

Contribution by Asociația Unic to the 1st Thematic Evaluation Round of GREVIO - Romania (2025)

Acknowledgment

This contribution would not have been possible without the dedication and insight of our colleagues and partner organizations within the Romanian Women's Lobby (RoWL). We are especially grateful to Marinela Onofraș from Asociația Orientat and Cristina Chinole from Asociația Femeilor și Familiilor din Mediul Rural, whose experience and field work have helped shape the content and direction of this report. We also thank Fundația Centrul de Mediere și Securitate Comunitară (CMSC) for its consistent leadership in advancing domestic violence prevention and for its efforts to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations across the country.

The work of feminist organizations rooted in local communities has been a continuous source of learning and collaboration for us. This report reflects that shared experience and a common commitment to justice, care, and the rights of women and girls, especially those whose voices are too often excluded.

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About Asociația Unic

Asociația Unic is a feminist civil society organization based in north-eastern Romania, dedicated to defending women's rights and preventing gender-based violence, with a focus on rural and underserved communities. The organization works to promote awareness, empowerment and access to protection mechanisms, particularly for women and girls affected by social exclusion, economic dependency, or intersecting forms of discrimination.

Founded in and working from deeply rural areas, Asociația Unic is deeply anchored in the lived realities of small communities. We maintain longstanding partnerships with local schools, mayors' offices, and Local Action Groups (LAGs), collaborating across sectors to identify needs and mobilize resources. In all our initiatives, we strive to offer integrated, community-responsive services that address both the immediate safety of women and their long-term autonomy and inclusion.

In 2025, Asociația Unic established the ADELA Center, a rural service currently undergoing the licensing process as a domestic violence prevention and support service. The center functions as a community-based center for prevention, awareness-raising, early identification of risk, and referral, especially for women and girls living in isolated or under-resourced areas.

Through the ADELA Center, Asociația Unic has:

- Implemented educational workshops and outreach activities in 11 rural communes;
- Developed a localized version of the Violence Meter (Violentometrul) for adolescents;
- Organized peer learning and support circles for women and youth;
- Contributed to building informal coordination links between schools, SPAS, local authorities, and civil society.

As a member of the Romanian Women's Lobby (RoWL), the national coordination of the European Women's Lobby, Asociația Unic is also engaged in monitoring legislation and public policies through a gender lens, advocating for systemic changes that reflect the lived experiences of women – especially those facing multiple layers of exclusion.

This report reflects the direct observations and experiences of Asociația Unic and its partners in addressing violence at community level, as well as structural obstacles that persist in service provision, institutional cooperation, and public accountability. It is structured in response to GREVIO's thematic questionnaire and highlights key areas where implementation of the Istanbul Convention remains incomplete or inadequate.

This contribution focuses in particular on Articles 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 25, 31, 48 and 49-53 of the Convention, which reflect key areas of concern from our work in underserved communities.

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Part I: Changes in comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the area of violence against women and domestic violence

(1) Article 7 - Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies

Despite the existence of a national strategy on preventing and combating gender-based violence, Asociația Unic observes a persistent lack of coherent and coordinated implementation mechanisms at the local and county levels, especially in rural areas.

For example, in the communes where Asociația UNIC operates (e.g. Bivolari, Victoria, Tiganasi), there are no formal cooperation protocols between the local police, public social services (SAS), schools, and primary healthcare providers. In the absence of such protocols, cases of domestic violence are often treated in isolation, with no case management or risk assessment mechanisms in place, leading to delayed or inadequate protection for victims.

Moreover, definitions and institutional responses to “domestic violence” and “violence against women” remain fragmented. Many local stakeholders continue to apply narrow or gender-neutral interpretations, focusing primarily on physical aggression within family relationships. This contradicts Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention, which defines violence against women as a gendered and structural phenomenon. The concept of coercive control is still largely unacknowledged in practice.

Furthermore, intersectionality is rarely considered in local policy or practice. Roma women, women with disabilities, and rural women face additional barriers in accessing services and are often excluded from formal consultations or prevention programs. The needs and risks they face are not addressed in mainstream local planning documents.

The lack of county-level coordination units, dedicated funding streams, and compulsory gender-sensitive protocols at the level of General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) also limits the implementation of comprehensive strategies. Some counties have informal interinstitutional working groups, but these are inconsistent and depend on individual leadership, not systemic planning.

(2) Article 8 - Funding

Asociația Unic underlines the chronic underfunding of gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and support services at the local and regional levels in Romania. Since the previous GREVIO evaluation, no significant structural changes have been made to

ensure **sustainable and dedicated financial resources** for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, especially in underserved rural areas.

In the absence of earmarked national or county-level budgets, local public services such as SPAS (Public Social Assistance Services) are left to operate with minimal resources and often without trained personnel. Services for victims of domestic violence are either missing entirely or reliant on temporary project-based funding. As a result, the availability of psychological counseling, legal aid, or emergency shelter is inconsistent and extremely limited outside urban centers.

Furthermore, there is **no sustainable public funding mechanism for women's rights NGOs** providing specialist support. Asociația Unic has implemented some initiatives that respond directly to the needs of women survivors in rural areas (including counseling, awareness-raising, community education, and empowerment programs), yet each project depends on competitive external funding - EU, private donors, or limited grants. These short-term mechanisms cannot replace systemic state support.

Although there are some initiatives, coordinated by ANES using EU or SEE grants, to improve infrastructure and services at county level (judet), these investments are not accompanied by long-term financial planning or state-supported service continuation. In some cases, services created through EU-funded projects were discontinued after the funding ended, due to the lack of local financial commitment.

Additionally, there is **no structural funding scheme** at national level that supports specialist services for **migrant, Roma, or disabled women**, despite the increased exposure to intersectional discrimination and violence faced by these groups. Even in regions with significant Roma or Ukrainian refugee populations, local budgets rarely allocate any resources for gender-responsive programs or for partnerships with NGOs.

The funding gap is further widened by the **lack of transparency in public resource allocation**, and the absence of gender-responsive budgeting at local or central levels. Without legal obligations to fund or prioritize GBV-related services, gender equality objectives remain rhetorical.

While Romanian authorities have publicly stated that NGO services for victims of violence would be supported through dedicated funding mechanisms – including via the National Agency for the Management of Seized Assets (ANABI) – **the actual allocation of public funds in 2024 does not support this claim.**

According to the *Official Report on Non-reimbursable Funding Contracts for Fiscal Year 2024*, published in the Official Gazette on 31 December 2024, **only three projects were funded** under ANABI's program "Support for Victims and Community. Offenders Pay." All funded initiatives focused on general crime prevention, legal education, or support for persons with disabilities. **None addressed gender-based violence or services specifically targeting women survivors of domestic violence.**

Moreover, although **several rounds of public consultation were held throughout 2024** regarding the funding methodology for civil society, **no actual call for proposals was launched by ANABI during the year**. As a result, organizations working directly with women affected by violence **had no opportunity to access funding**, despite strong public messaging about support for victim services.

