



## The Observatory on Gender-Based Violence in Bizkaia (OVGB): An Experience of Good Practices<sup>1</sup>

(“El Observatorio de Violencia de Género en Bizkaia (OVGB): una Experiencia de Buenas Prácticas”, publicado originalmente en *Oñati Socio-Legal Series*, 2015, 5 (2) pp. 447-471)

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### Abstract:

The Observatory on Gender-based Violence in Bizkaia (OVGB) emerged as an initiative of the Bizkaia Provincial Council (DFB) in 2003. It began to operate in 2004.

This Observatory has two main objectives:

- To understand the reality and evolution of the situations of violence against women in Bizkaia.
- To make recommendations and proposals to improve the services and facilities offered by public institutions in the field of gender-based violence.

Its work on compiling data on dealing with situations of gender violence within the social sphere, where there are multiple information sources, is of particular interest (123). Data gathering process coordinated by the Indicators Working Party.

Along with the information on a social level, the political and legal data make up a database providing a closer view on the care provided to this collective and the analysis of the evolution. This knowledge is used to issue recommendations as guidelines for public policies.

The work carried out can be found on the OVGB website: [http://www.bizkaia.eus/Gizartekintza/Genero\\_Indarkeria/ca\\_index.html](http://www.bizkaia.eus/Gizartekintza/Genero_Indarkeria/ca_index.html)

### Palabras Clave:

Observatory on Gender-based Violence in Bizkaia, Gender violence, Violence against women, Abuse, Data collection process, Indicators, Bizkaia.

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Terminological note: The expressions “violence against women” and “gender-based violence” are interchangeably used in the article. The latter should only be interpreted in the meaning established by Organic Law 1/2004 on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender-based Violence when it mentions programmes and measures whose scope of application is linked to article 1 of the said Law, indicated in the text with an asterisk (\*).

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## 1. PRESENTATION OF THE OVGB

The *Observatorio de Violencia de Género en Bizkaia* (Observatory on Gender-based Violence in Bizkaia or OVGB) is a collegiate body of an advisory nature, made up of representatives from both public institutions and civil society - through the associative movement - involved in the struggle against gender-based violence in Bizkaia.

This body has an advisory nature and was created in 2003 in order to increase understanding of the actions carried out in matters related to care for victims, analysing their evolution and guiding the public policies developed to eradicate this serious social problem, which constitutes the very worst example of the inequality suffered by women.

### 1.1 GENESIS OF THE OVGB: CREATION AND REFERENCE CONTEXT

The OVGB was set up as an initiative of the *Diputación Foral de Bizkaia* (Provincial Council of Bizkaia or DFB), in response to the recommendation made in the Final Report of the Paper on the Abuse of Women, drawn up by the Commission on Social Action of the General Assembly of Bizkaia in 2002 (General Assembly of Bizkaia 2002).

This recommendation is included in the specific conclusions of the Final Report, particularly the first of them, and indicates the following:

It is necessary to continue to increase understanding of the problem, descending to even more disaggregated levels and fields. Lines of psychological and psycho-social research are useful, but it is necessary to make urgent progress in the integration of the data of the different registers already in existence, improving their operation and complementing them with the results which can be provided by the sociological research mechanisms at more disaggregated levels and in more detail. The province of Bizkaia, as well as its different spheres of human geography, may serve as a reference for the purpose.

We therefore believe it necessary to promote the creation of an OBSERVATORY on gender-based violence in Bizkaia, in order to centralize all the information and whatever data allow us to understand this reality in all its dimensions. Women's organizations will also take part in this Observatory.

This deeper understanding should guide the improvement in the provision of care services and also the management of apparatuses suitable for revealing the hidden demand and activating it. Not only Emakunde but also the provincial administrations, the large municipalities, the associations and Eudel must become involved in this task (General Assembly of Bizkaia 2002, p. 4)

Therefore, it advocates the creation of a body which gathers and analyses information in order to increase understanding of gender-based violence, using the province of Bizkaia as its geographical area of reference.

This experience was absolutely new at the time with regard to the objectives, but also with regard to the incorporation of civil society - by means of women's organizations - into a body which would obviously have to be assigned to a public institution. It represented recognition of the work carried out by these organizations, who had historically led the

struggle for equality and against violence before the public institutions assumed their responsibility and included violence against women in their policies.

However, the initiative arose within a propitious context. The political commitment in favour of equality and the progressive awareness of civil society regarding the seriousness of the problem posed by the abuse and the serious violations of the rights of the victims had been given decisive impetus in the Basque Community by the creation of EMAKUNDE-Basque Institute for Women in February 1988. Among its objectives, the institute established the promotion of conditions facilitating equality between the sexes and the removal of the obstacles preventing or hindering its complete plenitude and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

When the General Assembly of Bizkaia recommended the setting in motion of an Observatory in the province, Emakunde-Basque Institute for Women had already been working for twelve years. The development and the progress achieved in the social and institutional intervention carried out against abuse in the Basque Country were included within the framework of the three Positive Action Plans for Women in the Autonomous Community of Euskadi - Plan I (1991-1994) (Emakunde 1991), Plan II (1995-1998) (Emakunde 1996) and Plan III (1999-2005) (Emakunde 1999), drawn up by Emakunde-Basque Institute for Women and approved by the Basque Government, whose guiding principles were coordinated intervention and the establishment of homogeneous procedures for action by the public authorities, in such a way that they could ensure full protection (health, police, judicial and social) for victims.

As a result of the work in this field, the highest authorities of our Community signed, on 18 October 2001, the first “inter-institutional agreement for an improvement in the care of female victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault” (Emakunde, 2001). The signatory institutions undertook to adapt their actions in cases of criminal offences arising from situations of domestic abuse and/or sexual assault on women to the Action Protocol, which was attached as an appendix to the text of the Agreement. The purpose of the above was to improve the care provided for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault, in order to ensure their comprehensive health, police, judicial and social protection. To do this, the Protocol established action guidelines and criteria which were to be followed by the professionals in these cases, with regard both to the work of each of them in their fields and to the relationships between the different institutions.

