapped is normal, that’s the way it is in the Roma ethnic group.” (Verónica, 56 years old). “(...) in the old days, when a person received a hard slap like the young ones today, we used to keep quiet. It wasn’t anything to make a fuss about. Not nowadays, they get a light slap in the face and right away they....” (Guiomar, 74 years old).

Considering violent abuse as normal and playing it down, is however, noted by one of the interviewees, an older woman of 70 years of age, when telling of her past experience: “In the old days, I used to hear a lot of girls of my age, when we used to chat with each other, and one would say: ‘Oh, my husband ... Thank God I married very well. Since I’ve been married, I only been given two kicks, three shoves and three slaps’.” (Rosalina, 70 years old)

As the 43-year-old woman who has been married since she was 15, said: “In the Roma community, being slapped around isn’t domestic violence. [Is it normal?] Yes, it is. [Is it a part of life?] Yes, it’s a part of life. It is, unfortunately.” (Teodolinda, 43 years old)

The suffering and pain, but also the strength and courage that mark the lives of the women involved in violent, abusive relationships stand out very clearly in the discourses (and in the tears) of the Roma women who agreed to share with during the course of the interview, their personal and family lives at the mercy of domestic violence.

This is the case of a 53-year old woman who got married at 17 and is a widow today. Some of the episodes in this woman's life history of violence are described thus:

“Look, it's like this. I was also involved in domestic violence. I suffered a lot for many years. Many years. I also suffered a lot. All the women who are suffering from this deserve to be helped, rescued and put in a protected place. I have already suffered so much, for so many years, and my husband has already died, and he was so bad to me. He spent a year in jail because of these things; and it's like this, a woman who suffers is very unhappy. Suffering, being beaten up, abused. Sometimes we want to do things that any woman does, and our husbands don't let us, beating us up, suffering, going hungry. There should be something to help these women, otherwise it's death. And many women are threatened by their husbands not to tell anyone; it was the same with me. I was destroyed, reviled, and I often called the police and came here [to the social organisation doing community work in the neighbourhood] and sometimes [the name of the psychologist] helped me, referred me to houses where there were rooms for me and my daughters. I had her support. But I suffered a lot at the hands of the police. Because when we need them to take action, they don't. I often called the police to come and help me but only after many months they came to take him away, to arrest him. Only then, and until they did that, I suffered so much, a lot, a whole lot. And my daughters even more. [Was the violence against you and also against your daughters?] My daughters suffered because they saw me suffering, because I'm their mother. If my husband had thrown me out into the street, my daughters would have come with me because they felt so sorry for their mother. Even if their father did not hurt them, they suffered with me. When I cried, they also cried. They used to see their father torturing me and they cried right next to me. It's very sad. There needs to be a solution for these women (...) He was a man who threw me out into the street, beat me up, took my money. Beat me up, threw me out. He used to torment/ridicule me, swear at me. There's no explanation to what I suffered. [A while back you said you didn't have any freedom] I wanted to be free like other women. But I couldn't. I had to go to the shop but I would have to go fast so that he wouldn't yell at me. It was like that, sad. I had to be at home the whole time. He used to check up on me and see if I was at home and then he rested easy. But if I went out for one or two hours it was already dangerous. It was complicated. I cried a lot, suffered a lot. (...) I became so depressed that I couldn't recognise people anymore; I didn't eat, I didn't have any strength, I stopped eating, brushing my hair. I went to hospital in a bad way because I was suffering from domestic violence. I went crazy. I wandered aimlessly in the street because I didn't know where I was.” (Dénia, 53 years old)

Likewise, another woman, one of the few who completed the 9th grade of schooling, is now 49 years old and has been separated six years, told us how she managed to break free from the life of domestic violence she and her son and two daughters had led. Neither did she neglect to point out the personal price she paid for her decision, as a Roma woman, now ostracised by her community:

“People, the men think that they have total power over women and unfortunately, many women go along with it for different reasons, mainly owing to money problems because afterwards, they have no place to go, they are poorly informed and, in this sense... I think that most women know about things ... only, unfortunately among our people, many believe that a woman has to obey her husband in every way. A separated woman is very badly regarded. She is alone, yes, as the support we receive comes from outside our community. Well, I don't have a problem admitting it; I speak from experience. My family hasn't excluded me fully because they knew what was happening and I went to them [for help]. And they helped me. But before I was able to take this step, I had to become another person, outside my community, open wide my mind, my eyes, and I forced myself to see things because it wasn't only me who was suffering, it was also my small children. It's like this, I think that a mother always puts the happiness of her child in first place and this is what made me take the first step because my children didn't deserve to live through that but deserved a better future. Thank God, they have it now. And all the steps I have taken, I don't care about the consequences they have caused, I don't care. There were consequences. Being excluded, I don't care one bit. The only thing I care about are my children, their well-being. I know I'm badly seen by the community. I know that although they don't say it to me to my face, many women would like to have had the same courage but they don't because, poor things... unfortunately it's like that. You need to have a lot of courage to take such a big step. Not only because we feel unprotected, that's the first step, you have to feel protected. At the time, and I'm being honest, I took the step I did and I ran away with my children; I didn't feel safe because sadly, a lot of things happened including his family. They came and searched for us. We were protected by the police and the protection given by victim support, and in this sense, we were super-protected. Thank God. I never thought about going back. I had already made a first complaint and I withdrew charges. I regretted doing so. I went forward and now six years have gone past. My daughters are studying at school; they are also badly regarded owing to this because their father didn't want them to [be educated]. My daughter is now in the 11th grade and is studying economy; the other daughter is in the 6th grade and will go further. And in this respect, I'm rather badly seen, in this respect.” (Madalena, 49 years old)

5.3 The level of knowledge Roma women possess in regards to domestic violence, their rights, and how to seek help for themselves

The level of knowledge about the support services to women victims of violence varies among the Roma women we interviewed.

