



**SHADOW REPORT OF THE MONITORING NETWORK AGAINST GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PLATFORM FOR ACTION, BEIJING +30**

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This report is produced by the Monitoring Network Against Gender Based Violence under a project implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives in cooperation with UN Women Albania within the United Nations Joint Program “Ending Violence Against Women in Albania” (EVAWIA) Project, a UN Joint Programme funded by the Government of Sweden and implemented by three UN agencies, namely UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA.

The report draws on the experience of member organizations of the Monitoring Network Against Gender Based Violence in Albania, with significant input from the following civil society organizations:

Albanian Center for Population and Development  
Center for Legal Civic Initiatives  
Organization Different & Equal  
The Center for Gender Justice in Albania  
The National Centre for Community Services  
Woman Forum Elbasan  
Center for Labour Rights  
Human Rights in Democracy Centre  
Mary Ward Loreto Foundation  
Roma Women Rights Centre  
Observatory for Children and Youth Rights  
Center for Development of Rural Women

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The views and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of UN Women, other UN agencies or the Government of Sweden.



## I. Introduction

The Monitoring Network Against Gender Based Violence was established in November 2017 and is composed of organizations working across various districts of the country to prevent and fight against gender based violence and domestic violence. The network monitors the implementation on international and domestic legislation standards, develops relevant shadow reports for mechanisms of conventions ratified by the Albanian state and advocates and lobbies for the implementation of recommendations addressed to Albania by international mechanisms.

The network was established in the framework of the "Establishing a non-profit organization network to better implement gender equality and gender based violence recommendations in Albania" project implemented by Center for Legal Civic Initiatives (CLCI) and funded by the European Commission, and also implemented with the support of UN Women. Currently, the Monitoring Network Against Gender Based Violence is continuing its activity under a project implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives in cooperation with UN Women Albania within the United Nations Joint Program "Ending Violence Against Women in Albania" funded by the Government of Sweden.

**Organization Different&Equal (D&E)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing high quality reintegration services for victims of trafficking, exploitation and abuse, and to improving the legal, institutional and social context to prevent and counter these violations of human rights.

**The Center for Gender Justice in Albania (CGJA)** is a non-profit, independent, non-political organization that works to empower women and girls, protect their rights and fight gender inequalities.

**Woman Forum Elbasan (WFE)** aims to protect women's rights and achieve gender equality through: education, awareness, advocacy programs; psycho-social-legal services for victims of violence, housing and other alternative services.

**The National Centre for Community Services (NCCS)** has a vital mission and a clear understanding of its identity. It is actively involved in regular, results-oriented, strategic, and self-reflective thinking and planning that aligns strategies with the mission and organizational capacity. The planning process involves stakeholders in an ongoing dialogue that ensures that the organization's mission and programs are valuable to the neighbourhood or constituency it serves.

**Center for Legal Civic Initiatives (CLCI)** CLCI's mission is to support, aid and provide legal education to the citizens, giving priority to women and girls, so as to increase their access to public institutions, and in particular in the justice system through: offering free legal services, legal education, monitoring, advocacy and lobbying using international standards, undertaking legal initiatives and networking.

**Albanian Center for Population and Development.** The Albanian Center for Population and Development (ACPD) is a non-for-profit organization, established in January 1993, which works for the improvement of policies and legislation on population issues, including the reproductive health; promotion and provision of equal access in particular for young people and marginalized groups; provision of services in the field of health through its centers in Tirana, Vlora, Shkodra.

**Center for Labour Rights, CLR.** The Center for Labour Rights (CLR) is a national organization, the only resource center in Albania, specialized and committed to the promotion and protection of labour rights, empowerment of labour movement in the country and the creation of a better labour world for the Albanian employees.

**Human Rights in Democracy Centre (HRDC)** Established in 2002, HRDC is a grassroots NGO which works on the field of protection of human rights with a special focus on women rights - through organizations of awareness events/activities, capacity building of state service providers, strengthen functioning of Referral Mechanisms, train women/girls on their rights, provide tailor made services (legal assistance, court representation, social, referral as well as DV 's case management. HRDC monitors justice system (courts), amend laws etc. Also, HRDC works on international settings through drafting of Shadow/Stakeholders Reports , lobby and advocacy on domestic and international level.

**Mary Ward Loreto Foundation.** The Mary Ward Loreto Foundation is a non-profit organization focused on women and youth. The MWL provides services for the rehabilitation of victims of trafficking in persons and gender-based violence, and preventive community activities to educate and develop the community while fostering employment opportunities for youth mainly in poor areas.

**Roma Women Rights Centre.** Roma Women's Rights Center (RWRC) is a notable organization founded in September 2012 by dedicated Roma women activists in Albania. The center's team consists of individuals with extensive experience in advocating for the rights of the Roma and Egyptian communities. The primary mission of RWRC, known as Qendra për të Drejtat e Gruas (QDGR) in Albanian, is to empower, encourage, and support Roma women and girls, as well as other women facing challenges, in safeguarding their rights and the rights of children. The organization is committed to combating all forms of discrimination and exploitation while promoting awareness of the vital roles that women and girls play in both society and the family structure.

**Observatory for Children and Youth Rights.** The Observatory for Children and Youth Rights ([Observatory](#)) was established in 2013 and it is a non-governmental organization monitoring the situation of children and youth in Albania, while following strategies and policies contributing to the application of child and youth rights within the country. Through its country-wide distribution, the Observatory serves as a forum for research, education and advocacy, while collaborating with local, central and international institutions and donors to promote child and your welfare through studies, analyses and awareness-raising campaigns.

**Center for Development of Rural Women (CDRW)**

The Center for Development of Rural Women (CDRW) places special attention to the empowerment of the role of women and girls living in rural areas, thus increasing the level of legal information on the prevention and protection from domestic violence and gender-based violence in rural areas of Tirana and Durrës regions.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

NSGE	National Strategy for Gender Equality
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
OPMIP	Order for Preliminary Measures of Immediate Protection
DCM	Decision of Council of Ministers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
AWEN Network	Albanian Women Empowerment Network
PO	Protection Order
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoHSP	Ministry of Health and Social Protection
GoA	Government of Albania
FC	Family Code
INSTAT	Official Institute of Statistical Data in Albania

## II. PARALEL REPORT ON CHAPTER III FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE, STIGMA AND STEREOTYPES

### Executive Summary

The **Parallel Report of the Monitoring Network Against Gender-Based Violence** evaluates Albania's progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing +30), focusing specifically on Chapter III: Freedom from Violence, Stigma, and Stereotypes. Prepared by a coalition of civil society organizations, the report provides a comprehensive analysis of gender-based violence (GBV) in Albania, assessing its prevalence, the effectiveness of current interventions, and the challenges that persist. It highlights efforts under the UN Joint Program "Ending Violence Against Women in Albania," supported by the Government of Sweden, and sheds light on the systemic gender inequalities that continue to affect women and girls disproportionately.

Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue in Albania, manifesting in various forms such as domestic violence, digital violence, early marriages, femicide, and human trafficking. These forms of violence, while long-standing, have evolved with societal and technological changes, presenting new challenges for prevention and response. Vulnerable groups, including Roma and Egyptian women, individuals with disabilities, and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, face additional barriers due to intersecting layers of marginalization and limited access to support services.

The report notes significant strides in aligning Albania's legal framework with international standards, including the Istanbul Convention, and in implementing national strategies such as the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2021–2030). However, it identifies persistent gaps in enforcement, inconsistencies in institutional capacity, and limited financial resources for addressing GBV effectively. While national awareness campaigns, including the "16 Days of

Activism Against Gender-Based Violence," have raised public consciousness, outreach to rural areas and marginalized communities remains insufficient. Furthermore, support systems, such as Coordinated Referral Mechanisms (CRMs), are under-resourced and lack the necessary training to address emerging forms of violence, particularly digital abuse.

The report emphasizes the need for systemic reforms to address these challenges. Legal frameworks must be revised to explicitly define and criminalize new forms of violence, such as digital violence and femicide, ensuring alignment with international standards. Support for marginalized groups should be enhanced by developing targeted programs that provide equitable access to legal, social, and housing services. Institutional capacity must be strengthened through specialized training for law enforcement, judiciary members, and CRM staff to improve the handling of complex and emerging cases.

Prevention efforts require expansion, particularly in rural areas where awareness and resources are limited. This includes integrating gender equality education into school curricula and training educators to address GBV effectively. Sustainable funding for civil society organizations (CSOs) is critical to ensure the continuity of services and programs. Simplified funding mechanisms and increased financial support from the state are essential to address bureaucratic barriers that currently limit the reach of these organizations. Improved data collection and monitoring systems are also necessary to provide a clearer understanding of GBV's scope and inform evidence-based policymaking.

The report concludes with a call for coordinated and inclusive action to combat GBV in Albania. By addressing systemic gaps, strengthening legal and institutional frameworks, and supporting civil society, Albania can make significant progress toward achieving gender equality. These efforts are essential to ensure that women and girls are free from violence, stigma, and stereotypes, enabling them to live with dignity and security.

#### **15. OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WHICH FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, AND IN WHICH SPECIFIC CONTEXTS OR SETTINGS, HAS YOUR COUNTRY PRIORITIZED FOR ACTION?**

Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent forms of human rights violations, primarily affecting women and girls. In Albania, phenomena such as domestic violence, digital violence, early marriages, and femicide remain at the center of national concerns and institutional priorities. Data provided by institutions and civil society organizations indicate a concerning increase in such forms of violence, which result in serious physical, psychological, and social consequences for the victims.

Albania has undertaken to comply with the Istanbul Convention and to align its legal framework with European and international standards. In view of this, initiatives to enhance domestic violence laws, establish case management mechanisms, and strengthen the justice system for victims have been carried out. However, reality remains challenging. The prevalence of psychological and emotional violence, its combination with physical violence, and the impact of technology on new forms of violence, such as digital violence, highlight the need for new and robust measures. In the Albania 2024 Progress Report, the

European Commission continues to view violence against women and girls in Albania as a pressing issue to be addressed.<sup>1</sup>

This section of the report provides an overview of the prioritized forms of gender-based violence addressed in Albania, based on the reports by civil society organizations, statistics, legal developments, and institutional challenges. The selection of these priority areas was informed by the need to address the forms of violence with the greatest impact and which represent specific challenges in the Albanian context. Taking into consideration violence trends, the report covers some of the most concerning areas: domestic violence, digital violence, assisted violence, violence against women in politics, early marriages, femicide, etc.

