

Episode 6

“Collaborative Support for Domestic Violence Survivors in the Workplace”

Transcript

Featuring this episode:

- The **Narrator** (voice of Dylan)
- The **Protagonist** Anna (voice of Aine)
- **Gigi Guizzo**, Rinova (Spain)

Episode 6 Transcript

(Music)

Protagonist

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

Narrator

Welcome to the 2gether4victims podcast

[Soundscapes: train, stations, announcements]

Protagonist

A journey through abundance, plunge and shadow to new understandings, heights and depths, unexpected discoveries or recoveries.

Narrator

A journey by train around Europe through the complexities of coordinating and harmonizing support services for victims of gender-based violence.

This podcast is focused on the latest developments in the field of gender-based violence services in the European Union.

This journey, shaped by Victim Support Europe, the leading European organization advocating for the rights and services of all crime victims, explores how eleven partner organizations in the 2Gether4Victims project are working together with one goal: improving services for victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

Along the way, we'll examine their current efforts and how these actions are paving the way for harmonized, gendered support services for victims across Europe.

Our 2gether4victims podcast takes listeners on a rail journey through seven countries: Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Portugal. And the journey doesn't end there—it will cross even more borders...

Protagonist

If you work with victims of crime, have been a victim yourself, or know someone who has, please, find your seat. You'll learn about the latest advancements in victims' rights across Europe.

Narrator

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(Music: Upbeat)

Welcome to our episode on *'Collaborative Support for Domestic Violence Survivors in the Workplace'*.

In this episode, we'll explore how different entities—including victim support services, NGOs, government agencies, and companies—are joining forces to support women affected by domestic violence in the workplace. We'll gain insights from EU-funded projects that demonstrate the importance of collaboration in developing effective support plans for survivors.

You'll also discover innovative ideas and free resources that empower professionals, researchers, and organizations to enhance their support for survivors. Our goal is to inspire meaningful actions that make workplaces safer and more compassionate for women who have experienced domestic violence.

Our main character is Anna, an independent podcaster, sound artist, and a survivor of domestic abuse. Anna is a European citizen, with Irish, Polish, and Italian roots, and she sees herself as a world citizen, embracing diverse cultures and experiences, though without forgetting where she comes from.

[Soundscape: train]

Through sound, she explores social structures, personal histories, and the unconscious imagination of individuals. Traveling by train across Europe, her goal? To investigate best

practices and initiatives that support vulnerable populations, all with the aim of making the world a better place.

[Soundscape: typing]

Protagonist

3, 2, 1... started

(Music: Spanish music)

[Soundscape: train stopping, city sounds]

My train pulls slowly into Malaga, the heart of the Costa del Sol and birthplace of Picasso. Malaga is best known internationally for its beautiful weather, and it's true—the sun blinds me as I step off the train, walking straight into the warm, yellow sunshine. The air has its own charm here, too; the scent of orange trees fills the street, a fragrant welcome that's unmistakably Andalusian.

I'm on my way to meet **Gigi Guizzo** at Rinova Málaga, a learning and development company focused on social and cultural innovation. Gigi's impressive—she's been managing EU projects for over a decade, covering everything from lifelong learning to LGBTQI and gender equality. She's fluent in six languages, and her background spans art history to social media strategies, and even tackling cyber-discrimination.

Gigi's experience with Rinova centers around creating real, positive change. Today, through her insights, I'm hoping to understand the unique challenges domestic violence survivors face, particularly, in the workplace. Her work highlights the urgent need for safe, supportive environments, and through her story, she's inspiring us all to take action—to make workplaces not just safer, but truly inclusive for everyone.

[Soundscape: far voices]

Protagonist

Thanks for having me here today, Gigi. The walk along Malaga's coastline to your office was stunning—the Mediterranean glistening under the sun, the air filled with the scent of oranges. It's such a peaceful setting, but it contrasts with the important and challenging work you do here. To get us started, could you introduce yourself? Share a bit about your name, job title, and what brought you to this work.