Many say that they know they exist and are well-informed about the aid and services available to them: “Yes, yes. I know about them. Yes, of course I do.” (Otília, 48 years old). “I know about them, I’m very well informed. Yes, yes. I really am.” (Leontina, 21 years old).

On the other hand, we also found that other interviewees had little or no information about such aid and services: “No, it happens that I don’t know about them.” (Emiliana, 28 years old). “No, no I don’t.” (Teodolinda, 43 years old). “I don’t know what to say about this.” (Eudora, 55 years old). “I have already heard about them but I don’t know them” (Zita, 22 years old).

Among the interviewees who say they already know something about the way the services and aid work, for most of the them, the police act as the most recognisable form of aid and they resort to them or they advise other women to do so. “The most likely advice is to tell her to go to the police.” (Cristal, 28 years old). “I would phone up the police.” (Hélia, 39 years old). “The police station, right away. The police.” (Isis, 24 years old). Either go to the police or call them up” (Juvelina, 19 years old).

In most cases, the interviewees were somewhat hazy about identifying what organisations and/or services specialised in offering support to domestic violence victims whether telephone support and/or emergency lines, about counselling or sheltering facilities, or about the shelters themselves; they mostly gave the loose term “victim support”, “call line” rather than the names of the organisations.

“(…) there’s victim support.” (Isis, 24 years old)

“I know there’s a line to call for domestic violence.” (Úrsula, 29 years old)

Furthermore, as regards recognising the specialised services as those offering emergency shelter and the shelters taking in women victims of domestic violence, apart from the situations already

referred to, the interviewees only got to know about them on the basis of their own experience or that of someone close to them; the women resorted to them when suffering victimisation.

“The community welfare service where I was. They didn’t have a vacancy and so, at the time, I went to [the organisation’s name – Emergency Shelter] yes, that’s it.” (Madalena, 49 years old)

“I have a cousin, this was some years ago, but she suffered quite a lot with her husband. She had to ... she fled, she fled, she was 18 years old and she landed up in a shelter.” (Isaltina, 30 years old)

The community support services and the health services were also mentioned somewhat tentatively as being somewhere to seek help in the event of being the victims of domestic violence.

“If it was really serious, I’d go to the police station or contact the [name of the community support service].” (Paulina, 31 years old)

“I would go to [an NHS] health centre or some place where I saw a call number and I’d call it.” (Brenda, 54 years old)

Three of the interviewees mentioned Roma women associations as a resort that would lend a hand in cases of domestic violence.

“Yes. Through the [name of the Roma women’s association].” (Quitéria 39 years old)

“I would go directly to the [name of the Roma women’s association] because it’s a place where we feel at home.” (Hermengarda, 26 years old)

“(…) the association [of Roma people] that helped me.” (Isaltina, 24 years old)

Hardly any of the interviewees knew about the role of an intercultural male or female mediator. In the cases where the women being interviewed mentioned them, they were mainly associated with educational mediators and not as people actively helping in situations involving domestic violence.

Regarding the way in which the interviewees get to know about the support services or how to contact them or how they would contact them in the event they are needed, and how to obtain information about them, it seems that digital technology is a possible source and one to make use of.

“I think that this [referring to isolation] is a little more difficult [to find] today as with cell phones and the internet, we can all obtain access to everything. (...) Yes, I think so. Even if you don't know a lot of information, it's like I say, it's easy to gain access, it's easy to get in touch. You may not know things by heart, but... yes.” (Susete, 37 years old)

Nevertheless, television is generally referred to as being the channel through which most of the information and knowledge about domestic violence is obtained, helping to publicise it and break the silence about domestic violence, as well as increase the coverage of available aid.

“Since it started appearing on the television and that call line, I think that things have changed. People are more informed now and don't accept certain things.” (Gabriela, 46 years old)

“Yes, it [TV] has helped a lot. It tells us what to do. Teaches us.” (Isis, 24 years old)

“They feel they are safer, that they can escape somewhere if need be.” (Susete, 37 years old)

The television has given domestic violence and campaigns about domestic violence shown throughout the years, greater visibility; television programmes that speak about domestic violence and the system's answers have been pointed out as possible sources of better information, acting as “an open door”.

“A little while ago, it was always being spoken about on the television. Things about domestic violence and such like. (...) I think it helps, yes.” (Anastácia, 22 years old)

“I think it's a good thing to show it on the television. (...) people become more informed and they get to see the things that are happening.” (Eudora, 55 years old)

“It helps, because through the television, there’s always a call of attention which indicates that people are going to speak about it afterwards and a lot of people are going to hear about it, and that helps and it’s a pathway and an open door for women who are suffering like this.”
(Penélope, 46 years old)

This greater visibility even acts as a dissuasive factor against domestic violence.

“They are also more afraid now. They know that it can lead to jail. If they beat up a woman in the middle of the street, they already know that someone is going to call the police.” (Hélia, 39 years old)

Notwithstanding, some of the women we interviewed think that the information about domestic violence is scarce in Roma communities.

“There’s little, very little information. We have very few things about the Roma community, very little information.” (Quitéria, 39 years old)

Other women stated that domestic violence information campaigns aimed at the Roma community are really needed, including up-and-running services and resources as well as their dissemination among the Roma communities.

“It’s very important that they know this support exists. The messages given out are very important, even if they know at first hand that they need to solve matter between themselves; but it’s very important because the messages that are sometimes aired in soap operas, or even in outdoor publicity, and the projects already in action about gender violence in Roma communities and also domestic violence in the Roma communities, are very important; very important because there, they know that if they can’t solve it one way, they can solve it another way.” (Rosalina, 70 years old)

“I think that there should be more publicity. So that a lot more women are able to see, well, that the situation can’t drag on and continue.” (Zita, 22 years old)

While still considering the way in which Roma women seek help in situations involving domestic violence, it should be mentioned that most of the interviewees singled out the family, turning to “the older women”, thereby abiding by the customs and rules of so-called “Roma law”.

