

## **WORKING TOGETHER FOR A EUROPE FREE FROM VIOLENCE – ENSURING ROMA WOMEN’S ACCESS TO JUSTICE TO ASSERT THE RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM VIOLENCE**

**How to take into account the rights and needs of Roma women when  
working to prevent and combat gender-based violence**

2023 Handbook  
from the EEA and Norway Grants’  
SYNERGY Network against Gender-based and Domestic Violence



Norwegian Ministry  
of Justice and Public Security



SYNERGY Network against  
Gender-based and  
Domestic Violence



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## List of abbreviations

CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EEA	European Economic Area (Grants)
EU	European Union
GPR	General Policy Recommendations
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
Istanbul Convention	2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
NG	Norway Grants
NGO	Nongovernmental organisation
SC	Steering Committee
SYNERGY Network	Network of governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders from all relevant programmes under the EEA and Norway Grants working together against gender-based and domestic violence
UN	United Nations
VAWG	violence against women and girls
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Listening to the voices of Roma women

The aim of this handbook produced within the framework of the SYNERGY Network against Gender-based and Domestic Violence is to strengthen EEA and Norway Grants' programmes in order to prevent and combat gender-based and domestic violence. Based on mid-term evaluations of ongoing programmes of the EEA and Norway Grants, it has been shown that there is a need to step up efforts to ensure Roma women's access to justice to assert their right to be free from violence.

Freedom from gender-based violence is a fundamental right of all women. Violence directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately, is prevalent in all regions, countries, cultures, and social classes. Gender-based violence affects millions of women worldwide, destroying the fabric of all our societies.

Contrary to some prejudicial notions, it is important to acknowledge that gender-based violence is not a 'Roma problem,' but is rather a universal phenomenon. However, when we are addressing violence, we have to take into account the specific rights and needs of different groups of women. This is sometimes referred to as an intersectional approach, which is a requirement that also stems from the text of the Istanbul Convention.

Roma is the largest (ethnic) minority and one of the most disadvantaged groups in Europe. The discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion of Roma from mainstream society represent additional barriers for Roma women's access to justice, which is necessary for them to be able to assert the right to be free from gender-based violence. So how can we best consider the rights and needs of Roma women in EEANG programming?

Inclusion and participation of end-users in programming is a central principle in a human rights approach and is also very important in order to identify and take into account Roma women's rights and needs as part of the efforts to prevent and combat gender-based violence. What are the perspectives of Roma women on prevention, protection and prosecution measures outlined in the Istanbul Convention, the groundbreaking Council of Europe Convention from 2011 which is internationally recognized as the gold standard?

This handbook will provide guidance on:

- The active involvement and participation of Roma women and NGOs in programming
- Roma women's perspectives on preventing and combatting gender-based violence
- Targeted measures to prevent and combat gender-based violence in line with the needs of Roma women

We hope people dedicated to the work to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women will be inspired by this handbook, and that it will stimulate meaningful conversations about its policy implications!

## About the Handbook

This handbook is based on the expertise and experiences of Roma women and NGOs, the Sami communities in Norway, the Council of Europe and several stakeholders of the EEA and Norway Grants. It has been written by human rights experts Zora Popova from Bulgaria and Rachel Eapen Paul from Norway and is commissioned by the European Institute and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

The Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA) allows the EEA member States (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) to participate in the internal market of the European Union (EU) without adhering to it. Since the EEA Agreement entered into force in 1994, the EEA have contributed to social and economic progress in different EU countries. To do this, the financing mechanisms of the EEA (“EEA Grants” and “Norway Grants”) are intended to reduce economic and social inequalities in European countries and strengthen cooperation with the beneficiary countries.

On 9 December 2016, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway signed new cooperation agreements with Bulgaria on a number of new programmes under the EEA and Norway Grants 2014-2021. The Home Affairs programme, signed on 23 May 2018, aims at strengthening the rule of law and is operated by the Ministry of Interior in Bulgaria. The Norwegian National Police directorate, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security are Donor Programme Partners, and the International Partner Organisation is the Council of Europe. The programme funding (excluding co-financing) amounts to 21.5 million Euros and is funded entirely by the Norway Grants.

The programme facilitates and encourages actions related to strengthening bilateral relations between Bulgaria and Norway; actions will in particular promote networking, exchange, sharing and transfer of knowledge, experience and good practices between public entities in both countries. This handbook is part of the project “Working together for a Europe free from violence - ensuring Roma women’s access to justice to assert the right to be free from violence,”, supported by the bilateral fund of the Norway Grants Home Affairs Programme in Bulgaria. The project partners are the European Institute in Bulgaria and the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, in close cooperation with Council of Europe’s Roma and Travellers team and the Gender Equality Division.

The project is implemented in the framework of the SYNERGY Network against Gender-based and Domestic Violence. The Network brings together governmental and non-governmental stakeholders from all relevant programmes under the EEA and Norway Grants, aiming at making a greater impact of the EEA and Norway Grants on addressing violence against women and domestic violence in Europe.

A Steering Committee has been the advisory body of the project, consisting of Roma women and NGOs, project promoters from Bulgaria and Romania, and representatives from the Council of Europe, the Financial Mechanism Office of the EEA Grants, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the European Institute Foundation.

The process in developing the Handbook included:

- A Study visit to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, in November 2022, on relevant Council of Europe standards, case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the findings and recommendations of the Council of Europe monitoring bodies and other organs.



- 6 Steering Committee (SC) meetings, between November 2022 and May 2023, focused on:
  - Introduction of the SC members (experts, government and NGO representatives and Roma stakeholders) and adoption of the working plan and methodology
  - Discussion on the participatory approach and the barriers faced by Roma women and NGOs to participate in designing and programming programmes.
  - Collection of information about challenges to the **protection** of Roma women victims from further violence, as well as challenges to providing support and assistance to Roma women to overcome the consequences of such violence and to rebuild their lives.
  - Collection of information about the challenges for the effective **prosecution** of perpetrators of violence against Roma women and provision of reparations for acts of violence.
  - Collection of information about the challenges in **preventing** gender-based violence within Roma communities.
  - Discussion on the challenges for **Roma women's access to justice** to be presented in the Handbook, followed up with feedback and comments.
- An International Conference looking into good practices and measures, in June 2023

A warm thank you to everyone for sharing knowledge and experiences and listening to each other with an open heart!



## Part 1: Gender-based violence through intersectional lenses

To effectively prevent and combat gender-based violence against Roma women, an intersectional approach is needed. Seeing how gender intersects with race, ethnicity, disability, or class, helps both in understanding the pervasiveness of the phenomenon, and in informing measures to address it. An intersectional approach considers multiple forms of oppression and structural violence and allows for a more nuanced approach to working with victims and survivors of gender-based violence. An intersectional approach can also inform strategies for the prevention of gender-based violence in a better manner by looking at the different factors that lead to certain groups becoming more vulnerable and which limit their access to services and support.

### Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence against women is a universal phenomenon, prevalent in all regions, countries, cultures, and social classes, affecting millions of women worldwide while destroying the fabric of all our societies. The Council of Europe, through its Istanbul Convention, recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women, with gender inequality as its root cause. It has been defined by the United Nations as one of the most widespread violations of human rights and as one of the most serious health hazards in the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared violence against women and girls to be a serious and pervasive hazard endemic to all societies, its prevalence being of pandemic proportions.

Although other international instruments such as the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights established the principle of non-discrimination on any ground, including sex, the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women became the first international instrument explicitly addressing violence against women, providing a framework for national and international action<sup>1</sup>. The declaration states that the term “violence against women” means any act of *gender-based violence* that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. It encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family, including marital rape and traditional practices harmful to women; occurring in the general community including rape, sexual abuse and sexual harassment at work and in educational institutions, and trafficking in women; or perpetrated or condoned by the State.

Inspired by case-law from the European Court of Human Rights,<sup>2</sup> the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention<sup>3</sup>) adopts this definition and expands upon it, to affirm that violence against women is “a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N94/095/05/PDF/N9409505.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/impact-convention-human-rights/freedom-from-violence-against-women>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

<sup>4</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>



The Istanbul Convention specifies several forms of gender-based violence against women, including:

- psychological violence
- stalking
- physical violence
- sexual violence (including rape)
- forced marriage
- female genital mutilation
- forced abortion
- forced sterilisation
- sexual harassment
- crimes committed in the name of so-called “honour”
- domestic violence, including all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence <sup>5</sup>

The measures required by the Istanbul Convention are firmly based on the premise that only real equality between women and men and a change in power dynamics and attitudes can prevent this serious violation of human rights. The Committee<sup>6</sup> that monitors the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women Committee (CEDAW)<sup>7</sup>, throughout its work has also made it clear that gender-based violence against women is a critical obstacle to the achievement of substantive equality between women and men and to the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, as enshrined in the Convention. The CEDAW acknowledges that gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

Gender-based violence against women is thus a huge obstacle to women’s, and girls’ enjoyment of their human rights. It is rooted in gender inequality, in the historically, systemic, and structurally unequal status of women and girls in our societies. The Beijing Platform for Action 1995<sup>8</sup> declares: ‘Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement’.

Gender-based violence is an extreme manifestation of women’s and girls’ unequal status. It is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Yet violence against women and girls (VAWG) is actively tolerated in society, in both the public and private spheres, and affects not only women’s lives and safety but those of the whole society. The silence that surrounds this phenomenon contributes to its persistence. Shame and fear of reprisals lead to leaving the perpetrators unpunished, an impunity they enjoy that is grounded in and perpetuated by the widely spread social misconceptions that violence against women is a private matter, and that women and girls instigate or provoke the violence by their disobedience or non-conformity to their roles in society as women. Even though much light has been shed on the root causes of the violence and there have been pushes for improved legislation, support services and measures to prevent the violence, to protect the victims, to provide services and to prosecute the perpetrators, governments worldwide are still not able to address the problem adequately.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/key-facts>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.efi-rcso.org/publications/guidelines/regional-guidelines-implementation-women-peace-and-security-agenda-south>

## Discrimination

Discrimination is one of the most common human rights violations and is prohibited under women's rights treaties and human rights covenants, including the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>10</sup>, the European Social Charter<sup>11</sup> the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>12</sup> and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.<sup>13</sup>

The notion of discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different groups of people, especially on the grounds of race, ethnicity, age, sex, gender, or disability. Discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than others in a comparable situation, only because they belong to or are perceived to belong to a particular group, and where such treatment cannot be objectively and reasonably justified.<sup>14</sup>

The principles of equality in rights and dignity, and freedom from discrimination were outlined in the first two articles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights:

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Article 1)
- Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind (Article 2).

Protection against discrimination in Europe is regulated by the within European Union law, the Council of Europe treaty systems, and in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. In particular, prohibition of discrimination is provided by:

- Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>15</sup>
- Part V of the European Social Charter<sup>16</sup>
- Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>17</sup> is legally binding for all EU member states
- The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), General Policy Recommendations (GPR) N 13, defining Antigypsyism as a specific form of racism.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding social and political factors that combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege, advantage and disadvantage. Different forms of oppression and systemic discrimination throughout history create inequalities, and these 'intersect' with each other, for example, poverty, racism (including anti-gypsyism, as defined in ECRI GPR No.13, as a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of dehumanisation and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed, among others, by

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention\\_ENG](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG)

<sup>11</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/prems-125622-gbr-2573-key-coe-standards-depliant-3-volets-a5-web-bat/1680a807ad>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-human-rights-work/monitoring-and-promoting-un-treaties/international-covenant-civil-and>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/intersectionality-and-multiple-discrimination>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention\\_ENG](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/convention_ENG)

<sup>16</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168007cf93>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/intersectionality-and-multiple-discrimination>

violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and the most blatant kind of discrimination...), sexism, the denial of rights and equal opportunities - impacting the situation of individuals. The concept is about how gender, race, class and other systems of domination and oppression 'intersect', impacting on people in different ways, and shaping people's lives.

Kimberle Crenshaw, the feminist legal scholar who first coined the term intersectionality, defines it as a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking.<sup>18</sup>

## Intersectional discrimination

Intersectional discrimination happens when two or multiple grounds operate simultaneously and interact in an inseparable manner, producing distinct and specific forms of discrimination. Women in general meet a number of obstacles when seeking access to justice when subject to gender-based violence, and women and girls from specific groups can face multiple obstacles due to intersectional discrimination.

### Box 1

#### Forced sterilisation - a manifestation of intersectional discrimination

Roma women have a history of being subject to forced sterilisation in several central and eastern European countries. Based on a number of cases brought before the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR, in 2017, the Court concluded that the practice of sterilisation amounts to inhumane and degrading treatment and thus constitutes a violation of article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

However, only France, Malta, Portugal, Spain, and Turkey are the Istanbul Convention parties that have officially recognised forced sterilisation as a criminal offence. GREVIO noted that the absence of data makes it difficult to assess the effective implementation of the legal framework in such cases.

Forced sterilisation is an example of the forms of gender-based violence that are either excluded from or not given sufficient policy attention in national strategies on combatting violence against women in many countries.

## Structural and complex challenges faced by Roma women

Roma have been present in Europe for centuries, but their communities have never become fully integrated in any European societies. The history of the largest European minority has been, and still is to a certain extent, one of exclusion, marginalisation, and discrimination. According to estimates, there are between 10 to 12 million Roma in Europe, living dispersed in communities of various sizes, traditions, customs, and religions. Their presence in the countries is also unequal - from a couple of

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/using-intersectionality-understand-structural-inequality-scotland-evidence-synthesis/pages/10/>

hundreds in Luxembourg and Malta to almost 2 million in Romania.<sup>19</sup> With an average age of about 25.1 years,<sup>20</sup> the Roma population constitutes a potentially significant workforce in Europe. However, due to lack of education and skills, the majority of this human capital is not actively and efficiently engaged in the labour market, which according to estimates affects negatively the national economies, and the EU average economic levels, respectively.<sup>21</sup> Low levels of education and the impediments to access the labour market affect their socio-economic status, living quality standards, and prospects for the future. Besides the social exclusion and marginalisation connected with the higher levels of poverty, Roma often face discrimination based on their specific ethnic characteristics, culture, language, and traditions.

Roma women and girls living in such marginalised communities, are particularly exposed to additional disadvantages based on their gender and age. This was raised as an issue in the steering committee meetings. The project has identified a number of major challenges faced by Roma women subject to gender-based violence and domestic violence.

