Closing gender data gaps in the Eastern Partnership region: Guidelines on data collection practices relevant for women's access to justice

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Women's Access to Justice: implementing Council of Europe gender equality and violence against women standards

Anne Laure Humbert
With contributions by:
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1. Introduction

These guidelines provide a practical roadmap for justice sector institutions, national statistical offices, and other competent authorities in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine to design, collect, manage, and use gender-sensitive data on women's access to justice. They respond to regional gaps and challenges identified in assessments done by national consultants in every Eastern Partnership country throughout 2024 and 2025 in the framework of the project "Women's Access to Justice: implementing Council of Europe gender equality and violence against women standards", as part of the Partnership for Good Governance[1]. The guidelines build on the Framework for Measuring Access to Justice including Specific Challenges Facing Women (UN Women/Council of Europe, 2016)[2].

The institutions these guidelines apply to include, but are not limited to:

- ► Justice sector institutions (courts, prosecution services, police, legal aid providers)
- ► National statistical offices
- ► Ministries of Justice and related agencies
- ► Ombudsperson institutions, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Equality Bodies
- ► Civil society organisations engaged in legal aid and monitoring

The standards of reference for this work include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), particularly General Recommendation No. 33, which sets out comprehensive guidance on ensuring women's access to justice; the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

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1. The national assessments are non-public working documents.
2. Framework for Measuring Access to Justice including Specific Challenges Facing Women (UN Women/Council of Europe, 2016)

(Istanbul Convention), with Article 11 establishing obligations for the collection of relevant disaggregated statistical data; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 on promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive societies; and the indicators developed by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) to assess the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of justice systems.

2. Principles for gender-sensitive data collection

These guidelines would not be complete without first establishing the key principles that underpin gender-sensitive data collection. Setting out these principles at the outset provides a foundation for all subsequent recommendations, ensuring that data collection processes are not only technically sound, but also inclusive, respectful of human rights, and responsive to the specific realities and barriers faced by women. By defining these guiding values, we create a consistent framework that can be applied across institutions and contexts to produce reliable, comparable, and meaningful evidence for advancing women's access to justice.

2.1. Principle of data quality and comparability

To ensure that justice sector data are meaningful and comparable across institutions and over time, standardised definitions, classifications, and metadata must be adopted and consistently applied. For example, terms such as "domestic violence" or "legal aid beneficiary" should have a shared, legally and operationally recognised meaning. Data-quality assurance protocols, including routine audits, validation checks, and mechanisms for reporting and correcting errors, should be embedded in institutional practices. While audits and validation checks are essential, these processes must also comply with ethical principles, particularly in handling sensitive justice data (e.g. ensuring confidentiality, avoiding harm, respecting informed consent). These measures not only improve reliability but also build confidence among users of the data, from policymakers to the public.

2.2. Principle of multiple data sources and triangulation

A robust understanding of women's access to justice cannot rely on a single source of information. Triangulation (i.e. combining multiple data sources) strengthens validity and fills knowledge gaps. This means integrating administrative data from courts, police, prosecution services, and legal aid providers with survey findings, focus groups, and qualitative interviews that capture lived experiences and contextual nuances. Civil society organisations and academic partners play a vital role in this process, both as data providers and as independent validators of official statistics, ensuring that figures are grounded in reality and reflect diverse perspectives. NHRIs and Ombuds institutions also play a role as data providers (through complaints handling, case monitoring, thematic reports) and independent validators of justice sector data, complementing the contributions of CSOs and academia.

2.3. Principle of timeliness and regularity

Data must be collected and updated on a regular basis to remain relevant for policy and programmatic decision-making. Institutionalising fixed data-collection cycles (such as annual or biannual reporting for key indicators like case attrition rates, levels of legal awareness, and trust in justice institutions) ensures continuity and trend analysis over time. Administrative registers in police agencies, courts, and legal aid offices should be updated at a minimum agreed frequency, allowing timely access to current information and reducing the risk of outdated or incomplete datasets guiding strategic decisions.

2.4. Principle of inclusion and non-discrimination

Gender-sensitive data collection must be guided by the commitment to inclusion and non-discrimination, ensuring that all relevant population groups are represented in the evidence base. This requires the systematic disaggregation of data by sex, gender, age, socioeconomic status, geographic location, disability status, and other intersecting factors that shape access to justice such as Roma women, stateless persons, older women or migrants. Special attention should be given to capturing the experiences of marginalised and underserved groups, including those living in rural or remote areas, ethnic and linguistic minorities, LGBTI persons, and persons with disabilities. Without such granularity, critical barriers and disparities remain hidden, undermining the ability to design policies and interventions that address the needs of all women and girls. Data collectors should also systematically consider intersecting inequalities to better reflect overlapping and potentially mutually reinforcing barriers.

