

*Building trust
by delivering support,
protection and justice*

Serbia

First thematic
evaluation report

GREVIO

Group of Experts
on Action against Violence
against Women and
Domestic Violence



Council of Europe Convention
on preventing and combating
violence against women
and domestic violence
(Istanbul Convention)

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ISTANBUL CONVENTION
SAVES LIVES

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and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)

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Executive summary

This evaluation report addresses progress made in bringing support, protection and justice to victims of violence against women and domestic violence under selected provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). It offers an assessment made by the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the convention. GREVIO's findings identify developments that have taken place since the publication of its baseline evaluation report on Serbia on 22 January 2020 and are based on the information obtained during its first thematic evaluation procedure as set out in Article 68 of the convention. These include written reports, including a state report submitted by the Serbian authorities and additional information submitted by the Centre for Support of Women, women's rights organisations FemPlatz and Fenomena, the National Network for Treatment of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (OPNA), the Autonomous Women's Centre, the NGO Atina, as well as a five-day evaluation visit to Serbia. A list of the bodies and entities which GREVIO had exchanges with can be found in Appendix II.

The report assesses the wide variety of measures taken by the Serbian authorities to prevent violence against women and domestic violence and to deliver protection, support and justice for victims – the theme chosen by GREVIO for its first thematic evaluation round. In identifying emerging trends in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, GREVIO shines a light on laudable efforts made for the implementation of this convention. Moreover, it provides in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution as building blocks for a comprehensive response to the different forms of violence against women that instils trust in victims.

In this context, GREVIO welcomes the efforts undertaken to align legislative and policy frameworks with the standards set forth in the Istanbul Convention. A particularly notable example is the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality in 2021, which introduces a definition of violence against women consistent with that of the convention. At the policy level, the adoption of a comprehensive Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021 - 2025 represents a significant step forward. This strategy encompasses measures addressing all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, structured around its four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution and co-ordinated policies while also recognising the compounded experiences of women subjected to intersectional discrimination.

Important steps have also been taken to maintain the momentum generated by the adoption of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence in 2017, in particular, the continued provision of mandatory initial and in-service training for professionals involved in the implementation of the law, including judges and prosecutors. A further positive development in this regard is the planned expansion of these training initiatives to address the digital dimension of violence against women, a phenomenon that has seen a marked increase in prevalence in Serbia in recent years, mirroring global trends. Several promising initiatives have been undertaken in the area of prevention, including awareness-raising campaigns and efforts to improve school attendance among Roma pupils, with particular emphasis on Roma girls as well as the establishment of an online platform for parents, children and educators to report incidents of violence.

Under the pillar of co-ordinated policies, the co-ordination and co-operation groups established within the jurisdiction of each local prosecutor's office contribute to a multi-agency response to violence against women. Their functions include conducting regular risk assessments and management, as well as establishing referral pathways. While the composition of these groups varies across regions, with some including non-statutory agencies and others not, the increased participation of victims in the meetings of these groups constitutes a positive development.

With regard to prosecution efforts, and while taking into account the low reporting rates, the relatively high conviction rates for sexual violence and harassment suggest that the authorities are making efforts to effectively implement the relevant criminal provisions. The systematic implementation of

emergency protective measures provides crucial protection to victims of domestic violence by ensuring the removal of the perpetrator from the shared residence.

Beyond the progress made in Serbia to implement the convention, GREVIO has identified areas which require urgent action by the authorities to comply fully with the convention's provisions. An area of particular concern is the suspension of the Law on Gender Equality, currently under review by the Constitutional Court, which contains key provisions for implementing gender equality policies and combatting violence against women, including serving as the legal basis for mandating the national co-ordination body. Similarly, the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021–2025 was never operationalised, as the necessary action plans for its implementation were not adopted.

While the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence provides a foundation for the disaggregated collection of data on domestic violence, other forms of violence against women are insufficiently included in data collection efforts due to varying definitions across different legal frameworks and the absence of a unified system to harmonise data collection. Similarly, the systematic and mandatory training initiatives introduced under the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence do not extend to other forms of violence against women.

In the area of protection, insufficient resources hinder the effective provision of both general and specialist support services. Moreover, the strict licensing requirements imposed on domestic violence shelters, which are already limited in number, place additional burdens on these services and have resulted in some operating without official licences. Sexual violence referral centres are currently concentrated in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, with none established in the rest of the country. The requirement to report the violence to the police at the existing centres may act as a deterrent, undermining victims' trust to seek assistance.

A key issue identified in the civil law system is the insufficient attention given to the safety of mothers and children in custody and visitation decisions. Supervised visits are rarely ordered for abusive parents and protection measures for mothers are often not extended to their children. Women who are victims of domestic violence and express legitimate concerns for their children's safety in relation to contact with the abusive parent are often accused of manipulating their children against the father.

In the area of prosecution, low reporting rates reflect a lack of trust in the criminal justice system and its ability to protect victims from further violence, often linked to the absence of gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches by law enforcement professionals. Attrition rates for offences related to violence against women remain high within the criminal justice system and cases that result in a conviction often lead to lenient penalties, including in instances of gender-based killings. While emergency protective measures are systematically applied, their transition to long-term protective measures is sometimes hindered by the lack of harmonisation among protective measure schemes provided under different laws, leading to gaps in protection. Additionally, the monitoring of these measures' effective implementation requires improvement including through electronic means if necessary, and breaches should be systematically sanctioned to be dissuasive. Furthermore, procedural measures aimed at preventing re-victimisation, re-traumatisation, and safeguarding the dignity and privacy of victims during court proceedings are not always systematically applied, often due to the lack of necessary technical resources in many courts and public prosecutor's offices. In this regard, the report highlights worrying examples of re-traumatising practices in proceedings, particularly in rape cases.

GREVIO has identified a number of additional issues that require sustained action in order to effectively build trust by delivering protection, support and justice for acts of violence against women. These relate to the need to:

- harmonise across all areas of law all legal definitions of domestic violence on the basis of the definitions set out in the Istanbul Convention and to ensure their effective application in practice;

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- ensure the systematic, disaggregated and harmonised collection of data by all relevant professionals for all forms of violence against women covered by the convention as well as to enable the tracking of cases on violence against women throughout the criminal justice chain;
 - regularly implement prevention measures that challenge patriarchal attitudes and address all forms of violence against women, including in their digital dimension, while ensuring that they are evaluated for their impact;
 - expand domestic violence perpetrator programmes nationwide by ensuring the allocation of adequate resources, adopting standards to harmonise service quality, implementing measures to improve attendance rates and introducing safeguards to prevent participation in such programmes from substituting criminal accountability;
 - enhance co-ordination among relevant statutory agencies and specialist support services provided by NGOs, including for forms of violence beyond domestic abuse;
 - implement standardised, gender-sensitive protocols in the healthcare sector for identifying and treating victims of all forms of violence against women, ensuring all victims have access to healthcare services, providing documentation of violence and forensic evidence, and obtaining informed consent from victims before reporting the violence to the police;
 - improve conviction rates for all forms of violence against women, ensure dissuasive sentences and address the root causes of attrition in the criminal justice system through data collection and case-tracking;
 - systematically conduct multidisciplinary risk assessment and management for all forms of violence against women by involving relevant institutions, adopting standardised risk assessment methodologies for various forms of violence and analysing gender-related killings and suicides.

Additionally, GREVIO has identified further areas in which improvements are required in order to comply fully with the obligations of the convention under this round's theme. These relate, among others, to the need to set up one-stop shops for the provision of services to victims of violence against women and domestic violence. Measures should also be taken to limit the deferral of prosecutions and plea agreements to exceptional cases and ensure that mediation in family law proceedings is carried out on a voluntary basis, with safeguards that take into account power imbalances in cases involving domestic violence.

Lastly, GREVIO highlights several emerging trends, including the rise of anti-gender discourses and the shrinking space for women's rights organisations, which foster an environment conducive to violence against women. The report also identifies the increased prevalence of and insufficient responses to image-based abuse, as well as the ongoing structural discrimination faced by Roma women and girls, which undermine their trust in the system and limit their access to justice, all of which require action by the Serbian authorities.

Introduction

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, the Istanbul Convention) is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle violence against women and domestic violence.

It sets up a two-pillar monitoring mechanism to assess the level of implementation by its parties: the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), an independent expert body, and the Committee of the Parties, a political body composed of official representatives of the parties to the convention. In line with Article 68 of the convention, GREVIO has been providing country-based monitoring reports under its baseline evaluation procedure since 2017. Its baseline evaluation report on Serbia, offering a comprehensive assessment of the convention's implementation in its entirety, was published on 22 January 2020, following Serbia's ratification of the Istanbul Convention on 21 November 2013. Serbia's original reservation not to apply the provisions under Article 30, paragraph 2, entered in accordance with Article 78, paragraph 2, of the convention, was renewed by declaration dated 31 January 2020 due to the unavailability of the necessary data on the number of legal proceedings against perpetrators making it impossible to calculate the amount of funds needed for compensation. By the same declaration, Serbia withdrew its original reservation not to apply the provisions under Article 44, paragraphs 1e, 3 and 4 of the convention.

This report was drawn up under GREVIO's first thematic evaluation round launched in 2023 focusing on the theme of building trust by delivering support, protection and justice. To address this overarching theme, it describes emerging trends in the areas of preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in the country. Section two aims to identify developments in key areas such as comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection that have ensued following the completion of the baseline evaluation procedure. Section three sets out to present more in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution, in respect of which baseline evaluation procedures and the conclusions on the implementation of recommendations of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention have revealed significant challenges and the need for further action.

In respect of Serbia, the first thematic evaluation procedure was initiated in accordance with Article 68 of the convention by letter and transmission of GREVIO's first thematic questionnaire on 12 January 2024. The Serbian authorities subsequently submitted their state report on 16 October 2024. Following a preliminary examination of Serbia's state report, GREVIO carried out an evaluation visit to Serbia, which took place from 18 to 22 November 2024. The delegation was composed of:

- María Rún Bjarnadóttir, Member of GREVIO
- Ivo Holc, Member of GREVIO
- Elif Sariaydin, Administrator at the Secretariat of the monitoring mechanism of the Istanbul Convention.

During the evaluation visit, the delegation met with a wide range of governmental and non-governmental representatives working in the area of preventing and combating violence against women. GREVIO wishes to highlight its constructive exchanges with the Serbian authorities, in particular Tatjana Macura, minister without portfolio in charge of gender equality, prevention of violence against women, and economic and political empowerment of women; Tomislav Žigmanov, Minister for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue; Stana Božović, State Secretary of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, Bojana Šćepanović, State Secretary of the Ministry of Justice. A list of the national authorities, non-governmental organisations and others met is set out in Appendix II of this report. GREVIO is grateful for the valuable information provided by all of them. For the co-operation and support provided throughout the entire evaluation procedure, it wishes to extend its gratitude to Mr Miodrag Pantović, who was appointed as contact person. The state report and the written contributions submitted by civil society are available on the country

monitoring website of the Istanbul Convention.¹ GREVIO regrets the fact that it did not meet with members of the judiciary despite a request to this extent.

The present assessment was drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of GREVIO and is based on the information collected during the various steps of the evaluation procedure. In keeping with the approach adopted in its baseline evaluation reports, the findings made reflect different levels of urgency, indicated in order of priority by the following verbs: “urges”, “strongly encourages”, “encourages” and “invites”.

Resulting from a process of confidential dialogue with the aim of offering country-specific proposals and suggestions for improvement within the national context of the party under review, this report describes the situation as observed by GREVIO up until 27 March 2025. Where applicable, relevant developments up until 3 July 2025 have also been taken into account.

According to the convention, national parliaments shall receive this report from the national authorities (Article 70, paragraph 2). GREVIO requests the national authorities to translate this report into their official national language(s) and to ensure that it is widely disseminated, not only to the relevant state institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the government, the ministries and the judiciary, but also to NGOs and other civil society organisations that work in the field of violence against women.

1. www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/serbia.

I. Emerging trends in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

The growing anti-gender sentiment and its impact on the perpetration of violence against women, including LGBTI women and girls

1. The push for greater gender equality in Serbia has been facing an intensified reaction from groups and organisations that advocate so-called traditional values, which is evident in two key areas. The first pertains to gender roles and feminism, where arguments motivated by growing anti-gender sentiments are rooted in traditionalist perspectives on family structure, reinforcing specific roles and hierarchies for men and women. The second expression of this sentiment is evident in its reactions to non-heteronormative expressions of sexuality, which are likewise perceived as a threat to the traditional family structure.

2. This has undermined the progress in terms of gender equality in the country, as evidenced by the initiation of a Constitutional Court procedure to assess the constitutionality of the Law on Gender Equality shortly after its adoption in 2021. This procedure was triggered by eight initiatives, some of which were submitted by religious and conservative groups.² The majority of the contested provisions relate to the constitutionality of the term gender and the use of gender-sensitive language by public institutions and media organisations. In 2024, during its review of the Law on Gender Equality, the Constitutional Court issued a temporary measure suspending the enforcement of any individual acts based on this law. This measure has resulted in the *de facto* suspension of the entire law, as employers and public authorities are no longer obliged to adopt the individual acts prescribed by the Law on Gender Equality, with no sanctions for non-compliance. This situation has effectively brought policy making on both gender equality and violence against women in Serbia to a standstill for an indefinite period, potentially for years, as progress will now depend on the adoption of a new gender equality law by parliament following the review of the Constitutional Court.

3. This anti-gender sentiment has also particularly affected LGBTI women, exposing them to violence that has been overlooked by the authorities. GREVIO has received alarming reports of law-enforcement officers using disproportionate force against LGBTI women during searches, interrogations or arrests, which should be viewed within the broader context of discrimination against the LGBTI community by law-enforcement agencies.³

4. GREVIO considers it essential to curb the spread of such attitudes, as they create a breeding ground for discrimination and violence against all women, including gender-related killings of women and girls. It is essential to arrive at an understanding across all sectors of society of the importance of addressing all forms of violence against women as a cause and a consequence of gender inequality on the basis of the international normative framework in this area, including the Istanbul Convention.

The shrinking space for women's rights organisations

5. The hostile working environment for civil society organisations and human rights defenders in Serbia, which has also been noted by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,⁴

2. The Serbian Orthodox Church organised a discussion entitled "Legal Aspects and Consequences of the Law on Gender Equality", calling for the initiation of a constitutional review process and arguing that the Law on Gender Equality introduced the term "gender" as a social construct, a concept that does not inherently exist in the Serbian language, and that the mandatory provision on gender-sensitive language effectively eliminated the distinction between male and female sexes. See a news article on this discussion at: www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/5397607/spc-stavite-van-snage-neustavni-zakon-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti.html.

3. For instance, in 2022 four incidents of violence motivated by homophobia and transphobia occurred in police stations in Serbia; one incident was reported in 2018; two in 2019; three in 2020; and one in 2021. See Kovačević M. and Planojević, N., "Transphobia and homophobia in Serbia: report on hate-motivated incidents against LGBT+ persons in Serbia in 2022" (2023), p. 38, available at: www.rs.boell.org/en/2023/11/13/transphobia-and-homophobia-serbia-2022, and information obtained during the evaluation visit.

4. Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, Report Following Her Visit to Serbia from 13 to 17 March 2023, pp. 18-20.

has also had a significant impact on the work of women's rights organisations. Since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, women's rights NGOs have been operating under significant strain, facing both limited resources and persistent attacks from groups that challenge the need for advocacy on women's rights and support services for women victims of violence. Despite these challenges, they continue to provide essential services for victims of violence against women and promote gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence.

6. In this regard, GREVIO notes with concern that the allocation of public funds for women's support services and advocacy efforts against violence against women raises concerns about transparency and effectiveness, as long-standing women's rights organisations have been placed in an unfavourable position. Research by the Balkan Investigative Research Network (BIRN) reveals that in 2022 and 2023, a significant portion of public funds was awarded to organisations that have limited or no verifiable track record, including entities without an online presence or identifiable representatives.⁵ This trend persisted in 2024 when, following a lengthy tender process, the majority of available public funding was allocated to smaller, lesser-known organisations, with only one women's rights organisation operating on feminist principles receiving support.⁶ Stringent licensing requirements for operating domestic violence shelters, which appear to prioritise administrative criteria over service quality, have also placed women's rights organisations providing these essential services at a disadvantage. This situation has created an increasingly restrictive environment for women's rights organisations, with many representatives expressing to GREVIO their concern that they may be forced to cease operations in the near future.

7. Women's rights organisations, including those supporting women exposed to intersectional discrimination, have also faced online harassment, threats and physical attacks from certain groups that have largely been overlooked by the authorities.⁷ In response, in July 2024 the Women Against Violence Network, representing 28 organisations and three associations, submitted an open letter to the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue and the Council for the Creation of an Encouraging Environment for the Development of Civil Society, urging the adoption of measures to ensure the protection and sustainability of civil society initiatives. GREVIO welcomes the ministry's engagement in dialogue with women's rights organisations following this appeal and the inclusion of measures in the 2025-2026 action plan for the implementation of the Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society, such as regular meetings between civil society organisations and ministries to enhance co-operation.

8. Recalling the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' guidelines on civil participation in political decision-making as well as the commitment of Heads of State and Government, as expressed in the Reykjavik Declaration, to supporting and maintaining a safe and enabling environment for civil society,⁸ and recognising the essential role of women's rights NGOs and specialist women's support services in preventing and combating violence against women, as outlined in Article 9 of the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO stresses the need to foster an enabling environment that allows these organisations to operate freely and effectively, including by ensuring their safety and the long-term sustainability of their activities.

5. See the BIRN's database of public tenders, which tracks the spending of government funds in the media and public information, culture and arts, civil society and youth sectors, available in Serbian at: www.birn.rs/baza-o-javnim-konkursima/.

6. According to the information provided by the Serbian authorities, in 2024 the government funded 81 projects on gender-based violence against women carried out by various civil society organisations. Accordingly, the applicants to the respective tender procedures included certain women's rights organisations whereas some others refrained from applying.

7. The Citizens' Association of Women for Peace faced multiple threats and cyberattacks in 2022, possibly in response to the organisation's criticism of the allocation of public funds to a helpline service led by an individual twice convicted of domestic violence. Representatives of the LGBTI rights organisation "Da Se Zna!" were subjected to physical attacks in 2022.

8. "United around our values – Reykjavik Declaration", 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, 2023, p. 16, available at: www.edoc.coe.int/fr/le-conseil-de-l-europe-en-bref/11619-united-around-our-values-reykjavik-declaration.html#.

The epidemic of image-based abuse

9. The digital dimension of violence against women has been increasing globally, a trend that is also reflected in Serbia. Manifestations of such violence have reached alarming levels in recent years, exacerbated by the growing use of AI technologies. Image-based abuse, where intimate images of victims are shared on social media platforms or instant messaging applications, or uploaded to pornographic websites, is particularly prevalent, exposing critical gaps in both protection and prosecution mechanisms.

10. The case of the Telegram group Nišlijke highlights the systemic shortcomings in addressing digital violence against women in Serbia. This group, which had approximately 24 000 male members, was created for the non-consensual sharing of intimate photos and videos of women and girls, often accompanied by doxxing. Although the administrators were arrested and legal proceedings were initiated, the case ultimately resulted in a decision of non-prosecution. This decision has fostered a sense of impunity among perpetrators of such violence, as it is not an isolated case: according to research by BIRN, explicit photos and videos of Serbian women were being shared in at least 16 Telegram groups in 2023, with the largest group containing nearly 50 000 members.

11. GREVIO notes that the majority of such cases remain unprosecuted unless they fall within the scope of existing criminal offences, such as stalking, blackmailing or child pornography, due to the absence of explicit legal provisions criminalising image-based abuse. Otherwise, victims are required to initiate a private lawsuit for invasion of privacy within three months of discovering the content, which places an additional burden on them and erodes their trust in the system.

12. Women who report such abuse also frequently encounter dismissive attitudes from law-enforcement authorities, who often minimise the severity of the violence or justify the perpetrator's actions.⁹ This reflects a widespread lack of awareness and understanding of the digital manifestations of violence against women and their severe impact on victims' lives, safety and well-being. The consequences for young women are particularly concerning, with studies indicating that one in 10 high-school girls in Serbia has had private images shared without consent.¹⁰ GREVIO also notes that this form of violence is frequently perpetrated as an extension of domestic violence. According to indications from representatives of domestic violence shelters, most of their residents have experienced threats from former partners to share intimate images, either as a means of coercion to prevent separation or as an act of retaliation post-breakup.¹¹

13. GREVIO welcomes the recognition of "revenge porn" as a form of gender-based violence that requires more attention in the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2021-2025). However, it considers it a missed opportunity that the working group on amendments to the Criminal Code did not take steps to introduce a specific offence on image-based abuse, despite repeated calls from women's rights organisations. Nevertheless, GREVIO welcomes the statement from the Ministry of Justice issued in November 2024, confirming its intention to seek a legal solution to address this issue,¹² as in light of significant public interest, the public debate on the proposed amendments was extended, with the objective of aligning domestic legislation with international standards. GREVIO hopes this commitment will materialise, as its evaluation work has demonstrated successful prosecution practices in countries that have explicitly criminalised image-based abuse.¹³ Furthermore, it stresses that such legislative amendments should be accompanied by comprehensive professional training

9. Milivojevic A., "I was powerless": Serbian women detail devastating impact of revenge porn", BIRN, 2023, available at: www.balkaninsight.com/2023/03/14/i-was-powerless-serbian-women-detail-devastating-impact-of-revenge-porn/.

10. Pavlović S., "Awareness, experiences, and strategies of high school girls and boys for identifying the problem of digital sexual and gender-based violence", Autonomous Women's Centre, 2020, available in Serbian at: www.womenngo.org.rs/en/publications/good-practice-development-program/1997-awareness-experiences-and-strategies-of-high-school-students-for-addressing-the-problem-of-digital-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-serbia-2020.

11. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

12. See the statement from the Ministry of Justice in Serbian at: www.mpravde.gov.rs/sr/vest/44678/saopštenje-povodom-navoda-u-medijima-u-vezi-sa-javnom-raspravom-o-nacrtima-zakona-o-izmenama-i-dopunama-krivicnog-zakonika-i-zakonika-o-krivicnom-postupku.php.

13. See for example GREVIO's First thematic evaluation report on Denmark, Emerging trends.

initiatives and a holistic approach to prevention and protection, guided by GREVIO's General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women,¹⁴ to ensure their effectiveness.