Gigi Guizzo

00:05:31

So my name is Gigi Guizzo. I work for an organization, a social enterprise called Rinova. I work as a development manager in primarily in European projects for over ten years or more than ten years now in projects around fundamental rights. The reason I'm here today is projects around gender-related violence. So not only violence against women, but LGBT people and in the widest sense, and intersectional approach. To victim support Europe and conferences. I've always come with a specific topic close to my heart, which is domestic violence against women and how we can tackle it from the company or from the workplace.

Protagonist

Thank you for that introduction, Gigi. To begin our discussion, could you reflect on your personal journey and what inspired you to focus on initiatives that support individuals who have experienced domestic violence, particularly in the workplace?

Gigi Guizzo

00:03:32

Yes. Well back in 2016, I was working on a project that was called CARF. And it was specifically hoping to involve companies to become more active in supporting women who are in situations of domestic violence. And so, at the beginning of the project, we did some interviews to get to know the organizations and companies around us in our location. I live in Spain, and I was struck by how many experiences people brought forward of having had colleagues who may have gone through a situation, but they never found out if it really was. Yeah, and the other thing that I was struck by is interviewing two women from an NGO that specialized in supporting women with about 200 staff, only women when asking them what strategy and plan they had in place to support the women in their organization who might be victims of domestic violence. They didn't have a strategy. So, when interviewing a woman, two women from an NGO in Spain who work with women and support women who may be suffering domestic violence or other forms of violence. And asking them about what strategy they had in place in their own organization, about supporting women in their own organization who might be going through a situation of domestic violence. It was surprising that they didn't have a strategy. And this is an organization who, at the time when I interviewed them, had 20 years of experience, 200 women. So roughly, I'm generalizing. But what I found striking there is, if we look at the statistics that 1 in 5 women experience at some point in their life intimate partner violence. It is unthinkable that 200 women over 20 years, there has not been a single woman who might have needed that support. So back in 2016, as I say, it struck me that this project was very much needed. And ever since, I've been sort of activating, doing activism around it through different projects.

Protagonist

Wow, Gigi, that's really eye-opening. It's hard to believe that even an organization dedicated to supporting women didn't have a strategy in place for those facing domestic violence. Your experience really underscores how vital it is to raise awareness and create resources for those in need.

So, speaking of collaboration, you mentioned working with a variety of groups like victim support organizations, charities, government agencies, and businesses. Can you share how these partnerships have helped you provide better support for survivors of domestic violence?

Gigi Guizzo

00:09:14

Yes. So in preparing for this interview today. I was trying to think of specific examples because of course, otherwise, I'll be waffling about generic what could one do? And collaboration in general. But I struggle to think about what I could offer European mind because every country is different. And then even beyond that, in the countries, every region is different. Every urban or rural area is different. So, so. one has to really look in each context what can be done. But I thought I bring an example. So one of the organizations that I really like is a foundation called Annabella Foundation in Spain, and Annabella is a survivor of domestic violence herself, who has created a network of survivors, of women survivors who support each other. But apart from the Women's Survivor Network, what she has created is a program of domestic violence survivors who, through big companies like Danone, Benefit Cosmetics, really big companies become brand managers, so they become the face of the company. And of course, this is only possible through a series of collaborations. So, in the first place, the NGO collaborates with government services who refer the women to them. They have a whole system and structure of help, for housing, for childcare, for training, for the women, they have a school, so on and so forth. And then they have the network, the connection with the companies who offer jobs to the women. So, these collaborations give really a holistic support to the women and make them the job and the future life after exiting the violence possible in the long term.

Protagonist

That's such a powerful example, Gigi. The Annabella Foundation's approach to creating a network of support among survivors is really inspiring. It's clear that those collaborations really help women regain stability and build a future after experiencing violence.

Shifting gears a bit, what are some of the unique challenges that domestic violence survivors face in the workplace, and how have you and your collaborators tackled these issues?

Gigi Guizzo

00:11:25

Well, there are many different ones. I think what I would like to mention here is the way women who suffer domestic violence react at the workplace can be very different. There can be either overworking, spending more time than usual at work because it's the only space where they are safe. Or it can be not coming to work. So, absenteeism because of violence, bruises that they experience physically or mentally at home and not being able to come to work. So, both create challenges in the sense of stress to, of course, themselves. But also, to their surroundings. So, their colleagues, people usually pick up on it at some level. And this creates a stressful environment. So, overcoming these challenges is of course difficult in all sorts of levels. But coming always back to this workplace angle, one important thing, difficulties that women who suffer domestic violence encounter at work is either they overwork because they want to be away from home and be in a safe space, or they have absenteeism because of mental or physical bruises.

So, in both cases this creates stress, of course, for themselves and for the people around them sometimes. And it creates a stressful work environment. So, what that then leads or can lead to is actually loss of work eventually. And that is one of the things that we're really trying to campaign against is that companies can offer support in having in watching out, if you so want, and then by creating a space where the victim can come forward and ask for help to the company. And that really should be the the way forward.

Protagonist

Thank you for sharing those insights, Gigi. It's important to recognize how differently survivors can react in the workplace, whether it's by overworking to find a sense of safety or facing absenteeism due to the impacts of violence. Addressing these challenges is crucial not just for the individuals but for creating a healthier work environment overall. I think I'll be thinking about this for a while.

Can you highlight any specific initiatives or strategies that have been effective in creating safer and more supportive environments for domestic violence survivors in the workplace?

Gigi Guizzo

00: 13:45

Yes. So, one specific project, as I say, it's a while back it was the CARFproject. We did a poster, which I still recommend. It's from 2016, but it has some basic steps, five steps that are interconnected that companies can take or should take or should take into consideration to take, if they want to become active, which I would highly recommend.

(Music)

So the the five points are not necessarily in that order. One is to create a policy and a plan, a strategy in the company. So how do I do that? Some initial research of what there is in my context is important. So what NGOs are there in my context who could give me support, training and so on? What national legal framework, etc.? Then of course staff training. So this is really crucial. People need to be trained. They need to be experts in the company to, to know how to, to implement that. Then there need to be some internal channels. All these things are of course part usually anyway, of human resources activities around equality plans. So, this shouldn't come as a, as a totally new thing, but it's just thinking in, in those equality plans also around domestic violence, not just about violence in the workplace. Then once these things are in place, it's raising awareness. That's the company is open to. Yeah, and then, of course, engage and collaborate actively with expert organizations in one's surroundings. So that's really the crucial one, I would say. So companies or staff in companies should not feel that they can be first responders. So, if somebody comes to me and since I've been campaigning around this, more and more people have come forward to me and I'm always careful to not feel that I am the expert who can advise them what to do. Because I'm not trying psychologist. I'm not a trained victim support first responder. So, what I need to know is who to refer them to be off course open to to listening if I can and have also the space to have boundaries if I need to.

Protagonist

Thank you for outlining those key steps, Gigi. It's clear that creating a structured approach through policy, training, and collaboration is vital for companies wanting to support domestic violence survivors. Your emphasis on awareness and knowing when to refer individuals to experts highlights the importance of a well-rounded strategy.

Looking ahead, how do you envision the future of workplace support for domestic violence survivors, and what role do you believe collaborative efforts will play in achieving this vision?

Gigi Guizzo

00:16:26

I think in the in the present, some great steps have been made over the last few years across Europe through European policies. I think we see more and more in different countries companies being encouraged by the government, by national laws to actually have equality plans that include gender-related violence prevention. They of course focus more usually on the workplace, but there is a space there, I think, to include violence in the private sphere, which is absolutely needed. As I say, I think it's it's something that doesn't stay in the private sphere, but it carries over to to the workplace. I think there's definitely space there and there's strides being made. And actually today we heard from Terry Nicholson from International Security Expert that what was she saying? Collaboration means

success. And I think that's that's definitely the way forward for, for domestic violence, victims supports to make sure that they they get that support at the company. And I would like to add here, which we've heard today at the at the conference a lot is two things. One, that NGOs should be sought for, for giving support, helping. But we've also heard that many of them are experiences 20%-25% cuts to funding. So I think here is a great opportunity for companies to actually give back and not just ask for the help from NGOs, but actually to create collaborations where the companies pay for training, pay for services, pay for NGOs to actually come into the company and help them with their plans, which also already happens. So, this is not something I'm making up, but this is something that's happening. But maybe through that and through CSR and companies help also give some funding back to organizations who actually then can help victims.

Protagonist

Thank you for sharing those insights, Gigi. It's encouraging to hear about the progress being made in European policies and the importance of incorporating support for domestic violence into workplace equality plans. Your point about the need for collaboration, especially when NGOs are facing funding cuts, it just highlights a critical opportunity for companies to step in and support these organizations while also benefiting their own employees.

For my final question, what advice would you give to individuals and organizations looking to take proactive steps in supporting domestic violence survivors in their workplace?

Gigi Guizzo

00:18:56

As I mentioned before, I think first of all, do the basic research of what's around me. So, in my local context, who is there active in domestic violence support? What helplines exists? What national government support exists? Look also at unions, for example. Many of them have specific gender-related or gender-based violence support services. Those are great starting point to give some basic information. From there on, do some basic training and then you can start thinking about a plan, a strategy. As a company, you start with a plan. You have to have some staff that is actively engaged in that. If you're an individual in your organization, you can find out what's already in place. And if it isn't, it can be an opportunity to start an equality Commission or start activating something, depending on, of course, the size of the company, on the resources available and so on. So yeah, and maybe here I could just mention the different projects that I've been involved in. So, there's the Active project. There's a toolkit and a guide for companies. This is a recent project, active project.eu If I don't misremember. Then there's the CERV Daphne Project, which has a poster with the five steps and also some best practices. And then there's the SEA project, which I wasn't involved in, but colleagues that I know, that also has some ideas for companies. And then

the USBreact.eu project, which was specifically for universities. So, what universities can do to support staff to support victims of sexual violence, and domestic violence.

Protagonist

Thank you for those practical insights, Gigi. It's clear that doing local research and understanding the existing support systems are crucial first steps for organizations. Your suggestions about training and activating equality commissions are empowering for individuals looking to make a difference in their workplaces. It's great to hear about the various projects you've been involved in, as they offer valuable resources for companies to implement effective strategies benefiting everybody in the workplace.

This has been a truly engaging conversation, and I appreciate you sharing your expertise with us today. Thank you for being here!

Gigi Guizzo

00:21:21

Thank you.

[Soundscape: restaurant + typing]

Protagonist

3, 2, 1... started

(Music)

As the train pulls away from Malaga, I find myself enveloped in a swirl of thoughts. THankfullt the train isn't too busy today. I have space to reflect on the conversation I just had. The vibrant colors of this coastal city are fading in the distance, but the insights I gained today will stay with me long after I've left. My conversation with Gigi opened my eyes to the urgent need for collaboration in supporting domestic violence survivors in the workplace. It's unsettling to think about how many individuals are silently struggling, perhaps sitting next to us in the office, carrying burdens that often go unseen. Gigi's experience underscored just how vital it is for organizations to recognize their role in creating a safe environment. The fact that even a dedicated NGO lacked a strategy for supporting their own staff really highlights a gap we can't ignore.

Listening to Gigi detail practical steps—like conducting local research and establishing support networks—has given me so much to consider. I'm inspired to know that by simply being aware of our surroundings and the resources available, we can pave the way for meaningful change. The initiatives she mentioned, particularly the ones involving

collaborations with companies like Danone and others, show how real impact can be made when different entities come together for a common cause.

I feel a sense of responsibility now, knowing that I can share this knowledge with my audience and beyond. What can we do in our own communities? How can we elevate these conversations in a way that encourages proactive support for survivors? It's a question that lingers in my mind as I gaze out at the passing landscape.

As we speed toward my next destination, I'm filled with a renewed sense of purpose. There's so much work to be done, but if we all take those first steps, even the smallest ones, we can make a difference. The sun may be setting on this beautiful city, but the light of awareness is just beginning to shine.

[Soundscape: "ding"]

Narrator

As Anna continues her journey through Europe on the train, she's filled with anticipation for the new countries and experiences that await her.

(Music)

Thanks for listening! We hope you'll join us again for the next episode of the 2gether4victims podcast.

Protagonist

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

Narrator

You're listening to the 2gether4victims podcast, focusing on gender-based violence services. This podcast was produced by the 2gether4victims project, led by Victim Support Europe in collaboration with ten partner organizations and funded by the CERV program of the European Commission.

Thank you very much for listening.

(Music: exit)

Protagonist

Thank you very much for listening.

[Soundscape: train passing]

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