Asociația Unic considers this a **significant disconnect between institutional communication and actual resource allocation**, which undermines trust, predictability, and partnership between the state and civil society.

In conclusion, Asociația Unic urges GREVIO to recommend the establishment of:

- Dedicated national and local budget lines for gender-based violence prevention and response;
- Core funding for specialist women's NGOs;
- Mandatory integration of gender-responsive budgeting in public institutions;
- Sustainability mechanisms for services developed through EU or donor funding.

(3) Article 11 - Data collection and research

Asociația Unic and its partner organizations observe a **persistent lack of coherent, disaggregated, and actionable data** on violence against women and domestic violence in Romania. This gap continues to hinder the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective public policies.

While some progress has been made at national level in defining categories such as type of violence or sex of victim/perpetrator, **local-level administrative data collection remains fragmented, incomplete, and non-standardized**. Most rural municipalities and even some counties do not collect or centralize relevant data from health services, police, social assistance, and education authorities in a coordinated manner.

In our direct experience, **SPAS (Public Social Assistance Services)** rarely register detailed information on the relationship between victim and perpetrator, the context of the incident, or its outcome. Case files are often incomplete and are not digitized or tracked over time. This leads to poor case management, limited risk assessment capacity, and an inability to evaluate repeat violence or escalation patterns.

There is currently no unified national system to track cases of violence against women from the initial report through to judicial resolution. Each institution – police (IGPR), courts, prosecutors, social services, and healthcare providers – collects and stores data separately, using different formats and categories. These data systems are not interconnected, nor are they routinely shared across sectors.

As a result, no institution has a comprehensive overview of a victim's situation or the cumulative risks she may be facing. This fragmentation severely limits the effectiveness of protection measures, delays coordinated interventions, and increases the risk of repeated or escalating violence.

Moreover, the absence of an integrated data system prevents the identification of institutional gaps or failures (such as delays, case dropouts, or lack of follow-up), and makes it nearly impossible to evaluate the real impact and effectiveness of support services.

No data is routinely published or collected regarding:

- Emergency barring orders and their enforcement or breach rates;
- Protection orders granted or violated;
- Custody decisions in which domestic violence has been taken into account;
- Outcomes for victims or perpetrators post-intervention;
- Victims' access to support services (especially in rural areas).

In addition, **intersectional dimensions of violence are not systematically recorded**. There are no reliable national data on the prevalence and experiences of Roma women, women with disabilities, migrant or refugee women, or LGBTI+ survivors. This invisibilizes their experiences and excludes them from most policy planning or service development.

While some NGOs - including Unic - collect limited internal data through project monitoring and surveys, this cannot replace the role of the state in ensuring regular, comprehensive, and public data collection and dissemination. Moreover, independent academic or policy research in this field remains limited, poorly funded, and disconnected from policymaking.

We strongly recommend:

- The development of a national integrated data system, in line with Article 11;
- Disaggregated data collection by all relevant institutions, following shared protocols;
- Mandatory reporting of indicators related to violence in judicial, police, social, and medical records;
- Inclusion of intersectional categories in all data systems (ethnicity, disability, migration status, age, etc.);
- Public access to anonymized national data on violence against women;
- Increased investment in gender-sensitive research and community-based studies.

Part II: Information on the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the field of prevention, protection and prosecution

(4) Article 12 - General obligations

Asociația Unic observes that Romania lacks a consistent and coordinated national strategy for **primary prevention of violence against women**, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Most prevention efforts remain fragmented, underfunded, and overly dependent on short-term civil society initiatives.

Despite the commitments of the Istanbul Convention, **public authorities do not systematically engage in awareness-raising or attitude change campaigns**. Prevention is rarely prioritized in county or municipal plans, and few resources are allocated to challenge harmful gender stereotypes or to engage men and boys in meaningful ways.

In this context, Asociația Unic has actively contributed to the development and delivery of community-based prevention initiative in several rural areas of Iași and Botosani county, including:

- **Community-based workshops** addressing gender norms, emotional literacy, and violence recognition;
- The development of an **interactive tool for adolescents**, the “*Violentometru*” (*translation : violence-meter*), adapted to the Romanian context, aimed at helping young people identify early signs of emotional and physical abuse in relationships;
- The use of **guided storytelling and art-based activities** to encourage open dialogue on relationships, trust, fear, and control among girls and boys aged 11-16;
- Training local educators and community leaders in **nonviolent communication, gender-sensitive pedagogy**, and referral mechanisms;
- Targeted support and safe spaces for **mothers at risk**, particularly single mothers and Roma women, to break cycles of silence and isolation.

These initiatives have revealed:

- **Entrenched patriarchal attitudes** among both adults and youth, often reinforced by religious or cultural traditions;
- Deep **mistrust of institutions** among women who experienced violence, often linked to past experiences of inaction or blame;
- The need for **long-term, localized and trust-based prevention**, particularly in areas with high levels of poverty and school dropout.

These observations are echoed by other grassroots organizations working in rural communities. **Asociația Orientat**, for instance, has conducted prevention and education activities in several underserved rural areas in north-eastern Romania, engaging children, youth, parents, and teachers. During a session on violence prevention in schools and families, **one teenage participant asked, with sadness, whether “there are families where violence doesn’t happen”** – revealing the extent to which verbal and physical abuse is perceived as normal.

Children and adolescents are often so accustomed to violent interactions that **they cannot imagine alternative models for family or school relationships**. At the same time, many parents are trapped in cycles of intergenerational violence and unaware of the harmful effects of their behavior on their own children. There are virtually no community-based programs for parental education or counseling to address these patterns.

Bullying and violence also occur in interactions with teaching staff, who may misuse their position of authority due to lack of training and institutional support. Teachers are rarely offered guidance or emotional support to help them manage classroom conflict or respond appropriately to signs of abuse.

Based on their field experience, **Asociația Orientat** highlights the urgent need for educational programs that:

- prevent violence through emotional literacy and gender equality education;
- make information and support accessible to vulnerable children and youth;
- establish safe and inclusive environments in schools;
- promote awareness of the impact of family-based education and parenting practices;
- strengthen community involvement in violence prevention;
- foster cooperation between schools and families for integrated prevention efforts.

These insights further reinforce the conclusion that prevention must be locally rooted, sustained over time, and adapted to the lived realities of rural and marginalized communities.

These concerns are also shared by Asociația Femeilor și Familiilor din Mediul Rural (AFFMR), which works in villages across Moldova and Muntenia. AFFMR reports that prevention remains largely absent from rural public planning. Local officials often resist gender-sensitive programs, and community leaders – including religious authorities – openly oppose women’s rights. In this environment, AFFMR has developed prevention workshops on emotional literacy and gender norms, and created informal support networks led by women and youth. Their experience reinforces the urgent need to institutionalize local prevention facilitators and integrate gender-based violence prevention into rural development strategies.