The Agreement represented a key element in articulating and coordinating the institutional action against violence against women. By means of the creation of the *Monitoring Commission*, which was established in it, the foundations were laid for more intense and stable inter-institutional collaboration, promoting the joint work and commitment of society as a whole and, in particular, the public authorities. Any action and planning which might be scheduled in matters of intervention against domestic abuse should be inserted within this framework, at Community, Provincial and Municipal levels.

Moreover, in May 2000, the DFB had approved the Provincial Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men and Gender Policies in Bizkaia for 2000 - 2003, which established, among others, the following actions:

- 6.1.2. To create and coordinate a working group of a technical, multi-disciplinary and inter-institutional nature on family violence which, among other duties, analyses and draws up proposals for comprehensive attention to situations of domestic violence, in-

corporating the gender perspective and integrating the different existing resources (Provincial Council of Bizkaia, 2000)

The project for the creation of the Observatory therefore formed part of the activities to be carried out by the DFB.

The context was created, the foundations were laid. It was a challenge, a very ambitious goal, and although the General Assembly did not indicate whose responsibility it was to promote the creation of the Observatory, the institution which took the initiative was the DFB, by means of its Department of Social Action, taking as its reference framework the inter-institutional Agreement for improving care for female victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, signed by all the institutions of the Autonomous Basque Country, including the DFB itself.

## **1.2 REGULATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS OF THE OVGB**

Within this context, the OVGB was created and regulated by the Provincial Decree 53/2003, dated 18 March, published in the Official Gazette of Bizkaia (BOB) on 1 April.

This creation Decree established the OVGB's purpose, goals and functions, composition, functioning and legal status, as well as its assignment and administrative management.

Once the initial phase was completed, the Plenary of the OVGB was constituted on 25 June 2004 and the proposal for the Regulations on the OVGB'S Organization and Functioning was submitted (OVGB Regulations, Provincial Decree of the Department of Social Action of the DFB 2005, 2005/5,016) and approved at the following plenary session, as well as the Work Plan for 2004-2008 (OVGB 2004).

Since the initial decree the composition of the Observatory has been modified in order to adapt it to the structural changes made in both the regional and provincial fields in the different legislatures, as well as the representation of the local bodies arising from the successive municipal elections.

Thus, although the fields of action upon which the work carried out has focussed from its beginnings until 2013 have remained stable - police, judicial and social - the institutions representing these fields which make up the OVGB have varied in their structures, which has meant the corresponding updating of the regulations, made effective by means of Provincial Decree 188/2004, dated 9 November, published in the BOB on 23 November 2004 and, later, by means of Provincial Decree 5/2010, dated 2 February, published in the Official Gazette of Bizkaia on 12 February 2010.

A new modification was made in 2013, fulfilling two objectives: a routine one, to adjust the composition to the changes made in the Departments which made up the Basque Government in the new legislature, and other strategic one, to materialize the incorporation of the educational and health fields into this body and to fulfil the 2009-2012 action plan of the OVGB (OVGB 2009c), approved at the plenary session on 24 April 2009. This is contained in Provincial Decree 75/2013, dated 21 May, published in the BOB on 27 May 2013.

In 2016 the final modification was made in order to adjust the composition of the OVGB to the new organisational structure of the DFB, meaning that this body now reports to the

Department of Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality, as stated in Provincial Decree 35/2016, dated 1 March, published in the BOB on 4 March 2016.

### 1.3 OBJECTIVES

The Observatory has two *main objectives*:

- *To understand the reality and the evolution* of the situations of violence against women in the province of Bizkaia.
- *To make recommendations and proposals to improve* the services and facilities offered by the public institutions in the field of gender-based violence.

### 1.4 FUNCTIONS

To achieve these two objectives, the OVGB is assigned the following *functions*:

- The design, setting in motion and maintenance of a computer application integrating data relating to situations of gender-based violence in the province of Bizkaia.
- To act as a permanent body for the gathering and analysis of the information available in the different fields of attention to situations of gender-based violence.
- To make recommendations and proposals aimed at improving the information indicators and systems used by the services in matters of violence against women.
- To participate in and maintain relations with other similar institutions. To learn about their experiences and the reforms undertaken and proposed in other administrations.
- To propose the carrying out of studies and technical reports for the diagnosis and evaluation of the extent and evolution of the situations of gender-based violence.
- To analyse the adaptation of the comprehensive measures aimed at victims of gender-based violence, investigating their consequences and effects and examining the examples of good practice.
- To make recommendations and proposals aimed at promoting improvements in the range of different resources which affect the field of gender-based violence in Bizkaia and to transfer them to the relevant institutions.
- To provide a forum of exchange and communication facilitating the works of study and analysis of research groups in the area of gender-based violence.
- To issue an annual report on the activities carried out by the Observatory, submitting it to the General Assembly of Bizkaia.
- To draw up its regulations on its organization and functioning.

### 1.5 INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED

The OVGB has incorporated four fundamental axes into its structure, firstly the institutions with autonomic, provincial and local representation and, secondly, civil society by means of associations and organizations from Bizkaia working in favour of equality and against violence against women.

The composition, as indicated above, has adapted to the modifications in the structure of the institutions, but this has always been confined to the police, judicial and social fields.