Persistent and structural barriers to support and justice for Roma women

14. Roma women have long been subjected to systemic discrimination in Serbia, a concern consistently highlighted by various international human rights organisations, including in the CEDAW Committee's Concluding Observations on the Fourth Periodic Report and GREVIO's Baseline Evaluation Report on Serbia. Despite the widespread prevalence of various forms of violence against women within the Roma community in Serbia,¹⁵ Roma women's experiences of such violence are marked by profound mistrust in the authorities, affecting all pillars of the Istanbul Convention. Prevention measures fail to address their specific cultural needs, their access to protection services is obstructed by cultural biases and access to justice is hindered by discriminatory attitudes among justice professionals.

15. The Serbian authorities have, to some extent, acknowledged these challenges, recognising that Roma women report incidents of abuse at lower rates and are more likely to remain in abusive relationships due to a range of factors. These include economic dependency, a lack of recognition of non-physical forms of violence that are often perceived as "normal" by the victims, fear of retaliation from perpetrators and family members towards themselves or their children, or fear of being excluded from their communities,¹⁶ and particularly, distrust in state institutions as a result of experiences of racism and discrimination in institutions.¹⁷

16. Moreover, Roma culture and traditions are often used to justify overlooking certain forms of violence against Roma women and girls. A particularly prevalent example is the widespread stereotype linking child marriage to Roma culture and tradition, which is seldom examined within the broader context of systemic inequality, limited access to education and healthcare, patriarchal family structures, and poverty.¹⁸ While recognising the distinction between underage and forced marriages, GREVIO emphasises that the young age of brides often prevents them from giving full and free consent or resisting a forced marriage. GREVIO reiterates that the Serbian authorities have a duty to protect all women and girls from all forms of violence covered by the convention and that culture, custom, religion, tradition or "honour" cannot be used as justification for any act of violence within its scope.

17. While GREVIO welcomes the various co-operation activities of the Serbian Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue with the civil society organisations working on Roma rights, the available information highlights the urgent need for further efforts to dismantle harmful beliefs surrounding violence against women within the Roma community while also raising awareness of its various forms. Additionally, it is equally essential to address and eliminate the stereotypes about the Roma community that prevail among relevant professionals and institutions working on violence against women. This dual approach is necessary to foster trust in the system among Roma women, enabling them to come forward with their experiences of violence.

14. GREVIO's General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, available at: www.rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147.

15. Research from 2017 shows that 91.9% of Roma women have been exposed to some form of physical and/or sexual violence after turning 18, the majority of the perpetrators being current or former intimate partners. See the written submission by the Roma Women Network, Ženski prostor (Women Space) and Roma Women's Centre Bibija, submitted during GREVIO's baseline evaluation of Serbia, 2018, pp. 4-5. Recent prevalence surveys also corroborate this finding, with 77% of Roma women reporting having experienced intimate partner violence. Roma women are also victims of repeated domestic violence above the national average. See "Why don't women report domestic violence?", Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in partnership with the UNDP, 2023, pp. 42 and 45, available in Serbian at: www.undp.org/sr/serbia/publications/zasto-zene-ne-prijavljaju-nasilje-u-porodici-rezultati-istraganja.

16. "Case study – child, early and forced marriage", Gordana Stevanovic Govedarica, 2023, pp. 20-22.

17. "Why don't women report domestic violence?", Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in partnership with the UNDP, 2023, p. 64, available in Serbian at: www.undp.org/sr/serbia/publications/zasto-zene-ne-prijavljaju-nasilje-u-porodici-rezultati-istraganja.

18. "Case study – child, early and forced marriage", Gordana Stevanovic Govedarica, 2023, p. 1.

II. Changes in definitions, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

18. Chapter I of the Istanbul Convention sets out general principles that apply to all the substantive articles contained in Chapters II to VII and therefore lay the foundation for a comprehensive and adequate response that ensures the delivery of support, protection and justice for all women and girls at risk of or who have experienced gender-based violence. These include, among other things, that it is a fundamental human right for everyone, particularly women, to live a life free from violence in both the public and the private sphere, that the convention must be implemented without discrimination on any ground, and that the potential for, and effects of, multiple forms of discrimination should be borne in mind. They also spell out that a gender perspective must be integrated into the implementation of the convention and the evaluation of its impact. Chapter II of the Istanbul Convention sets out the core requirement for a holistic response to violence against women: the need for state-wide effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, sustained by the necessary institutional, financial and organisational structures.

A. Definitions (Article 3)

19. Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention sets out key definitions of concepts that are fundamental to its implementation. “Violence against women” refers to “all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”, whereas the expression “domestic violence” is to be understood as referring to “all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim”. The definition of “gender-based violence against women” provided in paragraph *d* of Article 3 seeks to ensure more clarity regarding the nature of the violence covered, by explaining that this is “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”.

20. In its baseline evaluation report on Serbia, GREVIO had highlighted the fragmented approach to defining violence against women and domestic violence, which hindered a unified understanding of these phenomena. In this regard, the report had noted the gender-neutral definition of gender-based violence in the Law on Gender Equality, the differing definitions of domestic violence in the Family Law and the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (hereinafter, the “LPDV”), with the Family Law offering a broader definition of family members, and the exclusion of non-cohabiting partners without children from domestic violence protections under the Criminal Code.

21. At the outset, GREVIO commends the progress made in implementing legislative measures to address the concerns raised in the baseline evaluation report, particularly through the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality in 2021. However, GREVIO notes with grave concern that the constitutional challenge has effectively suspended its implementation.¹⁹ Among its key changes, this law introduced a definition of violence against women aligned with the Istanbul Convention, replacing the gender-neutral definition of its predecessor, a development that GREVIO commends. It defines violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women, encompassing all acts of gender-based violence that cause or are likely to cause physical, sexual, psychological or financial harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.²⁰ GREVIO further welcomes the fact that the definition of domestic violence included in the new Law on Gender Equality aligns with Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention in that it covers all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit, or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with

19. See section I, Emerging trends in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence.

20. Law on Gender Equality, Article 6, paragraph 1 (11).

the victim.²¹ Given that the aforementioned provisions of the Law on Gender Equality are in full alignment with the principles of the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO considers it to have significant potential to bring Serbia's legal framework closer to the convention and to encourage further policies to support the convention's implementation in Serbia. For this reason, GREVIO emphasises the importance of promptly reinstating the implementation of the law.

22. GREVIO however notes that the term "family member" continues to be defined inconsistently across Serbian laws in the context of domestic violence provisions. The Family Law in this respect provides the broadest definition, ensuring protection for a wide range of individuals, including spouses or former spouses, individuals who live or have lived in a joint family household, life partners or former life partners, and individuals in an emotional or sexual relationship, including those who have a child together or are expecting a child, even if they have never lived in a joint family household.²² On the other hand, the domestic violence offence in the Criminal Code does not apply to former or current extramarital partners who do not live together, unless they share a child or are expecting a child.²³ Similarly, the LPDV restricts the application of its measures to current or former partners who share or have shared a residence.²⁴

23. GREVIO notes that the classification of what constitutes a family member is significant when accessing various remedies and protection measures provided by different laws. For example, individuals who perpetrate violence against a non-residential partner with whom they do not share a child cannot be prosecuted under the domestic violence offence stipulated in the Criminal Code and must instead be prosecuted under general offences. Similarly, the LPDV allows for the issuance of emergency measures by the intervening police officer, which include temporarily removing the perpetrator from the home and prohibiting them from contacting or approaching the victim of violence. However, under the definition provided by this law, non-cohabiting partners are not eligible to benefit from this measure.

24. According to information provided by the Serbian authorities, the draft law on amendments to the Criminal Code, prepared by the Working Group for the Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Criminal Justice System based on closed cases, includes a proposal to expand the definition of a family member in the context of domestic violence to encompass current or former partners who have not shared a residence.²⁵ However, GREVIO notes that the public debate on the proposed criminal amendments is still ongoing; therefore, it remains uncertain whether this proposal will be retained in the draft amendment or, if it does, when it will be discussed by parliament.

25. In light of the above, GREVIO points to the pressing need to harmonise the definition of domestic violence across various laws with Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention. In this respect, it welcomes the information provided by the Serbian authorities indicating that the Ministry of Justice is considering the issue of defining the term family member as part of its review of all legislation for which it holds drafting responsibility. Such harmonisation will contribute to ensuring unified protection for all victims of domestic violence, leaving no victim behind, and thereby enhancing trust in the system. In this regard, the definition contained in the Law on Gender Equality, currently under review by the Constitutional Court, could serve as a reference point.

26. GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to harmonise across all areas of law all legal definitions of domestic violence on the basis of the definitions set out in the Istanbul Convention and to ensure their effective application in practice. In this regard, the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality on addressing violence against women and domestic violence should be preserved in any future amendments following the constitutional review process and serve as a model for other legislative frameworks.

21. LPDV, Article 3, paragraph 3, and the Law on Gender Equality, Article 6, paragraph 1 (12).

22. Family Law, Article 197, paragraph 3.

23. Criminal Code, Article 112, paragraph 128.

24. LPDV, Article

25. See the state report, p. 13, also corroborated by information obtained during the evaluation visit.

B. Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies (Article 7)

27. Article 7 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to take co-ordinated and comprehensive measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women. Policies must ensure effective co-operation and place the rights of victims at their centre. This includes taking into account and addressing the specific circumstances and barriers experienced by women exposed to or at risk of multiple forms of discrimination,²⁶ in line with Article 4, paragraph 3, of the convention. Ensuring service delivery, effective protection and justice with a comprehensive understanding of intersecting forms of discrimination is a fundamental element of building trust among all women and girls

28. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had noted the various policy documents addressing gender equality and combating violence against women, including the National Strategy for the Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, which ended in 2015, and the National Strategy on Gender Equality, which was in force at the time. Additionally, operational efforts such as multi-agency responses and standard protocols for domestic violence cases had been introduced. However, GREVIO had also identified several challenges, including fragmentation caused by poorly resourced and unevaluated strategies, a lack of focus on preventive measures and protection needs in the policy documents, insufficient attention to forms of violence beyond domestic violence such as rape, sexual harassment and forced marriage, and the inadequate integration of the expertise and knowledge of specialist support services provided by women's rights NGOs.

29. Following the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Serbia, the Serbian Government adopted the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021-2025 (hereinafter "the Strategy"), which contains measures related to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention under all of its four pillars, namely prevention, protection, prosecution and co-ordinated policies. It also acknowledges the compounded experiences of women facing intersectional discrimination, including Roma women, women with disabilities, women living in rural areas and LGBTI women. The implementation of the Strategy and the allocation of budget for its measures is to be achieved through the adoption of periodic action plans. The responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Strategy is assigned to the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality, established under the Law on Gender Equality.

30. GREVIO acknowledges the alignment of the Strategy with the general principles of the Istanbul Convention and recognises the importance of the measures it contains, such as the establishment of a femicide watch. However, it notes with concern that, since its adoption, the Strategy has yet to be implemented due to the absence of an adopted action plan to operationalise its provisions. While the development of action plans for the implementation of the Strategy falls within the purview of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the constitutional challenge to the Law on Gender Equality also appears to have contributed to delays in the process as it has effectively halted the operations of the Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality. However, no explanation has been provided for the failure to adopt an action plan during the early implementation period of the Strategy. This situation risks reducing this strategic document, which holds significant potential, to merely a theoretical framework, hindering the country's progress towards greater compliance with the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO notes with regret that, although the development of an action plan for the period 2024-2025 for the implementation of the Strategy was initiated in 2024, and a public consultation was conducted in February 2025, the formation of a new government on 16 April 2025 necessitates the repetition of public consultation process.

31. Within the policy framework, GREVIO welcomes the adoption of the General Protocol on Handling and Multisectoral Co-operation in Situations of Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in March 2024. This protocol requires the development of sector-specific protocols within a year, the implementation of training programmes for professionals, and co-ordinated monitoring by relevant ministries and the Council for the Suppression of Domestic

26. These include, but are not limited to, women from national and/or ethnic minorities, Roma women, migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women, women with disabilities, women without a residence permit, LGBTI women, women from rural areas, women in prostitution and women with addiction issues.

Violence. While GREVIO recognises the adoption of this protocol as a step towards strengthening the multi-agency response to violence against women and welcomes the fact the Ministry of Justice's initiative to draft a special protocol for the judiciary accordingly, it lacks information regarding the status of implementation of the specific measures outlined therein.

32. Another significant challenge in ensuring a co-ordinated response to violence against women is the ongoing suspension of the activities of the official Co-ordination Body for Gender Equality caused by the ongoing assessment of the constitutionality of the Law on Gender Equality, which is expected to continue for an indefinite period. Pending the constitutional review, GREVIO notes that certain functions previously carried out by the Co-ordination Body are assigned to the newly established Office of the Minister without Portfolio responsible for gender equality, the prevention of violence against women, and the economic and political empowerment of women. These functions include, inter alia, co-ordination with relevant international organisations to ensure Serbia's compliance with its obligations under international legal instruments related to gender equality and the prevention of violence against women. GREVIO notes, however, that it remains unclear at this stage whether the mandate and powers of the Minister without Portfolio fully encompass all co-ordination responsibilities related to the policies and measures required under the Istanbul Convention for the prevention and combating of all forms of violence against women.

33. Notwithstanding the current hiatus in the activities of the co-ordinating body, GREVIO observes that, even during its operational phase, the body lacked the human and financial resources necessary to effectively fulfil its mandate, which was also noted in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Serbia. GREVIO acknowledges that the co-ordinating body has been partially institutionalised through the incorporation of its mandate into the Law on Gender Equality, adopted in 2021. However, challenges regarding its day-to-day operations continue to persist because of the lack of a dedicated budget and permanent staff.

34. A particularly important step taken by the Serbian authorities that was welcomed by the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention²⁷ and has substantial potential to inform policy-making efforts is the implementation of a prevalence survey carried out in 2021 by the Statistical Office of Serbia based on the Eurostat methodology. The findings of this survey informed the development of two publications²⁸ aimed at assessing the prevalence of various forms of violence against women in society and at analysing victims' profiles through a statistical framework. GREVIO anticipates that the Serbian authorities will actively utilise the findings of these surveys in the development of targeted, evidence-based policies to prevent and combat violence against women.

35. **GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the effective implementation of the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021-2025, as well as its independent monitoring and evaluation. Safeguards must also be put in place to prevent any future strategic documents on violence against women from facing the same implementation challenges as the current one, thereby ensuring continuity in policy implementation.**

36. **Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to allocate the necessary human and financial resources, along with a clear and well-defined mandate, to the to the competent body or bodies responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of policies and measures in relation to all forms of violence against women as well as for the monitoring and an independent, objective evaluation of those policies and measures.**

27. Conclusions on the implementation of recommendations in respect of Serbia adopted by the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention, available at: www.rm.coe.int/conclusions-on-the-implementation-of-recommendations-in-respect-of-ser/1680ab7280.

28. Babović M., "Quality of life and safety of women", Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022 and Komatina S., "Women victims of violence from the point of view of statistics", Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022, both publications are available in Serbian at: www.stat.gov.rs/sr-cyrl/vesti/20220630-zenezrtvenasilja?a=0&s=0501.

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

37. Article 8 of the Istanbul Convention aims to ensure the allocation of appropriate financial and human resources for activities carried out by public authorities and by relevant non-governmental and civil society organisations.²⁹

38. The baseline evaluation of Serbia had highlighted that funding to combat violence against women was primarily sourced from regular ministry budgets, with limited earmarking except in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. GREVIO had identified the state funding for both specialist services, such as shelters, and general services, such as social welfare centres, as being insufficient. Similarly, funding for action plans and strategies had been regarded as inconsistent. However, the introduction of a requirement for the authorities to provide a financial calculation and cost estimate prior to the adoption of national action plans and strategies, as set out in the Law on the Planning System of the Republic of Serbia, had been welcomed as a positive development. GREVIO had also noted the significant contributions of international donors to essential services for victims of violence against women, reflecting Serbia's effective co-operation with international organisations and development partners. However, the baseline evaluation report had highlighted the risk that reliance on project-based funding posed to the sustainability of these efforts.

39. GREVIO notes that although some of the funding schemes observed in the baseline evaluation have been reformed, the challenges previously identified continue to persist. This is exemplified by the lack of funding allocated to specific measures outlined in the Strategy, which fall outside the regular activities of the line ministries, due to the non-adoption of the action plan.³⁰ Additionally, for activities related to violence against women that are within the remit of the regular operations of relevant ministries, GREVIO notes the continued absence of dedicated budget lines to monitor the allocation and expenditure of public funds aimed at combating violence against women.

40. To address the funding issues related to the provision of services, the Law on Gender Equality introduced a funding scheme effective from 1 January 2024, involving the budgets of the Republic of Serbia, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and local self-government units. Accordingly, the law designates local self-government units as the sole funders of shelters and rape crisis centres, while programmes for perpetrators of violence are to be funded by the central budget. GREVIO notes, however, that there is no available information regarding the extent to which the 2024 budgets of the central government, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and local authorities include funds for specialist services. This uncertainty is further exacerbated by the ongoing constitutional review process of the Law on Gender Equality, which has led to the suspension of actions or decisions based on its provisions.³¹

41. While the available information does not allow for an exact determination of the amount allocated for the provision of specialist support services, it indicates that the funding is insufficient, particularly for women's rights organisations delivering these essential services. In this context, an analysis conducted by the women's rights organisation FemPlatz examined public tenders issued in 2023 by relevant authorities to support projects aimed at promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women. The analysis, with a particular focus on funding services for women victims of violence, found that while local projects received funding from the authorities in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, no national-level public tenders were conducted in that year for civil society organisations working on promoting gender equality or preventing violence against women.³² When state funding is allocated to certain projects, the available information suggests that the processes for funding allocation do not consistently prioritise women's rights organisations and often lack transparency in the selection of providers. For example, the aforementioned analysis revealed that, among 15 projects funded by the Ministry of Family Care and Demography addressing gender equality and violence against women, only two were implemented by women's rights organisations.

29. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 66.

30. See Article 7, Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies.

31. See section I, Emerging trends in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence.

32. Written submission by the women's rights organisations FemPlatz and Fenomena, p. 6, and a written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, pp. 7-8.

Furthermore, only five projects had publicly available financial reports detailing the expenditure of allocated funds.³³ GREVIO notes with regret the information indicating that certain women's rights organisations have decided to refrain from participating in public tenders until the procedures for tendering and the allocation of funds are made more transparent.³⁴ GREVIO recalls that under Articles 8 and 9 of the convention, funding processes for women's rights organisations providing specialist support services to victims should ensure adequate and guaranteed levels of funding for them to adequately provide these services. However, the current situation compels organisations providing essential services to women affected by violence to rely on unsustainable funding sources from international donors, typically through project-based financing.

42. GREVIO further notes that insufficient funding also affects the availability and quality of services provided by social welfare centres. For instance, established perpetrator programmes are often discontinued due to a lack of resources, while inadequate staffing levels force staff to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously, compromising effectiveness.

43. At the local level, where specialist services for victims of violence against women are funded, GREVIO notes with concern that a significant number of local self-government units still do not implement gender-responsive budgeting and lack the necessary capacity to do so, primarily due to insufficient understanding of the concept.³⁵ As also stressed by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, strengthening gender-responsive budgeting is essential not only for ensuring a balanced distribution of budgetary resources but also for enhancing the availability and sustainability of services critical to preventing and combating violence against women.

44. **Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:**

- a. **ensure appropriate, sustainable and long-term financial resources at national and local levels for all of the legislation, policies and measures aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and for the institutions and entities mandated for their implementation;**
- b. **implement gender-responsive budgeting with the aim of enabling the monitoring of public expenditures;**
- c. **ensure sustainable funding levels for women's rights NGOs that provide specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence through long-term grants based on transparent procurement procedures.**

D. Data collection (Article 11)

45. Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence requires evidence-based policy making. The collection of systematic and comparable data from all relevant administrative sources is crucial in this regard, as is information on the prevalence of all forms of violence against women.

1. Law-enforcement agencies and the justice sector

46. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO commended the establishment of the Central Register of Domestic Violence Cases, which integrates and consolidates data collected by the police, basic courts, public prosecutor's offices and Centres for Social Welfare on domestic violence offences as defined under the Criminal Code, as well as on the emergency and protective measures stipulated in the LPDV. However, the collected data was not available to the public and exhibited certain inconsistencies caused by the variations in the definitions of domestic violence across different laws. GREVIO had noted the lack of extensive data collection on other forms of violence

33. Written submission by the women's rights organisations FemPlatz and Fenomena, p. 6.

34. Ibid.

35. Annual report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality for 2022 (2023), p. 18, available at: www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs/en/reports/.

against women aside from domestic violence and to some extent sexual violence. Furthermore, the lack of data on emergency barring and protection orders disaggregated on the basis of the sex and age of victims and perpetrators, their relationship and geographical location had been found to hinder a clear understanding of how women victims of violence benefit from these measures in practice. In light of these considerations, the baseline evaluation report had recommended the establishment of a central database to address challenges arising from the differing definitions of domestic violence in legislation while enabling the collection of disaggregated data by all relevant authorities on other forms of violence against women.

47. GREVIO acknowledges that initial steps were undertaken to establish a centralised database for all forms of violence against women in collaboration with UNDP, in accordance with the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. However, GREVIO notes with regret that the initiative was regrettably discontinued in 2022 due to funding constraints, and no further information regarding its future is currently available.³⁶

48. According to the authorities, the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office is responsible for collecting data within the criminal justice system on reports, prosecutions, convictions and, to a certain extent, sanctions in cases of violence against women on the basis of specific and general offences related to violence against women under the Criminal Code, such as family violence, persecution, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office is also responsible for collecting data on the activities of co-ordination and co-operation groups established within the jurisdiction of each local prosecutor's office, including data on the number of individual protection plans issued in response to domestic violence. The data collected by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office on the implementation of the LPDV are transmitted to the Ministry of Justice on a monthly basis. The Ministry analyses these data with regard to the victim's sex and age, as well as the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim and subsequently publishes statistical information on the "Switch Off Violence" website.

49. Additionally, the Ministry of Interior collects data on the implementation of the LPDV. This includes information on protective measures prescribed by the law, such as the number of orders for emergency measures, the number of proposals for extending such measures and the number of extended measures approved through court decisions. Data are also gathered on violations of protective measures; however, information on the sanctions imposed for these violations is not collected.

50. While GREVIO welcomes the efforts to collect data on the forms of violence covered by the LPDV, it notes that data collection with respect to forms of violence addressed under other legal frameworks requires further improvement. In this respect, a significant challenge in ensuring that the data provide an accurate representation of the situation concerning violence against women stems from the limitations in data categories. According to the information provided by the Serbian authorities, the data collected by the Ministry of Interior and Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office are disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim. However, they are not disaggregated by these factors for the perpetrator, nor do they include information on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator or the location where the violence occurred.³⁷ These limitations not only make it difficult to identify gender-specific trends in cases of violence but also hinder the differentiation of intimate partner violence, intergenerational violence and violence perpetrated by strangers. As highlighted in the European Commission's 2024 report on Serbia, the country still lacks a comprehensive case-management system that interlinks cases across courts and prosecutors' offices, which also impedes the ability to track cases throughout the justice chain, from the initial reporting to the delivery of the final court decision.