2.5. Principle of privacy, confidentiality, and ethical considerations

All gender-sensitive data collection must uphold strict privacy, confidentiality, and ethical safeguards, particularly when handling sensitive cases such as those involving gender-based violence. This involves anonymising or aggregating personal data to prevent the identification of individuals and mitigate risks of harm or stigmatisation. Data collectors and custodians must comply with national data-protection laws as well as international human-rights standards, ensuring informed consent where applicable and embedding a victim-centred approach that prioritises the dignity, safety, and rights of all individuals represented in the data.

3. Organisational roles and coordination mechanisms

3.1. Purpose and rationale

Strong organisational roles and coordination mechanisms are the backbone of coherent, consistent, and sustainable gender-sensitive justice data collection. Without a well-defined framework for how institutions interact, data risks being fragmented, incomplete, and difficult to compare over time or across agencies. In many contexts, overlapping mandates and unaligned data systems result in duplication of effort, gaps in coverage, and inconsistencies in definitions or coding, which in turn weaken the policy relevance and reliability of the evidence base.

An integrated coordination structure ensures that each part of the justice chain (including for example courts, police, prosecution services, legal aid providers, statistical agencies, and gender equality bodies) understands its role and contributes systematically to a shared set of indicators. By streamlining data standards, clarifying responsibilities, and establishing regular channels for exchange, coordination mechanisms improve efficiency, reduce unnecessary duplication, and foster trust between institutions.

These mechanisms can enable the production of robust, timely, and comparable sex-disaggregated justice data, strengthening the capacity of policymakers and stakeholders to design evidence-based interventions that address the specific barriers faced by women in accessing justice.

3.2. Relevant institutions

The first step in establishing an effective coordination framework is to create a comprehensive inventory of all entities involved in collecting, storing, or using justice-related data. A mapping exercise can help to understand the full landscape of data producers, custodians, and users, and to identify opportunities for alignment, integration, and collaboration.

The scope of this mapping should cover the entire justice chain and related stakeholders, including:

- ▶ **Judicial bodies** such as the Supreme Court, appellate courts, first-instance courts, and judicial councils.
- ▶ **Law enforcement agencies** including police forces, prosecutors' offices, and investigative committees.
- ▶ **Legal aid providers** (both state-funded and independent) such as public defender offices, bar associations, and non-governmental organisations offering free or low-cost legal services.
- ▶ **National statistical offices** at both central and regional levels, which play a key role in consolidating and publishing official data.
- ▶ **Specialised agencies** mandated to address specific issues such as gender equality, domestic violence prevention, and child protection.
- ▶ Healthcare professionals and social welfare services, which are often the first point of contact for women victims of violence and provide valuable administrative data for understanding the prevalence of unreported cases.
- ▶ **Civil society organisations and academic institutions** engaged in justice monitoring, advocacy, and research.

This process can provide a detailed **institutional map** describing each body's mandate, the types of data it collects, its reporting obligations, and its formal or informal data-sharing relationships with other entities. Such a map not only clarifies roles and responsibilities but also highlights duplication, gaps, and potential synergies in data flows.

3.3. Coordination mechanisms

The overarching goal of coordination mechanisms is to ensure effective data flow across the justice system, prevent duplication of effort, and enable cross-checking between administrative datasets to enhance accuracy and completeness. Well-designed coordination structures create the foundation for a coherent and integrated gender-sensitive justice data system.

The coordination framework should comprise both **inter-agency working groups** and **permanent coordination units**. Inter-agency working groups bring together representatives from the judiciary, national statistical offices, police, prosecution services, and legal aid providers, serving as platforms for dialogue, joint problem-solving, and the alignment of methodologies and priorities. Complementing these groups, permanent coordination units

embedded within key ministries or statistical agencies provide continuous oversight of justice-related gender data. These units ensure follow-through on agreements, preserve institutional memory, and manage the day-to-day coordination tasks necessary for maintaining a coherent and responsive data system. Further, the involvement of other beneficiaries (e.g. women's organisations, survivor networks, or broader civil society representatives) could strengthen accountability, ensure that data reflects lived realities, and foster trust in the system.