Only after the OVGB was consolidated was its expansion promoted, incorporating the fields of health and education into its structure, which was regulated in 2013. The current composition includes:

- Provincial Council of Bizkaia:
  - Department of [Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#): Directorate-General of Social [Inclusion](#)
  - Department of [Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#): Directorate-General of Equality
  - [Department of Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#): [Directorate-General of Employment](#)
  - Department of [Public Administration and Institutional Relations](#)
- Basque Government:
  - EMAKUNDE- Basque Institute for Women
    - Department of Security
    - Department of Public Administration and Justice
    - Department of Employment and Social Policies
    - Department of Education, Linguistic Policy and Culture
    - Department of Health
- Municipalities and Communities of the Province, designated by EUDEL (Association of Basque Municipalities):
  - Galdakao Town Hall
  - Ermua Town Hall
  - [Forua](#) Town Hall
- Associations and Organizations in the Province:
  - AUZOLAN psycho-social module
  - Women's Advisory Centre-ARGITAN
  - Association of [Muslim Women-BIDAYA](#)

## 1.6 FUNCTIONING

The OVGB is organized at two levels. Firstly, the PLENARY, made up of political and technical representation designated by the bodies making up the OVGB, which meets in ordinary session twice a year. Secondly, the WORKING GROUPS, which are deemed necessary for the fulfilment of the established functions.

Thus, upon the basis of the Working Plan for 2004-2008 (OVGB 2004), the plenary session held on 22 October 2004 approved the constitution of the *GRUPO DE TRABAJO SOBRE INDICADORES DE VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO* (WORKING GROUP ON INDICATORS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE or GTI), made up of technical personnel designated by the institutions and organizations which comprise it.

Over the years which have gone by since the constitution of the OVGB, this is the only working group to have been created and it has been responsible for the carrying out of the technical work of gathering and analysing the information, drawing up the annual reports, formulating the recommendations and proposals for improving institutional action and any other tasks assigned by the Plenary.

## 1.7 ASSIGNMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT

The OVGB is assigned to the Department of [Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#) of the Provincial Council of Bizkaia and is directly dependent on the Provincial Councilor of this Department (currently Ms [María Teresa Laespada](#)), who presides over the Observatory, the Directorate-General of Social [Inclusion](#) being responsible for providing the necessary technical and administrative assistance. This Directorate-General includes the Service for Women and Family Intervention, which manages and coordinates the work carried out by this body. The secretaryship of the OVGB and the coordination of the GTI are the duties of the headship of the Women's Section.

In order to support the Department in the carrying out of the technical and administrative tasks which are the OVGB's responsibility, a recruitment procedure was initiated by means of a public tender, which was won by the INFOPOLIS 2000 S.L. company. Until today three competitions have been successively initiated for the provision of the technical and administrative assistance that the OVGB requires and this body has been the winner of the corresponding contracts.

## 2. THE WORK OF THE WORKING GROUP ON INDICATORS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GTI)

### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

On 20 January 2005 the Working Group on Indicators of Gender-based Violence (GTI) was set up, with the following objectives:

- To identify and access the *sources of information* allowing the obtaining of accurate and reliable data.
- To find out and gather the *data currently available*.
- To design *indicators* permitting a representation of the magnitude of the violence against women on a certifiable basis and comparable over time.

### 2.2 MEMBERS

This Working Group is made up of professionals with a technical profile who represent the different bodies which make up the Observatory. The current composition is the following:

- Provincial Council of Bizkaia:
  - Department of [Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#): Directorate-General of Social [Inclusion](#)
  - Department of [Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#): Directorate-General of Equality
  - Department of [Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#): [Directorate-General of Employment](#)
- Basque Government:
  - EMAKUNDE-Basque Institute for Women
  - Department of Security
  - Department of Public Administration and Justice
  - Department of Employment and Social Policies

- Department of Education, Linguistic Policy and Culture
- Department of Health
- Municipalities and Communities of the Province, designated by EUDEL (Association of Basque Municipalities):
  - Gernika-Lumo Town Hall
  - Ermua Town Hall
- Associations and Organizations in the Province:
  - AUZOLAN psycho-social module
  - Women's Advisory Centre-ARGITAN

The last change in the composition of the Group corresponds to the modification made after the publication of Provincial Decree 75/2013, dated 21 May, which modifies the structure of the OVGB, incorporating the Department of Health and the Department of Education, Linguistic Policy and Culture of the Basque Government for the first time and reintegrating the Department of Employment and Social Policies (which recovers the functions of direct attention to victims and management, after EMAKUNDE-Basque Institute for Women took over the functions of the former Directorate for Attention to Victims of Gender-based Violence of the then Department of the Interior in the new legislature).

### **2.3 ACTIONS**

The actions of the GTI are aimed at achieving the two objectives guiding the OVGB's activity and the carrying out of its functions.

#### **2.3.1 Information gathering process**

During the years which have gone by since its constitution, the GTI has mainly focused its activities on the planning and development of the annual data gathering process on the specialized social resources available in Bizkaia for intervention in situations of violence against women and on the number of cases attended by the different judicial, police and social bodies.

In the police and judicial fields the information is centralized, but not in the social field, where the sources are multiple and scattered throughout the geography of the province. In Bizkaia, in addition to the autonomic and provincial entities, the social services system is made up of 112 municipalities and 9 associations, and each of these entities is a source of information. Given the particular difficulty of the preparation of the information gathering process within the field of social services, the primary and fundamental challenge facing the GTI consisted of finding a solution to a basic series of problems: multiple sources, the absence of homogeneous instruments and common technological back-up for the gathering, registering and processing of the information, a lack of practice in the collection of data which might serve as indicators for the preparation of databases and their subsequent analysis, professional informers whose work focuses on direct assistance for users of the social services system, with a heavy workload and a high turnover and labour mobility, a lack of specific training - in many of the cases - in equality and violence against women, etc.

It did not seem easy to overcome the challenge. Where to begin? To make progress the goals had be realistic; ambitious and unattainable goals could not be set without dooming

the project directly to failure. In the social field the gathering of information started almost from scratch and the only way of moving forward was to establish basic objectives with little ambition so that, following the consolidation of a *Red de Contacto Municipal* (Municipal Contact Network or RCM) - made up of the various reporting bodies - things could improve.

