

## 5. WOMEN'S SHELTERS

### Introduction

For detailed information on this section, please see tables 13–18 on pages 92–94.

Women's shelters provide safety, accommodation, counselling and support to women survivors of domestic violence and their children. In the last 40 years, shelters have been established in all but one European country, most run by women's NGOs which have not only a gendered analysis of domestic violence but also a human rights approach to tackling the problem. As is demonstrated in the following analysis, there is a lack of adequate shelter provision in Europe and more shelters are urgently required. In addition, existing provision is under constant threat by cuts in funding as well as the increasing popularity of gender-neutral analyses which, in some countries, has resulted in State funding being linked to demands for women's shelters to be open to men.

Since the inception of women's shelters and as a result of their tireless campaigning on women's rights, there have been several improvements in the law relating to domestic violence and services for victims and their children, if any. For example, in the past 20 years 22 European countries have introduced emergency barring orders which make it possible to exclude violent men from the family home and many women are able to make use of this legislation to protect themselves and their children, if any, from harm. Nevertheless, women's shelters are still an essential service for women affected by domestic violence. Barring orders are only of use if abusive men are willing and able to observe the law. Some women who are in fear for their lives or the lives of their children cannot feel safe enough in an address known to their abusive partner, even if there is a barring order. Men who are intent on controlling their partners at any cost are not deterred by barring orders. Similarly, if abusive partners are unpredictable and unaccountable perhaps due to addiction or other problems, barring orders cannot guarantee safety for women and children in their own homes. In addition, if the home also accommodates wider family members, barring orders may not be appropriate and some women may prefer to leave the family home.

Thus almost 45 years after their inception, women's shelters remain an essential service for women and children affected by domestic violence. Shelters provide not only a safe refuge for women fleeing violence in their home and their children, if any. They also provide specialist counselling services for women who have experienced physical, sexual and emotional violence over many years from their partner. Shelter staff have become experts on the very difficult task of empowering women, whose ability to assert themselves has been systematically destroyed over a prolonged period of time, to make radical changes to their lives. In addition research has shown, that women's shelters have also become the experts in helping children who have suffered from living with domestic violence (Hester et. al., 2000). Shelter staff also offer practical advice on the law relating to domestic violence and on financial support for women and children fleeing violence. Research has shown that shelters are very good at developing strong local networks and good working relationships not only to other specialist services for women but also a wide range of local agencies dealing with housing, child welfare and education (Bell, 2016, p. 125).

They are, therefore, able to offer guidance to women in building a violent free life for themselves and their children, if any. Emergency barring orders and other initiatives, such as perpetrator programmes, can supplement but never supplant the shelter movement. A woman must have access to a range of services and be able to make her own decision about the best option. To guarantee this right, countries need to provide adequate numbers of specialist services for women and children. Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention requires all parties to establish: "appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out proactively to victims, especially women and their children." (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 13)

Furthermore, in the explanatory report of the Istanbul Convention, it is recommended that such accommodation should be in specialist women's shelters, available in every region, providing secure accom-

modation and the minimum standard of provision should be one family place per 10,000 head of population (ibid, p. 81). In addition, the EU Victim's Directive recognises that: "Violence in close relationships is a serious and often hidden social problem which could cause systematic psychological and physical trauma with severe consequences because the offender is a person whom the victim should be able to trust. Victims of violence in close relationships may therefore be in need of special protection measures. Women are affected disproportionately by this type of violence and the situation can be worse if the woman is dependent on the offender economically, socially or as regards her right to residence." (Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012, Para.18)

Therefore, in addition to a minimum quantitative standard, Article 18 stipulates that the quality of service provided in shelters should be "based on a gendered understanding of violence against women and domestic violence and shall focus on human rights and safety of the victim" (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 12). Quality standards for setting up and running women's shelters have been developed by WAVE "Away from Violence" 2004, a report which is available online in 16 languages <http://www.wave-network.org/content/away-violence>.

## Aims of this Section

The data collected at the end of 2015 provides a picture of the current situation of women's shelters in Europe, as core services and also highlights new developments. For example, information was included on other domestic violence shelters which do not fulfil the quality standards required by the Istanbul Convention but nevertheless form part of the service landscape on which victims of domestic violence call for assistance.

Basic information on women's shelters was gathered, such as; number of women's shelters in a country; their geographical distribution; the number of beds available in shelters and the number of women and children accommodated. Also asked were: questions which explored the quality of women's shelters; accommodation of specific groups; about organisations running shelters; the existence of national standards; how women's shelters are accessed; length of stay; costs incurred; safety precautions; kind of support provided and the funding of women's shelters.

The WAVE respondents were aware that not all information would be available, but as in other parts of this report, it was also an objective of the research to start an exploration of that which we do not know to establish which data is missing and the reasons for this. On the basis of the picture thus gleaned, WAVE intends to create standards for data collection in order to ensure a more complete picture about the situation of protection and support for women victims of violence and their children, if any.

## Definition of Women's Shelters

As has been described in the introduction to this chapter, the European Victims' Directive and the Istanbul Convention have both acknowledged that domestic violence is a problem disproportionately affecting women and is linked to the position of women in society. Therefore, in order to offer effective support to women in this position and their children, if any, specialist women-only services should be developed. These should be based on a gender-specific analysis of the problem and have a human rights approach to empowering women to a better life. These shelters should assist all women facing domestic violence, be available 24/7 and be free of charge to women and their children. This is a basic standard for women's shelters that WAVE has upheld and expanded on in publications which are freely available on the WAVE website.

However, in previous reports which only gathered data on shelters which fit these criteria, other provision used by women escaping domestic violence have not been reported. This year the WAVE Report has gathered data on other domestic violence shelters and has received data which fits into three

broad categories. The first are women's shelters which are mostly run by women's NGOs and have a gender-specific analysis and a human rights approach. The second are shelters, many of which are run by women's NGOs which are under pressure from funders (often European States) to also be open to men. Some of our respondents have requested that their shelters still be classified as women's shelters although they are officially open to men on the basis that men have never applied, and are unlikely to apply, for admittance. Others wish to be considered as women's shelters because the proportion of men using their services is negligible. The third category are shelters often run by government agencies which are not gender-specific and deal with all forms of family violence; for the purposes of our questionnaire we called these domestic violence shelters.