The legal framework and recent updates thereof indicate that Albania has prioritized various forms of gender-based violence.<sup>2</sup> At the strategic level, protecting victims of violence and granting them specific rights constitute part of the policy goals under the National Strategy for Gender Equality (NSGE) 2021-2030. The “NSGE 2021-2030” ranks fourth in the series and reflects the special attention Albania pays to gender equality and reducing gender-based and domestic violence, considering the appropriate addressing thereof as a prerequisite toward a sustainable development. Specifically, Goal III **“Reduction of all forms of harmful practices, gender-based violence, and domestic violence”** focuses on the need to take measures to prevent and combat violence against women, as well as to facilitate the integration of victims of domestic and gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup>

However, the review conducted by civil society organizations emphasizes the issues pertaining to the actual implementation of the legal framework and strategic commitments and the identified gaps in the existing legal framework. As an example, during the 2020-2023 period, the “Different & Equal” Center has assisted in a considerable number of cases involving domestic violence, sexual abuse, and human trafficking, which indicates an increase in awareness and in the reporting of such phenomena in Albania. Statistics show an ongoing increase in the number of addressed cases, from 41 domestic violence and sexual abuse cases in 2020, to 119 cases in 2023. Furthermore, there has been a notable increase in the number of victims of trafficking, involving different forms of exploitation, such as sexual exploitation, forced labor, criminal activities, and begging. Such data do not only highlight the phenomenon’s extent, but also the ongoing challenge to improve the protection and rehabilitation of victims. In particular, the increased number of new cases, specifically in 2023 (52 new cases of trafficking), underscores the need for a coordinated and

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2024), Albania Progress Report, p. 39, accessible on: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68\\_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> - Law No. 125/2020 "On Some Addenda and Amendments to Law No. 9669, dated 18.12.2006 “On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations”, as amended. See: <https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Ligj-Nr.125-2020-Shtesa-dhe-ndryshime-te-LDHF-6996-2016.pdf>

- DCM No. 327, dated 02.06.2021 “On the Work Coordination Mechanism among Responsible Authorities for the Referral of Cases of Domestic Violence and Relevant Proceedings, for purposes of Supporting Violence Victims’ Rehabilitation” repealing DCM No. 334/17.2.2011 “National Work Coordination Mechanism for the Referral and Addressing of Domestic Violence Cases and Relevant Proceedings Rules”. See: <https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/VKM-Nr.-327-dat%C3%AB-2.06-00000002.pdf>

- General Instruction of the Prosecutor General No. 17/2020 “On the Effective Investigation and Criminal Prosecution of Violence against Women, Domestic Violence, and Hate-based Violence”.

- General Instruction of the Prosecutor General No. 8, dated 15.11.2021, “On the Effective Investigation and Prosecution of Criminal Offenses involving Juveniles in Conflict with the Law, Victim and/or Witness”.

- Law No. 35, dated 16.04.2020 "On Some Addenda and Amendments to Law No. 7895, dated 27.1.1995, “Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania”.

- Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 400, dated 30.6.2021 "On the Adoption of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 and its Action Plan”. See: [https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/WEB\\_Strategjia%20Kombetare%20-%20EN.pdf](https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/WEB_Strategjia%20Kombetare%20-%20EN.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>See, Council of Ministers, Decision No. 400, dated 30.6.2021, “On the Adoption of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2023 and its Action Plan”

effective response. Different forms of violence, including intimate partner violence, forced marriages and digital violence, indicate a change in the nature and extent of phenomena, thus giving rise to the need to strengthen protection mechanisms and to deliver specialized services to victims. The review confirms the importance of a comprehensive approach to address the complexity of violence and trafficking, ensuring effective protection and full treatment of all victims.

The following sections will include disaggregated data on each form of gender-based violence:

**Domestic violence.** Domestic violence remains one of the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence. Currently, Albania has established a legal framework that addresses domestic violence, as well as a functioning mechanism to manage domestic violence cases at municipality level. Law No. 9669/2006 “On Measures against Violence in Family Relations” has been amended four times thus far in order to address issues identified during its actual implementation and to provide effective victim protection in line with the Istanbul Convention. However, irrespective of the amendments that the Law has undergone in the past five years, it remains partially aligned with the Istanbul Convention and other international obligations.<sup>4</sup> This results in a lack of appropriate institutional and legal attention to certain forms of violence affecting primarily women and girls in Albania, such as digital violence and the threat it poses to them.

Regarding domestic violence, the Prosecutor General’s Report on Criminality<sup>5</sup> 2020-2023 indicates a notable increase in the number of domestic violence cases in 2020 and 2021, with a significant increase of 12.4% in 2021 compared with 2020. The number of murders because of family relations was largest in 2021 at 19 cases. The following chart shows the number of recorded prosecutions for the criminal offense of “Domestic Violence” as set forth under Article 130/a of the Criminal Code during 2020-2023.

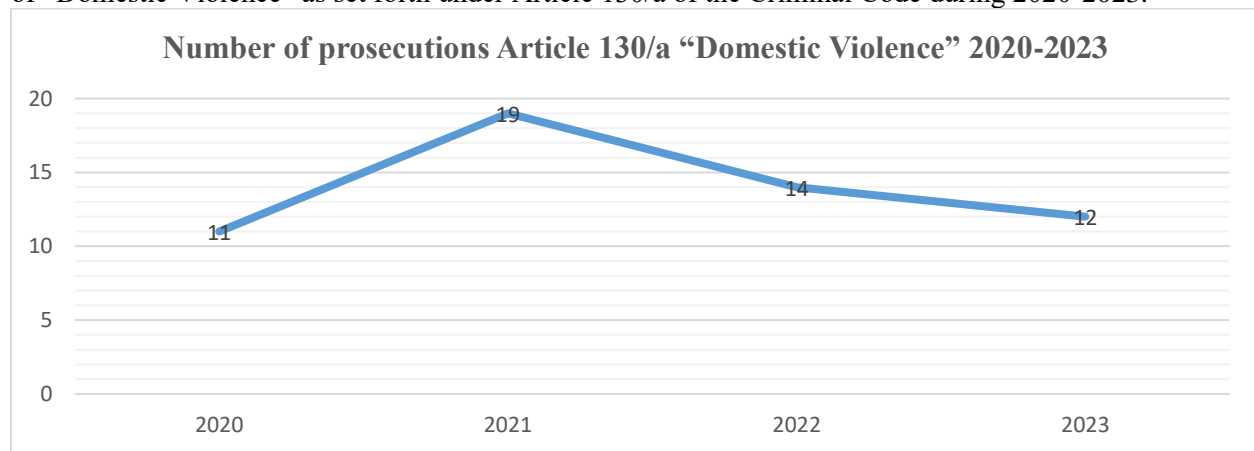


Chart 1: Number of recorded criminal prosecutions for the criminal offense of “Domestic Violence”, Article 130/a, 2020-2023.

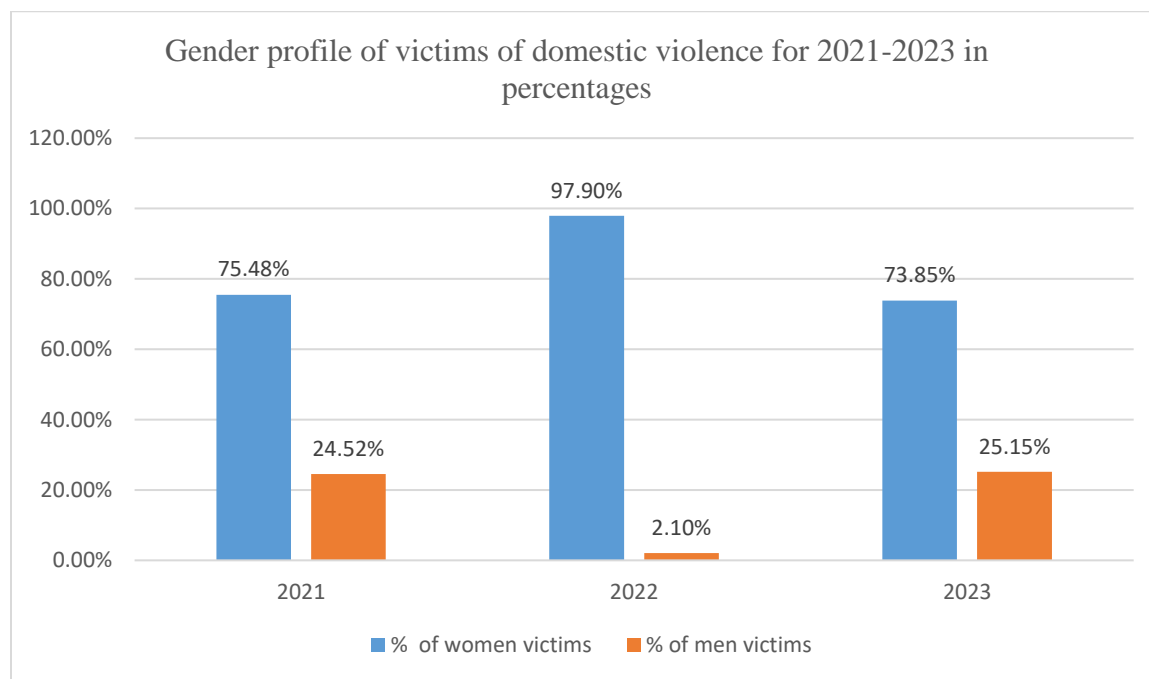
As evidenced by statistical data, in 2020 there is a notable increase of 9.74% in recorded prosecutions for the criminal offense of “Domestic Violence” as provided for under Article 130/a of the Criminal Code compared with 2019. Such increase corresponds to a period of challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on family relations and social isolation. In specific figures, 11 criminal prosecutions were recorded in 2020 for the criminal offense of murder because of family relations. In 2021, recorded prosecutions concerning domestic violence increased further by 12.4% or 19 criminal

<sup>4</sup> See also, European Commission (2024), Albania Progress Report 2024, p. 39 accessible on: [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68\\_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.pp.gov.al/Dokumente/RAPORTE\\_T\\_PROKURORIT\\_T\\_P\\_RGJITHSH\\_M/?ser=1183&rpp=2&msv=](https://www.pp.gov.al/Dokumente/RAPORTE_T_PROKURORIT_T_P_RGJITHSH_M/?ser=1183&rpp=2&msv=)

prosecutions compared with 2020. Meanwhile, in 2022 and 2023, the number of recorded criminal prosecutions - 14 and 12 respectively - decreased, which could be an indication of a potential improvement in case management, but it also raises questions about a likely underreporting of violence due to stigma and lack of trust in law enforcement institutions.