It was essential to obtain partnerships with these 121 institutions, making them active agents of the OVGB and preventing the entrusting of a new job for the professionals involved, the demand for the strict fulfilment of deadlines, the difficulty or lack of clarity of the requests and the absence of fluid communication and positive collaboration between both parties from turning our informants into our main detractors. Without this cooperation nothing would be achieved and therefore we could not burn our boats before beginning to sail. Facilitating the work required of them by designing simple instruments, contextualizing their effort by means of the return of the products made thanks to their efforts, providing support and cooperation, taking into account their professional needs in the design of the OVGB website in order to try and provide them with tools to facilitate their work, making the OVGB a close and accessible point of reference and, in short, establishing and reinforcing the partnerships became the guide for all our actions.

Moreover, it was the first time a similar experience had been carried out in the social field. We sensed some of the problems but lacked references and it was essential to analyse the shortcomings and difficulties encountered during the data collection in order to improve the process and implement solutions.

There were two key elements: the design of a form enabling us to gather the data for the drawing up of meaningful and simple indicators and the process for the gathering of information and the processing of the data collected.

The police field stood at the opposite end of the scale. The then Department of the Interior of the Basque Government had broad experience in data collection and processing, it had a statistical department in its structure and its leadership had been appointed as a representative of the Department in the GTI. Two differing worlds, two contrasting realities... how difficult it was to understand what was happening and the difficulties encountered in the social sphere for someone who ran a specific area! A large mountain facing a prairie.

However, most of the people who made up the GTI belonged to the social field and we were convinced that, in order to improve the care provided to female victims of gender-based violence we should have a reliable, rigorous, homogeneous, valid and comparable register of actions so as to assess the reality of the situation and its evolution over time. Only then could we identify the trends, analyse the characteristics of the victims and the changes in their profiles and propose the adjustment of the programmes to the new situations and the detected needs, setting in motion new services and modifying the existing ones. The presence of the Department of the Interior in the group was a stimulus - it served as an example and provided motivation.

The data gathering process has evolved over the years. After an initial phase focussed on the design and improvement of a register instrument and a system for the storing and processing of the information and consolidating and increasing the loyalty of the RCM it became possible to establish new goals and enrich the information gathered.

An internal working tool was designed within the group itself, an individual digitalised form which is managed telematically and which forms part of an integral system for the gathering, registering and processing of the information created in order to give the OVGB a specific solution to the need to collect the established social indicators from 121 local sources of information. This system enables fluid interaction between the Observatory and the reporting social bodies (basic social and specialized services, equality services, town halls and associations of the Province), which allows the compiling of figures and their verification prior to the approval of the document.

The social area is completed with data provided by the Basque Government which make reference to the Telephonic Care Service for female victims of gender-based violence (SATEVI), to measures of positive action in relation to housing for female victims of gender-based violence(\*), to economic aid for female victims of gender-based violence(\*) established in Article 27 of Organic Law 1/2004 on Comprehensive Protection Measures against gender-based violence, envisaged for women who can prove a lack of resources and special difficulties in accessing employment.

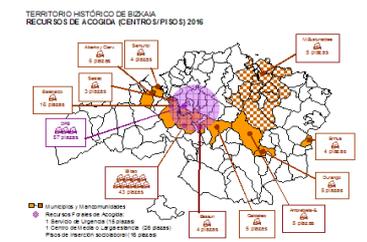
The gathering of data corresponding to the judicial and police fields, as it is centralized, does not offer the difficulties of the social level. It is provided in the case of the autonomous police by the person who represents the Department of Security of the Basque Government in the Working Group. In the case of data from judicial processes, the source of information is the *Consejo General del Poder Judicial* (General Council of the Judiciary or GCPJ), based on the data and information published by it. The information from the judicial field is complemented by the data provided by the Bar Association of Bizkaia (ICASV) on the specific duty rota and the autonomous Department of Public Administration and Justice on the *Servicio de Atención a la Víctima* (Victim Care Service or SAV) while the Basque Institute of Legal Medicine (IVML) is also used as a documentary source for finding out data related to medical forensic care.

As a result of this work the following technical reports are published each year:

- “Figures for attention to situations of gender-based violence in the Province of Bizkaia: field of social, police, judicial, **health and educational** protection”, corresponding to the previous year. The latest edition corresponds to figures for **2014** (OVGB 2015).



- “Resources of provinces, municipalities and associations for care for female victims of violence in the domestic field and sexual violence”, relating to this year. The latest edition corresponds to **2016** (OVGB 2016a).



The reports are firstly approved by the Working Group - once their content has been analysed and checked - after which they are published in the “Documents” section of the website, as well as in the “Indicators” section in the case of the report on the figures for

the period. At the plenary session of the Observatory, which is usually called at the end of the year, they are submitted together with information on all the activities carried out and the reports drawn up during the year.

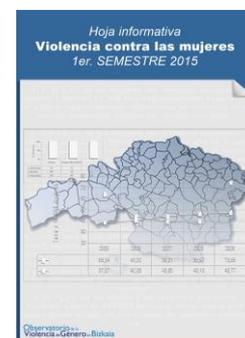
In this regard we should point out that, in accordance with the Work Plan for 2009-2012 (OVGB 2009c) approved at the plenary session on 24 March 2009, since 2009 there has been a *qualitative analysis of the information* which was not envisaged during the previous period; This analysis is already incorporated into the “Figures Report...” for 2008; the content of the documents corresponding to the successive years 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 continues to be increased and improved.

Thus, based on the analysis of the data registered by the public services for attending victims, the OVGB has initiated and laid the foundations for a series of annual reports to increase understanding of violence against women in Bizkaia and to assess its evolution. The descriptive analysis has created a profile of the information the data represent, putting them in the context of the measures approved by the institutions involved and showing the most significant aspects of the care given during the year in question and its evolution throughout recent years.