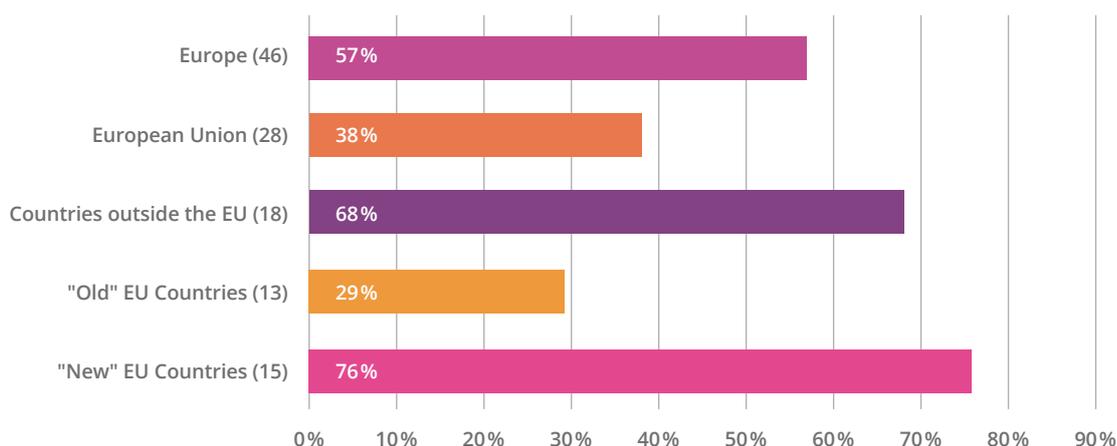
The move towards de-gendering women's services is often justified on the basis that women-only services discriminate against men. However, as the Istanbul Convention and the European Victims' Directive make clear, domestic violence is a form of violence which particularly impacts on women and requires a gender-specific solution, as is the case with sexual violence.

## **Domestic Violence shelters**

Some respondents to the questionnaire were particularly concerned about shelters for domestic violence which were not run by independent NGOs. They highlighted for example, that many of these shelters provide services not only to women and children but also to male victims of family violence. Some run perpetrator programmes on the same premises. The staff are not trained in a gender-specific approach to the problem of domestic violence and have little sensitivity to women's safety issues, for example, one domestic violence shelter allows abusive men visitation rights to their children in the shelter. In addition, the shelters do not work with a self-help or empowering approach. In many cases, women were not able to refer themselves, rather their case would be adjudicated by social services or helpline workers who would decide if they were really in need of shelter. Access is therefore controlled by organisations which are not available 24/7 and which are staffed by individuals (including men) who have no training on gender or human rights issues. As a consequence, some women are poorly supported and may be subject to victim-blaming from staff.

## **Shelter Provision in Europe**

The explanatory report of the Istanbul Convention Article 23 recommends a minimum standard of women's shelter provision of one place per 10,000 inhabitants and furthermore "the number of shelter places should depend on the actual need (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 81). According to this minimum standard, eight of the 46 European countries fulfil or exceed this provision and three almost fulfil the Istanbul convention criteria. This is an improvement from last year when only three completely fulfilled and one nearly fulfilled the criteria. It can be concluded, therefore, that progress is being made, albeit slowly.

**FIGURE 3 – Percentage of Shelter Places Missing in Europe**

This table describes how far short the provision of beds in women's shelters falls from the minimum standard of one bed per 10,000 population established within the context of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2012 p. 81). As can be seen, although overall two out of every three of the minimum number of beds is missing overall in Europe, and those services which are available are concentrated in the EU member states and, in particular, in those 13 states which joined the EU prior to the millennium.

Overall in the 46 European countries, 57% of the Istanbul Convention minimum standards of shelter provision is missing; this is a slight improvement on last year when the figure was 66%.

### EU Countries

In the 28 EU countries, overall 38% of the minimum number of women's shelter places are not provided. Four countries exceed the minimum number of shelter places (Denmark, Latvia, Luxemburg and Slovenia) and two countries come within 5% of the minimum (Malta and Netherlands).

### "Old" EU Member States

Of the 15 countries which were members of the EU before 2014, two exceed (Denmark, Luxemburg) and one (Netherlands) almost meets the minimum standard of shelter provision. On the whole, among the "old" EU Member States there is a shortfall of one third of shelter places (29%).

The greatest increase in service provision is in Finland which last year had the lowest level of provision of shelter places among the old EU Member States, with a 97% shortfall in places. Nevertheless despite increasing the number of shelters from two to 19 and a sevenfold increase in places available, they are still reporting a 79% shortfall in shelter provision. Finland has not established 17 shelters in the last year, rather this year they have included shelters which are not exclusively for women in their total. These shelters overwhelmingly provide a service for women with 2.5% of residents accommodated in 2014 being male. Italy as well has opened new shelters in the past year and provided more shelter places, yet continues to report a 90% shortfall in provision measured against the Istanbul Convention minimum standard provision. It is difficult to draw conclusions about data from Belgium due to difficulties in collecting national information. Ireland and Greece continue to lack half the minimum service provision and in common with the remaining old EU Member States have not expanded provision to any significant degree<sup>4</sup>. This is despite a shortfall in the minimum standard of provision of between one quarter and one third in Portugal, Spain, Sweden and UK and 16% in Germany and 11% in Austria.

<sup>4</sup> It has to be pointed out, however, that Ireland does employ the measure of "family spaces" which is a more generous service provision than "beds" and, therefore, the situation in Ireland is better than appears in a bed count comparison.

## "New" EU Member States

The newer Member States in general have a much lower provision of women's shelters and overall an 76% shortfall in the minimum standard.

Two countries (Latvia and Slovenia) exceed the minimum standard and Malta is making steady progress in expanding services and is within 5% of achieving the minimum standard. Of the two countries which exceed the recommended minimum service provision, Latvia has dramatically increased service provision from no shelters last year to 23 this year providing over 1,000 places. This increase is, however, due to the fact that this year all family crisis centres in the country have been included in the analysis as these do, in practice, provide shelter mainly to women and children feeling from violence in the home. These shelters are, however, not run by women's organisations but rather by municipalities and therefore are unlikely to have a gendered approach to supporting women survivors of violence. They are required to accommodate men in an emergency if requested to do so by social services but, in practice, are seldom, if ever, asked to accommodate men. Hungary too has, by the inclusion of regional shelters for families, also increased its provision from none to 14% of the minimum standard.

Romania has made dramatic progress in expanding provision and has reduced the number of places missing from almost three quarters to just over half. However, here too the type of service varies. Nine shelters are run by women's NGOs with a gender-specific/feminist approach. Five shelters are run by faith-based organizations. 49 shelters are run by the State. 10 shelters are run by other NGOs.

Overall, rapid increase in service provision in the last year is due to some countries requesting that shelters which are predominantly, but not exclusively, used by women be included in the count of women's shelters. It is necessary, however, to be very clear about the drawbacks of services which are not based on a gender-specific analysis of domestic violence and do not take a human rights approach to the problem. To highlight these shortcomings, a paraphrased comment by one of the respondents from an east European country named above is included to indicate the scale of the problem.