The functions of the coordination mechanisms include the joint planning of annual or biannual data-collection activities, ensuring that timeframes, resources, and responsibilities are clearly defined for all participating institutions. They also involve reaching agreement on shared priorities and key indicators, which helps maintain a common focus and ensures the comparability of datasets across different agencies. In addition, these mechanisms facilitate the development of data-sharing agreements and interoperability standards that enable secure, efficient, and automated exchange of information between systems, strengthening the overall quality and accessibility of gender-sensitive justice data. Coordination bodies should meet on a quarterly basis to review progress, address operational issues, and plan upcoming activities. In addition, an annual strategic review session should be held to evaluate the system's overall performance, identify lessons learned, and adjust priorities for the following year.

Effective coordination mechanisms must be underpinned by a robust risk management framework to safeguard the credibility, independence, and ethical use of justice data. Risks in this domain extend beyond technical vulnerabilities and include institutional and political dimensions that can undermine data integrity and public trust. Key risks include **political manipulation of data**, where statistics are influenced or selectively disclosed to portray favourable outcomes; **selective or inconsistent reporting**, where negative findings or gender-based disparities are omitted; and **misuse of data** to justify predetermined policy decisions rather than inform evidence-based reform. Such practices can distort public understanding, erode confidence in institutions, and weaken accountability.

3.4. Protocols and standards

Clear and consistent protocols and standards are essential to ensure that gender-sensitive justice data is coherent, comparable, and usable across institutions. This begins with the adoption of uniform templates and coding systems, including common definitions for key terms such as "domestic violence

case," "legal aid beneficiary," and "protective order issued." In addition, all actors should agree on a set of minimum disaggregation variables, including sex, age, geographic location, disability status, and ethnicity where legally permissible, to ensure that data captures the diversity of experiences and barriers faced. In cases of violence against women, data should also ensure that it covers type of violence and relationship between perpetrators and victims.

The framework should also establish a set of standardised indicators for monitoring gender equality in justice systems, aligned with international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), CEDAW, and the Istanbul Convention.

To enable seamless exchange and integration, all data should be stored and transmitted in machine-readable formats (e.g., XML, CSV) that facilitate interoperability across systems. Secure channels for data transfer and storage must be in place to protect sensitive information, especially in cases involving gender-based violence.

The digitalisation of justice data requires particular attention to cybersecurity and inclusion. Given the sensitivity of personal data collected in cases of gender-based violence, robust IT safeguards are indispensable. At a minimum, systems should use end-to-end encryption, multi-factor authentication, restricted access based on the "need-to-know" principle, and maintain audit logs to track data use. Regular penetration testing, cybersecurity training for staff, and secure data-backup protocols should be mandated. At the same time, digitalisation must not deepen territorial or social divides: justice institutions in rural or remote areas often face connectivity gaps and limited technical capacity. To avoid digital exclusion, hybrid systems (combining digital tools with paper-based or offline data collection) should be maintained until full connectivity and user training are achieved.

Finally, an approval process should be established, whereby all templates, indicators, and technical standards are formally endorsed by the inter-agency coordination group. These should be reviewed and updated periodically (e.g. at least every three years) to ensure continued relevance, alignment with evolving legal frameworks, and responsiveness to emerging data needs.

3.5. Capacity building

Building institutional capacity is essential to ensure that gender-sensitive justice data are collected, recorded, and analysed accurately and consistently. Annual training programmes should be organised for key personnel, including court clerks, statisticians, police data officers, and legal aid administrators. These

trainings should cover core topics such as gender-sensitive data recording, requirements for disaggregation, confidentiality and privacy protocols (e.g. Statistical Disclosure Control standards), and the effective use of digital data systems. Delivery should combine in-person workshops for interactive learning with online modules to ensure accessibility and continuity.

In addition, specialised training modules should be developed to address complex areas, such as handling data on gender-based violence. These modules should include case studies that highlight practical challenges and solutions, as well as hands-on exercises in coding and validating case files to strengthen technical accuracy for relevant professionals.

To maintain high standards and encourage professional development, each training programme could include evaluation and certification. Post-training assessments will verify participants' understanding and their ability to apply new skills in their work. Participants who meet the required competency standards should receive formal certification, enhancing their professional recognition and reinforcing institutional commitment to quality gender-sensitive data practices.