- **Normalisation of the violence within the community and by mainstream society**

Domestic violence and forms of violence against women in the Roma communities may often be seen as 'normal' and accepted within the framework of a family due to a lack of awareness in the community, including among Roma women and girls, of their fundamental human right to live free from violence. There is also a lack of awareness that women's exposure to domestic violence, sexual harassment, psychological, social, and economic forms of oppression from family members are indeed forms of gender-based violence, and a violation of their right to live a life free from violence. This violence should not be perceived as 'normal' or accepted disciplinary practices in the family under any circumstances. Further, the misperception on the part of mainstream agencies and services, that violence is a 'normal' practice, embedded in the 'culture, customs and traditions' of Roma communities, results in discriminatory practices towards the Roma in these services, and in inaction.

- **The police and service providers**

Roma women are often reluctant to reach out to law-enforcement and social services due to their lack of trust in these agencies largely resulting from their prior negative experiences such as discrimination, stereotyping and prejudicial treatment.

<sup>19</sup> Council of Europe, Estimates on Roma population in European countries, Data available at [http://hub.coe.int/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=3f6c4a82-0ca7-4b80-93c1fef14f56fdf8&groupId=10227](http://hub.coe.int/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=3f6c4a82-0ca7-4b80-93c1fef14f56fdf8&groupId=10227)

<sup>20</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Health and the Roma Community, analysis of the situation in Europe: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain; Report arising from the project Health and the Roma Community: Analysis of the Situation in Europe, funded by the European Union Public Health Programme, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009, Madrid, p.19, Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_health\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_health_en.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> World Bank, Europe and Central Asia: Economic Costs of Roma Exclusion, Knowledge brief, 2010, Available at <http://go.worldbank.org/G1EL5HZ8S0> ; According to estimates, if the level of 'Roma' employment is brought to the EU average, a 4-5 % GDP increase could be expected- more than the defense budget of any European country, Livia Jaroka, interview, "Inclusion of the Roma: an ethnic and social issue", Article date: 2011, March 8 modified date: 2011, <http://www.eu2011.hu/news/roma-integration-no-discrimination-justbeginning#sthash.0u4begJD.dpuf>

- **Loyalty towards the community before individual rights**

As expressed in the Steering Committee meetings, there is often a reluctance on the part of Roma women and girls to report incidences of violence in the family. Roma women may have been exposed to strong patriarchal norms within the community, which may lead to the reluctance on their part to report incidents of violence in the family.

Further to this, the discrimination in general that Roma communities have been subject to and still face, results in Roma women feeling a greater sense of loyalty towards their community, which may also be an underlying reason for their reluctance to report violence and initiate the requisite steps to ensure a life free from violence. They may similarly see reporting such a 'family issue' to the authorities as a form of 'betrayal' that may lead to 'negative exposure' of the family and the community.

- **Fear of loss of support from families and from within the community**

Domestic and gender-based violence often remains underreported and unaddressed due to the social stigma attached to it. Victims are afraid of getting excommunicated from the larger family. Further, other family members often refrain from supporting the victim, also due to a fear of exclusion for challenging the established 'community social order'.

#### Awareness and Information

- **About rights**

Many Roma women are not aware of their right to protection from violence and the right to receive support to be free from violence.

- **About existing mechanisms and services and the access to them**

Women's lack of information about domestic violence laws and institutional mechanisms that are in place constitutes a significant impediment to the right of Roma women to live free from violence. An additional barrier is the unawareness of how victims may access these services.

- **About different forms of discrimination**

Due to a possible internalisation of the discrimination, they experience, Roma women may not always recognise the discrimination as such, which in turn hinders them from reaching out for help. A lack of trust in the institutions creates a barrier to their access to services.

#### Socio-Economic Challenges faced by Roma women

- **Economic and financial dependence**

Poverty and lack of access to material resources place many Roma women in a position of dependence on their partners and families. Returning to the perpetrator and to the relapse of the cycle of violence are connected with the lack of alternative possibilities available for victims to build their independent lives free from abuse and oppression. The lack of access to education and skills is a serious challenge that many Roma women face. It prevents them from entering the labour market, from securing the possibility to become financially independent and have an alternative to returning to the perpetrator due to economic reasons.



- **Distance of services**

When services and shelters are not easily, including geographically, accessible to Roma women, poverty and substantial costs of transport might prevent them from seeking support and protection.

- **Marginalisation**

Roma communities often live on the fringes of mainstream society. The multi-dimensional discrimination and intersectional inequalities that Roma women face often leads to their marginalisation. Marginalisation leads to isolation and neglect. Isolation is one of the major factors that fosters and sustains gender-based violence and domestic violence. To avoid marginalisation, there is a need for addressing gender-based violence against Roma women through intersectional lenses.



## Part 2: Active involvement and participation of Roma women and NGOs in the development of programmes addressing gender-based violence

*“To effectively address the issues faced by Roma women, it is crucial to engage with them directly in order to identify their specific needs and ensure their continuous participation.”*  
Aida-Diana Farkas, CoE and member of the Steering Committee

Roma women should be involved as active agents in asserting the right to be free from violence and engaged in all phases of programming so that more sustainable and higher quality outcomes are achieved. A central aspect of a human rights approach is inclusion and participation of end-users in the design, planning, implementation, and all stages of decision-making processes (see box 2.1). Involvement of Roma women and NGOs in all stages of programming is also very important in order to identify and take into account Roma women’s rights and needs in measures implemented to prevent and combat gender-based violence. However, Roma women’s participation in programming to be free from violence is often not sufficiently ensured. This part of the handbook gives guidance on the active involvement and participation of Roma women in programming.

### Box 2

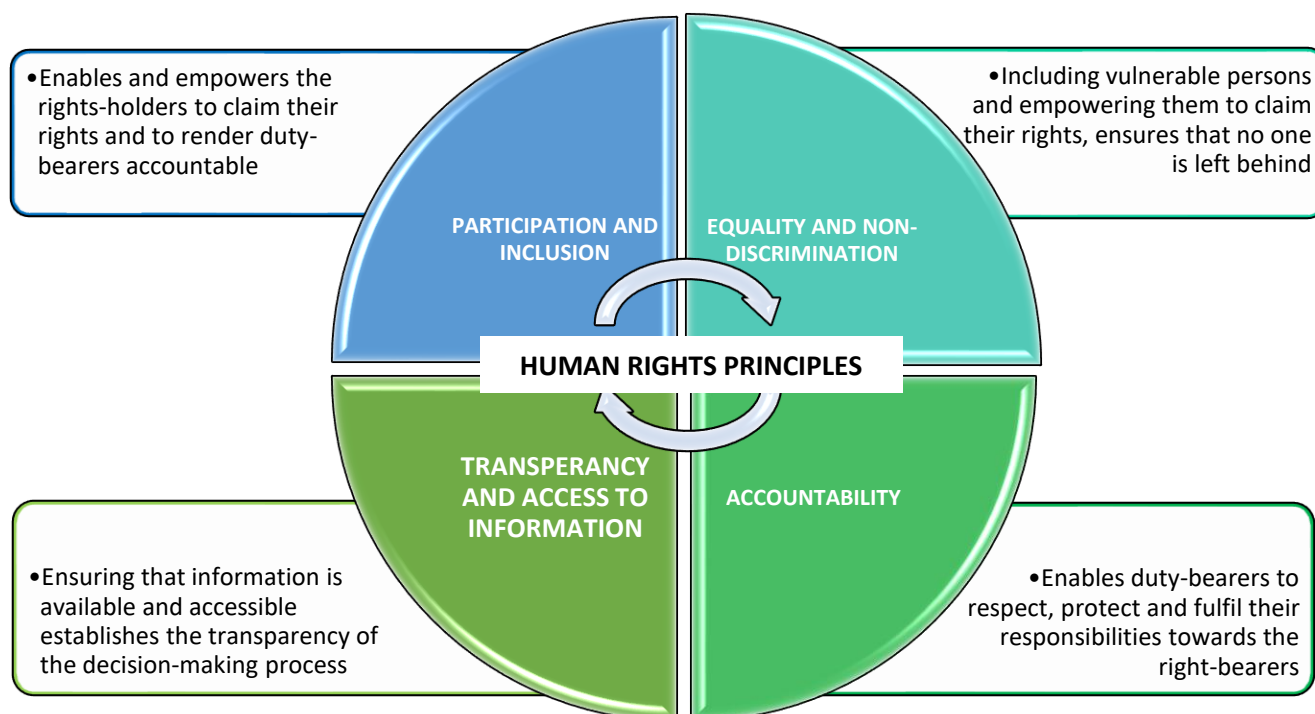
#### HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

A human rights approach incorporates human rights standards and principles into all levels of programming, with the ultimate goal of advancing human rights (The Council of Europe’s Practical Guide on the Human Rights Approach for Co-operation Projects), by empowering rights-holders to claim and exercise their rights, and to strengthen capacity of duty-bearers who have the obligation to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil human rights (UN)

Duty-bearers are state or non-state actors, that have the obligation to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil human rights of rights-holders. This is a key principle aiming to ensure that beneficiaries would not be passive recipients but owners and active users of their rights. Such an approach is also important to reduce the risk of overlooking the needs of groups in vulnerable situations and hence perpetuating inequalities.

A participatory approach is also supported by the Istanbul Convention. Comprehensive and coordinated policies to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence should support, recognise and encourage the work of civil society and relevant non-governmental organisations and establish effective cooperation with these organisations (article 9).





## The 10 common basic principles of Roma inclusion<sup>22</sup>

The adherence to the following 10 principles, as defined by the European Commission to guide the process of Roma inclusion can support the application of the Human Rights Approach:

1. Constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
2. Explicit but not exclusive targeting
3. Inter-cultural approach
4. Aiming for the mainstream
5. Awareness of the gender dimension
6. Transfer of evidence-based policies
7. Use of European Union instruments
8. Involvement of regional and local authorities
9. Involvement of civil society
10. Active participation of the Roma

<sup>22</sup> The 10 common basic principles on Roma inclusion: Vademecum

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7573706d-e7c4-4ece-ae59-2b361246a7b0/language-en/format-PDF/source-291289078>



## Participation of Roma women in the planning stage

Consultations with Roma women stakeholders should take place at the programme/project's development stage. To encourage participatory approaches in all the measures for Roma inclusion, stakeholder consultations need to be carried out already at the conceptualisation of the programmes and thereafter at the phase of the early design of the calls for proposals so that the identified issues are projected into the selection criteria and in the definitions regarding the eligibility of applicants. Priorities can also be projected into programme agreements setting up the frameworks of the future open calls. It could be good to take into account that time-constraints related to programme/project design, selection of implementers, and launching often prevent donors/service providers to conduct consultations with target vulnerable groups, therefore proper planning will help to ensure full participation. Consultations with stakeholders should be systematic. Involvement of Roma women in *ad-hoc* needs assessments do not empower the stakeholders to have a real voice. Often, the lack of follow-up mechanisms (provision of information, as a minimum) has a negative impact on the interest of Roma women to participate in such processes.

The defined priorities in consultations with stakeholders should be put forward through:

### Concept-note objectives

- Design a programme/project to address the particular needs of Roma women (which can vary depending on the communities).
- Think in terms of duty-bearers and rights-holders, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.
- Take into account the different stakeholders' perspectives, including vulnerable groups.
- Support the capacity of rights-holders to know, claim and obtain redress for their rights and for duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil these rights.
- During the inception phase of the project, hold broad consultations, including with civil society, and adjust the project log-frame and work plan accordingly.

### Predefined project frameworks

- To ensure that there is a specific project on Roma women and domestic violence, project frameworks must be predefined and projected in a call for proposals.

### Defined quantitative and qualitative indicators (outputs & outcomes)

- To mainstream or bring forward the perspective of Roma into domestic and gender-based violence activities or vice versa, specific indicators to measure the programme outputs must be included.
- Indicators can be quantitative (e.g., number of Roma women/Roma organisations involved, number of Roma women reached out, number of initiatives involving Roma women's group, etc.) or qualitative (e.g., development of intersectional measures to address Roma related issues).
- Set inequality-sensitive indicators (e.g., to gender, age, ethnicity, etc.)

### Eligibility criteria

- Define who would be eligible as a partner – Roma organisations, Roma-women organisations, pro-Roma organisations, all/other.
- Place priorities for Roma women's organisations, if appropriate.
- Place priorities for partnerships – e.g., a mainstream NGO and Roma (women) organisation.
- Avoid imposing funding thresholds to allow for NGOs with lesser finances to participate.



### **Selection criteria**

- Strengthen the focus on Roma women and girls – this aspect can be embedded into the selection criteria when framing the respective calls (e.g., a call for projects regarding domestic and gender-based violence can include selection criteria related to Roma women and girls).
- Incorporate awareness of a human rights approach (HRA) into the selection criteria for experts, Steering Committee members, participants and grantees, where appropriate. Also, consider the principle of equality and non-discrimination with regards to age, gender and ethnicity, etc., during selection.

### **Targeted funding for fostering participation of Roma women**

- Develop Roma-specific programmes
- Outline priorities for Roma-applicants
- Ensure that the allocated programme/project budget provides sufficient resources for applying a HRA (i.e., for gender analysis, capacity building activities with a specific focus on HRA, outreach to vulnerable groups, monitoring of participation, translation and interpretation costs)
- Avoid funding thresholds, to allow for NGOs with lesser finances to participate

### **Programme agreements**

- Outline the frameworks for future open calls.
- Donor program partners and international partner organisations can channel perspectives of other stakeholders.
- Provide specific references to the anti-discrimination and inclusion principles in all programmes/projects and respective calls.

### **Ensuring involvement of Roma women**

- Map stakeholders (Roma women's organisations and activists) as potential programme/project partners and participants in events.
- Collect and use disaggregated data only for the purposes of developing of specific policies to address vulnerable persons as a matter of priority. Data on ethnicity, gender, age, etc. must not include personal details and should be collected and processed in compliance with applicable data regulations
- Develop networks between public authorities (project implementers) and stakeholders (Roma women's organisations and activists).
- Develop rules and procedures to ensure provision of targeted support to involved Roma women (formal & informal) and especially to Roma women in rural areas.
- Involve Roma women as programme/project managers to foster their participation. Elaborate Job Specifications & Terms of Reference for Recruitment to enable hiring of Roma (women) as programme/project personnel at all levels.

### **Participation of Roma women in the implementation stage**

Mainstreaming of Roma women as a target group in general violence prevention/protection programmes and projects can remove barriers to their participation. Development of particular selection criteria ensuring Roma women's involvement in implementation of projects and initiatives is therefore to be prioritised.



### Mainstreaming

- Involve Roma women in the implementation and monitoring processes to render service-providers more accountable.
- Ensure a gender and ethnic balance with regards to participants in activities and in the selection of consultants.
- Increase trust in the institutions through hiring of Roma (women) for decision making positions/structures – provide incentives for future opportunities so that skillful stakeholders come forward and declare themselves as Roma.
- Foster inter-cultural (inter-ethnic) women support networks.