51. Furthermore, GREVIO notes that not all the collected data are publicly accessible; however, it is made available upon request in accordance with legislation governing access to information of public importance. Certain data are published following analysis for various annual reports, such as those issued by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office and the Statistical Office, which include

36. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

37. See the state report, p. 18.

information on reports, prosecutions and convictions disaggregated by sex but not by the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. According to information provided by civil society organisations, the outcomes of these analyses differ from the findings of women's rights organisations.³⁸

52. Within the civil courts system, GREVIO notes with regret the lack of data on how often domestic violence witnessed by a child is taken into account in custody and visitation decisions.

2. Healthcare sector

53. GREVIO's baseline evaluation of Serbia had identified some promising practices in the healthcare sector regarding data collection on domestic violence. For instance, the Institute of Public Health maintained records on identified cases and referrals, disaggregated by geographical location and including information on women with disabilities, pregnant women and elderly women. However, significant regional disparities had been identified, with some districts failing to report between 10% and 40% of cases to the Institute of Public Health. Furthermore, the data failed to capture the relationship between victims and perpetrators, and no information was available on whether similar records were maintained for other forms of violence against women, such as sexual assault, rape, forced abortion, forced sterilisation and female genital mutilation (FGM).

54. GREVIO notes that since the baseline evaluation, the Special Protocol of the Ministry of Health for the Protection and Treatment of Women Victims of Violence, issued in 2010, which provides the framework for data collection in the healthcare sector through the use of a standard form for recording and documenting violence, has not been updated. However, in 2017 the Institute of Public Health issued an instruction for completing reports on gender-based violence to ensure consistency and systematic application of these forms. GREVIO welcomes the fact that these forms, completed by medical professionals when attending to patients who are suspected of having experienced or who self-report cases of violence against women, cover physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence and information on the history of violence. Despite efforts to expand the use of these forms, information provided by women's rights organisations indicates challenges in their systematic and consistent implementation.³⁹ GREVIO stresses that the importance of ensuring consistency in data collection within the healthcare system, as demonstrated by the valuable insights provided in the periodic reports published by the Institute of Public Health on cases of gender-based violence reported within healthcare institutions. The most recent such report, covering the year 2022, presents data on cases of physical and psychological intimate partner violence as well as sexual violence. It includes information on the geographical distribution of healthcare providers, the average age and number of children of the victims, whether the violence was disclosed by the victim or suspected by healthcare professionals and the nature of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.⁴⁰

3. Social services

55. The data-collection system within the social welfare sector, as observed in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, remains in effect. Accordingly, Centres for Social Welfare collect data on the number of domestic violence cases and cases of child marriage reported, the protection measures implemented under the Family Law and the number of victims placed in shelters, including their length of stay. The Republic Institute for Social Protection consolidates these data in its annual reports. GREVIO however notes with regret that the data-collection efforts do not yet extend to other forms of violence against women.

38. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, pp. 10-11.

39. Ibid., p. 31.

40. Živković Šulović M. and Horozović V. "Report on reported cases gender-based violence in healthcare institutions of the Republic of Serbia for the year 2022", Institute of Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut", 2023.

56. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, and bearing in mind the need for data-collection endeavours to extend to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to pursue their efforts to:

- a. ensure that data collected by all relevant stakeholders, namely law-enforcement agencies, judicial authorities, Centres for Social Welfare and healthcare institutions, are disaggregated with regard to the sex and age of victim and perpetrator, type of violence, the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location, as well as other factors deemed relevant;**
- b. harmonise data collection between law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary, with the aim of allowing for the tracking of a case across the different stages of the criminal justice system and thus enabling an assessment of, inter alia, conviction, attrition and recidivism rates;**
- c. expand the data-collection efforts in the social welfare and healthcare sectors to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention.**

III. Analysis on the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution

A. Prevention

57. Chapter III of the Istanbul Convention contains a number of general and more specific obligations in the area of prevention. This section analyses the progress made since the baseline evaluation monitoring procedure on the implementation of early preventive measures. It also covers progress made on the implementation of the more specific preventive measures provided under this chapter in the areas of education, training of all relevant professionals and perpetrator programmes. Ensuring the effective prevention of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence is an important step in rendering it unacceptable and reducing levels of perpetration.⁴¹ In turn, effective prevention empowers women and girls to speak out about their experiences and seek support and protection.

1. General obligations (Article 12)

58. Article 12 sets out a number of general preventive measures that represent the overarching principles of the parties' duty to prevent violence against women. These include the requirement to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men, with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men. A positive contribution to achieving such change can be made by men and boys acting as role models and advocates for equality between women and men and mutual respect, including by speaking out against violence, engaging other men in ending violence against women or actively taking on caring responsibilities. Moreover, flowing from the premise that violence against women is a cause as much as a consequence of gender inequality, Article 12 further requires that parties adopt specific measures to empower women in order to enable them to recognise and reject discrimination, unequal power relations and, ultimately, reduce women's vulnerability to violence and achieve greater gender equality.

59. GREVIO's baseline evaluation of Serbia had identified persistent patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes as contributing factors to the normalisation of domestic violence, particularly among younger generations. Survey results revealed concerning trends, with many girls and young women, especially within the Roma community, accepting traditional gender roles and tolerating abusive relationships in the interest of preserving family unity. In this regard, GREVIO had welcomed the planned measures outlined in the National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016-2020), which aimed to address these issues through media and awareness campaigns, revisions to school curricula and efforts to promote gender equality in sports and higher education.

60. GREVIO notes that significant efforts are still needed to address harmful gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes and to achieve gender equality in Serbia, the urgency of which is heightened by the worrying rise in discourses that call into question advances made in women's equality with men rooted in so-called traditional values and cultural norms and reinforced by conservative influences. The 2021 Gender Equality Index, developed by the Serbian Government using the EIGE methodology, highlights a positive trend in women's increased political participation, attributed to the 2020 amendment to the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament.⁴² However, discrimination of women and girls remains highly prevalent in Serbia, as evidenced by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality's findings, which highlight ongoing discrimination related to childbirth, maternity and child care, alongside gender-related killings, obstetric violence, digital violence, and

41. The importance of this endeavour has been reiterated and strengthened through the Dublin Declaration on the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, adopted in Dublin, Ireland, on 30 September 2022, by 38 member states of the Council of Europe.

42. Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia 2021, available for download at: www.eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/11/gender-equality-index-of-the-republic-of-serbia-2021.

public insults and belittling comments targeting women.⁴³ Gender-based complaints rank among the most common received by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, often intertwined with marital and family status, reflecting systemic multiple discrimination in employment and workplace practices.⁴⁴ Of particular concern, as noted by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, are the frequent misogynistic and discriminatory statements targeting women, particularly female politicians and journalists, made by politicians and religious representatives.⁴⁵

61. Furthermore, the findings of prevalence surveys and studies on women's reporting of violence indicate that various forms of such violence are widespread in Serbian society and highlight a significant need for awareness-raising initiatives to enable women to recognise violence and seek support. For instance, data show that 16.9% of women have experienced physical violence, 13.8% have been subjected to stalking, 18.4% have faced sexual harassment in the workplace and 4.1% have experienced sexual violence, including rape.⁴⁶ Many women also hold beliefs that discourage them from reporting violence, such as perceiving it as a private matter to be resolved within the family or believing that the violence they have experienced is not severe enough to justify reporting.

62. This information highlights the need for educational and preventive measures to address the harmful and stereotypical beliefs that serve as root causes of violence against women. GREVIO notes that the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2021-2025) outlines a specific objective on improving the actions of all stakeholders to prevent gender-based violence against women and domestic violence, which foresees at least one annual prevention campaign, with the overarching aim of challenging stereotypical gender roles and reducing tolerance for violence against women in society. However, the strategy has not been implemented. Despite this, GREVIO acknowledges some promising preventive initiatives undertaken since the baseline evaluation report. For example, two campaigns, "Stop Femicide!" and "Improve Gender Equality", were conducted in 2023 and implemented through mainstream media, social media and panel discussions in various cities. Similarly, in the same year, as part of the project "Safety of Women and Girls in Public Spaces", awareness raising activities such as exhibitions and safety walks were conducted with the aim of improving the safety and accessibility of public spaces from the perspective of women and girls.

63. Another noteworthy example, particularly welcome by GREVIO for its inclusion of men and boys in prevention efforts, is the development of the manual "Changing the attitudes of Roma men to child marriage". This initiative was undertaken as part of a project aimed at preventing child marriage and was piloted in three cities in Serbia. GREVIO also notes with interest the noteworthy initiatives undertaken by local police departments in Niš, Kikinda, Kruševac and Pirot, aimed at increasing the reporting of domestic violence

64. Further in relation to awareness raising efforts, GREVIO welcomes the information provided by the Serbian authorities indicating that the Ministry of Justice plans to implement future initiatives with a particular focus on the digital dimension of violence and sextortion against women and girls, with the aim of harmonizing judicial practice in addressing such forms of violence, particularly given their high prevalence among young people.⁴⁷

65. Despite these efforts, GREVIO notes with regret a clear absence of systematic, long-term prevention initiatives aimed at the whole of society, along with mechanisms to assess their outreach and impact. Moreover, the campaigns conducted thus far only address certain aspects of domestic violence and forced marriages, particularly early marriages, and do not encompass the full range of violence against women outlined in the Istanbul Convention. It is essential to expand

43. Annual report of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality for 2022 (2023), p. 123, available for at: www.ravnopravnost.gov.rs/en/reports/.

44. Ibid., pp. 8-9.

45. Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović, Report Following Her Visit to Serbia from 13 to 17 March 2023, p. 28.

46. Quality of Life and Women's Safety Survey, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022, available in Serbian at: www.stat.gov.rs/sr-cyrl/vesti/20220630-zenezrtvenasilja/?a=0&s=0501.

47. See section I, Emerging trends in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence.

awareness-raising efforts to explicitly address sexual violence, including rape, in both intimate and non-intimate relationships, gender-based violence in the workplace and in institutions of higher education, psychological violence, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriages affecting adult and non-Roma women, the widespread image-based abuse and digital dimensions of all forms of violence, and the impact of domestic violence on children who witness it. GREVIO also highlights the need for targeted sectoral interventions, as high-profile cases that have garnered significant media attention and sparked public debate revealed instances of sexual harassment within the arts, sport and journalism sectors.⁴⁸

66. Another area of concern is the role of media reporting in perpetuating the normalisation of violence. An analysis of Serbian media coverage on violence against women in 2020 revealed that 45% of reports failed to adhere to professional reporting standards. This was particularly evident in the use of sensationalist and stereotypical language in headlines, breaches of victims' and their families' privacy, justifications for the violence based on the perpetrator's personal characteristics or external circumstances and expressions that diminished the severity of the violence.⁴⁹

67. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to strengthen their efforts to:**

- a. counter patriarchal attitudes that persist in society by developing and implementing regular preventive measures. Such preventive measures should be aimed at eradicating prejudice and gender stereotypes and should address gender inequality as a root cause of violence against women. Guidance on specific measures and tools for preventing and combating sexism, including in the media, can be drawn from Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating sexism;**
- b. promote awareness-raising campaigns or programmes that address all forms of violence against women and girls covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension. These initiatives should target the whole of society, including workplaces, as well as specific groups of women, including Roma women and other women at risk of intersectional discrimination;**
- c. regularly carry out impact assessments and evaluations of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures taken.**

2. Education (Article 14)

68. The drafters of the convention recognised the important role that formal and informal educational settings play in addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls. Article 14 therefore requires the design of teaching material that promotes equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships and the right to personal integrity, and that informs learners of the different forms of gender-based violence against women, adapted to the age and capacity of learners and where parties deem appropriate. The obligation to promote these principles extends to informal educational facilities as well as any sports, cultural and leisure facilities. In this context, GREVIO underlines the importance of informing parents about the content and objectives of related courses, the qualifications of the persons providing the courses and to whom any questions can be directed.

69. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had acknowledged Serbia's legal framework for implementing gender equality policies in schools, particularly welcoming the National Strategy for Gender Equality in force at the time, which included measures such as teacher training, textbook

48. The #MeToo movement was reflected in Serbia when three young women, former students of a renowned director, screenwriter and acting teacher, came forward with accusations of rape and sexual harassment. A 2023 article published on the website Cenzolovka highlighted the challenges faced by female journalists in Serbia and globally, including public sexism, misogyny and workplace sexual harassment, which is available at www.cenzolovka.rs/pritisci-i-napadi/novinarke-ustaju-protiv-nasilja-prema-drugim-zenama-ali-o-seksualnom-uznemiravanju-u-redakcijama-i-dalje-cute/.

49. Analysis of Media Reports on the Issue of Violence against Women, Journalists against Violence against Women with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2020, available at: www.serbia.un.org/en/87478-serbian-media-violence-against-women-2019-sensationalist-reporting-lacking-social-context.

reviews and comprehensive education on gender roles in relationships. However, GREVIO had observed persistent gender stereotypes and tolerance of sexual harassment among pupils, as well as gaps in addressing gender equality and violence against women in the curriculum. GREVIO had also called for enhanced early intervention in cases where children are exposed to domestic and sexual violence.

70. GREVIO notes with interest the efforts undertaken since 2021 to integrate the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in the Serbian education system. Currently, the educational approach in Serbia prioritises the development of key skills in children, referred to as "cross-cutting competences", which are integrated into various subjects throughout the mandatory education system. These competences include digital literacy, communication, problem-solving and responsible participation in society, the latter being particularly relevant to gender equality and the prevention and combating of violence against women. The civic education course, taught at all levels of primary and secondary education, is intended to incorporate topics aimed at improving this cross-cutting competence, such as human rights and democratic participation. GREVIO welcomes that this course includes elements related to gender equality as well as the promotion of tolerance and prohibition of discrimination. However, this course is offered as an alternative to religious education, allowing parents and students to choose between the two. According to information provided by women's rights organisations, less than 40% of primary and secondary school students are enrolled in civic education.⁵⁰ In 2022, following an initiative by the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Ministry of Education mandated a review of biology textbooks and their content related to gender and gender identity, resulting in their amendment.⁵¹ The revised textbooks, introduced for the 2023-2024 school year, include explanations and terminology on sexual orientation and gender but no longer contain narratives aimed at countering the stigma faced by LGBTI persons.⁵²

71. A significant step in preventing and combating violence against children within the school system has been the establishment of the online platform "I Protect You!". This platform connects schools with Centres for Social Welfare and child-protection services, police stations, healthcare institutions and higher public prosecutor's offices, providing a mechanism for parents, children and educators to report incidents of violence online. The platform also provides information and guidance on various forms of violence, including peer-to-peer, digital and domestic violence to both students and parents and provides training to educators on detecting and responding to domestic violence. However, GREVIO notes concerns raised by women's rights organisations indicating that the platform primarily focuses on peer-to-peer violence, namely bullying, and lacks a gender-sensitive approach in defining the different forms of violence addressed.⁵³ In light of recent reports highlighting the widespread occurrence of image-based abuse on social media platforms and instant messaging services,⁵⁴ GREVIO stresses the urgent need to integrate topics addressing the digital dimension of violence against women into the school curriculum, as none of the existing digital literacy courses within the mandatory education system currently cover this issue. Additionally, the educational material on sexuality provided on the "I Protect You!" platform appears to focus primarily on protection from child sexual abuse and does not address image-based sexual abuse among peers, which is highly prevalent among young people. GREVIO highlights the important role played by schools not only in identifying such violence but also in questioning gender stereotypes, harmful concepts of masculinity and sexual relations. The increasing consumption of (violent) pornography by children and young adults is being linked to the growing rates of sexual violence against girls and young women. Children and young adults watching and sharing pornography without the ability to contextualise or comprehend what they see is a phenomenon that GREVIO has been observing in several parties to the convention. Research confirms that pornography can have devastating effects

50. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 16.

51. Ibid., p. 18. See also an article on this debate at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-textbook-battle-lgbt/32051160.html>.

52. This issue was addressed in ECRI's 2024 report on Serbia during the sixth monitoring cycle, which recommended that "the authorities ensure that the curricula and textbooks at all levels of education address LGBTI issues in a manner which is sensitive, age-appropriate and easy to understand and that discussions on LGBTI issues are evidence-based and place particular emphasis on equality, diversity and inclusion".

53. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 16.

54. See section I, Emerging trends in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence.

on children's minds, and studies have made the link to the harmful sexual behaviour of children.⁵⁵ The Council of Europe Steering Committee on the Rights of the Child has recently issued a guidance note on safeguarding children from the risks of accessing online pornography, which contains tools and recommendations on tackling this issue.⁵⁶ GREVIO therefore sees the need for increased efforts by the Serbian authorities to teach children, in an age-appropriate manner, on the notion of freely given consent in sexual relations and raise their awareness of the harmful effects of violent pornography and the implications of sharing of intimate images of oneself and others.

72. GREVIO notes that Serbia's current legal framework mandates further efforts in this regard. The provisions of the updated Law on Gender Equality require the integration of gender equality principles in the development of teaching and learning programmes, the establishment of standards for teaching materials and the implementation of teaching methods with the aim of eliminating gender stereotypes, encouraging non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships and preventing and combating gender-based violence within the school system. When reporting on the implementation of obligations under the Law on Gender Equality, the Ministry of Education referenced several strategies and tools, including the Strategy for the Development of Education and Training, a rulebook on institutional protocols for responding to violence, abuse and neglect, and the 2022 General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Violence without providing details on specific measures taken. Two task forces have been established by the ministry to prevent violence in education and to revise the rulebook but no information regarding their progress was made available.⁵⁷ GREVIO notes that, under the legal framework, educational institutions are required to establish teams to combat discrimination and violence, as well as to develop annual programmes with clearly defined preventive activities. However, the extent of their implementation remains unclear.

73. With regard to promoting access to education for Roma girls, GREVIO welcomes the progress made in increasing school attendance among Roma pupils. However, further efforts are needed to ensure that Roma girls complete their upper secondary education, as data from 2022 indicate that while completion rates for male and female Roma students are similar at the primary and lower secondary levels, dropout rates among Roma girls at the upper secondary level are 12% higher than those of their male counterparts.⁵⁸ Given the correlation between school dropout rates and early marriage, GREVIO highlights the essential role of access to education in empowering Roma girls and protecting them from violence against women, including forced and early marriages.⁵⁹

74. Recalling the findings issued in the its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to promote the principles of equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships through adequate teaching material; to monitor how teachers make use of such material, and where necessary, to include programmes on the topics listed in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention as mandatory subjects in the formal curriculum; while also calling on the authorities to teach children, in an age-appropriate manner, about the notion of freely given consent in sexual relations, raise their awareness of the harmful effects of violent pornography and the implications of sharing intimate images of oneself and others.

55. GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report on Austria, paragraphs 5 and 6.

56. Council of Europe Steering Committee on the Rights of the Child, thematic guidance note on safeguarding children from the risks of accessing online pornographic content, available at: www.rm.coe.int/cdenf-2024-20-final-guidance-note-on-safeguarding-children-from-the-ri/1680b4bc32. See also the "Study on sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children: nature, causes, consequences and responses", p. 33, available at: www.rm.coe.int/enf-vae-2024-05-e-harmful-sexual-behaviour-/1680b219c7.

57. Report on the achievement of gender equality in the Republic of Serbia for 2022, Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality, pp. 33-34, available in Serbian at: www.minlmpdd.gov.rs/dokumenta/izvestaji/.

58. UNICEF, Education Pathways in Roma Settlements: Understanding Inequality in Education and Learning, Findings from MICS6 in Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, 2022, p. 51, available at www.unicef.org/eca/reports/education-pathways-roma-settlements-understanding-inequality-education-and-learning.

59. According to information provided by the Serbian authorities, the key factors contributing to school dropout rates include the family's disadvantaged socio-economic status, low motivation particularly among girls, limited family and community support, early marriage and early pregnancy, while the lack of preventive measures such as free transportation, school meals, scholarships, textbooks and supplies play a contributing role.

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

75. Building society's trust by delivering support, protection and justice to women and girls with experiences of gender-based violence requires well-trained professionals across a wide spectrum of fields. The standard set by the Istanbul Convention in its Article 15 is that of systematic initial and in-service training of all those who deal with victims or perpetrators of all acts of violence. The training that is required must cover the prevention and detection of such violence, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims and the prevention of secondary victimisation.

76. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had welcomed the progress made in providing mandatory specialised training on domestic violence for law-enforcement authorities, judges, including those handling family law cases, and prosecutors, as required by the LPDV and in co-operation with women's specialist NGOs. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the mandatory training scheme for justice and law-enforcement professionals established under the LPDV, delivered by the Judicial Academy and the Police Academy, has been sustained, with the sixth training cycle concluding in 2024. Information on these training sessions is published in the Judicial Academy's annual reports. For instance, according to available information, in 2022 a total of 21 in-service training sessions on domestic violence were conducted, attended by 452 judges, prosecutors and police officers.⁶⁰ In 2021, 18 in-service training sessions were organised with 385 participants in attendance.⁶¹ While GREVIO commends the systematic nature of these training sessions, it notes the absence of data on the breakdown of each professional group benefiting from them. The training covers international standards for combating gender-based and domestic violence, including the Istanbul Convention, the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, interagency co-operation, risk assessment, the development of individual protection plans for victims and the prevention of domestic violence. However, women's rights organisations maintain that the training should place greater emphasis on trauma-informed responses to domestic violence, psychological violence, including coercive control and post-separation violence, and the consequences of domestic violence on children exposed to it, an observation also shared by the Protector of Citizens.⁶²

77. These systematic training efforts, however, do not extend to other forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, as there are no mandatory or voluntary training initiatives for justice sector professionals on stalking, sexual violence and harassment, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced sterilisation and forced abortion. This gap is reflected in the conduct of police officers, prosecutors and judges when handling cases involving these forms of violence, demonstrating a lack of knowledge and awareness of their dynamics and victims' trauma responses, which in turn undermines victims' trust in the justice system and may discourage them from seeking justice. Given the essential role of all those in the justice chain to ensure access to justice for women victims of violence, GREVIO stresses the need to implement mandatory initial and in-service training for all justice professionals, including judges, on all forms of violence against women. GREVIO notes with great interest, in this context, the plans of the Ministry of Justice to organise training sessions for judges, prosecutors, and other competent authorities on the digital dimension of violence against women, including image-based abuse and sextortion.