*These shelters are gender-blind and, therefore, not just for women. However, as the victims of relationship violence are 99.9% women, they are not used by men at all or very rarely. Nevertheless, the government stresses all the time that these shelters are for everybody. The staff working there are not specially trained and do not have a gender-awareness or a human rights-based approach to the issue of domestic violence and victim blaming attitudes can be present. There have even been cases of women being abused by their husbands in the shelter. Women are only admitted if they are in immediate danger and can only stay for one or two months.*

Cyprus and Bulgaria are making more modest progress. Bulgaria has reduced the number of places missing from 93% last year to 86% this year and Cyprus has over the same time period reduced from 89% to 80% the proportion of places missing. These services are run by women's NGOs, although for example, because the law in Bulgaria on domestic violence is gender-neutral the shelters are required to be open to men but they are unlikely to be approached by men seeking shelter.

Croatia and Estonia, which are both missing about one third of the minimum places required, have not been able to expand provision in the past year. Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland have also not expanded provision although all fail to meet even a tenth of the minimum standard and Poland has only one shelter in the capital city. It should be pointed out, however, that in Poland there are 34 State run domestic violence shelters. These do not provide a service exclusively to women, some accommodate men and run programmes for perpetrators on the women's shelter premises. Therefore, there are some concerns about the extent to which they focus on the safety of the victim as required by Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention. Nevertheless, it appears that there is a growing awareness on the part of the government in Poland of the importance of a gender-based analysis of the problem of domestic violence and it would be hoped that this would result in an ever increasing move towards the standards as set out in the Istanbul Convention.

Lithuania is alone in having no shelter at all for women and children fleeing violence in the home.

## European Countries Outside of the EU

In the 18 European countries outside the EU, 68% of women's shelter places are still missing, although it has to be recognized that progress has been made in the last twelve months as last year 87% of places were missing. Only Norway and Liechtenstein meet or almost meet the Istanbul Convention recommendations.

Although there has been an increase in the number of places available in shelter for women in Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Russia and Switzerland and a significant increase in Turkey (55% increase in places available in shelter) and Serbia (59% increase) all these countries are still only providing a fraction of the minimum standard. Turkey is currently providing just over half of the minimum standards and Serbia is still one third short of the minimum level. Montenegro does, in addition, have one domestic violence shelter which provides some service to women fleeing violence and their children, if any and Albania has three.

In Belarus and Russia, despite small expansion of services, provision of space for women in shelters is still only 3% of the Istanbul Convention standards for minimum provision. In addition, Armenia which fell 95% short of the minimum standard last year, reported this year a slight decrease of places available. Armenia did, however, report the existence of three domestic violence shelters which provided some service to women fleeing domestic violence and their children, if any.

Azerbaijan, Iceland, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine reported no increase in service provision in the last year and it should be noted that Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine are still only providing one tenth or less of the minimum standard. Both Moldova and Ukraine reported the existence of domestic violence shelters, in Moldova there were five, Ukraine gave no number. These provided a service that was neither gender-specific nor based on a human rights approach, but are used by women fleeing violence. Iceland has such a small population that with one shelter and a mobile support service for women outside the capital, they report never having to turn women away from their shelter.

## Right to Stay

35 countries provided data on the length of time women and their children were able to stay in shelters. On the whole, the period of stay varied not only between countries but within countries. 16 countries reported that women could stay for more than six months and four countries measured the length of stay in days or weeks with a maximum of between four and six weeks. Spain and Romania reported a two-tier system with women staying a maximum of two months in emergency centres but able to stay for six months (Romania) or twelve months (Spain) in second stage accommodation.

No country mentioned that women survivors of violence and their children, if any, had the right to stay as long as needed, which would be the standard of a human rights-based and gender-sensitive approach as outlined in the WAVE Away From Violence Manual (WAVE, 2004, p. 22). This report is available in 16 languages to download from the WAVE website <http://www.wave-network.org/content/wave-publications>. Failure to implement this service recommendation is due to restrictions set by State funding of shelters. Restrictions on the right to stay are especially problematic if there are no housing programmes guaranteeing permanent or even temporary housing for women leaving shelter. The right of women victims of violence and their children, if any, to seek safe accommodation in a woman's shelter is part of her fundamental human right to live a life free from violence, as defined in Article 4 of the Istanbul Convention and other human rights conventions. If a woman is exposed to the same situation of violence after her stay in shelter, the State and society have failed to guarantee her right to live free from violence.

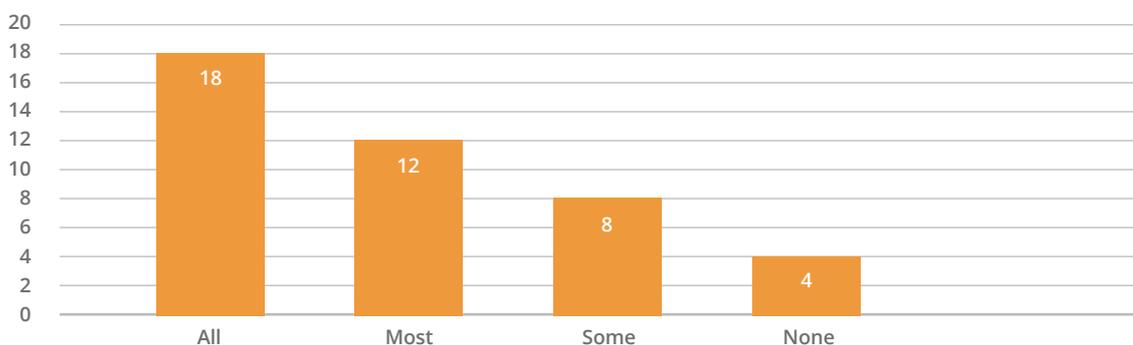
## Non-residential Support, Counselling and Advice

Women's shelters in many countries, not only provide safe accommodation but also provide a wide range of services to women in shelter, women who have already left the shelter as well as to women coming for advice. Many have drop-in advice centres and provide telephone counselling to women who may not be in need of accommodation in a shelter. For example, women who are in paid employment may be able to afford accommodation for themselves and their children without recourse to shelter accommodation. Similarly, some women may have family and friends who are able to accommodate them and their children and also not need to live in a shelter. It should be remembered, however, that some women may require shelter irrespective of their ability to pay for alternative accommodation because their abusive husband or partner has threatened to kill them or may have already attempted to kill them and/or their children, if any. In addition, women who have not made the decision to leave a violent partner often require information and support.

Very often, women call on women's shelter providers for legal and practical advice because there are no other specialist services for women survivors of violence available in their vicinity to support them. Women seek support from non-residential support, counselling and advice centres provided by women's shelters on a range of problems, such as; leaving a violent partner; divorce proceedings; securing one's livelihood; seeking employment and housing and difficulties relating to child custody and visitation rights of abusive fathers among others.

In addition, some shelters have staff dedicated to visiting and supporting women after their stay in a shelter, which is also an important part of comprehensive and holistic quality services women's shelters need to offer (WAVE, 2004, p. 35).