### Targeted involvement of stakeholders (Roma women) and community networks

- Involve Roma women at all programme/project implementation levels (at decision-making levels, in Project Selection Committees, as project implementers and/or assistants, in Task-forces / Mobile teams).
- Raise awareness through targeted provision of information to Roma (women) about opportunities for involvement.
- Design and provide targeted training to interested stakeholders.

## Participation of Roma women in the evaluation stage

Roma women need also to be given the possibility to assess the implementation of activities and to provide feedback on their appropriateness and efficiency.

### Preparation of the evaluation process

- Involve Roma women in evaluation committees.
- Prepare evaluation criteria and questionnaires that reflect the participation indicators.

### Implementing the evaluation

- Gather feedback from participants and Roma women stakeholders.
- Analyse the achieved levels of participation and the factors that have contributed to their increase or to the lack of such.
- Identify barriers to participation, in case participation rate differs from the initially expected levels.

### Post-evaluation

- Adjust selection/eligibility criteria and other parameters based on the assessment of the Roma women aspect in the evaluation of the project results.
- Provide possibilities to continue project funding, especially in cases of achieved success.

## Recruitment of Roma women to management positions

More Roma women should be recruited for leadership roles in projects and programmes. When recruiting, take into account that Roma women may be reluctant to apply to positions due to a number of reasons - lack of information about such vacancies, lack of understanding of the type of job (and hence lack of interest in it), lack of skills and previous negative experiences of discrimination. Proactive measures, such as identification of skillful potential candidates and direct outreach, could help overcome this challenge.

## Capacity building programmes

To support the active involvement and participation of Roma women in programming, special capacity building programmes should be developed, for addressing the following identified challenges in the areas of:

- **Information**  
The lack of accessible information in the language of the stakeholders about available programmes and grants is a significant barrier to small NGOs, especially when established by local stakeholders in rural areas or remote locations.
- **Awareness**  
Participation of Roma women's in programmes and projects addressing violence-related issues (incl. gender-based and domestic violence) is sometimes hindered by a lack of awareness about their human rights and understanding of what constitutes domestic violence.
- **Training**  
Many Roma women do not possess the needed knowledge and capacities to efficiently address violence-related issues (either as individuals or as NGO representatives). Insufficient training opportunities (reaching out to stakeholders in rural or remote areas) are therefore an additional impediment.
- **Gender inequality**  
Often raised in patriarchal (gender-unequal) families and/or communities, and being exposed to patronising behaviour, many Roma women lack self-confidence that prevents them from taking a step forward (i.e., reporting violence, seeking of help and support) and from pursuing their rights as rights-bearers.
- **Discrimination**  
Many Roma women of all ages have been exposed to prejudices, stigmas, and different forms of (multiple/intersectional) discrimination. Such a negative experience has a direct impact on their motivation and confidence to act and to seek protection from violence (when it occurs), and of their rights in general.
- **Sensitivity of the topic**  
Domestic and gender-based violence is a sensitive topic which many Roma women talk about reluctantly, yet they need to be able bring it forward before the wider public, or to participate in discussions, projects, and Steering Committees.
- **Lack of trust**  
The insufficient support offered by institutions in cases when Roma women-victims approach them, the limited training of public officials on how to address such situations adequately, and the low sensitivity of service-providers are all factors that increase the lack of trust in institutions and hence – a barrier to participation of stakeholders.

## Accessible project funding

The access to project funding by Roma NGOs should be improved. Impediments in access to institutions and (international) donors such as administrative obstacles (including complex application procedures), lack of digital skills, lack of foreign language skills, and in some cases – illiteracy are all barriers to Roma women's participation that should be taken into account when implementing proactive steps for the improvement of access to funding. In rural areas or in remote communities, the lack of local level supportive structures (info-centres, local desks of Agencies, representative structures of state institutions and donors) is another significant challenge that needs to be addressed.

For more accessible calls and funding:

- Attract targeted applicants instead of pushing them away.
- Translate calls to the language of the targeted groups.
- Disseminate information within and across communities in minority languages and in formats that are accessible to persons with vision or hearing impairments.
- Use community networks to disseminate information.
- Provide support to Roma (women) organisations to apply to calls, especially to Roma (women) organisations from rural areas.
- Provide support to Roma women, especially from rural areas, to initiate project/funding applications – i.e. to find organisation to submit a project proposal developed with regard to the specific needs put forward by the concrete stakeholders.
- Provide support to Roma (women) organisations to implement projects (hands-on-training)

## Part 3: Roma women's perspectives on the challenges to preventing and combatting gender-based violence

All women and girls, regardless of who they are or where they live, including Roma women, have the right to be free from violence. Measures should be implemented to prevent gender-based violence. If violence occurs, measures should be taken to protect and support victims against further violence, and measures to prosecute perpetrators of such crimes should be advanced (see box 3.1 and part 5). How are the Council of Europe standards regarding violence women and domestic violence seen from the perspective of Roma women?

### Box 3

#### MEASURES TO PREVENT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, PROTECT VICTIMS AND PROSECUTE PERPETRATORS

##### PREVENTION

Violence against women and domestic violence should be prevented before it occurs. Prevention is about changing attitudes, gender roles and stereotypes that make violence against women acceptable and raising awareness of different types of violence. Preventive actions should be taken within the education system, among professionals working with victims and in cooperation with NGOs, the media and the private sector in order to reach out to the public. Measures for the prevention of gender-based and domestic violence are:

- Training programmes for professionals
- Rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators
- Campaigns to raise awareness
- Promote women's empowerment
- Involve men and boys
- Education in non-violence and equality between women and men
- Challenge gender stereotypes

##### PROTECTION AND SUPPORT

Victims of gender-based violence shall be protected from further violence and receive support and assistance to overcome the multiple consequences of such violence, and rebuild their lives. Victims of such crimes are entitled to protection and support. Protection can e.g. be ensured through specialised support services that provide medical, psychological and legal services to victims and their children and through shelters and free helplines. All protection should be carried out with a victim-centred approach. Measures for the protection and support of victims of gender-based and domestic violence are:

- Information on victims' rights
- Focus on the needs and rights of child witnesses
- Protection or restraining orders
- Emergency barring orders
- Safe custody and visitation rights for children
- Free telephone helplines / internet helplines
- Support services
- Shelters
- Rape crisis or sexual violence reception centres
- Report violence to the relevant authorities
- Regional or international complaint mechanisms

#### PROSECUTION

Perpetrators of violence against women and domestic violence shall be held accountable for their criminal acts throughout the processes of prosecution. The Prosecution pillar of the Istanbul Convention refers to the set of measures and strategies designed to make sure that legislation is in place that recognizes such acts as crimes with appropriate sanctions, as well as measures for investigating, prosecuting, and punishing perpetrators. Criminalisation and appropriate punishment, with no excuses on the grounds of culture, custom or religion is important. Law enforcement agencies must respond immediately to calls for assistance, and victims must be protected during investigation and judicial proceedings. Measures for the prosecution of perpetrators include:

- Dissuasive sanctions for perpetrators
- Effective public prosecution
- Consideration of aggravating circumstances
- Protection of child victims and witnesses
- Coordinated risk assessment
- No victim blaming
- Secure victims' right to privacy
- Secure victims' right to information and support
- Victims' protection during investigative and juridical proceedings
- Legislation criminalising violence against women
- Effective police investigation

Source: [www.eeagender.org](http://www.eeagender.org)

The project has identified that Roma women face challenges in all three areas:

- **Prevention:** Efficient prevention measures in Roma communities are still lacking.
- **Protection:** Protection and support measures are not easily accessible for many Roma women. Furthermore, the specific needs of Roma women are often not taken into account in the design of the measures.
- **Prosecution:** Cases of gender-based violence against Roma women continue to be severely underreported crimes. Hence the rates of perpetrators being held accountable through processes of prosecution are very low, leading to impunity.



## Challenges related to Prevention

The project has identified the following major challenges in preventing gender-based violence and domestic violence against Roma women.

### GENERAL STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

- **Systematic and coherent approach is needed**

Prevention measures are not always a priority. Even if they are, they seem rarely to address problems such as negative experiences with discrimination, stigmas and prejudice. An integrated institutional approach to prevention (inter-ministerial cooperation, and comprehensive and coordinated measures to addressing problems) could help in bringing about change.

- **Reliable, pro-active and ethnic-sensitive institutions**

A lack of trust in institutions (i.e., mistrust that authorities will take such a case seriously and the perpetrator will be sanctioned, that there will be any reaction from the institutions and a remedy would be offered, that eventually women would not be exposed before their families and communities for having reported the case) increases the number of “silent victims”. Having negative experiences with multiple discrimination and intersectionality, Roma women are particularly reluctant to turn to institutions for support or even to report a case. Social workers at large do not have sufficient skills or competences to address cases of violence against Roma women. Hence, they feel reluctant to follow these cases and very few social workers are willing to enter and work in Roma communities.

- **Legal frameworks**

Multiple discrimination and intersectionality are still largely absent from legal frameworks regulating the protection from discrimination at international and national levels. Roma women are particularly vulnerable on both grounds.

- **Provision of services**

When clear legal frameworks are not in place, including sustainable funding for cooperation between the authorities and NGOs as providers of state support to victims of domestic violence, public and state institutions are reluctant to establish structured partnerships with civil society organisations. The role of the state is therefore often taken over by NGOs at their own initiative. NGOs, however, are not able to offer efficient and continuous support due to the lack of stable and continuous state funding.

- **Infrastructure**

The lack of a sufficient number of nearby shelters, especially in rural areas, and the time limits for staying in shelters force many women (especially those with children) to return to the perpetrator. This is largely the case with Roma women victims of domestic violence, who are often dependent financially on their partners and/or families.

### STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

- **Accepted practice**

In many European societies violence against women remains excused and accepted as a practice by both men and women. Gender-specific perceptions about roles in the community or in the family, including in Roma communities, are still persistent.



- **Gender unequal communities**

In patriarchal communities, the family of the victim or the family of the perpetrator can pressure the woman to accept and tolerate domestic violence, and to return to the perpetrator after she attempted to leave. Sometimes, the family can also contribute to the perpetuation of the violence. Sometimes several members of the extended family (such as brothers) may also subject a woman to violence to force her to conform to the gender norms of the community that are assigned to her as a woman. As expressed in Steering Committee meetings, many Roma women perceive (or are made to believe) that domestic violence is “a family issue”. This internalised norm hinders them to step forward and report such cases. Some women are even reluctant to talk about it and to seek support from peers (women who have been exposed to similar experiences). The lack of support-groups and safe places, where they can meet, and talk is an additional challenge to prevent violence from (re)occurrence.

## MEDIA-RELATED CHALLENGES

- **Implementation of legal provisions**

Although the EU Directive 2000 against Racial Discrimination, apart from being directly applicable, is also embedded in the national legislation of many EU countries, its implementation by the media may still an issue.

- **Media impact**

Biased and stigmatizing media messages add to the challenges faced by Roma women. Sometimes, media remain silent about the ethnic origin of a woman, victim of violence, when such occurs in Roma communities in contrast to sensationalising cases, when a Roma woman is the perpetrator.

- **Regulation over media**

In contrast to the measures for ensuring compliance of public media with adopted principles and practices, there is still no efficient tools to prevent transmission of incorrect or biased information by private and especially online media. No regular media monitoring is performed to prevent the dissemination of negative stereotypes against Roma. In some cases, the lack of control of online media leads to hate speech following portrayed violence against Roma women and hence contributes to a further victimisation and humiliation of the victim.

- **Recognising violence**

Training available to professionals on how to recognise, to respond to, and to report gender-based and domestic violence was identified as insufficient. Such training, based on European standards, would increase awareness and work toward changing harmful attitudes towards gender-based violence against women often seen in the media.

- **Ethnic-sensitive training**

Taking into account that the Roma are represented in almost all European countries, media standards about how to report cases of violence against Roma women should be considered.

- **Responsibility**

Media at large are often well aware and very careful with regard to the compliance to documents and frameworks that regulate their work. The CoE has developed a number of guidelines on the

media's role in promoting gender equality and violence prevention. However, due to their non-binding character, these documents seem to be not sufficiently utilised.

#### CHALLENGES REGARDING EDUCATION AND LACK OF TRAINING

- **Eradicating stereotypes, Antigypsyism, and sexism**

To change social and cultural perceptions so that violence is recognised, avoided, and not tolerated or accepted as a “normality” is a key prevention measure, though a long and difficult process. In patriarchal communities, especially when they are closed as Roma communities largely are, it is even more problematic to introduce the concept and the principles of “gender equality”.

- **Schools and youth clubs**

Engaging Roma youth in extracurricular activities, in sport, hobby or other youth clubs, is particularly important. It can contribute to the reduction of the high drop-out rates. However, obtaining both the consent of the youngster and their parents might be a challenge. Similarly, although engaging Roma parents in consultations is of significant importance, that could not always be feasible due to various reasons (such as lack of trust in institutions, complicated family relationships, parents working abroad).

#### CHALLENGES REGARDING AWARENESS-RAISING

- **Human rights**

Many victims are not aware that being free from violence is a fundamental human right that is protected by international and national laws. This allows perpetrators to continue to breach the rights of people in all impunity.

- **Domestic and gender-based violence**

Mistaken for “expression of love and care”, for “normality” or “dirty laundry” (a family issue that must not be talked about), victims of domestic and gender-based violence are often reluctant to report, act against or take any measures to prevent such violence from reoccurring.

- **Lack of information**

Even if awareness about human rights and domestic/gender-based violence exists, victims often do not have information about where they can turn for support, how to report and how to prevent such violence.

- **Perpetrator programmes**

The establishment of programmes to teach perpetrators of domestic violence and sex offenders to adopt non-violent behaviour is an important prevention component that is still underexplored in many countries.

### Challenges related to Protection and Support

The project has identified a number of major challenges faced by Roma women subject to gender-based violence and domestic violence, in accessing protection and support services.

### STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

- **Isolation - a sustaining factor to the persistence of gender-based violence**  
Women in marginalised and minority communities (as they often live isolated from mainstream society), are particularly susceptible to gender-based violence and face compounded difficulties to escape from the cycles of violence.
- **Racial violence, abuse, and discrimination (by protection and support service providers, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary)**  
When discriminatory attitudes underlie the perceptions and practices of law-enforcement and social service providers, professionals, authorities, and members of societies at large, the barriers to access of Roma women victims of violence to protection and support services are higher. The same attitudes can also hinder the development of Roma women sensitive programmes and projects.
- **Prejudice and misperceptions about Roma and their customs, traditions and cultural practices**  
Due to existing stereotypes and prejudices, service providers and law-enforcement officers might disregard cases of violence against Roma women (e.g., early marriages) with the assumption that these are “cultural practices” and hence ignore the need for intervention, and provision of protection and support.

