



PORTUGAL 2007



European Crime Prevention Award
and
EUCPN Best Practices Annual Conference 2007

Project Entry Form

The theme for this year's European Crime Prevention Award and EUCPN's Best Practices Annual Conference is **Prevention of Domestic Violence**.

The following are some areas that the projects may focus on:

- Role of the community and partnerships in the prevention of domestic violence;
- Role of the police in addressing domestic violence;
- Alcohol, drugs and domestic violence;
- Juvenile delinquency and domestic violence;
- Cultural/educational issues and domestic violence;
- Prevention of domestic violence against women, children and elderly people;
- Victim support, psychological rehabilitation and prevention of revictimization in domestic violence (both direct and indirect victims);
- Use of technologies in the prevention/deterrence of recidivist offenders in domestic violence;
- Prisons, community sanctions and rehabilitation of domestic violence offenders; and
- Alternatives to shelter programmes for victims of domestic violence.

The list is not exhaustive. The projects may address any question relevant to prevention of domestic violence.

Please complete the attached form (the boxes are expandable). Note that the last page is for a one-page description of your project.

Entries should be in English, but may be accompanied by a version of the entry in the national language if wished. Each country may enter one project as its ECPA entry and up to two other projects to be presented at the conference. Projects should be submitted only through the National Representatives. The full ECPA rules may be found at www.eucpn.org

The deadline to send in your entries is **10 November 2007**.

Send your entry or entries to: eucpn.pt@gmail.com

If you have any questions, please contact us at the above email address or paulo.vgomes@gmail.com



PORTUGAL 2007



ECPA/BPC 2007

Please answer the following questions in English.

1. Is this your country's ECPA entry or is it an additional project? (Only one ECPA entry per country plus up to two other projects.)

ECPA entry Belgium

2. What is the title of the project?

"Intrafamiliaal geweld intersectoraal geveld"
(Domestic Violence Tackled Intersectorally)

3. Please give a short general description of the project.

In order to give domestic violence in the Province of Limburg priority on the agenda and to make the collaboration and the way of acting more effective and efficient, the "Provinciale Denktank Intrafamiliaal Geweld" (*Provincial Think Tank Domestic Violence*) was set up end 2004. All sectors that are actively involved in fighting domestic violence – police, justice and assistance – are represented in the Think Tank and its working groups. Indeed, within all of these sectors, the persuasion grew that only a goal-oriented approach to violence through the synergy of justice, police and welfare work would eventually result in a univocal strategy to tackle domestic violence in a preventive, curative as well as repressive manner.

Since then, a number of areas of improvement have been pinpointed by mutual agreement based on an integral and integrated approach to domestic violence. In a nutshell, it concerns: an intersectoral scenario, the "relief points domestic violence" (making it possible to refer victims, offenders and couples faster to assistance, resulting in less escalation, less recidivism and less prosecution), diverse prevention and consciousness-raising initiatives, initiatives regarding the right of access, the local social consultation, crisis centre, teaching, training & education, offender therapy, etc. The broad range of initiatives that has been developed, is intended to stop domestic violence being taboo and to find an appropriate answer to this societal problem.

4. Please describe the objective(s) of the project?

- A more efficient and effective, but also integral and integrated, approach to domestic violence.
- A far-reaching intersectoral collaboration between the police, justice and assistance sectors, by means of an intersectoral scenario and a better knowledge of one another's way of working.
- A comprehensive regional approach to domestic violence.
- The emphasis on a curative approach to domestic violence, in other words, referring people faster to assistance, leading to the desired effect of less escalation, less recidivism and less prosecution.
- Providing sufficient relief possibilities and a hotline within the assistance sector.
- Stimulating local social consultation.
- Searching for solutions concerning the issue of the right of access, and this in the field of verdicts, mediation and execution.
- A structural solution for the capacity problem in the crisis relief.
- An adequate offer of education / treatment / therapy for offenders.
- Teaching, education, sensitization and exchange of knowledge with regard to the various professional groups which are confronted with domestic violence.
- Sensitizing both the general public and specific target groups of the fact that domestic violence exists, that it cannot be tolerated, that it is a good thing to talk about it and that there are organizations where they can get help.
- Making children and young people "stronger" by means of education and teaching them how to solve conflicts without resorting to violence.
- Searching for good practices in order to detect domestic violence in an early stage, so that action can be taken in order to stop the spiral of violence in time.
- Paying more attention to the children's position and welfare in situations of domestic violence.
- An oriented approach to domestic violence among immigrants.