Asociația Unic also highlights the **complete absence of intersectionality** in state prevention campaigns. There are no materials or programmes tailored to women with disabilities, Roma girls, migrant women or LGBTI youth. These groups are either erased or included only as a token gesture.

Very few public campaigns encourage **men and boys to take an active role** in preventing violence. When they do exist, they are either limited to social media or designed without consultation with local communities or youth.

To address these gaps, Asociația Unic recommends:

- That **prevention become a structural pillar** in all public policies addressing violence against women, not an optional or decorative element;
- **Dedicated funding** for grassroots prevention initiatives that are community-based, intersectional and intergenerational;
- Systematic inclusion of **men and boys** in prevention strategies, based on feminist and trauma-informed frameworks;
- A national network of **local prevention facilitators**, coordinated by trained NGOs and supported by public authorities.

Another underreported form of domestic violence in Romania – highlighted by **Asociația UNIC** – is violence against older women. Despite the country's rapidly ageing population and growing dependency rates, this form of abuse remains institutionally invisible. There is no national data collection on elder abuse, no public prevention campaigns targeting this issue, and no protection mechanisms adapted to the realities of older victims – especially those living in rural areas, with limited mobility or full dependency on family members. Field practitioners report recurring situations of neglect, verbal and physical abuse, and financial exploitation, often perpetrated by adult children or informal caregivers. These cases are rarely reported due to shame, fear, or social isolation, and institutions are not equipped to detect or intervene. With demographic trends pointing to a significant rise in the number of elderly women at risk, Romania must begin to recognize and address violence against older women as a specific and urgent dimension of domestic violence.

(5) Article 13 - Awareness-Raising

Public awareness campaigns on violence against women **remain extremely limited** in Romania, particularly in rural areas. When they do exist, they are rarely targeted, sustainable, or inclusive. Asociația Unic observes that state institutions often **rely on NGOs to develop awareness materials**, but provide neither funding nor dissemination support. As a result, prevention messages fail to reach vulnerable groups – especially rural women, Roma communities, and adolescent girls.

This gap is further compounded by the negative influence of mass media. **Asociația Femeilor și Familiilor din Mediul Rural (AFFMR)** draws attention to the **harmful media narratives that shape public understanding of gender-based violence**. Romanian news outlets frequently sensationalize femicides, use victim-blaming language, and erase systemic causes such as institutional failures or patriarchal norms.

AFFMR, along with organizations like Centrul FILIA and ActiveWatch, documented that:

- Over 70% of national media coverage omits any mention of prior abuse or patterns of violence;
- Only 10% of articles include expert or survivor perspectives;
- Victim identities (including name, age, and family status) are often disclosed, leading to secondary victimization;
- Headlines routinely refer to “crimes of passion” or “jealousy,” which shift blame away from perpetrators and normalize violence;
- Media rarely provide information about support services, helplines, or legal rights, missing opportunities for prevention.

In rural areas, the impact is particularly severe. Survivors are discouraged from speaking out due to shame, stigma, and fear of exposure in local media – especially in small communities where anonymity is impossible. AFFMR reports that victims often feel retraumatized by public narratives and excluded from national conversations.

In response, AFFMR has:

- Delivered workshops for rural journalists on trauma-informed and gender-sensitive reporting;
- Created survivor-led storytelling campaigns;
- Monitored local media for bias and ethical breaches;
- Advocated for the adoption of binding ethical standards for the press, in line with Articles 12 and 49 of the Istanbul Convention.

To address these gaps, both Asociația Unic and AFFMR recommend that Romanian authorities:

- Fund rural-specific awareness campaigns, using accessible formats (radio, posters, mobile units);
- Collaborate with grassroots NGOs to co-create prevention content and ensure cultural and regional relevance;
- Train journalists on trauma-informed, ethical reporting on gender-based violence;
- Require national media outlets to publish support service information alongside all coverage of violence;
- Monitor media compliance with ethical standards and apply sanctions for violations that contribute to victim-blaming or secondary trauma.

Without responsible media engagement and targeted awareness efforts, public understanding of gender-based violence will remain fragmented, and survivors – particularly in rural areas – will remain invisible, silenced, or retraumatized.

(6) Article 14 - Education

Although Romania has adopted national strategies on gender equality and violence prevention, education remains an underutilized and inconsistently implemented pillar. There is no nationwide integration of gender equality, emotional literacy, or violence prevention into the formal school curriculum. Where such topics are addressed, it is often through ad-hoc initiatives by NGOs, with no guarantee of sustainability or systemic follow-up.

In rural communities where organizations like Asociația Unic and Asociația Orientat are active, schools frequently function in isolation from support structures and lack the tools to identify, prevent, or address violence. Teachers receive little to no training on gender-based violence, emotional development, or classroom strategies for non-violent conflict resolution. In many cases, they inadvertently reproduce harmful norms.

Asociația Orientat reports that in their outreach work with children, youth, parents, and teachers in rural areas, violence is often perceived as normal. In one workshop on family violence prevention, a teenage girl asked whether "families without violence even exist" – highlighting the internalization of abusive dynamics as the norm. Children and adolescents are regularly exposed to verbal and physical aggression at home and in school, with no exposure to alternative relational models.

Teachers themselves are rarely supported in developing the skills to manage complex classroom dynamics. Due to their position of authority and lack of institutional backing, some resort to punitive or harmful disciplinary practices. Bullying and psychological abuse in teacher-student interactions are not uncommon, especially in under-resourced or overcrowded schools.

Furthermore, parents are often unaware of the impact of their own behavior or disciplinary practices, having themselves grown up in violent households. There are no widespread programs for parental education or positive parenting in rural communities. The absence of such support perpetuates intergenerational cycles of violence.

Testimonies collected by AFFMR in Vaslui, Iași, and Ilfov counties confirm that girls in rural areas face heightened vulnerability due to poverty, early/forced marriage, lack of access to information about sexual and reproductive health, and school dropout. Many of the young mothers they interviewed were under 15, with some as young as 11 or 12. These situations are rarely addressed by local education plans or child protection systems. AFFMR advocates for mandatory sex education and co-develops

tools with other NGOs – such as violence meters and trauma-sensitive teaching prompts – for use in rural schools.

To address these challenges, Asociația Unic and its partners recommend that the Romanian authorities:

- Integrate emotional and social learning, gender equality, and violence prevention into the national curriculum from an early age;
- Provide mandatory, ongoing training for teachers on non-violent classroom management, trauma-informed education, and referral mechanisms;
- Develop school-wide frameworks for safe and inclusive learning environments, with involvement from students and parents;
- Fund community-based education initiatives that include children, families, and local leaders in building alternative, non-violent social norms;
- Establish national programs for parental education and community-school collaboration on violence prevention.