The preparation of these reports is very laborious and they are published on the website between the months of October and November of the following year. The reasons for this include, firstly, as has already been explained in detail, the large number of informants who make up the social field, the Observatory itself being responsible for the gathering and the compilation of the data, their analysis and their interpretation and, secondly, the fact that the provision of information from the police and justice fields is subordinate to the publication and diffusion of the corresponding departmental reports and those of the General Council of the Judiciary.

Moreover, in fulfilment of the Work Plan for 2009-2012 (OVGB 2009c), since 2010 there has been a six-monthly collection of data, aimed at the municipalities and associations which have their own care resources, in order to know more about the demand for care registered during the first half of the year. As a result of this collection, an individualized report is drawn up for each participating body<sup>3</sup>, which includes a summary of the most significant indicators relevant to the municipality or association in matters of violence against women from the activity of the municipal and supramunicipal public services.

The “Municipal Fact Sheet” is strategically presented within the context of 25 November<sup>4</sup>, so that the OVGB can contribute to the reflections and activities which occur in the local municipal bodies on that date, providing structured and easily accessible information related to the municipal level.



<sup>3</sup> These individualized reports are exclusively given to the corresponding body.

<sup>4</sup> International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

### 2.3.2 Formulation of recommendations and proposals for improvement

In the first OVGB Work Plan (2004-2008) (OVGB 2004), the formulation of recommendations for improving institutional action in the field of gender-based violence in Bizkaia was planned for the end of the period in order to comply with the second objective that Provincial Decree 53/2003, on the creation of an Observatory, attributed to this body.

In the plenary session on 10 January 2008, the GTI was entrusted with the drawing up of the corresponding report and the later monitoring and evaluation of the recommendations made, upon the bank of knowledge acquired during its existence for the building of the continuous information system represented by the Observatory and the synergy created among the member institutions.

The work to cover this demand was carried out between February and October 2008, the group concluding the process with the approval, at the meeting on 14 November, of a lengthy document shaping the proposal for the “Report on Recommendations and Proposals for Improvement to Institutional Action in matters of violence against women in the Province of Bizkaia” (OVGB 2009a). It was submitted to the plenary during the session on 15 December 2008 and approved on 24 April 2009 after a period for allegations open to the the member institutions of the Observatory. The report is available in the “Documents” section of the website.

To facilitate its handling and diffusion we produced a summary of the recommendations contained in the said document (OVGB 2009b), which was published in paper format and also uploaded onto the website. The printed document was sent to the institutions and bodies from the autonomic, provincial and local fields involved and committed to equality and the eradication of gender-based violence:



The recommendations were structured around two areas of reflection: the prevention of violence against women and the care provided to victims, concretized in improving the provision of social services, data collection, the training of professionals and inter-institutional coordination. These reflections were made in constant reference to the general framework for inter-institutional coordination established in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country by the *Second Inter-institutional Agreement for improvement to the care of female victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence* (Emakunde 2009). Although attention was particularly focussed on the performance of the provincial entity and the area of social intervention, we did not ignore aspects involving other institutional levels, both governmental and local. This process served as an exercise for the Observatory in terms of internal reflection on the action carried out, the possibilities for improvements resulting from it and the establishment of commitments in that particular field.

The second OVGB Work Plan (2009-2012) (OVGB 2009c) envisaged for 2011 studying the development and evaluation of the recommendations made in the first phase and the

subsequent production of a further report at the end of the period, which would go further in the light of the monitoring of aspects already covered in the first report and/or address new ones.

The “Report on the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Recommendations made by the OVGB (End of 2004-2008 period) 2012” (OVGB 2012) began in 2011, was approved by the GTI at the meeting on 27 April 2012 and was ratified by the plenary session on 15 November the same year.

The preparation of the “Second report on recommendations and proposals for improvement to institutional action in matters of violence against women in the province of Bizkaia” (OVGB 2013a) was subsequently initiated. Between October 2012 and May 2013 the GTI worked on its content, establishing the definitive proposal for the document at the meeting on 10 June 2013. The report was submitted to the plenary session on 27 September and approved within 20 days of the date of the meeting without any allegations being made by the member bodies.

Just like the first report in the series, the document was published in traditional and electronic formats and posted on the website. The printed format was sent to institutions and bodies from the autonomic, provincial and local fields.



With regard to the first recommendation report (OVGB 2009a), the areas of Protection and Care were retained as axes for reflection and the new axis of the area of Knowledge of Reality was added, based on data collection and research (covered on the previous occasion as part of the Care section).

The formulation of the recommendations which make up this second report was undertaken from a global perspective, accommodating the plurality of issues that the working group identified as subjects of attention; a focus largely aimed at showing the need for improvements and changes, based on the knowledge and experience of the member bodies - representatives of the three levels of the public administration and the associative field - and their productive baggage as a working group.

By 20 January 2015 ten years had gone by since the establishment of the Working Group. During this time the work carried out can be evaluated as very positive. The OVGB has gradually become a point of reference, especially in the social field, it has an established and participatory RCM which is progressively introducing information collection into its work agendas, which actively collaborates with the GTI and which has brought the open spaces closer to its presence in the meetings of the working group, which demands information and collaboration from the technical and administrative secretariat, which requests the provision of informative talks on the OVGB and its activity in its institutions and geographical areas of action, which receives its quarterly newsletter,

provides suggestions on topics of interest to be discussed and facilitates reviews on educational activities, publications and events to be included in the publication and which participates in the evaluation processes of the activity of the OVGB, giving very positive evaluations in all the fields of its activity.

The collaboration of EUDEL through Berdinsarea (Network of Basque municipalities for equality and against violence) has been crucial throughout this process, as it has served as a link with the equality agents of the municipalities and associations of Bizkaia included in the network and they, in turn, have found in the OVGB a useful and nearby source of information and analysis for the carrying out of their work and for the orientation of the municipal policies.

Thus, the main weakness which was initially identified has become one of the greatest strengths of the OVGB for the fulfilment of its objectives and functions. This is one of the main reasons for the title to this communiqué, as we consider that the OVGB has been a model of good practice which could be useful and serve as a benchmark for other provinces.