Civil society organizations have raised significant concerns on gender profiling of the victims, indicating that domestic violence remains an issue that disproportionately affects women and girls. This concern is supported by statistical data which demonstrate the predominance of women as domestic violence victims during the analyzed period. More specifically, in 2021, the General Prosecutor’s data show that 75,48 % of adult victims were women and 24,52 % were men. In 2022, 97,9 % of victims were women and 2,1 % were men. Meanwhile, in 2023, women and girls remain the main victims of domestic violence, with 73,85% being females and 26,15% being males. As shown in the graph below, there is significant gender disparity among victims of domestic violence, clearly highlighting the gendered nature of violence in Albania.



Graph no. 2 Gender profile of victims of domestic violence for 2021-2023 in percentages / Source: General Prosecution Office

When also referring to statistics on the issuance of Protection Orders, data show that the majority of domestic violence victims with a Protection Order are women and girls. More specifically, according to official statistics from the Ministry of Justice it results that during 2020-2023 a total of 5164 requests for Protection Orders were admitted, out of which 75% were issued for women/girls.<sup>6</sup>

As per the above, it is worth noting that gender profiles of victims emphasize the systemic inequalities and challenges that women and girls face within family settings. Despite some reported decreases in 2023,

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Justice, Statistical Yearbooks accessible at <https://www.drejtësia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Vjetari-2020-i-plote-per-publikim-1.pdf> / <https://www.drejtësia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/REPUBLIKA-E-SHQIP%C3%8BRIS%C3%8B-Vjetari-Statistikor-2021-pdf.pdf/> <https://www.drejtësia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Vjetari-Statistikor-2022.pdf>

domestic violence remains a significant issue necessitating sustainable approaches and effective interventions.

An identified problem is the fact that the special law against domestic violence in Albania provides only one definition of “violence”, defining violence consequences as well<sup>7</sup>, without specifying the actions or omissions considered as violence in the psychological, physical, economic context, etc.. A similar lack of definition is also evident in article 130/a of the Criminal Code<sup>8</sup>. Failure to define these actions or omissions has granted the court/prosecution office the necessary discretion and internal belief to determine which unlawful actions or omissions fall under the scope of violence.

Regarding forms of violence it is noted that the most frequently reported are psychological, emotional and physical violence. These forms of violence often occur combined with one another. Recently, due to society’s growing dependency on technology, there has been a tendency to engage in psychological, emotional violence, or to stalk victims online.

Thus, for example, in one of the cases handled by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, General Jurisdiction Court of Appeal recognized the defendant's obstruction and denial of the victim's right to meet and exercise parental responsibility with their child as a specific form of psychological violence. In the decision remarks section, the Court of Appeal stated: *“The Court of Appeal deems that the plaintiff feels psychologically violated as a result of the continuous actions of the defendant, which have made it difficult, to the point of denial, for her to meet her minor child. [...] In the Court of Appeal’s assessment, such a situation, in which the child’s mother not only faces continuous obstacles to meeting her child, but also becomes a witness to the child’s severe psychological distress and feels powerless to intervene in improving this situation, constitutes a continuous situation that violates her psychological integrity”*<sup>9</sup>. This approach by the Court ensures comprehensive and effective protection for victims of domestic violence against of all forms of abuse, in line with international standards<sup>10</sup>.

Moreover, based on the data obtained from a draft report conducted under the project “Promotion of a Responsive, Gender-sensitive, Effective Justice System through Systematic Monitoring of the Judicial System and Strategic Litigation of Gender-based Violence Matters”<sup>11</sup>, it was found that the vast majority of domestic violence cases occur within relationships stemming from marriage or cohabitation. This includes spouses, cohabitants, former spouses and former cohabitants. A high percentage of cases also includes violence from an intimate partner or former intimate partner. Based on the analysis of these cases,

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<sup>7</sup> Article 3, point 1 of Law no. 9669/2006, “On measures against violence in family relations” as amended, provides that: *“Violence’ means any action or omission of a person against another person, resulting in a violation to the physical, moral, psychological, sexual, social, economic integrity”*.

<sup>8</sup> Article 130/a of the Criminal Code, point 1, provides that: *“Battering and any other act of physical, psychological violence against a person who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, close relative (ancestors, descendants, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandsons, granddaughters, children of brothers and sisters) or close relative in-law (father-in-law, 41 mother-in-law, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, brother-in-law/sister-in-law, stepson, stepdaughter, stepfather and stepmother) or in an intimate relationship or intimate former relationship with the perpetrator, resulting in violation of his or her physical, psycho-social and economic integrity, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to three years”*.

<sup>9</sup> Decision No. 211 (32024-8327), dated 12.11.2024 of the General Jurisdiction Court of Appeal.

<sup>10</sup> See, *Buturugă v. Romania*, Application No. 56867/15, 11.06.2020, available at: <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22appno%22:%5B%2256867/15%22%5D,%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-201342%22%5D%7D>

<sup>11</sup> The Joint Program Project of the United Nations “Ending Violence Against Women”, funded by the Government of Sweden and implemented by three agencies of UN, namely UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA, which is implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives in cooperation with UN Women Albania.

approximately 90% of the identified victims are females, clearly confirming that domestic violence is a phenomenon rooted in gender inequality, disproportionately affecting women and girls.

Another group affected by domestic violence receiving special attention by the law against domestic violence is the elderly<sup>12</sup>. From the preliminary data of the abovementioned draft monitoring report<sup>13</sup>, out of 348 cases of domestic violence monitored, 54 involved violence against the elderly<sup>14</sup>. These cases primarily occur within the context of parent-children relationships (45 cases), between parents-in-law and daughters-in-law/sons-in-law (8 cases), and in one case involving violence between a grandmother and a granddaughter. The age of the elderly victims ranges from 55 to 80 years.

Moreover, another category particularly at risk of domestic violence are children. According to the European Commission's 2024 report,<sup>15</sup> children make up 66% of all current and potential victims of human trafficking, with 65% of them being girls, primarily from the Roma and Egyptian communities. Violence and sexual violence against children, including digital violence, remains a critical concern. In 2023, Child Protection Units handled 2163 cases of children in need of protection, including children at risk or victims of violence, abuse, negligence or exploitation. However, the number of child protection workers (only 241 across all 61 municipalities) falls far short of the actual needs, raising doubts about the ability to provide adequate protection and support for this vulnerable group. This population segment faces numerous challenges, ranging from direct violence within the family settings to violence and exploitation outside it, including trafficking and modern forms of online violence. Children often experience assisted violence, witnessing domestic violence, which negatively impacts their emotional and psychological development. In many cases, intervention for their protection is limited due to the lack of financial and human resources at local level.

These findings emphasize the complex nature of domestic violence, including different vulnerability dimensions, such as gender inequality and economic or emotional dependence within family relationships. Tackling these forms of violence requires a comprehensive approach including not only legal intervention, but also increased state funding to ensure personalized social and psycho-social support for affected groups. At the same time the data reflect the necessity for capacity-building for child protection units and improvement of coordination between institutions to ensure more effective and comprehensive protection for children and vulnerable groups in Albania. Interventions should focus not only on addressing existing cases but on preventing violence and creating a safe environment for all at-risk groups too.

**Digital violence:** Digital violence encompasses a wide range of harmful actions that occur in online spaces, including incitement to collective hatred, privacy violations, harassment, stalking, insults, unwarranted

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<sup>12</sup> Article 1, point 2 of Law no. 9669/2006, "On measures against violence in family relations" as amended, provides that: "*To guarantee protection through legal measures to members of the family who are subject to domestic violence, paying particular attention to the needs of women, girls, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, subject to this law pursuant to article 3*".

<sup>13</sup> Conducted under the project "Promotion of a Responsive, Gender-sensitive, Effective Justice System through Systematic Monitoring of the Judicial System and Strategic Litigation of Gender-based Violence Matters", the Joint Program Project of the United Nations "Ending Violence Against Women", funded by the Government of Sweden and implemented by three agencies of UN, namely UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA, which is implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives in cooperation with UN Women Albania.

<sup>14</sup> The data are obtained from the monitoring of civil court hearings related to the enforcement of Law No. 9669/2006 "On measures against violence in family relations" in First Instance Courts of General Jurisdiction of Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Shkodra, Fier, Vlora and Berat, for the period October 2023 – December 2024.

<sup>15</sup> See also, European Commission (2024), Albania Progress Report 2024, p. 40 accessible at [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68\\_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a8eec3f9-b2ec-4cb1-8748-9058854dbc68_en?filename=Albania%20Report%202024.pdf)

access to harmful content, and the dissemination of violent and offensive comments. A category particularly at risk of this form of violence is women in politics, who face digital violence due to their public profile and exposure on social media. As identified by research from the National Democratic Institute (NDI)<sup>16</sup>, in Albania as well, online violence against women in politics aims to discourage their participation, undermine their power, and minimize their influence in the public and political life. This type of violence affects not only women's private lives, but their public image and reputation too.

Civil society organizations report an increase in cases of women and girls experiencing digital violence and seeking assistance from specialized services. However, the number of reported cases remains low due to stigmatization, feelings of shame, and limited institutional responses. These challenges are also reflected in the state report, which acknowledges that some forms of gender-based violence, including digital violence, are neither adequately reported nor properly addressed in practice.<sup>17</sup>.

Gaps in the legal framework present another obstacle to effectively addressing digital violence. Existing legal provisions in the Criminal Code can currently be applied indirectly to these cases, but the lack of clear definitions and specific provisions makes prosecuting perpetrators more difficult. For instance, cases of cyberbullying, online threats, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and image manipulation remain major challenges for the legal system. In this context, civil society organizations and the state report<sup>18</sup> recommend revising the Criminal Code to impose stricter penalties for new forms of digital violence.

Improving legislation should include provisions that specifically address online harassment and stalking, cyberbullying through persistent harassment on social networks, threats, publication of personal life images, publication of manipulated intimate images<sup>19</sup>, etc., ensuring greater protection for women and girls, victims of these actions. This step is essential to address existing gaps and to ensure a stronger response to these forms of gender-based violence, which are becoming increasingly prevalent in the digital age.

Another significant problem concerns the capacities of existing mechanisms to address cases of digital violence. Members of the Coordinated Referral Mechanisms, responsible for managing domestic and gender-based violence cases, are inadequately prepared to identify, prevent, and protect victims from specific forms of violence, such as digital violence, online stalking, and assisted violence. The lack of specific knowledge and skills to handle complex cases of digital violence limits the effectiveness of these mechanisms and adversely affects the protection of victims. In this context, continuous training and capacity building for members of these mechanisms are essential to ensure a more effective and comprehensive response to this phenomenon.

***Assisted violence:*** Assisted violence has been identified in Albania as a phenomenon mainly affecting minor children within families and it encompasses situations where children witness physical, psychological, or emotional violence against another family member. This type of violence has profound consequences for the psychological and emotional development of children, negatively affecting their sense of security and well-being. Despite this, member organizations' practices of the Monitoring Network Against Gender Based Violence have identified cases where minor children exposed to assisted violence

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<sup>16</sup> National Democratic Institute (2021) Political Participation and Violence against Women in Politics in Southeastern Europe, pp. 35-36 accessible at <https://www.ndi.org/publications/violence-against-women-politics-southeastern-europe>

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Protection (2024) NATIONAL NARRATIVE REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING+30 PLATFORM FOR ACTION, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Health and Social Protection (2024) NATIONAL NARRATIVE REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING+30 PLATFORM FOR ACTION, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

were not included in the Orders for Preliminary Measures of Immediate Protection issued by the state police, nor in lawsuits requesting Immediate Protection Orders or Protection Orders.

This issue was brought to the attention of the Albanian state through one of the recommendations from the GREVIO Group of Experts in the 2017 evaluation report. However, in the 2024 GREVIO thematic report<sup>20</sup> on domestic violence, the Council of Europe expert group highlights that “...regarding the lack of systematic inclusion of child witnesses of violence in restraining and protection orders issued by courts, GREVIO notes significant progress since the adoption of the GREVIO baseline report. The authorities have introduced several legislative amendments (mainly to the Law “On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations”), including the possibility for courts to temporarily restrict custody rights of the perpetrator as part of the protection order procedure,<sup>21</sup> and an obligation to separately include children who have witnessed violence as victims, and GREVIO indicates this is a positive development<sup>22</sup>”. This positive progress serves as a solid foundation that requires further strengthening.

Nevertheless, as emphasized by the “**Human Rights in Democracy Center**” (HRDC) and various civil society organizations, significant challenges remain in the effective implementation of these provisions. HRDC has noted that certain police stations are still issuing a low number of OPMIPs for minors experiencing assisted violence. In this context, establishing a cohesive framework for implementing protective measures and ensuring that children are recognized as protected subjects in all judicial and administrative decisions is crucial. More specifically, within the framework of advocacy for the implementation of GREVIO's recommendations, the HRDC has formally addressed the General Directorate of State Police in an official letter, articulating its concern that a comprehensive review of the judicial decisions of the Court of First Instance of General Jurisdiction of Tirana for 2020-2021 has revealed a notably low number of cases of OPMIPs at certain police stations<sup>23</sup>. The Center has advised the GDSP “to implement a standardized practice for issuing protective measures by establishing the Order for Preliminary Measures of Immediate Protection for minor children experiencing assisted violence, and to ensure that minor victims of assisted violence are included in lawsuits aimed at facilitating the issuance of these measures”.

This organization has also approached the High Judicial Council to advocate for a unified approach among all courts nationwide, carefully analyzing cases of domestic violence involving minors, whether as direct victims or witnesses, addressing the need of safeguarding and supporting children by involving them in decisions regarding the confirmation of immediate protective measures, specifically the issuance of OPMIPs. The HRDC highlights that, in accordance with *Law No. 9669 dated 18.12. 2006, "On Measures against Violence in Family Relations," as amended, children are subject to special protection*<sup>24</sup>. The High Judicial Council has addressed this matter and informed<sup>25</sup> the High Court, the General Jurisdiction Court

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<sup>20</sup> GREVIO (2024) Building trust by delivering support, protection and justice; Albania's First thematic evaluation report, paragraph 128.

<sup>21</sup> Article 10, paragraph 1(j), of the amended Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations.

<sup>22</sup> Article 10, paragraph 3/1, of the Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations, introduced with the amendments of 2020.

<sup>23</sup>The HRDC study titled "The Judicial System as a Precursor in Protecting the Rights of Victims of Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence" covers the monitoring period from 2020 to 2021.

<sup>24</sup>Article 1, paragraph 2, provides that the purpose of this law is: “*To guarantee protection through legal measures to members of the family who are subject to domestic violence, paying particular attention to the needs of women, girls, children, the elderly and persons with disability, subject to this law pursuant to article 3*”

<sup>25</sup> High Judicial Council, Letter No. 6191/1.Prot, dated 27.12.2024, with the subject “Information on the letter of the Center “Human Rights in Democracy”.

of Appeal, and the 13 First Instance Courts of General Jurisdiction about the importance of including minor children, who are victims of domestic violence, in immediate protection orders or protection orders when they experience assisted violence, while also referencing the Recommendations from the GREVIO Group of Experts for Albania regarding this issue.

Further improvements are necessary to ensure that every case of assisted violence is prioritized and addressed with the utmost sensitivity, guaranteeing that all children affected by such violence are recognized as victims with full rights. Furthermore, it is crucial to provide specialized training for judges, police officers, and other professionals involved to enhance their awareness and skills in effectively managing these cases. Establishing robust protections for children in violent family environments will ensure that they have a safer future and full legal protection.

***Intimate partner violence, Domestic Violence, Including Sexual Violence and Marital Rape: Lack of consent:*** Intimate partner violence, including sexual violence and marital rape, remains a concerning and underreported phenomenon in Albania. According to the organization "Different and Equal" and member organizations of the Gender-Based Violence Monitoring Network, this form of violence is particularly challenging due to its covert nature and the cultural barriers that hinder victims from reporting the abuse. The primary victims are frequently women and girls who experience violence at the hands of current or former partners, including spouses and cohabitants.

Even with regard to sexual violence between spouses, ex-spouses, cohabitants and former cohabitants, member organizations of the Gender-Based Violence Monitoring Network raise concerns that this form of violence is underreported.<sup>26</sup>

A significant concern surrounding sexual violence within marital and cohabiting relationships is related to the legal framework, where rape is often only recognized as such solely when accompanied by the use of force or violence. Lack of consent is required as a condition only for rape between spouses or cohabitants. The use of force is also a fundamental component of the criminal offenses related to sexual violence against minors aged 14 to 18 (Article 101) and in cases of sexual violence occurring within homosexual relationships (Article 102/1). In each of these cases, the burden of proof falls on the victim, who must prove both the occurrence of violence against them and their act of resistance. This legal definition, as outlined in the Criminal Code of Albania, does not align with international standards, particularly those established in Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention, which asserts that the primary criterion for defining sexual violence should be the lack of consent, rather than the use of force. In cases of sexual violence against minors and within homosexual relationships, the law continues to predominantly rely on the concept of force, placing the burden of proof on victims to prove both violence and their resistance.

A study conducted by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives in 2023, titled "Improving Albanian Legislation in the Field of Gender Equality,"<sup>27</sup> emphasized the urgent need to revise the Albanian legal framework to ensure that its definitions of sexual violence align with international standards. This study indicates that the current definition of rape does not include lack of consent as a fundamental element, thereby limiting both

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<sup>26</sup> Inputs from the Marry Ward Loreto organization.

<sup>27</sup> Prof. Dr. Aurela Anastasi, Prof. Dr. Arta Mandro-Balili, Dr. Elona Saliaj, citizen and expert at the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, and Agustela Nini-Pavli, expert at the UN Women Office in Albania. "Improving Albanian Legislation in the Field of Gender Equality". 2023, This study was conducted as part of "Improving Albanian Legislation in the Field of Gender Equality" project, which is implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives with support from the UN Women Office and the UN Representative's Office in Albania. [https://www.qag-al.org/publikime/legal\\_review\\_report.pdf](https://www.qag-al.org/publikime/legal_review_report.pdf)

criminal prosecution and legal protection for victims. The study <sup>28</sup>suggests a series of key amendments to the existing legal framework in order to more effectively tackle sexual violence and provide effective protection and support to victims, specifically:

- **Rape of adult women:** Amending the definition of rape of adult women to be based on the lack of freely given consent, without it requiring proof of force or resistance. This amendment would require the revision of Article 102 of the Criminal Code.
- **Rape of minors aged 14-18:** Amending the definition of this criminal offense to also be based on the lack of freely given consent and remove the requirement for proof of force or resistance, in line with international standards (Article 101 of the Criminal Code).
- **Age gap between the victim and perpetrator:** In cases involving minors, particular consideration should be given to the age gap between the parties to assess the free and full consent of the victim.
- **Minimum age of consent:** Reviewing and establishing a minimum age for consent that is in line with international standards.
- **Definition of sexual violence:** Providing a detailed definition of sexual violence, including the nature of the sexual acts, the objects used, and all behaviors that constitute rape.
- **Non-consensual sexual conduct:** Incorporating into the Criminal Code a specific provision for the punishment of all forms of non-consensual sexual conduct, as outlined in the Istanbul Convention (article 36, paragraph 1, letter b).
- **Inciting non-consensual sexual conduct:** Providing for the criminal offense of inciting another person to engage in sexual acts with a third person without that person's consent
- **Involuntary sterilization and genital mutilation:** Involuntary sterilization and genital mutilation should be classified as criminal offenses.
- **Discriminatory language and content:** Reviewing Article 102/a and all associated articles on sexual crimes to remove any discriminatory language or provisions related to sexual orientation or other affiliations. Furthermore, changing the terms that describe sexual violence to better reflect the severity of these criminal offences.
- **Sentences and proportionality:** Reviewing sentences for sexual offenses, based on the principle of proportionality to reflect the true gravity of the offense.
- **Alignment of legal provisions:** Conducting a comprehensive review of all provisions pertaining to sexual crimes to ensure their alignment and uniform interpretation.

The proposed legal changes will also require a thorough consultation process with all key stakeholders in the justice system, ensuring that future reforms are comprehensive and effective. Aligning Albania's legal framework with the Istanbul Convention is crucial for safeguarding the rights of women and girls, particularly those affected by sexual violence and marital rape, and represents a vital step in promoting gender equality and upholding the fundamental human rights of women and girls.

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<sup>28</sup> This study was conducted as part of "Improving Albanian Legislation in the Field of Gender Equality" project, which is implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives with support from the UN Women Office and the UN Representative's Office in Albania. See: [https://www.qagal.org/publikime/legal\\_review\\_report.pdf](https://www.qagal.org/publikime/legal_review_report.pdf)

**Early marriages:** The Family Code (FC) stipulates that the age related to the right to marry is 18 years of age, and this is unified for both male and female genders. However, court-authorized exceptions are permitted under Article 7 of the FC, thereby creating a legal framework for marriages involving individuals under this age. In the meantime, according to the analysis undertaken by the Human Rights in Democracy Center within the "Improving Albanian Legislation in the Field of Gender Equality"<sup>29</sup> study, it is observed that the existing legislation lacks a provision stipulating the minimum age threshold below which the court cannot grant an exception to the legal age of marriage under specific circumstances. Moreover, several challenges emerge in judicial practice, including issues related to the court's initiation process, active legitimation, verification of free consent, assessment of the child's best interests, the involvement of a psychologist, the provability of "important reasons," the connection between these reasons and the minor's physical and psychological maturity, as well as the necessity of parental consent.

Early marriages have serious consequences for the rights and well-being of girls. As emphasized by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives study, these marriages undermine access to education and training, limit personal and economic development, and often lead to harmful and dangerous relationships, violating the human rights of children. These marriages often prove to be fragile and coercive, laying the foundations for situations of abuse and human trafficking<sup>30</sup>.

The study proposes a series of measures to improve the Family Code and address early marriages, including<sup>31</sup>:

- **Defining an absolute minimum age** below which marriage is not permitted, even with judicial authorization.
- **Clarifying of the criteria for "important reasons"** and their evaluation concerning the child's best interests, as well as their physical and psychological maturity.
- **Enhancing the judicial process**, including the presence of psychologists and Child Protection Units.
- **Clarifying the legitimacy of active participation** in proceedings concerning underage marriage;
- **Clarifying the form of the court inquiry** for cases with the subject matter of 'permission to marry underage';
- **Legal considerations regarding free consent** are crucial in cases of underage marriage, as well as in the assessment of the best interest of the child in court decisions.
- **Providing free legal and psychological support** for the people involved.
- **Training teachers and social workers** to identify and report cases of girls in danger.

Early marriage is a particularly troubling phenomenon in Roma and Egyptian communities, where gender inequality, poverty, and social exclusion are the main factors driving this practice. The Roma Women's Rights Center raises concerns that early and forced marriages are a prevalent issue, particularly affecting Roma girls in Albania. This phenomenon is frequently underreported and underestimated at the institutional level.

According to official INSTAT data 15 girls were married before the age of 18 in 2022. This figure does not accurately represent the reality, as the actual number is significantly higher due to underreporting, particularly within the Roma and Egyptian communities. In these communities, child marriages are

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<sup>29</sup> Prof. Dr. Aurela Anastasi, Prof.Dr. Arta Mandro-Balili, Dr. Elona Saliaj, citizen and expert at the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, and Agustela Nini-Pavli, expert at the UN Women Office in Albania. "Improving Albanian Legislation in the Field of Gender Equality". 2023, This study was conducted as part of "Improving Albanian Legislation in the Field of Gender Equality" project, which is implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives with support from the UN Women Office and the UN Representative's Office in Albania.[https://www.qag-al.org/publikime/legal\\_review\\_report.pdf](https://www.qag-al.org/publikime/legal_review_report.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, pg.6

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

frequently defended as a traditional practice, and local institutions have at times refrained from intervening, viewing the issue as a private family matter.

Despite incorporating measures to combat child marriage in its national strategies, such as the National Agenda for Children's Rights 2021–2026, the Albanian government continues to encounter challenges in their implementation. Existing laws are often not applied equally. Cases of underage marriages within the Roma and Egyptian communities are often tolerated as cultural practices; however, the absence of official data and limited access to legal services significantly hinder efforts to protect girls from these communities.

The organization "Roma Women Rights Center" recommends that an integrated approach and strong collaboration among all institutions are crucial to effectively tackle the issue of early marriage. It is recommended that teachers actively participate in reporting instances of children's school absences to child protection units and the police. This approach is advised to uphold the principle of prioritizing the best interests of the child while mitigating media exposure that could lead to further stigmatization of the Roma and Egyptian communities.

*Femicide*, defined as the killing of women and girls due to gender-related reasons, is an extreme form of gender-based violence and remains a major concern in Albania<sup>32</sup>. Between 2021 and 2023, 32 cases of femicide were reported, with 27 of the victims being killed by individuals with whom they had a pre-existing family or intimate relationship.<sup>33</sup> These cases reveal a clear pattern of persistent and normalized violence against women in familial settings and intimate relationships. However, the lack of a specific criminal offense for femicide in the Criminal Code limits the ability of the justice system to effectively address this phenomenon. This gap has been the subject of criticism from civil society organizations and the Ombudsperson institution, who argue that classifying femicide as a separate criminal offense would help prevent, investigate, and punish perpetrators of these crimes more effectively.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, the Ombudsperson's reports emphasize problems in the implementation of existing measures for the protection of victims. In many cases, the police have not issued Orders for Preliminary Measures of Immediate Protection (OPMIPs), a critical mechanism for safeguarding victims' safety. Moreover, legal aid for victims is severely lacking, particularly in rural and remote regions, which leaves women and girls without adequate support to pursue their cases in the justice system. Another worrying issue is the violation of protection orders. According to statistics from the General Directorate of State Police (GDSP), referred to in the Ombudsperson's report, during the last three years, 478 cases of violations of protection orders have been identified, divided as follows: ✓ 169 cases during 2021; ✓ 157 cases during 2022 and, ✓ 152

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<sup>32</sup> OP, Mrs. Lindita Cakoni and Mrs. Agustela Nini-Pavli, Expert, UN Women Mrs. Erinda Ballanca, Mrs. Vilma Shurdha and Mrs. Brunilda Dervishaj, from the Ombudsperson Office, Mrs. Alba Agolli and Majlinda Nesturi, from UN Women, "MURDER OF WOMEN AND GIRLS - FEMICIDE IN ALBANIA (2021-2023)", Report. This report was prepared by the Ombudsman with the support of UN Women Albania within the framework of the United Nations Joint Programme "Ending Violence against Women", funded by the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden. <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Draft%20Raporti%20per%20Femicidin%2004.12.2024.pdf> pg.11.

<sup>33</sup> OP, Mrs. Lindita Cakoni and Mrs. Agustela Nini-Pavli, Expert, UN Women Mrs. Erinda Ballanca, Mrs. Vilma Shurdha and Mrs. Brunilda Dervishaj, from the Ombudsperson Office, Mrs. Alba Agolli and Majlinda Nesturi, from UN Women, "MURDER OF WOMEN AND GIRLS - FEMICIDE IN ALBANIA (2021-2023)", Report. This report was prepared by the Ombudsman with the support of UN Women Albania within the framework of the United Nations Joint Programme "Ending Violence against Women", funded by the Government of the Kingdom of Sweden. <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Draft%20Raporti%20per%20Femicidin%2004.12.2024.pdf> pg.7

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pg. 19.

cases during 2023. These data underscore the need for continuous monitoring of compliance with protection orders to prevent the escalation of violence.”<sup>35</sup>.

Although the establishment of the Femicide Watch structure within the Ombudsman is a positive first step, its financial and logistical support remains limited, jeopardizing the sustainability of its activities. Femicide Watch seeks to monitor and analyze femicide cases to identify contributing factors and develop more effective prevention policies. However, in order to ensure a comprehensive and accurate understanding of the situation, it is essential to enhance the collection and processing of data by the police, prosecution offices, and courts.

The recommendations issued by the report of the **Center for Legal Civic Initiatives**, titled “**Murder of Women (Femicide) and Attempts for Femicide in Albania**” (2022)<sup>36</sup>, provide a clear guideline on improving the response to cases of femicide in Albania and addressing gaps in legal and institutional system. The key recommendations on addressing this phenomenon include informing victims on the rights and institutional mechanisms, raising the awareness of professionals on the dangerousness of crimes on the grounds of gender, and securing the detachment of the perpetrator from the victim through strict protection measures. Furthermore, the report highlights the importance of unifying the femicide statistics and strengthening the legal responsibility of institutions to guarantee the protection and compensation of victims. These measures aim at improving the implementation of existing legislation and building a more gender-sensitive justice system, ensuring that women and girls are more protected from violence and its consequences.

*The gender-based violence against women in politics* represents a significant barrier in realizing political rights of women candidates, voters, activists, party supporters, observers, election workers or public officials. The Observatory for Children and Youth Rights identifies violence against women during elections as a form of violence against women in politics, which affects not only the engagement of women in political and public life but their perception as legitimate and effective leaders.

According to the report, during the election period women comprised 40% of parliamentary candidates but they were mentioned only in 22% of articles and media broadcasts, whereas men comprised 78% of the coverage.<sup>37</sup> This disparity not only strengthens gender stereotypes but creates a favorable environment on violence against women in politics, reducing their impact and power in public life. Young women under 40 and those belonging to minority groups are particularly at risk due to multiple discrimination and their ongoing marginalization.<sup>38</sup>

At international level, the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has called on an equal and inclusive representation between women and men in all the decision-making

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See:

<https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Draft%20Raporti%20per%20Femicidin%2004.12.2024.pdf> f.44-45.

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.qag-al.org/ang/publication/summary\\_femicide.pdf](https://www.qag-al.org/ang/publication/summary_femicide.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> The Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, “Violence Against Women during Elections & Gender Bias in Media Coverage of April 2021 General Elections in Albania”. See: [https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/media\\_brief\\_web.pdf](https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/media_brief_web.pdf) prepared by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (Observatory) and supported by UN Women Albania under the Joint Program of the United Nations “Ending Violence Against Women” funded by the Government of Sweden through the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, p. 21

<sup>38</sup> Commission on the Status of Women, ‘Women’s Full and Effective Participation and Decision-Making in Public Life, as Well as the Elimination of Violence, for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls Agreed Conclusions’, para. 35; Inter-parliamentary Union, ‘Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians’ (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016), <https://www.ipu.org/file/5472/download?token=PjtucdkS>; O’Connell and Ramshaw, ‘Violence Against Women in Politics: Global Perspectives of a Global Issue’; Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’.

systems. In the **General Recommendation 40 (GR40)**<sup>39</sup> approved in October 2024, CEDAW clearly highlights that equal representation requires a **50-50 parity** between women and men in public, private, political, economic and digital spaces. This approach guarantees equal access for women and girls to decision-making processes at any level.

The measures to promote gender equality in politics in Albania have included mandatory rules on inclusion of women in election lists. More specifically, the law requires that a woman should be included in the first three places of election lists for the parliament, whereas a gender quota of 50% for lists of municipal councils was introduced in 2015<sup>40</sup>. As a result, now women hold 44% of seats in municipal councils. However, the existing legal framework requires further improvements to meet the international standards provided for by CEDAW. The Albanian laws should be adjusted to guarantee an equal gender representation in all levels of government and public and private sectors. In addition, stronger protection for women facing violence in politics, including those from minority or marginalized groups, should be ensured. Such change would empower a society where women are not only represented but also effectively protected in every sphere of public and private life.

