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Ending violence against women and girls:**Lessons and solutions from the region****Preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls****Note by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)^{1,2}***Summary*

At its sixty-fourth session in 2020, the Commission on the Status of Women will review and appraise the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the contributions and the challenges that remain. This note provides background information on violence against women and girls in the 56 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), analysing current trends, progress and challenges, and identifying priority actions. Many States improved legal measures to end violence against women in line with international obligations. But persistent challenges remain in the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. Patriarchal norms, traditional gender roles, social acceptance of violence against women, and barriers to reporting continue to weaken government response and undermine women's access to justice. Rates of violence against women and girls remain inexcusably high in the region as a whole, albeit with variation among countries. Priority actions should include renewed adoption and implementation of laws and policies in line with international commitments, strengthening national mechanisms for coordinated multi-sectoral response involving all essential sectors, and eliminating gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices towards equality within families, communities, workplace and in decision-making (in political and public life), in particular to counter gender backlash trends that heighten the risk of violence against women and girls.

¹ This note has been prepared in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

² The present document was submitted late due to delay in inputs from partner organizations.



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I. Introduction

1. This note provides a review of progress by the 56 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)³ in eliminating violence against women and girls in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,⁴ and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular goals 5 and 16. It is based on available data and literature and draws on National Beijing+25 Reports submitted by member States. It is a background note on the issue for the regional meeting to review 25 years of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the ECE region.

II. Main trends in the ECE region

2. Violence against women and girls is a persistent and intensifying phenomenon with significant harm to women, children and society at large. Globally, one in three women still suffer from intimate partner violence. Patriarchal norms, discriminatory gender roles, gender-based discrimination and tolerance of violence against women and girls remain widespread in the region, undermining women's access to justice and weakening government response.

3. Many survivors of violence remain silent or do not seek assistance. Its intimate character might explain the silence surrounding gender-based violence, especially within the family, but only partly so. More importantly, silence is due to social norms that render women subordinate to men and emphasize acceptance and reconciliation over assistance and punishment. Combatting these social norms is the first challenge to ensuring women and girls' safety.

4. Despite much recent progress in the development of laws and policies on violence against women, insufficient institutional capacities and resources hinder the necessary multi-sectoral coordinated response, involving health, social protection, police, justice and civil society. Low-quality, poorly coordinated services further victimize survivors, leading to a low demand for services.

5. In addition, several emerging trends exacerbate violence against women and girls. Of particular concern is a growing phenomenon of backlash against women's rights, associated with the rise of authoritarian governments and the spread of conservative ideologies and anti-gender movements, with ensuing repression of women's human rights defenders⁵ and women's organizations. Large migration flows to and within the region in recent years have exposed women and girls in migrant, refugee and internally displaced populations to multiple forms of violence, with little recourse to justice.

A. Forms of violence and prevalence

6. Forms of violence against women in the region include domestic violence (including physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence),⁶ sexual violence, femicide, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, trafficking, stalking, harassment, cyber-violence, violent extremism, kidnapping for forced marriage and child marriage.

Regional data on violence against women

7. Many States have increased data collection on violence against women, contributing to a better understanding of trends. However, gaps in comprehensive, disaggregated data on

³ This note has been prepared in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund.

⁴ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, paragraph 112.

⁵ A/HRC/38/46.

⁶ The terms domestic violence and intimate partner violence are often used interchangeably. This note uses domestic violence except where intimate partner violence is specifically used in cited material.

various forms of violence against women prevent a full understanding of the scope and scale of violence against women and girls.

8. Violence remains pervasive and most cases are not reported to law enforcement.

9. A survey of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova, and Ukraine found that 70 percent of women experienced some form of sexual harassment, stalking, intimate partner violence or non-partner violence since the age of 15. Physical or sexual violence experienced 31 percent of women, while 23 percent survived physical or sexual violence by intimate partners. Ten percent were stalked, and 45 percent were sexually harassed, with 19 percent reporting that the harassment included kissing, hugging or touching.⁷ The same survey revealed disturbing gaps in reporting violence. Only 7 percent of women who experienced violence by a current partner reported the abuse to police. Only 15 percent of women who survived violence by a former partner, 19 percent of women who were harmed by a non-partner, 2 percent of women who were sexually harassed and 13 percent of women who were stalked made reports to police.

10. Women in Central Asia rarely seek justice when facing sexual and gender-based violence because of a culture of silence surrounding domestic violence. When they do, they face a lack of sensitivity about the devastating effects of gender-based violence, persistent stereotypes and a poor understanding of the complexity of the problem – all critical factors jeopardizing effective response and resulting in low levels of trust in social services, the police and judiciary. Patriarchal norms and perpetuate harmful practices and traditions such as child marriage, and data collection on violence against women on a regular basis is lagging behind.⁸

11. Another study found a strong correlation between intimate partner violence and violence against children in Albania, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Moldova, Turkey and Ukraine. The lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence ranged from 15 percent of women in Ukraine to 37.5 percent of women in Turkey. Violent discipline of children was common, ranging from 52.7 percent of children in Kazakhstan to 76 percent of children in Moldova.⁹

12. State-specific data reveals higher-than-average rates of domestic violence in some States. A survey of women in Tajikistan found that 24 percent survived domestic violence in the prior 12 months.¹⁰ Physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence had experienced 17 percent of ever-partnered women; 21 percent experienced psychological violence; and 7 percent experienced economic violence.¹¹ About 27 percent of women in Czechia had ever experienced domestic violence, one-third of whom required medical treatment as a result.¹² In Georgia, 14 percent of ever-partnered women reported physical, sexual and/or emotional intimate partner violence and 10 percent experienced economic violence. Over 26 percent of women in Georgia experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, including child sexual abuse.¹³

⁷ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) 2019, 'OSCE-Led Survey on Violence Against Women: Well-Being and Safety of Women,' pp. 33, 67, 73-75.