### 3. THE OVGB WEBSITE

#### 3.1 GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE WEBSITE

Since 2004 the Observatory has had a website which is hosted on the page of the Department of [Employment, Social Inclusion and Equality](#) of the [DFB](#). The general objectives of this website consist of publicizing the work of the body, promoting the transfer of knowledge of research into and the elimination of violence against women, designing, updating, providing bodies and professionals with work tools and facilitating contact and an exchange of ideas and documentation between the Observatory and the bodies with which it maintains dialogue.

Since its publication, work has been carried out to consolidate the website as a tool promoting communication and the publicizing of the proceedings of the organism. The information has been regularly enriched and updated and the necessary changes have been incorporated into its structure in order to simplify the process of obtaining knowledge for its users by introducing the appropriate improvements.

Much of the content of the OVGB website draws on the information gathering work carried out each year by the GTI and described in the previous section.

The website consists of 16 entries (eight of them textual sections):

- **Definition:** presentation of the body, history, aims and functions.
- **Members:** list of people making up the Observatory, the position and the institution they represent.
- **Members:** list of people making up the Observatory, the position and the institution they represent.
- **Meetings:** Calendar and documentation ratified at the plenary sessions.

- **Documents:** Repository compiling downloadable documents categorized into protocols, legislation, international instruments, studies and guides, macro-surveys published by the Department of Social Action of the Provincial Council of Bizkaia (“*Violence against women in the domestic field. Results of an investigation in the Province of Bizkaia, 2006*” and “*Violence against women in the domestic field. Results of an investigation in the Province of Bizkaia. 2009 and comparative 2005-2009 results in the Province of Bizkaia*”). As well as this documentation, there is that generated by the Observatory itself:
  - OVGB Work Plan (2013-2017) (2009-2012) and (2004-2008)
  - Regulations on the organization and functioning of the OVGB
  - Activity Report (annual editions since 2004)
  - Document titled “*Figures for attention to situations of gender-based violence in the Province of Bizkaia: social, police and judicial fields of protection*” (annual editions since 2004)
  - Report titled “*Resources of provinces, municipalities and associations to assist female victims of violence in the domestic field and sexual violence in the Province of Bizkaia. 2016*”
  - Manual of practices, initiatives and experiences against gender-based violence (2006, 2010 and 2014)
  - Document titled “*Figures for violence against women in the European Union, 2006*”
  - Study titled “*Evaluation of the Observatory on Gender-based Violence in Bizkaia*” (2004-2008) and (2009-2012)
  - Document titled “*Recommendations and Proposals for Improvement to Institutional Action in matters of violence against women in the Province of Bizkaia, 2009*” (Summary/Full Text)
  - Report on the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Recommendations formulated by the Observatory on Gender-based Violence in Bizkaia. (End of 2004-2008 period). 2012
  - Document titled “*Second Report on Recommendations and Proposals for Improvement to Institutional Action in matters of violence against women in the Province of Bizkaia*”. 2013.
- **Resource map:** a database consisting of resources and bodies (both institutions and third sector) who provide care for female victims of gender-based violence in Bizkaia. This map allows access to the equality plans, programmes against violence and protocols for coordinated action provided by local bodies to the OVGB for public distribution. By means of the **resource searcher** application, visitors to the website can extract lists of services related to social services, judicial resources, police resources, health resources, associations, other specialized services against violence and equality tools. There are three search options:
  - Total resources corresponding to all the municipalities
  - Total resources corresponding to the selected municipality
  - Total resources of the areas chosen from all the municipalities
- **Indicators:** an area which consists of two sections:
  - *Working Group:* includes a list of members of the Working Group of Indicators, their positions and the bodies they represent, the calendar of the meetings and the documentation resulting from their meetings.
  - *Figures:* includes the 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 editions of the document titled “*Figures for attention to situations of gender-based violence in the Province of Bizkaia*”.

- **Resource atlas:** a collection of maps covering all the resources for judicial, psychological and shelter care for female victims of violence in the domestic field set up in the different municipalities of the Province of Bizkaia, the coordination systems and the policies in force concerning equality mechanisms (plans, areas, networks and agents), as well as the different types of agreements between the *Ertzaintza* (Basque Police Force) and the local police forces and, as regards the judicial field, the *juzgados de violencia sobre la mujer* (courts for violence against women or JVSM) and the SAV in Bizkaia.
- **Document manager:** a document centre compiling equality plans, municipal programmes, local protocols and applicable legislation in the Province of Bizkaia, in other autonomous communities and at state, European and international levels.
- **Links:** a set of links to websites of the institutions which make up the Observatory, other institutions, linked observatories and other bodies, programmes and projects.
- **Participation in the evaluation of the OVGB/BGIB:** an online survey on the functioning of the Observatory and its website.
- **Newsletter:** an electronic magazine whose quarterly issues are posted on the website. You can view the latest issue (no. 41) (OVGB 2016b) *in situ* or choose the archive where all the versions published since 2005 are stored.
- **Language:** allows you to swap between the versions in Basque, Spanish and English (the latter is exclusively a summary of the activity of the body which includes links to the main products).
- **Contact:** data on the location of the body (location, website address, telephone and fax number).
- **Mailbox:** Observatory e-mail address [ovgb.bgib@bizkaia.eus](mailto:ovgb.bgib@bizkaia.eus)
- **Accessibility.**
- **Website map.**