The Report of the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights suggests also an improvement to the media coverage to eliminate gender bias and promote positive images of women as active participants in social, economic and political life. Furthermore, online resources to address online sexism and violence, including fast procedures on reporting and removing unwanted or harmful materials, are required<sup>41</sup>.

To address this phenomenon effectively, an integrated approach combining the implementation of law on gender-based violence, public awareness and specific support for women in politics and for women rights defenders, is required. The implementation of CEDAW recommendation for 50% representation of women in politics would be an important step towards gender equality and elimination of violence and discrimination against women in the public sphere.

***Violence against women and girls in public premises:*** This phenomenon includes sexual harassments and physical violence occurring in public spaces, such as streets, public transport and workplaces. This type of violence remains often unreported and with no legal response as the victims of such form of violence remain silent and do not report the events due to fear, shame or lack of trust to authorities.

***Trafficking in women and girls:*** The trafficking in women and girls continues to be a significant challenge in Albania with a spread of cases of sexual exploitation, forced labor and criminal activities. Regardless of the ongoing efforts, the country still cannot meet the minimum standards in the elimination of trafficking as reported in the US Department of State Report on Trafficking in Persons (TIP Report 2024), which puts Albania in Level 2.<sup>42</sup>

The civil society organizations, such as “Different & Equal”, have played a key role in providing services to victims of trafficking through years. In 2023, this organization assisted 125 victims or potential victims of trafficking with 52 of them being new cases. The forms of abuse include sexual exploitation, forced

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<sup>39</sup> **General recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems (CEDAW/C/GC/40)**

<sup>40</sup> Election Code of the Republic of Albania.

<sup>41</sup> The Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, “Violence Against Women during Elections & Gender Bias in Media Coverage of April 2021 General Elections in Albania”. See: [https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/media\\_brief\\_web.pdf](https://albania.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/media_brief_web.pdf) prepared by the Observatory for Children and Youth Rights (Observatory) and supported by UN Women Albania under the Joint Program of the United Nations “Ending Violence Against Women” funded by the Government of Sweden through the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund, p. 21

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/albania/>

labor, drug dealing, begging and other criminal activities. Meanwhile, the “fake marriage” phenomenon affecting Roma women and girls in particular is another form of abuse used for trafficking and exploitation.

The reports of organizations such as the Roma Women Rights Center highlight that this community is at large risk of trafficking due to gender inequality, poverty and social exclusion. The Roma women and girls are often exploited for prostitution in Albania and the region, being initially attracted by employment offers as ballerinas or waitresses and then being forced to provide other services.

As for the victims of trafficking, Albania has implemented rehabilitation and re-integration programs through specialized centers. One of those centers, funded by the government and international donors, such as IOM, has provided specialized services to more than 300 victims during the period 2018-2022. The programs have included legal, psychosocial and professional support, assisting victims to regain control over their life and to integrate into the society (IOM Albania, 2022).<sup>43</sup> However, an important lesson is the need for more resources to prevent trafficking and to broaden access to such services for the victims in rural areas.

Another concerning aspect is the inclusion of Roma and Egyptian women and girls in network of human trafficking or prostitution. Due to poverty and quite often under threats, many of them end up working in night clubs and luxury clubs in Albania and Kosovo. At first they are offered to work as ballerinas or waitresses, and then they are forced to provide even other services to clients. There is an immediate need to establish effective mechanisms, to strengthen investigations on trafficking and to provide legal, economic and psychological support to these women from Roma community, who are victims of such severe form of abuse and violence.

In reference to the latest information published by the US Department of State Report (TIP Report 2024),<sup>44</sup> the Government of Albania does not fully meet the minimum standards on the elimination of trafficking but it is making significant efforts to do that. According to this report, one of the key recommendations on improving the situation include: strengthening of investigation and prosecution of traffickers, including officials collaborators; ensuring harsh sentences to traffickers; and establishing specialized structures for the investigation and prosecution of trafficking. In addition, the increase of financing on shelters for victims and re-integration services, including long-term housing professional training, are a priority. The national referral mechanisms should operate effectively, whereas the training of frontline officials on proactive identification of victims is required.

Finally, a significant challenge remains the lack of a specific law on victims of trafficking. Despite the lobbying work of civil society related to this matter, such a law has not been approved yet. A good practice related to special laws is Law No. 9669, dated 18.12.2006, “On measures against violence in family relations”, as amended, and Law No. 18/2017 “On the Rights and Protection of the Child”. The adoption of a special law is crucial to secure full protection and a victim-focused approach. This would help in aligning preventive and supportive measures, and in improving the prosecution of traffickers and protection of victims at risk.

## ***16. WHAT ACTIONS HAVE BEEN A PRIORITY FOR YOUR COUNTRY IN ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS?***

The civil society organizations recognize the priority actions taken by the Albanian state to address gender-based violence in the last five years, as mentioned in the state report. These organizations evaluate the progress and steps undertaken for the improvement of the legal framework, policies and action plans at

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<sup>43</sup> <https://nexusinstitute.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Albanian-Stages-of-reintegration.-A-reintegration-guide.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-trafficking-in-persons-report/albania/>

central and local level, awareness-raising campaigns organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and international organizations, such as the agencies of the United Nations and the World Health Organization, as well as initiatives on strengthening the capacities of gender-based violence response system professionals, including domestic violence.

In reference to their activity, the civil society organizations raise some issues that need to be addressed onwards. When providing services to the victims of domestic violence, it is important to implement the principles of service provision without delay, provision of services without costs, and the simplification of procedures to benefit them.

The geographical distribution of services and access of victims from marginalized groups to such services comprise two important matters that require immediate response. The state report highlights the strengthening of services for victims of domestic violence, but their number should be increased and the geographical distribution of services should be enhanced to increase the accessibility of services from victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence. More priority should be given to certain groups in need, such as: Women and girls from rural areas due to the lack of services and social stigma; women from Roma and Egyptian communities, and those from groups with special needs (for example, women with disabilities), women and girls from the LBTIQ+ community, women and girls facing sexual harassment in educational institutions and workplaces.

It is recommended to improve the provision of services for disabled victims of domestic violence, including victims with mental health issues (lack of access and infrastructure), victims from Roma and Egyptian communities, the elderly, victims from rural areas. It is also recommended that the service is specialized for each group, on the basis of needs and the best interest of the individual.

The number of existing services is not sufficient; they are not easily reached from groups in need; there is no sufficient coordination among institutions to guarantee the services for victims; the capacities of the existing services staff on addressing cases of victims of domestic violence from groups in need should be strengthened, and in some cases the victims are not informed about the existing services.

The legislation governing the access of victims of violence to accommodation services, such as emergency and residential shelters, needs to be revised so that victims can benefit from services without being obliged to use legal means or being equipped with protection orders. Currently, DCM No. 518, dated 4.9.2018, "On Community and Residential Social Care Services, Criteria, Procedures to Receive such Services and Personal Expense Amount for Organized Service Beneficiaries" limits the benefit of service only to victims equipped with an Immediate Protection Order (IPO) or Protection Order, excluding the victims equipped only with an Order on Preliminary Measures of Immediate Protection (OPM-IP) and those who do not report violence.

This limitation is in contradiction to the Istanbul Convention standards, which requires that the benefit of services is not related to the fact whether victims report violence or follow legal means. It is recommended that the DCM is aligned with Law No. 9669 (as amended) and to ensure an inclusive approach for the protection of victims, providing equal access to shelters and other specialized services. This was one of the recommendations of GREVIO Team of Experts for Albania, published in September 2024. GREVIO has encouraged the Albanian authorities about the specialized support services (Article 22) (paragraph 112) to:

ensure that all women victims of gender-based violence and their children, irrespective of their age, have access to emergency and long-term shelters, irrespective of their will to report the violence<sup>45</sup>;

- With regard to access of victims of domestic violence to social housing programs, the victims of gender-based violence encounter challenges in application due to the bureaucracies and application to services in e-Albania. The public services digitalization is followed by issues of accessibility for victims of gender-based violence due to the lack of education, lack of skills and financial restrictions to access documentation to e-Albania.

Furthermore, the free legal aid, although provided for by law, remains limited due to the lack of information and sufficient resources. Based on monitoring, a very small number of victims have benefitted secondary legal aid guaranteed by state. Based on the draft report conducted by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives under the “Promotion of a responsive, gender-sensitive and effective justice system in Albania through systematic monitoring of the judicial system and strategic litigation of gender-based violence matters” project<sup>46</sup>, out of 348 monitored cases, only 80 of them have been represented by a legal defender/lawyer in the process of issuing an immediate order of protection/protection order<sup>47</sup>. Out of 80 cases represented by a lawyer in the civil proceedings of protection from domestic violence, only 6 of those victims have benefitted secondary legal aid guaranteed by the state. The representation for 23 cases has been provided by lawyers from civil society organizations and in 51 cases the victims were represented by private lawyers contacted by them themselves. The secondary legal aid and/or exclusion from legal fees and expenses for other judicial matters is practically benefitted from victims of domestic violence for whom an immediate protection order or protection order by a final court decision has been issued<sup>48</sup>. In cases when the status of a victim of domestic violence has been recognized by a final court decision (the perpetrator of domestic violence offense has been found guilty, in accordance with Article 130/a of the Criminal Code), but they were not issued a protection order or its effects have terminated, the court has not approved their request for secondary legal aid. In such cases, the victim has been guided by the court to be a beneficiary as per Article 12 of Law No. 111/2017, as a person with insufficient income and wealth. Such an approach limits the number of cases of victims to domestic violence to benefit de facto from the legal aid service guaranteed by the state.

To improve the legal aid for victims of domestic violence, it is essential to increase the number of Centers of Primary Legal Aid Services managed by the Ministry of Justice, and to strengthen the work of law clinics and to increase the financial support for authorized civil society organizations. In addition, it is recommended to facilitate the application process for those organizations and to review the legislation with the aim of providing not only primary but secondary legal aid as well, while addressing the most urgent needs of victims.

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<sup>45</sup> GREVIO, First Thematic Evaluation Report, p. 52, <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-s-first-thematic-evaluation-report-on-albania/1680b1a0ca>

(GREVIO further strongly encourages the Albanian authorities to (paragraph 112): a. ensure that all women victims of gender-based violence and their children, irrespective of their age, have access to emergency and long-term shelters, irrespective of their will to report the violence;)

<sup>46</sup> The Joint Program Project of the United Nations “Ending Violence Against Women”, funded by the Government of Sweden and implemented by three agencies of UN, namely UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA, which is implemented by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives in cooperation with UN Women Albania.