Education must be understood not only as a tool for academic development, but as a critical space for shaping values, behaviors, and the capacity to build relationships free from fear and domination.

(7) Article 15 - Training of professionals

Romania continues to lack a **mandatory, systematic, and interdisciplinary training framework** for professionals who come into contact with victims or survivors of gender-based violence. Initial and in-service training programs are inconsistent across sectors and often absent at the local level, especially in rural areas.

From the perspective of Asociația Unic and its partners, the following issues persist:

- Police officers, prosecutors, and medical staff often **do not receive training** on gender-based violence, coercive control, or victim-centered approaches;
- **Judicial personnel** are rarely trained on the dynamics of intimate partner violence or the impact of trauma on survivors;
- **Social workers and educators** are left without clear protocols or gender-sensitive tools, and many report feeling unprepared to intervene or offer support in cases of domestic violence;
- Existing trainings, where available, are short-term, not mandatory, and rarely evaluated for impact.

In this context, Asociația Unic has engaged in targeted training activities with two key groups:

- **School professionals** (teachers, counselors, school principals), through workshops on gender equality, early signs of abuse in adolescent relationships,

and tools like the *Violentometrul*. These trainings are part of broader educational efforts to prevent violence and promote emotional intelligence and respectful relationships.

- **Local social workers**, primarily from SPAS (Public Social Assistance Services), through sessions focused on recognizing abuse indicators, coordinating with community resources, and reducing stigma in victim support.

In both cases, Unic emphasizes the importance of:

- **Using feminist, trauma-informed, and participatory methodologies;**
- **Co-developing content with professionals**, to ensure local relevance;
- **Promoting collaboration between professionals and NGOs**, rather than leaving public servants isolated in their interventions.

In addition, Asociația Unic organizes regular **sessions with parents**, particularly mothers, to raise awareness about emotional abuse, power dynamics, and the importance of modeling non-violent conflict resolution in the family.

In similar efforts, AFFMR has organized training for rural police officers and SPAS staff, highlighting widespread patterns of delayed responses, discouragement of reporting, and a lack of understanding of trauma. Their fieldwork shows that many victims are told to “solve the issue in the family,” especially if the aggressor is connected to local authorities. AFFMR also produced easy-to-use handbooks for first responders and systematically monitors how local institutions respond to domestic violence reports.

While these efforts are meaningful, they are insufficient to address the systemic training gaps that exist across professions. The contribution of women’s rights organizations in developing and delivering training content remains undervalued and underfunded by state institutions.

We recommend:

- The **establishment of mandatory initial and in-service training programs** for all frontline professionals in health, education, justice, and law enforcement;
- The **involvement of specialist women’s NGOs** in the development and implementation of these programs;
- The **integration of intersectionality and trauma awareness** into all training curricula;
- Clear protocols for inter-professional cooperation following training, with accountability mechanisms for institutions that fail to apply best practices.

(8) Article 16 - Preventive intervention and treatment programmes

In Romania, **preventive intervention and treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence remain extremely limited, underdeveloped and geographically restricted**, with almost no coverage in rural or small-town areas.

Asociația Unic and its partner organizations observe that:

- **Most violent men are not referred to any form of behavior change programme**, even when a protection order is in place;
- When such programmes do exist (often piloted by NGOs in urban areas), **they are voluntary, fragmented, and not supported by stable public funding**;
- **No national standards or accreditation mechanisms** are in place to ensure quality, safety, or consistency in perpetrator programmes;
- **There is no coordination** between the justice system, social services and specialist NGOs to mandate or monitor participation in such programmes.

In the communities where Asociația Unic operates (Iași county), **no perpetrator programmes are available**. Police officers and social workers rarely consider referral of perpetrators as part of the intervention chain. The responsibility is placed entirely on victims to avoid or manage contact with their abuser.

Moreover, **there is no public awareness** of the existence or purpose of such programmes. The idea of behavior change is often met with skepticism or cultural resistance in highly patriarchal environments. Without a coordinated state strategy, **perpetrator programmes remain marginal, inaccessible, and disconnected from victim protection mechanisms**.

Unic also notes a worrying trend: in the absence of perpetrator programmes, **victims are often pressured to "reconcile"**, especially in rural areas or when children are involved, reinforcing the cycle of abuse and increasing the risk of revictimization.

To ensure safety and compliance with the Istanbul Convention, Romania must urgently:

- Establish a **national framework and accreditation system for perpetrator programmes**, based on best practices and victim safety;
- **Extend access to such programmes to rural areas**, possibly through mobile services or digital formats;
- Make participation **mandatory** in relevant judicial decisions (e.g. as a condition in suspended sentences or after breach of protection orders);
- Ensure that **perpetrator programmes are closely coordinated with victim support services**, and never used as a substitute for safety planning;
- **Monitor and evaluate** the outcomes of such programmes, with clear indicators for reduced recidivism and improved victim safety;

- Fund **public awareness campaigns** to deconstruct myths about masculinity, anger control, and “provocation” narratives.

In the absence of such programmes, **the burden of protection falls disproportionately on women**, and the state fails to fulfill its obligation to prevent further violence and hold perpetrators accountable through rehabilitation.

(9) Article 18 - General obligations (multi-agency co-operation)

Asociația Unic observes that **multi-agency co-operation mechanisms in Romania are either absent or function only nominally**, particularly in rural areas. Despite the Istanbul Convention’s clear emphasis on coordinated institutional responses, what exists in practice is often **unstructured, dependent on personal relations**, and lacking formal protocols or accountability.

In the communities where Unic operates, **institutional collaboration most often flows in a single direction**: from NGOs toward public authorities. It is NGOs that initiate contact, offer training, raise awareness, refer cases, and sometimes even coordinate informal responses – with little or no reciprocal engagement from local institutions.

This dynamic is especially visible in:

- **Social assistance departments (SPAS)**, which often lack specialized personnel or clear procedures and rely on NGOs to support victims or manage crisis situations;
- **Schools**, where educators are generally open to prevention activities but do not have internal protocols for referring cases of suspected abuse;
- **Police**, who vary significantly in responsiveness and rarely participate in coordinated safety planning unless pressured externally.

Moreover, **in rural communities, nothing tends to move without the mayor’s informal approval**. Public servants, school principals, and even medical staff may hesitate to act or collaborate unless the mayor endorses or initiates the process. This politicization of institutional cooperation is a **major barrier to systemic victim support** and undermines the autonomy of professional staff.

Local authorities **rarely offer structural support to NGOs**:

- It is **extremely rare for an NGO to receive public funding or direct support** from a local authority for services related to violence prevention;
- **No local contracts or subgrants** exist for victim support services in the areas where Unic works;

- Even **basic needs like access to public space** (e.g. a room in a school or town hall for support meetings) require personal negotiation and are often denied or delayed;
- **Emergency shelter options are nonexistent** in rural areas, and no local authority has offered co-funding for such initiatives.