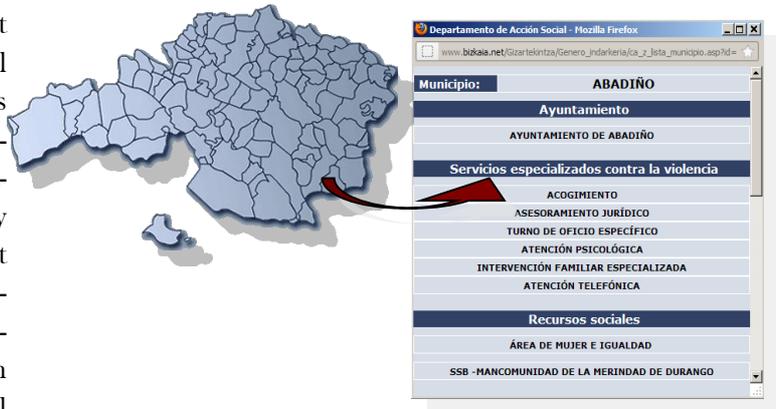
### 3.2 RESOURCE MAP OF BIZKAIA

One of the main products of this website is the Resource map. This map constitutes a tool designed to display reliable and updated information, gathering and visualizing information on all the resources - specialized and general, social, police, judicial and health and from the associative field - provided in Bizkaia for care for female victims of domestic violence. It also facilitates access to equality and/or anti-violence plans and programmes and the local action protocols of the municipalities and associations of the Province, among other documents.

This resource map, added to the website in February 2006, includes information on the network of public resources available in the Province of Bizkaia to attend to female victims of gender-based violence and it has become established over the years as a valuable work and reference tool for professionals and the general public, an instrument only provided by Bizkaia within the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country which would be desirable for Araba and Gipuzkoa too. This repository gathers together information on the bodies involved in attention to situations of violence, facilitates the contact of resources and constitutes an instrument-guide for direction in the search for resources for professionals, the general public and the collective of victims themselves. It contains the successive editions of the plans, programmes and protocols of all the municipalities of Bizkaia, facilitating the study of the evolution of planning in this field and helping the institutions to know what measures are being carried out in other similar localities. The

map is regularly updated by means of the modifications corresponding to the database with regard to new services and their contacts, providing reliable information for the people who view it.

This database is made up of eight sections designed to store municipal data related to specific services against violence, social, police, judicial and health resources, associations and equality tools (equality plans, plans and programmes against violence, local coordination protocols, equality councils, empowerment schools, urban diagnoses with a gender perspective and municipal equality ordinances).



The map provides information on the functioning of the resources and their description. Moreover, using it leads to resolving the queries of those requesting data, with two formal options:

A. *Municipal forms*: by selecting a municipality on a graphic map or list, the system returns a completed form with the resources available in the locality.

B. *List of resources*: used to obtain lists related to the three search options:

- all the resources contained on the map, with reference to all the municipalities;
- a selection of the resources in a single municipality;
- a selection of the resources in all the municipalities.

The tool also allows you to obtain the lists of data in Excel format.

In addition to the above, we should point out that the Resource Map is intended to be useful for the following collectives:

- Professionals and bodies with competences in the provision of care services, due to the fact that information is transmitted about the resources available in each locality and there is an opportunity to review the existing regulations (plans, programmes and protocols implemented by the different municipalities and associations) against violence against women.
- Affected people, as the information on the care resources and their contact details are itemized.
- Those responsible for public policies, as access to verified data and information which contributes to examining the current situation and applying new strategies for intervention is facilitated.
- The general public/community, because it identifies the resources and the specialist bodies providing care in situations of gender-based violence.

The Map is also helpful for planning, serving as a basis for the Resource Atlas, published on the website in January 2007.

### 3.3 RESOURCES ATLAS OF BIZKAIA

The resource atlas constitutes the graphic visualization and development of the information contained on the Resource Map by means of images. It lists and describes the services available in each area - locality, sub-region and region - in order to visualize the extent and nature of the institutional response to the needs of the collective in Bizkaia. It consists of a collection of maps on which there is graphic information about the network of public care services in situations of gender-based violence and the equality and coordination tools approved by the administrations.

You can view the information contained in the atlas on the following website:

[http://www.bizkaia.eus/Gizartekintza/Genero\\_Indarkeria/ca\\_atlas.html](http://www.bizkaia.eus/Gizartekintza/Genero_Indarkeria/ca_atlas.html)

The tool allows you to obtain all the information represented on the maps in text mode.



This information is categorized into three sections, the first of them with five blocks:

#### Section 1. SOCIAL FIELD

##### ➤ *Plans*

- Equality Plans for Women and Men in the Municipalities and Associations of Bizkaia, by edition (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th)
- Equality Plans for Women and Men in the Municipalities and Associations of Bizkaia, by year of approval
- Equality Plans and Programmes for Women and Men in the Municipalities and Associations of Bizkaia in relation to the existence of specialized technical personnel

##### ➤ *Coordination*

- Network of Basque Municipalities for Equality and against Violence, BERDIN-SAREA
- Local and regional protocols for improving care for female victims of abuse in the domestic field and sexual violence

##### ➤ *Shelter*

- Resources for sheltering Female Victims of Violence in the Province of Bizkaia, by number of places
- Resources for sheltering Female Victims of Violence, by year of creation

##### ➤ *Psychological care*

- Psychological Care Services in the Province of Bizkaia, by hours of care
- Psychological Care Services in the Province of Bizkaia, by year of the beginning of activities

➤ *Legal advice*

- Legal Advisory Services in municipalities of the Province of Bizkaia, by hours of attention
- Legal Advisory Services in associations of the Province of Bizkaia, by hours of attention
- Legal Advisory Services in the Province of Bizkaia, by year of the beginning of activities

**Section 2. POLICE FIELD**

- Police Stations and Domestic and Gender-Based Violence Teams of the Ertzaintza in the Province of Bizkaia
- Committees for coordination between the Ertzaintza and the local Police Forces in the Province of Bizkaia

**Section 3. JUDICIAL FIELD**

- Courts for Violence against Women (JVSM) in the Province of Bizkaia, by Judicial Districts and year of creation
- Victim Care Service (SAV) in the Province of Bizkaia

#### 4. CURRENT WORK

In the plenary session held on 27 September 2013 was discussed and approved the Work Plan for 2013-2017 (OVGB 2013b), which currently governs the actions of the OVGB.