⁸ UNDP, UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF (2018), Turning Policies into Action: Eliminating Violence against Women and Girls in Central Asia, Bishkek, 4-5 November 2018. Conference Report.

⁹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2018, 'Making the Connection: Intimate Partner Violence and Violence Against Children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,' pp. 13-15.

¹⁰ Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan 2017, Demographic and Health Survey, p. 207.

¹¹ Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2017, 'Sample Survey on Violence Against Women in Kazakhstan,' pp. 15-17.

¹² National Beijing +25 Report Czech Republic (2019), www.unece.org/b25_national_reports.html.

¹³ UN Women 2017, 'National Study on Violence Against Women,' pp. 6,9.

Sexual violence

13. Sexual violence, including rape, remains pervasive. It is also underreported and challenging to quantify.¹⁴ Studies have found that about 7 percent of women were subjected to sexual violence since the age of 15. Marital rape persists, with 17 percent of women who responded to one survey stating that “it is a wife’s obligation to have sex with her husband even if she doesn’t feel like it”. Nearly one in five women in Albania, North Macedonia, and Ukraine share this belief.¹⁵

14. Even in countries with high levels of gender equality, sexual violence is disturbingly common and underreported. The University of Denmark estimates 24,000 women were raped in 2017, while only 890 rapes were reported to police that year.¹⁶

15. Almost one-fourth of university and undergraduate students in the United States of America report that they have experienced sexual assault or sexual misconduct.¹⁷

Femicide

16. Femicide, as used in this document, is the intentional murder of a woman because of her gender. Among the European countries covered in a 2018 report, 38 percent of all femicides were committed by family members, and 29 percent were committed by intimate partners. Even in countries where overall homicide rates are low, a large proportion of femicides are committed by male intimate partners. Femicide rates are particularly concerning in some countries. In Europe and Northern America, the Russian Federation, for instance, has an intentional female homicide rate of 7.3 per 100,000 population – the highest in the region.¹⁸

Violence against women related to armed conflict

17. Armed conflict increases the risk that women will experience violence, including domestic and sexual violence. A survey on violence against women in the context of armed conflict found that 32 percent of survey respondents believed some experiences of violence by a current partner were connected to the conflict. Of those who experienced non-partner violence, 26 percent said some of their experiences were related to conflict, rising to 34 percent for their most serious incident.¹⁹

18. A study of sexual violence in Ukraine found that women “were subjected to sexual violence to extract confession or information.” The conflict is also likely to exacerbate the existing problem of sex trafficking in Ukraine, especially in militarized areas.²⁰

19. The lack of consistent policies or laws on returnees associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups is an emerging challenge, especially for women, girls and boys. As a result, they are prone to abuse by state and community actors and face increased risk of violence and re-radicalization and re-recruitment. Current policies and programming tend to either ignore women and girls associated with violent extremist groups or frame women and girls in binary terms, either as victims or perpetrators of violence. Yet in most instances, women’s and girls’ association with violent extremist groups is due to a mix of

¹⁴ Differing definitions of rape, and the failure of many States to use a consent-based definition, pose challenges to determining prevalence.

¹⁵ OSCE-Led Survey on Violence Against Women (2019), pp. 34, 22.

¹⁶ Deen, L., Bindesbøl Holm Johansen, K., Pagh Møller, S., Laursen, B. 2018, ‘Violence and sexual abuse’, p. 52. Data was drawn from the Danish National Health survey, and from qualitative research and data gathered by the authors.

¹⁷ UN Women 2018, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

¹⁸ UN Women 2018, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Factsheet for Europe and Northern America*.

¹⁹ OSCE-Led Survey on Violence Against Women (2019), p. 82.

²⁰ UN Women and UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights 2018, ‘The Strategy for Prevention of and Response to the Conflict Related Sexual Violence in Ukraine’, pp. 7-8.

factors including coercion, co-option, enslavement or kidnapping, or subjugation in their own communities.²¹

Violence affecting women in migrant, refugee and minority communities

20. Migrant and refugee women are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse, violence, forced unskilled labour, and associated humiliation both during their journey and after relocating.²² For example, a survey of women and girl migrants and refugees in Serbia from conflict-affected areas, including Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, found that almost 65 percent experienced some form of physical violence. While, 24 percent were exposed to sexual violence and 94 percent who experienced sexual violence also survived physical violence.²³

21. Bakchy girls (“girl nannies”) from Kyrgyzstan are subject to trafficking and related forms of violence against women. In exchange for payment, parents send girls to act as nannies for Kyrgyz families migrating to Russia. The girls are at high risk of violence, including sexual violence, from the families for whom they work.

22. Married migrant women from Kyrgyzstan suffer economic violence as they must send their incomes to their husbands’ families. Young brides from both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, who live with their husbands’ families, are particularly vulnerable to intimate partner violence, usually encouraged by mothers-in-law as a form of social control.

23. In Tajikistan, women left behind by husbands who have migrated are more vulnerable to violence, often living in conditions of slavery in their husbands’ families or running away to become migrants themselves. If the couple divorces, the woman and her children are evicted from her parents-in-laws’ home and often rejected by her own family.²⁴

Child marriage and kidnapping for forced marriage

24. Approximately 10 percent of girls in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are married before age 18, and the prevalence of child marriage is on the rise in the region.²⁵ Rates of officially registered marriages involving girls aged 15-19 are highest in Albania (27.2 percent), Turkey (23 percent), and Kyrgyzstan (19.1 percent). Child marriage is especially widespread among Roma communities, and often goes together with trafficking. In Serbia, 45 percent of Roma girls aged 15-19 were married or in union, and 14 percent were married before the age of 15.²⁶ The true rates of child marriages may be much higher, because many are never registered, or registered in religious courts. The persistent abduction of young girls for forced marriages in Kyrgyzstan is a reflection of this harmful practice and the socially legitimised violence against women.