78. In the social welfare sector, GREVIO notes that various training programmes are provided to professionals, including guardianship authorities, employees of Centres for Social Welfare, mediators and child-protection officers, covering topics such as the protection of victims and child witnesses of domestic violence, interagency co-operation, risk assessment and working with perpetrators. GREVIO notes that some of these initiatives are systematic and periodic training programmes while some appear to be one-off, project-based efforts implemented at a local level. The majority, however, remain to be of a voluntary nature. This raises concerns about the lack of systematic and nationwide mandatory training programmes in the social welfare sector, a concern

60. 2022 Annual Report of the Judicial Academy (2023), pages 16, 19 and 21, available in Serbian at: www.pars.rs/sr-lat/o-akademiji/izve%C5%A1taji-o-radu.

61. 2021 Annual Report of the Judicial Academy (2022), pages 16, 30 and 31, available in Serbian at: www.pars.rs/sr-lat/o-akademiji/izve%C5%A1taji-o-radu.

62. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 16 and written submission by the Centre for Support of Women, p. 11.

previously highlighted in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report. An issue of grave concern in this area is the existence of various training courses on parental alienation in custody and visitation proceedings.⁶³ While the content of these courses remains unknown to GREVIO, it reiterates that the concept of parental alienation, and similar notions, has historically been used to discredit women's legitimate reports of domestic violence during separation proceedings, as well as to undermine children's well-founded reluctance to maintain contact with an abusive parent, thereby exposing both women and children to post-separation abuse.⁶⁴ Furthermore, as GREVIO has had the opportunity to note, the concept of "parental alienation syndrome" has been denounced by the scientific community as a scientifically unfounded concept that shifts the attention away from the alleged abuse towards a supposedly "alienating" behaviour of a domestic violence victim.⁶⁵ GREVIO also lacks information on whether training programmes for mediators include a clear focus on the unsuitability of cases involving domestic violence for such processes.

79. In the healthcare sector, according to the authorities some form of mandatory training is provided to medical professionals, including doctors, medical technicians and psychologists, on the prevention and detection of domestic violence, the needs and rights of victims, the prevention of secondary victimisation and interagency co-operation. However, GREVIO notes that no information was provided regarding the number of participants benefiting from such training, its frequency or whether it constitutes initial or in-service training. GREVIO emphasises the crucial role of healthcare professionals, as they are often the first and only professionals to whom victims disclose their experiences with violence, and stresses the importance of gender-sensitive and trauma-informed training to strengthen the victims' trust in the system.

80. A new catalogue of professional development programmes was created for the period 2021-2024 for teachers in primary and secondary schools, as well as preschool educators, incorporating components on equality and non-discrimination, including gender equality for teachers. GREVIO notes that approximately 900 teachers are reported to have benefited from these programmes; however, there is no available information regarding whether participation was mandatory or whether the programmes also covered topics related to violence against women in addition to gender equality.

81. Another professional group for whom training should be encouraged or incentivised is journalists, particularly in view of the harmful stereotypes and attitudes that remain prevalent within the profession.⁶⁶

82. At a general level, GREVIO notes with concern that all training programmes for relevant professionals focus exclusively on domestic violence, with a worrying lack of training on other forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, a persistent issue previously highlighted in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report. Furthermore, GREVIO regrets the lack of involvement of women's rights organisations and specialist support services in the development and delivery of the existing programmes. These organisations possess extensive knowledge and offer valuable training opportunities for all relevant professionals, and their expertise should be made use of.

83. Recalling the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to step up their efforts to ensure mandatory and systematic initial and in-service training on violence against women for all professional groups that interact with victims, including law-enforcement officials, prosecutors, judges, social workers, healthcare professionals and teachers. Such training should encompass prevention, detection and trauma-informed, gender-sensitive responses to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension. It should also address equality

63. See a list of the training provided to social welfare professionals in the state report, pp. 160-173.

64. See Article 31, Custody, visitation rights and safety.

65. See the statement of December 2017 by the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP) warning that the concepts of "parental alienation syndrome" and "parental alienation" should not be used in any psychotherapeutic practice. This statement by the EAP, which is made up of 128 psychotherapy organisations from 41 European countries, serves as a guideline for psychotherapists across Europe.

66. See Article 12, General obligations.

between women and men, as well as stereotypes and perceptions related to violence against women. Furthermore, any training initiatives must clearly focus on the safety and protection concerns women victims of domestic violence and their children may have and must refrain from dismissing such concerns by labelling their actions as “alienating”, “hostile”, “unco-operative” or similar. The impact of all professional training initiatives should be regularly evaluated.

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

84. Perpetrator programmes are important elements of an integrated and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating violence against women. Under Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention, parties are required to set up or support programmes that prevent perpetrators of domestic violence and of sexual violence from reoffending and support them in adopting non-violent behavioural strategies. Making the safety of, the support for, and the human rights of victims a primary concern, these programmes are key elements for ensuring women’s safety from known perpetrators. The convention requires their close co-ordination with specialist support services for victims.

a. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

85. GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, while acknowledging efforts to establish perpetrator programmes in Serbia, had identified several challenges preventing full compliance with the standards of the Istanbul Convention. These included an over-reliance on project-based funding, which undermined the sustainability of the available programmes, low referral rates, including from courts, limited voluntary participation and significant disparities in treatment methods, quality and availability across regions due to the absence of legal standards, and insufficient co-operation with specialist services for victims of violence against women.

86. GREVIO regrets that the challenges identified in the baseline evaluation have not been addressed. The lack of sustainable funding continues to hinder the availability of perpetrator programmes in Serbia. According to information provided by the National Network of Programmes for the Work with Perpetrators of Violence (OPNA), although 13 accredited service providers exist throughout the country, including social welfare centres and NGOs, only four are currently operational due to financial constraints. Among these, only the programme in Bajina Bašta benefits from permanent dedicated funding through the local budget, while the remaining three lack earmarked funds and dedicated full-time personnel, regardless of whether they are run by social welfare centres or NGOs.⁶⁷

87. Referral and participation rates also remain extremely low. Under the current legal framework, perpetrators may be referred to treatment programmes within the criminal justice system either by the courts, in accordance with Article 73 of the Criminal Code regulating the suspension of sentences, or by public prosecutors as a means of deferring prosecution under Article 283 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The latter mechanism has been criticised by civil society organisations and in the state report for enabling offenders to avoid trial and punishment.⁶⁸ Centres for social welfare may also recommend participation in these programmes during family counselling sessions or through the development of individual plans for the exercise of parental rights. According to information provided by the Serbian authorities, a total of 51 perpetrators were referred to treatment programmes by the courts or public prosecutors in 2023, excluding those mandated to undergo psychiatric treatment in closed medical facilities.⁶⁹ The figures provided by civil society organisations are slightly higher, at 75, which includes perpetrators referred by both the justice system and Centres for Social Welfare.⁷⁰ The number of perpetrators who complete the programme is even lower, although the dropout rates are not well documented. When these figures are considered alongside

67. See the state report, p. 46, and the written submission by OPNA, p. 7.

68. See the state report, p. 46 and the written submission by OPNA., p. 11.

69. See the state report, p. 46.

70. See the written submission by OPNA, p. 9.

the number of domestic violence incidents reported to the police in 2023,⁷¹ they indicate a very low rate of participation in such programmes. This can be attributed to two key factors. First, the limited availability of perpetrator programmes across the country may discourage relevant authorities from making referrals in certain regions. Second, a lack of information regarding available programmes may further contribute to the low referral rates. Regardless of the underlying reasons, GREVIO emphasises the need to make better use of perpetrator programmes to prevent recidivism, as evidenced by the increase in repeat offenders, with the number of perpetrators who committed repeated acts of violence rising from 6 002 in 2019 to 10 365 in 2023.⁷² One possible way could be enabling referrals by probation services.

88. The lack of a standardised approach also results in fragmented quality in service delivery. For instance, risk-assessment and management methodologies vary between programmes. While some providers have established strong co-operation with women's support services, in certain areas, such co-operation is either minimal or limited to merely referring victims to specialist support services. In some cases, victim support is reportedly provided at the same location where perpetrators of violence are treated, or the same professionals work with both victims and perpetrators.⁷³

89. In this regard, GREVIO notes with interest that in 2018 an initiative was launched in partnership with national and local social protection institutions and civil society organisations to develop a set of standards for perpetrator programmes. An analysis of these standards by OPNA indicates that they largely comply with the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes, which GREVIO welcomes while also identifying areas for further improvement.⁷⁴ These include extending the programme duration from 39 to 51 hours, placing greater emphasis on gender roles, improving the training of the professionals involved, ensuring supervision of service providers and conducting systematic evaluations of the programmes.⁷⁵ In the hope that these standards will be formally adopted by the Serbian authorities, GREVIO highlights their potential to provide guidance on standardised, high-quality, gender-sensitive treatment for perpetrators and to reduce recidivism.

90. In custodial settings, GREVIO welcomes the introduction in 2022 of a specialised programme for perpetrators of domestic violence, developed by the Ministry of Justice, which has been rolled out to penal institutions and district prisons with professionals working at these institutions undergoing additional training to enable its delivery. However, GREVIO notes with regret that out of nine existing penal institutions, the programme is currently active in only four, although the reasons for this remain unclear. An initial analysis of these programmes revealed that their content primarily focuses on conflict management and emotion regulation skills, while insufficient attention is paid to topics such as attitudes towards women, gender roles and positive attitudes towards fatherhood.⁷⁶ Additionally, these programmes appear to be designed for all perpetrators of domestic violence, addressing both intergenerational violence and intimate partner violence.

91. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to:

- a. ensure the allocation of adequate resources for existing domestic violence perpetrator programmes, both in voluntary and custodial settings, to guarantee the continuation of their work in a sustainable manner;**

71. In 2023 the police registered 28 413 incidents of domestic violence.

72. Twelfth report on independent monitoring of the implementation of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence in Serbia for the period January-December 2023, Autonomous Women's Centre, 2023, available in Serbian at: www.womenngo.org.rs/en/independent-reports-on-law-on-prevention-of-dv/2234-the-twelfth-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-law-on-the-prevention-of-domestic-violence-in-2023-has-been-published.

73. See the written submission by OPNA, p. 12.

74. European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes – Standards for Survivor Safety-Oriented Intimate Partner Violence Perpetrator Programmes, European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence, 2023, available at: www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/european-standards-for-perpetrator-programmes.

75. The Missing Link: Analysis of the Situation in the Implementation of the Perpetrator Programmes in Serbia, OPNA, 2024, available in Serbian at www.opna.org.rs/page4.html.

76. Ibid.

- b. increase the number of voluntary domestic violence perpetrator programmes across the country;**
- c. adopt and implement uniform standards in accordance with the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes, which prioritise the safety, support and respect for the human rights of victims by fostering close co-operation with specialist support services for victims, as required by Article 16, paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention;**
- d. take measures to improve attendance at such programmes and reduce dropout rates, including by incorporating them into the probation service, promoting referrals by authorised bodies such as courts and Centres for Social Welfare or introducing incentive schemes as a tool to reduce recidivism. At the same time, legislative measures should be taken to ensure that participation in such programmes does not serve as a means to avoid prosecution for acts of domestic violence.**

b. Programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence

92. The available treatment programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence remain those identified in the baseline evaluation report, namely programmes delivered in custodial settings for convicted perpetrators. For those convicted of sexual offences against children, specific measures may be imposed upon release, including mandatory counselling and supervision. GREVIO does not have information on the number of perpetrators who have participated in such programmes.

93. GREVIO reiterates that Article 16, paragraph 2, of the Istanbul Convention establishes the obligation to develop or support treatment programmes for perpetrators of sexual assault and rape outside prison settings, in addition to those provided in custodial settings. Another group requiring targeted intervention in this regard is children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour, which differs from sexual offences committed by adults. Consequently, programmes should be developed that are specifically tailored to the child's developmental age, stage and capacity.

B. Protection and support

94. Chapter IV of the Istanbul Convention requires a multifaceted, professional and victim-oriented support structure for any woman or girl who has experienced any of the forms of violence covered by the convention. General and specialist support services that are victim-oriented, accessible to all and adequate in numbers greatly facilitate recovery by offering support, protection and assistance to overcome the multiple consequences of such violence. As such, they play a key role in offering a comprehensive and adequate response to the different forms of violence covered by the convention.

1. General obligations (Article 18)

95. Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention sets out a number of general principles to be respected in the provision of both general and specialist protective and supportive services for women victims of violence. One of these principles is the need for services to act in a concerted and co-ordinated manner, with the involvement of all the agencies concerned. More specifically, Article 18, paragraph 2, of the convention requires parties to put in place appropriate co-ordination mechanisms that can ensure effective co-operation among, *inter alia*, the judiciary, public prosecutors, law-enforcement agencies, local and regional authorities, NGOs and other relevant entities and organisations. In this regard, women's rights NGOs and specialist women's support services play an important role in guaranteeing that the rights of victims are safeguarded in multi-agency co-operation. Other general principles established under this article include the need for measures of protection and support to be based on a gendered understanding of violence against women and to focus on women's safety and human rights, taking into account the relationship between victims, perpetrators, children and their wider environment, and addressing their needs holistically.

Specialist support services must aim at the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence and avoid their secondary victimisation. This provision equally stresses the importance of ensuring that access to services is not subject to the victim's willingness to press charges or testify against the perpetrator.

96. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had identified significant progress in Serbia towards institutionalising multi-agency co-operation in domestic violence cases, particularly through the adoption of the General Protocol for Action and Co-operation of Institutions, Bodies and Organisations in Situations of Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence against Women and the LPDV. The establishment of co-ordination and co-operation groups at the level of basic prosecutors had been particularly commended while concerns had been raised about the absence of NGO-run specialist services within these groups, despite their vital role in supporting victims. Additionally, GREVIO's findings had highlighted the need to extend multi-agency co-ordination beyond domestic violence to other forms of violence against women, including early and forced marriage, which remains particularly prevalent within the Roma community.

97. GREVIO welcomes the Serbian authorities' ongoing multi-agency co-ordination efforts in domestic violence cases at both the national and local levels. At the national level, the Council for the Suppression of Domestic Violence, comprising representatives from relevant state and local authorities, is responsible for monitoring and recommending measures to enhance multisectoral co-operation. However, it appears to meet infrequently, typically once a year, with frequent changes to its composition.⁷⁷

98. At the initiative of the Council for the Suppression of Domestic Violence, a new General Protocol on Handling and Multisectoral Co-operation in Situations of Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was developed in 2024. This protocol provides a more detailed framework outlining the obligations of state bodies and institutions to detect and combat violence against women through a multi-agency approach. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the protocol explicitly sets out the involvement of women's specialist support services, including informing victims about their services, facilitating their participation in co-operation group meetings with the victim and incorporating their views into individual safety plans.

99. Under the LPDV, co-ordination and co-operation groups are required to convene to review reports of domestic violence, stalking, rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, as well as to develop safety plans for victim protection. In 2023, basic prosecutor's offices recorded 55 739 cases of domestic violence, including 25 805 newly reported cases, discussed at 2 961 co-ordination and co-operation group meetings.⁷⁸ These groups devised 25 396 individual safety plans, marking a 51.62% increase compared to 2018. GREVIO also welcomes the increase in the number of victims participating in the work of the co-ordination and co-operation groups, rising from 2.62% in 2018 to 11.12% in 2023, a positive development that GREVIO hopes will be sustained. While the specific categories of cases examined is unclear, indications made by women's rights organisations to GREVIO suggest that the majority of the co-ordination and co-operation groups primarily focus on domestic violence cases.⁷⁹

100. The composition of the groups also appears to vary. The LPDV designates certain authorities as mandatory members of the co-ordination and co-operation group, namely the prosecutor's office, the police and Centres for Social Welfare, while other entities, such as representatives of educational and healthcare institutions, the National Employment Service and victim support services, may be invited to attend meetings when necessary. Although nationwide data on the participation of non-designated members are unavailable, GREVIO notes that only 11 victims attended the group

77. According to information provided by the Serbian authorities, in order to enhance the efficiency of the operations of the Council for Combating Domestic Violence, an Operational Team was established, comprising contact persons appointed by each member of the Council. This team reportedly meets more frequently than the Council itself; however, GREVIO does not have information on the exact scope of these meetings.

78. Twelfth report on independent monitoring of the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in Serbia in the period January-December 2023, Autonomous Women Centre, 2024, available at: www.womenngo.org.rs/en/news/2232-awc-the-twelfth-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-law-on-the-prevention-of-domestic-violence-in-2023-has-been-published.

79. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 27.

meetings in 2023 and that the involvement of NGOs appears to be sporadic despite the findings of the baseline evaluation report.⁸⁰

101. GREVIO notes with concern that the Serbian authorities have not intensified their efforts to provide one-stop-shop services for victims of gender-based violence against women since the adoption of the baseline evaluation report. Although four centres for victims of sexual violence are operational in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, offering holistic, trauma-informed services for victims of sexual violence and rape,⁸¹ these efforts are not implemented on a national scale, nor are comparable holistic services available for other forms of violence against women.

102. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to step up their efforts to improve co-operation among all relevant statutory agencies and specialist support services provided by NGOs. This could be achieved by promoting the systematic participation of specialist support services and other relevant bodies in the meetings of the co-ordination and co-operation groups. Further measures are also needed to expand such institutionalised co-operation to cover cases involving forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, such as rape and sexual violence, forced marriage, stalking and sexual harassment.

103. GREVIO further encourages the Serbian authorities to set up one-stop shops for the provision of services to victims of violence against women and domestic violence.

2. General support services (Article 20)

104. General support services, such as social services, health services and housing or employment services, must be equipped to offer support and protection to women victims of gender-based violence of all ages and backgrounds. Article 20 of the Istanbul Convention requires states parties to ensure that these services are adequately resourced and that the staff are adequately trained on the different forms of violence against women and are able to respond to victims in a supportive manner, in particular those that women and girls turn to first (health and social services).⁸² Their interventions are often decisive for victims' onward journey towards a life free from violence and thus a core element of a trust-based system of protection and support.

a. Social services

105. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that the increased responsibilities imposed on Centres for Social Welfare following the adoption of the LPDV further strained their limited resources, a situation exacerbated by a hiring freeze at the relevant time. GREVIO's assessment had also revealed that social welfare professionals would have benefited from specialised training in handling cases of forced and early marriage, as their lack of knowledge and expertise regarding the complex needs of vulnerable groups, including Roma women, limited their ability to effectively address these forms of violence against women. Regarding the long-term empowerment of victims, although initiatives such as social housing schemes and employment services had existed, their practical impact remained limited due to the small number of municipalities offering these services and the low level of use among women.

106. The majority of essential services for victims of violence against women, such as financial and social support, counselling, legal assistance and referrals to shelters, free legal aid or psychotherapy, continue to be provided by Centres for Social Welfare. However, the constraints identified in GREVIO's baseline evaluation have not improved, as these centres remain affected by

80. For example, the Special Report of the Protector of Citizens on the Work of Co-ordination and Co-operation Groups under the Jurisdiction of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Niš (2022) states: "Just like victims, representatives of other institutions and organisations are not invited to attend the consideration of a case about which they have knowledge or can provide assistance and support".

81. See Article 25, Support for victims of sexual violence.

82. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 127.

insufficient financial and human resources, compounded by high caseloads and extensive responsibilities, which in turn impact the availability and quality of the services provided.⁸³ According to indications received from women's rights organisations, Centres for Social Welfare often exhibit a misunderstanding of the gendered nature of violence against women and do not systematically co-operate with NGOs offering specialist support services to women victims of violence.⁸⁴

107. With regard to the long-term empowerment and financial independence of victims of violence against women, GREVIO welcomes the inclusion of measures in the Employment Strategy for the Republic of Serbia (2021-2026) aimed at integrating victims of domestic violence and human trafficking into active employment policy programmes. Similarly, the Draft National Housing Strategy for 2022-2032 recognises victims of domestic violence as a beneficiary group for social housing, although this document has not been adopted yet. In practice, however, GREVIO notes that these measures are either inconsistently applied or ineffective. For example, the scheme that provides victims of domestic violence with priority in the employment market through certificates issued by centres for social work may create stigma, since many employers refrain from hiring these individuals due to perceptions of instability in their personal lives despite the existence of subsidies aimed at encouraging the employment of individuals from hard-to-employ categories, including victims of domestic violence.⁸⁵ GREVIO notes some examples of these provisions being implemented efficiently although they tend to be local initiatives. For instance, in the City of Belgrade the Centres for Social Welfare offer employment mediation for victims of domestic violence and representatives of the National Employment Service are regularly invited to the meetings of the co-ordination and co-operation groups. GREVIO notes with interest that in 2023, in the City of Belgrade, 71 victims of domestic violence were employed through such schemes while 278 victims underwent vocational training for employment.⁸⁶ In other instances, domestic violence shelters conclude memorandums of co-operation with local employers to facilitate the integration of their residents into the job market.⁸⁷ While there is no data on the number of victims of violence against women benefiting from housing schemes, information provided by Serbian authorities indicate that, as of 2024, a total of 185 women victims of domestic violence were registered in the unemployment registry of the National Employment Service. In the same year, 91 victims benefited from non-financial measures under active employment policies, while 18 received support through financial measures.

108. GREVIO notes that state representatives have recognised the long-term economic empowerment of victims as a crucial step in effectively combating violence against women. It points to the importance of ensuring that this acknowledgement translates into concrete measures to enable women victims of violence to achieve independence from their perpetrators, thereby strengthening their trust in the system.

109. Regarding early and forced marriages, although certain policy-level measures have been implemented, such as the establishment of the National Coalition for Combating Child Marriage in 2019 and the subsequent recognition of child marriage as a form of violence in the national Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence (2020-2023), GREVIO notes that, according to information provided by civil society organisations, professionals within the social welfare system continue to regard child marriage as a "Roma tradition". In some cases, they refrain from intervening, as such intervention is perceived as interference with community norms.⁸⁸

110. Recalling the findings of its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. allocate sufficient human and financial resources to enable Centres for Social Welfare to fulfil their responsibilities effectively, while ensuring among their staff a**

83. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

84. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 31.

85. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

86. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 28.

87. According to research carried out by the NGO Atina, 52% of shelters for women victims of gender-based violence have signed memorandums of co-operation with local partners that increase the employability of the women benefiting from their services.

88. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

- gendered understanding of all forms of violence against women, including forced and early marriage, with the aim of eliminating cultural and gender bias;**
- b. take measures to improve the access of women victims of gender-based violence to long-term financial assistance, social housing and support to find employment in order to enable them to recover from the violence and live independently.**

b. Healthcare services

111. In the area of healthcare services, GREVIO had identified in its baseline evaluation report the lack of attention to forms of violence against women other than domestic violence, such as FGM, forced sterilisation, abortion and sexual violence committed without the use of explicit force, in the Special Protocol of the Ministry of Health for the Protection and Treatment of Women Victims of Violence. Further concerns had been raised regarding the inadequate forensic documentation of violence, insufficient referrals, high patient loads and fees for obtaining forensic certificates. Moreover, while the protocol recognised the heightened vulnerability of women facing intersectional discrimination, it lacked specific screening and referral procedures tailored to their needs, particularly those of Roma women and women with disabilities.

112. GREVIO notes with regret that the issues concerning the scope of the protocol, as well as its practical implementation, have persisted in the period following the baseline evaluation. Information obtained by GREVIO indicates that the detection of violence against women, including domestic violence, within the healthcare system remains insufficient. In this regard GREVIO observes some local initiatives aimed at involving healthcare professionals in preventing and combating violence against women at the local level, such as using home visits for annual breast cancer awareness examinations as an opportunity to proactively detect and inform victims of violence.⁸⁹ However, such efforts do not appear to be consistently implemented. Although data on the identification and treatment of victims of violence against women since 2022 are unavailable, in that year, 1 555 cases of domestic violence were registered within the healthcare system,⁹⁰ while 28 907⁹¹ reports were received by the police. These figures suggest room for improvement in the responsiveness and ability of the healthcare system to identify and refer victims to support services and law-enforcement agencies. This is particularly important given that healthcare professionals, together with Centres for Social Welfare, often serve as frontline responders to violence against women. GREVIO further notes with regret the lack of data on other forms of violence against women identified within the healthcare system.

113. Women's rights organisations have alerted GREVIO to concerns about the quality and gender sensitivity of forensic examinations and reports, as they often fail to accurately assess the impact of violence against women and domestic violence on mental health.⁹² This issue is particularly concerning in parental separation proceedings, where such assessments are used to determine custody and visitation arrangements.⁹³

114. Other issues that may hinder victims' trust in the system and obstruct their access to justice include the fees for forensic documentation and the reporting obligations of healthcare professionals. When a forensic examination is requested by the victim rather than a public prosecutor, the cost is not covered by state insurance, placing a financial burden on the victim during legal proceedings. Regarding the reporting obligations, although the special protocol outlines the requirement for medical professionals to obtain the victim's consent before reporting to the police, except in cases where escalated violence is suspected, not all healthcare professionals apply this provision consistently. In practice, it appears that healthcare professionals are more likely to report the case than to refrain from doing so.⁹⁴ GREVIO notes that this situation may present barriers to seeking medical help for certain women, including Roma women, women with irregular migrant status or

89. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

90. Živković Šulović M. and Horozović V. "Report on reported cases gender-based violence in healthcare institutions of the Republic of Serbia for the year 2022", Institute of Public Health "Dr Milan Jovanović Batut", 2023, p. 8.

91. See the State Report, p. 119.

92. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, pp. 31-32.

93. See Article 31, Custody, visitation rights and safety.

94. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

women whose residence in Serbia is dependent on their husband's status, as they may fear mandatory reporting and the initiation of criminal proceedings against their will.

115. GREVIO notes that, in line with the new General Protocol on Handling and Multisectoral Co-operation in Situations of Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence adopted in 2024, a new special protocol for the healthcare system is expected to be drawn up. GREVIO views this as an opportunity to strengthen the healthcare response to violence against women, particularly by incorporating all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, providing clear guidance on the identification and referral of victims, including those at risk of intersectional discrimination, as well as ensuring the documentation of violence and preparation of forensic reports in a gender-sensitive manner.

116. Regarding access to healthcare, GREVIO notes that while emergency care is accessible to all, persons without valid health insurance are required to pay for other medical services. In this respect, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that Article 11 of the Healthcare Act recognises victims of domestic violence as a category entitled to free non-emergency healthcare services, regardless of their insurance status. However, no comparable provision exists for victims of other forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence. This can present a significant financial barrier for victims of certain forms of violence against women. GREVIO further notes that the provision of free healthcare does not extend to include complimentary medications or medical supplies. In this regard, GREVIO notes that in many instances, women's rights organisations are compelled to intervene and raise funds to facilitate the access of victims of violence against women to healthcare.⁹⁵

117. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to:

- a. implement standardised care pathways in the public and private healthcare sectors to ensure a gender-sensitive, trauma-informed and non-judgmental approach to identifying victims of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, diagnosing and treating their injuries, documenting the violence suffered (including photographic evidence), addressing resulting health issues and facilitating referrals to appropriate specialist support services;**
- b. ensure that healthcare professionals provide free-of-charge documentation of forensic evidence adequate for use by the criminal justice sector;**
- c. ensure that informed consent is sought from a victim of violence for the reporting of a suspicion of a criminal act, outside of those cases where there is a reasonable suspicion that there is an imminent danger to the victim or another person, or where the victim is a child;**
- d. ensure that health services for immediate experiences of violence against women are accessible to all women, including Roma women, women with irregular migrant status or women whose residence in Serbia is dependent on their husband's status.**

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

118. Specialist support services ensure the complex task of empowering victims through optimal support and assistance catered to their specific needs and are an equally important cornerstone of a trust-based system of protection and support. Much of this is best ensured by women's organisations and by support services provided, for example, by local authorities with specialist and experienced staff with in-depth knowledge of gender-based violence against women. They need to be able to address the different types of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and to provide support to all groups of victims, including hard-to-reach groups.

119. GREVIO's baseline evaluation of Serbia had found that the provision of specialist services for victims of violence against women primarily relied on civil society organisations, which operated

95. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 41.

with insufficient funding. As a result, essential services such as counselling, long-term psychological support and trauma care remained largely unavailable across the country. Additionally, support services were predominantly focused on domestic violence, with no specialised services for victims of forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking, sexual violence or sexual harassment. Regarding shelters, GREVIO had observed significant variations in quality, widespread understaffing and the inadequacy of existing licensing standards in addressing the needs of domestic violence victims. While no comprehensive mapping of shelter capacities or detailed user data were conducted, GREVIO had noted the under-representation of Roma women in shelters, likely due to the requirement for referrals from Centres for Social Welfare and prevailing biases against the Roma community. Furthermore, GREVIO had noted with concern the insufficiency of the shelters equipped to accommodate the specific needs of women with disabilities, women with addiction issues or migrant and asylum-seeking women.

120. GREVIO notes that, among the 13 operational shelters for victims of domestic violence, only seven are currently licensed. It is unclear whether the remainder of the shelters, which are unlicensed, remain operative. Representatives of women's shelters alerted GREVIO to the fact that the existing licensing standards⁹⁶ impose a disproportionate administrative burden, affecting their ability to secure funding from local authorities.⁹⁷ While GREVIO recognises the importance of establishing standards to ensure high-quality, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed services throughout the country, the requirements in Serbia appear to place excessive emphasis on administrative criteria, such as employee contract types and diploma credentials, rather than prioritising the quality and scope of support provided to victims. In certain cases, licensing requirements compel shelters to accommodate fewer victims than their actual capacity.⁹⁸ GREVIO notes that a draft rulebook was prepared in 2023 to establish functional standards for shelter services for women victims of gender-based violence, with its adoption expected in the near future.⁹⁹ While GREVIO does not have information on the specific content of the draft rulebook, it considers this an opportunity to introduce quality standards while ensuring that the licensing process does not impose additional burdens on service providers.

121. Even when unlicensed shelters are taken into account, GREVIO notes that the existing capacity of shelters remains insufficient to meet the needs of domestic violence victims and falls short of the standards set by the Istanbul Convention.¹⁰⁰ A 2023 study on the operation of shelters for women and children victims of violence found that only 190 beds are available throughout Serbia, representing a 74% deficit in the required number of family places.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the research revealed that 14.3% of shelters lacked suitable accommodation for mothers with children¹⁰² while some shelters only accepted a certain number of children.¹⁰³ The geographical distribution of shelters is also inadequate, with at least nine administrative districts in Serbia lacking a shelter.¹⁰⁴

122. GREVIO further notes with concern that there are few shelters that respond to the needs of women exposed to intersectional discrimination. For instance, over 40% of shelters are not accessible to women with disabilities, and of those that are, nearly two thirds lack accommodation facilities tailored to the needs of women with physical disabilities.¹⁰⁵ Access for women with

96. Rulebook on Licensing of Social Protection Organisations, 2013.

97. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

98. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

99. See the state report, p. 72.

100. Article 23 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to ensure that there are appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for women and children. Paragraph 135 of the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention provides guidance to parties on how to assess whether the current number of shelters is sufficient. More specifically, it refers to the Final Activity Report of the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (EG-TFV (2008)6), which recommends that there should be one family place per 10 000 head of population. A "family place" is defined in the Council of Europe publication "Combating violence against women: minimum standards for support services", EG-VAW-Conf (2007) Study rev., as "an adult plus the average number of children". This notwithstanding, it is important to note that the explanatory report clarifies that the number of shelter places should be adapted to the actual need/demand in the country.

101. Functioning and operation of shelters for women victims of violence in Serbia, Atina, 2023, p. 7, available in Serbian at: www.atina.org.rs/en/existing-capacities-safe-houses-serbia-correspond-quarter-prescribed-minimum.

102. Ibid., p. 38.

103. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

104. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Shelter, p. 37.

105. Written submission by Atina, p. 13.

psychosocial disabilities, women with addiction issues and trans women appears to be even more challenging.¹⁰⁶ GREVIO has also received worrying information regarding Roma women being denied access to shelters in Novi Bečej, reportedly due to issues related to hygiene or the number of children accompanying them.¹⁰⁷ Only one shelter, operated by the NGO Atina, provides specialised support for asylum-seeking and migrant women who are victims of violence.

123. The existing referral system requires women to first approach the Centre for Social Welfare in their place of residence to access shelters, making self-referrals for those who wish to seek accommodation in a shelter outside their place of residence either impossible or contingent upon the shelter's willingness to accommodate the woman, sometimes at her own expense.

124. Regarding other forms of specialist services, GREVIO notes a lack of long-term psychosocial support tailored to victims of violence against women within the social welfare or public healthcare system – the limited short-term psychological counselling provided by some Centres for Social Welfare notwithstanding. This is particularly evident in areas without established Family Counselling Centres, and even where such centres exist, there is no standardised, trauma-informed approach to treating victims of violence against women. Long-term psychosocial support is thus primarily offered by shelters, with approximately 80% providing some form of counselling. However, research indicates that none of these shelters have dedicated professionals for this task; instead, shelter employees with relevant education offer it on an ad hoc basis.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, while certain shelters have the capacity to offer psychosocial support to children who have witnessed domestic violence, these services remain limited in availability.¹⁰⁹ This issue is further exacerbated by the insufficient number of professionals, with only 123 psychologists employed in public healthcare institutions across Serbia¹¹⁰ and only 21 licensed child psychiatrists.¹¹¹ To address this issue, GREVIO welcomes the information provided by the Serbian authorities that the Ministry of Health has declared psychiatry and child psychiatry as deficit specialisations for 2025, a designation that will enable the implementation of measures aimed at expanding the mental health workforce.

125. GREVIO welcomes the implementation of a specialised empowerment programme for women in prison, developed in response to a survey of incarcerated women, which revealed that the majority had experienced gender-based violence at some point in their lives. The programme is designed to enhance the emotional well-being of participants, promote understanding of healthy family and intimate-partner relationships and equip them with practical skills for successful reintegration into society, including through economic empowerment. GREVIO also commends the development of a tailored module for juvenile female offenders as part of this initiative.

126. Regarding legal support for victims of violence against women, GREVIO notes with concern that the Law on Free Legal Aid has effectively excluded specialist women's support organisations from providing legal representation, limiting their role to free legal counselling, while at the same time recognising victims of domestic violence as beneficiaries of such legal aid. In contrast, NGOs working on asylum and discrimination continue to be recognised as providers of free legal aid, a disparity previously criticised in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report. GREVIO notes with concern that it results in women victims of domestic violence seeking legal aid from lawyers employed by public legal aid services established by local municipalities, as well as those registered with the Bar Association to provide free legal aid, who frequently are not adequately informed about the specific dynamics of domestic violence, instead of being given the option of obtaining legal representation by specialist lawyers working in women's support services.¹¹² GREVIO also notes with regret that under the current legal framework victims of forms of gender-based violence other than domestic violence are not included in the free legal aid scheme.

106. Written submission by FemPlatz and Fenomena, p. 10.

107. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

108. Written submission by Atina, p. 14.

109. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Shelter, p. 38.

110. Health and statistical yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, Institute for Public Health of Serbia, Dr Milan Jovanović Batut, 2022.

111. Written submission by the Centre for Support of Women, p. 10.

112. Written submission by FemPlatz and Fenomena, p. 18.

127. Last, GREVIO regrets that specialist support services in Serbia continue to be predominantly focused on domestic violence, with no dedicated support available for victims of forced marriage, FGM, stalking, sexual violence or sexual harassment, nor for victims of online and technology-facilitated violence against women. Consequently, emergency accommodation, counselling, long-term psychological support and trauma care remain largely inaccessible to victims of these forms of violence.

128. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the provision of adequate specialist support services with a gendered approach throughout the country and for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including by:

- a. increasing the number of available shelter places and addressing gaps in underserved municipalities, with the aim of ensuring safe accommodation for women victims of violence regardless of their residence status and place of residence;**
- b. making shelters accessible to all women victims of gender-based violence and their children, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, and offering the option to self-refer;**
- c. revising licensing standards for shelters to focus on ensuring gender-sensitive, victim-centred and empowering support, rather than creating administrative obstacles for existing shelters;**
- d. providing specialist immediate, medium and long-term psychosocial support to victims of all forms of violence against women, free of charge;**
- e. ensuring the provision of specialist legal aid for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, drawing on the long-standing expertise developed by women's specialist support services provided by NGOs.**

4. Support for victims of sexual violence (Article 25)

129. Under Article 25 of the convention, parties are required to provide a set of holistic services to victims of sexual violence, including immediate medical care and trauma support, combined with forensic examinations, as well as short- and long-term psychological counselling and therapy to ensure the victim's recovery. Such services should be provided by trained and specialised staff in an appropriate manner to respond to the victims' needs, preferably within rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres established in sufficient number throughout the country to ensure their easy access. The recommendation is to set up one of the above-mentioned centres per every 200 000 inhabitants.¹¹³

130. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had noted with concern the absence of fully established rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres in Serbia, apart from three centres in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which operated without sustainable public funding. Outside Vojvodina, however, victims had to rely on non-specialist forensic examiners, often undergoing multiple examinations and encountering financial barriers because of the fees required for obtaining forensic reports.

131. While a fourth sexual violence referral has been opened in Vojvodina, which GREVIO welcomes, the overall situation in the country has not been remedied since the adoption of the baseline evaluation report. Outside Vojvodina forensic examinations continue to be conducted at medical institutions upon the instruction of the public prosecutor once the victim reports the rape to the police. While victims can request documentation of their injuries at their own expense, rape kits are not readily available in either general medical institutions or the sexual violence referral centres in Vojvodina and can only be provided by a police officer. This removes the possibility of collecting and preserving forensic evidence at the request of the victim and irrespective of her willingness to pursue criminal proceedings, which is not in line with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention.

113. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 142.

132. Moreover, GREVIO regrets that the treatment of victims of sexual violence by general forensic doctors cannot be considered a holistic service, as these professionals lack specialised training in responding to victims of sexual violence and rape. No specific protocol is in place to provide guidance in this regard and the Special Protocol for the Protection and Treatment of Women Victims of Violence does not include provisions on responding to sexual violence or conducting forensic examinations in such cases.

133. Furthermore, according to information from women's rights organisations, victims are not automatically offered testing for sexually transmitted diseases or HIV, emergency contraception or the opportunity to consult with a psychologist.¹¹⁴

134. Regarding the existing sexual violence referral centres, GREVIO notes with concern that they continue to rely on funding from international donors, with no efforts made to ensure their long-term sustainability. Additionally, information from civil society organisations indicates that these centres no longer employ dedicated in-house psychologists who previously provided psychological support to victims before, during and after forensic examinations.¹¹⁵

135. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to establish rape crisis centres and/or sexual violence referral centres across the country, ensuring a sufficiently widespread geographical distribution to make them accessible to victims in both rural and urban areas. These centres must provide comprehensive support, including medical care, trauma support, forensic examinations and immediate and long-term psychological counselling and support by qualified professionals trained in victim-sensitive approaches. The collection of relevant forensic documentation must not be contingent upon the victim's willingness to report the violence to the police and must be provided free of charge.

C. Substantive law

136. Chapter V of the Istanbul Convention covers a range of provisions related to substantive law, in the area of both civil and criminal law, which aim to create the necessary legislative framework to prevent women and girls' further victimisation and to ensure robust intervention and prosecution by law-enforcement agencies. This section focuses on progress made with respect to selected provisions of the convention in the area of substantive law, notably Article 31 on custody, visitation rights and safety and Article 48 on the prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing in cases of violence against women.

1. Custody, visitation rights and safety (Article 31)

137. Custody and visitation decisions in relation to families with a history of abuse require a careful balancing of the different interests at stake. Article 31 of the Istanbul Convention seeks to ensure that incidents of violence covered by the convention, in particular domestic violence, are taken into account in decisions on custody and visitation rights, to ensure that the exercise of these rights does not harm the rights and safety of the victim or children. This provision contributes directly towards their trust in the authorities because it offers essential protection from post-separation abuse.¹¹⁶

114. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 41.

115. Ibid., p. 39.

116. It is noteworthy that in the case of *Bîzdîga v. the Republic of Moldova* (Application No. 15646/18, 17 October 2023), the European Court of Human Rights held that in proceedings concerning the custody and visitation rights regarding children in a domestic violence context, the primary focus must be on the best interests of the child, and an assessment of any risks of violence or other forms of ill-treatment therefore has to form an integral part of such proceedings. For this reason, it found that an alleged history of domestic violence was a relevant and even mandatory factor to be weighed in the assessment of domestic authorities when deciding on contact rights (paragraph 62). In the recent case of *Luca v. the Republic of Moldova* (Application No. 55351/17, 17 October 2023), the Court found a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights on account of the failure of the Moldovan authorities to take into account incidents of domestic violence in the determination of child contact rights.

138. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had identified a number of shortcomings in the protection of victims of domestic violence and their children in custody and visitation proceedings. While Serbia's legal framework permitted courts to limit parental contact or withdraw parental rights in cases where a child has witnessed domestic violence, these measures were rarely applied in practice. Furthermore, Centres for Social Welfare, whose assessments served as the primary basis for court decisions, were under-resourced and lacked specialisation in domestic violence, resulting in rushed evaluations. Even in cases where these centres recommended against contact, courts continued to order supervised or unsupervised visits, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and its psychological impact on children. GREVIO had also expressed concern over the disproportionate placement of Roma children in state care, separating them from their mothers in domestic violence cases.

139. GREVIO welcomes the explicit recognition in Serbian Family Law that the presence of domestic violence, including violence witnessed by a child, is a factor to be considered when determining child contact in cases of parental separation. Additionally, several recently adopted bylaws, such as the "Professional methodological instructions for the work of guardianship authorities in the process of maintaining the personal relations of a child with a parent, relatives and other persons with whom he has a special closeness in controlled conditions" and the new General Protocol on Handling and Multisectoral Co-operation in Situations of Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, reaffirm the status of children exposed to domestic violence as victims in their own right. However, concerns remain regarding the implementation of these provisions in practice.

140. Instead, GREVIO notes that custody and visitation procedures lack active screening and systematic assessments of safety risks for both mothers and children, as well as the impact of domestic violence on children. Courts primarily rely on assessments conducted by Centres for Social Welfare; however, a 2020 analysis of reports from these centres in 15 custody and visitation cases involving domestic violence witnessed by the child found that risk assessments were carried out in only 40% of cases. Moreover, at most, only half of the reports addressed the negative effects of exposure to domestic violence on children. In contrast, 40% of the reports highlighted the positive relationship between fathers and children, even in cases where emergency or protection measures had been issued in favour of the mother.¹¹⁷

141. GREVIO observes a similar approach by courts in parental separation cases, with reports from civil society organisations indicating that a history of domestic violence, including the presence of criminal convictions, protection measures and post-separation violence, only occasionally results in decisions for supervised contact between the abusive parent and the child.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, emergency and protection measures issued for mothers are rarely extended to their children. GREVIO notes that in 2022 only 6.6% of protection measures in domestic violence cases included children, despite Centres for Social Welfare identifying children as making up 21% of domestic violence victims that year.¹¹⁹ While this figure increased slightly to 9% in 2023, the lack of data distinguishing between children who were direct victims and those exposed to domestic violence suggests that the proportion of protected child witnesses is even lower.

142. A particularly worrying practice identified by GREVIO is the explicit inclusion of the concept of parental alienation in the "Professional Methodological Instructions for the Work of Guardianship Authorities", issued by the Republic Institute for Social Protection in 2021. These instructions define parental alienation as "any behaviour that encourages the child to develop a negative opinion and behaviour towards the parent, ranging from speaking negatively about the parent in front of the child to directly instructing the child to hate the parent and deny them the maintenance of personal relations". The instructions also prescribe the mandatory inclusion of both the child and parents in psychotherapy treatment in severe cases of "parental alienation". GREVIO notes with concern that

117. Assessments by the Centres for Social Welfare on the consequences, security risks and recovery needs of children witnesses of violence in parental relationships, Tanja Ignjatović (Autonomous Women's Centre), 2020, p. 314, available in Serbian at: www.doiserbia.nb.rs/ft.aspx?id=1450-663720033071.

118. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 46.

119. Ibid., p. 42.

the instructions fail to acknowledge the historical use of such concepts to discredit women's valid reports of domestic violence and children's legitimate reluctance to contact an abusive father, nor do they consider the potential safety risks that reliance on such concepts may pose. GREVIO nonetheless welcomes the information that the Republic Institute for Social Protection has initiated a revision of the Methodological Instructions, in cooperation with civil society organisations, with the aim of amending the use of the term "alienation" to better safeguard the safety of women and children.