In the absence of formal inter-institutional agreements or mandates, collaboration depends on **personal goodwill and the credibility built by NGOs over time** – a fragile and unsustainable model. There is no legal obligation at local level to establish coordination groups, no allocated funding for cooperation structures, and no monitoring of inter-agency outcomes.

In response to this institutional fragmentation, Asociația Unic has focused its efforts on **building informal cooperation channels** through the work of the **ADELA Center**, which acts as a **community-based prevention and referral hub**. The center:

- Engages local educators, parents, and social workers in workshops and dialogue;
- Raises awareness on the dynamics and signs of violence;
- Builds trust with women and girls through a consistent presence and open-door approach;
- Facilitates access to **specialist services provided by partner organizations such as CMSC**, especially for women in rural areas who lack direct institutional access.

This approach demonstrates that **even in the absence of formal cooperation mechanisms**, localized, NGO-led initiatives can **mobilize prevention and improve access to help** – but only if they are recognized and supported by public institutions.

Asociația Unic recommends:

- That local authorities be **required by law to establish formal cooperation protocols** with relevant institutions and NGOs;
- That **multi-agency case management structures** be developed and resourced at county level, with participation from police, health, education, SPAS, and civil society;
- That **local budgets include dedicated lines** for NGO partnerships, service subcontracting and co-financing of community-based responses;
- That training and supervision be provided to local decision-makers, including mayors, on their responsibilities under the Istanbul Convention.

Without formalized, funded, and enforced cooperation mechanisms, **victims in rural areas remain unprotected**, and NGOs like Asociația Unic are left to bridge the gaps with minimal support.

(10) Article 20 - General support services

Asociația Unic emphasizes that in Romania, **general support services for victims of violence against women are neither accessible, integrated, nor responsive to the specific needs of women survivors**, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

In the localities where Unic is active, **victims rarely receive coordinated support** through the general public services system. The existing structures - including public social services (SPAS), healthcare facilities, and employment agencies - **lack both the capacity and the gender-sensitive approach** required to support survivors in a meaningful and safe way.

Key challenges include:

- **Social assistance services (SPAS)** often operate with minimal staff and without any training in gender-based violence. They may offer basic paperwork or redirect women to NGOs, but lack in-depth psychosocial expertise or case management protocols;
- **No financial assistance schemes** are designed specifically for survivors of domestic violence, and navigating existing social benefits is bureaucratically complex;
- **Public housing is unavailable or severely limited** in rural areas, and there are no mechanisms to prioritize victims of violence;
- **Employment support services** are disconnected from victim support systems. Women exiting abusive relationships are often economically dependent and isolated, yet job counseling or vocational programs do not target or support them;
- **Healthcare professionals**, particularly in local clinics and family practices, are not trained to recognize signs of abuse, offer sensitive care, or refer women to support services. Medical responses are typically limited to treating physical injuries, with no follow-up or psychosocial component.

At the same time, **there are no regional or national protocols** that require these general services to adopt a gender-sensitive, coordinated response aligned with the Istanbul Convention. Each institution acts in isolation, and victims are left to navigate disconnected systems on their own.

While Asociația Unic does not itself provide licensed specialist support services, we work in close partnership with the **Community Mediation and Security Center (CMSC)**, which delivers direct assistance – including counseling, legal support, and outreach – to women and children affected by domestic violence.

In 2024, Asociația Unic established the **ADELA Center** in a rural commune in Iași county, as a **community-based hub for prevention, awareness-raising, and empowerment**. The center serves as a **safe space for information, peer learning**

and referral, particularly for women and girls in isolated or underserved communities.

The ADELA Center focuses on:

- **Educational and awareness-raising activities** related to gender-based violence and women's rights;
- **Interactive prevention tools**, such as the adapted *Violence Meter* for adolescents;
- **Community workshops and discussions** with educators, parents, and local stakeholders;
- **Support circles and empowerment sessions** for girls and women at risk, including Roma women and single mothers;
- **Facilitated referrals** to specialized services offered by CMSC and other expert NGOs.

This partnership model demonstrates the value of **local prevention infrastructure connected to professional service providers**. However, such grassroots initiatives remain largely unsupported by public authorities, and operate with limited capacity and no formal recognition in local protection frameworks.

However, these services are **entirely project-based and cannot substitute for systemic support**. Without public investment and structural integration, victims' access to recovery remains a matter of geographic luck and NGO capacity.

We also stress that **vulnerable groups of women - Roma women, women with disabilities, undocumented migrants - are structurally excluded** from general services. Language, stigma, lack of documentation, and discriminatory attitudes often act as invisible barriers to care.

Asociația Unic recommends:

- The **integration of victim-sensitive protocols** into all general services (social, health, employment, housing), including mandatory referral mechanisms;
- **Training for front-line professionals** to recognize and respond to violence against women;
- The creation of **public financial assistance schemes specifically for survivors**, including housing, healthcare, and childcare support;
- Improved cooperation between SPAS, health services, and NGOs;
- Clear accountability structures to monitor and evaluate service quality and victim outcomes.

(11) Article 22 - Specialist support services

Romania continues to lack a coherent, accessible, and sustainable network of **specialist support services dedicated to women survivors of gender-based violence**, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Although a limited number of shelters and helplines exist, they are insufficient in both coverage and capacity, and often disconnected from local realities.

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More broadly, Romania does not meet the requirements of Article 22:

- **Specialist support services are concentrated in cities**, with minimal or no presence in rural counties;
- **Services for specific forms of violence** (stalking, sexual harassment, digital violence, forced marriage) are largely absent;
- **Very few services include professionals trained to work with children** who have witnessed domestic violence;
- There are **no state-funded services tailored to the needs of Roma women, migrant women, women with disabilities, or LGBTI survivors**;

- The national helpline exists but is not accessible to all and is not linked to local referral networks.

In Unic's experience, **survivors in rural areas are often referred to shelters located tens or hundreds of kilometers away**, without transportation, emotional support, or follow-up. Most choose to remain in abusive environments rather than face the isolation and bureaucracy of the system.

Despite these limitations, local civil society organizations like Unic have proven that **community-based, intersectional, women-led support services are both effective and in demand**. However, without sustained funding and integration into public systems, their impact remains limited.

Asociația Unic recommends:

- The creation of a **national framework for specialist services**, with minimum standards and regional coverage obligations;
- **Structural funding and co-financing mechanisms** for NGOs providing specialist services, including subcontracting schemes;
- Inclusion of **child psychologists and culturally competent professionals** in all service teams;
- Outreach and mobile services for rural areas;
- Recognition of **grassroots women's organizations as key actors** in service provision, not just "project implementers".