“We Roma, we have our fathers and our mothers to turn to. But our parents solve the problem; they speak to the husband. Our law acts like that. If we ourselves can’t solve things, we have our parents who solve them for us. This is what we do in our law. (Isis, 24 years old)

“I’m always hearing people talk about Roma Law, when these things put our Roma race to shame, and are solved at home. Call on the mother-in-law or an aunt, but the mother-in-law is better, so that things are sorted out. (Paulina, 31 years old)

“It’s our law-makers. Men worthy of respect. Older men, and these older men are [best] for troubled marriages, such as in situations involving domestic violence”. (Luana, 22 years old)

“Very different [from mainstream society] in the way that the first measure taken resorts to mediation, which is through our law-makers. The law of smoothing things over. This is the first measure.” (Rosalina, 70 years old)

In Roma communities concerning situations involving domestic violence, the most frequent strategy adopted is “to mark time”, a “separation”, or in other words, the wife temporarily leaves home with her children and goes back to her own family for a few days or even for one, two or more months, in the hope that “they [husbands] get their heads around it”.

“It like this in our community, we leave them for a few months and go back to our parents’ house until they get their heads around it, until they think, ‘I’m not going to do this anymore because she’s my wife; I’m not going to treat her in this way anymore, I’m not going to beat her up’, until they think that they cannot do this.” (Isaltina, 24 years old)

“How should I say this... They get beaten up and afterwards, they grab the children, if they have any, and go their parents’ house to mark time. They stay there for a few days if necessary. And afterwards, they go back to their own lairs. And the next time it happens,

they do the same. And that's the way it goes. It's always like that. Nothing's solved."
(Teodolinda, 43 years old)

And when the "first measure" laid down by "tradition" is not an adequate answer, sometimes, although not at all often, Roma women resort to "a 21st -century way of thinking"; they resort to "the misters' law"⁶, that is the legal rulings and procedures enforced to protect victims of domestic violence in mainstream society.

"One way of solving [domestic violence] if we act according to our tradition, is to call someone older in the family and explain what's happening and he/she tries to solve things. (...) If we see things from a 21^s -century way of thinking? We give the authorities an account of it and say what has been happening. There. This is today's way of thinking. Not dependent on tradition." (Susete, 37 years old)

[Referring to the experience her cousin had when she stayed in a shelter for three years]. She suffered quite a lot. But she couldn't make it with the Roma, so she went to the misters [*senhores*]. And it was better. (...) Because, as she said: 'I can't make it under Roma law; I have to make it under the misters 'law'''. (Hermengarda, 26 years old)

5.4 The experiences of Roma women in accessing or not accessing, support services

Due to their own experience in some cases, or because they know about the situations that their friends or family members have gone through in other cases, the interviews allowed us to find out what the Roma women's opinions are about the support services as well as about the solutions provided by shelters and protection.

As far their experience in accessing community services is concerned, the women we interviewed said that the local services provide adequate information and the necessary referrals.

"I'm going to speak, not about my own experience but a case that I have already seen, where they give us information about our rights." (Berta, 30 years old)

⁶ "A lei dos senhores", in Portuguese; a common term used by Roma to refer to people who are not Roma.

“They gave me information, gave me the names. They told me... I had already left home several times before, taken the van with my children; I slept in the van several times. They [meaning the technical staff of a community support organisation] knew about it because other people knew about it, almost the entire neighbourhood, not so? And so, they gave me some information about who to contact, including the time I was living inside the van with my children when I lodged my first complaint.” (Madalena, 49 years old)

Regarding the work carried out by the police, their expediency and efficiency in terms of support going to Roma women who were victims of domestic violence, they gave negative feedback about the delay in receiving police help and they complained about the fact that sometimes, the police failed to show up at the place where the call was made.

“The police went 100 times or more. They went twice a day and never took him. They said they never caught him in the act. And we got to talk to the cops and they sent us inside. (...). We would help and then call the police. The police already knew it was there and still took the time that was needed.” (Berta, 30 years old)

The way in which Roma women are attended by the police also deserves the disapproval of some of the interviewees. They reckon that the prejudice held against Roma people is responsible for police activity when confronted with episodes involving domestic violence against Roma women.

“It happened again. This was some weeks ago. I called the police again (...) Do you know what the police officer answered? ‘In your race, don’t you have an understanding with your elders?’ I said: ‘No, my race, no. My ethnic group. No, we don’t have an understanding. I’m doing this according to our law, because I’m Portuguese and I have this right’. And he replied: ‘Ah... but you usually solve things among the older people’. ‘It’s no body’s business knowing anything about my father. I want to follow our law, your law as a policeman and my law. Because I have the right’. But he failed to record the incident. He only said: ‘If I come here again, then I’m going to arrest him’. Till today, I haven’t received any letter, nothing. The situation has stayed as it was.” (Berta, 30 years old)

“...you have many more possibilities of resorting to these amenities and being much better attended in such amenities than us, Roma people. It much more difficult for us to receive help. Because it’s: ‘Ah! This matter is handled among the Roma, they’ll solve it among themselves’. There’s this pre-conceived idea.” (Rosalina, 70 years old)

The assessment made about the follow-up procedures made by the services attending and supporting domestic violence victims is that it has been adequate and meets their needs.

“I was received well. Yes, me and my children. They gave me support, and in fact they gave me very good support. They gave us a shelter, they gave us food, children’s clothing. At the time, when my boy was just a baby, they went to the chemists to buy him a medicine because he was running a temperature, and they bought him nappies... Yes, I was received well, yes I was.” (Penélope, 46 years old)

And when assessing the support they received, they also stated they knew of another Roma woman who had received the help she needed: “she received the help she needed.” (Rosalina, 70 years old). “She received it. Yes.” (Isaltina, 24 years old)

Nevertheless, also referring to the response of the services attending and supporting domestic violence victims, some delays were pinpointed in responding promptly with emergency help.