143. In practice, the concept of parental alienation is used by Centres for Social Welfare and courts to dismiss children's refusal to have contact with an abusive parent. In such cases, the history of domestic violence is often downplayed as an isolated incident or a high-conflict relationship, while maintaining the child's contact with the violent parent is prioritised. This is frequently accompanied by accusations that the mother, as the non-violent parent, is manipulating the child. GREVIO further notes with grave concern the reports indicating that children, and in some cases, the non-violent parent, are ordered to undergo psychotherapy to facilitate co-operation with the abusive parent, under the threat of fines or loss of parental rights.¹²⁰

144. GREVIO recalls that a child's exposure to physical, sexual or psychological violence and abuse between parents or other family members breeds fear, causes trauma and adversely affects children's health and development.¹²¹ GREVIO also recalls that joint parenting in these circumstances allows perpetrators to maintain their control and dominance over the mother and children. As it has had occasion to note in several of its evaluation reports, the positioning of mothers as alienating, hostile or un-co-operative contributes to a masking of the extent of the violence experienced by both, the abused mother and the children exposed to such abuse, with a detrimental impact on their ability to obtain safe custody and visitation decisions.¹²² Additionally, GREVIO stresses the importance of having mechanisms in place for safe supervised visits as well as adequate support from social services. In this context, it is essential to ensure appropriate training of all professionals involved, including judges, court-appointed experts and social and child-protection services, on violence against women and domestic violence.

145. GREVIO notes with regret that the custody and visitation system in Serbia fails to uphold the safety and well-being of mothers and child victims of domestic violence, with social welfare professionals, judges and court-appointed experts lacking a sufficient understanding of the dynamics of intimate partner violence and the psychological impact of witnessing violence on children. This lack of understanding results in continued post-separation violence towards mothers and children, sometimes occurring even during supervised visitations at Centres for Social Welfare, which not only endangers the safety of the mother and children but also puts social welfare professionals at risk.¹²³ This is exemplified by the murder of a two-year-old girl from Vršac by her father during a visitation in 2022. In this instance, the protection measures issued for the mother were not extended to the child.¹²⁴

120. See the findings of the research conducted on 24 custody and visitation cases from the basic courts in Belgrade, Niš and Kragujevac: "Domestic violence hidden behind the concept of 'alienation from parents' – Analysis of court proceedings related to trust and maintaining personal contacts of children with the other parent", Ignjatović T., Pavlov T. and Lukić M. (Autonomous Women's Centre), 2024, key results of the research available in English at: www.womenngo.org.rs/en/news/2249-the-awc-presented-findings-of-legal-analysis-and-judicial-practice-research-on-the-concept-of-parental-alienation.

121. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 143.

122. See for example GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report on Denmark, paragraph 116.

123. See: "Social workers on targets – Can objective decisions be made under threats and public pressure?", Radio Television of Serbia, 2024, available in Serbian at: www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/5396466/socijalni-radnici-na-meti-napada-mogu-li-se-pod-pretnjama-i-pritiskom-javnosti-doneti-objektivne-odluke.html; "Increasingly frequent attacks on workers at Centres for Social Work, they are also threatened on social networks", Radio Television of Serbia, 2022, available in Serbian at: www.rts.rs/lat/vesti/drustvo/4924605/sve-cesci-napadi-na-radnike-centara-za-socijalni-rad-preti-im-se-i-na-drustvenim-mrezama-.html; "Social workers frequently attacked", Politika, 2025; "New tragedy at a Centre for Social Work: man murdered wife and child, three people injured", 2017, available in Serbian at: www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/nova-tragedija-u-centru-za-socijalni-rad-muskarac-ubio-zenu-i-dete-ranjene-tri-osobe/r2yr2em.

124. See the findings of the investigation of the Protector of Citizens into this case, where he concluded that the competent authorities failed to protect both the mother and the deceased child: www.ombudsman.org.rs/index.php?limitstart=24.

146. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation to ensure the safety of victims and their children:

- a. ensure that the legal obligation to consider incidents of violence against women and domestic violence when assessing the best interests of the child in custody and visitation proceedings is effectively upheld in practice, including by raising awareness among the Serbian judiciary by introducing specific guidelines for judges handling such cases;
- b. implement screening and risk-assessment procedures to systematically and proactively identify cases of violence in custody and visitation proceedings;
- c. take steps to ensure that professionals at Centres for Social Welfare have a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, post-separation abuse, the harmful impacts of witnessing domestic violence on children and the safety risks of continued contact with an abusive parent, through professional training efforts and revising relevant professional guidelines and protocols;
- d. take all appropriate measures to ensure that all relevant professionals, including social workers, members of the judiciary, court experts and child psychologists are aware of the lack of a scientific basis for the "parental alienation syndrome" and refrain from using concepts that position women victims of abuse as alienating, hostile or un-co-operative;
- e. improve the conditions for supervised visits by ensuring that staff at Centres for Social Welfare understand their role and responsibility in supervising and documenting these visits and by allocating adequate resources to create appropriate conditions for such visits on Centres for Social Welfare premises, with a view to ensuring the safety of mothers, children and social workers.

2. Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing (Article 48)

147. Article 48, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to prohibit the mandatory participation in any alternative dispute resolution processes, including mediation and conciliation, in relation to cases of all forms of violence against women covered by the convention. This provision stems from the principle that violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power relations and that victims of such violence can never enter the alternative dispute resolution processes on an equal footing with the perpetrator. To avoid the recurrence of such violence and to enable the victim to seek justice, it is the responsibility of the state to provide access to adversarial court proceedings on the basis of robust criminal and civil law provisions.

148. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had concluded that the provision in the Serbian Criminal Code permitting the deferral of prosecution for certain offences, including domestic violence, provided the suspect agreed to fulfil specific obligations such as paying a fine, undergoing treatment or completing community service, was not widely applied, except in cases where the offence was considered minor, victims withdrew their statements or the perpetrator agreed to undergo perpetrator programmes. However, GREVIO had expressed concern that the decision to defer prosecution is made solely by the prosecutor with the perpetrator's consent, excluding the victim's perspective from the process.

149. GREVIO welcomes the introduction of mandatory instructions by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office prohibiting deferred prosecution through the payment of fines in cases of domestic violence. Furthermore, GREVIO notes with satisfaction the continued decline in the number of deferrals in domestic violence cases compared to the 3.18% recorded in the baseline evaluation report. In this regard, in 2023, domestic violence charges dismissed under the deferral of prosecution mechanism accounted for 1.15% of all dismissed cases, while in 2022, this figure stood at 1.23%.¹²⁵

125. State report, p. 92.

150. While GREVIO acknowledges the cautious approach taken in applying this mechanism to domestic violence cases in Serbia, it notes with concern that victims remain without a voice in the process. Similarly, they are not involved in plea agreements, another mechanism through which the public prosecutor seeks reduced sanctions in cases of violence against women. This lack of victim participation risks undermining trust in the justice system, conveying a message to society that such offences are not treated with the seriousness they warrant and that perpetrators may act with impunity.

151. In civil proceedings, mediation may be offered to parties in divorce cases or proceedings concerning custody and visitation rights. Article 230, paragraph 2, of the Family Law explicitly states that mediation shall only take place with the consent of both parties. While GREVIO welcomes this safeguard, it lacks information on the measures implemented in practice to ensure that, in cases with a history of domestic violence, victims do not feel implicitly pressured to undergo mediation. Furthermore, there is no available information on whether mediation professionals, including court-appointed mediators or those working in Centres for Social Welfare, receive the necessary training to identify undisclosed domestic violence or to understand power dynamics in such cases, which may lead victims to agree to mediation without fully informed and voluntary consent.

152. GREVIO encourages the Serbian authorities to continue their efforts to ensure that deferral of prosecutions and plea agreements are applied only in exceptional cases and to adopt relevant measures, including legislative reforms, to integrate the victim's perspective into the process with the aim of preventing impunity.

153. GREVIO further encourages the Serbian authorities to ensure that mediation conducted in family law proceedings do not become quasi-mandatory in cases involving a history of domestic violence by:

- a. **adopting screening procedures to systematically identify cases of violence in family law proceedings;**
- b. **introducing the obligation to proactively inform parties of the voluntary nature of mediation, emphasising that declining to participate will not result in any negative legal consequences with a view to ensuring that cases are only referred to mediation with the freely given and informed consent of the victim;**
- c. **ensuring that, where domestic violence becomes apparent during the mediation process, the victim is actively offered the opportunity to halt the mediation and return the case to an adversarial procedure;**
- d. **improving the awareness of judges and mediators regarding power imbalances in relationships affected by violence, enabling them to take these dynamics into account when determining whether mediation should be proposed.**

D. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

154. Full accountability for all acts of violence against women requires an adequate response from law-enforcement agencies and the criminal justice sector. Chapter VI of the Istanbul Convention establishes a set of measures to ensure criminal investigations, prosecutions and convictions in a manner that validates women's and girls' experiences of violence, that avoids their secondary victimisation and that offers protection throughout the different stages of proceedings. The provisions covered in this section are fundamental to the delivery of protection and justice for all women and girls at risk of or who have experienced gender-based violence.

1. General obligations (Article 49) and Immediate response, prevention and protection (Article 50)

155. A key principle of an adequate response to violence against women is that of swift and effective investigations and judicial proceedings that are based on a gendered understanding of these types of offences and that take into consideration the rights of the victim during all stages. Law enforcement or judicial actors often do not prioritise incidents of violence against women and domestic violence, thereby contributing to the impunity of perpetrators and reinforcing the misconception that this type of violence is “acceptable” in society.¹²⁶ The consequences of assigning low priority to incidents of violence against women and domestic violence are delays in initiating investigations and judicial processes, which in turn may lead to the loss of vital evidence and to an increased risk for the victim of repeated violence. For these reasons, Article 49 of the convention requires parties to ensure that investigations and judicial proceedings are conducted without undue delay, while at the same time respecting the rights of victims during each stage of these processes. Article 50 further reinforces these obligations by requiring that law-enforcement agencies react promptly and appropriately in cases of violence against women, including by offering victims immediate protection and by engaging in the prevention of violence. GREVIO reports focus on the application of Article 50 at key stages of the criminal justice process, notably reporting, investigation, prosecution and conviction, all of which are key contributors to victims’ sense of support, protection and justice.

a. Reporting to, immediate response and investigations by law-enforcement agencies

156. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had acknowledged that the existing legislation, protocols, guidelines and training initiatives contained measures to ensure a swift response to cases of violence against women by law-enforcement officers. These measures aim to secure evidence, prevent secondary victimisation and gather information on prior reports of violence, any protective measures issued and social welfare records. However, GREVIO had expressed concern regarding the absence of standardised procedures for other forms of violence against women, such as early and forced marriage. Additionally, it highlighted the reliance on victims’ statements in domestic violence cases, often resulting in case dismissals when testimonies are withdrawn.

157. GREVIO notes that the protocols and guidelines in place at the time of the baseline evaluation remain in force, including the Special Protocol on the Procedure of Police Officers in Cases of Violence against Women in the Family and in Partner Relationships and the Guidelines for the Prevention of Secondary Victimisation of Women Victims of Violence in Contact with Police Officers. Additionally, GREVIO notes with interest the development of new guidelines¹²⁷ by the Ministry of Interior in collaboration with UNDP in 2021, which provide guidance to police officers on proving the criminal offence of domestic violence. These guidelines outline procedures for collecting physical and digital evidence and for documenting injuries, including those that may not be immediately visible, and offer insights into victims’ psychology and trauma responses. They also include measures to prevent re-traumatisation when gathering victim’s testimony. However, GREVIO could not obtain information on the extent to which these guidelines have been disseminated and whether their implementation is supported by training initiatives.

158. GREVIO welcomes the establishment of specialised units within each police department in Serbia to handle domestic and sexual violence cases. If a patrol officer is the first to respond to an incident of violence against women, they are required to inform the designated specialised officer. Victims or witnesses may report incidents of violence against women in person at a police station, via telephone or e-mail, as well as through other authorities such as Centres for Social Welfare or healthcare institutions. In this regard, GREVIO notes that in 2022 Centres for Social Welfare submitted 346 criminal reports related to domestic violence against women and 73 reports concerning domestic violence against children.¹²⁸

126. Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 255.

127. Guide for Effective Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence: Skills in Proving the Criminal Offence of Domestic Violence, Ministry of Interior in partnership with the UNDP, 2021, available in Serbian at: www.undp.org/sr/serbia/publications/vestine-u-dokazivanju-krivcnog-dela-nasilje-u-porodici.

128. Written submission by the Autonomous Women’s Centre, p. 30.

159. The findings of the survey “Women as victims of violence from the perspective of statistics” indicate, however, that only approximately 25% of victims of intimate partner violence choose to report the incident to the police or other authorities. GREVIO notes with concern that, even in the most serious cases resulting in murder, nearly 80% of the victims had never reported the violence.¹²⁹ GREVIO acknowledges that some of the reasons for non-reporting stem from women’s perceptions of violence, such as the belief that the incident is a personal or family matter, feelings of shame and guilt and the perception that the violence is not serious enough to warrant police involvement, which need to be addressed via broader awareness-raising initiatives. However, other factors highlight a lack of trust in the criminal justice system and its ability to provide protection from further violence. These include fear of retaliation from the perpetrator, mistrust in the police and the belief that law enforcement is unable to offer effective assistance.¹³⁰

160. Moreover, research has identified certain police practices that deviate from the Special Protocol on the Procedure of Police Officers in Cases of Violence against Women in the Family and in Partner Relationships and may contribute to the aforementioned lack of trust in law enforcement. For instance, in 22.7% of cases, victims were not interviewed separately from the perpetrator at the scene and 52% of victims reported being asked whether they wished to pursue criminal proceedings, even though the protocol explicitly prohibits officers from expressing personal opinions about the incident or inquiring about the victim’s willingness to press charges.¹³¹

161. GREVIO further points out that the existing protocols and guidelines focus exclusively on domestic violence, highlighting a gap in the guidance provided to law-enforcement professionals on adopting a gender-sensitive, trauma-informed approach to other forms of violence against women. Notably, GREVIO highlights that no cases of forced marriage have been reported to the police, with only a single report of FGM recorded in 2021, since these forms of violence against women were introduced as criminal offences in the Criminal Code in 2016.¹³² The reporting rates for forced marriage appear to be particularly low, especially considering studies showing that 30% of Roma women in Serbia enter a marital or common-law union by parental decision or coercion by their partners, and 67% enter such unions before the age of 18.¹³³ In this regard, GREVIO highlights recent research findings indicating that systemic and cultural factors significantly impede Roma women from recognising and reporting violence. In addition to the general barriers to reporting, such as age, rural residence and limited access to education, Roma women encounter specific challenges, including profound institutional distrust stemming from experiences of racism and ethnic discrimination.¹³⁴

162. Another group of women who face significant barriers in reporting violence against women, especially in rural areas, are LGBTI women. According to information from civil society organisations, lesbian women’s claims of domestic violence are often not taken seriously, as their relationships are not always recognised as domestic partnerships, while trans women reporting violence frequently experience discrimination by the law-enforcement authorities, including being deadnamed.¹³⁵

163. Law-enforcement authorities in Serbia also appear to lack sufficient awareness and understanding of online and technology-facilitated violence against women, including image-based abuse. Despite the prevalence of this issue, victims report instances where police officers have doubted their accounts, failed to recognise the severity of the violence or even justified the

129. See the “Femicide Memorial” established by the Autonomous Women’s Centre, www.womenngo.org.rs/en/femicide-memorial.

130. “Women victims of violence from the point of view of statistics”, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2022, available in Serbian at: www.stat.gov.rs/sr-cyrl/vesti/20220630-zenezrtvenasilja/?a=0&s=0501.

131. Respecting the Minimum Rights of Victims of Gender-Based Violence When Reporting and Processing Violence, Autonomous Women’s Centre, 2024, pp. 11-13.

132. Eleventh report on independent monitoring of the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence in Serbia in the period January-December 2022, Autonomous Women Centre, 2023, p. 15.

133. Criminal prosecution in cases of forced and child marriage in Serbia – Data for 2020 and 2021, Roma Centre for Women and Children “DAJE”, 2023, available at: www.romadaje.org/?p=7723&lang=en.

134. “Why don’t women report domestic violence?”, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in partnership with the UNDP, 2023, p. 64, available in Serbian at: www.undp.org/sr/serbia/publications/zasto-zene-ne-prijavljuju-nasilje-u-porodici-rezultati-istrazivanja.

135. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

perpetrators' actions.¹³⁶ Catfishing and extortion are also common on dating websites and women face an increased risk of sexual attacks after meeting people through such platforms. However, due to social stigma they often refrain from reporting these crimes and when they do, their experiences are often dismissed by the police.¹³⁷

164. As for reporting of sexual violence, GREVIO notes a decline in reported cases of rape over the past two decades, from 203 in 2000 to 44 in 2020, 79 in 2021, 58 in 2022, and 75 in 2023 and remains very low. Various factors may contribute to the low reporting rate of sexual violence, including the limited number of sexual assault centres offering holistic services as well as broader challenges associated with forensic examinations in Serbia and the alleged use of polygraphs by the police.¹³⁸ GREVIO notes with concern that a key factor affecting reporting rates is the persistent definition of rape in the Serbian Criminal Code, which is based on force and coercion rather than consent. Consequently, many women's and girls' experiences of sexual violence are not effectively criminalised, preventing them from accessing justice. The Istanbul Convention requires its parties to adopt a consent-based definition of rape, a call reaffirmed in the "Conclusions on the implementation of recommendations in respect of Serbia adopted by the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention".¹³⁹ GREVIO notes that this approach has been shown to improve reporting rates.¹⁴⁰ Such legislative reforms should also be accompanied by further specialisation of police officers in delivering a gender-sensitive and trauma-informed response to cases of sexual violence, which is currently lacking in Serbia.

165. GREVIO notes with regret the findings of recent studies indicating victims' dissatisfaction with the attitudes and responses of professionals involved in the investigation process, highlighting a lack of sensitivity, professionalism and efficiency. Many victims describe feeling dismissed, ignored or even blamed for the violence they experienced, with some recounting instances where officials refused to listen or took minimal action. Law enforcement's failure to enforce protective measures, such as restraining orders, further exacerbates victims' sense of insecurity. Additionally, a pattern of belittling and indifferent attitudes among professionals has been reported, with some victims experiencing outright sexist behaviour that undermines their credibility and discourages them from seeking justice. This systemic disregard for victims' experiences not only erodes trust in institutions but also reinforces a culture of impunity and encourages gender-based violence in both speech and behaviour, ultimately deterring many women from reporting violence in the first place.¹⁴¹

166. GREVIO notes that the physical conditions of police stations and other logistical factors may deter many victims, in particular those who are exposed to intersectional discrimination, from reporting the violence they have suffered. Information provided by women's rights organisations indicates that police departments do not have allocated funds for interpreters and translators, often compelling victims to seek assistance from civil society organisations. Additionally, not all police stations, or the specialised domestic violence units therein, are accessible to women with mobility impairments, and victims with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities, as well as those who are hard of hearing or blind, face even greater accessibility challenges. Last, GREVIO notes that in many instances, police officers and prosecutors share offices, which may cause victims to feel uncomfortable about the lack of privacy.¹⁴²

136. "I was powerless": Serbian women detail devastating impact of revenge porn", Balkan Insight, 2023, available at: www.balkaninsight.com/2023/03/14/i-was-powerless-serbian-women-detail-devastating-impact-of-revenge-porn/.

137. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

138. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 63 corroborated by information obtained during the evaluation visit.

139. "Conclusions on the implementation of recommendations in respect of Serbia adopted by the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention", available at: www.rm.coe.int/conclusions-on-the-implementation-of-recommendations-in-respect-of-ser/1680ab7280.

140. See the 4th General Report on GREVIO's activities, 2023, p. 39, available at: www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/4th-general-report-on-grevio-s-activities.

141. "Why don't women report domestic violence?", Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in partnership with the UNDP, 2023, p. 47.

142. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, pp. 57-61.

167. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to take measures to promote victims' trust in law-enforcement authorities in order to increase their willingness to report experiences of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention to police, including by:

- a. ensuring greater adherence to standard investigative procedures set out in existing protocols and guidelines;
- b. developing standard investigative procedures for other forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, including early and forced marriage, sexual violence and harassment and digital manifestations of violence against women, and ensuring their implementation;
- c. enhancing awareness among law-enforcement authorities with a view to eradicating stereotypical notions regarding violence against women and sexist attitudes towards victims;
- d. ensuring a gender-sensitive and trauma-informed response to sexual violence;
- e. allocating sufficient resources to law-enforcement authorities to enhance the physical accessibility of police premises, improve their comfort and privacy for interviewing victims, and ensure the availability of interpretation and translation services, including sign language interpretation, information in braille and easy-to-understand materials.

b. Effective investigation and prosecution

168. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed a strong reliance by police and prosecution services on victims' statements, particularly in domestic violence cases. This dependence frequently resulted in the termination of prosecutions when victims withdrew their testimonies due to a lack of supporting evidence, although GREVIO also acknowledged instances of successful prosecutions that proceeded without victim testimony. A particularly concerning issue identified by GREVIO in this regard was reports of women facing retaliation for withdrawing or altering their statements, including cases where they were charged with false accusations. Additionally, GREVIO had emphasised the importance of concluding investigations into violence against women within a reasonable time frame, given the excessive delays observed at both the investigation and trial stages.

169. In practice, despite domestic violence cases being recognised as a priority for law enforcement and prosecution authorities in the General Protocol on Handling and Multisectoral Co-operation in Situations of Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, GREVIO notes that investigations continue to face delays due to certain working methods of prosecutors, such as limiting interviews to a single designated day per week. According to information provided by women's rights organisations, it can take two to three months for the perpetrator to be summoned and up to six months before the victim is able to testify. Perpetrators frequently delay their statements by requesting postponements, citing reasons such as the need to hire a defence lawyer or illness. On average, it is reportedly a minimum of one year before prosecutors submit indictments to the court.¹⁴³

170. GREVIO notes that while Serbia does not have an official unit of specialised prosecutors for violence against women, public prosecutors leading the co-ordination and co-operation groups possess *de facto* expertise of handling domestic violence cases. However, it is unclear whether they receive mandatory initial and in-service training on effectively responding to such cases, including trauma-informed approaches.¹⁴⁴

171. The challenges facing the prosecutorial system in terms of addressing violence against women effectively are further reflected in the prosecution of online technology-facilitated violence against women. The Special Department for Combating Cybercrime at the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade is the sole authority responsible for prosecuting the digital manifestations of

143. Ibid.

144. See Article 15, Training of professionals.

violence against women. However, information available to GREVIO indicates that the department is severely understaffed, while its workload remains disproportionately high due to the prevalence of such violence in Serbia, particularly image-based abuse.¹⁴⁵

172. In 2023 public prosecutors' offices handled a total of 12 451 reports of family violence under Article 194 of the Criminal Code, which included 8 103 newly reported cases and 4 348 cases carried over from the previous year. This is compared to 2022, when 7 638 new cases were reported bringing the total to 12 201 after accounting for 4 414 carried-over cases. According to information provided by the Serbian authorities, prosecutors dismissed 35.70% of cases in 2023 and 38.51% in 2022.¹⁴⁶ As acknowledged by the authorities, one of the factors contributing to the high attrition rates is the victim's unwillingness to testify against the perpetrator.¹⁴⁷

173. Regarding sexual violence in 2022, out of 116 reported cases of rape, prosecutors issued 30 indictments. In 2023, this ratio was 48 indictments out of 108 reported cases. For sexual harassment, prosecutors acted on 495 reports in 2022, resulting in 127 indictments, while in 2023, 552 reports led to 169 indictments. GREVIO observes that the absence of a specialised approach to sexual violence within the public prosecution services may contribute to low prosecution rates, a situation further exacerbated by the lack of specific guidance and training for prosecutors. It stresses the need for a gender-sensitive and trauma-informed response to victims of violence against women, including sexual violence and rape, across all levels of the justice system. In this regard, GREVIO notes the benefits of establishing specialised prosecution teams dedicated to handling cases of sexual violence, in addition to those addressing domestic violence.