### LACK OF DATA AND INFORMATION

- **Lack of data, information, and statistics on the provision of protection and support to Roma women**  
The design and planning of efficient mechanisms and programmes aiming at protection from violence and the provision of adequate support to Roma women are often impeded by a lack of data and information, and accurate statistics on cases of violence against Roma women and domestic violence in Roma communities.
- **Underreported violence**  
A number of factors as mentioned earlier, create barriers for Roma women to report cases of violence, which leads to further impunity to perpetrators – a vicious cycle.

### SERVICE-PROVIDERS WITH KNOWLEDGE IN ROMA-RELATED ISSUES

- **Awareness**  
The lack of awareness of the especially vulnerable situation of Roma women, together with discriminatory attitudes from within the law-enforcement structures (e.g. police) as well as the support services, is a major barrier to women accessing protection and support.
- **Training**  
To be able to recognise and understand the particular vulnerabilities of Roma women and to acquire knowledge and competences on how to address such cases and the specific needs of Roma women (girls and children) victims of gender-based and/or domestic violence, special training for police and service providers is needed.

## TAILOR-MADE SERVICES

- Sensitive protection and support measures**  
 To eliminate challenges that Roma women face when seeking protection from violence and support to be free from violence, measures that consider the particular needs of Roma women need to be elaborated.
- Gender sensitivity in Roma integration strategies**  
 The current Roma integration policies and strategies at large fail to take into account gender-related issues and challenges (issues and challenges that are specific to the different life situations of women and men). The lack of a gender-sensitive approach hinders the provision of adequate protection and support services to Roma women.
- Adequate specialist women's support services**  
 The project has, through the Steering Committee meetings, identified that there is an overall lack of awareness and understanding of gender-based violence and domestic violence against Roma women, in the Roma community centres, health-care services, among medical professionals, counselling centres at the local level, and the police. This prevents Roma women from approaching these service providers and to seek protection and/or support.
- Reaching-out and pro-active tools**  
 The project identified that the institutions and services providing support to victims of domestic violence at large in society, seem to lack appropriate and sensitive tools for reaching out to Roma women and their specific needs. A more pro-active approach towards Roma women and girls on the part of schools, and social and health services, in facilitating the access of Roma women victims of violence and domestic violence to protection and support could be considered.
- Adequate service infrastructure**  
 Impeded access to and often the limited capacities of shelters for women and children, low-threshold safe places and short-term shelters for urgent cases, rape crisis centres with easily accessible and immediate medical counselling, trauma care and forensic services are major challenges that many Roma women face. Furthermore, sometimes the insufficient sensitivity of the services providers to the special needs of Roma women at the shelters and safe places appear an additional impediment to their access to protection and freedom from violence.
- Alternative solutions**  
 Alternative solutions to compensate an underdeveloped infrastructure for protection to victims of domestic violence are not often sought. Such alternative solutions could be the establishment of "emergency" shelters at police stations or setting up special units to combat domestic violence and provide support to victims.

## EFFICIENT, COORDINATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE PROVISION OF SERVICES

- Normative frameworks and law enforcement**  
 The project notes that emergency barring orders etc. are not being effectively implemented. The Steering Committee meetings also pointed out that children were not being adequately protected by law enforcement, also deterring women from seeking help and support against violence.

- **Service-package**

In cases of gender-based and domestic violence, general services such as legal aid, psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, healthcare, social services, and assistance in finding employment, sensitive to the particular needs of Roma women, need to be made available to the victims as a part of a comprehensive protection and support “package”. Ensuring long-term support is a key to avoid a relapse into the cycle of violence.

- **Involvement of civil society**

The project notes the need for legal, operational and financial support for NGOs and civil society organisations, working in and with Roma communities. This would ensure that their knowledge, expertise and competencies could be put into real service in providing support to women victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

- **Inter-institutional/ agency coordination and cooperation**

A complex and comprehensive response is needed to address adequately and efficiently the complex challenges associated with efficient protection and support to Roma women exposed to gender-based and domestic violence. It can be achieved only through structured cooperation and coordination between various service providers. A lack of such may constitute a major barrier to Roma women to be free from violence.

## Challenges related to Prosecution

The project has identified a number of major challenges faced by Roma women subject to gender-based violence and domestic violence, in the prosecution process.

### STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

- **Language barriers**

Some Roma women face language barriers. Despite many countries having interpretation services in place during legal proceedings, the limited number of independent and competent interpreters hinders women’s access to justice.

- **Socio-economic challenges**

Poverty is a major obstacle to Roma women victims of domestic and/or gender-based violence, in seeking legal support. If there is no free legal aid available to victims, that would hinder the right of Roma women to seek justice.

- **Lack of personal documents**

For undocumented Roma women, going to the police and reporting any violence that they have been subject to is can be problematic. They fear the consequences from approaching the police and other government agencies that may cause them to face greater problems than the violence they are subject to in their families.

## CHALLENGES IN THE AREA OF VICTIMS' RIGHTS

- Right to privacy and protection during proceedings**  
 Victims' right to privacy is often not ensured. If victims are not provided with the needed support and protection during investigation and judicial proceedings, that would further increase the lack of trust in these institutions. It constitutes another impediment to many Roma women from going to the police and the courts to defend their rights.
- Right to not to be blamed as a victim**  
 Victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women often face being blamed for the violence they are subject to, and often more so in the case of Roma women. Such situations deter them from seeking support and protection.
- Right to information**  
 Often information is not provided to victims about their cases – they are not kept informed about the development of the case or about the situation of the perpetrator, such as if he is or will be released. On occasions when such information has been made available to Roma women, it has rarely been provided in a Roma language.
- Right to non-discrimination and equality**  
 The discrimination that Roma women face from public officials, as for example, when they turn to the police and/or the courts, often discourages victims to go forward and seek justice.
- Access to complaints mechanisms**  
 The project has identified that Roma women have little access to complaints mechanisms to report cases of experienced discrimination by the judiciary, law-enforcement, and support services, or of dismissive behaviour or inaction on the part of the Police. This lack of a possibility to render the authorities accountable can create distrust in the prosecution system and hinders Roma women's access to justice.
- Child Protection**  
 A further barrier to Roma women in seeking justice is the incoherent and inadequate support to child-victims. Child-victims and young women need good protection measures made easily available and accessible to them.

## CHALLENGES FROM WITHIN THE ROMA COMMUNITIES

The project notes challenges in a number of areas.

- Law enforcement agencies and trust**  
 Many Roma women are reluctant to approach law enforcement agencies due to the discrimination they have experienced in the past from legal institutions and law-enforcement agencies. There develops lack of trust in these agencies on the part of Roma communities. Women lack the support from peers in the community to go forward with reporting and actively pursuing their rights.

- **Justice provision**

In cases when legal frameworks and procedures are not elaborated well enough to offer full support to the victim of domestic and gender-based violence, Roma women victims often feel that they have not been justly heard or had real access to the prosecution system. Cases have been reported where Roma women have been to the police and reported a case of domestic violence, resulting in the woman being moved out from her home while the perpetrator continues to reside there. This lack of dissuasive sanctions against perpetrators fuels the feeling of injustice in the victim.

- **Fears of exclusion from the community**

Roma women often fear that reporting a case and bringing the perpetrator to court might lead not only to exclusion from the community and/or the extended family but also to the loss of their children.

## CHALLENGES TO ROMA WOMEN IN THE PROSECUTION PROCESS

- **Absence of Normative and Legal Frameworks and Standards**

A huge challenge to Roma women's access to justice is the inadequate legislation and normative frameworks that set up standards and principles and regulate and monitor the work of institutions protecting and supporting victims of gender-based and domestic violence, including Roma women and girls. For example, the lack of laws regulating marriages that allow marriage only after the age of 18. Dissuasive sanctions are also lacking for parents for allowing early marriages and trafficking. The acceptance of abuse as 'cultural practices' is often used as an excuse for acts of violence against Roma women.

- **Alternative legal solutions**

When existing legal frameworks are inadequate, efforts must be made to find alternative legal solutions, for example, complaints can be registered as "endangerment of security" or under another law. Police should be able to start a procedure ex-officio.

## CHALLENGES IN THE JUDICIARY AND LAW-ENFORCEMENT

- **Unreported cases**

The majority of violence against women and domestic violence cases are not reported and thus not taken to the courts. This is even more so the case for Roma communities.

- **Police investigation and accountability for inaction on the part of the Police and law enforcement agencies**

The project has noted that in a number of cases where the police have been approached, the response has been ineffective and inadequate. The police are usually the first service to respond to cases of gender-based violence. And if they are not attentive and do not understand violence against women and domestic violence, and the specific needs of the victim, and are untrained in dealing with victims of compounded discrimination, they will be unable to respond adequately to calls for assistance from Roma women. There seems to be a tendency in the police to turn to the prosecutor's office for instructions on how to proceed with a case. There are no mechanisms in place for making the Police accountable for inaction.



- **Proactive approach**  
A proactive approach on the part of the Police and law enforcement authorities would be beneficial to Roma women victims seeking support against violence and contribute to establishing trust in the institutions.
- **Public prosecution**  
The Steering Committee members have noted that that public prosecution is rarely followed up. This is a challenge leading to impunity for perpetrators.
- **Protocols**  
The lack of protocols for public officers to follow when dealing with cases of violence against Roma women is another challenge to law-enforcement professionals and the judiciary. Protocols need to ensure that the rights of the victims are adequately protected and that the procedures are respected, regardless of the level of knowledge and capacities of the officers in place. As a minimum, protocols need to instruct:
  - What steps need to be followed in cases of domestic violence?
  - Which laws shall be applied in case there is no law on domestic violence (or when domestic violence is not criminalised as a stand-alone crime)?
  - How to address specific issues?
  - Which are the experts and/or institutions that the police can approach in special cases (24/7)?
  - How can cooperation take place between public officials and law enforcement agencies and the prosecutors' office (cooperation strategy in the case of domestic violence)?
- **Trained professionals**  
The project has noted that there is a general lack of trained law enforcement professionals and lawyers for dealing in a good manner with investigating abuse, gender-based violence and domestic violence, and with providing protection to the victims. Police officers/ social security services need to know which laws are applicable, what actions need to be taken (to record the case, to help the victim, to address the perpetrator), and what services are available to support the victims.
- **Awareness and sensitivity to multiple discrimination among public officials**  
The Steering Committee members noted that there seems to be a lack of understanding among a number of public officials that Roma women face discrimination multiple grounds. Violence and abuse are seen sometimes as cultural practices, as seen for example with forced marriages.
- **Stereotypes and discriminatory practices**  
The lack of awareness and sensitivity in the judiciary and law enforcement agencies often results in the lack of an adequate response to cases of violence against Roma women. Stereotypes and discriminatory practices are a major impediment to Roma women victims of violence to turn to law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, and to bring their cases to the courts.



## Part 4: Targeted measures and recommendations on how to address the challenges faced by Roma Women

Targeted measures are needed to ensure that the specific needs of Roma women are taken into account when designing and implementing measures in the area of prevention, protection and prosecution of gender-based and domestic violence.

### Measures for prevention of gender-based violence against Roma women

To prevent violence against women in Roma communities, the root causes should be identified, analysed and addressed. Development of targeted measures or adaptation of the existing ones should be considered. The specific needs of people in vulnerable situations need to be addressed from a human rights standpoint.

#### Active engagement of public institutions at state level

- Within the programmes aiming at prevention of gender-based violence, particular components targeting Roma and the specific community challenges that they face need to be developed and embedded.
- Countries need to ensure that all laws reflect gender equality principles, and that attention is paid to the prevention of multiple discrimination and intersectionality. Sanctions should be envisaged in established cases of discriminatory practices at institutional level.
- Institutions should be rendered accountable for their effectiveness in all cases of reported violence.
- Domestic violence prevention measures should be embedded in municipal programmes for provision of social services. Targeted measures addressing Roma women should be integrated in the local level action plans for implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies. Strategies and programmes at national level and at local level need to be synchronized.

#### Law-enforcement institutions

- To ensure that procedures in cases of domestic and gender-based violence against women, and Roma women in particular, adhere to the principles of human rights, non-discrimination and equality, protocols should be developed in line with European standards.
- Law enforcement institutions need to ensure that all their officers are made well aware of the procedures in case of reports of violence, and that they follow the adopted protocols.
- Law enforcement institutions should establish structured cooperation with lawyers, social workers, psychologists, NGOs, etc., so that there is a point of reference in case of complicated cases of domestic violence when protocols do not provide clear indication of the steps that need to be taken.

### **Cooperation between public institutions and NGOs, media, and other stakeholders**

- Structured cooperation between countries and NGOs should be established.
- Programmes and activities for women's empowerment should be introduced.
- Programmes aimed at prevention of violence should be launched offering sustainable funding to NGOs that would engage with their implementation.
- Existing projects and initiatives should be ensured continuity through the provision of stable funding from states or through the establishment of structured partnerships with respective civil society or other organisations.

### **Awareness Raising**

- Foster anti-discrimination and combat antigypsyism measures.
- Information about available legal support, services, shelters, and the respective contact points should be disseminated widely among Roma communities, specifically reaching out to women and girls. Roma mediators, having an immediate access to the target group, could be actively engaged in that.
- To be accessible, the information needs to be provided in a language that Roma women understand and via means of communication that will ensure the wider outreach. Development of visual materials (posters) can eliminate any potential language barrier.
- Countries, in cooperation with media, should develop and offer info-materials to raise awareness about and promote gender equality, healthy relationships, perceptions about roles in the family, and antigypsyism. Particular focus needs to be placed on increasing the level of understanding of what is multiple discrimination and intersectionality, of how to recognise gender-based and domestic violence and how to report it, of the rights of a victim of violence and respective response from institutions.
- Self-reflection on values, norms, tolerance to and unacceptance of violence, aggressive and non-aggressive behaviour can be fostered among Roma women members through targeted seminars and workshops.
- The State should fund the development of such programmes and info-materials.

### **Regulatory framework and standards for media and private sector**

The media and the private sector need to enhance respectful gender roles and challenge attitudes that excuse violence against women.

- Laws regulating the media must reflect not only gender equality principles, but also provide standards for the portrayal of cases concerning gender-based violence against women, and especially cases of violence against Roma women.
- Bodies to monitor traditional and online media and to report cases of negative portrayals of Roma women should be established.
- The State needs to ensure that media and the private sector are aware of the Council of Europe Guidelines and Recommendations concerning violence prevention and gender equality including the Istanbul Convention; and that the media promotes them sufficiently.
- Equality bodies should provide expert support and targeted training to journalists and media professionals to increase their understanding of domestic and gender-based violence, of the international standards and mechanisms to prevent and address them, and of human rights principles. Particular focus needs to be placed on issues concerning cases of violence against Roma women and the concept of intersectionality, including the multiple discrimination faced by Roma women and girls.