5. How was the project implemented?

Actions undertaken:

From the start the Think Tank has been methodologically counseled by the provincial process coordinator. In order to optimize the collaboration, the collaboration and improvement process was elaborated step by step. The process consisted of the following six steps:

- 1) Introduction and communication of the expectations (the various sectors all have a different view of the issue and sometimes have a number of (unjustified) prejudice ideas with regard to one another's actions)
- 2) Definition of the problem on the basis of manifest symptoms
- 3) Exposing structural causes by means of a cause analysis
- 4) Formulating ideas for improvement
- 5) Selecting the most concrete and meaningful ideas for improvement
- 6) Elaborating, implementing and adjusting measures for improvement in specific, intersectoral composed working groups.

This time-intensive working method has certainly encouraged the mutual consultation. Moreover, mutual respect has thus increased even if everyone did agree that the police must remain the police, justice has to remain justice and assistance must remain assistance.

Concrete initiatives / results:

The elaboration of ideas for improvement was realized in working groups, each comprising representatives of the police, justice and assistance sectors.

a. INTERSECTORAL SCENARIO

Every day, the police and the justice system are confronted with many cases of domestic violence. But the police, the justice department and the clients are not always able to find the way to assistance or they cannot see the wood for the trees anymore. People often hide their problems for the outside world and do not easily knock on the door of assistance themselves. Both victims and offenders are, however, often seriously in a mess. The confrontation with the police and with justice can get them to start tackling their problem and could prevent further escalation of the violence.

The intersectoral scenario "Anticiperen op partnergeweld" (*"To anticipate on partner violence"*) describes a simple and transparent standardized working process that allows the police, justice and assistance in the Province of Limburg to handle reports of partner violence in a uniform way. Victims, offenders and couples can now be faster referred to assistance, resulting in less escalation, less recidivism and less prosecution.

The purpose of the Working Group Scenario was, in other words, to develop a chain-oriented collaboration between the services of police, justice and assistance in dealing with domestic violence. First, the working process was drawn up for the police, in consultation with justice and assistance. By systematically writing down all the steps (according to the agreements made), it is clear to both the internal and external parties what has to be done and what can be expected. When this process was finalized, the circular letters COL 3/2006 and COL 4/2006 came into force. Consequently, a few additions had to be made to the scenario.