3.6. Monitoring and evaluation

Ongoing monitoring and regular assessment are vital to maintaining the quality, coherence, and relevance of gender-sensitive justice data systems. The coordination body should conduct an annual review of institutional arrangements, evaluating how well roles, responsibilities, and processes are functioning in practice.

Clear performance metrics should be used to track progress and identify areas for improvement. These may include the percentage of institutions consistently using agreed templates and coding systems; the percentage of datasets fully disaggregated by the required variables such as sex, age, and location; and the timeliness and completeness of data submissions.

An effective system must also incorporate feedback loops with data users (including policy units, researchers, and civil society organisations) to ensure that data collection protocols remain responsive to evolving needs. This engagement helps to refine indicators, update definitions, and strengthen methodologies, fostering a cycle of continuous improvement that ensures justice data remains robust, relevant, and fit for purpose.

Priority data areas and indicators

Identifying and agreeing on priority data areas and indicators is essential to focus collection efforts on the most relevant aspects of women's access to justice. These areas provide a structured framework for measuring both the enabling environment and the functioning of justice institutions, as well as the experiences and outcomes for women seeking justice (Box 1). A separate analysis to support prioritisation has been conducted with national consultants in 2025.

Box 1

Enabling environment	Supply side	Demand side
The enabling environment refers to the legal and policy framework that underpins women's access to justice. This includes the alignment of national laws with CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention, ensuring that commitments under these instruments are fully reflected in domestic legislation. It also covers the existence of gender equality clauses in the Constitution and laws, which provide a formal legal basis for non-discrimination and equal treatment. The criminalisation of all forms of violence against women is a critical benchmark, ensuring that survivors have legal recourse and protection. In addition, the ability of NGOs to have legal standing for strategic litigation is an important mechanism for advancing women's rights through the courts.	The supply side examines the capacity and responsiveness of justice institutions to meet women's needs. Key elements include the sex composition of judges, prosecutors, legal aid lawyers, and police officers, which can influence accessibility and trust in the justice process. The number and geographic coverage of specialised gender-based violence units and courts reflects the system's readiness to address gender-based crimes. Geographic accessibility, measured as the average distance or travel time to the nearest court, is crucial for equitable access. Finally, case clearance rates and average case duration, disaggregated by case type and the sex of the litigant, provide insight into the efficiency and fairness of justice delivery.	The demand side focuses on women's experiences, perceptions, and behaviours in seeking justice. Awareness of rights, typically measured through surveys, is a prerequisite for claiming those rights. Understanding the barriers faced by women (including cost, stigma, and physical distance) helps identify where reforms are needed. Attrition rates in gender-based violence cases, along with documented reasons for case withdrawals, can reveal weaknesses in protection, investigation, and prosecution. Finally, levels of trust in courts, police, and legal aid services, gathered through public perception surveys, serve as an important measure of the justice system's legitimacy and its perceived fairness among women.

To use the report effectively for prioritising measurement, the first step can be to map all indicators from the framework against both national and international commitments. This means identifying which indicators directly contribute to domestic justice reform objectives as well as reporting requirements under SDG 5 and 16, CEDAW, and the Istanbul Convention. Indicators that serve multiple purposes should be given higher priority, as they maximise efficiency and deliver impact across several obligations at once.

Next, it is essential to assess the current availability of data for each indicator. Drawing on the institutional mapping and data source descriptions in the report, indicators can be grouped into three categories: those for which data is fully available and standardised, those for which data is partially available but needs improvement, and those for which no data is currently collected. This categorisation makes it possible to secure early wins by starting with indicators in the first group, while planning short-term investments to strengthen those in the second.

Policy urgency should also guide the sequencing of measurement. Indicators linked to active policy debates, legislative reforms, or areas of heightened public concern should be moved to the front of the queue. For example, if gender-based violence legislation is being reviewed, it would make sense to prioritise indicators on criminalisation, attrition rates, and protection orders. The country-specific context and good practice examples contained in the report can help to align indicator selection with these immediate policy opportunities.

Institutional readiness is another critical consideration. The report's section on institutional arrangements makes it possible to identify which agencies have the mandates, systems, and capacity to collect each indicator. Indicators that can be implemented by well-prepared institutions with minimal cross-agency coordination should be prioritised before tackling those that require extensive new collaboration or infrastructure.

The complexity and cost of implementation must also be weighed. Indicators that can be measured using existing administrative systems, such as the sex composition of judges, should be implemented first. More resource-intensive indicators, such as those requiring surveys or complex inter-agency data integration, can be scheduled for later phases. The report's notes on infrastructure needs for each data area can be used to inform these decisions.