“What I think is that sometimes they don’t do so well and that when a person is desperate, they ask us to wait a while or something similar; it’s like this, there are certain kinds of situations that we’re in which can’t wait a while. (...) Now, telling us to wait a while is, I think, not correct. Because many families have nowhere to stay. They don’t have any help from anyone. They feel battered, abused, they want somewhere to escape to right then. Well, this is what I think that’s wrong because, otherwise, they’re doing a great job.” (Leontina, 21 years old)

On the other hand, the fact that they are victims and they have to leave their homes in search of protection and safety, while the aggressor remains at home, as well as the geographical distance between the shelter and their residential area, is not considered to be the ideal solution.

“But in practice, it’s not quite like that. They take their time, they don’t give help so easily. If necessary, they have to send us to Oporto and he stays at home instead of him leaving. Sometimes, they say one thing and in practice, do something else.” (Berta, 30 years old)

Regarding the likelihood of it being more difficult for a Roma woman to receive help, the Roma women we interviewed indicated discrimination and racism as factors leading to differentiated treatment.

“It’s more difficult because there’s a lot of racism. There’s a lot of racism against the Roma people. It’s different [if they go to the police], they don’t give us such good attention. We’re not that important.” (Gabriela, 46 years old)

“Racism exists. And we know that sometimes, racism doesn’t help either. Almost certainly, because a lot of people are racist, even working in these things [organisations]... Yes, who know that you’re Roma and don’t help you. [Even in situations involving domestic violence? Regardless of any kind of situation?] To my way of thinking, yes, if they don’t help in various others kinds of situations, this one’s not going to be an exception. Maybe they’re afraid, I don’t know.” (Eufena, 24 years old)

Be that as it may, other participants in the interviews consider that there are no particular difficulties facing Roma women and point out equality in treatment: “I think it’s equal.” (Hélia, 39 years old). “I think it’s the same thing. I think so. It’s equal for everyone, obviously.” (Doroteia, 58 years old).

Finally, it should be mentioned that many of the difficulties that Roma women victims of domestic violence experience in obtaining support, are due to the concerns with preserving the image of the own community and, judging from the interviewees’ comments, to the community closing in on itself around its “traditions”.

“It’s more difficult for the Roma community to ask for help because it is an environment that is closed around its traditions.” (Quitéria, 39 years old)

5.5 The skills Roma women may lack in order to claim their rights

At this point, we would first of all stress the need for conditions that favour and enhance the exercise of Rights to be met. Now, in the case of Roma women, the lack of information, the development of potential and strategies that facilitate the mobilisation of skills, influence the way they feel, whether or not they are empowered and empowered in the face of system failures and to claim rights, as well as the very awareness of the existence of these rights.

Claiming rights demands indeed skills and abilities that are sometimes not easy to mobilise. First and foremost, it means knowing and acknowledging one's rights and being aware of the fact that they are being threatened or jeopardised.

In recognising that domestic violence means a violation of women rights, the overwhelming majority of Roman women we interviewed, stated that it was a breach of their rights. They said so mainly in terms of the rights denied them during the acts of violence that happen, particularly the right "to be happy".

"It's violating a person's right to be happy; it's violating a person's right to be independent; it's violating a person's right in many facets of life". (Carmo, 42 years old)

"We have the right to live, the right to be happy, not so? To have the right to eat in peace. To enjoy our food. And when a woman is like this [i.e., victimised], terrorised by her husband, she has neither the peace to eat nor does she taste the flavour, she gulps it down quickly; it's complicated. Domestic violence robs us of the taste of the food we eat, and that's the truth." (Luana, 22 years old)

"Because they think that they're the man (*macho*), they think they're the boss, everything that a man thinks. (...) That women are lower down than they are. (...) They think they can do everything they want and feel like doing, but they think wrong because our owners are us, we ourselves. We ourselves are the owners of our bodies. We ourselves. I think the way they think is crazy thinking. They think they are kings. They cannot think like that." (Luana, 22 years old)

When describing women's rights and the way they are breached, some of the women we interviewed mentioned the lack of means, the lack of information and knowledge that act as facilitators ensuring their on-going their *status quo*.

"Mainly, I say, it's the lack of means, the lack of information, a whole range of things and there we have it, also a way of thinking. One's mentality also counts for something. (Madalena, 49 years old)

Illiteracy and poor schooling which are so evident even among the younger women, are referred to as constraints for Roma women who are victims of violence, holding them back from making a complaint when they believe their rights have been violated.

“Because sometimes we don’t know how to speak correctly. We don’t know how to express ourselves as we should.” (Teodolinda, 43 years old)

“(…) there are many [Roma women] who don’t know how to read, they don’t know... if they sign a paper, they don’t know what they’re signing and in what terms. They could be signing a paper that they shouldn’t.” (Úrsula, 29 years old)

On the other hand, the lack of material autonomy of many Roma women mainly in managing to acquire their accommodation for themselves and their children, are likewise a serious constraint, preventing them from breaking off abusive relationships. Even when they work in sales, they have no control over the income from that work.