**FIGURE 4 – Shelters able to Provide Counselling and Support Services for Non-Residents**



As the graphic above demonstrates, in total 42 countries provided a response to the question of non-residential support and 30 countries reported that all or most women's shelters were able to provide this kind of support to non-residents. Eight countries (Czech Republic, Latvia, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia) reported that only some shelters were able to provide this support and only four countries (Greece, Hungary, Serbia and Turkey) reported that non-residents could not be provided with any service.

## "New" Shelters Opened 2014–2015

21 countries opened new shelters in 2014–2015 and in countries, such as Italy, Latvia, Romania, Russia and Georgia this represents a very significant increase in provision. It has to be noted, however, that not all these facilities are based on a gendered understanding of domestic violence and focus on the human rights and safety of the victim as required by Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention. Especially in the area of women's shelters, women-specific services are very important for the empowerment of survivors. Thus, the increasing demands for women's shelters to accommodate male victims is problematic. Some-

times funders believe that it would be discriminatory not to serve men. However, Article 4 of the Istanbul Convention clearly states that “special measures that are necessary to prevent and protect women from gender-based violence shall not be considered discrimination” (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 7).

## Specialist Services for Black and Minority Ethnic Women

Only five countries reported having shelters specifically for black and ethnic minority women. UK has the largest provision with 29 shelters for this group, Bulgaria provided nine, Italy three and Finland and Austria one each, although the shelter in Austria is specifically for black and ethnic minority women seeking asylum.

Five countries provide shelters specifically for women who were impacted by forced marriage. Georgia provides five shelters for this group, and Austria, Italy, Switzerland and UK each one shelter.

27 countries have at least one shelter for women who had been trafficked, although in Bulgaria, Croatia and Montenegro this provision was not only available to women. In addition, Norway accommodated women who had been trafficked in their ample women's shelter places. Lithuania, which has no shelter for women experiencing domestic violence, has five shelters for women who have been trafficked. Spain reported having 35 shelters for trafficked women, Italy 12 and Bulgaria 14 which are also open to women. The remaining 20 countries have between one and seven shelters for women who are trafficked.

**FIGURE 5 – Shelters for Specific Groups of Survivors**



This graphic demonstrates that five countries reported having a total of 43 shelters for black and minority ethnic women. The same number of countries reported having a total of nine shelters specifically for women who are affected by forced marriage. As described in more detail above, 27 countries reported having a total of 111 shelters for women victims of trafficking.

## Diversity and Non-discrimination

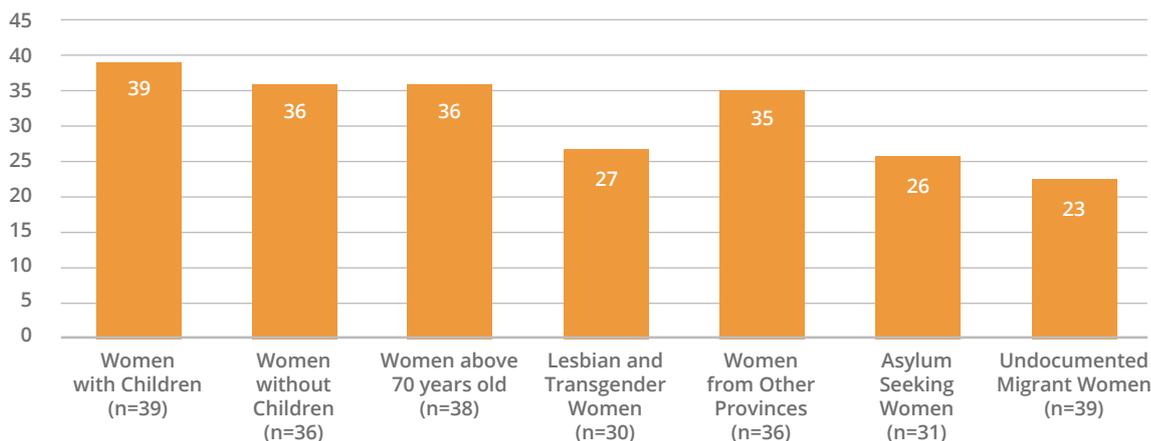
All countries responding said that they provide shelter to women without and with children, although some shelters do have an age limit for children, particularly boys. 27 countries provided detailed information on the age limit for boys and this was between 12 and 18 years of age. Only some shelters in Ukraine have a maximum age limit of seven years, over which boys will not be accommodated. Only nine countries gave a response to the question about age limit for girls, of these six have an age limit between 16 and 18 years. Ukraine and Montenegro have age limits of 13 and 12 years respectively, and one of the three shelters in Armenia only accept pregnant women or women with children under three years of age. An age limit for children and, in particular, the commonplace age limit on boys is a cause for concern. Whilst it is understandable that living together in often limited space may make such regulations necessary, it is nonetheless problematic to separate boys from their family. Women's shelters should therefore receive enough State funding to make it possible for women and their juvenile children to stay together by, for example, having separate living units. Boys being violent should be dealt with by being barred from the women's shelter as is the case for anyone being violent.

Spain and Ukraine were alone in saying they did not accommodate women over 70 years of age.

Lesbian and transgender women would not be accommodated in shelters in the Czech Republic, Georgia and Russia and, in addition, Austria and Denmark are unsure if all shelters would accept transgender women.

Ukraine was alone in reporting that no shelters would accept women from other provinces, however it is known in practice that this restriction exists in other countries. It is often related to funding as local government support for shelters is often restricted to funding local residents. Latvia was alone among the EU Member States in reporting that no women's shelters would accept women from other EU countries. Russia was alone in reporting that no shelters would take women from ethnic minorities and was joined only by Serbia in reporting that no shelters would accept migrant women, but again in practice this problem is not restricted to these countries. Undocumented migrant women cannot be accommodated in any women's shelters in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein and Ukraine. Cyprus, Hungary, Russia and Serbia reported that women seeking asylum would not be accommodated in any shelters. Liechtenstein would only take women who were documented as asylum seekers and Slovenia reported that only 11 of the shelters run by NGOs (out of a total of 16 shelters) would be able to take women who were undocumented asylum seekers.

The main problem of accommodating undocumented migrant women is that in many countries the State does not provide funding which makes it difficult for women's shelters to accommodate them because they need to have other funding sources. It should be noted that this applies to documented migrant women who have not independently earned the right to state support in the country of residence. This applies even to women moving within EU member states. It appears that only shelters in Iceland, Finland and Belgium can cover the costs of accommodating such women. Czech Republic and UK reported that accommodating such women is problematic, although it is maybe not impossible in all cases. It can be that some shelters have access to a funding source which would cover these costs, such as a special foundation which support their work. It is clear that access to public funds for undocumented migrant women is difficult. It should be pointed out here, that it is the right of every woman and her children, if any, to live free from violence regardless of their migrant or refugee status. This implies that they should receive shelter and support in a situation of domestic violence, as stated in Article 4 of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 7). The discriminatory practice of not funding places for undocumented migrant women and their children, if any, which results in them not being admitted to women's shelters needs to be challenged. The same is true for documented migrant women who have not independently earned the right to state support in their country of residence. In particular, within EU member states, this should be addressed as a limitation on the free movement of labour.