<sup>47</sup> The data are obtained from the monitoring of civil court hearings related to the enforcement of Law No. 9669/2006 “On measures against violence in family relations” in First Instance Courts of General Jurisdiction of Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Shkodra, Fier, Vlora and Berat, for the period October 2023 – December 2024.

<sup>48</sup> Evidenced by the case-law supported by the Center for Legal Civic Initiatives.

Request No. 47, dated 7.1.2025, of the Free Legal Aid Directorate, “On announcing the call for financing the authorized NGOs to provide primary legal aid for 2025”<sup>49</sup> aims to increase the number of civil society organizations supported financially to provide primary legal aid, while planning the inclusion of 5 organizations for 2025. However, the application process remains challenging due to the burden of required documentation, irrespective of recommendations to facilitate it. The current criteria can exclude the experienced organizations that are already providing primary legal aid with the support of donors. In addition, even though the organizations providing online or secondary legal aid can apply for funding on primary legal aid, this division remains complex and may limit the application opportunity for some organizations.

The courts<sup>50</sup> encounter challenges related to the observance of procedural deadlines and provision of appropriate support for victims of domestic violence. Practices such as mediation in cases of violence are in contradiction to the Istanbul Convention and require immediate intervention. The civil society organizations have played a key role in monitoring courts and have called on improving training for judges and judicial staff.

The campaigns on raising awareness on gender-based violence and empowering victims to report cases are a crucial element of the Albanian state efforts. The ongoing training of violence response system professionals, including police, judges and social services, is a priority to ensure that such institutions are prepared to effectively address cases of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

The observance of the rights of victims of domestic violence also requires important improvements. Breaches of procedural deadlines during the adjudication of matters on the issue of IPO/POs were noted, and unjustified delays in the processes of providing secondary legal aid. The 48-hour deadline on the issue of decision for IPO is often insufficient to ensure the appointment of a lawyer, leaving the victims without timely legal representation. To address this issue, it is crucial to consider an administrative approach, which would allow faster decision-making on providing a lawyer free of charge. In the meantime, issues to the right of children meeting the perpetrator parent during the protection order validity period have been identified. The lack or inaccuracy in determining meetings, and the non-enforcement of court decisions for such cases lead to conflict situations between the victims and the perpetrator, putting in danger the safety and well-being of children and victims.

Finally, although being an important step, the digitalization of public services has brought challenges for victims who have no access or skills to use electronic platforms. The lack of access to technology, the low level of digital skills, and the financial limitations to secure equipment and Internet connection exclude many victims, in particular those living in rural areas or from marginalized groups. Furthermore, the complex application processes and the need for full documentation in platforms like e-Albania become quite often additional barriers for women and girls that request assistance or protection. These challenges underline the need to simplify digital procedures, to increase access to technological resources and to provide assistance to groups in need, guaranteeing that the digitalization process is inclusive and equal to all.

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<sup>49</sup> Request of the Free Legal Aid Directorate No. 47, dated 7.1.2025, <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/bnjz/2025/1/bce54f76-105c-4485-b733-2d468351ba96>

<sup>50</sup> Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, Woman Forum Elbasan, “Woman to Woman” Shkodra, “Women, Peace and Security Association” Durrës, Human Rights in Democracy Center, members of the Monitoring Network against Gender-Based Violence, and other organizations, such as “Vatra” Psychosocial Center Vlora and “Protection of Urban and Rural Women Rights” Association, Berat.

## **17. IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WHAT STRATEGIES HAS YOUR COUNTRY USED TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE?**

“Reducing gender-based violence and domestic violence” constitutes one of the main goals of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030<sup>51</sup>. Strategies in other fields also include strategic objectives related to it, such as the Ministry of Interior’s Strategic Plan for Gender Equality.<sup>52</sup> This objective also pertains to the strategies of civil society organizations operating in the relevant field.

In terms of preventing gender-based violence, in the past five years Albania has employed three key methodologies: raising public awareness and enhancing education and mobilization at local level by way of combining policies and practices that involve all three methodologies. This was facilitated by the cooperation among state institutions, national civil society organizations, supported by and with the cooperation of international organizations, involving various actors.

- With respect to awareness-raising, “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” has been one of the key campaigns, which is organized annually during November-December. The campaign has been institutionalized and involves a wide participation of all actors. Usually, its aim concerns raising awareness about the prevention of violence against women and girls by promoting gender equality through awareness-raising activities in the media, at schools and in the local communities. Funded by the Government and international partners, the campaign has had an impact on the increase in the reports of violence cases and has highlighted the need to enhance the involvement of rural communities in the related efforts. A number of activities are also carried out in March, also known as the Women’s Month.

Such campaigns have also focused on including rural residents. These have been in the focus of civil society. However, the interventions of state institutions in carrying out the initiatives in such areas have been limited. We have noted that women and girls living in rural areas are affected by a significant lack of basic information on gender-based violence. To make matters worse, girls are forced to stop attending school after completing compulsory education. As a consequence, women have limited information about the Albanian and international legislations on the protection of victims of gender-based violence, legal means, and support services available. Therefore, it is necessary to further the work on assessing the impact of awareness campaigns (GREVIO) in order to highlight useful lessons. NGOs are making efforts to establish this assessment system.

- Another crucial step involves the inclusion of gender equality and gender-based violence prevention topics in primary and secondary school curricula. This step aims at educating children and youth about mutual respect and gender equality by ensuring a sustainable influence on changing the attitudes that facilitate violence normalization. With the support of the Ministry of Education and international organizations, these efforts have contributed toward raised awareness among youth. We have also noted that several university programs address this topic.

However, greater attention is required in this regard. In particular, ongoing training of teachers and updating of educational materials is required (UNDP, 2018)<sup>53</sup>. On the other hand, it is imperative to combat the phenomenon of girls dropping out of school. The organizations working in rural areas report that a considerable number of girls do not attend secondary education. Therefore, it is necessary for future work to focus on avoiding the factors that lead to girls dropping out of school, as well as providing gender-based violence prevention education.

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<sup>51</sup> See: [https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WEB\\_Strategjia-Kombetare-AL.pdf](https://shendetesia.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/WEB_Strategjia-Kombetare-AL.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> See: [https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Plani\\_Strategjik\\_per\\_Barazine\\_Gjinore\\_i\\_Ministrise\\_se\\_Brendshme.pdf](https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Plani_Strategjik_per_Barazine_Gjinore_i_Ministrise_se_Brendshme.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> See: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/Dhuna-ndaj-Grave-dhe-Vajzave-studimi-2018.pdf>

- As regards local-level initiatives, it should be noted that Albania has established domestic violence prevention networks by training local authorities, the police, and social service providers to identify and address cases of violence. Such networks, funded by local budgets and international partners, have enabled the addressing of reported cases.

With respect to the above, a critical lesson learned comprises the need for better coordination among central and local institutions to maximize the effectiveness of measures (Ministry of Interior’s Strategic Plan for Gender Equality, 2024)<sup>54</sup>.

- Several measures have been taken in the past 5 years to address the needs of special groups, such as women and girls with disabilities, by delivering specific training and support services. Moreover, projects aimed at the economic and social empowerment of women and girls from Roma and Egyptian communities have been implemented, in order to reduce their vulnerability to violence (UNDP, 2018)<sup>55</sup>. Such initiatives have highlighted the importance of a comprehensive approach to ensuring equal protection for all women and girls<sup>56</sup>.

However, the inclusion of marginalized communities, such as Roma and Egyptian women, as well as women with disabilities, remains challenging. Therefore, investments and cross-sectoral cooperation should increase in order to develop a more comprehensive and sustainable approach.

- The strategy followed by civil society organizations has focused on two objectives: 1) including boys and men in activities against gender-based violence; 2) informing women and girls in rural areas<sup>57</sup>. Civil society has played a key role in implementing perpetrator programs, although they have limited coverage and effectiveness. By way of various projects, NGOs have promoted the involvement of men and boys in the fight against gender-based violence, leading to positive changes in societal attitudes and social norms.

Civil society organizations continue to work to this end in rural areas, too, but interventions are carried out through projects, which means that they are limited in terms of time and not sustainable. Consequently, measures remain fragmented and insufficient to ensure a sustainable impact. It should be noted that there is a lack of sufficient financial resources and capacities, especially at local level. This results in weak protective structures for women and girls or in a complete lack thereof. As a result, it is necessary to increase the budgets allocated to supporting victims, with greater focus on a preventive approach, which does not always constitute a priority for institutions.

## **18. IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WHAT ACTIONS HAS YOUR COUNTRY TAKEN TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (E.G. ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT, ONLINE STALKING, NON-CONSENSUAL SHARING OF INTIMATE IMAGES)?**

<sup>54</sup> See: [https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Plani\\_Strategjik\\_per\\_Barazine\\_Gjinore\\_i\\_Ministrise\\_se\\_Brendshme.pdf](https://mb.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Plani_Strategjik_per_Barazine_Gjinore_i_Ministrise_se_Brendshme.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> See: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/Dhuna-ndaj-Grave-dhe-Vajzave-studimi-2018.pdf>

<sup>56</sup>“Ending Violence against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Albania” (UN Albania, 2022) [https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/ALB-UN%20Position%20Paper%20on%20VAW\\_short%20version%20FINAL-rev%20A.N%20and%20M.K.30.11.2024\\_0.pdf](https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/ALB-UN%20Position%20Paper%20on%20VAW_short%20version%20FINAL-rev%20A.N%20and%20M.K.30.11.2024_0.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> The Center for Gender Justice reports that “Since 2022, 1082 men and boys have participated in information and awareness activities related to gender-based violence and domestic violence.”

The technology-facilitated gender-based violence is a dynamic phenomenon requiring effective protection from abusive behaviors. The Network's Organizations providing free legal aid highlight that the online forms of violence are the most frequent forms. In particular, they consist of: threats via telephones or social networks, creation of fake addresses/profiles in social networks (TikTok, Instagram and Facebook) and publication of personal or intimate pictures of the victim, stalking of the victim through social networks, intervening in the victim's addresses and publication of pictures of inappropriate contents to damage their image. Based on the direct work with women and girls victims of violence and with service providers, it was noted that the online violence happens often from ex-husbands/wives or ex-partners, subject to the law "On measures against violence in family relations". The forms of violence mentioned above have been addressed to the court by civil society lawyers in two forms: in civil proceedings through protection orders and immediate protection orders pursuant to the law "On measures against violence in family relations"; in criminal proceedings through charges on criminal offenses. "Intruding into someone's privacy" (Article 121 of the Criminal Code); "Stalking" (Article 121/a of the Criminal Code) and "Domestic violence" (Article 130/a of the Criminal Code).