“It’s like this. We don’t depend upon ourselves for anything. Even if we go out selling. We don’t have work, all the money we make goes to the husband. It’s the husband who controls; it’s the husband who knows. When we leave home, after a beating, we leave empty-handed. How are we going to live? With children. In whose house? That’s the way it is, it’s us to leave home, they get the house. Where are we going to go? And so there we come, back home again. Because we don’t have anywhere to go. We can’t give our children any comfort, we don’t have any money to provide for our children, because we leave empty-handed. Because when we leave, we never take anything that’s our own. Because even if we work, we are never the bosses of anything. They are the ones who own everything.” (Teodolinda, 43 years old)

“Because they [the women] feel unprotected, lacking in support, they feel... Because it’s like this, they are in a marriage in which they are can’t study, they don’t have a schooling, they don’t have jobs, they don’t have anything, they don’t have a safe harbour where they can manage to anchor.” (Madalena, 49 years old)

In this way, the women are held “hostage”, “limited to this way of life”:

“So, the Roma woman herself is made a hostage. Because we can’t work, we can’t have jobs. [But isn’t this a Roma Law?]. Yes, it is. [And staying at home?]. Precisely. Roma women are brought up to take care of the children and the house. Only. Or help in selling, and that’s all. [And is it like that even today?] Yes, even today.” (Madalena, 49 years old)

“It’s like this, I have my mother’s house. My mother has been married to my father for more than 20 years, she’s been married to him for a long time; as I told you, she’s already old. She’s had a lot of children, and as you know, when Roma women have children and when they’re already getting old, they think in a different way. Or rather, if I’ve been with this man for twenty years, and I’ve had children with this person, I’ve got grandchildren, I’ve got everything, it is not because of a fight that I’m going to leave him. Do you understand? It’s like this, it happens that my father has problems.... He’s bipolar. He has. He’s really got problems. So, my mother has had to put up with him all these years. Many years, madam, ever since she’s been with him. Many years... he’s beaten up my mother many times, abuses her verbally, sometimes my mother is thrown out into the street.... Even so, she’s still there, and she says: ‘What am I going to leave him for if I have already been with him for so many years? I already have grandchildren, I already have children.’ She doesn’t have the wherewithal, do you understand? She’s no longer young. Well, there she is and she limited to it. Limited to this way of life.” (Leontina, 21 years old)

Limited to such a degree that “the way they look at things changes”:

“They have to deal with what they are going through; they have to know how to deal with their husbands, they have to know how to cope.... They are imprisoned into doing nothing, even the way they look at things changes. They change a lot, a woman changes a lot.” (Isaltina, 24 years old)

Terms that frequently crop up in the discourses of the Roma women we interviewed, are “shut up”, “ashamed” and “afraid”, particularly when speaking about the difficulties that Roma women have to face when they are victims of domestic violence.

- “Shut up and put up with it”:

“The Roma woman is very submissive” (Madalena, 49 years old)

“There lots of them ... difficulties. If she gets beaten up, if she’s one of those women who don’t have a reaction, she shuts up, takes what she gets and stays there suffering. She doesn’t answer back, no nothing. My mother was a victim of domestic violence for twenty odd years. I know, that’s why I’m here talking. My mother used get beaten up as if she was a child getting a beating. She protected herself, like this, with her hands. She raised her hands because she was afraid. We always came between them, but it wasn’t enough. That’s why I’m speaking about it now. And my mother never spoke out of turn. If it was needed, she’d shut up. She bit into every nerve. Today, she has lots of problems with her health owing to the state of her nerves all those years.” (Berta, 30 years old)

“Sometimes, we keep our mouths shut because a wife has a lot of Roma blood in her. I don’t know about other ethnic groups. But the Roma ethnic group is mostly made up of the value she places on her husband, husbands must be respected. But, it’s like this, when there’s domestic violence, there’s no respect, there’s no nothing, it’s like that. Why? We are Roma, we are what we’ve always been, we feel the pain in our skin, it’s as simple as that. Whatever it is. But there’s a lot of silence and there’s a lot of domestic violence swept under the carpet; many women are afraid to stick their heads out of the window and speak about what they should be speaking about, and act as they should be acting and get things straight. Because they’re afraid of reprisals. And so, they suffer in silence. Which is even worse. They don’t tell anyone. It even makes it worse and harder to bear.” (Núria, 47 years old)

- “They’re ashamed”; “A question of honour”:

“I think that they’re ashamed, so as not cause any gossip about what’s going on, so as not to publicise their lives; I think that also comes into it. Because after they speak about it, after everyone knows, after they do what’s needed, they still get criticised, there’s still the whispering behind their backs. And sometimes, they just clam up.” (Núria, 47 years old)

“They’re ashamed. Because in traditional Roma marriages, to be well seen, we have to be fine, the couple has to get on well, the children.... It’s all very important. It’s all a question of honour.” (Susete, 37 years old)

- “She’s afraid of her husband”:

“This mustn’t be easy. She must be afraid, I think. She must be afraid of her husband. Because when a woman is beaten up by her husband, they’re always afraid.” (Anastácia, 22 years old)

“It’s difficult because she’s afraid to go out into the street. She’s afraid of looking around, at someone else because he could think she’s looking at another man or another person. Jealousy is like that. It where most of the domestic violence comes from. (...) She’s always afraid. She sleeps with her heart in her mouth.” (Juno, 37 years old)

- She’s afraid of “reprisals”, of pitting family against family:

“It’s a very serious problem. A lot of people die out of fear. Because, at the bottom of it, there are threats, there’s everything. ‘If you tell anyone, it’s going to be worse for you, if you say anything, I’m going to hurt her/him, or I’m going to fix her/him’. And threatened with reprisals, they keep quiet and they take another back-hander. (...) And we know that the Roma people solve everything with their fists. There no talking it over here, no police. It’s all fisticuffs. When they marry young, they’re afraid of telling anyone. Why? ‘My father will get to know about it and beat him up or my brother will get to know about it and beat him up, so it’s better if I keep my mouth shut and don’t harm anyone.’ And they keep on being quiet about it. And so it grows worse. When they look the next time, it’s not only a slap. It becomes a beating with a stick if need be. Because it not only happens to others and not the Roma. Many women have died among the Roma like this ... [Perhaps we don’t get to hear very much about it] That’s it. Because the Roma community stifles it because they want to take the law into their own hands. (Teodolinda, 43 years old)