25. Child marriage also increases during crisis, including among refugees fleeing violence.²⁷ Fifty-two percent of refugee and migrant women surveyed in Serbia said they could not choose to whom and when they would marry. The youngest respondent was only

²¹ UNDP (2019), *Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Reintegration and Rehabilitation*. www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/invisible-women.html.

²² UN Women (2018), ‘Awareness Raising Among Refugee and Migrant Women on How to Access Justice Services,’ p. 3.

²³ Atina (2017), ‘Violence Against Women and Girls in Refugee and Migrant Population in Serbia, Belgrade,’ pp. 14-15.

²⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2018, ‘The Fragile Power of Migration: the needs and rights of women and girls from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan who are affected by migration,’ pp. 28, 45-46, 48.

²⁵ WHO (2019), ‘Policy Brief: Health and Gender Equality,’ p. 5.

²⁶ UNFPA ‘Child Marriage in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Regional overview,’ p. 2, https://eca.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Child%20Marriage_27072015_web.pdf; see also UN Women ‘Report on Capacity and Knowledge Assessment with Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian CSOs in the Area of Early Marriages and Laws,’ pp. 3, 6.

²⁷ UNICEF (2019), ‘Preventing Child Marriage,’ www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/child-marriage, viewed 25 July 2019.

seven years old when she was married. More than 50 percent of women surveyed were subject to child marriage.²⁸

Trafficking of women and girls

26. The number of women and girls who are victims of trafficking in human being for sexual exploitation, labour, forced marriage and other purposes is rising. Approximately 14 percent of the total number of victims of forced sexual exploitation worldwide are in Europe and Central Asia, with the second highest number of trafficking victims, following Asia and the Pacific.²⁹

27. Migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities and women and girls from low-income countries are especially vulnerable to trafficking. In 2014-2017, the largest numbers of trafficking survivors identified in Denmark were from Nigeria (235), Romania (49), Sub-Saharan African (27), Thailand (21) other Eastern European and Central Asian countries (14).³⁰

28. Some States, including Romania, Hungary and Albania, report much higher rates of both domestic and international trafficking for sexual exploitation than others, while Albanian women and girls are particularly targeted for domestic trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour during the tourist season.³¹

29. Roma women continue to suffer high levels of violence, with official data on prevalence still lacking in most countries, and substantially lower rates of reporting than in the overall population.

B. Perpetrators and survivors

Perpetrators

30. Violence against women is primarily committed by men and operates as a function of male domination over women in intimate relationships, family, communities and in broader society. Most perpetrators of domestic violence, sexual violence and femicides are women's own partners and their family members.³² One survey found that 42 percent of all non-partner violence occurred in women's homes, suggesting that other family members were complicit in women's victimization.³³

Survivors and femicide victims

31. Most femicide victims are killed by their intimate partners.³⁴

32. Women facing multiple forms of discrimination are also at heightened risk of multiple forms of violence.

(a) Lifetime intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence is higher among those women who consider themselves to be disabled (27 percent versus 23 percent

²⁸ Atina (2017), 'Violence Against Women and Girls in Refugee and Migrant Population in Serbia, Belgrade, p. 16-17.

²⁹ International Labour Organization (ILO) 2017, 'Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage,' p.39; UNODC 2018, 'Global Report on Trafficking in Persons,' pp. 8, 51-60.

³⁰ Beijing +25 National Reports, www.unece.org/b25_national_reports.html.

³¹ Ibid.; also, UNODC 2018, 'Country Profiles: Central and South Eastern Europe,'; UNODC 2019, 'Monitoring Target 16.2 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: multiple systems estimation of the numbers of presumed victims of trafficking in persons,' www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/MSE_Research_Brief_Romania.pdf

³² UN Women (2019), 'Families in a Changing World: Progress of the world's women 2019-2020,' p. 177.

³³ OSCE-Led Survey on Violence Against Women (2019), p. 51.

³⁴ UNODC (2018), 'Global Study on Homicide,' p.13.

on average) or to be a refugee or internally displaced (26 percent). The same is also the case for non-partner violence. Among those who consider themselves disabled, 24 percent say they experienced non-partner violence compared with 19 percent in the rest of the population, while 28 percent of those who are refugees or internally displaced say the same.³⁵

(b) More than 55 percent of women with disabilities in Vojvodina, Serbia, say they have experienced violence.³⁶

(c) In Canada, indigenous women and girls encounter multiple forms of discrimination and are nearly three times more likely to be victimized by violent crime and six times more likely to be murdered than non-indigenous women.³⁷

(d) Roma women suffer high levels of all forms of violence and face more difficulties due to poverty, social exclusion and the lack of social services in the areas where they live.³⁸

(e) Some countries in the region have among the highest skewed ratio of boys over girls at birth in the world, comparable to countries such as China and India. Despite efforts laws and legislation to protect women and girls, negative gender norms and gender socialization persists.

33. Age also influences women's risk of violence. The prevalence of lifetime intimate partner violence is highest among women aged 40–49 (26 percent) and also comparatively higher than average among women aged 50 or above. However, the prevalence of recent intimate partner violence is highest among women aged 18–29 (10 percent).³⁹ Another survey in five European countries found that 28 percent of women over 60 years of age experienced violence in the previous year.⁴⁰

34. Women in the sex industry have the highest homicide victimization rate of any set of women ever studied⁴¹ but despite this extreme vulnerability, data on in the sex industry is scarce.