**FIGURE 6 - Number of Countries where Shelters Provide Access to Specific Groups**

The graphic above indicates that out of the total number of countries who provided answers to this question (n) the number which provided access to specific groups. For example, all of the 39 countries which responded to the question of women with children, all said that this group were able to access shelters. The lowest level of access to shelters was demonstrated in the case of undocumented migrant women, here 33 countries responded but only 23 reported that such women could access shelters in their country.

### Access for Women with Disabilities

For some shelters, there are challenges involved in accommodating women with particular needs, although indications are that shelters have made progress on the issue of accommodating women with disabilities. Naturally, disability is a complex issue which encompasses many issues and cannot be reduced to wheelchair accessibility. Nevertheless, out of 35 countries which provided data, only five said that they were not able to accommodate women with disabilities. Two of the countries unable to accommodate women with disabilities had only one shelter each (Cyprus and Liechtenstein) and Ukraine which has two. In addition, two countries with more resources, Georgia which has eight shelters and Switzerland, which has 18 also reported no ability to accommodate women with disabilities.

The overall picture from the data available demonstrates that individual shelters are thinking about services for women with disabilities and considering how these can be improved. In Germany, about half of shelters are accessible for women with disabilities. In engaging with the subject and developing an awareness of issues around disability services can be improved in the long term for women who may not just be experiencing reduced mobility as a physical disability. Denmark reported having specific services for residents with disability, for example, interpreters for hearing impaired residents.

### Housing Situation and Second Stage/Transitional Housing

A major factor in the length of stay women can and do have in shelters is the availability of accommodation for women and their children leaving shelters. In assessing the general housing situation for women and children seeking permanent accommodation, 16 countries reported that it was possible for women and children to find affordable housing after leaving a shelter and 12 reported that this is not possible.

Nine countries reported having a public housing programme, but 22 reported not having such programmes in their countries. A fairly new development are municipalities committing to giving women living in shelters priority points for social housing, as is the case in the Netherlands and Austria. This is also the case in Belgium although waiting times for social housing can still be several years. There needs to be

an expansion of such initiatives as affordable permanent housing solutions for women and their children, if any, leaving shelters is essential to ensure that women are not forced into living with abusive men.

## Women's Shelters Providing Access to Specific Groups

Second stage/transitional housing for women leaving shelters is obviously not as good as a permanent housing solution, it does, however, at least provide women with time to adjust after leaving shelter. 15 countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and UK) did report that at least some shelters were able to offer second stage/transitional housing to some residents. In addition, Denmark reported that a pilot project is running which addressed this issue. Italy reported that although the service is limited, some shelters are able to refer some women to transitional accommodation, which provided social support and was available at a very low rent for up to one year. In Spain, women and their children can move to mentored accommodation for up to 18 months after leaving shelters. In Lithuania, social housing is provided to women leaving shelters as temporary accommodation and this is the case to a limited extent also in Portugal. 23 countries are not able to provide second stage/transitional accommodation to women and their children following a stay in shelter.

## Costs of Living in Shelters

It was clear from the analysis of the data provided that shelters were using different definitions of whether or not their service was free of charge, for example, one country defined the shelters as not free of charge because women had to provide their own food, other shelters assumed that women would be self-sufficient. It was also clear that some countries responded to the question of whether charges were levied for women in shelters in terms of particular groups of women, for example, their own nationals.

22 countries reported that all shelters were free of charge but provided no additional information. Three countries provided no data for this question. The remaining 22 countries presented more detailed information which gave a varied picture.

Three countries were able to say that all shelters were free of charge with no exceptions (Cyprus, Finland and Greece). It has to be noted however that Cyprus does not provide women seeking asylum access to shelters and does not admit undocumented migrant women. Switzerland reported that the State covers the costs of accommodation for all women for the first three weeks. 13 countries reported that their shelters are free of charge but that women with an income (either in work or in receipt of State support) are required to make a contribution to their accommodation costs (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Serbia, Slovenia, UK). In Romania, it is a general practice for clients who can afford it to be requested to pay a contribution to the costs of food and utilities.

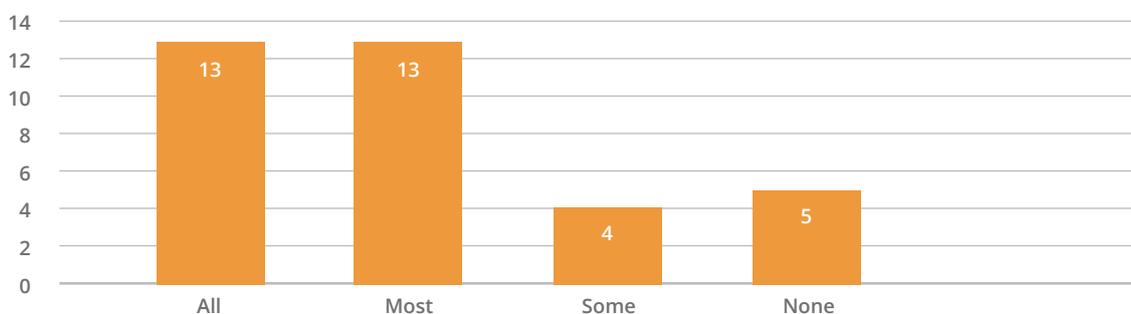
Denmark reported that shelters are free but women have to be self-sufficient, in that they have to run their own households and, for example, pay for their own groceries.

The question of what happened to women who are not able to pay, for example, who had no income and no recourse to State support, is varied. Belgium reported that such women (for example, undocumented women) are not required to pay towards their costs. Similarly, in Iceland women who cannot pay do not have to and children are accommodated free of charge. Liechtenstein also provides accommodation rent-free to women who have little or no income, although they do not accept women from other EU countries or undocumented women into their shelter. Czech Republic and UK reported that accommodating women who have no income is problematic. As was pointed out earlier, in the section on right to stay in shelter, not accommodating women in need contravenes Article 4 of the Istanbul Convention.

## Shelters with 24/7 Access

Of 37 countries which provided data on this question, 36 reported that only some of their shelters are able to provide 24/7 access. Slovenia reported that no shelters are able to provide this service. Of more significance were the number of shelters which had direct access.