A phased rollout ensures that measurement is introduced in a manageable way. The initial phase should focus on administrative data that can be captured quickly, followed by indicators that require moderate system upgrades, and finally those that demand entirely new data collection systems or surveys.

The roadmap examples in the report provide guidance on what is achievable at each stage.

Finally, linking the rollout of measurement to reporting cycles can enhance its strategic value. National and international reporting deadlines allow the implementation of indicators to be timed so that results feed directly into high-profile outputs. This not only increases the visibility of the work but also helps to secure political and institutional commitment. The monitoring and continuous improvement section of the report can be used to conduct annual reviews, dropping or postponing indicators that prove to have low policy relevance or persistent data challenges, and advancing those that have become more feasible over time.

Key recommendations to competent authorities

To strengthen the collection, analysis, and use of gender-sensitive justice data, competent authorities should consider the following actions:

A. Governance and Standards

1. Adopt a national gender-sensitive justice data framework that aligns with the UN Women/Council of Europe indicators. This will ensure consistency across institutions, comparability over time, and alignment with international standards.

2. Mandate the collection and reporting of disaggregated data by sex and other categories relevant to intersectional inequalities (e.g. age, disability, ethnicity, geographic location, socioeconomic status) for all justice statistics. This requirement should be embedded in relevant legislation, regulations, or ministerial directives to guarantee compliance across all justice sector bodies.

3. Develop and implement ethical and data-protection standards across all justice data systems. These should include anonymisation of sensitive data, victim-centred confidentiality protocols, and clear rules on consent and data retention to safeguard the privacy and dignity of all persons involved.

4. Ensure transparency through the publication of annual public reports and/or dashboards presenting key gender justice indicators. Such reports should be accessible to policymakers, researchers, and the public, and include both quantitative and qualitative insights.

B. Systems, Security, and Capacity

5.   **Roll out secure, integrated digital systems** linking courts, police, prosecution, and legal aid providers. Interoperability should be complemented by cybersecurity safeguards (such as encryption, user authentication, access control, and audit trails) to prevent data breaches and misuse, especially in cases of gender-based violence.

6.   Provide regular, adequately funded training for data collection staff. Training should focus on gender-sensitive data recording, disaggregation requirements, confidentiality protocols, and the use of digital systems.

7.   Strengthen knowledge retention and institutional continuity, procedures and methodologies should be clearly documented, mentoring arrangements established between experienced and newer staff, and backup focal points designated for all key data functions. These measures help maintain knowledge consistency even when staff change roles or leave their institutions.

8.   Establish formal data-sharing agreements among justice sector actors. These agreements should define the scope, format, frequency, and safeguards for data exchange to facilitate collaboration while protecting confidentiality.

9.   Apply gender-responsive budgeting to allocate sufficient resources for data system upgrades, analysis, and reporting. Funding should specifically support activities that improve the quality, coverage, and accessibility of gender-sensitive justice data.

C. Participation and Sustainability

10.   Conduct user surveys at regular intervals to capture the perspectives of those engaging with the justice system. Use the results to inform service delivery, outreach strategies, and evidence-based reform.

11.   Engage civil society organisations and academia in the design, testing, and review of data collection methodologies. This inclusive approach helps ensure indicators are relevant, reliable, and responsive to emerging needs.

12.   Review the national indicator set periodically to ensure it reflects new justice challenges, legislative changes, and evolving international obligations. Regular updates will keep the framework relevant and responsive over time.

This report provides practical, evidence-based guidance for improving the collection and use of gender-sensitive data on women's access to justice in the Eastern Partnership region. Building on the UN Women and Council of Europe Framework for Measuring Access to Justice, it translates international standards into operational recommendations tailored to justice institutions, statistical offices, and related public authorities. The guidelines on data collection practices set out core principles for high-quality, ethical, and inclusive data collection, with particular attention to disaggregation, comparability, co-ordination across institutions, and the protection of sensitive information. They identify priority data areas and indicators covering the enabling environment, the supply side of justice, and women's lived experiences in seeking justice, including in cases of violence against women. Drawing on expert input from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, the report highlights common gaps and good practices, and proposes concrete steps for strengthening institutional capacity, interoperability, and accountability. It is intended as a practical resource for policymakers, justice practitioners, statisticians, and civil society actors committed to producing reliable evidence to inform reforms, monitor progress, and advance women's equal access to justice in line with European and international human rights standards.

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