III. Progress and challenges

A. Progress in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action Strategic Objective D and Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16

35. Five years after its entry into force, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (also known as the Istanbul Convention) has been ratified by 34 countries and signed by an additional 12.⁴² The

³⁵ OSCE-Led Survey on Violence Against Women (2019), p. 61.

³⁶ Iz Kruga Vovodina (2018), 'Implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Law: Experience of Organizations of Women with Disabilities,' accessed on 26 July 2019, www.izkrugavojvodina.org/en/2018/03/30/implementation-of-the-domestic-violence-prevention-law-experience-of-organizations-of-women-with-disabilities/.

³⁷ A/HRC/41/42/Add.1.

³⁸ UNDP (2018), Nowhere to Turn: Gender-based violence against Roma Women. www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/roma/nowhere-to-turn-gbv-against-roma-women.html.

³⁹ OSCE-Led Survey on Violence Against Women (2019), p. 61.

⁴⁰ UN Women (2018), Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

⁴¹ UNODC (2018), 'Global Study on Homicide,' p. 36.

⁴² Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, No. 210 (11 May 2011) (Entry into force 8 January 2014) [Istanbul Convention].

convention is the first legally binding instrument on violence against women in Europe. It requires the criminalisation of a broad range of forms of violence against women, child and forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation. The convention obliges States to prevent offences, protect victims, prosecute perpetrators, develop integrated policies through criminal and civil law provisions, improve service delivery and resource allocation, and adopt culturally transformative measures.

36. Some countries in the ECE region responded to women-led movements such as #MeToo, launched in 2017 in the United States of America, by passing legislation to protect women from widespread sexual harassment and violence. In France, advocacy by women's movements led to the adoption of legislation to penalize sexual harassment in public places. In the United States of America, multiple states passed laws in 2018 and 2019 improving protections against sexual harassment in the workplace. Georgia and Serbia adopted legislation regulating sexual harassment at workplace and public spaces.

37. The United Nations Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence, issued in 2015, identifies services to be provided by health, social services, police and justice sectors, along with guidelines for coordination. Many countries used the package and its operating procedures to develop or improve coordinated multi-sectoral responses to violence against women, resulting in the expansion and improvement of services, referral systems and law enforcement response to violence against women.⁴³ For example, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine developed standard operating procedures for frontline health, social, psychological and police sectors, with training to enhance the quality of services.

38. Many States adopted laws to prevent and address violence against women or amended existing laws to better respond to violence against women. For example:

- (a) Kyrgyzstan's new domestic violence law (2017) defines clear roles and responsibilities of state and local self-government bodies; it includes a perpetrator rehabilitation programme, a coordination mechanism and a procedure for issuing protective orders. Parliament introduced penalties in 2016 for religious marriage of minors.
- (b) Uzbekistan drafted a law in 2018 to combat domestic violence. If passed, it will be the country's first domestic violence law in 20 years.
- (c) Ireland strengthened its domestic violence law in multiple ways, including by criminalizing coercive control.
- (d) Serbia passed a domestic violence law in 2017 which includes survivors' right to information and free legal aid, specialized education for police, prosecutors and judges, a multi-sectoral coordination group to implement the law; and urgent protective measures. Amendments to the criminal code defined domestic violence, stalking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and specific categories of sexual violence as criminal offences.
- (e) Finland increased penalties for several categories of sexual violence and expanded the definition of rape to be more inclusive of victimization of LGBTIQ people.
- (f) Bulgaria, Andorra, and the Republic of North Macedonia amended their respective laws on trafficking to protect survivors without legal status from deportation. North Macedonia also passed a domestic violence law.
- (g) Moldova amended its law to allow police to issue emergency restraining orders and to strengthen penalties for violating a protective order or emergency restraining order.

⁴³ UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP, UNODC, 2015, 'Essential services package for women and girls subject to violence;' see also Standard Operating Procedures on areas including police, health care, and social services, available at <https://eeca.unfpa.org/en/publications>.

(h) Albania prohibited wider range of forms of violence, in line with the Istanbul Convention, and issued by-laws to support implementation of the law. They developed domestic violence risk assessment tool, and police can issue emergency protective orders. Low-cost public housing will be prioritized for women survivors.

(i) Bulgaria, the Netherlands, and Spain criminalized violations of civil protection orders.

39. Some States improved implementation of violence against women laws by developing risk assessment tools, training judges and law enforcement officers, multi-sectoral coordination, and increasing prosecution of violence against women crimes. For example:

(a) Ireland's National Action Plan (2016-2021) on violence against women includes risk assessment tool for domestic violence cases.

(b) Three consecutive national action plans spanning the years 2007 to 2020 were adopted by Turkey to tackle violence against women as a form of discrimination requiring targeted measures to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

(c) Albania trained hundreds of police officers to respond to domestic violence; 60 specialist officers were trained to investigate sexual violence and over 400 judges and legal professionals were trained on legislative changes to the domestic violence law.

(d) Moldova carried out court-monitoring process for sexual violence, domestic violence and trafficking/sexual exploitation cases.

(e) Georgia reports that the number of domestic violence prosecutions increased five times, partly due to increased reporting of domestic violence.

40. Some States, including Sweden, Spain and Germany, adopted consent-based definitions of rape.

41. Some States, including Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kazakhstan report an increase in issuance of protection orders.

42. Many States developed or expanded services for survivors, including free legal aid, emergency shelters, domestic violence hotlines, health services, counselling, income assistance, and monetary compensation. For example:

(a) In response to a WHO survey, about 83 percent of countries indicated that they address violence against women in their health plans and policies. Eighty percent developed national multisectoral plans to address violence against women and at least one preventative strategy.