174. These figures indicate a significant attrition rate across various forms of violence against women, highlighting the need for investigative and prosecution authorities to move beyond an over-reliance on the victim's testimony. Instead, they should proactively gather corroborating evidence, including medical records, witness statements and digital evidence. Additionally, it is essential to recognise the psychological impact of trauma on the victim, which may result in inconsistent statements or reluctance to testify, and ensure that such factors do not undermine the victim's credibility. Police officers and prosecutors must also actively challenge harmful gender biases and stereotypes that trivialise violence while implementing protective measures to safeguard victims from retaliation and intimidation.

175. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. identify and address factors contributing to case attrition in all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;**
- b. strengthen investigative and prosecutorial case-building in accordance with rigorous professional standards for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension, and also in particular in relation to sexual violence and rape. This may include ensuring timely evidence collection beyond the victim's testimony and enabling prosecutions to proceed even when victims withdraw their statements, in line with Article 55, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention;**
- c. implement measures to ensure a victim-centred, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approach to handling cases of violence against women, prioritising these cases appropriately and preventing secondary victimisation.**

c. Conviction rates

176. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had identified extremely low conviction rates for certain forms of violence against women, including stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage and FGM, caused by under-reporting, insufficient case-building efforts and reluctance to apply criminal law

145. According to an article published by BIRN, the office comprises only four staff members. See: www.balkaninsight.com/2023/03/14/i-was-powerless-serbian-women-detail-devastating-impact-of-revenge-porn/.

146. See the state report, p. 122.

147. See the state report, p. 99.

within the Roma community. While rape cases generally led to convictions and prison sentences, GREVIO had raised concerns about the use of “confrontation” in legal proceedings, where victims were forced to face the perpetrators as a means of corroborating evidence.

177. GREVIO notes that conviction rates remain absent for certain offences identified in the baseline evaluation, namely FGM and forced marriage, due to a lack of reporting. Regarding the offence of persecution, which applies to stalking, GREVIO notes that in 2023, 114 convictions were reached out of 388 reported cases, while in 2022, 149 convictions resulted from 422 reports.¹⁴⁸ GREVIO welcomes the Serbian authorities’ application of this offence, introduced in 2016 to align with the Istanbul Convention, but notes that in both years, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators received probation rather than prison sentences.

178. GREVIO welcomes the judicial authorities’ application of criminal provisions on sexual violence and harassment, as reflected in the relatively high conviction rates for these offences. In 2022, 122 convictions were reached from 127 indictments for sexual harassment, while in 2023, 136 convictions resulted from 169 indictments, with sentences primarily divided between prison terms and conditional sentences. Similarly, for rape, 30 indictments in 2022 led to 19 convictions, and 47 indictments in 2023 resulted in 33 convictions, with nearly all convictions leading to prison sentences.¹⁴⁹ However, despite these positive developments, GREVIO notes with concern the persistently low reporting rates, which remain significantly below the estimated prevalence of these forms of violence against women, which suggests worryingly high thresholds for women victims to seek criminal justice for experiences of rape – and in turn high levels of impunity for perpetrators.

179. As for domestic violence, in both 2022 and 2023, more than half of all verdicts for family violence resulted in non-custodial sentences, with 51.35% and 53.21% respectively consisting of suspended sentences, fines, community service, court warnings or security measures. Despite the high conviction rates – 90.34% in 2022 and 92.51% in 2023 – the predominant use of suspended sentences raises concerns about the effectiveness of sanctions in deterring repeat offences and ensuring accountability for perpetrators.¹⁵⁰ One contributing factor may be the practice of prosecutors entering plea agreements with perpetrators in exchange for reduced sentences. For instance, in 2023, the prosecutor’s office reached plea agreements with 150 perpetrators in domestic violence cases, of which 142 were approved by the court, while in 2022, 151 agreements were concluded, with 154 ultimately approved.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the tendency to overly rely on the victim’s testimony during the investigative phase appears to extend to court proceedings as evidenced by the frequent acquittal of defendants based on the *in dubio pro reo* principle when victims refuse to testify, even in cases where the assault is corroborated by expert reports.¹⁵²

180. Regarding gender-based killings of women, GREVIO notes that in Serbia these are prosecuted under general offences such as murder or aggravated murder. Judicial practice reveals inconsistencies in how these crimes are classified and sentenced, often resulting in lenient penalties. Courts frequently overlook the gendered nature of these crimes, the power dynamics and prior violence, while disproportionately considering mitigating factors such as the perpetrator’s family status or courtroom behaviour. In some cases, sentences were reduced based on problematic reasoning, including gender-stereotypical views that implicitly shifted blame onto the victims.¹⁵³

181. GREVIO welcomes the provisions of the Special Protocol for the Judiciary in Cases of Violence Against Women in the Family and Partner Relationships, which emphasise the importance of prompt action, thorough preparation and a victim-centred approach in judicial proceedings. The protocol outlines judges’ responsibilities, including treating victims with respect, minimising secondary victimisation and ensuring clear communication about legal procedures and protective

148. Ibid., p. 126.

149. Ibid., pp. 124-125.

150. Ibid., pp. 122-123.

151. Ibid., p. 92. This higher number includes agreements that were concluded during the previous reporting period but approved in 2022.

152. Ibid., p. 99.

153. “Femicide in Serbia: crime and lesser punishments”, Serbian Centre for Investigative Journalism, 2023, available in Serbian at: www.cins.rs/femicid-u-srbiji-zlocin-i-manje-kazne/?tztc=1.

measures. However, the aforementioned court practices highlight the need for further efforts to enhance judges' understanding of the various forms of violence against women, ensuring more consistent and effective application of the principles enshrined in the special protocol.

182. GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to:

- a. implement measures aimed at increasing conviction rates for all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention and ensuring that the sentences and measures imposed for such offences are effective, proportionate and dissuasive;**
- b. identify and address the root causes of attrition within the criminal justice sector by establishing comprehensive data collection and case-tracking mechanisms across the sector.**

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

183. Many perpetrators of domestic violence, rape, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage and other forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention threaten their victims with serious violence, including death, and have subjected their victims to serious violence in the past, including non-fatal strangulation. The growing digital dimension to such violence further exacerbates women's and girls' sense of fear. Article 51 thus places concern for their safety at the heart of any intervention in such cases by requiring the establishment of a multi-agency network of professionals to protect high-risk victims without aggravating the harm experienced. It sets out the obligation to ensure that all relevant authorities, not just law-enforcement authorities, effectively assess and devise a plan to manage the safety risks a victim faces, on a case-by-case basis, according to standardised procedures and in co-operation with each other.¹⁵⁴

184. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report had praised the establishment of the co-ordination and co-operation groups, which are tasked with conducting a risk assessment in domestic violence cases and devising protection plans for the victims. However, GREVIO had raised concerns about the exclusive focus placed on intimate partner violence, with insufficient attention on other forms such as forced and early marriage, which are particularly relevant for Roma women and girls. GREVIO had also noted that the composition of these groups was limited to just three statutory agencies, often excluding specialist women's support services, and that risk assessments lacked standardised tools and a lack of monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of protection plans, which sometimes resulted in the failure to identify risk factors in cases where women were fatally injured or killed by current or former spouses and partners.

185. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had further expressed a particular concern regarding the lack of information on efforts to assess perpetrators' access to firearms. GREVIO notes with interest that, in 2021, a project was carried out in partnership with UNDP to address the risks associated with firearm use in domestic violence cases and to enhance the safety of victims. In this context, the National Judicial Academy created and launched an online training programme designed to improve multi-agency case management and reduce the risk of firearm violence in domestic violence case. However, GREVIO has not received any information regarding the number of professionals who have benefited from or continue to participate in this training.

154. In addition, GREVIO points out that conducting risk assessments in domestic violence situations is not only an obligation under the Istanbul Convention but also under Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, pursuant to the 2021 judgment in the case of *Kurt v. Austria* [GC], Application No. 62903/15, paragraphs 167-176, 15 June 2021. Notably, the European Court of Human Rights held that authorities needed to respond immediately to allegations of domestic violence and establish whether there exists a real and immediate risk to the life of one or more identified victims by carrying out an autonomous, proactive and comprehensive risk assessment. The reality and immediacy of the risk must be assessed taking due account of the particular context of domestic violence cases. If the outcome of the risk assessment is that there is a real and immediate risk to life, the authorities' obligation to take preventive operational measures is triggered. Such measures must be adequate and proportionate to the level of the risk assessed. The Court found that once a risk has been established, rapid sharing of information and co-ordination among relevant stakeholders is part of a comprehensive response to domestic violence, including information from child-protection agencies, schools and other childcare facilities, should children be involved.

186. When responding to calls involving domestic violence, specialised police officers conduct an on-the-spot risk assessment based on a questionnaire developed by the Ministry of Interior, comprising 27 questions on risk factors. These officers may issue emergency barring orders when they identify a risk of repeated or escalating violence. While all specialised police officers receive training on risk assessment, women's rights organisations have alerted GREVIO to certain gaps in their skills, particularly regarding the understanding that risks in domestic violence cases are not static but can escalate rapidly.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, the questionnaire does not include indicators for high-risk factors, leaving the assessment to the discretion of individual police officers. In practice, this often leads to the identification of only the most obvious risks while overlooking others, potentially resulting in a misjudgement in terms of the most effective measures needed to minimise all risks.¹⁵⁶

187. Meetings of the co-ordination and co-operation groups serve as a platform for conducting comprehensive multi-agency risk assessments. During these meetings, all group members contribute all available information on incidents of domestic violence within their purview as well as any history of violence. According to reports from civil society organisations, there is a general lack of awareness among the co-ordination and co-operation groups regarding the risks associated with certain forms of domestic violence, such as non-fatal strangulation and psychological violence, including coercive control. Similarly, according to both women's rights organisations and experts in the field, a significant risk factor that is rarely considered by the co-ordination groups, but is highly relevant in the Serbian context due to its history of armed conflict, is the perpetrator's past participation in armed conflict, the resulting post-traumatic stress disorder and the experience of displacement caused by conflict.¹⁵⁷ GREVIO further regrets that risks and threats directed towards the victim's children are also frequently overlooked in the risk-assessment process.

188. Overall, the co-ordination and co-operation groups appear to continue operating based on a list of risk factors rather than an established methodology, such as Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) or Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC). Furthermore, as highlighted in the baseline evaluation report, the participation of relevant agencies and NGOs – other than the three statutory bodies comprising the prosecutor's office, the police and Centres for Social Welfare – is by invitation only. While GREVIO welcomes the fact that in certain areas, such as the City of Belgrade, NGOs providing specialist support services for women report enjoying good co-operation with the groups and regularly participate in their meetings, this is not the case across Serbia.¹⁵⁸

189. As for risk management, GREVIO notes that there are no data on the evaluation of the outcome or impact of the protection plans devised by the co-ordination and co-operation groups. However, an assessment of cases of gender-related killings in Serbia indicates that improved efforts are needed to strengthen risk-management measures. While there are no official statistics on such murders of women and girls in Serbia with appropriate disaggregation factors related to the victim, perpetrator and event,¹⁵⁹ data referenced in the sub-section of this report addressing Articles 49 and 50 of the convention indicate that between 2021 and 2023, approximately 20% of the victims had previously reported violence,¹⁶⁰ yet were not effectively protected from further harm through the implementation of adequate safety plans. Recalling the call made by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in 2024 for the establishment of a mechanism to monitor gender-related killings of women and girls (femicides), GREVIO highlights the importance of collecting comparable data at the national level to identify possible systemic gaps in the institutional response of the authorities when victims have come into contact with them and to develop evidence-based policies for

155. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 71.

156. Written submission by the Centre for Support of Women, p. 22.

157. Ibid., p. 72.

158. See Article 18, General obligations.

159. See for example the disaggregating variables in the "Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as 'femicide/feminicide')", UNODC, 2022, available at: www.data.unwomen.org/publications/statistical-framework-measuring-gender-related-killings-women-and-girls-also-referred.

160. See the "Femicide Memorial" established by the Autonomous Women's Centre, www.womenngo.org.rs/en/femicide-memorial.

the prevention of such incidents. Additionally, suicides linked to gender-based violence, which often go undetected, should be incorporated into these review mechanisms.

190. In addition to the co-ordination and co-operation groups, the Ministry of Health's Special Protocol for the Protection and Treatment of Women Victims of Violence offers guidance to healthcare professionals on assessing safety risks and threats to life, as well as on drawing up safety plans in cases of violence against women. The risk assessment includes questions regarding the victim's fear of future harm, any threats of violence or self-harm, the victim's sense of safety when returning home or going to work and whether the perpetrator consumes drugs or alcohol. If one or more of these questions are answered positively, the protocol outlines safety measures, including seeking the victim's consent to report the violence to the police, informing the victim about available resources and referring her to relevant services such as shelters, telephone helplines and both specialist and general services. However, GREVIO lacks information on whether this risk assessment is systematically implemented in practice or whether there are measures in place to ensure its application. Given that healthcare institutions are not statutory members of the co-ordination and co-operation groups, GREVIO views this as a missed opportunity to integrate the perspectives of a key frontline sector in assessing risks and providing protection for victims. In this regard, GREVIO highlights the importance of conducting risk-assessment processes across various sectors based on internationally recognised tools in order to ensure a multidisciplinary and co-ordinated response by the system as a whole.

191. Last, GREVIO notes with concern the persistent absence of systematic risk-assessment and management mechanisms for those forms of violence against women other than domestic violence, as also highlighted in the baseline evaluation report. Despite the prevalence of such violence, there remains no comprehensive approach to assessing the risks associated with early and forced marriages or violence related to "honour", including in the Roma community.

192. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to ensure that risk assessment and risk management are systematically conducted for all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention across all regions of Serbia, by:**

- a. **ensuring comprehensive training and guidance for police officers on risk assessment, including risk rating and an understanding of the evolving nature of risks;**
- b. **establishing a robust methodological multidisciplinary framework based on internationally recognised tools for risk assessments, incorporating all relevant risk factors, such as the possession of firearms, non-fatal strangulation, psychological violence and participation in armed conflict;**
- c. **facilitating the active involvement of all relevant institutions, including statutory agencies, healthcare services and NGOs providing specialist support services to victims of violence against women, in risk-assessment and management mechanisms in order to ensure an effective multi-agency approach to the human rights and safety of the individual victim while giving due consideration to the rights and safety needs of children exposed to intimate partner violence;**
- d. **developing and standardising risk-assessment mechanisms for forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, including early and forced marriages and violence related to "honour", using established methodological frameworks;**
- e. **systematically reviewing and analysing all domestic and gender-based violence-related homicides and suicides.**

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

193. Under Article 52 of the convention, in situations of immediate danger, the authorities are granted the power to issue an emergency barring order, ordering the perpetrator to leave the

residence of the victim or person at risk for a specific period of time, and to prohibit the perpetrator from entering the residence or contacting the victim or person at risk. Emergency barring orders are tools intended to prevent a crime and to put safety first.¹⁶¹ They should therefore be time-bound and incident-based, with the possibility of renewal in the case of continued danger. Longer-term protection should, however, be granted by a court by means of a protection order, upon application by the victim. An emergency barring order should in principle extend to children in need of protection and should have immediate effect.

194. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had acknowledged that the introduction of emergency barring orders under the LPDV had enhanced the protection of victims, noting a significant increase in their application from 2017 to 2018. However, it had also expressed concern about the low number of proceedings initiated for violations of such orders, the frequent issuance of mutual protection orders for both partners and the disproportionate imprisonment of women for breaches.

195. The legal framework governing emergency barring orders, as assessed during the baseline evaluation, remains in force in Serbia. Under the LPDV, police officers are authorised to issue emergency protective measures without the victim's request in cases of immediate risk of domestic violence or the likelihood of its recurrence. These measures include ordering the perpetrator to leave the shared residence and prohibiting contact with the victim for a period of 48 hours. These measures may be extended by a court decision upon the request of the public prosecutor for up to 30 days, and violations may result in imprisonment for up to 60 days.

196. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that emergency barring orders are systematically issued in Serbia and can be applied in cases of psychological violence and stalking. An analysis on the implementation of the LPDV revealed that in 2023, out of 28 413 reported incidents of domestic violence, the police issued 21 882 emergency orders, representing 77% of reported cases.¹⁶² Of these orders, 20 276 were subsequently extended. However, GREVIO notes with concern that only 2 103 misdemeanour proceedings were initiated in 2023 for breaches of such orders, a figure significantly lower than the number of perpetrators who committed repeated acts of violence, which stands at 10 365.¹⁶³ As GREVIO has had occasion to note, electronic monitoring of emergency orders, such as through the use of ankle monitors, can serve as an effective measure to prevent breaches of these orders. GREVIO notes in this regard that in 2019 the Ministry of Interior launched an initiative in partnership with UN Women to introduce electronic monitoring of emergency protective measures and restraining orders.¹⁶⁴ However, GREVIO notes with regret that this project appears to have been discontinued without further explanation.

197. GREVIO notes with concern that the practice of issuing emergency measures to both the victim and the perpetrator, which are often extended, remains a persistent problem. Information provided by women's rights organisations indicates that, in some cases, such decisions are made without conducting separate risk assessments for each party but instead relying on a single assessment for both.¹⁶⁵ This practice suggests a lack of understanding of the gendered nature of domestic violence, the underlying power dynamics and the importance of engaging in primary aggressor analysis. Furthermore, despite requests from women's rights organisations for data on the number of such mutual orders, it remains impossible to determine their exact prevalence because of the absence of disaggregated data based on the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. GREVIO further notes with regret the absence of data on the sanctions imposed for violations of emergency and extended protection orders.

161. See GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on Denmark, paragraph 207, and on Malta, paragraph 218.

162. 12th report on independent monitoring of the implementation of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence in Serbia for the period January-December 2023, Ignjatović T., the Autonomous Women's Centre, 2024, available at: www.womenngo.org.rs/en/independent-reports-on-law-on-prevention-of-dv/2234-the-twelfth-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-law-on-the-prevention-of-domestic-violence-in-2023-has-been-published.

163. Ibid., Table 1A.

164. See a news article featuring the State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Biljana Popović Ivković, announcing the introduction of electronic bracelets, available in Serbian at: www.paragraf.rs/dnevne-vesti/240719/240719-vest7.html.

165. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 71.

198. Another issue of grave concern is the infrequent application of emergency and extended protective measures to children exposed to domestic violence but who are not direct victims. This omission has, in some cases, led to murders of children by the abusive parent. While no official data exist on the number of children granted emergency protective measures, recent research indicates that such orders for children exposed to domestic violence account for only approximately 9% of the total orders issued.

199. **Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:**

- a. **enhance the monitoring of compliance with emergency and extended emergency protective measures through the implementation of protocols, targeted training initiatives and the use of technological tools such as electronic monitoring;**
- b. **ensure that misdemeanour proceedings are initiated where breaches of such measures are identified;**
- c. **re-examine the practice of issuing mutual emergency protective measures by law-enforcement officials with a view to eliminating it through the implementation of enhanced primary aggressor analysis and by increasing awareness of the dynamics of domestic violence and its gendered nature;**
- d. **ensure that emergency protective measures issued in respect of victims of domestic violence are extended to include their children with a view to ensuring their safety in their own home.**

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

200. Restraining and protection orders are conceived to prolong the protection afforded to the victim and her children by emergency barring orders and may be considered complementary to the protection offered by emergency barring orders. Under Article 53 of the Istanbul Convention, victims of all forms of violence against women should be able to obtain a protection order available for immediate protection – without undue financial or administrative burden placed on the victim and irrespective of whether or not they choose to set in motion any other legal proceedings.

201. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had noted the various protection schemes established under different legal frameworks. These include protection orders under the Family Law, which can be issued for up to one year; contact bans under criminal procedural law, imposed to prevent absconding, reoffending or interference with evidence; restraining orders under the Criminal Code, which prohibit the perpetrator from approaching or contacting the victim for a period ranging from three months to three years; and restraining orders under the Law on Misdemeanour Procedures, which can last for up to one year. GREVIO had observed that, as a result of the limited number of criminal proceedings for domestic violence, many victims were left to rely on measures foreseen under the Family Law once emergency protective measures expired. However, when public prosecutors and social services failed to apply for such protection orders on their behalf, victims were required to initiate the process themselves, facing significant financial and administrative burdens. This complex system created gaps in protection as victims were left to navigate multiple legal frameworks.

202. GREVIO notes with regret that no measures have been taken since the baseline evaluation to streamline protection measures across legal regimes to ensure more effective and accessible protection for victims. The primary form of protection for victims of violence against women remains emergency and extended emergency protective measures, which, unfortunately, provide only short-term protection of up to three months. Contact bans and restraining orders under the criminal procedure and criminal law systems are not consistently issued in all cases where there are sufficient grounds for their application. Similarly, the number of *ex officio* proposals for protection measures under the Family Law remains extremely low. In 2023, public prosecutors filed only 291 requests for

such measures,¹⁶⁶ in stark contrast to the 20 900 requests for extending emergency protection measures against domestic violence.

203. The existing protection system also excludes victims of certain forms of violence against women. Protection measures under the Family Law are limited to individuals defined as family members. Contact bans can be issued during criminal proceedings under the Criminal Procedure Code whereas restraining orders under the Criminal Code and the Law on Misdemeanours can only be imposed in conjunction with a conviction for an offence punishable under these laws. Consequently, victims of forms of violence that are not yet criminalised and are perpetrated by non-family members, such as certain digital manifestations of violence against women, remain outside the scope of available protection measures.