### Media awareness-raising campaigns

- Awareness-raising campaigns should inform and increase societal and institutional sensitivity about the different forms of violence, their devastating nature, and the impact that they have on women and children. Social media influencers also should be considered as important stakeholders, which could promote positive change.
- In such campaigns, particular attention needs to be paid to the situation of Roma women and on the equality and non-discrimination standards. Promotion of changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men would eventually counteract established gender and ethnic stereotyping.
- Of particular importance is that media campaigns avoid stereotypes when portraying Roma women. Media should promote positive examples of Roma women.
- In addition, campaigns to raise awareness of target groups and communities should be designed and implemented.
- To enhance the role of media, professionals need to be trained on how to recognise and report gender-based violence. Reference to standards for gender-sensitive reporting, including the Istanbul Convention, and case studies can be particularly helpful. Both guidance materials and case studies can be found in the Council of Europe [online resource library](#). Training for journalists on how to report and describe cases of violence against women and domestic violence against Roma women should be more widespread.

### Education

- Development of Codes of Conduct that promote gender equality and foster adherence to non-discrimination as well as to non-violent behaviour should become a standard and a prerequisite for access to youth clubs, schools, and other educational institutions, and to the benefits that they offer. Roma women should be actively involved in the designing of the training programmes.
- Educational programmes must not introduce stigmas – i.e., not all men are perpetrators of violence by default.

### General curricula and educational resources

- Education on gender equality, gender-based violence, non-violent conflict resolution, and the right to personal integrity should be embedded within formal curricula at all levels of education.
- Educational programmes need to be supported by relevant educational materials, which are still largely missing, relevant institutions need to focus on the development of the respective resources.
- Teaching materials on gender equality, gender-based violence, non-violent conflict resolution, women's rights, etc., should be adapted and/or developed to reflect the specific situation of Roma communities.
- Cooperation between schools and social service providers at national and local levels is needed for identification and implementation of measures that would foster the engagement of parents.
- Special educational programmes of governmental websites and social media channels (e.g. in YouTube) could be a useful tool for widening the outreach.
- The above recommended measures could be considered and included in non-formal education as well.



### **Training of professionals**

- Professionals need to be trained to work with victims or perpetrators, to recognise and respond to violence, and make appropriate referrals.
- Gender equality should be embedded in programmes for educational professionals at every educational level. Such programmes should therefore also combat antigypsyism and promote tolerance and diversity and raise awareness about negative stereotypes and prejudices (e.g., as the CoE Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals HELP courses that cover both gender-based and domestic violence and antigypsyism).
- There is a need for developing training programmes for professionals on how to work in Roma communities and with Roma women victims of domestic violence. These should be developed and delivered to the respective public servants at national and local level. For social workers such trainings must be included in the job-requirement.

### **Training programmes for Roma women**

- There is a need for the development of training programmes for Roma women (outreach workers) on how to provide support to other Roma women and raise their awareness about gender equality and domestic violence.
- Special programmes to support young (Roma) mothers to complete their secondary education (as a minimum) and to acquire professional skills should be developed and implemented at local and national levels.
- Roma women can learn from and be empowered by peer-to-peer experience sharing. For that purpose, safe spaces where they can gather and discuss sensitive issues need to be created in order to encourage Roma women and girls to talk openly about domestic and gender-based violence.

### **Training programmes for youth**

- Training of youth in gender equality and non-violent behaviour, fostering self-reflection among boys and men about the negative impact and consequences of aggression and about their role in preventing violence, and fostering their active engagement is a necessary precondition for achieving lasting and sustainable societal change.
- Schools and youth clubs can contribute significantly but a structured approach is needed. Schools can become active agents in the prevention of violence by monitoring the well-being of children. A specific approach to reach out to Roma parents should be elaborated.
- Alternative methods for engaging Roma youth in activities promoting gender equality and non-violence in conflict resolution should be developed. These should also reach out to early school leavers and young people dropping out of schools.

### **Role of mediators**

- Due to the sensitivity of the topic for the Roma women, involvement of mediators from other Roma communities could be also considered.
- Roma educational and health mediators should be trained specifically on how to support gender-based violence prevention measures and programmes.
- Mediators are needed both in formal education and in non-formal education and youth programmes.



### Role of men and boys

- It is important to explore the manner in which involvement of men and boys in promoting gender equality and countering violence against women can be undertaken. Encouraging the active engagement and contribution from men and boys in the prevention of violence would enable the achievement of positive and sustainable results.
- Roma community leaders should be attracted and involved actively in all gender equality and violence prevention programmes, especially in outreach to Roma boys.

### Measures for provision of protection and support to Roma women

Roma women subject to gender based and domestic violence, face discrimination and social exclusion not only as women, but also on the grounds of race, education, and socio-economic status. They experience discrimination on multiple grounds at the same time. Further, Roma women may be subject to various forms of violence against women including racialised violence. All authorities, officials, agents and institutions responsible for the provision of protection and support services to victims of gender-based and domestic violence, need to be cognisant of this. They should therefore pay attention to the specific needs of Roma women in the development of all policies, programmes and projects, as well as in the implementation of measures, in the support, protection, and service provision for victims of gender based and domestic violence.

- All relevant authorities need to have an understanding of the situation of the Roma, and Roma women and girls in particular.
- All general services such as legal advice and aid, psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, healthcare, social services and assistance in finding employment, should pay attention to the specific needs of Roma women and should be made easily accessible to them. Further, countries should abide by the principle of due diligence, by which they shall be responsible for taking all possible steps for the prevention, investigation, and sanctioning of violence against women in all of its forms and must provide protection and reparation to victims. The needs of the victim should be placed at the centre of all protection and support services and adequate funding of all services should be ensured.
- Attention needs to be paid in all the services for building trust in the Roma communities. To achieve this, protection and support services need to work closely with Roma women, Roma lawyers and NGOs including Roma young people's organisations and Roma mediators.
- Children should be protected as victims of domestic violence when they have witnessed violence in the family.
- Application of a holistic and comprehensive approach in the designing and implementation of protection measures is of crucial importance for achieving real and sustainable results.

### Competence building of professionals and service providers

- Services need to have competence in gender-based violence and in dealing with victims and survivors of compounded and intersectional discrimination.
- All professionals and service providers across the protection and support services need to have adequate competences and knowledge on gender-based violence and domestic violence, its causes and consequences, both to the victims, the community and society as a whole. They must also have an understanding of the enormous negative impact on the lives of Roma women caused by discriminatory attitudes and practices in society. These services need to have the competences and capacity to provide protection and support in a gender sensitive and anti-discriminatory manner.



### Focused trainings

Professionals and service providers shall receive training in Human rights, Women's rights and Gender Equality, and Gender-based violence and domestic violence, its causes and consequences. They should gain knowledge on the harms of discrimination and discriminatory practices in society, on the multiple and the intersectional forms of discrimination that Roma women experience in their everyday lives and on the negative impacts of gender-based violence on the victims coming from marginalised communities.

### Access to information for Roma women on their rights to protection and support

Roma women should receive information in the Roma language regarding their rights to protection and support. Visual materials ought also to be provided.

Information should be provided on:

- Women's human right to live a life free from violence. They shall receive information on gender-based and domestic violence - that domestic violence, sexual harassment, psychological, social, and economic forms of oppression from family members are forms of gender-based violence, and a violation of their right to live a life free from violence
- Women's right to protection and support services when exposed to gender-based and domestic violence
- Where and how women can seek the protection and support they need
- Regional and International Complaint mechanisms and how to access these

### Access to shelters, rape crisis centres, and specialist women's support services

Roma women who have been subject to gender-based violence shall have quick and easy access to all protection and support services available for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence. If this is not easily accessible, women and their children have no other option than to stay in abusive and violent relationships and families, thus perpetuating the violence.

- Protection and support services need to work closely with Roma women, Roma lawyers and NGOs including Roma young people's organisations and Roma mediators.
- All services need to be adequately funded.
- Roma women exposed to gender-based or domestic violence must be ensured easy access to a local, easily accessible shelter for women with their children. Shelters shall have adequate capacity for housing women and their children. And they shall be available free of cost.
- Counselling shall be provided based on their specific needs. If they need support in relocating and/or establishing themselves in society, this should also be provided.
- Short-term safe shelters for urgent cases should be made available and easily accessible.
- Roma women who have been subject to rape or sexual violence must be provided with quick and easy access to a nearby easily accessible centre providing immediate medical counselling, trauma care and forensic services.
- Free transportation shall be provided to women in need of accessing victim services.
- Support services need to have a pro-active approach, reaching out into Roma communities, finding ways in which they can be more easily available and accessible to Roma women and girls.
- Outreach programmes should be developed, establishing centres close to where Roma women live, where they could drop in and access help and support. These could be counselling centres or open places, where women can come not necessarily for help against violence, but providing an open and safe space where they can talk about issues of interest to them. This would provide them with their own **forum for discussion** on questions of importance to them.



### **Access to health and social services**

- All social and health services should have an understanding of the specific needs of Roma women. Health and social workers should have an understanding of the negative impact that living in marginalised communities has on women's lives.
- Professional health workers and social service providers shall be able to communicate in a language women understand.
- Already existing social services, like Roma community centres should include professionals who have been trained to deal with domestic violence.
- The services should also have enough funds to travel to the women's homes, if necessary.
- Mobile teams consisting of professionals and experts such as doctors, psychologists, legal assistants, police officers, and mediators in Roma language, can be set up to work with Roma.
- Roma women should be heard with respect and sensitivity by all service providers.
- Social workers and psychologists in schools need to be trained in recognising gender-based violence and domestic violence, and how best to intervene.
- Mishandling of cases and discriminatory attitudes and practices on the part of service providers shall be sanctioned.

### **Access to housing, education and employment**

- Housing measures for women who wish to leave an abusive relationship shall be set up.
- Women subject to violence shall receive support to enter into or continue their education
- Women shall receive support to find employment and thus access to financial independence.

### **Roma mediators**

Roma mediators are often the only agency seen by the authorities as a legitimate actor to task with community work among the Roma. They are often the contact points between the authorities and the victims.

- Roma mediators need to be trained and supported.
- Social and health services should use the expertise of the mediators.

### **Building trust**

- Spaces and meeting points for ongoing discussions and debates between Roma and mainstream society need to be established.
- Regular consultations shall be held by the authorities with Roma women's NGOs, Roma youth organisations and Roma resource persons in policy making on support and service provision for victims of gender-based and domestic violence.
- Mechanisms should be put in place for facilitating the active involvement of Roma women survivors of gender-based violence and domestic violence, Roma women's NGOs, and Roma lawyers in all policy making, programming and protection, support and service provision for victims of gender-based and domestic violence, including in decision making in these services.
- Mechanisms for cooperation with Civil society, NGOS and Roma women's organisations and resource persons should be set up.
- Roma women's NGOs and civil society organisations should be funded for the work and support they provide to victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

### Media

- Mechanisms for regulating the media's portrayal of violence needs to be put in place.
- The media, when publishing articles or news on gender-based and domestic violence, should be obliged to publish the access number to protection and support services for victims of gender-based and domestic violence, including information about such services, and that it is a crime to use violence.
- Consider the regulation of the use of violence in video games.
- Mechanisms for countering hate speech in the media shall be put in place.

### Monitoring and evaluation

- Protection and support services should be regularly monitored and evaluated regarding their service provision, keeping in mind the needs and situation of Roma women victims of gender-based and domestic violence. Roma women's organisations should be actively involved in this process.
- A mapping of all relevant services and agencies shall be carried out.

### Reporting and police protection

The project has identified that Roma women are often reluctant to report the violence they have been subject to for fear of the social stigma attached in being seen as victims of gender-based and domestic violence. In addition, they are reluctant to bring 'shame' on to their community by reporting the violence. They also fear exclusion from the extended family and community.

The police are often the first agency to respond in the case of gender-based or domestic violence, and it is of great importance that their response is supportive with regard to the victim. Roma women should be met with respect and understanding.

- The Police should be provided training on gender-based and domestic violence.
- The police should be given training on how to respond to victims of gender-based and domestic violence, in particular to situations involving Roma women victims, which includes an understanding of the needs and cultural specificities of Roma women.
- The Police should have protocols to follow in responding to gender-based and domestic violence, for investigating the abuse and for protecting the victims, including a list of referrals and victim support services and NGOs.
- Special police units and / or stations for responding to domestic violence could be set up. Police working in these units should receive trainings on how to interview victims in order to avoid secondary victimisation.

### Emergency barring orders, protection or restraining orders

- Emergency barring orders grant the police the power to remove a perpetrator of domestic violence from their home for a specific period of time and order them to stay away from the victim. This is an important measure for Roma women, since, as Steering Committee members having direct experience with working with such victims of domestic violence pointed out that in a number of cases, Roma women have expressed their unwillingness to relocate to a shelter. An effective use of this measure would enable Roma women who have experienced domestic violence to continue staying at home with their children, if they so wish, while at the same time also removing the source of danger. This will in many cases also support the women in seeing that the perpetrator is being addressed and sanctioned.



- The same applies to protection and restraining orders. These should also be easily accessible for the immediate protection of Roma victims of gender-based and domestic violence.
- All these measures should be provided free of cost.

## **Measures for effective prosecution of perpetrators of violence against Roma women**

All perpetrators of gender-based and domestic violence against Roma women should be held accountable for their actions, and all victims of this violence, should receive justice, support, and protection from further harm. In order to achieve this, all Roma women who have been subject to gender-based and domestic violence shall be able to approach the Police and access the prosecution and courts to defend their rights, with no hindrance.

Public institutions need to ensure in a proactive manner that the access of victims of domestic and gender-based violence to justice is facilitated, and that sufficient support is provided to Roma women to report cases and take their cases to court, thus countering impunity of perpetrators.

### **Normative framework and legal provisions**

- All forms of gender-based and domestic violence shall be criminalised. Legislation ensuring criminalisation of all forms of gender-based violence against women, and domestic violence should be ensured. Laws and legal frameworks criminalising physical, psychological and sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, should be enacted. Culture, tradition or so-called 'honour' shall not be regarded as justification for the violence.
- Explore ways by which criminal and civil law can inform each other and work in a coordinated manner in cases of domestic violence.

### **Access to information for Roma women**

- Roma women shall receive information on existing laws and legal frameworks regarding gender-based and domestic violence in a language and manner most appropriate for them, taking into consideration their situation and needs.
- Roma women shall be informed on all institutional mechanisms available for combating gender-based violence and domestic violence.
- Mechanisms for cooperation with Roma organisations, Roma lawyers and other civil society organisations should be put in place.