Additional observations - Licensing of specialist services

Although Romania has adopted a **legal framework and quality standards for licensing social services**, including shelters and counseling centers for survivors of violence, **the process remains prohibitively complex, underfunded and ill-adapted to the realities of civil society organizations**, particularly those operating in rural or resource-poor contexts.

Asociația Unic and other grassroots NGOs face multiple structural barriers when attempting to license their services:

- The procedures are **highly bureaucratic**, with fragmented responsibilities across multiple institutions (Ministry of Labour, DGASPC, ISU, public health authorities);
- **Specialized staff requirements** (psychologists, social workers, legal advisers) are difficult to fulfill and retain without long-term financial support;
- **Physical infrastructure standards** are often unrealistic for NGOs operating in rented or community-donated spaces;

- **Fire safety and building authorizations (ISU licensing)** are almost impossible to obtain for older rural buildings or temporary spaces, even when all other conditions are met.

As a result, many women's rights organizations are **trapped in a legal paradox**: they are expected to provide high-quality, specialist services to meet victims' needs, but **are excluded from public funding or recognition** because they lack formal licensing – which, in turn, cannot be obtained without structural support.

This situation creates a systemic bottleneck that penalizes exactly the organizations with the most trust, experience and access to vulnerable women. In practice, it also pushes NGOs to operate "informally" or under temporary project codes, which undermines sustainability, visibility, and referral pathways.

Asociația Unic urges GREVIO to recommend that the Romanian government:

- **Simplify and harmonize licensing procedures** for NGOs providing specialist services;
- **Create adapted pathways for community-based and rural services**, including waivers or phased compliance for infrastructure-related authorizations;
- **Fund core costs and personnel positions** necessary for meeting licensing criteria;
- Recognize the **public interest function of women's NGOs** and include them in long-term service delivery strategies.

(12) Article 25 - Support to victims of sexual violence

Romania does not currently offer a national network of **specialist services for victims of sexual violence** that meet the standards set by the Istanbul Convention. Victims, particularly those in rural areas, have **extremely limited access to comprehensive, immediate and long-term support**, including medical, psychological, forensic, and legal assistance.

There are **no rape crisis centres** in the formal sense, and the existing structures (e.g., hospital emergency rooms, family doctors, general social services) are:

- **Unprepared and untrained** to handle disclosures of sexual violence with a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach;
- Often focused solely on physical treatment or documentation, with **no psychosocial follow-up**;
- Not coordinated with legal support or counseling services.

Furthermore, **sexual violence referral centres** - as defined by the Istanbul Convention - do not exist. In practice, victims are expected to:

- Travel long distances to a regional forensic institute (usually in county capitals);
- Cover costs related to transport or medical certificates;
- Navigate complex and intimidating procedures with little guidance or emotional support.

In the experience of Asociația Unic and partner organizations:

- **Many victims do not report** the assault due to stigma, fear of disbelief, or institutional retraumatization;
- **Police officers and prosecutors** are inconsistently trained and may use judgmental or accusatory language;
- **Survivors in rural areas are particularly isolated**, with no access to immediate crisis support or rape kits;
- **Minors and adolescent girls** face additional barriers, including lack of confidentiality, lack of appropriate specialists, and in some cases, revictimization through institutional negligence.

There are also significant **barriers to the collection and storage of forensic evidence**:

- Rape kits are not available in all hospitals;
- Forensic procedures are only conducted in a few urban centers and are **not survivor-friendly**;
- There are **no clear national protocols** on preserving evidence for victims who are not ready to report immediately.

Access to services is also obstructed by bureaucratic requirements (e.g. health insurance, ID, prior police report), which **disproportionately affect Roma women, migrant women, and undocumented survivors**.

Asociația Unic recommends:

- The establishment of **at least one sexual violence referral centre in each county**, offering immediate and long-term support in one location;
- Training and deployment of **mobile forensic and psychosocial teams** to cover rural areas;
- Development of **victim-centered protocols** for all public health institutions, including confidentiality and non-discrimination clauses;

- Funding for **long-term psychological support** for survivors, regardless of legal proceedings;
- Clear procedures and survivor consent mechanisms for the **collection and storage of forensic evidence**, with no obligation to report immediately;
- National campaigns to **reduce stigma** and encourage survivors to seek help safely.

(13) Article 31 - Custody, visitation rights and safety

Asociația Unic does not directly provide legal assistance or representation in custody or visitation proceedings and therefore cannot offer detailed, evidence-based observations in this area. However, through exchanges with partner organizations in the feminist network, we are aware of **recurring concerns** that incidents of domestic violence are **not consistently considered by family courts** when determining custody or visitation arrangements.

In particular, partners report that:

- **Judicial professionals often lack training** in identifying and understanding the dynamics of coercive control and its impact on children;
- There is **no standard mechanism to screen civil custody cases** for a history of domestic violence;
- **Risk assessments are rarely requested or available**, especially in rural jurisdictions;
- Survivors are sometimes accused of “alienating” the child from the abusive parent, echoing problematic narratives around “parental alienation”.

We strongly support the recommendations made by other NGOs with expertise in legal advocacy and child protection, and underline the need for a **child-centered and trauma-informed approach** to custody decisions, in full compliance with Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention.

(14) Article 48 - Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing

Asociația Unic does not provide legal assistance in criminal or civil proceedings involving mediation or alternative dispute resolution and therefore does not have direct operational experience in this area.

However, based on our collaboration with women’s rights organizations active in legal advocacy, we echo concerns that:

- **Victims of domestic violence may still be directed - implicitly or explicitly - toward reconciliation or mediation, especially in rural areas;**
- **In some cases, local professionals and institutions (including social workers or school staff) may encourage survivors to “make peace” with their aggressor, citing family unity or community harmony;**
- **There is a lack of clear, enforced prohibitions against the use of mediation in cases involving violence, particularly in family law settings;**
- **Survivors are often unaware of their right to refuse mediation, or feel coerced into it due to institutional pressure or lack of alternatives.**

Unic strongly supports the **full implementation of Article 48**, including the **legal and practical prohibition of mandatory or inappropriate mediation** in all proceedings involving gender-based violence, and calls for awareness-raising among legal professionals and institutional actors.

(15) Articles 49-53 - Immediate response, investigation, risk assessment and protection orders

Asociația Unic does not directly provide legal or law enforcement-related services. However, as a women's rights NGO with strong ties to grassroots networks, we feel compelled to express deep concern over **recent femicide cases in Romania**, which have exposed systemic institutional failures in responding to gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence.

In May and June 2025, two pregnant women – including **Teodora Marcu**, a 23-year-old woman in her sixth month of pregnancy – were murdered by former partners, despite **previous complaints and clear risk indicators**. These were the **25th and 26th recorded femicides** in Romania in 2025, prompting widespread public protests and renewed appeals from feminist organizations for systemic change.