**FIGURE 7 – Proportion of Shelters with Direct Access**



As the diagram above demonstrates, five countries reported that none of their shelters have direct access (Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cyprus, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey). The following list of obstacles to immediate access relate not only to those shelters which did not provide direct access, but also to those which did.

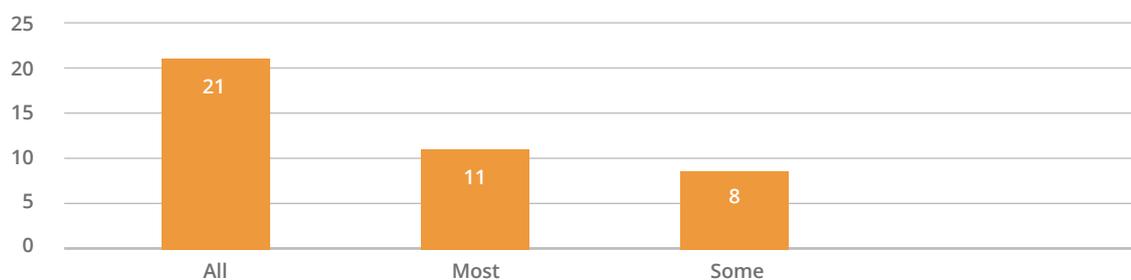
The main obstacle to immediate access to shelters by women fleeing domestic violence is, as 13 countries reported, the requirement that State authorities approve a placement in shelter and/or payment of the shelter space before women could be admitted. Two countries (Hungary and Montenegro) reported that access to shelters is through a helpline one of which is not open 24/7 and another which is staffed partly by men who assess if women are in immediate danger before approving access.

Five countries reported a lack of resources in shelters, either places or staff, as being an obstacle. UK and Iceland mentioned that not having a shelter nearby was an obstacle for some women accessing shelters immediately and that the health or complex needs of women fleeing domestic violence makes immediate access problematic. Finally, UK highlighted the fact that a failure in response at point of contact is often an obstacle to women accessing immediate shelter which indicates a training need, for example, with front-line staff coming into contact with abused women, such as in health services.

## Security Precautions

The following diagram shows the number of shelters providing safety precautions.

**FIGURE 8 – Proportion of Shelters with Safety Precautions (n=40)**



As can be seen in the graphic above, of the 40 countries which responded to this question, all said that at least some of their shelters had safety precautions. More than half the countries responding said that all their shelters had safety precautions.

## Data on Women not Accommodated (Demand for Places)

Only two countries (Albania and Iceland) report never having to turn away women even although they fall short of the Istanbul Convention standards on places available. It attempting to account for this it should be borne in mind that Iceland has a population of less than one third of a million people and may be able to use other social service provision, particularly outside the capital where the shelter is located. They may also be able to fall back on alternative less formal solutions than is common practice in larger countries. Albania meets almost 70% of the Istanbul Convention minimum standard on accommodation and it is not clear why the level of demand appears to be lower.

Only seven countries were able to put a figure on the number of women they turned away, two (Czech Republic and Denmark) reported having to turn away more women than they accommodated, Switzerland and UK reported having to turn away almost as many women as they accommodated and Italy and Bulgaria reported turning away half as many women as they accommodated and Austria one quarter. It should be borne in mind that number of places available is only one factor impacting on the number of women who are not able to be accommodated. A lower level of demand on shelter places can also be due to difficulties with accessing shelters, the quality of service provision and resources for women following a stay in shelters. Access to shelters through a helpline which is also staffed by men or a social work office which is only open during the day may reduce demand. Similarly, restricting access only to women in acute danger of violence, which is for example the case in Hungary, will reduce 'demand'. Shelter staff who do not have a gender-specific analysis of the problem of domestic violence and who have been known to blame victims may also deter women seeking accommodation as will restrictions such as only accommodating women with small children. Furthermore, if women can only stay in the shelter for a very limited period and the shortage of affordable housing is so acute that many have no alternative but to return home such factors will depress the demand for shelter space. Therefore, the number of women who have to be turned away from shelters is only one measure of the potential demand for shelter space.

## Reasons Women Cannot be Accommodated

The most common reason given that women cannot be accommodated is the lack of available space at the time required.

Of concern is the fact that service provision for women with mental health issues appears to be an intransigent problem for women's shelters. Furthermore, women with drug and alcohol dependencies can often not be accommodated in shelters. Ten countries provided comments on reasons for not being able to accommodate women and of these eight referred to mental health and addiction problems. This indicates a need for specialist services to be developed for these women which has a gender-specific analysis of both their experience of violence and their mental health and addiction problems. At the moment, they are often not able to accommodate in shelters which mostly require women to have a degree of self-sufficiency and be able, with the support of shelter staff, to help themselves. Their needs in terms of the gender-based violence they have experienced are not adequately met by services for mental health and drug and alcohol dependencies which often lack a gender-specific analysis of gender based violence. Obviously this problem requires that specialist services be developed and be adequately resourced.

An additional problem is the provision of services for women who have been convicted of violent crimes, women who have already been evicted from a shelter and those who pose a threat to other residents. It is understandable that shelters are unable to offer such women accommodation, it is however unclear to what extent shelter providers are able to provide such women with non-residential forms of ongoing help and support.

## Recommendations for Women's Shelters

- ▶ As can be seen by the first figure in this chapter, there is an urgent need to address the fact that in European countries outside of the EU and in the countries which joined the EU since 2000, only one fifth of the minimum standard of shelter provision is available.
- ▶ Growth of good standard shelters important, some countries attempt to meet the Istanbul Convention minimum standard on places available to women by redefining existing services as women's shelters without considering the requirement for a gender sensitive and human rights approach which ensures a better quality of service.
- ▶ Undocumented women are particularly vulnerable and, at present, are on the whole not catered for at all. There is a need to expand financing for women's shelters to allow them to accommodate women and their children who are experiencing domestic violence and who are unable to pay for their accommodation and have no recourse to State support. Governments at national, regional and local level are urged to remove barriers for undocumented women to access women's shelters. It should be borne in mind that this also impacts on documented migrant women who have not independently earned the right to state support in their country of residence, even if they are moving from one EU member state to another.
- ▶ Many shelters are considering the needs of women and children with disability and making progress on expanding services for this group, which is important as a representative study of women with disabilities in Germany showed they were twice as likely to experience physical and three times as likely to experience sexual violence and women without a disability and deaf women are particularly vulnerable (BMFSFJ; 2014). It is important in doing so, not only to consider the needs of women with mobility problems, but also sight and hearing impaired residents. As women with disabilities experience more violence than women without disabilities, it is important that shelters receive adequate government funding to expand their shelter service provision accordingly.
- ▶ Women's shelters need to offer a 24/7 service and have easy access for women i.e. women should be able to refer themselves. This is essential to ensure the safety of women and their children, if any, fleeing violence.
- ▶ Women's shelters need adequate resources to be able to accommodate and support women with mental health problems or women with drug or alcohol dependencies, which can often be a consequence of the traumatic experience of violence. Shelters need more and specifically trained staff to adequately help women who suffer from these problems.
- ▶ There is a need for shelter providers to address the needs of women who cannot be accommodated because they have a history of violence or have been excluded from the same or another shelter. It is unclear to what extent such women are able to be offered non-residential counselling support.
- ▶ Some women who wish to get away from violent partners may require legal advice, support and counselling to achieve without moving into a shelter. This service is very often also provided by women's shelters, many of whom run a separate drop in, advice centre or at least a telephone counselling service. These services need to be supported and expanded, especially in places where there are no women's centres offering support. They provide a cost effective way of assisting women experiencing violence in their home and also support those women who cannot be accommodated in shelters. Financing such services which exist and building capacity in countries which cannot provide such a service is important.