### **Training**

- Law enforcement officials should have competence in how to respond in a gender sensitive and antiracist manner to calls for assistance from Roma women. Officials should be provided training in how to respond in a sensitive manner to minorities and marginalised communities, including Roma women.
- Prosecutors shall receive regular training on gender-based violence and domestic violence, its causes and consequences, as well as the negative consequences for victims experiencing discrimination and living in marginalised communities. Trainings on these issues should also be made available to lawyers, perhaps through the national Bar associations.

### Dissuasive sanctions

- Apply dissuasive sanctions for perpetrators. Governments should ensure that all criminal offences and breaches of protection orders in cases related to violence against Roma women shall be subject to criminal or legal sanctions including imprisonment, extradition, monitoring and supervision, and withdrawal of parental rights.
- Ensure effective public prosecution. The prosecutor's office should have sufficient competence and knowledge in handling these cases. The process shall not be dependent only upon a report or complaint by the victim.
- Take aggravating circumstances, such as position of power, trust, use of coercive control, use of firearms etc. into consideration in legal proceedings.

### During police investigation and the prosecution process

Ensure effective and safe police investigation into reports made by Roma women about gender-based violence and domestic violence.

- Law enforcement agencies must respond immediately to calls for assistance from Roma women, assess all the relevant risk factors, manage dangerous situations appropriately, and investigate all allegations of violence by Roma women.
- Roma women who come forward to report gender-based and domestic violence should be ensured protection during the investigation process. They shall not be blamed for the violence.
- Free legal aid should be provided to victims of gender-based and domestic violence, throughout the course of case.
- Police must be rendered accountable and sanctioned for inaction.

### There should be no victim-blaming

All investigations and judicial proceedings shall ensure respect for Roma women victims at all stages and refrain from showing attitudes, behaviours and/ or practices which blame them for the abuse or cause them additional distress through secondary victimisation or otherwise.

- Ensure Roma victims' right to privacy.
  - Ensure that the privacy and image of the victim is protected, and that contact between the victim, and the alleged perpetrator is avoided where possible.
  - Roma women who forward their cases to the police and prosecution shall receive support in providing evidence, and have their needs and concerns presented directly or through an intermediary.
  - Roma women shall be enabled to testify in the courtroom through communication technologies, or without the alleged perpetrator present, where appropriate.
  - Questions as regards the sexual history of a victim shall only be permitted in civil or criminal proceedings where it is relevant and necessary.
- Ensure Roma victims' right to information and support throughout the case. Roma women who carried their case into the prosecution process shall:
  - have access to information on their rights as victims of gender-based and domestic violence.
  - be kept informed of the progress and outcome of their case.
  - have access to legal assistance and free legal aid.
  - have access to appropriate support services to help them represent those rights and interests.

- have access to support and assistance from governmental and non-governmental organisations, Roma women's organisations and domestic violence counsellors during the investigation and judicial proceedings.
  - have access to independent and competent interpreters.
  - be able to claim compensation from perpetrators of violence and to sue state authorities if they have failed in their preventive and protective duties.
  - Cooperation and coordination shall be established between the Police, the health sector and specialist support centres to gather and secure evidence of the violence.
- Ensure Roma women victims' protection during investigation and judicial proceedings. Roma women and their children subject to gender-based and domestic violence shall be protected at all stages of investigation and judicial proceedings, from intimidation, retaliation and repeat victimisation.
  - Alternative methods for conflict resolution or mediation between victim and perpetrator shall not be imposed on the victim.
  - The victim shall be informed of any escape or release of a perpetrator.

#### Safe custody and visitation rights for children

Many killings of women (femicides) and their children are perpetrated during this phase of investigation, prosecution, and the determination of child custody and visitation.

- Custody and visitation decisions must prioritise the rights and safety of the child and the victim.
- Women and children, victims of domestic violence, shall be protected from any form of violence or manipulative behaviour on the part of the perpetrators or others.

#### Protection and needs of child victims and witnesses

- The best interest of child witnesses of violence must be taken into account and age-appropriate psychosocial counselling provided, including for children from the Roma communities.
- Children must be provided with appropriate special protection measures. Child victims of sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced abortion or sterilisation must be able to initiate legal action for a sufficient amount of time after they have reached adulthood.
- If protection of children is not covered by the law on domestic violence, other laws framing the rights of children should be applied.

#### Co-ordinated risk assessments

- Risk assessments ought to be carried out in co-operation with relevant agencies and institutions in considering the risk to the victim, taking repeat offences and access to firearms into account, as well as any new information the investigation may uncover.

## Part 5: Resources on the topics covered by the Handbook

Please note that additional language versions of many of the following publications are available in the CoE Resource Library: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/search-a-resource>

### Access to Justice

- 2022, Research on the barriers of Roma women's access to justice in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania, **Report** <https://rm.coe.int/research-on-the-barriers-of-roma-women-s-access-to-justice-in-four-cou/1680a7cd27>

### Antigypsyism

- 2021, ECRI General Policy Recommendation N°13 revised on combating antigypsyism and discrimination against Roma, **Recommendations** <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/recommendation-no.13#:~:text=In%20this%20recommendation%2C%20ECRI%20calls,the%20application%20of%20criminal%20law>
- 2022, Antigypsyism- Causes – Prevalence – Consequences – Possible responses, **Report** <https://edoc.coe.int/en/roma-and-travellers/11121-antigypsyism-causes-prevalence-consequences-possible-responses.html>

### Awareness Raising/Advocacy for Istanbul Convention Ratification and Implementation

- 2022, Promising Practices from countries who have ratified the Istanbul Convention (CoE GREVIO secretariat), **Report**, <https://rm.coe.int/prems-010522-gbr-grevio-mid-term-horizontal-review-rev-february-2022/1680a58499>
- 2022 General/Ukraine. Infographic. What will the Istanbul Convention mean for Ukraine when it is fully applied? <https://rm.coe.int/ukr-2022-infographics-relevance-of-ic-eng-large/1680a97116>
- 2022 General/Azerbaijan – **Video**. Myths and facts on the Istanbul Convention. <https://vimeo.com/680005443>
- 2022 General/Ukraine. **Brochure**. The relevance of the Istanbul Convention in Ukraine today <https://rm.coe.int/ukr-2022-brochure-ic-relevance-en-web-final/1680a9709c>
- 2022 General/Azerbaijan. **Video** on Myths and facts about the Istanbul Convention [ENG](#)
- 2021 General/Moldova - **Video** How the system of assistance to victims of violence against women and domestic violence works in the Republic of Moldova now and how it will be improved. <https://vimeo.com/546534360>
- 2021 General/Moldova - **Infographic** How the system of assistance to victims of violence against women will need to be improved following the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the Republic of Moldova. <https://rm.coe.int/md-2021-2692-coe-infographic-how-the-system-eng/1680a33c8a>
- 2021 General/Moldova. **Brochure** Myths and facts about the about the Istanbul Convention. <https://rm.coe.int/md-2021-2692-coe-myths-and-facts-eng/1680a33d50>
- 2021 Moldova - **Video** Myths and facts about the Istanbul Convention. <https://vimeo.com/547543118>



- 2021 **National campaigns.** National NGOs' campaigns "Mobilise against sexism!" in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Spain. Ireland: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/mobilise-against-sexism-in-ireland->
- 2021 Ukraine: **Video** "[How will the Istanbul Convention help to stop violence against women in Ukraine?](#)"
- 2021 General/Ukraine: **Video** "Documentary on the impact of the Istanbul Convention" [ENG](#)
- 2021 General/Kosovo\*: **Guidance.** "Guidelines for Awareness Raising on VAW and DV" [ENG](#)
- 2021 Moldova: **Video** [Myths and Facts about the Istanbul Convention](#)
- 2021 Moldova: **Video** [how the system of assistance to victims of violence against women and domestic violence works in the Republic of Moldova now and how it will be improved following ratification of the Istanbul Convention](#)
- 2021 General/Moldova: **Infographics.** [How the system of assistance to victims of violence against women and domestic violence works in the Republic of Moldova now and how it will be improved](#)
- 2021 General/Moldova: **Brochure.** [Myths and Facts about the Istanbul Convention](#)
- 2021 Azerbaijan. **Interviews.** Azerbaijan Testimonials on the Istanbul Convention (lawyer, student, media) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/raising-awareness-of-the-istanbul-convention-and-other-gender-equality-standards-in-azerbaijan>
- 2021 Armenia: **Podcasts.** [Podcasts](#) on domestic violence and violence against women in Armenia
- 2020 General/Kosovo\* - **Guidelines** for awareness raising on violence against women and domestic violence. <https://rm.coe.int/guidelines-for-awareness-raising-on-vaw-and-dv-eng/1680a2cc4f>
- 2020 General: **Infographics.** 4Ps of the Istanbul Convention [ENG](#)
- **2020 General: Brochure.** 4Ps of Istanbul Convention
- 2020 General/Ukraine: **Infographics** "[Myths and facts about the Istanbul Convention](#)"
- 2020 General/Ukraine: **Video:** "[Myths and facts about the Istanbul Convention](#)"
- 2020 General/Ukraine: **Brochure:** [Myths and Facts about the Istanbul Convention](#).
- 2020 General/Ukraine: **infographics** "[Needed changes to the Ukrainian system of assistance for victims of violence against women and domestic violence](#)"
- 2020 General/Ukraine: **Brochure.** [explanatory brochure](#) on needed changes to the Ukrainian system of assistance for victims of violence against women and domestic violence
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- 2017 General/Ukraine: **Guidance.** [Guidance with regard to a long-term approach to awareness-raising on violence against women and domestic violence](#)
- 2015 General/Ukraine: **Report.** [Good international Practices and standards on violence against women and domestic violence; domestic violence, psychological violence, stalking, sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilisation.](#)
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- 2005 **Standards.** Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender mainstreaming in education and its explanatory memorandum. [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d5287](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d5287)
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- 2022 General **Guidance.** Ensuring the non-discrimination implementation of measures against violence against women and domestic violence: Article 4, paragraph 3 of the Istanbul Convention <https://rm.coe.int/paper-on-article-4-paragraph-3-of-the-istanbul-convention/1680a5d92e>
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- 2022 General. **Presentation**. Film professionals: women still only represent a quarter of all film directors working in Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/female-professionals-in-european-film-production-2022-edition-p-simone/1680a886c5>
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- 2016 General **Guidance**: [Encouraging the participation of the private sector and the media in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence: article 17 of the Istanbul Convention](#)
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- 2022 General/Kosovo. **Policy brief** - Implementing perpetrator programmes in Kosovo\* <https://rm.coe.int/implementing-perpetrator-programmes-in-kosovo-english/1680aa5265>
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- 2020 General/Kosovo\* - **Guidance**. Brochure on setting up treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and violence against women. <https://rm.coe.int/brochure-research-on-perpetrator-programmes-eng/1680a24d11>
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- 2021 General/Turkey. **Report**. [Assessing and managing risks in cases of violence against women and domestic violence: Strengthening risk assessments, the risk-management system and inter-agency co-ordination in Turkey](#)
- 2020 General/Ukraine: **Report**. [Risk Assessment Standards and Methodologies for Diverse Stakeholders: Next Steps in Implementing International Standards to Ensure the Safety of Victims of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#)

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- 2019 General. **Policy**. [Recommendation Cm/Rec\(2019\)1 Preventing and Combating Sexism](#)
- 2019 General. **Policy**. Website and **video**: Sexism: See it. Name it. Stop it. [ENG UKR](#)
- 2018 General. **Report**. [Joint study of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe](#)

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- 2019 General **Conference Report** "Tackling gender stereotypes and sexism", Helsinki, 28-29 March 2019. <https://rm.coe.int/prems-131619-gbr-2573-rapport-conference-helsinki-a5-web-1-/16809cbf75>

## Training of Professionals

- 2022, **Toolkit** for Police Officers: Council of Europe standards on racially motivated crimes and non-discrimination (2022), second edition, <https://rm.coe.int/toolkit-for-police-officer-council-of-europe-standards-on-racially-mot/1680a619c9>
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- 2021 General **Video**. Interactive online tool of the checklist on gender mainstreaming Law Schools' Curricula. [https://gender-mainstreaming.coe.int/story\\_html5.html](https://gender-mainstreaming.coe.int/story_html5.html)
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- 2021 General/Ukraine - **Manual** Combating violence against women and domestic violence: a practical guide for police officers. <https://rm.coe.int/ukr-2021-police-manual-updated-en/1680a46671>
- 2020 General/Ukraine: **Manual**. [Training Manual for Lawyers](#).
- 2020 General/Kosovo\*: **Manual**. Training of Trainer's Manual for Prosecutors and Judges [ENG](#) / [ALB](#) / [SRB](#)
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## Part 6: Positive examples of projects tackling domestic and gender-based violence (with a focus on Roma women)

The following projects were presented at the International Conference “Working together for a Europe free from violence – ensuring Roma women’s access to justice to assert their right to be free from violence”, held on 15-16 June 2023 in Sofia, Bulgaria

### Improvement of the efficiency of the police in the field of domestic and gender-based violence

#### General Project information

Funding line:	Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021
Project promoter:	Police Department, Ministry of Interior
Country:	Bulgaria
Website:	<a href="http://www.mvr.bg/gdnp/en/home">www.mvr.bg/gdnp/en/home</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/gdnp.mvr.bg">www.facebook.com/gdnp.mvr.bg</a>
Contact:	<a href="mailto:gdnp@mvr.bg">gdnp@mvr.bg</a>

#### Short description

The project combined measures to enhance the capacity of the Bulgarian police in responding to cases of domestic and gender-based violence as well as developing effective policies to combat this type of human rights violations. Aiming to improve the situation of Roma community and, in particular, of Roma women, the project was implemented in areas with a high concentration of Roma population. The project activities were planned with a focus on the improvement the administrative capacity of police officers to prevent violence against Roma women, to tackle such cases and to protect victims of violence. The activities included data collection on domestic and gender-based violence in Roma communities, risk assessment with focus on enhancing prevention, training to improve provision of support to victims.

#### Key project achievements

##### **Participation**

The implementation of the project envisaged the active involvement of Roma women, in particular, in the development of a risk-assessment algorithm for recognising cases of domestic and gender-based violence using protocols and standardised questionnaires. Furthermore, experts and NGOs with experience in Roma issues were involved and consulted to ensure that the tool will reflect the specific culture and traditions of the target group. An important element of the project implementation was the assessment of the level of trust of the Roma communities in the Police – two surveys have been therefore conducted at the beginning and at the end of the project within residential Roma settlements

The project accounted for achieving a better dialogue and partnership with representatives of Roma communities. The involvement of participants from the NGO sector in events and public discussions resulted in exchange of experience and generation of ideas for improving situation of Roma women.