(b) Spain's national strategy on violence against women for 2013-2016 included training health professionals to identify and respond to violence against women; referral mechanisms and communication between health professionals and the law enforcement and judicial sectors; and health sector data collection on violence against women.

(c) Croatia increased access to legal aid and victim support services through the courts.

(d) Austria increased funding for shelter, services, and legal support for trafficking victims, and opened a shelter for women and girls at risk of forced marriage.

(e) Finland added nine new domestic violence shelters, which can accommodate 202 families.

(f) Portugal established a specialized shelter for LGBTIQ survivors.

(g) Bulgaria and North Macedonia established inter-sectoral services to support survivors of sexual violence and collect evidence for criminal prosecution⁴⁴

43. Some States strengthened efforts to combat human trafficking. For example, Cyprus increased prosecutions and convictions, allocated more funding to survivor support services, and trained police and immigration officers on trafficking investigations.

44. Many States raised awareness about violence against women through seminars, public events, social media, publications, and education in schools and universities. For example:

(a) Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and the Republic of Moldova used the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) to study men's attitudes and practices related to gender equality and women's opinions and reports of their own experiences. Numerous countries launched campaigns based on the results of IMAGES, or by joining the global MenCare campaign.⁴⁵

(b) The Women Against Violence Europe network significantly increased its outreach, including via social media⁴⁶ on promoting and strengthening the human rights of women and children in general and preventing violence against women and children. The network embraces women's organisations combating violence against women and children in Europe and includes over 140 Members (networks, organizations and individual members) which work on the national level in 46 European countries.

(c) Sweden developed a website for immigrant youth with information in six languages about sexuality, violence, forced marriage and legal protections for survivors.⁴⁷

(d) UN agencies, in partnership with public figures, launched online, high-impact initiatives during the annual global UNiTE to end violence against women campaign.⁴⁸

45. Some States strengthened protections for migrant and refugee survivors. For example:

(a) Ireland included questions on domestic violence in its refugee screening process.

(b) The Republic of North Macedonia passed legislation establishing gender-based asylum claims.

(c) Azerbaijan created monitoring group on violence against women against internally displaced persons.

(d) The Government of the Netherlands and The Federation of Somali Associations in the Netherlands provided community education in migrant/refugee communities regarding the national law on female genital mutilation. Gender-related violence can be grounds for asylum in the Netherlands, and asylum officers are trained to identify violence against women.

46. Since 2017, UN Women and the European Union have been implementing the regional programme 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds', which amplifies the voices of marginalized and disadvantaged women in the Western Balkans and Turkey to tackle

⁴⁴ WHO (2019), The health system response to violence against women in the WHO European Region: a baseline assessment, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁵ <http://menengage.unfpa.org/en/>.

⁴⁶ www.wave-stepup.org; <https://blog.wave-network.org>; www.facebook.com/wavestepup/.

⁴⁷ GREVIO (2019), 'Baseline Evaluation Report: Sweden,' pp.25-27.

⁴⁸ UNDP (2016), Turkish movie starts join forces with UNDP to combat violence against women.

www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2016/12/01/turkish-movie-stars-join-forces-with-undp-to-fight-violence-against-women.html. This short video got more than a million hits on social media.

discrimination and violence.⁴⁹ Around 250 organizations partner to monitor and report on violations of women’s human rights for the prevention of violence.

47. The Council of Europe published reports on progress in implementing the Istanbul Convention by the following States: Albania, Denmark, Monaco, Montenegro, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey. It will issue a report on Finland in September 2019, and expects to publish reports on France, Netherlands, Serbia before the end of 2019.⁵⁰

B. Challenges

48. The rise of authoritarian governments and a growing gender backlash phenomenon pose profound challenges to preventing and eliminating violence against women and threaten to reverse hard-won gains. Human rights experts have called attention to reactionary trends and populist movements and governments that are undermining civil liberties and gender equality.⁵¹ A European parliament report highlighted the so-called “gender ideologies” that are hampering the implementation of international human rights standards on violence against women⁵² and, in some cases, have led to the decriminalization of violence against women. The Council of Europe has made efforts to raise awareness about the goals and content of the Istanbul Convention in response to concerns and misconceptions arising in several States.⁵³

(a) Bulgaria was poised to ratify the Convention when the Constitutional Court declared the Convention unconstitutional because the Bulgarian constitution is based on a binary understanding of sex and gender, and the Convention defines gender as a social construction and recognizes the rights of transgender people.⁵⁴

(b) Kazakhstan and Russia decriminalized domestic assaults that do not result in substantial bodily harm⁵⁵

49. Serious gaps in legislative frameworks have led to a failure to protect many women and hold perpetrators accountable. For example:

Domestic violence: Domestic violence is still not criminalized in all countries. In addition, some States do not provide effective protective measures to ensure women’s immediate safety. Portugal’s “emergency barring order” requires a hearing with both parties, with a high evidentiary threshold.⁵⁶ Many States provide protection orders that are far too short to ensure safety for survivors. Serbia’s emergency barring order is 48 hours, which can be extended to 30 days only by a court.⁵⁷

Rape: Even in States with high levels of gender equality and otherwise robust responses to violence against women, many sexual violence laws fail to fully protect women’s right to sexual integrity and autonomy. Most rape laws in Europe require proof of force, violence or coercion rather than lack of consent. These definitions conflict with international human rights standards defining rape, including the Istanbul Convention, which calls for criminalization of all non-consensual sexual acts.

⁴⁹ <http://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/regional-programme-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey/about-the-programme>.