The domestic legislation against gender-based violence still does not explicitly provide the online dimension of violence against women, as a specific form of gender-based violence. However, the judicial decisions prove that the court does not consider domestic violence and gender-based violence as a phenomenon limited only in traditional forms of violence, but it recognizes as such its new aspects, placing inclusive protection from the domestic violence phenomenon.

The Coordinated Referral Mechanisms (CRMs) have been established and operate in every municipality of the country for the cases of domestic violence, but their institutions and staff have not been trained to specifically address and manage the cases of online violence and to work on preventing online violence.

However, according to the organizations, such form of violence remains underreported compared to its real dimensions. Women and girls subject to this form of violence do not report it as they feel "embarrassed". Not talking to such form of violence leads to victims not receiving specific information on how to broaden knowledge on data protection, how to report, type of specialized assistance they may benefit if their online privacy is breached, etc. Therefore, Albania has recently witnessed some cases of online sexual violence and losses of lives. Although not a case of gender-based violence, the debate sparked off by the case of violence i digital platforms among children, which led to the loss of life of a 14-year old student killed from his peer, should be noted. Following this event, the Albanian government made a decision to close the TikTok digital platform, a decision that is widely discussed and criticized.

As per the above, the civil society has addressed this issue as a "national emergency" throughout 2024 and the need to intervene is immediate. Some civil society organization of this Network, and the AWEN Network have started the implementation of specific initiatives on informing and raising the awareness of women and girls on violence in the digital space, protection of personal data, reporting and benefitting services for cases affected by such form of violence.

On the other hand, the civil society has intensified its efforts in the field of advocacy to improve legislation and undertake legal initiatives on the protection of women and girls from online violence. The civil society has some experience created by the legal amendments to the Criminal Code during 2012-13 introducing the criminal offense of "Stalking" for the first time. Those efforts are currently focused on the revision of

the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania and the inclusion of specific articles for the definition and criminalization of the online violence against women and girls considering the quite rapid technology developments. This initiative has been strongly supported by the Ombudsperson. Albania is revising the Criminal Code, which is a process expected to last until the early 2026 and this is the right momentum to continue advocating for special articles in this field.

The civil society organizations are involved even in the initiatives undertaken by the General Rapporteur on Violence against Women in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the Alliance of Women MPs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, on raising awareness on online violence against women and girls. The initiating institutions have encouraged the civil society to intensify efforts to prevent online violence against women and girls, breach of privacy and protection of online data. In the framework of such initiatives, the “Gender-based violence in digital space” report was developed, including recommendations on legal initiatives related to the digital dimension of violence. The report is still in the process of publication. Meanwhile, the civil society organizations have sought solutions even from regional experience, addressing the issues encountered in Albania concerning the matters of access to justice on technology-facilitated and development-facilitated violence.<sup>58</sup>

#### **19. IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WHAT MEASURES HAS YOUR COUNTRY TAKEN TO RESOURCE WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO GBV?**

All the organizations of this Network carry out their activity on the prevention of gender-based violence. The financial resources are mainly secured on the basis of projects supported by international institutions and organizations.

However, theoretically, some opportunities have been created in those last 5 five years to seek even state funds, such as those allocated by the Agency for the Support of Civil Society; funds under the free legal aid and the funds allocated by local bodies.

**The state funds from the Agency for the Support of Civil Society ASCS** are allocated on the basis of applications, in interrupted periods, on the basis of calls. But these are short-term projects and very limited. Furthermore, there are also cases when the support with funds to organizations providing services in this field has not been a priority in financing. For example, no funds were allocated in 2018 and 2020 for projects in the field of domestic violence.<sup>59</sup>

**Another financing opportunity was created pursuant to the law “On legal aid guaranteed by the State”.** Pursuant to this law, 15 organizations have been authorized by the Free Legal Aid Directorate. But only 2 of them were financed in the period 2023-24,<sup>60</sup> even though the law entered into force since 2017. In addition to the time that sub-legal acts required, some obstacles related to the financing of organizations specialized in this field were also created. *“Although all the authorized NGOs provide the legal aid service, there is a provision in the DCM No. 110, dated 06.03.2019, which stipulates that in order to benefit financing, the authorized non-governmental organizations should not have two same financing sources for*

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<sup>58</sup> [The dark side of digitalization: Technology-facilitated violence against women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia | Publications | UN Women – Europe and Central Asia](#)

<sup>59</sup> GREVIO, Report submitted by Albania, p.19, <https://rm.coe.int/state-report-addressed-to-grevio-/1680ac0c69>

<sup>60</sup> See, [Authorized non-governmental organizations – Free Legal Aid Directorate](#)

*the same activity. Regardless of the good purpose of this provision, it seems like it may prevent a number of NGOs to benefit funds since the latter might have been financed by other donors related to the provision of legal aid.”*<sup>61</sup> The conditions set forth in this sub-legal act lead to a lack of access for specialized organizations as they are not allowed even to apply. We consider this prohibition not proportional at all and request that the Decision is reviewed in this regard.

**Important financing opportunities have been created to local bodies.** However, there are very few municipalities that support organizations against violence with funds. A positive experience was that of Woman Forum Elbasan (WFE), which created a good practice of financial support to services from the budget of Elbasan and Librazhd municipalities. In 2024, the Librazhd Municipality allocated to the WFE a fund amounting to ALL 500,000. In addition, this municipality informed the WFE that they would project a fund amounting to ALL 200,000 in the 2025 budget for the WFE. But this is not the case for Elbasan Municipality, which have highlighted that this municipality is responsible for the management of the local social plan and that the funds added for services will be subject to public procurement procedures. The WFE has officially requested the Prefect of Elbasan Region to verify the lawfulness of normative acts approved in this regard. With regard to local financing, we would like to bring to the attention that Law No. 162/2020 “On public procurement” explicitly provides for the procurement of social services for all the units. In this framework, the civil society organizations are facing new challenges and should work to meet the criteria set forth by this law.

## **21. WHAT ACTIONS HAS YOUR COUNTRY TAKEN TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST MARGINALIZED GROUPS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS?**

### **Roma and Egyptian women**

- One of the most important initiatives was the implementation of the “Empowerment of Roma and Egyptian Women through Social and Economic Initiatives” program, which aimed at reducing violence and exclusion of women from these communities. This program included trainings on economic empowerment, support for access to legal and social services, and awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality and women’s rights. The program included over 1,000 women and girls, and contributed to increasing reporting on violence (UNDP, 2018).<sup>62</sup>

Although initiatives were not missing during those years, the Roma and Egyptian women are still facing structural discrimination, thus limiting their access to protection services and opportunities for social and economic integration. The lack of effective and accountable monitoring mechanisms by public institutions has led to drafted policies and legislation remaining unimplemented. One of the main challenges remains the lack of state programs or emergency services. Many Roma and Egyptian families are not part of the economic assistance program and very poor. In order to break such cycle of violence and poverty, it is fundamental to ensure an integrated support system including the economic assistance, emergency and long-term housing, and access to psychosocial and legal services for women victims of violence.

### **Women with disabilities.**

- Initiatives on women with disabilities have been undertaken, establishing supportive mechanisms to enhance their access to services and to address violence that is often experienced within families or institutions. The UN Albania Report (2024)<sup>63</sup> indicates that the programs on those women have

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<sup>61</sup> State Supreme Audit, PERFORMANCE AUDIT REPORT “Free legal aid for people in need”, Tirana, 2023, p. 26-28.

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/Raporti-final-ESERE\\_-qershor-2019.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/al/Raporti-final-ESERE_-qershor-2019.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> [https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/ALB-UN%20Position%20Paper%20on%20VAW-long%20version%20FINAL-rev%20A.N%20and%20M.K.%2030.11.2024\\_0.pdf](https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/ALB-UN%20Position%20Paper%20on%20VAW-long%20version%20FINAL-rev%20A.N%20and%20M.K.%2030.11.2024_0.pdf)

included psychosocial assistance, labor market integration programs and trainings on local authorities to understand and address their specific needs.

However, women with disabilities do not always have the opportunity or information to request support services. For example, this is very difficult for tetraplegic women. Therefore, services should be provided in such a way to reach beneficiaries even when they do not have the opportunity to request them. Furthermore, women with disabilities may be even victims of gender-based violence. The Ombudsperson Institution report raises the concern for two specific cases of 2 women with disabilities who suffered from mental health problems and who are victims of femicide. One of them lived alone and in very difficult economic conditions<sup>64</sup>.

The network raises the concern that there are no data for disabled victims of domestic violence by the Coordinated Referral Mechanisms at municipalities. The collection of such data is needed.

### **LGBTIQ+ women.**

- Some initiatives that directly affect this category have been undertaken in the last 5 years. Therefore, we can mention amendments to Law No. 10 221, dated 04.02.2010, "On protection from discrimination".<sup>65</sup> In addition, improvements were also made to the practices of law-enforcement authorities and we can mention here Law No. 22/2018 "On social housing". This law directly addresses the community as a group of interest.

However, these measures are very poor and insufficient. This is the reason why this category of women faces many problems. It remains entirely marginalized in many fields, in particular in the field of education. "Unfortunately, this targeting frequently leads to dire consequences, ranging from psychological pressure, abuse, and bullying to outright physical assault. This relentless discrimination forces many students to discontinue their education and drop out of school."<sup>66</sup> In addition, the victims, women of this category, request more efficient protection before, during and after the criminal proceedings. There are no data on this aspect. The Network's organizations report that institutions do not store data for this aspect, neither for victims, nor for perpetrators. Based on the information obtained from the police, such data is noted only if declared voluntarily by perpetrators<sup>67</sup>.

### **Role of civil society.**

- The civil society in Albania has been a critical voice and a fundamental ally in the efforts to address violence against women that face multiple forms of discrimination. It has played an active role in providing supplementary services such as legal and psychological assistance, services that are missing by the public sector.

The gender equality organizations and activists underline the fact that the implementation of measures for the marginalized categories remains quite often limited due to insufficient resources and poor

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<sup>64</sup> [www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Draft%20Raporti%20per%20Femicidin%2004.12.2024.pdf](http://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Draft%20Raporti%20per%20Femicidin%2004.12.2024.pdf) f.29

<sup>65</sup> See, Joint Written Contribution on the Position of LGBTI+ Women to the Consideration of the 5th Periodic Report Submitted by Albania (CEDAW/C/ALB/5) to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Sptembre 2023).

<sup>66</sup> Idem.

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See: <http://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/media/manager/website/reports/Draft%20Raporti%20per%20Femicidin%2004.12.2024.pdf> f.27.

interinstitutional coordination. They highlight the need for more investments and better interinstitutional coordination to guarantee that measures are effective and inclusive, and the need for stable financial resources remains a key challenge.