### Prevention

The collection of data on domestic and gender-based violence in Roma communities aimed at improving the accuracy of the risk assessment with respect to prevention. The analysis of data showed that further prevention efforts in these areas should be specifically targeted at high-risk groups – i.e., at such, experiencing multiple vulnerabilities, including Roma women and girls.

The collected data were fed into the elaborated specialised information system on domestic and gender-based violence. The system is expected to ensure effective control by police structures, to facilitate the development of adequate policies appropriate to the needs of the victims, and to facilitate and increase the exchange of information between the respective service-providers.

Aimed at enhancing the implementation of the risk-assessment tool, the provided training raised awareness among officials of the Ministry of the Interior about domestic violence and violence against women and children, and in particular about the specific issues concerning Roma women and children. Human rights and victim's safety were also addressed with respect to the improvement of protection of victims of domestic and gender-based violence. A Training Manual for Trainers and a Methodological Manual for the Work of Police Officers on Domestic and Gender-Based Violence were developed within the frameworks of the project. Apart from the raised awareness, the project implementation accounted for improvement of the coordination mechanism to support victims of domestic and gender-based violence.

## Integrated measures for improved inclusion of people living in marginalized communities

### General project information

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021

Project promoter: Municipality of Pernik, Bulgaria in partnership with PULSE Foundation, Bulgaria and Intermezzo Ungdomsorganisasjon, Norway

Country: Bulgaria

Website: [www.pulsfoundation.org](http://www.pulsfoundation.org)

Contact: [pulse.women@gmail.com](mailto:pulse.women@gmail.com)

### Short description

Through application of integrated approaches, the project aims to create sustainable mechanisms to improve the condition and opportunities of people living in marginalized Roma communities on the territory of Pernik Municipality and to achieve their effective empowerment. The project targets the improvement of access of Roma and other vulnerable groups to social services, education, employment, and healthcare. Furthermore, it aims at fostering of non-discrimination, the active participation of Roma community, especially of Roma women and youth, in the decision-making processes at local level, as well as the cooperation with the public authorities, civil society and other service providers. Through active inclusion of the target group in the public life of Pernik Municipality, the project envisages to contribute to the overcoming of stereotypes and prejudices regarding the Roma community.



### **Key project achievements**

#### **Coordinated and targeted approach**

One of the core aspects of the project is the improvement of living conditions of end-users through the adoption of a complex coordinated approach to address their specific needs. The activities include the establishment of a multidisciplinary team to provide integrated social and health services, the equipment of a hub for social and health services, and the conducting of educational and informational events on various topics. The project activities include both infrastructural improvements and training and provision of social and health services in the community. It is expected that the strengthened partnership between the NGO-sector and the Municipality will not only ensure the development and provision of integrated social health services and the overall success of the planned and implemented initiatives, but will also increase the trust of the community in the public authorities.

#### **Participation**

To enhance the participation of stakeholders, a survey among the target group and key experts was conducted at the stage of project designing. Key collaborators were thereafter involved in the planning of the activities. Based on the analysis of the survey results, a Strategy for development of services was elaborated. Through the creation of a space for sharing and learning, the participants in the training programs became more engaged.

### **Improving the access to justice for people living under the poverty line with a special emphasis on women, children and Roma**

#### **General project information**

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021  
Project promoter: National Legal Aid Bureau  
Country: Bulgaria  
Website: <https://mjs.bg/home/index/1201f1c6-798b-41b6-a874-052e228ac8a1>  
Contact: [nbpp@nbpp.government.bg](mailto:nbpp@nbpp.government.bg)

#### **Short description**

Building on the Council of Europe and European Commission's Joint Programme "Roma Women's Access to Justice (JUSTROM)", the project aimed at improving the access to justice for citizens of Bulgaria who live under the line of poverty. Special emphasis is put to three main categories of beneficiaries: victims of domestic and gender-based violence, children at risk and Roma communities, especially in remote and isolated rural areas. Apart from establishing a coordination mechanism, the project achieved to deliver 7349 consultations. Out of them, 6000 were provided by the mobile teams, 567 consultations focused on issues related to domestic and gender-based violence, and 464 women were directly reached out.

### **Key project achievements**

#### **Coordinated approach**

To ensure access to legal aid for vulnerable groups and to facilitate the access to justice for Roma women, the project has established a local cooperation mechanism in response to domestic and gender-based violence and establishment of mobile legal aid units. Mobile teams of lawyers and Roma mediators were established in Varna, Veliko Tarnovo and Stara Zagora.



### Prevention

The raising of awareness on the existence and accessibility of free legal aid has enabled the provision of quality services to vulnerable groups across Bulgaria. Information campaigns and meetings were organised to inform the target groups about the project and the legal aid available in cases of domestic violence. The Roma mediators played an important role in the project implementation – they helped with the identification of people in need of legal aid, facilitated the organisation of meetings and the communication.

## Capacity building of the police officers working in multi-ethnic environment, including Roma communities and prevention of ill treatment by the police

### General project information

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021

Project promoter: Academy of the Ministry of Interior

Project partners: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) - Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)(PL)

Country: Bulgaria

Website: <https://studyinbulgaria.bg/academy-of-the-ministry-of-interior-sofia.html>

Contact: [radoslav\\_mishkov@abv.bg](mailto:radoslav_mishkov@abv.bg)

### Short description

The project contributes to the prevention of violation of human rights by the police while acting in a multi-ethnic environment. A special focus has been placed on the Roma population and on the enhancement of the police officers' skills related to prevention of domestic violence, trafficking in human beings and pickpocketing in Roma community and prevention of ill-treatment by the police. Overall, the project aimed to improve the situation of Roma.

### Key project achievements

#### Protection

Aiming at enhancing of the administrative capacity in policing in a multicultural society, at increasing the capacities of the police officers to address adequately cases involving Roma and preventing ill-treatment of the subjects, the project focused on provision of knowledge about the European antidiscrimination standards and about Roma values and culture. Among the issues, addressed by the training activities were prevention of stereotypes against Roma, reducing the prejudices, mistreatment and ethnic profiling. For the purposes of the project, a baseline study and analysis of policing on the current situation (including legislation, domestic violence, trafficking in human beings and pickpocketing in Roma community) was conducted. Special attention was placed on the of the concept of Roma safety and security, on the risks faced by Roma women and youth, and on the identification of specific challenges related to the trust between the police and Roma communities.

It is expected that the adapted to the situation in Bulgaria OSCE/ODIHR training program "Police and Roma effective police activity in accordance with human rights" will help to increase the sensitivity of the police officers and will enable the law enforcement authorities to provide an adequate response when a report of gender-based violence is filed in.



To ensure the sustainability of the project results and their multiplication, a module for e-learning platform on prevention of ill-treatment was developed and launched. Furthermore, a training curriculum on prevention of ill-treatment by police was elaborated and training sessions were conducted at the Centres for Specialized Police Training in Pazardzhik, Varna and Kazanlak.

### Participation

Another aspect of the project was the focus on the involvement of Roma community, NGOs, and international partners in trainings to share experience. In addition, a series of meetings with representatives of the focus groups were conducted. As a result of the seminars, problems that directly affect the relations between the Roma and the police at the national level were identified. Among these are the lack of trust in the police, the need for improving the processing of received signals, and the need for carrying out information campaigns for the prevention of gender-based violence.

## Roma policy lab

### General project information

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021

Project promoter: Open Society Institute Sofia

Country: Bulgaria

Website: [www.activecitizensfund.bg](http://www.activecitizensfund.bg)  
<https://romapolicylab.org/?lang=en>

Contact: [emarkova@osi.bg](mailto:emarkova@osi.bg)

### Short description

Romapolicylab.org is a joint initiative of Active Citizens Fund Bulgaria and the Bulgarian National Focal Point. It is a virtual space (website) for mapping, presenting, discussing and analysing EEA / Norway Grants Roma inclusion relevant projects and their results. The initiative is open also to other Fund Operators / Programme Operators from EEA / Norway Grants beneficiary countries to share projects' results, insights, as well as to participate in discussions. Fund Operator of the Active Citizens Fund Bulgaria program is Foundation Open Society Institute – Sofia, in partnership with Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation and Foundation Trust for Social Achievement.

The initiative aims at making Roma relevant projects more visible towards possible beneficial synergies. It is used also as a forum for policy discussions between NGOs and representatives of public institutions.

### Key project achievements

### Participation

To enhance participation of stakeholders, the Active Citizens Fund requests that applicants for funding to describe the way project beneficiaries have been involved in the needs analysis and project preparation. The embedded participatory activities within a project are also considered. For example, the project "I have a dream" aims at elaborating, testing, implementing and multiplying innovative methods for empowerment of Roma women and girls through advocacy and through training and building of key skills. The adopted innovative Norwegian methodology includes also direct advocacy through visual means, culture, folklore, and deliberative discussions.



## Capacity building and awareness on domestic and gender-based violence in the south-central region

### General project information

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021

Project promoter: Association "Union for Bulgaria"

Project partners: SUPRAS, Norway, Strelcha Municipality, Multi-Level Consulting

Country: Bulgaria

Website: [www.unionforbulgaria.eu](http://www.unionforbulgaria.eu)

Contact: [union.for.bg@gmail.com](mailto:union.for.bg@gmail.com)

### Short description

The project "Increasing capacity and awareness about domestic violence and gender-based violence in the South-Central Region" is implemented by the Union Association for Bulgaria in partnership with SUPRAS, Norway, Strelcha Municipality and Multi Level Consulting. The project aims to develop a pilot service in relation to domestic violence and gender-based violence and to create a centre for support, counselling and information "You are not alone". The centre will be established at the local level, in the project partner municipality, Strelcha. The project was launched in September 2022 and will be implemented until end of April 2024.

### Key project achievements

#### **Coordinated Approach**

Within the framework of the project activity "Study and analysis of the needs of vulnerable groups women and children that have experienced domestic violence and gender-based violence, with emphasis on the Roma community in South-Central region", 10 specific studies and analyzes will be carried out. They will focus on the needs of vulnerable groups women and children, that have experienced domestic violence and gender-based violence. A particular focus will be placed on the Roma community from 10 municipalities in South central region.

Based on the ten case-studies of the ten municipalities in the South-Central region, training programme on prevention and combating of domestic and gender-based violence against women and children, with emphasis on the Roma community, will be designed to support the capacity building of specialists working in the field. It envisaged that 80 specialists be trained in prevention and combating of domestic violence.

The project aims to develop a pilot service in relation to domestic violence and gender-based violence and to create a centre for support, counselling and information "You are not alone". The centre will be established at the local level, in the project partner municipality, Strelcha.

In all project activities the active participation of the Roma community and the cooperation with local institutions and stakeholders is encouraged.

The overall goal of the project is to increase the capacity of Bulgarian local authorities in the field of domestic violence and gender-based violence. The project supports the development and implementation of an effective integrated approach aimed at improving the status and opportunities of victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence. Part of the efforts associated with the

integrated approach (providing national/local protection, justice, social and psychotherapeutic support to overcome the consequences, based on an individual risk assessment for needs, resources, family, community, relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, etc.) will be supported with the implementation of the project.

## **Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**

### **General project information**

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021  
Project promoter: National Institute of Justice of Bulgaria  
Country: Bulgaria  
Website: <https://nij.bg>  
Contact: [nij@nij.bg](mailto:nij@nij.bg)

### **Short description**

The project aims at enhancement the professional knowledge and skills of the Judiciary, law enforcement and administration to handle domestic and gender-based violence cases as well as at improving the framework for institutional interaction and coordination. The main target groups are legal and other professionals working in the field of justice (magistrates, candidates for junior magistrates, court staff, assessors, lawyers, etc.), law enforcement officials, experts to Bulgarian authorities in charge of preventing and combating DGBV. The project activities are consistent with the Justice Programme's objective for strengthening the rule of law and contribute to the achievement of the Programme's outcome for ensuring the improved capacity of Bulgarian authorities in the DGBV-area.

### **Key project achievements**

#### **Coordinated Approach**

Aiming at ensuring a more effective prevention and counteraction to domestic and gender-based violence, the project focused on the enhancement of competences of Bulgarian magistrates and other respective experts. To improve the interaction between the Judiciary and the competent authorities, a pilot local cooperation mechanism in the field of violence against women and domestic violence was developed. Among the significant project results was the strengthening the inter-institutional cooperation and the building of synergies among projects, which enables the wider dissemination and sustainability of results. The conducted series of multi-professional training improved the mutual understanding and harmonisation of law enforcement practices.

#### **Protection**

To contribute to the improvement of the situation of Roma women, the professional training for the Judiciary and other professionals in the field with had a specific focus on the victims' rights and on the rights of vulnerable groups.

## Support for implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Romania

### General project information

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021  
Project promoter: National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men  
Country: Romania  
Website: [www.anes.gov.ro/justice](http://www.anes.gov.ro/justice)  
Contact: [proiect@anes.gov.ro](mailto:proiect@anes.gov.ro)

### Short description

The project represents a strategic action aimed at supporting the public administration authorities in Romania to adopt a coordinated action in addressing the challenges represented by the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, ratified by Romania on March 23, 2016. With the main objective of supporting the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Romania and implicitly aiming at the reduction of domestic violence and violence against women, this project is intended to facilitate the exchange of good practices with relevant Norwegian institutions with experience in the field domestic violence and violence against women.

### Key project achievements

#### **Coordinated and Roma-sensitive approach**

At the beginning of the project, an assessment of the national institutional framework in the field of domestic violence and violence against women was conducted. It started with identification of the prevailing forms of violence against women and subsequently, of the institutional capacity of ANES to fully implement the national policy on combating domestic violence and violence against women and on the implementation of administrative capacity building measures. The study enabled the development of a vocational training strategy.

To improve the methods of inter-institutional intervention at the level of the judicial system, including the law enforcement bodies, several multidisciplinary training sessions were organized for judges, prosecutors, police officers and forensic specialists. The training aimed not only at equipping the participants with better understanding of the key elements for a relevant approach to cases of domestic violence and violence against women, but also at enabling them to take into account the specific issues related to ethnic minorities (such as Roma women). Among the lessons learnt from the project is that Roma women should not be treated as a distinct vulnerable group but as women facing more challenges related to access of services and justice.

#### **Protection**

To improve the specialized support for preventing and combating domestic violence and gender-based violence, the project conducted a mapping at regional and national level in Romania of existing social services for victims, but as well for aggressors. The assessment placed a particular focus on prevention of discrimination in the context of provision of services and reporting mechanisms. Development of standardized working toolkits and uniform methodologies for social service providers dealing with victims of domestic violence and violence against women was also among the project goals. Measures to prevent discrimination against Roma women were particularly covered by one module within the training sessions organised for the social service providers.

Within the frameworks of the project, 8 regional centres for counselling aggressors were established, equipped, and put into use. Additionally, 10 regional crisis centres for victims of sexual violence were opened, through which specialized care and counselling services will be provided to victims of sexual violence, including the provision of sampling kits for the collection of biological samples in cases of rape.

### Prevention

With the purpose to enhance the prevention of domestic violence and violence against women, a media campaigns were organised aiming at informing and raising awareness on gender violence, and at combating gender stereotypes and stereotypes related to Roma women. The campaign targeted educational institutions, pupils, students, educators and teachers.

## Gender equality for Roma communities

### General project information

Funding line: Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA FM) 2014-2021  
Project promoter: People in Need  
Country: Slovakia  
Website: [www.clovekvohrozeni.sk/people-in-need-slovakia/](http://www.clovekvohrozeni.sk/people-in-need-slovakia/)  
<http://www.pulsfoundation.org/>  
Contact: info@clovekvohrozeni.sk

### Short description

The project aimed at raising awareness of gender equality among women in Roma communities through educational activities and campaigns, with the goal of empowering Roma women and girls with their rights, dignity and points of view. Among its key aims was to achieve a positive change in the perception of gender equality among people from marginalised Roma communities.

### Key project achievements

#### Participation

The entire project is designed in such a way that women have the space to define their own needs and the topics of the meetings and the areas in which they want to develop themselves. Thanks to this strategy, the project reached even women who were not involved in activities in community centres before. The project offered Roma women the opportunity to meet regularly in female support groups in community centres and to talk on topics of importance for them. The community coordinators used didactic games and books to help initiate discussions. The involved Roma girls and women developed a wide range of skills, building healthy self-confidence and at the same time strengthening their friendships as a source of social support. The project has helped to develop strong female leaders in marginalised Roma communities who are capable of coordinating other women in their community. A healthy dose of self-confidence and the power of women groups can positively affect the whole of family life, but this also presents a big challenge – new life strategies can sometimes be met with resistance from the wider family.

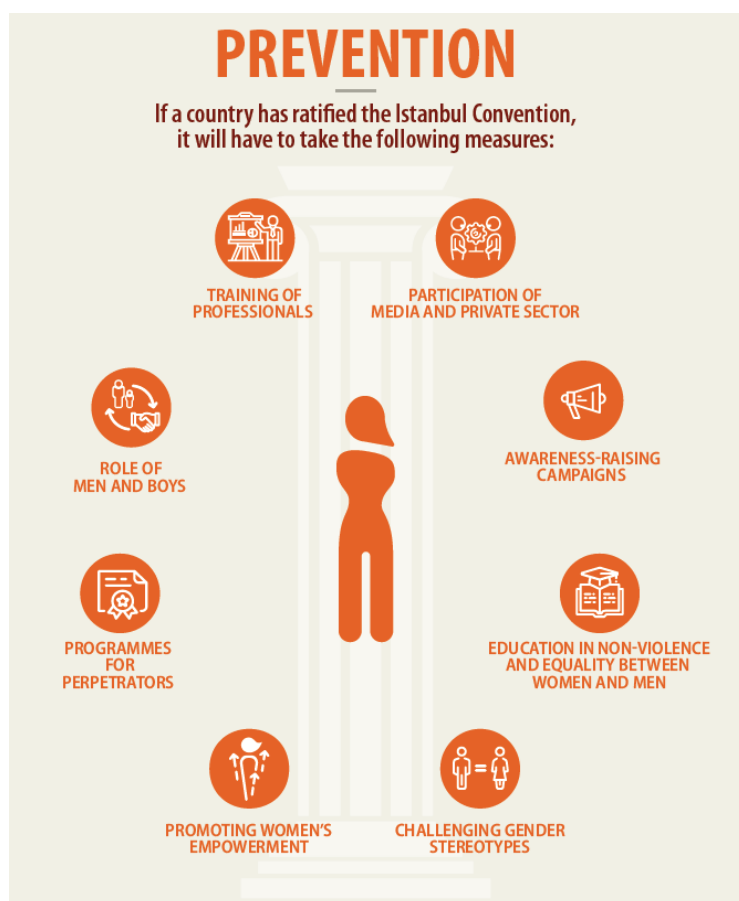
## Part 7: Council of Europe's standards regarding violence against women and domestic violence

*Included with the permission of the CoE*

The Istanbul Convention is the guiding standard<sup>23</sup> on ending violence against women and domestic violence, and the basis for the work of the EEA and Norway Grants' SYNERGY Network against Gender-based and Domestic Violence.







### How can we prevent violence against Roma women from ever happening?



Prevention is one of four main principles (often referred to as the "four pillars") outlined in the Istanbul Convention. This pillar focuses on strategies and measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence from occurring. It emphasises the importance of addressing the root causes of such violence and promoting a culture of gender equality and non-violence.



<sup>23</sup> See Brochure: The Four Pillars of the Istanbul Convention. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. <https://rm.coe.int/coe-istanbulconvention-brochure-en-r03-v01/1680a06d4f>

In order to do this, governments should ensure that there is the following:

 <p><b>PARTICIPATION OF MEDIA AND PRIVATE SECTOR</b></p>	<p><i>Participation of the media and the private sector in preventing violence against women.</i> Governments need to encourage the media and the private sector in setting standards that enhance respectful gender roles and challenge attitudes that excuse violence against women.</p>
 <p><b>AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGNS</b></p>	<p><i>Awareness-raising campaigns.</i> There need to be large campaigns that raise awareness of the different forms of violence, their devastating nature and the impact that they have on women and children.</p>
 <p><b>EDUCATION IN NON-VIOLENCE AND EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN</b></p>	<p><i>Education in non-violence and equality between women and men.</i> In formal curricula, at all levels of education, teaching material should be included on gender equality, gender-based violence, non-violent conflict resolution and the right to personal integrity.</p>
 <p><b>CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES</b></p>	<p><i>Challenging gender stereotypes.</i> If we are going to address the root causes of VAW, we must challenge gender stereotypes and promote changes in the social and cultural behavioral patterns of women and men.</p>
 <p><b>PROMOTING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT</b></p>	<p><i>Promoting women's empowerment.</i> Governments should introduce programmes and activities for the empowerment of women, not just focusing on communities which are the most visible – governments should also address the specific needs of people in vulnerable situations from a human rights standpoint.</p>
 <p><b>PROGRAMMES FOR PERPETRATORS</b></p>	<p><i>Perpetrator Programmes.</i> Programmes must be established to teach perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt non-violent behaviour and sex offenders to avoid re-offending.</p>

 <p><b>ROLE OF MEN AND BOYS</b></p>	<p><i>Role of men and boys.</i> There is a definite role for men and boys to be involved in prevention efforts. Governments must encourage active engagement and contribution from men and boys in the prevention of violence.</p>
 <p><b>TRAINING OF PROFESSIONALS</b></p>	<p><i>Training of professionals.</i> Professionals working with victims or perpetrators must be able to recognise and respond to violence and make appropriate referrals. This a wide category of professionals, which could include health care workers, mental health professionals, legal professionals, law enforcement, social workers, educational professionals, and many more.</p>


## How do we protect Roma victims of violence against women and domestic violence?







The second P of the convention is Protection. Countries implementing the Istanbul Convention refrain from committing acts of violence against women, including and ensure making sure that their authorities, officials, agents and institutions comply with the treaty. The concept of due diligence applies, that the countries are responsible for taking reasonable steps to avoid violence against women by people outside government as well, especially when we are discussing as regards the prevention, investigation and punishment of violence against women in all of its forms and must provide protection and reparation to victims.





As regards protection, the safety and needs of victims and witnesses must be at the heart of all protective measures adopted by a country. Their rights include the following:

 <p><b>INFORMATION ON THEIR RIGHTS</b></p>	<p><i>Information on their rights.</i> Victims must be informed of their rights and know where and how to get help, in a language they understand.</p>
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 <p><b>SUPPORT SERVICES</b></p>	<p><i>Support Services.</i> Victims should have access to specialist women's support services, which are often women-to-women and dedicated to a specific type of violence. Victims should also have access to general services such as legal advice/aid, psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, healthcare, social services and assistance in finding employment.</p>
 <p><b>REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMPLAINT MECHANISMS</b></p>	<p><i>Regional and International Complaint mechanisms.</i> Victims must be informed of and have access to relevant regional and international complaints mechanisms.</p>
 <p><b>SHELTERS</b></p>	<p><i>Shelters.</i> Victims must have access to a local, easily accessible shelter for women and children.</p>
 <p><b>RAPE CRISIS OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE CENTRES</b></p>	<p><i>Rape crisis or sexual violence centres.</i> Victims must have access to a nearby easily accessible centre providing immediate medical counselling, trauma care and forensic services.</p>
 <p><b>REPORTING VIOLENCE TO AUTHORITIES</b></p>	<p><i>Reporting Violence to Authorities.</i> Everyone must be encouraged to report acts of violence to relevant authorities to prevent further incidents, and confidentiality rules should not prevent professionals from doing so, where justified.</p>
 <p><b>EMERGENCY BARRING ORDERS</b></p>	<p><i>Emergency barring orders.</i> These will grant police the power to remove a perpetrator of domestic violence from their home for a specific period of time and order them to stay away from the victim.</p>



 <p><b>PROTECTION OR RESTRAINING ORDERS</b></p>	<p><i>Protection or Restraining Orders.</i> They should be easily accessible for immediate protection to the victim, without any cost.</p>
 <p><b>SAFE CUSTODY AND VISITATION RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN</b></p>	<p><i>Safe custody and visitation rights for children.</i> If there is a history of violence, custody and visitation decisions must prioritise the rights and safety of the child and the victim.</p>
 <p><b>FREE TELEPHONE HELPLINES 24/7</b></p>	<p><i>Free telephone helplines.</i> Victims must have access to a state-wide 24/7 free and confidential telephone helpline offering them expert advice and pointing them towards relevant services.</p>
 <p><b>RIGHTS AND NEEDS OF CHILD WITNESSES</b></p>	<p><i>Rights and Needs of Child Witnesses.</i> The best interest of child witnesses of violence must be taken into account and age-appropriate psychosocial counselling provided.</p>






## How do we ensure justice for victims of violence against Roma women and domestic violence?

The Prosecution pillar of the Istanbul Convention refers to the set of measures and strategies designed to make sure that perpetrators of violence against women and domestic violence are held accountable for their actions. This includes states putting in place criminal legislation that recognizes such acts as crimes with appropriate sanctions, as well as measures for investigating, prosecuting, and punishing perpetrators.



Overall, the prosecution pillar of the Istanbul Convention aims to hold perpetrators of violence accountable for their actions, and make sure that victims receive justice, support, and protection from further harm. In order to do this, governments should ensure that there are the following:

 <p><b>DISSUASIVE SANCTIONS FOR PERPETRATORS</b></p>	<p><i>Dissuasive Sanctions for Perpetrators.</i> Governments should ensure that criminal offences and breaches of protection orders will be subject to proportionate criminal or legal sanctions including imprisonment, extradition, monitoring and supervision, and withdrawal of parental rights.</p>
 <p><b>EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PROSECUTION</b></p>	<p><i>Effective public prosecution.</i> Investigation or prosecution of violent offences against women will take into account that women are disproportionately affected by violence; will not be dependent upon a report or complaint by the victim and may even continue if the victim withdraws their statement or complaint.</p>
 <p><b>CONSIDERATION OF AGGRAVATING CIRCUMSTANCES</b></p>	<p><i>Consideration of Aggravating Circumstances.</i> Proceedings should ensure that aggravating circumstances are taken into account, including the victim being an intimate or close relation, crimes against a vulnerable person or in the presence of a child, in collusion with other people, extreme levels of violence or psychological harm, threat of weapons, or previous convictions for crimes of a similar nature.</p>
 <p><b>LEGISLATION CRIMINALISING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN</b></p>	<p><i>Legislation criminalising violence against women.</i> States should introduce laws criminalising physical, psychological and sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation. Countries will ensure that culture, tradition or so-called 'honour' are not regarded as a justification for violence.</p>
 <p><b>EFFECTIVE POLICE INVESTIGATION</b></p>	<p><i>Effective police investigation.</i> Law enforcement agencies will have to respond immediately to calls for assistance, manage dangerous situations appropriately, and investigate all allegations of violence against women.</p>
 <p><b>PROTECTION OF CHILD VICTIMS AND WITNESSES</b></p>	<p><i>Protection of child victims and witnesses.</i> Children must be provided with appropriate special protection measures. Child victims of sexual violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced abortion or sterilisation will be able to initiate legal action for a sufficient amount of time after they have reached adulthood.</p>

 <p><b>CO-ORDINATED RISK ASSESSMENTS</b></p>	<p><i>Co-ordinated risk assessments.</i> These will be carried out in co-operation with relevant agencies and institutions considering the risk to the victim, taking repeat offences and access to firearms into account, as well as any new information the investigation may bring to light.</p>
 <p><b>NO VICTIM-BLAMING</b></p>	<p><i>No victim-blaming.</i> Investigations and judicial proceedings will respect victims at all stages and refrain from showing attitudes, behaviours and practices which blame victims and cause them additional distress.</p>
 <p><b>VICTIMS RIGHT TO PRIVACY</b></p>	<p><i>Victims' right to privacy.</i> Ensure that the privacy and image of the victim is protected, and that contact between them and the alleged perpetrator is avoided where possible. Victims will be enabled to supply evidence and have their needs and concerns presented directly or through an intermediary. Victims will be enabled to testify in the courtroom through communication technologies, or at least without the alleged perpetrator present. The sexual history of a victim will only be permitted in civil or criminal proceedings where it is relevant and necessary.</p>
 <p><b>VICTIMS RIGHT TO INFORMATION AND SUPPORT</b></p>	<p><i>Victims' right to information and support.</i> Victims have the right to be kept informed of the progress and outcome of their case; to have access to information on victim's rights, and appropriate support services to help them represent those rights and interests; to support and assistance from governmental and non-governmental organisations and domestic violence counsellors during the investigation and judicial proceedings; to legal assistance and free legal aid; to independent and competent interpreters if needed; and to be supported by law to claim compensation from perpetrators of violence and to sue state authorities if they have failed in their preventative and protective duties.</p>
 <p><b>VICTIMS PROTECTION DURING INVESTIGATION AND JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS</b></p>	<p><i>Victims' protection during investigation and judicial proceedings.</i> Victims of violence and their families will be protected at all stages of investigation and judicial proceedings from intimidation, retaliation and repeat victimisation. Alternative options to resolve disputes such as mediation between victim and perpetrator will not be mandatory. The victim will be informed of any escape or release of a perpetrator.</p>