⁵⁰ Council of Europe, GREVIO Country Monitoring, www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/country-monitoring-work, accessed on 26 July 2019.

⁵¹ Remarks by Ms. Feride Acar, former president of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), to the Council of Europe, May 2019.

⁵² European Parliament (FEMM Committee), 2019, Backlash in Gender Equality and Women and Girls’ Rights.

⁵³ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-122418-gbr-2574-brochure-questions-istanbul-convention-web-16x16/16808f0b80>.

⁵⁴ Constitutional Case No. 3/2018, 27 July 2018, Bulgaria.

⁵⁵ UNECE (2019) National Report of Kazakhstan; Amendments to the Article 116 of the Criminal Code of Russia, 2017.

⁵⁶ GREVIO (2019), ‘Baseline Evaluation Report: Portugal,’ p. 57.

⁵⁷ Mann, L. (2019), “Good Practices in Responding to Domestic Violence: A Comparative Study,” p. 19.

Trafficking: Despite stricter trafficking laws and increased investigation of trafficking in many States, holding traffickers accountable continues to be a challenge. For instance, in its recent evaluation in Bulgaria, the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings expressed concern that trafficking cases are not handled by specially trained judges and that survivors are sometimes subjected to re-traumatizing practices in court. In addition, people convicted of trafficking frequently receive suspended sentences.⁵⁸

50. Implementation of existing laws on violence against women is often poor. For example:

(a) Authorities in Albania often excuse violence to preserve nuclear families. Police and judges informally “mediate” domestic violence rather than holding offenders accountable, putting women at risk of repeated and even escalated violence.⁵⁹

(b) In Turkey, when women report physical or sexual violence by intimate partners, police fail to take the survivor’s statement in over 80 percent of cases, and do not direct survivors to support services or refer the matter to prosecutors or the courts roughly 60 percent of the time.⁶⁰

(c) Between 2014 and 2016, less than seven percent of reported domestic violence cases in Portugal resulted in a conviction.⁶¹

(d) A case brought against Russia in the European Court of Human Rights resulted in a landmark ruling of equal protection for survivors of domestic violence under the law. The court found that “the continued failure to adopt legislation to combat domestic violence and the absence of any form of restraining or protection orders clearly demonstrate that the authorities’ actions...flowed from their reluctance to acknowledge the seriousness and extent of the problem of domestic violence in Russia and its discriminatory effect on women.”⁶²

(e) In the United States of America, the Violence Against Women Act, the United States’ landmark legislation being enforced from 1994 with re-authorization roughly every 5 years provided more than \$7 billion to grant programs to prevent and prosecute violence against women.⁶³

51. Some States do not provide a full range of services needed to support survivors of violence against women. Of 22 European States surveyed by the WHO, only ten provide comprehensive services to sexual assault survivors.⁶⁴ Services available for women may not fully account for the needs of their children.

52. Addressing violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations, including migrant and refugee women, poses unique challenges. The lack of consistent policies or laws on returnees associated with terrorist and violent extremist groups is an emerging challenge, especially for women and children associated with such groups. As a result, they are prone to abuse by state and community actors and face increased risk of violence, as well as re-radicalization and re-recruitment.

(a) Cyprus and Azerbaijan state that disputes over territories impede the state-wide implementation of measures to prevent and eliminate violence.

(b) The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights documented a pattern of sexual violence against women detained as a result of

⁵⁸ GRETA (2016), Report Concerning the Implementation of the Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings by Bulgaria,’ pp. 41-42, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090001680630d6c>.

⁵⁹ GREVIO, Albania, p. 17.

⁶⁰ GREVIO (2018), ‘Baseline Evaluation Report: Turkey,’ p. 22.

⁶¹ GREVIO, Portugal, p. 54.

⁶² *Case of Volodina v. Russia*, 41261/17, European Court of Human Rights, 2019.

⁶³ *H.R.1585 - Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2019*, United States Congress.

⁶⁴ WHO (2019), p. 9.

armed conflict in Ukraine and expressed concerns that armed conflict is exacerbating existing problems of trafficking in human beings.⁶⁵

53. Patriarchal attitudes towards gender roles, widespread tolerance of violence against women, and victim blaming pose significant challenges in many States.

(a) A 2018 survey on violence against women in some European countries found that 25 percent of women believed that violence is often provoked by the survivor; 23 percent believed women make up or exaggerate their rape or abuse; and 30 percent believed domestic violence is a family matter to be dealt with privately⁶⁶. According to surveys, attitudes that justify intimate partner violence increased slightly in Tajikistan between 2012 and 2017,⁶⁷ but decreased in Albania.⁶⁸

(b) Violence related to “honour” – the idea that a woman should be punished because her actions or victimization tarnished the reputation of her partner or other family members – remains prevalent in some countries, and efforts to address honour crimes are insufficient. For example, violence against women committed in the name of ‘honour’ continues to occur in Turkey despite national policy measures, and perpetrators receive reduced sentences by invoking motives similar to ‘honour.’⁶⁹

54. Discrimination and bias are widespread in many countries toward women experiencing multiple forms of oppression, including refugees and migrants, ethnic minorities, lesbian/bisexual/transgender women and women with disabilities. These attitudes infect the judiciary, law enforcement, and social and health services, among others. They affect the ability of these women to access services and receive equal treatment under the justice system. In Albania, women from the Roma and Egyptian communities face discrimination especially in-service delivery.⁷⁰

55. Identification of survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, trafficking and other forms of violence against women is a challenge. Most cases of violence against women go unreported, often due to survivors’ fear of further violence, and because some States lack sufficient mechanisms and services to protect survivors after reporting. Albania, Austria and Norway report challenges in identifying migrant and refugee women who are survivors of violence against women and in providing effective services to these populations.

