**10. The lessons of history. The role of the Nation States and the EU in fighting violence against women in 10 European Countries**

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**Key words: Women’s movements, intimate partner violence, violence against women, policy-making, prevalence**

**Abstract**

The analysis of social policies and services to fight violence against women and intimate partner violence offers an innovative point of view on evaluation of the role of the state as well as supra-national bodies. While providing a historical reconstruction of policies in 10 European countries, the article aims to identify key actors of policy making and to describe their interconnection. The 10 countries under study are: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. First, the article answer the question, when did provisions to fight VAW start in each country? This is a question which has never been raised in a cross-national approach. By locating the starting point in time and grouping countries in temporal clusters, the article identifies the key actors of VAW policy-making in this region of the world. After discussing features of single countries, the article identifies trends in VAW policies, which are common to all or most of the countries. And finally, the article raises more ambitious comparative questions: by looking at history, can we detect VAW policy regimes? Are there patently exceptional cases in the clusters? And what is the actual role of the state in fighting VAW? At the end, the article argues that the state is a powerful instrument, on condition that it acts under pressure from or in combination with both independent activists and supra-national bodies.

**Introduction**

At a moment when the project to unify Europe that began in 1957 presents unexpected economic and political difficulties, the analysis of social policies and services to fight Violence Against Women (VAW) is offering an innovative point of view for evaluation of the role of the state as well as supra-national bodies. Several gender-oriented studies on the European welfare state exist in scientific literature. Above all, they deal with the transformation of the family welfare structure, female participation to the labor force, and care work policies (Fraser, 1994; Lewis, 2002; O’Reilly, 2006). Only recently, have researchers began to investigate VAW welfare programs in individual nation-states (Weldon, 2006; Charles and Mackay 2013; Cimagalli 2014) and to assess nation-state regimes by making comparative evaluations of the stronger and weaker points of each (Balkmar et al., 2009; Roggeband, 2012; Hearn and McKie, 2010). This latter point of view is innovative because, in the field of VAW and intimate partner violence (IPV), the state is not the only policymaker. Even if it is the strongest player, the state acts because it is constantly hounded by women’s movements and associations. In no area of the European social welfare state is the presence of grass-roots movements so strong.

This study aims to provide a historical reconstruction of VAW policies in 10 European countries. The 10 countries are: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. What can history teach us? What novelty of ideas can come out of a diachronic perspective in the comparative analysis of states and movements on VAW? History provides data on the political and social contexts of the countries, and these confer depth and meaning to the national situations. Time sequences in each state run in parallel, but cross-national comparison can show acceleration or deceleration, proliferation or scarcity, and reasons why this is the case. First, we want to raise the question: When? When did provisions to fight VAW start in each country? This is a question which has never been raised in a cross-national approach. After locating the starting point in time and grouping countries in a temporal sequence, we want to raise the question: Who did what when? By looking at history, what are the key actors in VAW policies in this region of the world, and what is their interaction? Then, after discussing features of single countries, we want to raise the question: Is there a trend in VAW policies, which is common to all or at least to most of the countries? And at the end, we want to raise more ambitious comparative questions: By looking at history, can we detect policy regimes with regard to VAW? And what is the actual role of the state in fighting VAW?

To use a metaphor which is common in comparative sociology, this study will employ the telescope instead of the microscope in order to assess if we can “homogenize a heterogeneous domain” (Dogan 2002: 64 and 89), i.e. investigate common trends and decision-making dynamics in different countries in order to understand the way in which VAW policy-making comes about in the EU. Hypotheses suggested in this study could also be tested in other regions of the world and concur to improve VAW prevention.

Since the end of the 60s, there has been an increasing awareness in European countries of VAW and IPV. Women’s movements began calling attention to this, through their claims on women’s subordinate position in society and ability to self-organize in order to provide services and put pressure on governments. Since that time, awareness has spread throughout the continent and, since 1997 it has been disseminated by the European Union (EU). Today, every country of the EU and the majority of the countries of Europe have deliberated some provisions on VAW. Obviously, due to space limitations here, the historical reconstruction can only take into consideration the most important developments. As the topic is truly timely and not dealt with enough it would, without a doubt, merit more space.

To enable cross-national comparison, all the selected countries are EU members, but variation is ensured by the fact that they are located in all corners of Europe. Many players act on VAW policy-making: nation states through parliaments, governments, single ministries, specialized commissions and departments, regional, provincial and municipal authorities; women’s awareness movements that can be (or not be) organized in national networks that have different levels of strength and autonomy, and, finally, the EU, through directives and resolutions, but also capacity building programs such as Daphne. The telescope as a comparative research tool highlights features of the bigger picture, hence it requires some degree of simplification. In this paper, nation states, women’s movements and the EU will be treated as if they were single entities without further internal organization.[[1]](#endnote-1)

**Country clusters and policy on VAW**

*The first question we want to answer is: when did provisions to fight VAW start in each country?*

In her seminal work on VAW policies, Weldon (2002) claims that government responsiveness to VAW results from the interaction between women’s movements and political institutions. “Strong, autonomous women’s movements and effective women’s policy agencies reinforce one another. This is not purely additive; it is interactive” (Weldon 2002, p. 141). All the same, in itself, the existence of the movement is a necessary but not sufficient cause to generate public action. Weldon underlines that the movement must be strong (organized, united), self-governing and autonomous, and free of political parties’ and labor unions’ influence, as these groups are stakeholders advocating gender-neutral interests that are for both men and women without distinction of gender, while the women’s movement is able to establish a privileged dialogue with female policymaking agencies, i.e. governmental departments especially dedicated to women’s issues. In 7 of the 10 countries under study in this paper, women’s movements began in the late 60s or early 70s, but public action to fight VAW did not start at the same time. In Spain, Portugal and Slovenia, because of the internal political situation, women’s movements appeared no less than one decade later. Following Weldon and in order to answer our first question, we will identify the time in which the national or local governments of each countryinitiated public action, because governments have multiple resources available and they are potentially the strongest player: they can introduce new criminal offences and more severe sentences in the penal code; they can assign public funding for advertising campaigns, help lines and training for those professionals who work in the field; they are able to reorganize the welfare state structure and coordinate activities of different agencies, like the courts, the police, public hospitals and social services. From the moment in which VAW policy making becomes an issue on the government agenda, long-term transformations are in place.

By looking at this starting point in time, we can group countries into three clusters: a) *Early Birds*, among which governmental action began in the mid-70s to early 80s; b) *Intermediate*, among which governmental action began in the late 80s to early 90s; and c) *Newcomers*, among which governmental action began in the mid-90s. Figure 1 shows the territorial collocation and country classification in the three clusters. Elsewhere, a more detailed analysis of the situation of each country regarding their respective VAW policies and data collection is available (Corradi and Stöckl, 2014). In this study, only key developments are mentioned.

**[Insert Figure 1 here]**

*The early bird countries*

The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden began governmental action between the mid-70s to early 80s. In London, in 1972, a shelter for victims of domestic violence was independently financed by activists that had participated in the women’s liberation movement of the 60s. It was the first shelter in the UK, and probably also the first in Europe. Women’s Aid, the federation for refugee services, became effective in 1974. In the following year, the government created the “Select Committee on Violence in Marriage”, active also today and which never relented attention to the issue (Strickland, 2012). In 1994, a further advance was the creation of an inter-departmental working group whose mandate was to formulate a coordinated strategy to protect the victims: different bodies of the public administration, i.e. the police, emergency rooms in hospitals and social services must work together to provide effective service. In this same light, in 2005, the Crown Prosecution Service accredited the first “specialized domestic violence” court systems, involving partnership between police, prosecutors, court staff and support services for victims (Kelly, 2005).

In the Netherlands, as a response to a decade of feminist mobilization, coordination of governmental action and policy plans exists since 1982, and it gives institutional support to continual dialogue between the government and the movements. In the ‘90s, for the first time in Europe, the treatment of perpetrators received government attention; at the turn of the millennium, domestic violence was framed as a priority linked to citizenship (Roggeband, 2012: 793).

Sweden has a strong legislation with severe punishments for VAW related crimes. The issue has always been high in the political agenda (Lindström, 2005). In 1982, assault in a private setting became an offense that the police was required to investigate *ex officio*, i.e. regardless of the victim’s approval. The country was also the first in Europe to introduce the “Visiting Ban Act” in 1988, which prohibits a perpetrator from contacting the victim by any means. In 1998, the penal code included the new crime “gross violation of a woman’s integrity”, in order to sanction repeated acts of violence by a man against a woman (Balkmar et al., 2009).

## *The intermediate countries*

In France, Germany, Spain and Finland governmental action on VAW and IPV started between the late 80s to early 90s. In France, the feminist movement rallied public opinion on rape and violence since the 70s, but the first national campaign on “conjugal violence” was funded by the Secretariat for the Rights of Women in 1989, an official body which was created in the aftermath of the French participation to the UN 1985 Nairobi Conference on Women (Jaspard 2007: 25). Today, in comparison with the other Intermediate countries and consistently with the nature of its political institutions, France has a stronger central-state intervention and weaker local provisions. Since the year 2000, the government implemented a continuous sequence of interdepartmental national action plans (4, covering twelve years), which have improved support of victims, prevention of recidivism and application of protection orders, as well as research (Wave, 2012). The network of shelters and violence survivor centers is relatively weaker, as compared to Germany. From its inception, the German feminist movement has been protective of its autonomy from the government and distrustful of institutions dominated by men. Since 1975, activists have established locally based feminist support services and by 1989, Germany had a wide network of shelters and counselling centers (Hagemann-White 2009: 104-105). This is one of the reasons why federal state action began in the late 80s and is characterized, still today, by a close collaboration between public agencies and NGOs: interagency cooperation is the key word to capture VAW policy making in Germany.

In Spain, the first reform of legislation, which framed domestic violence as a women’s rights issue, was passed by the Spanish Parliament in 1989, and nine years later the government issued the first national plan with a set of integrated provisions, such as restraining orders, training for the police, data collection and analysis, and public funding for awareness raising and shelters. At the turn of the millennium, the “Integral law against gender violence” made available legal protection for the victims and facilitated access to social services. (Roggeband 2012).

In Finland, a relatively weak feminist movement and continued adherence to gender neutrality in legislation made it difficult to address the gendered differences that are embedded in men’s physical and psychological abuse of women (Eriksson et al., 2005: 31). In 1979, in keeping with a family-centered and gender-neutral conception of violence, the Federation of Mother and Child Homes opened the first domestic violence shelter (Eriksson et al., 2005: 69-70). In contrast to most of the countries considered in this article, there is no network of women-only shelters in Finland, and they are run as part of the mainstream welfare (Hearn and McKie, 2010: 143). To meet external pressure exerted by the Council of Europe and the First Conference on VAW of the European Ministers, in 1990 the Finnish Council for Equality established a committee to tackle VAW (Kantola, 2006: 105). As a result, the first government plan for the “Prevention of prostitution and violence against women” was published in 1997, and then completed in 2002.

*The newcomer countries*

Portugal, Slovenia and Italy are classified as newcomers, since public support to combat VAW exists only since the mid-90s but, once the topic was set in the countries’ public agenda, the pace of change was fast. All three countries could profit from accumulated knowledge and policy expertise, which was disseminated by the EU and within international women’s networks.

For decades, the internal political situation of Portugal and Slovenia did not favor awareness raising on VAW. In Portugal, the women’s movement was born in the mid-70s, with the return to democracy, while in Slovenia, it was born a few years before the fall of the Berlin Wall (Azambuya et al., 2013; Filipćić, 2009). Italy is a democratic country since 1948, and it had an active presence of feminist movements since the 70s. However, for two decades the Italian activists were not sufficiently strong and autonomous to collaborate in producing the change they were hoping for. The first shelter independently financed by the activists was founded in Milan in 1990, the law against sexual violence was passed in 1994, and four years later the government financed “Urban 1 Plan” that established the first anti-violence network in eight Italian cities (Cimagalli, 2014). Today, national networks of women’s associations exist, work together and meet periodically.

We must not take the three time clusters above as if they were ideal-types, because they do not synthetize inductively notions or patterns of VAW regimes. What they do illustrate is a general trend both across and within clusters. The North/South partition, with former countries being more advanced and the latter family-centered, conservative countries lagging behind, is only partially confirmed (Esping-Andersen 1999: 83; Hearn and McKie 2010: 145). It is true that the Early-birds deserve credit for having given visibility, before the others, to a social issue; in emphasizing the need to *coordinate* the vast number of key players that help violence victims, these countries have been models. Yet, Spain is a southern European country that is a vanguard on VAW and Finland is a northern European country that recognized comparatively late the VAW issue. Portugal was the first country to create a governmental Commission for Women’s Social Policy, and today Italy is probably the only to have approved a special law against femicide. In the UK, specific policy provisions exist since the early ‘70s, but uneven distribution of services over the nation-state is still of great concern (Kelly, 2005; Charles & Mackay, 2013). In the Netherlands, privatization of Welfare during the 90s caused a regression, as opposed to improvements in assisting violence survivors during the former decade (Roggeband, 2012). This is the first lesson that we can learn by using the telescope in comparative sociology. VAW policy developments over 40 years disclose positive general trends. They also show how welfare patterns, which are fundamentally gender-neutral, do not capture what has occurred and is occurring in single nation-states, nor why. In a time-span of 40 years, policy arrangements are not always accumulative. Changes in the political orientation of governments, cuts in public funding, economic crises, and transformation of the welfare structure (i.e. decentralization and privatization of social services which began in Europe in the 90s) all can cause a temporary stall in the development of services to fight against and prevent VAW. However, the general trend is positive. We will return to this in the final section of this study.

*The second question we want to answer is: What are the key actors in this region of the world, and what is their interaction?*

In every cluster and country under consideration (even though at different points in time), women’s movements were the first actor working for the creation of emergency aid for female victims of violence. Activists quickly became social entrepreneurs: they collected donations, organized voluntary human resources and opened the first operating shelters for victims. Women’s movements were also the first to articulate the issue of VAW and press for recognition as a public problem. They drew public attention to the issue and tried to create public support by advancing moral and political arguments. At the same time, organized activists exerted pressure on public officials until the issue was a line item on the national agenda and received appropriate attention and funding. When this happened, governmental action accorded stability and longevity to provisions. This is the second lesson we learn from a comparative historical point of view. Nation-states are always subject to pressure by the myriad of stakeholders and advocate groups that occupy the public sphere of every country; thus, the trigger to government responsiveness *is the positive relationship established between women’s movements and women’s machineries.*VAW is fundamentally *not* a gender-neutral phenomenon, so “where women’s movements have introduced women’s issues as categories of the administrative structure of the state and policy, we would expect political institutions to be more effective” (Weldon 2002, p. 125). Examples of women’s “machineries” are the Commission for Women’s Social Policy, established in Portugal in 1973, the Office for Women’s Policy, established in Slovenia in 1992, and the Minister for Women, appointed in the UK in 1997.

**Results from the 2014 FRA survey**

The recently collected first EU-wide dataset on the prevalence and consequences of VAW also warrants against stereotyping. For this survey, specially trained female interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews in the home of a minimum of 1500 women in each member state in 2012. The survey targeted the general population of women aged 18 to 74 living in an EU member state through a strict random sampling approach, making it directly comparable across countries (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2014). It questioned women if they experienced specific acts of violence, ranging from being pushed to stabbed or shot at for physical violence, from forced sexual intercourse to consenting to sexual activity because of fear what happened in the case of refusal for sexual violence, from controlling behavior, economic violence, verbal abusive behavior and blackmail to abuse of children for psychological violence, and from questions on threatening communications to following or damage to property for stalking. Further details on the study and its methodology are described elsewhere (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2014).

**[Insert Table 1 here]**

The findings of the survey displayed in Table 1 illustrate some interesting patterns. Women in the early bird countries tend to report higher levels of lifetime experiences of physical and sexual IPV as women in the intermediary and newcomer countries. The trend is less clear when looking at the prevalence of physical IPV in the last year as prevalence rates are fairly low, ranging from two to six percent, with the majority of countries reporting a prevalence of five percent. Early bird and intermediary countries show a similar high prevalence of psychological abuse by intimate partners, non-partner physical and sexual violence and stalking. Whether or not the police was contacted for the most serious incident of IPV and stalking was similar across all three clusters.

Generally, one can also see from Table 1 that the prevalence of different forms of VAW tends to be higher in the geographically northern countries as compared to the southern countries.While these might be actual prevalence differences, they might also be due to the greater attention the issue of VAW received in these countries through media coverage and public attention. By making VAW an issue of public discussion and less stigmatizing to report, it is also likely that women in these countries are more likely to report violence in a survey setting, leading to higher prevalence rates than in countries where VAW is still a hidden and private issue, which women are discouraged from reporting on. What is more telling in terms of the policy impact on the prevalence is to look at the changes in prevalence compared to earlier surveys, as nearly all countries conducted previous surveys on VAW. Although not directly comparable due to different study designs and measurements, it has been observed that the prevalence of physical and sexual partner and non-partner violence dropped from 37 percent in 2003 to 35 percent in 2014 in Germany, while the prevalence of physical and sexual violence by a previous partner in Sweden dropped from 35 to 32 percent in 2014. In Italy in 2006, 32 percent of women reported physical and sexual IPV, compared to 29 percent in 2014 (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2014). In Finland however a rise was observed in physical or sexual violence, or threats from a non-partner from 29 percent in 2005 to 37 percent (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2014). Again, it is necessary to stress that different modes of survey delivery, study designs and questions used to assess different forms of VAW might be the source of differences between the current and earlier survey findings, which should therefore not be overstated.

**Policy development over 40 years**

While Figure 1 showcases country clusters, it is interesting to observe the historical forward movement inside these clusters. Table 2 shows the progress made in regard to actions and the services implemented over four decades. It presents six types of service/action: the *shelters* (which in almost all countries are the very first service provided), emerging out of the women’s movements and privately funded in the beginning; *governmentalaction* that lends major incisiveness to initiatives, such as launching a national campaign, financing a network of shelters, creating a hotline, etc.; *coordinatedgovernmentalstrategies* among different agencies; legislation for *restraining orders*, which implies changing the penal code for a more efficient and immediate protection of the victim; systematic *collection of data* by national statistics agencies or accredited research centers, which indicates a long-term interest towards the scientific understanding of VAW; finally, *programs for men* who have been violent to women and children, a provision aiming at re-socializing the abuser and avoiding recidivism.

**[Insert here Table 2]**

The analysis of Table 2 helps us answer *the third question: Is there a trend which is common to all, or at least most of the countries under study?*

In the 70s, only the Early Birds had activated services to fight VAW, in particular shelters and some kind of governmental action. Ten years later, in this same cluster, coordination strategies represent a further advancement. At the same time, the Intermediate introduce services which are already coordinated. In the 90s, the Newcomers set off a chain of initiatives, while in the other two clusters policy developments were progressing. Finally, since 2000, in the 10 countries under study, we can detect services and actions, including the systematic record keeping of statistical data. Programs for the re-socialization of violent men are still minimal in the Newcomers (Hearn et al., 2002).[[2]](#endnote-2)

The schematic representation of progress made over time clearly illustrates intensification of policy provisions, above all since the 90s; even if the Newcomers set off one or two decades later with respect to the other countries, when they do, they are able to leap into the new stage. Progress in policy in the 10 countries under study is not linear but incremental. Countries that come in late do not begin from zero, but in some ways benefit from the progress of those countries that started first. There is a clear multiplier effect applicable to the progress of history. Which components produce this effect?

Ever since 1975, the European Economic Community, now the EU, has striven to ensure equal opportunity between men and women. For 20 years, the EU gender directives mainly targeted the goals of equal pay and working conditions, and equal treatment in social security. “This has indeed guaranteed the creation of a legal framework for equality from which European women have been able to benefit” (Lombardo 2003, p. 161). However, since EU provisions in the field (such as recommendations, resolutions, communications) are legally non-binding, scholars conclude that its “provisions are indeed progressive, but at the end of the day too weak to effectively generate equality between the sexes” (Lombardo 2003, p. 170).

Further details on the role of the EU can facilitate the answer to this question. A number of political bodies make the EU: the Parliament (the legislative body), the Commission (the executive body), and the Court of Justice (the judicial body); added to these, the Council of Ministers, which represents governments of the member states and the collective presidency of the EU. In order to adequately describe the EU gender regime, authors emphasize the difference between “hard law” - consisting in treaties, directives, and the rulings of the Court of Justice - that are binding on member states, and “soft law”, consisting in different policy tools, i.e. recommendations and declarations, which basically rely on the power of knowledge dissemination and persuasion (Lombardo, 2003; Kantola, 2010: 12-13). During the 70s, the Equal Pay Directive 1975, the Equal Treatment Directive 1978, and the Social Security Directive 1978, all issued by the Commission, aimed at bridging gender inequalities by concentrating solely on discrimination in the labour market and the employment rights of women. In the 80s, the concern for VAW at the European level emerged in the aftermath of the UN Nairobi Conference. In 1986, the European Parliament Committee on Women’s Rights drafted a comprehensive report on VAW. At the end of a heated debate, the Parliament adopted the *Resolution on Violence against Women*, that called for a revision of the member states laws on sexual assault, for the extensive education of the legal-judiciary profession with the aim of eradicating sexist attitudes to the victim’s detriment, and for improvements in training of police officers and collaboration among professionals dealing with victims (European Parliament, 1986). Kantola claims that “its impact was minor and the Commission and the Council largely ignored the Parliament’s proposals” (Kantola, 2010: 159). Since the late 90s, VAW is a recurring priority on the EU agenda, and it is tackled with a variety of tools: the *Report on the need to establish a European wide campaign for zero tolerance on VAW*, which was approved by the Parliament in 1997; the campaign on VAW, which was launched by the European Commission in 1999; and, between the late ‘90s and the turn of the Millennium, the Council of the EU Presidencies of Austria, Germany, Finland, Portugal and Spain, which all hosted conferences on the topic and adopted recommendations to combat VAW. Established by the Commission in 1997, the Daphne program deserves a special mention. Daphne is a capacity building program, giving financial support to and promoting the establishment of networks among local NGOs that work in the field of violence in European societies. Daphne aims to disseminate best practices, to harmonize definitions and methods, to promote cooperation between local voluntary organizations and public authorities, and to reinforce pan-European networks. In order to receive funding, applicants undergo a competitive review process which evaluates innovation, transnational exchange and added value at a European level (Montoya, 2008). Between 1997 and 2020, the EU has invested 556 million euros on Daphne awareness raising and prevention of VAW (Dimitrova-Stull, 2014).

The question on the multiplier effect in policy development, which was raised above, is now clearer. To this purpose, Table 2 also displays some of the most important EU actions. In the 70s, the labor market directives appear to have very little or no connection with policy development on VAW. In the following decade, the *Resolution* on VAW is concurrent with the beginning of the UN involvement in this field, but it is in the 90s that the strongest EU actions come to effect, and they are simultaneous with the acceleration of nation-states policy-making in the three clusters.

Table 2 also indicates the third element, which has an influence on proliferation in policy development, i.e. UN commitment and stimulus. In 1979 the UN General Assembly approved the *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women* (CEDAW), which is often defined as the international “bill of rights” for women, providing world-wide impetus for improving women’s equal participation in society. VAW, as a special topic, is manifestly set in the UN agenda since the 1985 Nairobi Third World Conference on Women. The Conference Report recalls the particular situation of women as victims of violent crimes, and states that “Violence against women exists in various forms in everyday life in all societies […] Women victims of violence should be given […] comprehensive assistance. […] National machinery should be established in order to deal with the question of violence against women” (United Nations, 1985: § 258). The UN urges governments to put in place preventive policies and economic assistance, and to provide legal aid for the protection of women and children victims of domestic violence (United Nations, 1985: § 271). For the first time in UN documents, VAW is recognized as a gender-specific societal issue, which then receives further stimulus at the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights and the 1995 Beijing Conference.

Historical processes run in parallel and, at the same time, they benefit from each other. Since the mid-80s, VAW and IPV are part of the human rights agenda on a global scale and they have taken up speed and visibility in the regional, national and supranational polity. Extant literature suggest that in Finland (Kantola 2006: 105), France (Jaspard et al. 2003: 9), Germany (Kantola 2010: 159), Italy (Cimagalli 2014: 14), Portugal (Kantola 2010: 159; Azambuja et al. 2013: 35), Slovenia (Selišnik 2009: 43), and even in one of the Early-Birds, namely, the Netherlands (Roggeband 2012: 792), action taken at the level of the EU and the aftermath of the Conferences organized by the UN in 1985, 1993 and 1995 had significant influence on government action.

**Conclusions**

To conclude, *we can raise a few, more ambitious comparative questions: Can we detect policy regimes with regard to VAW? In our effort to homogenize a heterogeneous domain, are there patently exceptional cases? And finally: What is the actual role of the state in fighting VAW?*

With regard to the first question, evidence supports confident claim that there is no correspondence between the country clusters discussed in this study and systems of social provision which are classified as welfare states. Welfare typologies include Esping-Andersen’s three worlds of liberal, conservative, and social-democratic welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990), his revisions to incorporate some of the feminist criticism (Orloff, 1993; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Orloff, 2001), the introduction of a separate ‘Mediterranean’ model (Ferrera, 1996) and further typologies that are based on greater empirical refinement (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Danforth, 2014). One reason for disjunction between welfare classifications and VAW country clusters is, to repeat, that the latter are not meant as a typology; rather, they set out to chart developments in time. But the main reason is that VAW provisions did not arise as part of the welfare state. They emerged from mobilization of grass-roots movements which were manifestly challenging assumptions on the benign and supposedly gender-neutral state. Feminist activists in the field of VAW and IPV were not only criticizing the male breadwinner/housewife partition, but they were undermining men’s authority in the family and society. In countries such as the UK, early feminist claims were manifestly elaborated from outside, and against the state (Kantola, 2006: 73-78). As a result, the shelters were often conceived as both safe and *empowering* places for women (Allwood, 1989: 101). Empirical studies show that in all 10 countries except one, services for VAW victims progressed very slowly, if at all, into mainstream welfare (Hagemann-White, 2009: 104; Cimagalli, 2014: 20-21).

With regard to the second question, Finland, Italy and Spain emerge as exceptional cases, which illustrate the very special role played by womens’ movements on VAW. In Finland, statistics on women’s rate of employment, pay differentials, history of suffrage, universal availability of child care indicate great achievements of women (Hearn and McKie 2010: 142). The Council for Equality between men and women was created in 1972, the first in the Nordic countries and possibly the first in Europe, but it was only 20 years later that the Council recognized VAW as a public issue. “Gender neutrality has been coupled with a relatively wide acceptance of the principle of gender equality […] across the political spectrum” (Hearn and McKie 2010: 143). All these national characteristics make Finland a hybrid, thus very challenging case in the context of both the Scandinavian and EU countries. The Finnish refuges developed from former child welfare institutions, and this is seen as one of the reasons why the country targeted VAW at a relatively late stage (Kantola, 2006: 106-107).

In Spain, feminist efforts to politicize the topic of VAW started in the early 80s, soon after the country returned to democratic life. In 1982, a group of women lawyers and social workers founded the Research Commission on Women’s Abuse, which was well informed by international examples and focused mainly on political advocacy and awareness (Roggeband 2012: 790). As a result of the cooperation between a strong women’s movements, women members of parliament and women’s machineries, Spain quickly became a vanguard country on the topic of VAW.

In Italy, women’s movements have been a lively component of the Italian civic sphere; in the mid-70s, they were visible advocates of women’s rights in the streets and in the courts of law, particularly in support of rape victims. The “New Family Law”, introducing equality of status between man and woman, was approved in 1975, namely, two years before Germany; abortion is legal since 1978, namely, two years after France and Germany, and almost three decades before Portugal. But in spite of these comparatively early transformations, the country is a Newcomer. In 1996 the Reform of the criminal law Act introduced specific norms against sexual violence, and in 1998 the national government launched the Urban Program, establishing the first anti-violence network in 8 large cities, then extended to 18 more. Since the 2000’s we observe an intense acceleration of government action: the Ministry of Equal Opportunities financed two country surveys on the issue and the national “Pink hotline”, and the Parliament introduced restraining orders in the penal law, and stalking as a new crime. To explain why women’s activism wasn’t successful at the same time as in the UK, France or Germany, one must turn to Weldon’s analyses. Research on the recent history of Italian women shows fragmentation of feminist movements, as well as ideological dependence from political parties and unions (Calabrò and Grasso 2004; Rossi-Doria 2010). As a result, women’s voices were comparatively weaker than in other Western European countries.

A further lesson to be learned from this concise history of VAW policies in the EU concerns the role of the state. Is the state (i.e., governments, parliaments, women’s machineries, etc.) an instrument for change? This question is raised is numerous works which scrutinize the political sphere of democracies from a feminist outlook (Watson, 1990; O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999; Kantola, 2006). This study corroborates that the state is a powerful instrument, but on condition that it acts under pressure from or in combination with independent activists and supra-national bodies. It also confirms the role of the EU as an accelerator for change. But what *kind of* change? Over the decades, women who experienced violence have accessed more services and benefited from more coordinated intervention. However, it is not clear to what extent provisions have effectively reduced VAW and IPV. The results of the FRA survey show that the efficiency of provisions must be tested empirically at the level of single nation-states, as well as compared across nations. It is our hope that this study can pave the way to more detailed scrutiny of VAW policy making. A combination of the telescope with the microscope approach would greatly help to improve the safety and well-being of European women.

**Notes**

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Figure 1 Classification of 10 EU countries with regard to governmental action on VAW



Table 1: The prevalence of different forms of violence against women in the ten countries as reported by the Violence against Women survey of the FRA Survey (Fundamental Rights Agency 2014 )

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country | Response rate  (Sample size) | % of sexual & physical IPV lifetime a | Contacted police because of physical or sexual IPV | % of sexual & physical IPV in the last 12 months | Psycho-logical IPV | Non partner sexual and physical violence | Stalking | Contacted police because of stalking |
| Early bird countries |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Netherlands | 26.5% (1510) | 25 | 18 | 5 | 50 | 35 | 26 | 28 |
| Sweden | 19.7%\* (1504) | 28 | 17 | 5 | 51 | 34 | 33 | 25 |
| United Kingdom | 36.9% (1510) | 29 | 25 | 5 | 46 | 30 | 19 | 34 |
| Intermediary countries |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| France | 27.1% (1528) | 26 | 18 | 5 | 47 | 33 | 29 | 25 |
| Finland | 38.5%\* (1520) | 30 | 10 | 5 | 53 | 33 | 24 | 24 |
| Germany | 53.3% (1534) | 22 | 15 | 3 | 50 | 24 | 24 | 21 |
| Spain | 31.1% (1520) | 13 | 24 | 2 | 33 | 16 | 11 | 26 |
| Newcomer countries |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Italy | 58.4% (1531) | 19 | 19 | 6 | 38 | 17 | 18 | 31 |
| Portugal | 66.1% (1515) | 19 | 23 | 5 | 36 | 10 | 9 | 17 |
| Slovenia | 43.6% (1501) | 13 | 18 | 2 | 34 | 15 | 14 | 35 |

Table 2: VAW Policy Development



**Notes**

1. It would be interesting to assess whether or not different state formations (namely, centralized versus federal state) and different levels of public governance (namely, national versus local, i.e. provincial and municipal government) are more or less successful in reducing VAW; it would also be interesting to assess the extent to which different types of leadership and internal organization of movements are more or less effective in lobbying government action. To these purposes, a combination of the microscope and the telescope approach would be necessary. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The first comprehensive survey of domestic violence perpetrator programs in Europe shows that measures to reduce episodes of future reabuse were common throughout the continent in 2010 and that “most European countries had at least some measure in place to deal with the abusive attitudes and behaviors of men” (Akoensi et al. 2012: 1207). The survey also considered effectiveness of programs. The scope and variety of practices and program designs in Europe could not reveal definitive conclusions regarding the effective delivery of domestic violence perpetrators programs. Authors conclude that the European findings resonate with reviews from North America, namely, “compared with other fields of offender treatment […] evaluation research on domestic violence perpetrator programs is still at an early stage” (Akoensi et al. 2012: 1212). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)