204. Regarding the protection of children, GREVIO notes that, when exposed to intimate partner violence, they cannot be included under the protection measures issued for victims under either the criminal or family law frameworks. Instead, such measures must be issued separately for the child. While no official data are available on the number of criminal restraining orders or civil protection measures granted for the protection of children, GREVIO notes instances in custody and visitation proceedings where requests for protection measures made by domestic violence victims have been dismissed by the courts.¹⁶⁷ Restraining orders issued in criminal proceedings for the protection of a child do not allow for exceptions to be made for contact with the perpetrator. However, if a civil protection measure is issued, exceptions may be granted to allow supervised contact to take place within the premises of a Centre for Social Welfare. Such exceptions are not explicitly provided for in the Family Law but appear to have emerged in practice to enable the child to maintain contact with the non-custodial parent. GREVIO emphasises the importance of implementing all necessary precautions in such cases to ensure the safety and well-being of both the child and the mother, particularly in light of reported incidents of post-separation violence occurring during supervised visitations.

205. Last, GREVIO expresses regret over the lack of data on the number of breaches and the sanctions imposed for restraining and protection orders issued under the Criminal Procedure Code, Criminal Code, Family Law and Law on Misdemeanours.

206. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. streamline the existing protection measures and ensure greater consistency between emergency protection orders and long-term protection measures across various legal frameworks, including family law, criminal law and misdemeanour law;**
- b. remove financial barriers that may hinder victims from applying for protection orders under the Family Law;**
- c. systematically include children in the protection orders issued in respect of women victims of gender-based violence and ensure that exceptions within civil protection measures permitting contact between a child and a parent do not compromise the safety of victims and their children.**

166. The total number of protection measures issued under the Family Law in 2023 remains unknown; however, in 2022, a total of 4 827 such measures were recorded as per the state report.

167. "Domestic violence hidden behind the concept of "alienation from parents" – Analysis of court proceedings related to trust and maintaining personal contacts of children with the other parent", Ignjatović T., Pavlov T. and Lukić M. (Autonomous Women's Centre), 2024.

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

207. Article 56 of the Istanbul Convention is a key provision for building trust at the level of judicial proceedings for women and girls who have experienced or who are witness to any of the forms of violence covered by the convention. It sets forth a non-exhaustive list of procedures designed to protect victims of violence from intimidation, retaliation and secondary victimisation at all stages of proceedings, during investigations and at trial. The drafters intended this list to be indicative, and parties may adopt additional protection measures that are more favourable than those provided in the convention. Moreover, intimidation and secondary victimisation can occur not only at the hands of perpetrators but also when investigations and judicial proceedings are not based on a gendered understanding of violence against women, which is why the practical application of measures of protection should be firmly anchored in such an understanding.

208. GREVIO notes that the Serbian legal framework includes certain safeguards to protect victims of violence against women during legal proceedings, including the obligation to inform victims of the outcomes of certain proceedings. GREVIO however observes that the frequent failure to communicate court decisions concerning the perpetrator poses a significant risk to the safety of victims. For instance, while decisions extending emergency protective measures should be provided to victims in writing, reports from women's rights organisations indicate that this requirement is not consistently upheld.

209. Regarding contact bans issued under the Criminal Procedure Code during ongoing criminal proceedings, courts are required to send a copy of the decision to the victim. However, this obligation is not always met, often requiring victims to actively follow up and request a copy if they become aware that such a measure has been issued.

210. For restraining orders imposed upon conviction under the Criminal Code, as well as decisions on deferrals of prosecution and plea agreements, there is no legal requirement to inform victims. GREVIO notes with concern that this has resulted in the murder of a woman in at least one case, which reinforces the importance of ensuring stringent communication around measures introduced in relation to the accused.¹⁶⁸

211. With regard to procedural measures aimed at preventing re-victimisation, re-traumatisation, and protecting the dignity and privacy of victims, Articles 103 and 104 of the Criminal Procedure Code empower the public prosecutor or court to designate a witness as "particularly sensitive". Such witnesses may be examined with the assistance of a psychologist, social worker or other experts, using video-conference technology or other means to ensure they are not in the same room as other participants in the proceedings. However, in practice, the implementation of such measures appears to be limited, primarily due to the lack of necessary technical equipment in many courts and public prosecutor's offices, except for higher courts in certain larger cities.¹⁶⁹ Even where such technology is available, not all victims are granted the status of particularly sensitive witnesses, resulting in having to testify in the same room as the perpetrator. One particularly alarming example of re-traumatising practices was reported in a high-profile sexual abuse case, where the victim was subjected to cross-examination that included numerous humiliating, victim-blaming and provocative questions from the defence lawyer in a public hearing without any intervention from the presiding judge. Women's rights organisations assert that such practices are common in rape trials, often undermining victims' resolve to continue testifying.¹⁷⁰

168. See information on the femicide that took place in Pirot at: www.vreme.com/en/vreme/mrtve-jadnice-bednice-i-bitange/.

169. Written submission by the Centre for Support of Women, p. 26.

170. Written submission by the Autonomous Women's Centre, p. 70.

212. GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the full and effective implementation of all victim protection measures throughout investigations and judicial proceedings for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, by, among other things, systematically including victims of violence against women in the protection measures prescribed by Articles 103 and 104 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Sufficient technical and human resources should be allocated to enable victims to exercise their right to testify via video-conference technology.

213. GREVIO further urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the protection of victims from intimidation, reprisals and re-victimisation by recognising and upholding their right to be informed when the perpetrator is issued with an emergency, protection or restraining order under relevant legal frameworks, or when they are released or have escaped.

Appendix I

List of proposals and suggestions by GREVIO

II. Changes in definitions, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the areas of violence against women and domestic violence

A. Definitions (Article 3)

1. GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to harmonise across all areas of law all legal definitions of domestic violence on the basis of the definitions set out in the Istanbul Convention and to ensure their effective application in practice. In this regard, the provisions of the Law on Gender Equality on addressing violence against women and domestic violence should be preserved in any future amendments following the constitutional review process and serve as a model for other legislative frameworks. (paragraph 26)

B. Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies (Article 7)

2. GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the effective implementation of the Strategy for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for the period 2021-2025, as well as its independent monitoring and evaluation. Safeguards must also be put in place to prevent any future strategic documents on violence against women from facing the same implementation challenges as the current one, thereby ensuring continuity in policy implementation. (paragraph 35)

3. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to allocate the necessary human and financial resources, along with a clear and well-defined mandate, to the to the competent body or bodies responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of policies and measures in relation to all forms of violence against women as well as for the monitoring and an independent, objective evaluation of those policies and measures. (paragraph 36)

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

4. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. ensure appropriate, sustainable and long-term financial resources at national and local levels for all of the legislation, policies and measures aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and for the institutions and entities mandated for their implementation;
- b. implement gender-responsive budgeting with the aim of enabling the monitoring of public expenditures;
- c. ensure sustainable funding levels for women's rights NGOs that provide specialist support services for women victims of all forms of violence through long-term grants based on transparent procurement procedures. (paragraph 44)

3. Social services

5. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, and bearing in mind the need for data-collection endeavours to extend to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to pursue their efforts to:

- a. ensure that data collected by all relevant stakeholders, namely law-enforcement agencies, judicial authorities, Centres for Social Welfare and healthcare institutions, are disaggregated with regard to the sex and age of victim and perpetrator, type of violence,

the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and geographical location, as well as other factors deemed relevant;

- b. harmonise data collection between law-enforcement agencies and the judiciary, with the aim of allowing for the tracking of a case across the different stages of the criminal justice system and thus enabling an assessment of, inter alia, conviction, attrition and recidivism rates;
- c. expand the data-collection efforts in the social welfare and healthcare sectors to all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 56)

III. Analysis on the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution

A. Prevention

1. General obligations (Article 12)

6. GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to strengthen their efforts to:

- a. counter patriarchal attitudes that persist in society by developing and implementing regular preventive measures. Such preventive measures should be aimed at eradicating prejudice and gender stereotypes and should address gender inequality as a root cause of violence against women. Guidance on specific measures and tools for preventing and combating sexism, including in the media, can be drawn from Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating sexism;
- b. promote awareness-raising campaigns or programmes that address all forms of violence against women and girls covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension. These initiatives should target the whole of society, including workplaces, as well as specific groups of women, including Roma women and other women at risk of intersectional discrimination;
- c. regularly carry out impact assessments and evaluations of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures taken. (paragraph 67)

2. Education (Article 14)

7. Recalling the findings issued in the its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to promote the principles of equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships through adequate teaching material; to monitor how teachers make use of such material, and where necessary, to include programmes on the topics listed in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention as mandatory subjects in the formal curriculum; while also calling on the authorities to teach children, in an age-appropriate manner, about the notion of freely given consent in sexual relations, raise their awareness of the harmful effects of violent pornography and the implications of sharing intimate images of oneself and others. (paragraph 74)

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

8. Recalling the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to step up their efforts to ensure mandatory and systematic initial and in-service training on violence against women for all professional groups that interact with victims, including law-enforcement officials, prosecutors, judges, social workers, healthcare professionals and teachers. Such training should encompass prevention, detection and trauma-informed, gender-sensitive responses to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension. It should also address equality between women and men, as well as stereotypes and perceptions related to violence against women. Furthermore, any training initiatives must clearly focus on the safety and protection concerns women victims of domestic violence and their children may have and must refrain from dismissing such concerns by labelling their actions as

“alienating”, “hostile”, “unco-operative” or similar. The impact of all professional training initiatives should be regularly evaluated. (paragraph 83)

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

a. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

9. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to:

- a. ensure the allocation of adequate resources for existing domestic violence perpetrator programmes, both in voluntary and custodial settings, to guarantee the continuation of their work in a sustainable manner;
- b. increase the number of voluntary domestic violence perpetrator programmes across the country;
- c. adopt and implement uniform standards in accordance with the European Standards for Perpetrator Programmes, which prioritise the safety, support and respect for the human rights of victims by fostering close co-operation with specialist support services for victims, as required by Article 16, paragraph 3, of the Istanbul Convention;
- d. take measures to improve attendance at such programmes and reduce dropout rates, including by incorporating them into the probation service, promoting referrals by authorised bodies such as courts and Centres for Social Welfare or introducing incentive schemes as a tool to reduce recidivism. At the same time, legislative measures should be taken to ensure that participation in such programmes does not serve as a means to avoid prosecution for acts of domestic violence. (paragraph 91)

B. Protection and support

1. General obligations (Article 18)

10. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to step up their efforts to improve co-operation among all relevant statutory agencies and specialist support services provided by NGOs. This could be achieved by promoting the systematic participation of specialist support services and other relevant bodies in the meetings of the co-ordination and co-operation groups. Further measures are also needed to expand such institutionalised co-operation to cover cases involving forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, such as rape and sexual violence, forced marriage, stalking and sexual harassment. (paragraph 102)

11. GREVIO further encourages the Serbian authorities to set up one-stop shops for the provision of services to victims of violence against women and domestic violence. (paragraph 103)

2. General support services (Article 20)

a. Social services

12. Recalling the findings of its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. allocate sufficient human and financial resources to enable Centres for Social Welfare to fulfil their responsibilities effectively, while ensuring among their staff a gendered understanding of all forms of violence against women, including forced and early marriage, with the aim of eliminating cultural and gender bias;
- b. take measures to improve the access of women victims of gender-based violence to long-term financial assistance, social housing and support to find employment in order to enable them to recover from the violence and live independently. (paragraph 110)

b. Healthcare services

13. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to:

- a. implement standardised care pathways in the public and private healthcare sectors to ensure a gender-sensitive, trauma-informed and non-judgmental approach to identifying victims of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention, diagnosing and treating their injuries, documenting the violence suffered (including photographic evidence), addressing resulting health issues and facilitating referrals to appropriate specialist support services;
- b. ensure that healthcare professionals provide free-of-charge documentation of forensic evidence adequate for use by the criminal justice sector;
- c. ensure that informed consent is sought from a victim of violence for the reporting of a suspicion of a criminal act, outside of those cases where there is a reasonable suspicion that there is an imminent danger to the victim or another person, or where the victim is a child;
- d. ensure that health services for immediate experiences of violence against women are accessible to all women, including Roma women, women with irregular migrant status or women whose residence in Serbia is dependent on their husband's status. (paragraph 117)

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

14. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the provision of adequate specialist support services with a gendered approach throughout the country and for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including by:

- a. increasing the number of available shelter places and addressing gaps in underserved municipalities, with the aim of ensuring safe accommodation for women victims of violence regardless of their residence status and place of residence;
- b. making shelters accessible to all women victims of gender-based violence and their children, including those exposed to intersectional discrimination, and offering the option to self-refer;
- c. revising licensing standards for shelters to focus on ensuring gender-sensitive, victim-centred and empowering support, rather than creating administrative obstacles for existing shelters;
- d. providing specialist immediate, medium and long-term psychosocial support to victims of all forms of violence against women, free of charge;
- e. ensuring the provision of specialist legal aid for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, drawing on the long-standing expertise developed by women's specialist support services provided by NGOs. (paragraph 128)

4. Support for victims of sexual violence (Article 25)

15. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to establish rape crisis centres and/or sexual violence referral centres across the country, ensuring a sufficiently widespread geographical distribution to make them accessible to victims in both rural and urban areas. These centres must provide comprehensive support, including medical care, trauma support, forensic examinations and immediate and long-term psychological counselling and support by qualified professionals trained in victim-sensitive approaches. The collection of relevant forensic documentation must not be contingent upon the victim's willingness to report the violence to the police and must be provided free of charge. (paragraph 135)

C. Substantive law

1. Custody, visitation rights and safety (Article 31)

16. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation to ensure the safety of victims and their children:

- a. ensure that the legal obligation to consider incidents of violence against women and domestic violence when assessing the best interests of the child in custody and visitation proceedings is effectively upheld in practice, including by raising awareness among the Serbian judiciary by introducing specific guidelines for judges handling such cases;
- b. implement screening and risk-assessment procedures to systematically and proactively identify cases of violence in custody and visitation proceedings;
- c. take steps to ensure that professionals at Centres for Social Welfare have a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, post-separation abuse, the harmful impacts of witnessing domestic violence on children and the safety risks of continued contact with an abusive parent, through professional training efforts and revising relevant professional guidelines and protocols;
- d. take all appropriate measures to ensure that all relevant professionals, including social workers, members of the judiciary, court experts and child psychologists are aware of the lack of a scientific basis for the "parental alienation syndrome" and refrain from using concepts that position women victims of abuse as alienating, hostile or un-co-operative;
- e. improve the conditions for supervised visits by ensuring that staff at Centres for Social Welfare understand their role and responsibility in supervising and documenting these visits and by allocating adequate resources to create appropriate conditions for such visits on Centres for Social Welfare premises, with a view to ensuring the safety of mothers, children and social workers. (paragraph 146)

2. Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing (Article 48)

17. GREVIO encourages the Serbian authorities to continue their efforts to ensure that deferral of prosecutions and plea agreements are applied only in exceptional cases and to adopt relevant measures, including legislative reforms, to integrate the victim's perspective into the process with the aim of preventing impunity. (paragraph 152)

18. GREVIO further encourages the Serbian authorities to ensure that mediation conducted in family law proceedings do not become quasi-mandatory in cases involving a history of domestic violence by:

- a. adopting screening procedures to systematically identify cases of violence in family law proceedings;
- b. introducing the obligation to proactively inform parties of the voluntary nature of mediation, emphasising that declining to participate will not result in any negative legal consequences with a view to ensuring that cases are only referred to mediation with the freely given and informed consent of the victim;
- c. ensuring that, where domestic violence becomes apparent during the mediation process, the victim is actively offered the opportunity to halt the mediation and return the case to an adversarial procedure;
- d. improving the awareness of judges and mediators regarding power imbalances in relationships affected by violence, enabling them to take these dynamics into account when determining whether mediation should be proposed. (paragraph 153)

D. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures**1. General obligations (Article 49) and Immediate response, prevention and protection (Article 50)****a. Reporting to, immediate response and investigations by law-enforcement agencies**

19. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to take measures to promote victims' trust in law-enforcement authorities in order to increase their willingness to report experiences of all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention to police, including by:

- a. ensuring greater adherence to standard investigative procedures set out in existing protocols and guidelines;
- b. developing standard investigative procedures for other forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, including early and forced marriage, sexual violence and harassment and digital manifestations of violence against women, and ensuring their implementation;
- c. enhancing awareness among law-enforcement authorities with a view to eradicating stereotypical notions regarding violence against women and sexist attitudes towards victims;
- d. ensuring a gender-sensitive and trauma-informed response to sexual violence;
- e. allocating sufficient resources to law-enforcement authorities to enhance the physical accessibility of police premises, improve their comfort and privacy for interviewing victims, and ensure the availability of interpretation and translation services, including sign language interpretation, information in braille and easy-to-understand materials. (paragraph 167)

b. Effective investigation and prosecution

20. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. identify and address factors contributing to case attrition in all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention;
- b. strengthen investigative and prosecutorial case-building in accordance with rigorous professional standards for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including in their digital dimension, and also in particular in relation to sexual violence and rape. This may include ensuring timely evidence collection beyond the victim's testimony and enabling prosecutions to proceed even when victims withdraw their statements, in line with Article 55, paragraph 1, of the Istanbul Convention;
- c. implement measures to ensure a victim-centred, gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approach to handling cases of violence against women, prioritising these cases appropriately and preventing secondary victimisation. (paragraph 175)

c. Conviction rates

21. GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to:

- a. implement measures aimed at increasing conviction rates for all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention and ensuring that the sentences and measures imposed for such offences are effective, proportionate and dissuasive;
- b. identify and address the root causes of attrition within the criminal justice sector by establishing comprehensive data collection and case-tracking mechanisms across the sector. (paragraph 182)

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

22. GREVIO strongly encourages the Serbian authorities to ensure that risk assessment and risk management are systematically conducted for all forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention across all regions of Serbia, by:

- a. ensuring comprehensive training and guidance for police officers on risk assessment, including risk rating and an understanding of the evolving nature of risks;
- b. establishing a robust methodological multidisciplinary framework based on internationally recognised tools for risk assessments, incorporating all relevant risk factors, such as the possession of firearms, non-fatal strangulation, psychological violence and participation in armed conflict;
- c. facilitating the active involvement of all relevant institutions, including statutory agencies, healthcare services and NGOs providing specialist support services to victims of violence against women, in risk-assessment and management mechanisms in order to ensure an effective multi-agency approach to the human rights and safety of the individual victim while giving due consideration to the rights and safety needs of children exposed to intimate partner violence;
- d. developing and standardising risk-assessment mechanisms for forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, including early and forced marriages and violence related to “honour”, using established methodological frameworks;
- e. systematically reviewing and analysing all domestic and gender-based violence-related homicides and suicides. (paragraph 192)

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

23. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. enhance the monitoring of compliance with emergency and extended emergency protective measures through the implementation of protocols, targeted training initiatives and the use of technological tools such as electronic monitoring;
- b. ensure that misdemeanour proceedings are initiated where breaches of such measures are identified;
- c. re-examine the practice of issuing mutual emergency protective measures by law-enforcement officials with a view to eliminating it through the implementation of enhanced primary aggressor analysis and by increasing awareness of the dynamics of domestic violence and its gendered nature;
- d. ensure that emergency protective measures issued in respect of victims of domestic violence are extended to include their children with a view to ensuring their safety in their own home. (paragraph 199)

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

24. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to:

- a. streamline the existing protection measures and ensure greater consistency between emergency protection orders and long-term protection measures across various legal frameworks, including family law, criminal law and misdemeanour law;
- b. remove financial barriers that may hinder victims from applying for protection orders under the Family Law;
- c. systematically include children in the protection orders issued in respect of women victims of gender-based violence and ensure that exceptions within civil protection measures permitting contact between a child and a parent do not compromise the safety of victims and their children. (paragraph 206)

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

25. GREVIO urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the full and effective implementation of all victim protection measures throughout investigations and judicial proceedings for all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, by, among other things, systematically including victims of violence against women in the protection measures prescribed by Articles 103 and 104 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Sufficient technical and human resources should be allocated to enable victims to exercise their right to testify via video-conference technology. (paragraph 212)

26. GREVIO further urges the Serbian authorities to ensure the protection of victims from intimidation, reprisals and re-victimisation by recognising and upholding their right to be informed when the perpetrator is issued with an emergency, protection or restraining order under relevant legal frameworks, or when they are released or have escaped. (paragraph 213)

Appendix II

List of the national authorities, other public bodies, non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations with which GREVIO held consultations

National authorities

Office of the Minister without Portfolio responsible for Gender Equality, Prevention of Violence against Women, and the Economic and Political Empowerment of Women
Council for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
Ministry of Justice
Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office
Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue
Ministry of Internal Affairs
General Police Directorate
Ministry of Family Care and Demography
Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
Republic Institute for Social Protection
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation
Ministry of Culture
Ministry of Sports
Ministry of Health
Commissariat for Refugees and Migration of the Republic of Serbia

Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

Provincial Institute for Social Protection of Vojvodina
Provincial Secretariat for Social Affairs, Demography and Gender Equality of Vojvodina
Safe House Pančevo

Kruševac

Kruševac City Council
Kruševac Police Department

Non-governmental organisations

Safe House Belgrade - Domestic violence shelter
Association of the Free and Independent Trade Union
Pešćanik - Women's rights organisation
Women Against Violence Network
Oaza Sigurnosti - Women's rights organisation
OPNA - National Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence
Impuls - Pešćanik - Women's rights organisation
Human Rights Committee Vranje - Women's rights organisation
Victimology Society of Serbia – Victim support organisation
FemPlatz - Women's rights organisation
Autonomous Women's Centre - Women's rights organisation
Da se zna! - LGBTI human rights organisation
Women for Peace - Women's rights organisation
Zene Sport Drustvo - Women Sports Society
Centre for Support of Women

Labris- LGBTI human rights organisation

Praxis – Human rights organisation

Association of Roma Novi Becej – Roma and minority women's rights organisation

Iz Kruga Vojvodina - Organisation promoting the rights of women with disabilities

Osnažene - Organisation promoting the economic empowerment of women

Fenomena - Women's rights organisation

ASTRA - Anti-trafficking organisation

Atina - Anti-trafficking organisation

GREVIO, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, is an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) by the parties.

Following the comprehensive stocktaking exercise set out in its baseline evaluation reports, GREVIO's first thematic evaluation round identifies progress made in building trust among women and girls by delivering support, protection and justice for any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. This report contains an analysis of developments in law and policy in respect of provisions of the convention relating to victim support and protection, criminal investigation and prosecution of acts of violence. It also covers developments in the determination of child custody and visitation rights in cases with a history of violence and wider preventive measures.

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