“(…) in our ethnic group, it’s complicated if we tell our parents that we are suffering at the hands of our husbands. If we tell them, I think you already know about this, there are fights; and with the Roma, it’s not just a push here and a shove there, it gets really ugly. There are gunshots, stabbings, the whole lot. And so, like we don’t want to cause a huge rumpus, we put up with it, we keep our mouths shut, we suffer alone.” (Luana, 22 years old)

- The “shame of being separated”; “the tradition”:

“I think it’s more than this, Not causing our parents any grief. For good or for bad, it’s the shame of being separated. Although nowadays, there are parents who don’t want to see their daughters suffering in this way. But sometimes, it’s they themselves who want to stay and not go home to their parents and live separated. There’s a lot going on, it’s the tradition.” (Berta, 30 years old)

It is the same “tradition” which causes a Roma woman “to be left”, to deal with many difficulties, such as what a young Roma woman of 22 told us; she was married at 13, became a mother at 14, and separated at 15 and who, in her own words, has a son “who doesn’t know his father”:

“Eh, it’s very hard. Everyone points at you because you were left; you can’t interact with other women; they gossip about you... it’s very ... a woman comes out much more bruised than what she was before. You can’t imagine what it is to have the Roma community point at you. You can’t imagine it. And afterwards, having to bring up children alone, my God, it’s even worse. It’s complicated.” (Luana, 22 years old)

Nevertheless, the women participating in the interviews noted that “before, it was much harder” because nowadays, the Roma community “is more open” because “a woman is more determined” and she can now “put her foot down”.

“In the old days, it was harder, not it’s not so hard now because they have had a schooling and they lead different lives. (...) Only, it’s like this: today, you see Roma women working, they have their jobs, they lead normal lives, they have a driving licence, they have education, it’s different”. (Brenda, 54 years old)

“I don’t know, in the old days, the Roma community was more closed off, now that it’s more open...”. (Cristal, 28 years old)

“I’m speaking about our community (...) nowadays, a woman is more determined, if a woman wants a separation, she separates, if a woman wants to yell, she yells and in the old days, she didn’t: a woman was subject to everything the man did because we grew up with our mothers and fathers who used to teach us ‘everything your husband tells you [to do], you keep your mouth shut’, ‘you have to obey your husband’. The Roma woman was already born and grew up thinking ‘if I get a beating, I have to swallow it and shut up.’” (Juno, 37 years old)

“In my case, it wasn’t quite like that. In my case, I got separated after having stayed 14 years with him because he was jealous, but it wasn’t that kind, we only quarrelled that’s all. But with time, things got worse. And like I left, my mother’s doorway filled up with people. Lots of old Roma women, ‘Ah... he’s the father of your children, you’re going be the ruin of the house’. ‘I’m not going back, I’m not, I’m not’. And I put my foot down. ‘I’m not going back’. My mother wanted me to go back, my father was non-committal. I spoke to him alone afterwards. My father told me: ‘If you don’t want to go back, don’t go back’. My older brother also immediately said: ‘If you don’t want to, don’t go’”. (Juno, 37 years old)

Another positive sign of change mentioned by the interviewees is the fact that some Roma women resorted to asking the services for help, and other women supported her in her decision – “she’s a winner”.

“Almost no Roma woman would ask the police to come to the community. And she left the house with the police. She’s a winner. (...) A Roma is forbidden to do practically everything. Nowadays, it’s changed a lot, yes. (...) Little by little, they manage to do things; ‘Oh, they’ve got no shame’. They gossip about them. But they do things and afterwards, others do likewise. And so, things gradually change.” (Juno, 37 years old)

“In the old days, doing this would not even enter a Roma woman’s head [referring to the request for support outside the community]. I’ve seen many cases like this now. I think it’s great.” (Luana, 22 years old)

In order to see this change effected, it is crucial that Roma women feel less cut off, safer, informed and supported.

“it’s mainly feeling supported. And safer. How should I say this? Having people around to set their minds at rest, people who they can ask help when they feel they need to, to feel safe. Mainly this. They’re very cut off.” (Madalena, 49 years old)

It is in this sense, that some of the women we interviewed indicate ways of increasing Roma women’s information and knowledge about their rights and about domestic violence.

“To do this, there should be more talks given about the subject; owing to the fact that they’re receiving allowances [from the Social Integration Income (RSI) programme], it’s an advantage because they don’t have any excuse not to come to them.... It’s part of the programme and they end up by having to attend them. And, I don’t know, by listening to the talks, it opens up their minds more. Apart from giving them information, and also the talks, they can see the best way of seeking help, feeling safe, which is fundamental.”
(Madalena, 49 years old)

5.6 Other significant findings

The Roma women we interviewed indicated that not knowing about their own rights and the lack of information about the available resources are allied to domestic violence.

“No. I guess I needed to, but we don’t know a lot about this situation, or other situations where we, or even I, need help. There’s a lot of things that we don’t know and sometimes, we put our foot in it because we don’t know our rights and we don’t know who to ask for help. Who we can turn to. Sometimes, there’s a bad situation that becomes worse at times because there’s no correct information or no correct help. Or we don’t know our rights. We have the law [on our side] in every situation. Often, we don’t look for it or we don’t look for it because we don’t know about it.” (Núria, 47 years old)

Many of the women taking part in the interview recognise that domestic violence is a crime, a crime that anyone can report, and see this fact as a relevant, positive development; they consider that it favours women who, as victims of domestic violence, are able to make a complaint and seek specialised services.

“I think it’s wonderful that this part of it [referring to domestic violence] is decreed a crime. Because in this way, many women no longer suffer what they might have. I think it’s great to make this a crime because we women have the right not to suffer and keep quiet about it. We have the right to be happy like other people because we’re all equal.” (Luana, 22 years old)

“It’s not allowed anymore. But before, it used to be ‘Let no man come between a man and his wife’ and he could do everything he wanted. (...) Women have more help from the

family now. Their husbands are more afraid now. They know it can lead to jail.” (Hélia, 39 years old)

“I think that all women who are subject to domestic violence should seek support and help. (...) Because if there’s help in this field, we have to put it into practice, it has to be, and a woman should seek her rights as a woman. No matter what kind of violence. Seek her rights because she has the right to survive, she has the right to choose what’s best and she has the right to bring up her children.” (Núria, 47 years old)

Finally, we need to refer to the pandemic in which we are living, its impacts and its consequences particularly as regards women. COVID-19 was mentioned as being a determining influence on the drop in the income of the families belonging to the women we interviewed; any income they had usually came from their occupations as street vendors or vendors in fairs/markets, but also from their jobs that ceased to exist as a result of the economic slump aggravated by the pandemic. The situation, as pointed out by the Roma women who took part in the interviews, has given rise to negative impacts on the relationships between people, on family dynamics and between married couples.

6. Conclusions

Little is known about the incidence or the characteristics of domestic violence against Roma women in Portugal. Nevertheless, available studies have concluded that domestic violence is prevalent in Roma communities where women have been identified as the victims. It has also been concluded that Roma women are reticent as regards speaking about or taking a stand on domestic violence, viewing it in the light of their culture, as a problem pertaining to their private lives and for this reason, has to be dealt with in the family.

The interviews within the sphere of the PATTERN project held in Portugal with Roma women of different ages and with various conjugal situations, where some of them are the survivors of domestic violence, therefore make an important contribution to producing more knowledge in this field; knowledge that has been revealed all the more crucial as it prepares the groundwork for action in the way of predicting and fighting against domestic violence levelled against Roma women.

In analysing the interviews, what emerges is the gender inequality, the marked difference in the social roles attributed to women and men in the Roma communities, where “culture” and “tradition” join together to keep Roma women in relationships that victimise them, and create a deep divide between what they understand as their rights and the power to exercise their rights in freedom.

Fear, shame, silence, honouring “tradition”, the fact that a breakdown in the marriage is not easily accepted in the Roma community, the responsibility thrust upon women and absorbed by them to keep the family peace and the harmony between families, are all pointed out as factors preventing women from breaking free from the domestic violence which they experience.

The denial made by many of the interviewees is also a form of silencing the existence of domestic violence in the Roma communities.

However, many interviewees acknowledge the dimension and the gravity of domestic violent episodes against Roma women, above all physical violence and psychological violence.

The Roma women show that they place hope in change, without this meaning “stop being a gypsy”; some of them have already redirected their lives in this sense, namely by seeking the help

of specialised services, making themselves financially independent and separating from their husbands/partners, their erstwhile aggressors.

The women who took part in the interviews pointed out some of the changes they considered positive both at the level of the Roma communities in general, and also the greater support that daughters receive from their families when they want to separate from their husbands due to domestic violence. When compared with the past, the women think that the present is much kinder to them as they are more aware of their right to live joyful and without violence.

Likewise, they assess positively the fact that some Roma women have resorted to the services and asked for help, expressing approval of such a decision. They recognise changes to the laws that have been made as an advantage, in particular declaring domestic violence a crime. Nevertheless, they also pinpoint the fact that many Roma women lack of information about their rights and about how to obtain help in the event of domestic violence.

On the other hand, they complain about the racism and prejudice directed at Roma people as lying at the root of unequal treatment and inactivity mainly on the part of the police when Roma women (few as yet) seek police protection, and try and solve the situations of domestic violence in which they are living and can no longer tolerate.

In overall terms, the Roma women we interviewed, pointed out gender inequality and the denial of equal rights and defended that they be allowed to live in equality and happiness.

“We have the same right as the men. Opinion. The right to have an opinion. To have a voice so we can also speak.” (Otília, 48 years old)

“We have the right to do what we want, it’s not only the men who can do what they want. Yes. I can decide upon my own life. What I want, for the good of myself and my children. (...) I have the right to be free, yes.” (Florinda, 28 years old)

“I think a woman also has the right to live her own life and be happy. To have joy.” (Penélope, 46 years old)

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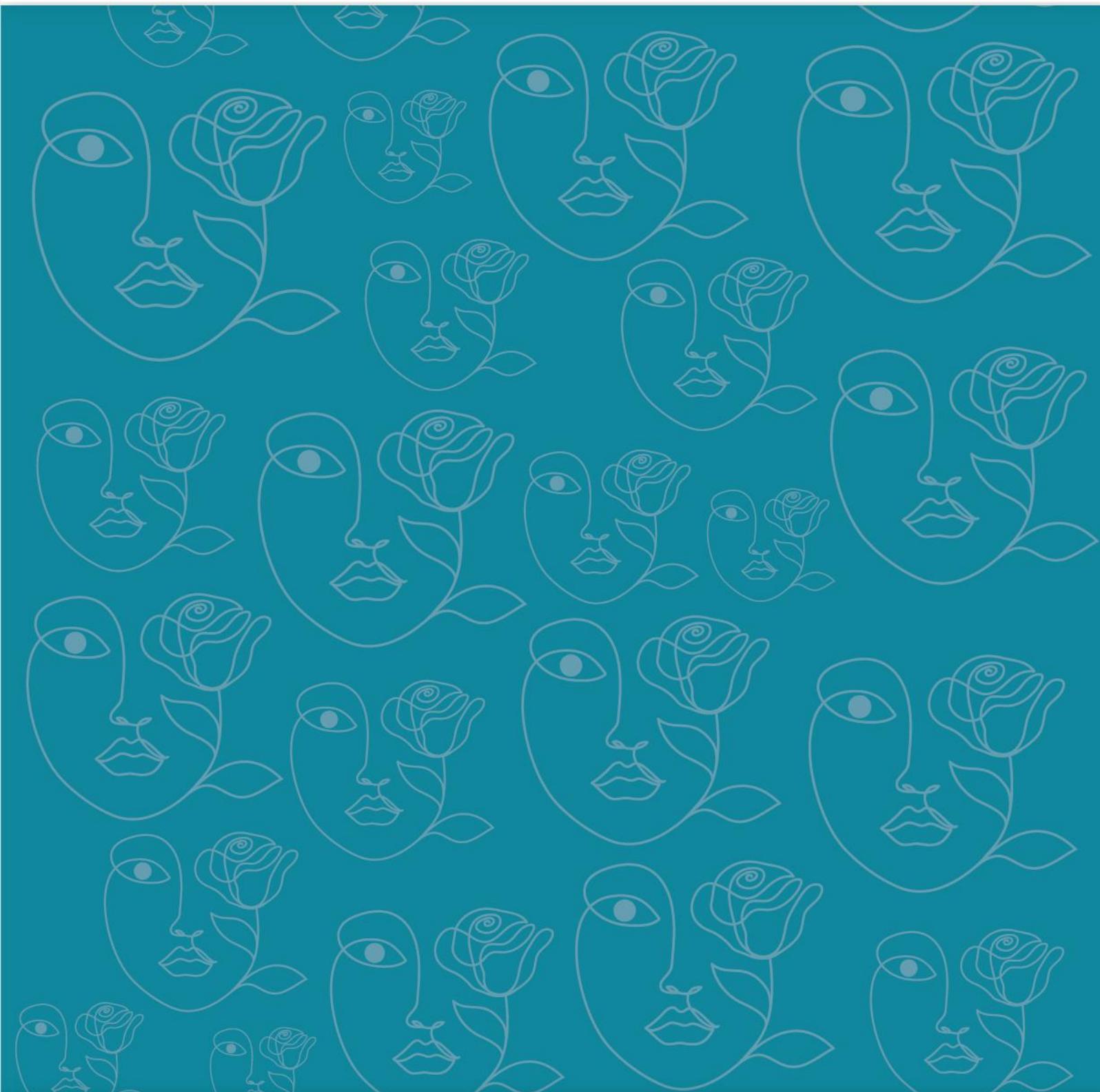
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7. Annex

Code Interview Nº	Fictitious name	Age	Years of schooling	Marital situation	Age she got married	Main activity	Nº of household members
I. 1	Agnes	40	---	Married/Cohabiting	18	Housewife	4
I. 2	Berta	30	9th grade	Married/Cohabiting	18	Unemployed	6
I. 3	Cristal	28	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	17	Housewife	6
I. 4	Emiliana	28	6th grade	Married/Cohabiting	13	Housewife	6
I. 5	Dénia	53	Cannot read or write	Widow	17	Housewife	5
I. 6	Flôr	74	---	Widow	16	Retired	6
I. 7	Gabriela	46	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	16	Unemployed	5
I. 8	Hélia	39	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	20	Unemployed	7
I. 9	Ísis	24	3rd grade	Separated	16	Housewife	5
I. 10	Juno	37	6th grade	Separated	---	Paid worker	4
I. 11	Luana	22	4th grade	Separated	13	Housewife	5
I. 12	Madalena	49	9th grade	Separated	---	Unemployed	3
I. 13	Norberta	50	Cannot read or write	Widow	---	Housewife	4
I. 14	Otília	48	4th grade	Widow	---	Retired	1
I. 15	Paulina	31	5th grade	Married/Cohabiting	17	Unemployed	5
I. 16	Quitéria	39	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	30	Paid worker	2
I. 17	Rosalina	70	4th grade	Widow	22	Retired	2
I. 18	Susete	37	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	17	Paid worker	5
I. 19	Teodolinda	43	Cannot read or write	Married/Cohabiting	15	Retired	4
I. 20	Úrsula	29	6th grade	Single	N.A.	Housewife	3
I. 21	Verónica	56	Cannot read or write	Married/Cohabiting	13	Housewife	8
I. 22	Anastácia	22	5th grade	Married/Cohabiting	15	Housewife	7
I. 23	Brenda	54	3rd grade	Married/Cohabiting	18	Housewife	7
I. 24	Carmo	42	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	16	Housewife	3
I. 25	Doroteia	58	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	18	Housewife	7
I. 26	Eudora	55	3rd grade	Married/Cohabiting	16	Housewife	6
I. 27	Florinda	28	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	16	Housewife	4
I. 28	Guiomar	74	2nd grade	Married/Cohabiting	18	Retired	3

Code Interview Nº	Fictitious name	Age	Years of schooling	Marital situation	Age she got married	Main activity	Nº of household members
I. 29	Hermengarda	26	5th grade	Separated	16	Paid worker	2
I. 30	Isaltina	24	6th grade	Single	N.A.	Paid worker	5
I. 31	Juvelina	19	5th grade	Married/Cohabiting	14	Housewife	3
I. 32	Leontina	21	9th grade	In a relationship without cohabitation	---	Housewife	7
I. 33	Mariposa	37	Cannot read or write	Single	N.A.	Housewife	2
I. 34	Núria	47	Cannot read or write	Widow	15	Housewife	2
I. 35	Penélope	46	Cannot read or write	Married/Cohabiting	---	Housewife	7
I. 36	Eufena	24	5th grade	Married/Cohabiting	19	Unemployed	3
I. 37	Solange	26	5th grade	Separated	20	Housewife	4
I. 38	Zita	22	4th grade	Married/Cohabiting	14	Housewife	4
I. 39	Umbelina	59	1st grade	Widow	14	Housewife	1
I. 40	Vicência	23	6th grade	Married/Cohabiting	15	Housewife	4



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