**TABLE 13 – Women’s Shelters in 46 European countries**

Countries	Total Population	Meets the Minimum Standard	Number of Women’s Shelters	Number of Beds in Women’s Shelters	Women’s Shelters Beds Available (%)	Women’s Shelters Beds Needed	Women’s Shelters Beds Missing
Albania	2,895,947	No	5	153	53%	290	90
Armenia	3,010,598	No	3	12	4%	301	289
Austria	8,506,889	No	30	759	89%	850	91
Azerbaijan <sup>27</sup>	9,356,483	No	4	19	2%	936	917
Belarus	9,463,840	No	4	30	3%	946	916
Belgium	11,203,992	No	37	283	25%	1,120	837
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3,791,662	No	9	204	54%	379	175
Bulgaria	7,245,677	No	7	72	10%	725	653
Croatia	4,246,809	No	7	267	63%	425	158
Cyprus	858,000	No	2	17	20%	86	69
Czech Republic	10,538,300	No	4	96	9%	1,054	958
Denmark	5,627,235	Yes	43	934	n/a	568	0
Estonia	1,315,819	No	13	86	65%	132	46
Finland	5,451,270	No	19	114	21%	545	431
France <sup>28</sup>	66,320,000	/	/	/	/	6,632	/
Georgia	4,497,617	/	8	/	/	450	/
Germany	80,767,463	No	369	6,800	84%	8,077	1,277
Greece	10,816,286	No	26	470	43%	1,082	612
Hungary	9,877,365	No	15	140	14%	988	848
Iceland	329,100	No	1	18	55%	33	15
Ireland <sup>29</sup>	4,605,501	No	21	141	31%	460	319
Italy	60,782,668	No	73	627	10%	6,078	5,451
Kosovo	1,794,180	No	8	140	78%	179	39
Latvia	2,001,468	Yes	23	1,084	n/a	200	0
Liechtenstein	37,129	No	1	3	75%	4	1
Lithuania	2,943,472	No	0	/	/	294	294
Luxembourg	549,680	Yes	8	150	n/a	55	0
Macedonia	2,022,547	No	5	22	11%	202	180
Malta	425,284	No	4	41	95%	43	2
Moldova	3,559,497	No	1	25	7%	356	331
Montenegro	621,521	No	3	44	71%	62	18
Netherlands	16,829,289	No	96	1,608	96%	1,683	75
Norway	5,107,970	Yes	45	907	n/a	511	0
Poland <sup>30</sup>	38,017,856	No	1	26	1%	3,802	3,776
Portugal	10,347,822	No	37	639	62%	1,035	396
Romania	19,947,311	No	73	828	42%	1,995	1,167
Russia	142,856,536	No	95	434	3%	14,286	13,852
Serbia	7,146,759	No	12	257	36%	715	458
Slovakia	5,415,949	/	2	/	/	542	/
Slovenia	2,061,085	Yes	16	274	n/a	206	0
Spain	46,439,864	/	53	/	/	4,644	/
Sweden <sup>31</sup>	9,644,864	No	161	631	65%	964	333
Switzerland	8,139,631	No	18	284	35%	814	530
Turkey	76,667,864	No	130	3,402	44%	7,667	4,265
Ukraine	42,701,791	/	2	/	/	4,270	/
United Kingdom	64,308,261	No	348 <sup>32</sup>	4,744	78%	6,431	1,687
<b>Total</b>	<b>831,096,151</b>	<b>5/41</b>	<b>1,842</b>	<b>26,785</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>83,110</b>	<b>47,556</b>

<sup>27</sup> Information provided in the WAVE Report 2014, PP.32-33, published in 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Data on available women’s shelters, and shelter places, for France was not available in 2015, due to the current updating of such data on the national level.

<sup>29</sup> Information provided in the WAVE Report 2014, PP.32-33, published in 2015.

<sup>30,31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> This number is made up of shelters in England (243), Northern Ireland (14), Scotland (37) and Wales (54)

**TABLE 14 – Women’s Shelters – User Statistics**

Countries	Number of Women’s Shelters	Women & Children accommodated in Women’s Shelters	Women who could not be accommodated due to lack of space
Albania	8	145 women, 179 children	0
Armenia	3	/	/
Austria	30	1,735 women, 1,767 children	460
Azerbaijan	4	/	/
Belarus	4	106 women, 104 children	/
Belgium	37	53 women, 70 children	/
Bosnia & Herzegovina	9	210 women, 216 children	/
Bulgaria	7	108 women, 96 children	55
Croatia	7	/	/
Cyprus	2	32 women, 40 children	/
Czech Republic	4	122 women, 104 children	139
Denmark	43	1,840 women, 1,768 children	2,248
Estonia	13	215 women, 186 children	/
Finland	19	987 women, 1,148 children	/
France <sup>33</sup>	/	/	/
Georgia	8	/	/
Germany	369	/	/
Greece	26	172 women	/
Hungary	14	/	/
Iceland	1	100 women, 84 children	0
Ireland	21	/	/
Italy	73	681 women, 721 children	308
Kosovo	8	315 women, 197 children	/
Latvia	23	/	/
Liechtenstein	1	17 women, 20 children	/
Lithuania	0	/	/
Luxembourg	8	/	/
Macedonia	5	/	/
Malta	4	214 women, 204 children	/
Moldova	1	/	0
Montenegro	3	171 women, 198 children	/
Netherlands	96	/	/
Norway	45	1,770 women, 1,507 children	/
Poland	1	/	/
Portugal	37	/	/
Romania	73	/	/
Russia	95	/	/
Serbia	12	1,250 women	/
Slovakia	2	/	/
Slovenia	16	/	/
Spain	53	/	/
Sweden	161	/	/
Switzerland	18	1,057 women, 989 children	1,033
Turkey	130	14,123 women, 5,742 children	/
Ukraine	2	126 women	/
United Kingdom	348 <sup>32</sup>	8,741 women, 8,461 children <sup>34</sup>	7,105

<sup>33</sup> Data on available women’s shelters, and shelter places, for France was not available in 2015, due to the current updating of such data on the national level.

<sup>34</sup> This information is partly based on statistics from England which provide information on referrals, not residents, this means women may be counted twice. In addition, the information is taken from a survey to which not all shelters submit information.

**TABLE 15 – Women's Shelters in EU28 Member States**

Countries	Total Population	Meets the Minimum Standard	Number of Women's Shelters	Number of Beds in Women's Shelters	Women's Shelters Beds Available (%)	Women's Shelters Beds Needed	Women's Shelters Beds Missing
Austria	8,506,889	No	30	759	89%	850	91
Belgium	11,203,992	No	37	283	25%	1,120	837
Bulgaria	7,245,677	No	7	72	10%	725	653
Croatia	4,246,809	No	7	267	63%	425	158
Cyprus	858,000	No	2	17	20%	86	69
Czech Republic	10,538,300	No	4	96	9%	1,054	958
Denmark	5,627,235	Yes	43	934	n/a	568	0
Estonia	1,315,819	No	13	86	65%	132	46
Finland	5,451,270	No	19	114	21%	545	431
France	66,320,000	/	/	/	/	6,632	/
Germany	80,767,463	No	369	6,800	84%	8,077	1,277
Greece	10,816,286	No	26	470	43%	1,082	612
Hungary	9,877,365	No	15	140	14%	988	848
Ireland	4,605,501	No	21	141	31%	460	319
Italy	60,782,668	No	73	627	10%	6,078	5,451
Latvia	2,001,468	Yes	23	1,084	n/a	200	0
Lithuania	2,943,472	No	0	/	/	294	294
Luxembourg	549,680	Yes	8	150	n/a	55	0
Malta	425,284	No	4	41	95%	43	2
Netherlands	16,829,289	No	96	1,608	96%	1,683	75
Poland	38,017,856	No	1	26	1%	3,802	3,776
Portugal	10,347,822	No	37	639	62%	1,035	396
Romania	19,947,311	No	73	828	42%	1,995	1,167
Slovakia	5,415,949	/	2	/	/	542	/
Slovenia	2,061,085	Yes	16	274	n/a	206	0
Spain	46,439,864	/	53	/	/	4,644	/
Sweden	9,644,864	No	161	631	65%	964	333
United Kingdom	64,308,261	No	348 <sup>35</sup>	4,744	78%	6,431	1,687
<b>Total</b>	<b>507,095,479</b>	<b>4/25</b>	<b>1,488</b>	<b>20,831</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>50,716</b>	<b>19,480</b>

**TABLE 16 – Women's Shelters in "New" EU Member States\***

Bulgaria	7,245,677	No	7	72	10%	725	653
Croatia	4,246,809	No	7	267	63%	425	158
Cyprus	858,000	No	2	17	20%	86	69
Czech Republic	10,538,300	No	4	96	9%	1,054	958
Estonia	1,315,819	No	13	86	65%	132	46
Hungary	9,877,365	No	15	140	14%	988	848
Latvia	2,001,468	Yes	23	1,084	n/a	200	0
Lithuania	2,943,472	No	0	/	/	294	294
Malta	425,284	No	4	41	95%	43	2
Poland	38,017,856	No	1	26	1%	3,802	3,776
Romania	19,947,311	No	73	828	42%	1,995	1,167
Slovakia	5,415,949	/	2	/	/	542	/
Slovenia	2,061,085	Yes	16	274	n/a	206	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>104,894,395</b>	<b>2/12</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>2,931</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>10,492</b>	<b>7,971</b>

\* Regarding the definition "Old" and "New" EU Countries see Glossary on p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> This number is made up of shelters in England (243), Northern Ireland (14), Scotland (37) and Wales (54)

**TABLE 17 – Women's Shelters in European Countries outside the EU**

Countries	Total Population	Meets the Minimum Standard	Number of Women's Shelters	Number of Beds in Women's Shelters	Women's Shelters Beds Available (%)	Women's Shelters Beds Needed	Women's Shelters Beds Missing
Albania	2,895,947	No	5	153	53%	290	90
Armenia	3,010,598	No	3	12	4%	301	289
Azerbaijan	9,356,483	No	4	19	2%	936	917
Belarus	9,463,840	No	4	30	3%	946	916
Bosnia & Herzegovina	3,791,662	No	9	204	54%	379	175
Georgia	4,497,617	/	8	/	/	450	450
Iceland	329,100	No	1	18	55%	33	15
Kosovo	1,794,180	No	8	140	78%	179	39
Liechtenstein	37,129	No	1	3	75%	4	1
Macedonia	2,022,547	No	5	22	11%	202	180
Moldova	3,559,497	No	1	25	7%	356	331
Montenegro	621,521	No	3	44	71%	62	18
Norway	5,107,970	Yes	45	907	n/a	511	0
Russia	142,856,536	No	95	434	3%	14,286	13,852
Serbia	7,146,759	No	12	257	36%	715	458
Switzerland	8,139,631	No	18	284	35%	814	530
Turkey	76,667,864	No	130	3,402	44%	7,667	4,265
Ukraine	42,701,791	/	2	/	/	4,270	/
<b>Total</b>	<b>324,000,672</b>	<b>1/16</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>5,954</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>32,401</b>	<b>22,076</b>

**TABLE 18 – Women's Shelters in "Old" EU Member States\***

Austria	8,506,889	No	30	759	89%	850	91
Belgium	11,203,992	No	37	283	25%	1,120	837
Denmark	5,627,235	Yes	43	934	n/a	568	0
Finland	5,451,270	No	19	114	21%	545	431
France	66,320,000	/	/	/	/	6,632	/
Germany	80,767,463	No	369	6,800	84%	8,077	1,277
Greece	10,816,286	No	26	470	43%	1,082	612
Ireland	4,605,501	No	21	141	31%	460	319
Italy	60,782,668	No	73	627	10%	6,078	5,451
Luxembourg	549,680	Yes	8	150	n/a	55	0
Netherlands	16,829,289	No	96	1,608	96%	1,683	75
Portugal	10,347,822	No	37	639	62%	1,035	396
Spain	46,439,864	/	53	/	/	4,644	/
Sweden	9,644,864	No	161	631	65%	964	333
United Kingdom	64,308,261	No	348 <sup>36</sup>	4,744	78%	6,431	1,687
<b>Total</b>	<b>402,201,084</b>	<b>2/13</b>	<b>1,321</b>	<b>17,900</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>40,224</b>	<b>11,509</b>

\* Regarding the definition "Old" and "New" EU Countries see Glossary on p. 102.

<sup>36</sup> This number is made up of shelters in England (243), Northern Ireland (14), Scotland (37) and Wales (54)