In both cases, the perpetrators had **known histories of domestic violence**, and the victims had actively sought help. Nevertheless:

- **Police response was either delayed, ineffective, or dismissive;**
- **No risk assessment or protective strategy was put in place;**
- **Protection measures, even when issued, were not monitored or enforced.**

These cases reflect serious deficiencies in Romania's compliance with **Articles 49 to 53** of the Istanbul Convention:

(16) Article 49-50: Immediate response, investigation, prevention and protection

- First responders such as police officers and prosecutors **lack specialized training and trauma-informed procedures**;
- There are **no protocols to prioritize high-risk cases**, and victims are often retraumatized by inaction;
- **Pregnancy and previous complaints are not treated as red flags**, despite being known risk factors for lethal violence.

(17) Article 51: Risk assessment and risk management

Romania formally introduced a **Risk Assessment Form** through Joint Order no. 146/2018, issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. This tool is intended to be used by police officers and social workers in domestic violence cases to evaluate the risk of repeated or escalating violence, including lethality.

The form includes relevant indicators such as:

- the type and frequency of violence,
- threats to life or serious harm,
- control and coercive behavior,
- victim vulnerability (e.g. pregnancy, disability),
- the presence of children and the victim's current intention to leave the relationship.

However, in practice, **this tool is not applied consistently or mandatorily across all police units and jurisdictions**. Based on observations from civil society and local-level cooperation, its use remains highly dependent on individual initiative, familiarity with the form, and available training – which is often lacking.

Moreover:

- **There is no national mechanism to monitor the application of the tool**, assess its outcomes, or ensure follow-up;
- The results of risk assessments are **rarely used to inform coordinated intervention plans** or long-term safety strategies;
- There are **no dedicated units within law enforcement** trained to systematically interpret or act on high-risk indicators;

- There is **no publicly available data or evaluation** of the effectiveness of this tool since its adoption in 2018.

In the recent femicide cases of 2025, risk factors such as prior complaints, stalking, and pregnancy were all present – yet **no formal risk assessment appears to have been carried out**, or if conducted, **it did not lead to protective action**. This reveals a gap between the existence of formal instruments and their meaningful implementation.

(18) Article 52-53: Emergency barring and protection orders

- **Emergency barring orders**, though legally provided for, are inconsistently used and poorly enforced;
- No electronic monitoring or alert systems exist to ensure real-time protection;
- **Data on the number, enforcement, and breaches of protection orders is not publicly available**, which hinders transparency and accountability;
- The burden to seek and follow through with legal protection remains on the victim.

Societal and institutional response

Despite public declarations condemning these acts, **no urgent legislative proposal, parliamentary debate, or formal interpellation** was launched following the femicides – including by politicians who had previously built campaign messages around “combating violence against women.”

For instance, Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu referenced women’s safety in his 2024-2025 presidential campaign, but did not take public or institutional action in the aftermath of the recent femicides – such as questioning the Ministry of Interior or initiating legislative reform on police response or risk protocols.

This **gap between political messaging and institutional action** reflects a broader pattern of instrumentalizing women’s safety in electoral discourse, without translating it into structural change.

Recommendations from Asociația Unic

To ensure effective compliance with Articles 49-53 of the Istanbul Convention, Romania must urgently adopt a set of structural reforms aimed at protecting women and preventing fatal outcomes:

1. Institutional coordination and accountability

- Establish **real and functional multidisciplinary cooperation mechanisms**, involving police, prosecutors, SPAS (social assistance), health services and women's rights NGOs;
- Create **specialized police and prosecution units** trained specifically in gender-based violence;
- Ensure that **risk factors such as pregnancy, prior complaints, and firearm possession automatically trigger enhanced institutional responses**;
- Require **independent fatality reviews** in all femicide cases and **publish findings** to inform systemic learning and reform.

2. Risk assessment and case management

- Make the **Risk Assessment Form (Ordin 146/2018)** mandatory in all reported domestic violence cases, with **legal and institutional accountability** for its application;
- Provide **specialized training to police officers and social workers** on applying and interpreting risk assessments within a coordinated, victim-centered safety plan;
- Develop **digital case management systems** to connect risk assessment results with referral pathways and protection measures;
- Introduce a **national monitoring mechanism** to track the implementation and effectiveness of risk assessments over time.

3. Protection measures and enforcement

- Ensure the **real-time enforcement of protection orders**, including through **electronic alert and monitoring systems**;
- Improve follow-up and coordination in protection order enforcement, especially in high-risk cases.

4. Training for police and law enforcement

Romania must invest in **structured, mandatory, and continuous training** for all law enforcement personnel who may come into contact with victims of violence against women. This should include:

- **Initial training for new recruits** on the Istanbul Convention, national legal standards, and survivor-centered approaches;
- **Regular in-service training** for officers and managers, using case simulations, trauma-informed techniques, and real-world scenarios;
- **Advanced modules** on risk assessment, inter-agency collaboration, and rural-specific responses;
- **Collaborative training design and delivery** with women's rights organizations and survivor-informed frameworks;
- **Internal mechanisms to evaluate training impact** and ensure that knowledge translates into practice.

Without such systemic investment, the culture within law enforcement will continue to tolerate **inaction, institutional neglect, and secondary victimization** – with fatal consequences for women.

5. Transparency and data

- Publish **annual disaggregated statistics** on all protection orders issued, violated, and enforced, as well as data related to risk assessment outcomes and interventions.

Part III - Emerging trends on violence against women and domestic violence

From the perspective of Asociația Unic and its partner organizations, several **concerning trends have emerged** since the last GREVIO baseline evaluation, many of which disproportionately affect women and girls in rural and underserved areas:

1. Increase in digital violence, particularly among adolescents

Gendered cyberviolence – including harassment, non-consensual image sharing, slut-shaming and threats – is on the rise, especially among teenage girls. These forms of violence are poorly addressed by public systems, while schools and families often lack awareness or tools to intervene effectively.

2. Normalization of abuse in young relationships

Workshops in rural schools reveal that control, jealousy, and verbal degradation are widely normalized among youth. Many girls do not recognize emotional or psychological abuse as violence, and prevention tools remain absent from formal curricula. This is consistent with the findings of partner organizations like Asociația Orientat, which reports that in their rural education sessions, both youth and adults often perceive verbal aggression, control, and punishment as normal or even necessary parts of relationships. Teachers may also unknowingly reinforce violent norms due to lack of training and support. The absence of emotional education and the lack of safe spaces for discussion leave many young people without alternatives to the patterns they observe in their families.

3. Institutional stagnation and burnout

Despite formal strategies, local implementation of violence prevention and victim support remains stagnant. Institutional actors show signs of fatigue, lack of ownership, and in some cases fear of political repercussions when addressing gender-based violence.