In general terms, the new plan maintains the guidelines outlined in the prior 2009-2012 four-year period which, in turn, sought the consolidation of the tasks initiated in the previous period. The guidelines are designed to achieve permanent improvement in activities related to knowledge of reality and greater depth in those related to the analysis and formulation of recommendations and suggestions for improvement, concretized in the following areas:

- Extension of the structure of the OVGB: health and educational fields
- Improving coordination and cooperation with the reporting bodies, particularly with the Municipal Contact Network, given the complexity and scope.
- Improvement in the data collection process
- Improvement in the visibility process and the divulgation of the results
- Improvement in the data analysis and the identification of trends
- Improvement in the process for the formulation of recommendations
- Drawing up of the report on good practices
- Evaluation of the period

With this plan a new phase began for the OVGB, a new challenge. Once the work has become consolidated with the initial structure and the composition, it's necessary to learn from its experience and assimilate the incorporation of two key new fields - health and education - for intervention and prevention, reconciling its actions with this significant change and adapting its internal work processes and its actions in order to continue progressing towards the disappearance of this serious problem affecting the human rights of women.

#### 5. CONCLUSIONS

The Observatory on Gender-based Violence in Bizkaia (OVGB) was set up in June 2004 and this year it has completed twelve years of uninterrupted work.

Understanding the reality and evolution of the situations of violence against women attended in the Province of Bizkaia and formulating, upon the basis of that knowledge and analysis, recommendations and proposals for improving the service and assistance offered by the public institutions in the area of gender-based violence have constituted the objectives of the work we have carried out.

Over the years which have gone by, this experience, unique and pioneering in the field, has performed a task which has achieved very positive results according to the two evaluations completed to date.

The OVGB has gradually become a benchmark, especially in the social field, for institutions, professionals and even bodies from the associative field.

However, at this point, we should make a number of reflections which arise from our own experience and represent the very essence of the conclusions of the above exposé. The first reflections make reference to the OVGB's own needs and address the question of whether this body is necessary. The answer is this: we need to know what is happening, we need to know why it happens and we need to learn to live together in equality.

No country in the world has solved this social problem. Violence against women is the most widespread silent crime on the planet. It is the most dramatic manifestation of inequality, a reflection of the increase in smaller cases of everyday violence. It obliges us to look forward, as a society, and it challenges us to relentlessly fight the models of co-existence based on subordination and violence.

Secondly, we must talk about the political commitment which makes the materialization of experiences like that of the OVGB possible. The possibility of developing these kinds of initiatives depends not only on the essential, but insufficient, material resources (budgets and professionals). It depends, above all, on whether there exists a clear involvement of the top management of the institution which creates the body, on whether we can count on the cooperation and collaboration of all the institutions involved, on the possibility of exercising criticism and self-criticism, on participation in the political debate, on suitably managing the publication of the information produced and, most importantly, on having “permission” and “support” in order to place us in a starting position and not one of arrival in the early stages of our work.

Thirdly, there are the reflections related to the Technical Working Group which is responsible for the fulfilment of the main practical functions. It is essential to create a space for meeting, exchange and debate. We should bear in mind that good ideas arise and improve in space and time, with the plural participation of institutions and bodies with different knowledges and sensibilities and with the passing of time, enabling mutual awareness, debate and the strengthening of partnerships based on trust. We must not forget that progress is often a question of small details and small changes can make a substantial difference in the implementation of resources.

Fourthly, we must point to the technical assistance of the external specialist company which has facilitated the direction of the OVGB since it was set up. The beginnings lay solid foundations for the future; in this sense, guiding the planning of the data collection processes in the mid-term and understanding that they should be regarded in themselves as a means of learning and systematization proved crucial.

Addressing this task without losing focus, avoiding setting initial goals which are desirable but not feasible and going forward without losing confidence in the continuous improvement processes have contributed to the recording of the first achievements and increased the motivation and confidence of the people who make up the Working Group on Indicators of Gender-based Violence (GTI). In time, as a result of these initial successes, each member has found his or her space and voice in the group, enabling the team to advance towards increasingly challenging tasks.

Another area for reflection, the fifth of these conclusions, is that laid down by “quality”: “Know how to do it - Do it - Teach how to know it” gives way to “Know how to do it well - Do it well - Teach how to do it well”. Quality is necessary in the OVGB for reasons of efficacy in the data collection process (managing to obtain the data to produce infor-

mation) and efficiency (obtaining them at the right cost in terms of time and resources). It is necessary because we aim to raise the “perceived quality” of everything coming out of the OVGB. And that quality is necessary from the beginning until the final result is published and divulged - tools, reports, etc. - providing “total quality”.

Sixthly, we should reflect on the evaluation because, in addition to basing our work on continuous improvement processes, it is desirable to know how they see us by asking those who participate, those who observe us, those who form part of the OVGB itself - the members of the Plenary and the GTI, the members of the Municipal Contact Network, etc. in order to learn from them, being held accountable for what we do and valuing the experience to correct dysfunctions and reinforce achievements.

Finally, we must inevitably mention the importance of the design of the image and the information and technologies. Facilitate: having technology as an ally. Visualize: given that we are in the era of the image. Divulge: putting every OVGB tool and product at the service of the general public, the professionals and the institutions so achieve common good.

To end, we should highlight the three elements which are considered to be keys to success in the experience of the OVGB:

- Involve all the institutions: plural participation is essential in projects focussed on generating knowledge.
- Begin constructing from below: the foundations appear invisible, they come prior to the building and are built in the slowness of the beginning, but they form the support of the architectures.
- Trust the strength of your convictions: walk from resistance to adhesion.

All these reflections justify and seek to argue the audacity of regarding the OVGB as an experience of good practices. We hope that it will serve to help and guide the setting in motion of similar initiatives in other Provinces and Autonomous Communities.

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