56. States have faced challenges in addressing violence against women in migrant and refugee communities. In some cases, fail to protect women who migrate to leave violence against women. For example:

(a) Norway identified concerns about child marriages among the approximately 30,000 asylum seekers who arrived in 2015. Sixty-one asylum seekers under the age of 18 were married or engaged to a person. Ten of the girls were under the age of 16.⁷¹

(b) In its most recent evaluation of Denmark, the Council of Europe reiterated previous recommendations that Denmark avoid prolonged detention of trafficking survivors and improve their identification and access to support services.⁷²

(c) Tens of thousands of Central American and Mexican women and children fled extreme violence (including domestic violence, sexual violence, and gang

⁶⁵ OHCHR, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁶ OSCE led survey on violence against women (2019).

⁶⁷ ‘Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey,’ p. 236.

⁶⁸ Institute of Statistics, Institute of Public Health 2017-2018, ‘Albania Demographic and Health Survey,’ p. 260.

⁶⁹ GREVIO, Turkey, p. 84.

⁷⁰ CEDAW 2016, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Albania, pp. 7, 11.

⁷¹ Beijing +25 National Reports, https://www.unecce.org/b25_national_reports.html.

⁷² GRETA 2016, ‘GRETA’S Report and Government’s Comments,’ pp. 17-25, www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/denmark.

violence) and sought refuge in the United States of America in the past five years.⁷³ Prolonged detention and family separation exacerbate the trauma experienced by these asylum seekers.⁷⁴

57. Insufficient allocation of funding to law enforcement, the judiciary, and prevention and support services to combat violence against women has undermined effective response. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women has decried the difficulties faced by women's organizations in accessing funding, and the rise in reprisals against women's human rights defenders. Lack of funding is causing civil society space to shrink and threatens the gains achieved by women's organizations.⁷⁵

58. Gaps in collection of data, on both prevalence and use of services, make it difficult to assess the rates of violence against women and determine whether laws are being implemented, and whether they result in increased reporting, or a decrease in the violence.

(a) Gaps in data collection by law enforcement and judicial sectors make it difficult to assess the implementation of laws on violence against women. In Montenegro, data collected by the prosecutor's office "does not give any information regarding the outcome of investigations, rendering it difficult to draw conclusions as to the number of cases sent to court."⁷⁶ Austria does not systematically record the number and duration of protective orders issued, and collects no information regarding the parties involved.⁷⁷

(b) Some States do not collect disaggregated data on all forms of violence; for instance, Portugal does not collect disaggregated data for forms of violence against women other than domestic violence.⁷⁸ Many States do not specifically collect data on survivors who face multiple forms of discrimination, making it impossible to fully quantify and evaluate patterns of violence as well as access to services and equal protection for women facing intersectional oppression.

59. Repression of women's human rights advocacy undermines efforts to eliminate violence against women. Despite some governmental support for its activities, Stop Violencias, a women's rights organization in Andorra, reports significant challenges in advocating against VAW.⁷⁹

IV. Priority Actions

60. Based on the findings of this review, UNECE Member States should undertake the following priority actions:

(a) Update and implement national legal frameworks to prevent and holistically address all forms of violence against women, including online violence and sexual harassment. States should engage women and particularly survivors in developing laws, policies and programs to address violence against women. States should create and implement a coordinated community response to violence against women.

(b) States which have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention should do so. All States should amend, adopt and implement laws, policies and procedures in compliance with the Istanbul Convention.

⁷³ UNHCR 2015, *Women on the Run*, pp. 16-20.

⁷⁴ Statement by UNICEF, 'Migrant children in the U.S. lack protection and services needed to ensure their wellbeing,' 26 June 2019, www.unicef.org/press-releases/migrant-children-us-lack-protection-and-services-needed-ensure-their-wellbeing, accessed 30 July 2019.

⁷⁵ A/HRC/41/42; see also UNFPA, 'Issue Brief 6, Combatting violence against women and girls in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,' p. 8.

⁷⁶ GREVIO 2018, 'Baseline Evaluation Report: Montenegro,' p. 20.

⁷⁷ GREVIO 2017, 'Baseline Evaluation Report: Austria,' p. 21.

⁷⁸ GREVIO, Portugal, pp. 23-24.

⁷⁹ Annex to Andorra National Report for Beijing +25 Review.

- (c) Regularly review and monitor laws and policies on combating violence against women, including surveying women who seek help to determine their satisfaction with the assistance they received. Civil society organizations should be empowered to monitor enforcement of laws, with funding provided by the State.
- (d) Fully support national mechanisms and relevant ministries for gender equality in creating, budgeting, implementing and monitoring policy and legal frameworks; implement the RESPECT Women framework on preventing and responding to violence against women for designing, planning, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating interventions and programs.⁸⁰
- (e) Fully fund measures to eliminate violence against women, including criminal justice, social service and health resources. States should prioritize funding for non-governmental organisations that provide services to victims and survivors. They should ensure free legal assistance and access to justice for women who are survivors of violence, including those with disabilities, and child-friendly and sensitive judicial procedures for girls.
- (f) Provide specialized survivor support services through coordinated, multisectoral response mechanisms with sufficient capacity to deliver services at central and local levels, based on specific needs of different groups of women and girls. States should inform women and girls about available services through a variety of media platforms.
- (g) Improve collection, analysis and data use for evidence-based policy-making, by using internationally agreed comparable data disaggregated by sex, age, rural/urban group. Reports and raw data should be made publicly available, while protecting confidentiality and safety of survivors and victims. States should strengthen statistical systems to produce and analyse gender data to report on SDG indicators.⁸¹
- (h) Eliminate gender stereotypes, prejudices and biases and discriminatory practices, by mainstreaming information about gender equality and violence against women in the education system; implementing awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of gender equality targeting youth, men and boys, as part of a comprehensive programme to address violence against women; improving coordination of prevention and support efforts; and allocating resources to address the root causes and risk factors of violence against women.⁸²
- (i) Allocate sufficient financial and human resources to support the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) to monitor implementation of the Istanbul Convention.
- (j) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate domestic violence including adopting, implementing, and monitoring risk assessment tools to assess perpetrators' likelihood of committing another act of violence against a survivor. They should strengthen protective measures for survivors, including emergency and long-term protective orders. They should provide regular, gender-sensitive training to police, prosecutors, judges and probation officers on domestic violence laws. They should provide adequate support for women in escaping abuse, including shelters or other safe space accommodation and social services. States should establish and implement programmes for work with perpetrator to prevent repeated violence.
- (k) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate sexual violence by adopting and enforcing sexual assault laws based on consent of the victim; criminalizing marital rape; and making trauma-informed specialist support services available.