4. Rising lethality and femicide

Recent femicide cases – including the murder of pregnant women by former partners – reveal the extreme escalation of violence and the institutional failure to prevent it, even after multiple complaints. These patterns call for urgent reform in police response, protection mechanisms and risk assessment.

AFFMR documented that in 2025, 28 femicides occurred in rural areas, many following repeated institutional neglect. Their evidence reveals a pattern of delayed police intervention, lack of risk assessment, and court practices that continue to grant visitation rights to abusers. This fuels a deep distrust in formal systems and further silences women who may otherwise seek help. AFFMR calls for mandatory audits

following femicides and the creation of safe, mobile response units tailored to rural realities.

5. Hostility toward feminist discourse and erosion of civic space

Some local officials reject the language of gender equality or discredit feminist NGOs, limiting collaboration and stalling public initiatives. Backlash against “gender ideology” rhetoric has been observed in school settings, local councils and public funding procedures.

6. Innovation from civil society despite constraints

Women’s rights NGOs continue to develop creative, locally rooted tools – such as mobile support units, the *Violentometrul* for adolescents, and survivor-led storytelling spaces. However, these remain donor-dependent and vulnerable in the absence of systemic support.

7. Political instrumentalization without systemic commitment

During electoral campaigns, political actors increasingly use slogans such as “*Stop violence against women*” as part of their public image. In 2024-2025, several prominent politicians – including Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu – referenced this issue in campaign messages.

However, following a series of high-profile femicides, including the murder of a pregnant woman in May 2025, **no urgent legislative proposal, parliamentary debate, or formal interpellation** was initiated by those same figures. Neither institutional sanctions nor urgent reforms were triggered.

This illustrates a worrying trend of **political tokenism**, where women’s safety is used rhetorically but not matched by resource allocation, legal action or institutional accountability. It undermines both trust and real progress in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

Institutional fragility of the national coordination body - ANES

The National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES) is formally tasked with coordinating Romania's public policies on violence against women and gender equality. However, its institutional position and operational stability raise serious concerns about its ability to fulfill this role effectively and independently.

Over recent years, ANES has been relocated multiple times within the government structure – formerly under the Ministry of Labour, and currently subordinated to the General Secretariat of the Government. These shifts, often lacking transparency or strategic rationale, have weakened the agency's visibility, continuity, and ability to coordinate across ministries and sectors.

From our perspective as a grassroots organization working closely with local authorities and civil society actors, ANES appears increasingly constrained in its mandate. Its capacity to speak publicly, to take independent positions, or to ensure long-term monitoring of national policies on violence against women is often limited by its precarious institutional placement.

This institutional fragility affects:

- the coherence and continuity of national strategies,
- the independence of monitoring and reporting processes,
- and the sustained dialogue with civil society.

While we acknowledge the importance of ANES as a national actor in this field, we are deeply concerned that its current institutional configuration undermines its effectiveness and compromises Romania's ability to meet the standards required by Article 10 of the Istanbul Convention.

Part IV - Administrative data and statistics

Asociația Unic does not have access to official administrative or judicial data on violence against women and domestic violence. As a grassroots NGO, we do not collect or manage national statistics and cannot provide annual figures regarding reports, investigations, convictions, protection orders or custody decisions.

However, we observe with concern that **no comprehensive, disaggregated national data set is publicly available** in Romania to allow for meaningful analysis of the institutional response to violence against women.

As stated in our contribution to Article 11, the available data:

- **Lacks disaggregation** by sex, age, relationship to perpetrator, and type of violence;
- Is often **incomplete or inconsistent** across sectors (police, judiciary, health, social services);
- Is not published in a format that enables public scrutiny or accountability;
- Fails to reflect intersectional realities (e.g. Roma women, women with disabilities, migrants).

We strongly recommend that Romanian authorities develop and publish **annual, harmonized, and disaggregated statistics** on all key indicators under the Istanbul Convention, and that civil society be involved in defining the categories and methodology.

Conclusions and key messages from Asociația Unic

Asociația Unic is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this evaluation, drawing from years of experience working with underserved communities in Romania.

From our perspective as a grassroots feminist NGO working directly with women, girls, and community institutions, we observe that:

- **Violence against women remains widespread and underreported**, while support systems are fragmented, underfunded, and difficult to access for those most at risk;
- **Recent femicides have exposed the failure of institutions to respond with urgency, coordination, or accountability**, despite clear warning signs and prior complaints;
- **Political actors increasingly use violence against women as campaign rhetoric**, but rarely follow through with legislative or structural action;
- **Digital and adolescent forms of gender-based violence are rapidly increasing**, and are neither tracked nor addressed in a systemic manner;
- **Women's rights organizations are expected to fill systemic gaps**, yet lack access to stable funding, institutional support, or pathways to license and sustain their services.

Despite these challenges, civil society organizations like Asociația Unic continue to:

- Offer **trauma-informed, culturally competent support** to survivors through initiatives like the ADELA Center;
- Engage in **community-based prevention** using creative tools like the *Violentometrul* and intergenerational dialogue;
- Build trust and informal networks of cooperation with educators, social workers, and local leaders.

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We therefore urge GREVIO to:

1. **Call for urgent reform of Romania's institutional response to femicide and high-risk violence, including:**
 - Standardized risk assessment;
 - Enforcement of protection orders;
 - Transparent fatality reviews and accountability.
2. **Recommend structural funding and support mechanisms for women's rights NGOs, including:**
 - Public co-financing schemes;
 - Simplified licensing pathways;
 - Inclusion in local service delivery frameworks.
3. **Encourage the Romanian government to translate political statements into legal, budgetary, and institutional commitments, with measurable benchmarks.**
4. **Promote the integration of rural, intersectional, and grassroots realities into national strategies and data systems, so that no woman is left invisible or unprotected.**
5. **Ensure women's and girls' empowerment through individualized, context-sensitive measures**

We call for the integration of **empowerment-based approaches** across all policies and services, beyond protection and crisis response.

This should include:

- ☒ **Access to programs that support women's economic independence**, including vocational training, job counseling, housing support and micro-grants – tailored to women's **age, life stage, and social context** (e.g. single mothers, elderly women, Roma women, survivors of long-term abuse);
- ☒ **Preventive empowerment programs for girls and young women**, especially those at risk of replicating harmful family patterns, to build self-esteem, autonomy, and critical thinking;

- ☑ Safe, inclusive spaces – both offline and digital – where girls and women can **explore alternatives to control-based or violent relationship models**, and develop tools for civic participation, leadership and solidarity.
- ☑ Empowerment must be treated not as a slogan, but as **a long-term commitment to structural change**, equal participation and freedom from fear and dependency.

Asociația Unic remains committed to defending the rights, dignity and safety of all women and girls – and to ensuring that prevention, protection and justice are not privileges, but public guarantees.

“Protection alone is not enough. We must create the conditions for women to reclaim power over their lives.”

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