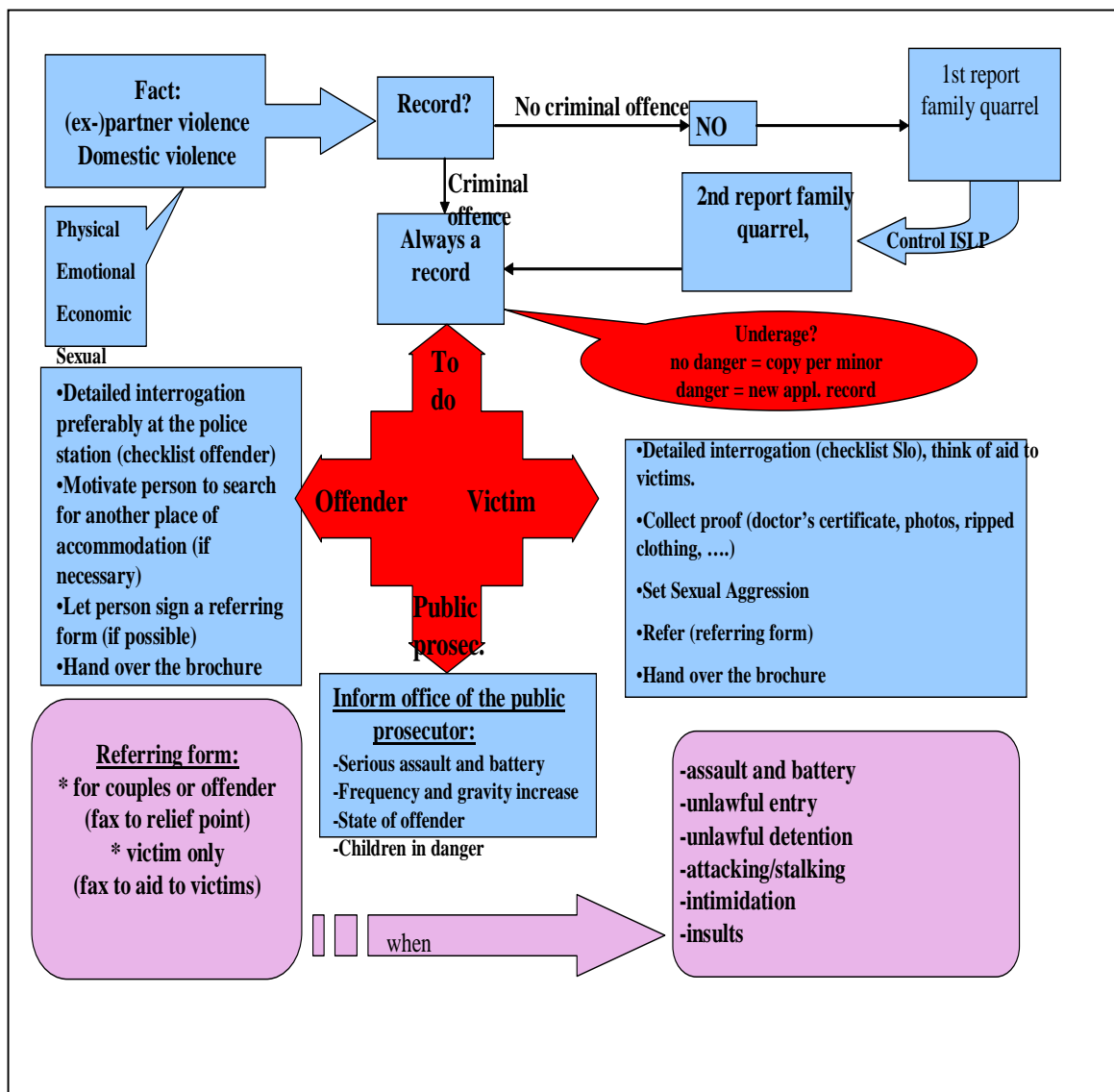
The scenario came into force on 15 September 2006 in all the police districts, the offices of the public prosecutors and both "Centres of General Welfare" ("relief points domestic violence," see also point c.) in the Province of Limburg. Four months later, a first evaluation of the scenario was performed by the police and assistance, with a view to clearing away the 'growing pains' and to optimize it.

Some of the scenario's strong points:

1 PO Box for referring to assistance: in the past, the considerable fragmentation of services and competences in the assistance field formed an obstacle to the collaboration and the referring to assistance. It was thus very difficult to live up to the philosophy of chain-oriented acting. Therefore, a "single and transparent access" was created with the view of referring to assistance: one single assistance PO Box from which people can be referred to specific assistance services if necessary.

Standard record (procès-verbal) of domestic violence: the Working Group Scenario, under the guidance of the police Superintendent and in collaboration with CIPAL and the KU Leuven (*Catholic University of Leuven*), has developed a standard record form for reporting domestic violence. This record is drawn up step by step by filling in screens so that one does not forget to mention anything. This way the author can generally deliver a more complete record of better quality. This user-friendly standard record also takes into account the circular letter COL 3 and 4/2006 concerning partner violence and extra attention is paid to risk increasing factors in partner violence (according to the insights from scientific research). Such a record – that will be used in all the Limburg police districts as from 1 January 2008 – has an important added value for justice and as study material for the academic world.

Graphical presentation of the scenario (police part):



b. PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENTIALITY / DEONTOLOGY

The field of welfare aimed for a thorough examination of the professional confidentiality and deontology aspects in the chain-oriented approach. First of all, the exchange of personal data between police/justice and assistance is far from obvious, as both services have their own goals.

It is not acceptable that a person demanding assistance is suddenly arrested by the police during the assistance process on the basis of what he or she told during a conversation in the framework of assistance. This would disturb the necessary basis for trust between the social worker and the person in need of assistance, causing the assistance process to become ineffective.

As a solution, a referring form was developed. Concretely, this means that when a file is transferred between the police and assistance, the person demanding assistance declares himself or herself in agreement (in writing) with the fact that the data are being passed on. It is only logical that when – with the consent of the person involved – someone is referred to a different (external) service, it is also possible to pass on the necessary information. This way, the touchy subject of professional confidentiality is taken into account.

C. PROJECT “RELIEF POINTS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE”

In order to call in assistance fast in each police district, there was an urgent need for sufficient accommodation facilities. Thanks to the financial support from the Province of Limburg (92,000 euros / year during 3 years), the “Centres of General Welfare” in the province of Limburg can recruit 3 fulltime employees to set up relief points. For all police districts, there now is one clear relief point for individuals and couples which are confronted with partner violence. More people who are facing partner violence can now be faster looked after and receive assistance. The project was launched on 15 September 2006.

The relief takes place in different steps:

- The police turns to the relief point by faxing a referring form signed by the persons involved.
- The social workers of the “relief points partner violence” within the “CAW’s” contact the persons involved within 5 working days and invite them for a consultation.
- The police is informed whether the person(s) involved has (have) shown up or not.
- Afterwards, the police is informed whether the assistance process has been finalized, broken off or referred to specific (internal or external) continued assistance.

A relief point means clarification of demand, providing information and advice and, if necessary, immediate ambulant psychosocial (crisis) assistance (by means of a specific reception method (time-out method) developed according to the “system”). If this is not satisfactory, the person involved can be referred to further counselling or therapy. The specialized social workers of the relief points do not make house to house calls. However, they do use approaching and stimulating assistance techniques.

In the framework of this project, both offices of the public prosecutor in the Province of Limburg commit themselves to elaborating a prosecution policy aimed at an

alternative settlement. The intention is to guide the partners so that a constructive solution is possible. Only when that does not work or when the problems are too serious, prosecution shall be considered. The role of the office of the public prosecutor is of crucial importance in this matter, as it is the last authority in the chain (“the big stick”).

d. LOCAL SOCIAL CONSULTATION

In the framework of the chain action, local social consultation was considered to be absolutely necessary. The local assistance is a very important partner for the police, both for tackling local social issues in general and domestic violence in particular.

The most ideal situation (also with regard to domestic violence) is the “local client consultations” method: – under the supervision of the “OCMW” (the public welfare centre) – the client and all other relevant services (if desired, also with participation of contact persons from the police) involved in the case are gathered in order to make arrangements which are geared to one another. This way, the services do not work by ignoring one another and, because of the direct involvement of the client, he or she will be more motivated. This system – that is now applied in 37 of the 44 Limburg municipalities – is extensively promoted and supported by the provincial administration.

e. PREVENTION AND SENSITIZATION

The provincial administration has also already set up various initiatives with respect to prevention and sensitization:

- **The White Ribbon Campaign:** ever since the year 2000, the provincial administration has been organizing the internationally known White Ribbon Campaign (“WLC”). Eight news anchors of TV Limburg were the face of this campaign in 2006. The “WLC” calls on all inhabitants of the Province of Limburg to show their solidarity against domestic violence by wearing a white ribbon.
- **The information brochure “Partner violence” for professional social workers** offers a better insight into the problems of physical and sexual partner violence and is also a manual for improving the help to these victims.
- **The “Crisis card” for victims of partner violence in Limburg** contains essential tips for security and also contact addresses in Limburg where victims can get help 24 hours a day.
- **“Jongeren tegen geweld... geweldig”** (*The Young against violence... great!*) (in association with the advice centre “Kinder mishandeling Limburg” (*child abuse*), “preventie Bijzondere Jeugdbijstand Limburg” (*prevention special child protection*), the “CAW ‘t Verschil,” Pandora, Jac, the police district HAZODI and community policing Hasselt): the two key notions here are prevention and participation. The project wants to prevent violence by actively involving at least 2,500 young people from the Province of Limburg in the discussion during the next two years. It is aimed at young people between 15 and 19 years old from the youth work, the youth welfare work and education. It wants to interview, inform and educate young people.
- **The Provincial Working Group Prevention and Sensitization Domestic Violence**, that was recently founded intersectorally, will permanently deal with the integral and integrated development and implementation of concrete initiatives with a view to sensitization and prevention within the field of domestic

violence. The provincial administration already has reserved the necessary means for this, through different competences.

f. ISSUE OF THE RIGHT OF ACCESS

The three sectors are often confronted with the issue of the right of access: not giving a child to the other partner during the weekend, not returning the child, not paying the alimony, not respecting the holiday arrangements, ... In the case of family problems or (problematical) divorces, quarrels about the right of access often cause other problems.

That is why at the end of 2005 the provincial administration of Limburg / the Think Tank Domestic Violence took the initiative to gather all relevant parties around the table in the Working Group Right of Access (under the supervision of 2 Justices of the Peace). Since then, the following initiatives have been developed:

- **The contents of verdicts** (with a view to preventing provisions or indistinctiveness in the verdicts which can bring about conflicts): the right of access begins with the content of the verdict. The working group has a number of policy recommendations for the court with regard to the contents of verdicts, bundled into one brochure. The leitmotiv in this brochure is how to best formulate certain things in order to prevent problems in the future (e.g. even and uneven weeks, weekend arrangements during holidays, ...). That way, verdicts are drawn up more clearly, more comprehensibly, unambiguously and in a way that avoids conflicts.
- **Offering legal arbitration in a more effective and efficient way:** in consultation with the notaries, lawyers and assistance sector, session days are organized. These are intended to jointly inform persons concerned about arbitration and to offer arbitration in an organized and systematic way.
- **Organize and 'facilitate' a structural collaboration between the mediators (by means of a professional network).**
- **The execution of the verdicts (in particular regarding the possibility to enforce):** in case of extreme unwillingness and if mediation really does not work anymore, other possibilities have to be used. Anyhow, the first decision of the judge has to be as performable as possible. Nowadays, there is sometimes a feeling of impunity. Plaintiffs and other people concerned will be informed as well as possible, among other things by means of an adapted brochure in which the new law of 18 July 2006 on shared parenting – which is a positive thing – is discussed in great detail. The law provides a whole series of measures which can be taken by judges in case a parent does not comply with the arrangement. The judge can, for instance, adapt the arrangement or reverse it, impose a penalty or allow compulsory measures in order to enforce compliance with the settlement.

g. CRISIS RELIEF

A lot of police areas have pointed out relief for victims of domestic violence as being a problem. The circular letter COL 4/2006 provides a guideline which stipulates that the purpose should always be to keep the "weaker" victim in the common house to the prejudice of the offender. However, one should not forget to keep into account the fact that there can always be situations which require crisis relief.

In the medium term, a structural solution will be provided in the Province of Limburg

for the capacity problem in the various women's refuge centres. A Provincial Steering Committee Crisis Assistance has also been created and it tries to draw up a definitive arrangement at provincial level. In the meantime, it has been agreed that each police district will elaborate their own policy to accommodate victims when the existing relief centres are full. A number of districts already had such a policy, whereas others have presently worked out the policy for crisis relief. With regard to this, some districts have drawn up a protocol.

h. TTE (TEACHING – TRAINING - EDUCATION)

An important instrument to get all operational personnel thinking along the same line, there is teaching, training and education. It is not because at a given moment a new approach is prescribed, that all the operational staff are automatically going to change their attitude or working method overnight. It is very important to sensitize the personnel in charge.

That is why the provincial administration, together with "PLOT" (training centre for police staff in the Province of Limburg), set up and presented a course on domestic violence in 2005. First, a number of teachers were trained. After that, the other members of the police forces were presented with the course. In the meantime, up to **380 police officers** have already followed the course (within "PLOT" or within their own organization).

This training course is of vital importance in order to obtain a certain change of mentality, a continuous sensitization and the necessary broadening of knowledge and exchange of knowledge on domestic violence of the people working in that field. This training course is also of great importance for an efficient, swift and practical implementation of the scenario.

i. PROJECTS "OFFENDER THERAPY"

The justice and assistance sectors have reported that there is an urgent need for an (additional) offer of offender therapy, in particular for a training and treatment project regarding controlling one's aggressiveness and impulses. This can help to tackle the aggressiveness issue in order to diminish the risk of a relapse into violent crime. It is especially in crisis situations (detention on remand) that it is important to be able to provide quickly a course or treatment regarding control of aggressiveness and impulses. The following initiatives have already been taken:

- **"Group training courses for persons who commit(ted) partner violence":** this offender project – which evolved from the intersectoral collaboration within the Think Tank and which is financed by the provincial administration – is one of the answers of the assistance sector to the various demands made by the police and justice. The primary target of these courses is to put a stop to violence. In the courses, the participants are taught a technique aimed at controlling one's aggressiveness, they are taught to increase their empathy, self reflection and taking one's responsibility are stimulated and social and communicative skills are learned. The courses intent to create amongst the offenders, a cognitive, instinctive and behavioural changing process in order to avoid relapses.
- In the framework of alternative judicial measures (Global Plan), steps are currently being taken in the Province of Limburg for launching an **offender therapy "controlling one's aggressiveness and impulses"** for aggressive/violence perpetrators. The two Houses of Justice, the Mental

Healthcare Association, the municipality of Houthalen-Helchteren as well as the provincial administration are the driving forces behind this initiative.

6. Were partners involved in planning and/or development and/or implementation of the project? If so, who were they, and what were their roles?

- **PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION / GOVERNOR:** *coordination, methodological supervision, process development, exchange of knowledge, administrative support, finance, networking*
- **POLICE:**
 - the 18 police districts in Limburg: *process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and the carrying out of the intersectoral agreements at police level*
 - Coordination and support services (CSD) Hasselt: *process development, exchange of knowledge and networking*
- **JUSTICE:**
 - Offices of the public prosecutor in Hasselt and Tongeren: *coordination, process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation ('the big stick')*
 - Justices of the peace: *coordination, process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
 - Houses of Justice of Hasselt and Tongeren: *exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
 - Syndic of the Bailiffs in Hasselt and Tongeren: *exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
 - Society of Notaries of the Province of Limburg: *exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
 - Lawyers' Bars in Hasselt and Tongeren: *exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
 - Mediation lawyers: *exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
 - Juvenile court judges: *exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
 - Court of first instance judges of Hasselt and Tongeren: *exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation with regard to the issue of the right of residence and of access*
- **ASSISTANCE:**
 - "Centre of General Welfare Sonar" and "Centre of General Welfare 't

Verschil": *coordination, process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation in the field of assistance*

- Relief Point General Welfare Work: *process development, exchange of knowledge, networking*
 - Special Youth Assistance Limburg: *coordination, process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation in the field of assistance*
 - Confidence Centre Child Abuse Limburg: *process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation in the field of assistance*
 - Limburg Centre of Social Services : *process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation in the field of assistance*
 - Mental Healthcare Association: *process development, exchange of knowledge, networking and implementation in the field of assistance*
 - Regional Welfare Consultation: *process development, exchange of knowledge, networking*
- **UNIVERSITY OF HASSELT AND CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LEUVEN (CU LEUVEN):**
 - Anne Groenen, law department at the University of Hasselt and CU Leuven: *exchange of knowledge and academic support*
 - Frank Hutsebaut, law department at the CU Leuven: *exchange of knowledge and academic support in the field of the right of access*
 - Hilde Vanboeckrijck, law department CU Leuven: *exchange of knowledge and academic support in the field of the right of access*
 - Tinne Mertens, researcher "SEIN", University of Hasselt: *exchange of knowledge and academic support*

7. How did you build in plans to measure the performance of the project?

- 4 months after the launching of the scenario and of the project Relief Points Domestic Violence, a first evaluation of the results and the process was performed (for the period starting from 15 September 2006 up to and including 15 January 2007). This assessment was carried out on the basis of objective and subjective measurements.
- A second objective result evaluation has taken place for the period up to 1 July 2007.
- There also is an ongoing registration of the police interventions regarding domestic violence (period 1 March 2007 – 31 August 2007).
- At medium term (within a few years), a scientific effect measurement will also be carried out (from a methodological point of view, it is still too soon to do so now).

8. Has the project been evaluated? How, and by whom?

a. OBJECTIVE PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT 2006-09-15 UP TO 2007-01-15
(COMPLETE RESULTS ENCLOSED)

The number of referred couples and offenders

Couples 177 (x 2 = 354 clients)
Individuals 134 clients amongst which 56 offenders
Total number of clients: 488

Reported forms of violence

• Combination physical – psychological violence	123
• Psychological violence / threats	20
• Stalking	24
• Sexual violence	6
• Non-compliance with the right of access	50
• Child abuse	4
• Parental abuse	1
• Economic violence	1
• None	3
• Unknown	73

Relief (figures based on the number of clients, one couple = 2 clients)

By telephone

• Assistance by Telephone with oriented referring	104
• The client hung up	152
• The “Centre General Welfare” hung up (amongst which 24 cases of language problems)	26
• Total number of contacts by telephone	359

Written: 24 letters were sent

Interviews at the centre

• Referring	29
• The client hung up	39
• The “Centre General Welfare” hung up	4
• Completed	25
• Ongoing	58
• Number of contacts by telephone	302
• Number of written contacts	8

The reception interview varied from 1 to 6 face-to-face contacts at the centre.

b. PROCESS EVALUATION (2006-09-15 UP TO 2007-01-15)

The process evaluation was carried out on the basis of a survey conducted amongst the reference officials of the 18 Limburg police districts and of evaluation meetings with the justice and assistance sectors.

c. SUBJECTIVE MEASUREMENT

The subjective result analysis was performed on the basis of a survey conducted amongst the reference officials of the 18 Limburg police districts and of evaluation meetings with the justice and assistance sectors.

9. What were the results? How far were the objectives of the project achieved?

Positive:

- Victims experience more recognition and more willingness to listen, whereas offenders feel more targeted because the sectors involved take action sooner.
- The project serves as a guideline for police officers.
- Couples who acknowledge their problems and are willing to work on them together, can be helped faster, even if they are told to do something themselves about the problem and not to rely on the police to sort things out for them.
- In the field, it is noticed that partner violence is taken very seriously and that is why the guidelines are more respected.
- Furthermore, action is taken more quickly in the framework of victim assistance. The reflex to check whether the victim needs relief is also quicker.
- Judging from certain case files, it can be clearly stated that far less complaints are pouring in. The effective communication with the other party as well as the different possibilities of being referred, apparently sometimes prevents the victim from taking new initiatives with regard to lodging complaints.
- There is a quality improvement of the services offered (orientation, processing and follow-up of the case files, new opportunities focused on offenders, responsible commitment shown by the staff members, ...).
- The purpose of a close and better collaboration and dialogue between the police and the assistance services is certainly a fact, even if this already was the case long ago in a number of police areas.
- A (police) report is drawn up faster, which means that later on, in case of greater difficulties, you have a stronger case file at your disposal.
- In the short term, a uniform working method has been achieved in Limburg.

Critical remarks:

- The police puts a great deal of time in following up this project, which is of course a positive thing. But by doing so, isn't the project missing its target? The project is labour-intensive. Before a partner violence case file is fully processed from the lodging of the complaint till the end of the assistance, a large deal of organization and administration are required.
- Are the relief points able to keep up with the project?

→ **On the basis of these remarks and the process evaluation, the scenario was optimized in April 2007!**

General appreciation of the project :

Innovative:

- "The most effective way of tackling domestic violence is a comprehensive regional approach."
- The originality of this project especially lies in the integral and integrated approach, in the common well-founded vision, in the fact that it goes

further than only the police area and the office of the public prosecutor, in the far-reaching intersectoral collaboration and in the broad range of initiatives that are implemented in order to break the taboo about domestic violence and to find a suitable answer to this social problem.

- The fact that, in this project, the persons concerned are being made aware of their own responsibility, is also a strong point. Only if that does not work, a consistent (external) intervention must take place.

Replication:

The Limburg approach is not restricted to a particular area and can, in principle, be applied everywhere where the partners concerned want to join forces. This project clearly shows that things can be done better and – given the first results – should be done better, so as to avoid that everyone concerned stays on his or her own island or keeps on living in an ivory tower. The intersectoral collaboration is now also stimulated by the circular letter COL 4/2006, in which an attempt is made to come to a coordinated approach.

10. Are there reports or documents available on the project? In print or on the Web? Please, give references to the most relevant ones.

The existing publications and reports can be consulted as from the beginning of December via the following URL: www.limburg.be/ifg

Please, write here a one page description of the project:

In every relationship there sometimes is a quarrel, which is quite normal as long as those quarrels are solved together. However, this is not always the case. One of the partners goes too far and threatens, screams at and hits the other person. Sometimes in presence of the children. The consequences are serious, far more serious than you think.

Domestic violence is a frequent and still increasing social problem. According to the figures of the federal police, domestic violence increased by another 13% in 2006. Amongst the number of records regarding domestic violence, 50% concerned (ex-)partner violence. A survey in 3 police areas in Limburg showed that on average about 14% of the reports have to do with partner and domestic violence.

In order to give this problem in Limburg priority on the agenda and to make the collaboration between the police, justice and assistance sectors as well as make the way of acting more effective and efficient, with the support of the Province of Limburg, the University of Hasselt and the Catholic University of Leuven, the "Provinciale Denktank Intrafamiliaal Geweld" (*Provincial Think Tank Domestic Violence*) was set up end 2004.

In close consultation, a number of improvements have since then been worked out from an integral and integrated approach to domestic violence, intended to stop domestic violence being taboo and to find an appropriate answer to it. Furthermore, it must be pointed out to the offenders that violence is not tolerated, that action will be taken in case of violence and that help exists.

The integrated approach in the whole Province of Limburg generates – provided that the adequate procedures are being applied – an output of a higher quality than before. Is this going to solve everything and are we 100% certain that nothing can go wrong anymore? Definitely not, but we do have a structured and high-quality approach to domestic violence, which means that this kind of violence is dealt with in a serious and “civilized” manner in partner relationships and families.

In a nutshell, the Limburg approach today is characterized by:

- **structure:** on the basis of structured protocols, each service clearly knows what to do and what to expect from the other services;
- **uniformity:** there is a scenario with unambiguous guidelines;
- **clearness:** all services concerned are familiar with the steps and procedures; they have no “secrets” for one another;
- **emphasis on the assistance aspect.**

Because of the good cooperation agreements, victims, offenders and couples can now be quicker referred to assistance, resulting in less escalation, less recidivism and less prosecution. But, in order to call in assistance quicker in each police district, there was an urgent need for sufficient accommodation facilities. Thanks to the financial support of the Limburg Province, the Limburg “Centres of General Welfare” were able to recruit 3 fulltime employees to set up relief points. Since mid-September 2006, there is now – for all police areas – one clear relief point for individuals or couples which are confronted with

partner violence.

The relief takes place in several steps:

- The police turns to the relief point by faxing a referring form signed by the persons involved (taking into account the duty of professional confidentiality).
- The social workers of the “relief points partner violence” within the “Centres of General Welfare” contact the persons involved within 5 working days and invite them for a consultation.
- The police is informed whether the person(s) involved has/have shown up or not.
- Afterwards, the police is informed whether the assistance process has been finalized, broken off or referred to specific (internal or external) continued assistance.

In the framework of this project, both Limburg offices of the public prosecutor commit themselves to elaborating a prosecution policy aimed at an alternative settlement. The intention is to guide the partners so that a constructive solution is possible. Only when that does not work or when the problems are too serious, prosecution shall be considered. The role of the office of the public prosecutor is of crucial importance in this matter, as it is the last authority in the chain (“the big stick”).

Furthermore, specific attention is paid to the issue of the right of residence and of access, because the problems in this area bring about a great deal of interventions by the police forces and result sometimes in serious escalations of violence. The Working Group Right of Access, under the guidance of two justices of the peace, has therefore worked out initiatives in 3 fields: the clearness and uniformity of verdicts, more attention paid to mediation and the execution of the right of access.

The Think Tank Domestic Violence also worked on: various prevention and sensitizing initiatives, stimulating the local social consultation, appointing and training specialized personnel within all sectors concerned, working out step by step an additional offer of education / treatment / therapy for offenders, providing a uniform police training with regard to domestic violence in order to make sure that the guidelines are applied in the same way everywhere and that the approach to the problem is everywhere the same, ...

The following initiatives are in the pipeline: additional attention for sensitization, prevention and early detection, e.g. by collaborating with educational institutes and general practitioners, more attention for the position and welfare of the children, an oriented approach to immigrants, a structural solution for the capacity problems with regard to crisis relief, ...

There still is a need for a common policy in which sensitization, education, prevention, assistance and repression go together and complete one another. The current Limburg dynamic must not slacken as, unfortunately, domestic violence still remains the harsh reality for a lot of people. The fight against it should therefore remain a priority on all the agendas.