⁸⁰ WHO, et. al. (2019), 'Respect Women: Preventing Violence Against Women.'

⁸¹ UN Women (2017), Assessment of opportunities for UN Women to support the development of gender statistics in Europe and Central Asia.

⁸² OSCE-Led Survey on Violence Against Women (2019), pp. 134, 139.

- (l) Invest in early childhood development, in positive gender socialization and promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to address violence in the home and stop the intergenerational transmission of violence.
- (m) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate femicide, including collecting and analysing mortality data; training police and other members of the criminal justice system to identify and document cases of femicide; training health care workers, mortuary staff and medical examiners to document cases of femicide; increasing prevention and intervention research; reducing gun ownership and strengthening gun laws; and strengthening surveillance, research, laws and awareness of murder in the name of ‘honour.’
- (n) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate trafficking, including ratifying and implementing the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930;⁸³ and decriminalizing all persons who are prostituted, providing support services to help them exit, and criminalizing the buying people for sex. States should address the root causes of trafficking of women and girls through practical policy and legal measures.
- (o) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate harmful practices including female genital mutilation, forced and child marriage, gender-based sex selection, so-called “honour” crimes, and others, including the following:
- (i) Identify where, when, and why female genital mutilation is practiced; assess and implement a range of interventions to address female genital mutilation; understand impacts of female genital mutilation on the lives of girls, women, and their families; and improve research into female genital mutilation.
 - (ii) Enact and enforce laws forbidding child marriage; improve girls’ access to education, health services and job opportunities; raise awareness among girls and decision makers such as religious authorities and parents; protect girls who flee marriage; and engage men and boys.
 - (iii) Conduct further research on the underlying causes of gender bias and on the potential consequences of current sex imbalances in the region; review gender equity laws to prevent direct or indirect discrimination against daughters, married wives, divorcees, and widows in property rights, access to education and employment, health and social insurance, pension benefits, and inheritance; engage in targeted advocacy, sensitization, and awareness-raising campaigns to change social norms, promote gender equity in families and society, and raise the status of women and girls.
 - (iv) Take effective measures to ensure that claims of violation of honour, custom, or traditional practices do not serve as a justification for violence against women and do not result in reduced sentences.
- (p) Ensure that prevention of violence and response measures accommodate the needs of disadvantaged groups of women and girls. States should take specific actions to prevent and eliminate violence against women facing multiple forms of discrimination including disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnic identity, and poverty (especially among older women). They should consult with women who face multiple forms of discrimination regarding their specific experiences and needs and ensure that this information is taken into account in formulating legislation, policies and practices to prevent and eliminate violence against women. They should train law enforcement, justice system professionals, and service providers in recognizing multiple types of discrimination suffered by members of disadvantaged groups and eliminating prejudice against those women.

⁸³ Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, 11 June 2014, P029, (entered into force 09 November 2016).

(q) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations, including strengthening and implementing legislation and training regarding armed forces' mandate to protect civilians; implementing support systems and reparations for survivors; prosecuting perpetrators of sexual violence at national and international levels; and undertaking reconciliation efforts to end cycles of retaliatory violence.

(r) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate violence, discrimination and bullying in schools, and sexual harassment in the workplace and in public, including ratifying and implementing the International Labour Organization's Convention Concerning the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work.⁸⁴ Establish and improve national mechanisms for reporting harassment in the workplace; adopt and implement legislation addressing sexual harassment in public spaces; train law enforcement and other public institutions in properly reporting and addressing sexual harassment; and increase awareness of cyberbullying and violence in schools.

(s) Take specific actions to prevent and eliminate violence against migrant and refugee women and women who are part of ethnic minority communities, by allowing for asylum and other humanitarian immigration relief to undocumented survivors of violence against women; dedicating sufficient resources to screening asylum seekers; providing sufficient linguistically and culturally appropriate services for survivors; and combating xenophobia directed toward migrant and refugee women.

(t) Implement the seven INSPIRE⁸⁵ and seven RESPECT⁸⁶ strategies for ending violence against girls and other children and violence against women; and join the public-private collaboration that includes United Nations agencies in a Global Partnership to End Violence against Children (#endviolence).

⁸⁴ Concerning the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, International Labour Conference, Convention, 21 June 2019.

⁸⁵ WHO (2016) INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children includes: implementation and enforcement of laws; norms and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic strengthening; response and support services; and education and life skills.

⁸⁶ WHO (2019) RESPECT women: provides seven evidence-based strategies for ending violence against women, including: relationship skills strengthened; empowerment of women; services ensured; poverty reduced; environments made safe; child and adolescent abuse prevented; and transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms.