

*Building trust
by delivering support,
protection and justice*

Malta

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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THE
ISTANBUL CONVENTION
SAVES LIVES

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**Building trust by delivering
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Group of Experts
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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 Malta on 23 November 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 (a state report submitted by the Maltese authorities and additional information submitted by Dar Hosea, Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, Professor Marceline Naudi, St Jeanne Antide Foundation, Victim Support Malta and the Women's Rights Foundation), as well as a five days evaluation visit to Malta. 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 Maltese 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 regard GREVIO welcomes the adoption of two consecutive, comprehensive strategies on gender-based violence and domestic violence embracing the four-pillar approach of the Istanbul Convention since the publication of the baseline evaluation report. These two strategies include measures that address forms of violence against women that were previously less addressed, including female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, rape/sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking and the digital dimension of violence against women and build on the findings issued by GREVIO's baseline evaluation report. Equally positive is the attention paid by these policies to the needs of women who are or may be subject to intersectional discrimination and the measures taken to overcome the significant barriers that victims living in Gozo encounter, as well as the drafting of these policies in consultation with civil society and women's rights organisations. Additionally noteworthy is the authorities' significant investment in preventive action, including the running of innovative awareness-raising campaigns with the involvement of women's rights organisations. These campaigns addressed domestic violence, gender equality, gender stereotypes, the digital dimension of violence against women, sexual violence, the importance of consent, stalking, sexual harassment and FGM. The role of men and boys in countering gender-based violence was also an important focus of these campaigns, with preventive measures leveraging a wide array of mediums and innovative partnerships with private companies and stakeholders. Welcome measures are also the provision of multi-agency training on gender-based violence to different categories of professionals on a continuous basis and in co-operation with women's rights organisation, and, in parallel, the strengthening of mandatory training for certain categories of professionals such as police officers and teachers.

A particularly welcome development which enhances the criminal justice response to violence against women and victims' trust in institutions, is the setting up of specialist gender-based and domestic violence hubs in Malta and Gozo, staffed with trained police officers and supported by a comprehensive standard operating procedure on dealing with gender-based and domestic violence. These hubs provide a supportive environment for victims and host staff from Aġenzija Appoġġ who systematically conduct risk assessments for every victim. Together, these measures have contributed to increased reporting of domestic violence.

Beyond the progress made in Malta to implement the convention, GREVIO has identified areas which require urgent action by the authorities to comply fully with the convention's provisions. More specifically, despite the rise in financial resources allocated to shelters and specialist support services, the financial viability and the very existence of certain shelters appear to be at serious risk. Financial allocations are in fact inadequate and do not reflect the real expenses incurred by shelters, including those related to the victim's or her children's medical or other basic needs or expenses incurred to respond to new structural requirements imposed on shelters. Overall, such funding is not sufficient to cover shelters' running costs and does not allow to offer competitive salaries to staff, leading to the inability to retain qualified personnel. In the area of data collection, since the baseline evaluation report, little progress has been made, as the data collected continues to primarily pertain to domestic violence and fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the incidence of all forms of violence against women or how they are being responded to by service providers and criminal justice. In particular, data on the number of prosecutions and convictions for acts of violence against women and domestic violence continues to be lacking. Moreover, no system is currently in place to adequately track such cases across the criminal justice system and identify attrition rates.

With regard to support services for victims of sexual violence and rape, there is an urgent need to establish dedicated rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centres in Malta and Gozo. These centres should be staffed by trained specialists and provide a victim-centred response in dedicated premises, on a one-stop-shop basis. They should also be supported by a protocol setting out the standardised pathway. Furthermore, the lack of a standardised procedure for collecting forensic evidence, including the absence of a standardised rape kit, was identified as a matter requiring urgent attention due to its potential negative impact on the quality of evidence used in court proceedings. Another important limitation is that the collection and storage of such evidence hinge on victims reporting violence to the police.

In the area of substantive law, GREVIO has identified numerous shortcomings with regard to custody and visitation rights which require remedial action. Notably, GREVIO found that there was currently no provision requiring incidents of violence against women to be taken into account when determining custody and visitation rights; no system was in place to systematically screen all cases on custody and visitation for possible instances of domestic violence, nor are all relevant bodies consulted to ascertain whether criminal proceedings are pending or have been initiated in the past against the alleged perpetrator; training for relevant professionals such as judges and court experts, among others, on domestic violence and on the very harmful impact that allegations of parental alienation and similar concepts that portray women victims of abuse as alienating, hostile or unco-operative have on victims and their children is equally lacking; as is a ban on the use of such concepts in/by courts. Finally, as regards criminal justice proceedings, training and guidelines for judges presiding over cases of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence is urgently needed in order to address, in many cases, a lack of gendered understanding of violence against women and the use of language leading to secondary victimisation. Moreover, while insufficient data are available from the criminal justice system to assess conviction rates, anecdotal information points to persistently low levels of convictions for all forms of violence against women, disproportionately low sanctions being applied and the frequent issue of suspended sentences.

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:

- ensure that prevention efforts adopt a gendered approach that explicitly recognises and addresses the disproportionate impact of violence on women and girls, including by using terminology that accurately reflects violence against women as a gendered phenomenon;
- ensure the mandatory provision of initial and in-service training on all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, to all professionals that are in contact with victims and perpetrators, accompanied by protocols that specify how to identify, provide support to and further refer victims to other services;

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- use all available means to ensure that perpetrator programmes are widely attended, including by integrating them into the criminal justice system as a tool to reduce recidivism, ensuring that they are attended and providing for mandatory court referrals;
 - ensure that a multidisciplinary risk assessment is carried out in co-ordination with key stakeholders such as judges, prosecutors and women's rights organisations in the context of the multi-agency risk-assessment and management framework (MARAM) and that the victim's perspective is taken into account when drafting and executing the safety plan;
 - ensure that that risk-management procedures are also carried out for cases that are not classified as high risk; that the prosecuting role of the police does not stand in the way of the completion of a victim's risk assessment and that a risk assessment is created and used for all forms of violence against women;
 - remove mandatory referrals from Aġenzija Appoġġ to domestic violence shelters, including by offering women victims of domestic violence the opportunity to self-refer; ensure that the number and capacity of specialist women's shelters meet the growing demand, including in Gozo and comply with the minimum standard of the Istanbul Convention; while ensuring at the same time that they are equipped to welcome women with disabilities and women with addiction issues;

Lastly, 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, *inter alia*, to the need to enhance the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in relation to all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence. As an emerging trend, among several others, GREVIO also points to initial policy action and research commissioned to address the growing rates of online misogyny, the digital dimension of violence against women and the problems posed by violent pornography.

Introduction

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, hereafter “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 Malta, offering a comprehensive assessment of the convention’s implementation in its entirety, was published on 23 November 2020, following Malta’s ratification of the Istanbul Convention on 29 July 2014. Malta’s original reservation not to apply the provisions under Article 59, entered in accordance with Article 78, paragraph 2 of the convention, was withdrawn on 24 April 2018. Moreover, Malta’s original reservation not to apply the provisions under Articles 30 paragraph 2 and 44 paragraph 1, indent e, was renewed by declaration on 1st of May 2025 without providing GREVIO with the reasons for maintaining it.

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 to obtain 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 Malta, 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 15 March 2024. The Maltese authorities subsequently submitted their state report on 9 September 2024 – the deadline set by GREVIO. Following a preliminary examination of Malta’s state report, GREVIO carried out an evaluation visit to Malta, which took place from 20-24 October 2025. The delegation was composed of:

- María Rún Bjarnadóttir, Member of GREVIO
- Ivo Holc, Member of GREVIO
- Francesca Montagna, Senior Legal Adviser 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 Maltese authorities, in particular, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence, the Ministry for Social Policy and the Family, the Foundation for Social Welfare Services, Aġenzija Appoġġ, Aġenzija Support, the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry for Health, the National Statistics Office, the Ministry for Gozo and Planning, the Ministry for Home Affairs and Security, the Malta Police Force, the Victim Support Agency, the Ministry for Justice, Research and Innovation, the Attorney General’s Office, the Court Services Agency, the Department for Probation and Parole, the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Secretariat for Catholic Education, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, the Commissioner for Children, the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability, the Social care Standards Authority, JobsPlus, the Housing authority, the International Protection Agency, the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers, and the Human Rights Directorate. 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 Sasha Na Jeong Farrugia, 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

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 26 March 2026. Where applicable, relevant developments up until 2 July 2026 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 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other civil society organisations which work in the field of violence against women.

1. See www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/malta.

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

Promising legislative and institutional developments

1. Since the publication of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, the Maltese authorities have further strengthened their legislative and institutional framework to prevent and combat violence against women, demonstrating their continued commitment to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention (the convention). One example is the 2022 amendment to the Criminal Code, which seeks to ensure adequate sentences for gender-related killings of women, in a number of circumstances, such as at the hands of intimate partners, by members of the family or by perpetrators driven by misogyny, and to move away from the possibility of applying mitigated sentences in such cases.² In view of this aim, the ability foreseen under Article 227 of the Criminal Code to excuse the crime of homicide on account of the perpetrator being "transported by a sudden passion or mental excitement" is no longer applicable.³ Equally worthy of mention are the 2024 amendments made to the offence of enforced sterilisation,⁴ with a view to better protecting women with disabilities, who the authorities recognise as being disproportionately impacted by this form of violence.⁵ The provision as amended explicitly prohibits the sterilisation of minors, even if carried out with the consent of the guardian,⁶ and defines in a detailed manner what qualifies as "free and informed consent" so that such consent cannot easily be circumvented. Furthermore, the use of fraud, false pretences and coercion now qualify as aggravating factors for this offence. Equally noteworthy is the criminalisation in 2024 of virginity testing carried out with or without the consent of the relevant woman/girl.⁷ Finally, GREVIO welcomes the amendments made in 2025 to the offence of forced marriage, in line with findings issued by GREVIO in its baseline evaluation report. GREVIO had observed that traditional marriages (celebrated without the consent of the victim), which formally had no legal effect in Malta, were not recognised as cases of forced marriage and thus did not prompt any criminal justice response. Article 251G of the Criminal Code as amended now prohibits and sanctions, *inter alia*, forced religious or civil ceremonies of marriage, whether legally binding or not.

2. Amendments made to legislation in 2024 with a view to protecting victims from secondary victimisation also represent a welcome step forward since the baseline evaluation report. More specifically, the Police Act as amended requires the police to record by audiovisual means interviews carried out with minors, victims of a sexual offence or vulnerable victims or witnesses during an investigation and provides that such recordings are admissible as evidence in court.⁸ Moreover, where these categories of victims/witnesses are required to testify in court, the Criminal Code as amended provides that testimony shall be given by videoconference, outside the courtroom.⁹ Additionally, GREVIO notes that the Committee of the Parties in its conclusions on the implementation of recommendations in respect of Malta welcomed a new procedure allowing a spouse, partner, cohabitant or a person in an intimate relationship to verify with the police whether their partner has been previously convicted of domestic violence.¹⁰

2. See Article 211A of the Criminal Code.

3. See Article 227 of the Criminal Code on cases of excusable wilful homicide.

4. See Article 251F of the Criminal Code.

5. See the report submitted by Malta pursuant to Article 68, paragraph 4, of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the state report).

6. Unless certain exceptions apply.

7. See Article 251EA of the Criminal Code.

8. See Article 55 of the Police Act.

9. See Article 646 of the Criminal Code as amended.

10. Under Act No. XVIII of 2023, the procedure can equally be initiated by a parent or a legal guardian of a vulnerable person who is in a relationship with a person who may be a perpetrator of domestic violence. Under this act "vulnerable person" means a person who is under the age of 16, or who has a mental disorder or other condition, or who is considered by the competent court to be particularly at risk when taking into account the person's age, maturity, health, mental disability and other conditions, including any situation of dependence as well as the psychological state or emotional state of the said person.

3. As regards positive institutional developments, GREVIO welcomes the further strengthening of the co-ordinating body, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV), by increasing its human resources and its funding since the baseline evaluation report. A momentous institutional development was also the setting up in 2020 of the specialised hubs on domestic violence, staffed with trained police officers. Indeed, these hubs appear to have strengthened victims' trust in the police and have been accompanied by a rise in the reporting of domestic violence, which GREVIO welcomes. This is further supported by the setting up in 2023 of the multi-agency risk assessment and management framework (MARAM), which enables a range of stakeholders to exchange information on cases identified as high risk and ensure co-ordinated safety planning.

Progress in prevention efforts, undercut by the use of gender-neutral terminology and insufficient training of key professionals

4. The past few years have seen significant investment by the Maltese authorities in preventive action, which is key to breaking the cycle of violence against women. This is visible in the increasing number of innovative awareness-raising campaigns that have been spearheaded by the authorities since the baseline evaluation report, frequently with the involvement of women's rights organisations. These campaigns raised society's awareness of domestic violence, gender equality, gender stereotypes, the digital dimension of violence against women, sexual violence and the importance of consent, stalking, sexual harassment and, to a lesser extent, early marriage/forced marriage. Awareness-raising campaigns also targeted the role of men and boys in countering gender-based violence, an approach that is key to changing mentalities. The reach of these activities was greatly enhanced because of a wide array of mediums and innovative partnerships with private companies and a range of stakeholders. Significant strides were also made in the training of professionals, including through regular interprofessional training and the strengthening of mandatory training for certain categories of professionals such as the police and teachers. In terms of secondary prevention, additional programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence have been introduced in custodial settings, a moderate increase in court referrals to such programmes has been registered and the number of staff working for the main perpetrator programme has been increased.

5. While welcoming these important strides, GREVIO notes that the impact of this far-reaching work would greatly benefit from the use of terminology that reflects a gendered understanding of violence against women in awareness-raising campaigns and in policies. Moreover, no prevention efforts are complete without robust training for professionals, which currently is severely insufficient when it comes to judges and healthcare personnel.

6. As regards the first aspect, the use of the concept of gender-based violence instead of violence against women and the conflation of men's and women's experiences in the delivery of awareness-raising campaigns weakens the message and the understanding that women are disproportionately affected because they are women. Coherent terminology aligned with the convention must be used to remove women from the shadows and give their experience of violence full visibility, including by highlighting the root causes of male perpetration. As regards the second aspect, as is discussed in this report, the dearth of mandatory training on violence against women for judges and healthcare personnel greatly impacts the prevention of secondary victimisation of women, ensuring their adequate support and protection and stemming perpetrators' impunity. Training not only allows awareness to be raised among professionals on violence against women and domestic violence; it also contributes to changing the outlooks and the conduct of these professionals with regard to the victims. Extending mandatory initial and in-service training to such key professionals is, therefore, of essence to strengthening prevention efforts.

Nascent steps taken to address the growing rates of online misogyny, the digital dimension of violence against women and the problems posed by violent pornography

7. Given the growing impact that online misogyny, the digital dimension of violence against women and violent pornography are having on women and girls in Malta, as elsewhere, it is particularly encouraging that the authorities are taking steps to address these emerging challenges. Policy documents such as the 2025-2030 Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan are

placing high on the agenda the commissioning of studies addressing these issues, including in the context of the general backlash against the advancement of women's rights and their equality with men experienced in Malta and other countries.¹¹ Moreover, the dangers posed by violent pornography are equally increasingly being explored at the policy level,¹² as well as through education, notably by including this topic in the mandatory curriculum and developing educational material for teachers to support them to address this issue. This is particularly timely as research confirms that violent pornography can have devastating effects on children's minds and makes the link to harmful sexual behaviour of children.¹³ Safeguarding measures for children and awareness among parents and educators about the accessibility of pornography online, its harmful effect on children's minds and its detrimental impact on their ability to establish healthy and consent-based sexual relations are therefore vital.

11. See Women, Peace and Security, Malta's Second National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, 2025-2030, pp. 19 and 31.

12. Through the commissioning of a policy document exploring the correlation between viewing simulated rape and the commission of the offence.

13. See the UK Children's Commissioner, "Evidence on pornography's influence on harmful sexual behaviour among children" (2023).

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

8. 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)

9. 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”.

10. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that the Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act (the GBVDV Act) did not define violence against women, using instead the concept of gender-based violence. The authorities had explained that such an approach aimed to ensure broader applicability of the law and policies and avoid the discrimination of LGBTI men and boys. In this respect, GREVIO had noted that under Article 4 of the convention, special measures that are necessary to prevent and protect women from gender-based violence are not to be considered as discriminatory. It had also drawn the authorities’ attention to the fact that to tackle the problem and its root causes effectively, both legislation and policy must define violence against women and acknowledge that it is a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women because it affects them disproportionately more than men.

11. GREVIO regrets that since the baseline evaluation report the above-mentioned shortcoming has not been remedied. While in the state report the authorities have reassured GREVIO that the disproportionate impact of gender-based violence on women is consistently recognised by the government and that training offered to professionals is underpinned by this principle, GREVIO underscores the importance of a formal recognition in the law and policies, notably by introducing a definition of violence against women and ensuring its consistent use, in line with obligations stemming from Article 3 of the convention. By way of example, the use of gender-based violence instead of violence against women in awareness-raising efforts and the tendency to conflate men and women’s experiences in this context weaken the understanding that women are disproportionately affected by this human rights violation and mask the gendered reasons behind male perpetration. Introducing a definition of violence against women would also represent a first step towards countering the insufficient gendered understanding of violence against women in the realm of justice and in other areas, as outlined in the baseline evaluation report and in this report. Indeed, it is essential that through the terminology used and the application of concrete measures,

the disproportionate incidence of violence against women, its gendered nature and specificities and root causes are recognised.

12. Since the baseline evaluation report, the definition of domestic violence provided under the GBVDV Act has been further refined, replacing the reference to violence that occurs “within the family and domestic unit” to violence that occurs “within the family and/in or an intimate relationship”.¹⁴ With this amendment, the Maltese authorities aimed to eliminate the backlog of cases pending before courts dealing with domestic violence, most of which concerned conflicts between cohabitants/persons living within the same household rather than instances of domestic violence as understood by the convention. GREVIO, therefore, welcomes the amendments made with a view to ensuring better alignment with the spirit of the convention.

13. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to ensure a clear gendered approach in their legislation and policies that fully acknowledges the gendered nature of domestic violence and violence against women, including by introducing a statutory definition of violence against women that acknowledges that it is a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women because it affects them disproportionately.

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

14. 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,¹⁵ 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.

15. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had welcomed the adoption of the first Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence Strategy and Action Plan (the first GBVDV strategy), which addressed a number of structural issues in the areas of prevention, protection and prosecution that affected victims of violence against women. Nonetheless, GREVIO had noted that, looking at its practical implementation, it primarily focused on domestic violence and did not address the challenges faced by women who face intersectional discrimination, nor the protection and support needs of victims living on the second largest island, Gozo. When it comes to the co-ordination of violence against women policies, GREVIO had noted with satisfaction that the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (CGBVDV), the designated co-ordination body, was a fully institutionalised entity with dedicated financial and human resources. Moreover, the co-ordination and the implementation of the relevant strategy was further attained through an Interministerial Committee (IMC), chaired by the CGBVDV, and composed of all relevant governmental stakeholders that met regularly to discuss progress on the first strategy and action plan. GREVIO had noted with concern, however, that both the CGBVDV and the IMC did not hold regular consultations with civil society, including with regard to the design of relevant policies and legislation. Finally, it had noted with concern that the responsibility to evaluate violence against women policies lay with the CGBVDV, the body that was equally responsible for co-ordinating and implementing those very same policies, thus not ensuring the necessary objectivity.

14. Under Article 2 of the GBVDV Act, domestic violence means all acts or omissions, including verbal, physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence causing physical and/or moral harm or suffering, including threats of such acts or omissions, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty that occur within a family and/or in an intimate relationship, whether or not the perpetrator resides or has resided in the same residence with the victim, and shall also include children who are witnesses of violence within a family and/or an intimate relationship.

15. 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.

16. GREVIO welcomes the fact that since the baseline evaluation report the authorities have adopted two consecutive, comprehensive strategies on gender-based violence and domestic violence embracing the four-pillar approach of the Istanbul Convention and covering 2021 to 2022 (the second GBVDV strategy) and 2023 to 2028 (the third GBVDV strategy). GREVIO notes with satisfaction that these two strategies include different measures that address forms of violence against women that were previously less addressed, including FGM, forced marriage, rape/sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking and the digital dimension of violence against women. The implementing stakeholders are equally specified for each measure, as well as the corresponding timelines. GREVIO further notes with satisfaction that a number of the above-mentioned measures build on and implement the findings issued by GREVIO's baseline evaluation report. Equally positive is the attention paid to the needs of certain groups of women that are or may be subject to intersectional discrimination, notably women from ethnic minorities, women with disabilities, LGBTI women, migrant women, elderly women and, as regards the third strategy, women with addiction issues. Furthermore, GREVIO finds it particularly encouraging that policy action is foreseen to overcome the significant barriers and difficulties that victims living in Gozo encounter, notably in the area of access to information, service provision and the reporting of domestic violence and violence against women. For example, the third strategy foresees the strengthening of service provision for domestic violence victims in Gozo, as well as the setting up of a specialist gender-based violence unit at the police station on the island. Finally, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the third GBVDV strategy was drafted in consultation with civil society, through dedicated meetings between the CGBVDV and women's rights organisations.

17. The objectives of the two strategies are broadly aligned and integrated with the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan covering the period 2022-2027 (the Gender Equality Strategy) and the 2025-2030 Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan. The first pursues, *inter alia*, the strengthening and mainstreaming of the principle of gender equality in education and challenging gender stereotypes, as well as the objective of eliminating gender imbalance in the field of justice by addressing gender bias and gender stereotypes, which GREVIO welcomes. GREVIO notes with interest that the 2025-2030 Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan aims to sponsor studies, among other things, on: the gender backlash in Malta and online misogyny, particularly among adolescents in school; and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, cybercrime and online harassment. GREVIO considers these studies as particularly timely given the growing impact that digital aspects of violence against women are having on women and girls in Malta and elsewhere. GREVIO furthermore notes with interest that the authorities have commissioned a policy document on the impact of pornography, including violent pornography and, in particular, the correlation between viewing simulated rape and the commission of the offence.¹⁶ GREVIO encourages the authorities to pursue this issue in order to address the harmful effect that violent pornography has on children's minds and its detrimental impact on their ability to establish healthy and consent-based sexual relations.

18. With regard more specifically to the co-ordination of policies on violence against women, GREVIO welcomes the further strengthening of the CGBVDV through increased human resources and funding.¹⁷ This reinforcement has enabled the CGBVDV to carry out extensive and valuable work to co-ordinate the two national strategies, as well as in the areas of awareness raising and training. Furthermore, since the baseline evaluation report, the IMC now meets on a monthly basis, and both the IMC and the CGBVDV hold regular consultations with NGOs, thereby facilitating their participation in the development of policies and legislation.¹⁸

19. Despite these positive developments, GREVIO notes with regret that at the implementation level most measures taken in the area of protection and prosecution continue to focus on domestic violence. Indeed, general and specialist support services for sexual violence/rape, as well as for FGM and forced marriage, for example, continue to be insufficient. Moreover, and despite a general commitment to intersectionality, it appears that not all relevant civil society representatives

16. Information provided to GREVIO during the evaluation visit.

17. See Chapter II, Financial resources.

18. See the state report, p. 12.

were involved in the consultation process for devising the two strategies, in particular NGOs dealing with migrant women's rights.¹⁹

20. Finally, as regards the evaluation of the gender-based violence and domestic violence strategies, these continue to be carried out by way of annual reports issued by the CGBVDV, thus not ensuring the required objectivity. Indeed, the CGBVDV appears to be cognisant of the importance of differentiating between policy making and implementation on the one hand and the evaluation of policies on the other. More specifically, the authorities brought to GREVIO's attention that discussions on attributing the evaluation function to the board of the CGBVDV were ongoing with a view to ensuring a more independent assessment. In this respect, GREVIO considers that identifying a separate institution, fully independent of the CGBVDV, and ensuring that such evaluation is carried out on the basis of standardised methodology and predefined indicators for each identified measure, may ensure greater objectivity.

21. While acknowledging the progress made in the area of integrated policies, GREVIO invites the Maltese authorities to:

- a. enhance the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and of policies on violence against women in relation to all forms of violence against women, beyond domestic violence;**
- b. hold regular consultations with civil society, including with NGOs dealing with migrant women's rights, with a view to ensuring their participation in the design of policies and legislation;**
- c. ensure, on a regular basis, the independent evaluation of policies on violence against women on the basis of standardised methodology and predefined indicators with a view to achieving the comprehensive and co-ordinated policy approach required by the Istanbul Convention.**

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

22. 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.²⁰

23. GREVIO welcomes the significant rise in funding for the CGBVDV and for the second and third GBVDV strategies since the baseline evaluation report. More specifically, the CGBVDV budget rose from €150 000 in 2018, covering both the running costs of the CGBVDV and the implementation costs of the first GBVDV strategy, to €570 000 in 2024, with the budget split into two separate spending lines – €500 000 for the costs of the CGBVDV and €70 000 for the implementation of the third GBVDV strategy. The total annual budget for domestic violence services,²¹ comprising the Domestic Violence Unit of Aġenzija Appoġġ, the Domestic Violence Risk Assessment Service, the state-run shelter Ghabex and the state-run perpetrator programme, also increased significantly from €1 746 148 at the time of the baseline evaluation report to €3 282 100 in 2024. Further funding is available to the Victim Support Agency, providing support to victims of crime with an annual budget of €400 000, as well as to two police hubs specialised in receiving and investigating reports of domestic violence. GREVIO further notes that the Maltese authorities have increased the funds allocated to NGOs providing sheltered accommodation and other specialist support to victims. Moreover, in the course of 2024, a total of €100 000 was awarded to NGOs on a project basis to carry out awareness raising on various forms of gender-based and domestic violence.

19. Information obtained during the visit.

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

21. The domestic violence services are structurally located under the specialist agency Aġenzija Appoġġ, which is, in turn, administratively placed under the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS). The FSWS is a state agency under the Ministry of Family, Children's Rights and Social Security and is responsible, *inter alia*, for the provision of social welfare services, in particular in relation to alcohol and substance abuse and in relation to problems related to family welfare.

24. Notwithstanding these positive developments, GREVIO has identified several areas where further improvement is needed. First, the second and third GBVDV strategies do not earmark funds for each foreseen measure, making it difficult to assess whether funding choices reflect the prevalence of different forms of violence against women. By way of example, it is difficult to identify the resources earmarked for prevention, protection of victims and prosecution for sexual violence and rape, or for digital forms of violence against women, and to assess their adequacy. Second, while different ministries and institutions may dedicate financial resources to combating violence against women, these do not appear to be quantifiable as they do not have separate budget lines for such measures. GREVIO considers that a more accurate estimate of the overall funding for measures to prevent and combat violence against women could be achieved if all of the ministries/institutions that dedicate financial resources to combating violence against women had separate budget lines or similar mechanisms for such measures and gender budgeting were introduced.

25. Third, as regards the funding of specialist shelters for victims of domestic violence and their children, GREVIO notes with grave concern that their financial viability and their very existence appears to be at serious risk. While funds allocated to NGOs providing sheltered accommodation and other specialist support services to victims has risen, according to indications provided by civil society, the financial allocations are inadequate and do not reflect the expenses incurred. More specifically, the funding for shelters is calculated on the basis of the number of nights for which they provide accommodation, regardless of the number of children accompanying the victim. Moreover, these sums do not account for expenses incurred by the shelter related to the victim's or her children's medical condition or economic circumstances nor for those incurred to respond to new structural requirements introduced by the authorities.²² On this point, civil society alerted GREVIO to the fact that because of the significant rise in the cost of living in Malta in the last few years, victims often do not have the means for basic sustenance, including costs for medical expenses and for their children's schooling, which are, therefore, borne by the shelter. As a result, women's rights NGOs have drawn GREVIO's attention to the fact that the funding is hardly sufficient to cover shelters' running costs and does not allow for competitive salaries to be offered to the staff.²³ Indeed, while GREVIO was informed that wages for social workers and employees in state-run domestic violence services have significantly increased – a development that GREVIO considers to be positive – no corresponding adjustments appear to have been made for NGO-run shelters. Consequently, shelters are unable to offer comparable salaries, which undermines their capacity to retain qualified staff and to fill vacant positions, due to a lack of applicants.²⁴ GREVIO notes with grave concern that as a result of the above-mentioned cumulative circumstances one such shelter has had to temporarily close.²⁵ GREVIO further notes that since the baseline evaluation report the procedure through which women's specialist support services can apply for state funding has remained unchanged. It is reliant on the proposal of a business plan to the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS), entering into a public social partnership with FSWS and negotiating a sum for a three-year term. GREVIO reiterates its observations made in the baseline evaluation report that such a procedure does not qualify as a transparent and accountable procedure allowing specialist women's rights organisations to request and compete for sustainable, long-term funding.

22. Civil society has drawn GREVIO's attention to various instances in which the Social Standards Authority has introduced new structural/infrastructural requirements, without the authorities providing the funds to assist the shelter to adapt their premises. This includes, for example, the newly introduced requirement to ensure a generator and air conditioning, without additional funds being provided.

23. See the NGO written submission by Dar Hosea, the Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, Professor Marceline Naudi, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service), Victim Support Malta (VSM) and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF).

24. During the evaluation visit, GREVIO's attention was drawn to the fact that in the course of one month, three staff members of a shelter had resigned to move to higher paying employment.

25. Notably, the shelter Dar Santa Bakhita.

26. **While acknowledging the progress made in the funding of policies on violence against women, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:**

- a. **ensure sufficient public funding for policies aimed at preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, while earmarking funds for each foreseen measure;**
- b. **take steps to identify the sums spent on addressing violence against women and domestic violence by all relevant institutions, in particular through gender budgeting.**

27. **Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to put in place a dedicated, transparent and accountable public procedure under which all NGOs that provide specialist support services to victims of all forms of violence against women and their children, including shelters, can compete for and request sustainable and long-term funding that reflects the real costs incurred.**

D. Data collection (Article 11)

28. 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.

29. Since the baseline evaluation report, some measures have been taken with a view to strengthening data collection, although much remains to be done. In the course of 2021, the National Statistics Office (NSO) set up a crime statistics unit within its structure and signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with key service providers, disaggregating the data collected on domestic violence by sex, the age of the victim, as well as the geographical location.²⁶ Moreover, the collection of disaggregated data on gender-based violence and domestic violence, in line with the convention's standards, has been set as a strategic goal in the third GBVDV strategy. Finally, a survey on safety and well-being was published in 2022 providing data from a population sample and highlighting experiences of sexual harassment at work, intimate partner violence, stalking, and physical and sexual violence, disaggregated by sex and, in certain cases, by age and the victim-perpetrator relationship. This notwithstanding, GREVIO notes with concern that data collected and published by the NSO as well as by the CGBVDV in its annual reports continue to pertain to domestic violence only, as was the case in the baseline evaluation report. The current system, therefore, fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the incidence of all forms of violence against women covered by the convention and how they are being responded to by service providers and criminal justice.

1. Law-enforcement agencies and the justice sector

30. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that data collected by the police primarily concerned domestic violence and were not disaggregated in line with the requirements of the convention. Moreover, GREVIO had found that courts did not collect data on various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, and that it was impossible to track cases across the criminal justice system, including as a result of a lack of co-ordination and comparability between data sets collected by the police, the Attorney General's Office and the courts.

31. GREVIO notes with concern that, overall, the situation has remained unchanged. If, on the one hand, some data on domestic violence are now collected by dedicated staff in the new gender-based violence and domestic violence unit within the police force, data publicly available and statistics made available to GREVIO are disaggregated only on the basis of the sex of the victim and by the age.²⁷ Data are, therefore, not disaggregated by the sex of the perpetrator and geographical

26. Key service providers that provide the NSO with data on domestic violence are the Domestic Violence unit of Aġenzija Appogg, emergency healthcare services, shelters, the police, the Victim Support Agency and Victim Support Malta.

27. See data published by the NSO, available at: <https://nso.gov.mt/crime/domestic-violence-2024/>.

location, nor by the victim–perpetrator relationship. Moreover, data on other equally harmful forms of violence against women, including rape, stalking, sexual harassment outside of an intimate partner context, FGM, forced marriage and forced sterilisation, cannot easily be extracted. When it comes to the court system, according to the authorities, courts are now collecting some disaggregated data related to domestic violence cases²⁸ and a tendering process is underway for a new case-management system that will collect data from the courts and the Attorney General’s Office. The aim being, *inter alia*, to ensure more co-ordination and interoperability of data between these institutions.²⁹ While welcoming this development, GREVIO notes that the implementation of the new case-management system is not immediate and is foreseen for 2028. Moreover, the information provided was not conclusive as to whether the co-ordination and comparability of data would be ensured also with law enforcement authorities. GREVIO thus notes with concern that currently no data are available on the number of prosecutions and convictions for acts of violence against women and domestic violence and that a system that allows cases to be adequately tracked across the criminal justice system is not yet in place. GREVIO underscores the importance of compliance with such a requirement in order to assess whether perpetrators are being prosecuted and punished as required by the convention and whether progress is being made in combating impunity.

32. GREVIO further notes that, as was the case in the baseline evaluation report, statistics on temporary protection orders and protection orders issued for all cases of violence against women, the number of breaches and the sanctions imposed are not publicly available, making it impossible for GREVIO to offer an assessment.

33. **Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to:**

- a. **swiftly ensure the comprehensive collection of disaggregated data in relation to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention at all stages of the criminal justice system (notably reporting, investigation, prosecution and their outcome, including the sanctions imposed), disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. Such data should be co-ordinated and comparable so that cases can be tracked across all stages of the law-enforcement and judicial proceedings;**
- b. **collect disaggregated data on the number of temporary protection orders and protection orders issued, as well as on their violation and the sanctions imposed for all cases of violence against women.**

2. Healthcare sector

34. In the area of healthcare, GREVIO regrets that there have been no significant developments since the baseline evaluation report. Data on access to primary healthcare and emergency services continue to be collected only in respect of domestic violence, including the type of injury, the sex of the victim, victim–perpetrator relationship and the number of minor dependants present in the household of the victim. As is mentioned earlier in this section, no data on rape committed outside a domestic violence context, FGM, forced abortion or forced sterilisation are therefore collected, a gap that requires urgent attention.

35. **Recalling the findings issued in the GREVIO baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that public and private healthcare services collect data on contacts made for all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator, the type of violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim.**

28. See the reply by Malta to the reporting form on the implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee of the Parties adopted on 15 December 2020, p. 26.

29. See the state report, p. 26.

3. Social services

36. Since the baseline evaluation report, there have been a few developments with regard to the type and scope of data collected by the FSWS. Notably, the FSWS issues statistical reports twice a year providing data on service provision for victims of domestic violence, gender-based violence and violence related to “honour” on the islands of Malta and Gozo, which is a welcome development. More specifically, data are collected on contacts made with the Domestic Violence unit of Aġenzija Appoġġ broken down by sex, type of abuse in the context of domestic violence, age and location, and participation in perpetrator programmes. Nonetheless, GREVIO notes that the references to gender-based violence and violence related to “honour” are not specified further, preventing the emergence of a clear picture in relation to contact made for forms of violence against women other than domestic violence.

37. Recalling the findings issued in the GREVIO baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to ensure the collection of data on access to social services with respect to other forms of violence against women under the Istanbul Convention beyond domestic violence, disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator, the type of violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim.

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

A. Prevention

38. 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 towards the implementation of early preventive measures. It also covers the progress made towards 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.³⁰ In turn, effective prevention empowers women and girls to speak out about their experiences and seek support and protection.

1. General obligations (Article 12)

39. 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.

40. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that the Maltese authorities had run an increasing number of awareness-raising campaigns focusing primarily on domestic violence and, marginally, on sexual harassment and gender equality, all the while integrating an intersectional approach. GREVIO had noted with concern that other serious forms of violence against women such as sexual violence, stalking, FGM, forced abortion, forced sterilisation and forced marriage were not addressed. Moreover, campaigns seemed primarily to be project-based, dependent on EU funding and mostly carried out in the context of the international campaign "16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence". Furthermore, no evaluation of the impact of such campaigns had been carried out by the authorities.

41. Since the baseline evaluation report, the Maltese authorities have taken significant steps to strengthen preventive measures, as reflected in the priorities set out by the third GBVDV strategy and by the Gender Equality Strategy. In particular, the third GBVDV strategy foresees, *inter alia*, the commissioning of research and the implementation of awareness-raising campaigns on all forms of gender-based violence and domestic violence and on the digital dimension of violence against women, integrating an intersectional approach. In line with the findings issued by GREVIO in its baseline evaluation report, the awareness-raising campaigns are to be carried out regularly, on a quarterly basis, and their impact is to be assessed by the authorities, which GREVIO greatly welcomes. In parallel, the Gender Equality Strategy includes as priorities measures to address gender stereotypes in the area of health, justice and education, including, for example, by reviewing court decisions and raising awareness of judicial stereotypes and by tackling stereotypes on gender roles and care responsibilities in the family.³¹ The Gender Equality Strategy, furthermore, foresees

30. 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.

31. See the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan 2024-2027.

concrete measures to achieve gender balance in political decision making and to ensure equal access to employment in all sectors.

42. GREVIO commends the Maltese authorities' efforts for turning the aforementioned policy objectives into tangible action on the ground. GREVIO notes with satisfaction the increasing number of innovative awareness-raising campaigns and preventive initiatives that have been spearheaded by the CGBVDV, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE), the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms and Equality and the Commission on the Rights of People with Disability since the baseline evaluation report, frequently with the involvement of women's rights organisations. These campaigns were carried out not only in conjunction with the 16 Days of Activism but also throughout the year and increased society's awareness of domestic violence, gender equality, gender stereotypes, the digital dimension of violence against women, sexual violence and the importance of consent, stalking, sexual harassment, FGM and, to a lesser extent, early marriage/forced marriage. Preventive efforts equally targeted the role of men and boys in countering gender-based violence, an approach that is particularly valued by GREVIO. For example, in 2022 a broad campaign was carried out, in co-operation with NGOs, on the contribution of men and boys to challenging gender stereotypes and toxic masculinity and preventing gender-based violence among their peers by not perpetrating themselves. This aim was achieved through the broadcasting of video clips involving public figures and the publishing of posters challenging gender stereotypes on social media and on official state websites. These efforts were further supported by the holding of a conference in which best practices from other countries were discussed and were followed by a round-table discussion aimed at formulating policy recommendations on this issue.³²

43. As regards the need to address the heightened exposure to gender-based violence by women and girls at risk of intersectional discrimination, awareness-raising efforts adopted an intersectional approach by focusing on the experiences of the elderly, persons with disabilities, migrants and LGBTI persons, albeit without a clear focus on women, which GREVIO notes with concern, as is further outlined below. Some campaigns targeted the general population, while others were aimed at the above-mentioned groups considered at risk of heightened exposure to gender-based violence. For example, since the baseline evaluation report, several information sessions on gender-based violence and domestic violence, including the role of consent in sexual relations, were held at Active Ageing Centres, targeting elderly people.³³ As regards migrants, a dedicated awareness-raising campaign was carried out in 2022 focusing on this group's experience of gender-based violence, domestic violence and addressing stereotypes that further reinforce violence. The campaign encompassed the dissemination of multilingual posters shared through a variety of means and dedicated, in-person, information sessions in reception centres, which are welcome developments.

44. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that to ensure the largest possible outreach the CGBVDV and other relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, used a wide array of mediums, including mass media news portals, radio, social media, artistic competitions (photography, drawing, poetry) and theatrical plays, with the commissioner of the CGBVDV actively intervening on television and on the radio. Co-operation with private companies was also leveraged, with corporations agreeing to display information on gender-based violence, including where to seek support, on their websites and through social media and newsletters; businesses such as supermarkets, pharmacies, private clinics and restaurants also displayed information material on their premises.³⁴ Equally positive is the fact that the outreach of the various campaigns extended to Gozo.

32. Equally worthy of note as a means to engage young people, and in particular boys, was the funding by the authorities of the production of a song by a popular boy band in 2025 to raise awareness of domestic violence.

33. Active Ageing Centres are community spaces specifically aimed at supporting the elderly. Their role is to provide social, physical, educational and recreational activities.

34. See the 2024 Commission on Gender-Based Violence annual report, p. 56.

45. As regards preventive action beyond awareness-raising campaigns, GREVIO notes with interest the commissioning of research, including in co-operation with the University of Malta, into the exposure of teens to dating violence³⁵ and on the impact of perpetrator programmes on the behaviour of perpetrators with a view to developing preventive measures.³⁶

46. Beyond campaigning initiatives, it is equally important to ensure primary prevention measures that aim to empower women and reduce their vulnerability to violence, notably by strengthening or restoring their confidence and informing them about their rights, while also addressing gender stereotypes and power imbalances in society. GREVIO considers it important to ensure longer-term primary prevention measures beyond awareness-raising campaigns and to firmly root any preventive effort in a gendered understanding of violence against women. This means highlighting the root causes of violence against women as being linked to women's inequality with men in intimate relationships as much as in society, patriarchal attitudes and harmful gender stereotypes, and emphasising and addressing the specific experiences of violence that women face because they are women. Instead, GREVIO notes with concern that in Malta awareness-raising campaigns that conflate the experiences of both men and women weakens the message and the understanding that women are disproportionately affected by violence at the hands of intimate partners, by rape and sexual violence, by sexual harassment and by all other forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention. This is compounded by the generalised use of the concept of gender-based violence without specific references to and examples of violence directed at women because they are women. Indeed, it is essential that through the use of accurate terminology and the application of concrete measures, the disproportionate incidence of violence against women, its gendered nature and specificities and root causes linked to women's historical inequality with men are recognised so that attitudes and beliefs can be changed in the long term.

47. When it comes to the evaluation of awareness-raising campaigns, while important steps have been taken by the CGBVDV to assess the impact of certain measures taken,³⁷ this is not carried out systematically by all authorities to allow for their adjustment and the identification of any undesirable or adverse effects.³⁸

48. **GREVIO invites the Maltese authorities to:**

- a. **increase their primary prevention measures in relation to all forms of violence against women, including on forced abortion and forced sterilisation, while maintaining a strong focus on the role of men and boys in prevention efforts and an intersectional approach to awareness-raising activities;**
- b. **systematically carry out impact assessments of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures taken;**
- c. **identify, through such impact assessments, any undesirable or adverse effects of the awareness-raising campaigns and adjust them accordingly.**

49. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to ensure that prevention efforts adopt a gendered approach that explicitly recognises and addresses the disproportionate impact of violence on women and girls, including by using terminology that accurately reflects violence against women as a gendered phenomenon, in line with the Istanbul Convention.**

35. The study looked into the commission of the following offences in the context of dates: sexual violence, sexual harassment, stalking, psychological violence and the digital dimension of violence against women. See the state report, p. 29.

36. See the reply by Malta to the reporting form on the implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee of the Parties adopted on 15 December 2020, p. 27.

37. For example, the CGBVDV commissioned a quantitative study to evaluate the impact of its awareness-raising initiatives implemented between November 2024 and March 2025, using an online questionnaire.

38. See for example the 2024 CGBVDV annual report, p. 60.

2. Education (Article 14)

50. 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 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.

51. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had noted with satisfaction that gender equality, non-stereotyped gender roles, non-violent conflict resolution, sexual education, including the notion of freely given consent, and, to a certain extent, domestic violence, were included in the mandatory national curriculum through the course Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) and that these notions were adapted to the evolving capacity of learners. GREVIO also had observed that the Ethics classes offered in state schools touched upon abusive relationships and the importance of consent in sexual relations, among other topics. This notwithstanding, GREVIO had found that the teaching of the different forms of violence against women, including the provision of more in-depth information on the characteristics and dynamics of domestic violence and the specific vulnerability of women at the intersection of discrimination, was lacking.

52. Overall, the authorities have taken steps to further reinforce the teaching of the topics under Article 14 of the convention by taking certain policy measures as well as by running specific, albeit non-mandatory, educational projects.

53. At the policy level, GREVIO welcomes the inclusion in the Gender Equality Strategy and in the third GBVDV strategy of the objective to mainstream the principle of equality in the education system and to challenge gender stereotypes, while at the same time taking an intersectional approach to violence. The PSCD course now also covers the harmful effect that violent pornography has on children and youth, the digital dimension of gender-based violence and online safety, which GREVIO commends. Educational videos and lesson plans addressing domestic violence, coercive control, stalking, on-line harassment and the importance of consent were also developed since the baseline evaluation report to further support the PSCD course.³⁹ Moreover, the authorities have informed GREVIO that the subject of social studies now also addresses the causes and effects of domestic violence and/or gender-based violence, although it is not clear which forms of gender-based violence against women and girls it specifically addresses. Furthermore, GREVIO also welcome the fact that, following a court case brought by parents seeking to have their child exempted from PSCD lessons, the court ruled in 2025 that parents do not have the right to withdraw their child from any subject that forms part of Malta's national minimum curriculum, including the PSCD subject.⁴⁰ A number of ad hoc, non-mandatory educational projects have also addressed some of the topics under Article 14 of the convention in the period following the adoption of the baseline evaluation report. The Safe Dates programme was run in four secondary schools with a view to tackling violence committed in the context of dates, including its digital dimension, and promoting safe and healthy relationships. The Be Smart online project run by the FSWS also aims to teach children how to protect themselves from cyberbullying and online violence and foresees an exchange on these subjects with parents. Moreover, in the context of this project, a toolkit has been developed for teachers that touches upon the impact of pornography. In addition, a three-hour

39. These videos and lesson plans were developed by the CGBVDV in cooperation with the Ministry for Education and Sport.

40. See the newspaper article "Couple's bid to revise school lessons on sexuality rejected by court", *Times of Malta*, available at: www.timesofmalta.com/article/couple-bid-revise-school-lessons-sexuality-rejected-court.1111598?utm.

seminar has also been delivered to secondary-school students on sexuality education, the notion of consent and gender stereotypes, among other issues.

54. While acknowledging the significant steps taken to implement Article 14 of the convention by the authorities, GREVIO would like to draw attention to the areas where further progress is still needed, which were already identified in the baseline evaluation report. Notably, the need to address the different forms of violence against women and provide more in-depth information on the characteristics and dynamics of domestic violence and the specific vulnerability of women at the intersection of discrimination.

55. As regards the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence in informal educational facilities, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the Secretariat for Catholic Education (SFCE), through two designated youth workers, works with the Malta Girl Guides to provide non-formal educational programmes to students aged 5 to 16. These address different forms of gender-based violence, gender stereotypes, the empowerment of girls and how to seek help.

56. When it comes to procedures in place to identify and further refer victims of gender-based violence against girls in schools, GREVIO had also observed in its baseline evaluation report that while a procedure was in place in church schools to identify and further refer victims of violence, it was not clear whether a similar protocol was in place in state schools. It had concluded that schools may not be sufficiently aware of all of the different forms of violence against women and girls and that there was a lack of understanding on how to identify children at risk of being taken out of Malta for the purpose of forced marriage or FGM. Since the baseline evaluation report, mandatory reporting guidelines were issued by the FSWS in 2020.⁴¹ These foresee that professionals working with children must make a report to child-protection services, according to a specified procedure, when they identify a child suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm because of abuse or neglect. These guidelines refer to domestic violence, sexual violence, FGM and forced marriage, which GREVIO welcomes.

57. Noting the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO encourages the Maltese authorities to strengthen the teaching about all of the different forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and the specific vulnerability of women at the intersection of discrimination, through the mandatory school curriculum, at all levels of education, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners.

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

58. 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.

59. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that all relevant professionals in contact with victims of violence against women had received minimal initial training as regards domestic violence but no initial training on other forms of violence against women. Furthermore, in-service training was primarily carried out on a voluntary and sporadic basis for all professions. Since then, important steps have been taken with a view to bridging this gap, including from a policy perspective. GREVIO welcomes the inclusion in the third GBVDV strategy of a number of objectives, including the carrying out of a training needs assessment on an annual basis in co-operation with NGOs; the provision, together with civil society, of interprofessional training and the evaluation of its impact; and the development and provision of dedicated training for different categories of professionals. These policy objectives have been operationalised by the CGBVDV, notably by carrying out various needs assessments and organising and delivering, in co-operation with civil

41. See the Mandatory Reporting Guidelines for Professionals in terms of Minor Protection (alternative care) Act, Cap. 602 of the laws of Malta, September 2020.

society, around 12 rounds of multi-agency training between 2022 and 2025.⁴² The subjects broached included, among others, the Istanbul Convention, domestic violence, certain forms of violence against women, including its digital dimension, FGM, referrals to support services, the accrued vulnerability of persons subject to intersectional discrimination, gender stereotypes and victims' responses to trauma. In 2026 two additional topics were included based on feed-back received from the participants, notably, on children who witness violence and on the national legal framework on domestic violence. The training targeted a wide range of professionals who were either new recruits or staff with limited training on violence against women.⁴³ Dedicated interprofessional training was also provided on the topic of risk-assessment tools and for a range of professionals operating in Gozo.⁴⁴ Dedicated training sessions were equally carried out by the NCPE on sexual harassment for a range of professionals, including the Armed Forces of Malta. Moreover, other training initiatives were provided for specific categories of professionals, as is outlined below.

60. GREVIO welcomes the sustained efforts made by the authorities in Malta to provide multi-agency training on gender-based violence to different categories of professionals on a continuous basis and in co-operation with women's rights organisations. There is wide agreement among stakeholders in Malta regarding the importance and usefulness of such training to strengthen professionals' knowledge on violence against women and reinforce interagency co-operation. Nonetheless, GREVIO regrets that such training is not mandatory and that only those selected by their respective ministries and who are willing to attend benefit from the training.

61. As regards more specifically the training of law-enforcement authorities, in its baseline evaluation report GREVIO had observed that no mandatory initial training on violence against women was provided, although short workshops were available on a voluntary basis. Similarly, in-service training on domestic violence was available on a voluntary basis to higher ranking officers. GREVIO had noted that the dire lack of training on all forms of violence against women had serious ramifications for the way reports were received and handled.

62. GREVIO welcomes the fact that since the baseline evaluation report mandatory initial training has been introduced on domestic violence, secondary victimisation and sexual violence for police recruits and police inspectors. Moreover, some training on domestic violence has been provided to divisional/district police so that each police station has at least one officer trained in the handling and management of cases of domestic violence.⁴⁵ This is important as not all cases of domestic violence are investigated by the specialist domestic violence hubs (DV hubs).⁴⁶ A range of in-service training is also available for police officers of different ranks, covering domestic violence, sexual violence, the effects of trauma on victims' responses and, to a limited extent, FGM, although it is not clear to what extent they are of a mandatory nature. Of particular interest is the domestic violence virtual reality simulation training that enables police officers to experience the dynamics and emotional intensity of domestic violence and improve their response. More in-depth mandatory training is provided to officers working in the hubs on domestic violence, stalking, sexual violence, risk assessment and management, and violence in the name of "honour". Moreover, voluntary training is provided to officers of the DV hubs in co-operation with the University of Malta by experts on violence against women and is also made available through the previously mentioned multi-agency training. This specific course is particularly comprehensive covering various forms of violence against women, domestic violence, gender stereotypes and the inappropriate use of the concept of parental alienation syndrome and similar concepts in the context of domestic violence. The police are further guided by a standard operating procedure on gender-based violence and domestic violence (the GBV and DV SOP) that lays out the respective roles of the district police officers and of the officers of the DV hubs in handling cases of domestic violence, and addresses the importance

42. Between 2022 and October 2025, 500 professionals underwent training.

43. Notably it targeted the police, social workers, risk assessors, probation officers, teachers, psychologists, legal aid lawyers, doctors and nurses. See, for example, the 2024 CGBVDV annual report, p. 50.

44. See the state report, p. 39.

45. In Malta, divisional police are the section within the Maltese police force responsible for territorial, frontline policing, organised by geographical divisions across the country.

46. For example, the District police investigate cases of domestic violence perpetrated by a former spouse/partner of over two years, where no children are involved and where there have been no reports of domestic violence for 12 months.

of risk assessments, temporary protection orders (TPOs), protection orders (POs), the dangers of attempted strangulation and the collection of evidence, among other topics.

63. While welcoming the broadening of the provision of training, including mandatory training, for police officers, civil society has alerted GREVIO to persistent problems in the handling of reports, particularly by district police officers, with victims being at times disbelieved and/or dissuaded from reporting. GREVIO underscores the importance of ensuring that initial and in-service training and the relevant supporting guidelines address all forms of violence against women and that training on violence against women is mandatory for all police officers, not only those operating in the DV hub.

64. When it comes to the training of judges and prosecutors, GREVIO had observed in its baseline evaluation report that they did not benefit from any initial training on the different forms of violence against women and that the sporadic in-service training that was offered on a voluntary basis did not reach all relevant professionals, leading to, *inter alia*, little sensitivity from judges, secondary victimisation of women, an inadequate understanding of the role and importance of emergency barring and protection orders in breaking the cycle of violence, and the value of referrals to perpetrator programmes. GREVIO notes that despite the objective included in the third GBVDV strategy to provide training to the judiciary on the role of risk assessments, emergency barring and protection orders and the prosecution of different forms of violence against women, little has changed since the baseline evaluation report. Apart from one course offered to judges, on a voluntary basis, by the CGBVDV together with the Judicial Committee in 2023,⁴⁷ and training on sexual violence provided to prosecutors, GREVIO observes a dire deficiency in the training on violence against women provided to these categories of professionals, despite their pivotal role. GREVIO notes with grave concern that most stakeholders pinpointed the training on violence against women of judges, court experts and other criminal justice professionals as requiring priority action because of the persistent use of gender stereotypes and language that lead to the secondary victimisation of victims and because of the insufficient understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence.⁴⁸ While according to the authorities other training modules are being developed by the CGBVDV together with civil society for the judiciary, resistance to the implementation of training seems to persist, including for reasons of judicial independence and autonomy.

65. GREVIO underscores its full respect for judicial independence and autonomy, while emphasising at the same time that efforts to enhance knowledge on violence against women are intended to support, rather than interfere with, judicial decision making. GREVIO also highlights the unique and essential role the judiciary plays in applying the Istanbul Convention and its principles incorporated into national legislation. By virtue of this essential role, judges' decisions may directly engage states' responsibility.⁴⁹ It is therefore of paramount importance that, when adjudicating cases in criminal and civil law pertaining to violence against women, such decisions are informed and based on appropriate, specialist knowledge, addressing, *inter alia*, gender stereotyping. Indeed, this requires expertise on very complex phenomena such as trauma-induced victim behaviour; the "freeze, flop and befriend" reactions of victims of rape; and the long-term harm and consequences of witnessing domestic violence on children, as well as in-depth knowledge of the standards of the Istanbul Convention. Such training needs cannot be sufficiently addressed by ad hoc, optional courses, but require mandatory and in-depth training of judges on relevant issues. It is encouraging that this is increasingly being recognised and that judicial training academies are moving towards mandatory training on violence against women to address the complex nature of these offences.⁵⁰ This is supported by the information collected by the Council of Europe European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) in 2020 showing that 24 member states of the Council of Europe

47. This course addressed the dynamics of domestic violence, its effects on children, FGM and child marriage, among other topics.

48. Information obtained during the evaluation visit. See also the NGO written submission by Dar Hosea, the Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebh, Professor Marceline Naudi, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service), Victim Support Malta (VSM) and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF), p. 4.

49. The following are examples among many cases in the area of violence against women where the decisions of judge(s) engaged states' responsibility under the European Convention on Human Rights and led to a violation: *Vuckovic v. Croatia* (Application No. 15798/20, 12 December 2023), *J.L. v. Italy* (Application No. 5671/16, 27 May 2021) and *Carvalho Pinto de Sousa Morais v. Portugal* (Application No. 17484/15, 25 July 2017).

50. See the first thematic evaluation report on Montenegro, paragraph 68.

require some form of compulsory in-service training for judges,⁵¹ and the complex nature of violence against women would merit inclusion of these topics. Ways must be found, therefore, to ensure that members of the judiciary are equipped with the necessary knowledge to respond to women victims of violence and their children in a manner that instils their trust in the judiciary and provides an adequate sense of justice. This is of acute relevance not only in the context of criminal proceedings but also in relation to family law cases, where judicial decisions on custody and visitation often do not offer sufficient consideration for the safety concerns and needs of women and children leaving abusive relationships, frequently ignoring allegations of domestic violence and/or accepting agreements despite a history of domestic violence.

66. As regards healthcare personnel, in its baseline evaluation report GREVIO had pointed to the absence of initial and in-service training on FGM accompanied by a standardised protocol, as well as a dire need for initial and in-service training in the area of sexual violence, as expressed by healthcare personnel. GREVIO notes with concern that despite some in-service training being made available to doctors, nurses, psychologists and physiotherapists on a voluntary basis on domestic violence, and to a limited extent on sexual violence and FGM, the situation has not improved. GREVIO notes with concern that this is causing inadequate handling of cases of sexual violence.

67. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had found that teachers lacked adequate training on violence against women, including on how to identify children at risk of being taken out of school for the purpose of forced marriage or FGM. GREVIO welcomes the inclusion of the topic of sexual violence as part of the mandatory initial training of teachers and the mandatory training carried out in co-operation with NGOs on a range of issues that has benefited teachers (including PSCD teachers), guidance counsellors, educators and psychosocial staff. The training includes information on the Istanbul Convention, various forms of violence, including domestic violence and sexual violence, and how to identify potential victims, empower them to disclose their experience and support them.⁵² GREVIO, furthermore, notes with interest the provision of a mandatory training module for teachers on “teaching resilience to radicalisation and misogyny in the ethics classroom, which aims to empower teachers to dismantle misogynistic narratives in the on-line world. The SFCE has also carried out mandatory training for educators on the different forms of violence children may be subject to or exposed to, as well as on the issue of consent, how to identify victims and support them. Training on FGM has been also made available by the NGO Tama, albeit on a voluntary basis. Likewise, the NCPE has also offered training to teachers on gender mainstreaming, sexual harassment and gender stereotypes with a view to raising teachers’ awareness on how to recognise, prevent and address discriminatory and harassing behaviour.

68. Finally, as regards the training of social workers, mandatory training on risk assessments, on Maltese legislation on domestic violence and on the standards of the convention is provided. This is complemented by non-mandatory in-service training such as on sexual violence and FGM.

69. While acknowledging the progress made in the area of training, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to take legislative and other measures to ensure the mandatory provision of initial and in-service training on all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, to all professionals that are in contact with victims and perpetrators. These include, in particular, police officers, prosecutors, lawyers, court-appointed experts, medical doctors, nurses, midwives, healthcare staff, teachers, educators and social workers. Such training must be accompanied by standardised protocols addressing all forms of violence against women, aimed at identifying, providing support to and further referring victims to other services.

51. Council of Europe European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), Qualitative Data on European Judicial Systems, 2020, available at: www.public.tableau.com/app/profile/cepej/viz/QualitativeDataEN/QualitativeData.

52. See the state report, p. 40 and the Annex, pp. xxx and xci.

70. **GREVIO further urges the Maltese authorities to ensure the mandatory initial and in-service training of judges, accompanied by guidelines for judicial proceedings in cases of gender-based violence against women that specifically address:**

- a. **for those presiding over cases involving custody and visitation rights, the devastating effects that witnessing violence against women has on children, the importance that victims' safety has on children's ability to recover from trauma and the need to take such circumstances into account when reaching a decision; the nature and dynamics of domestic violence, including the unequal power relations between the parties, as opposed to a mere conflictual relationship between spouses; and the inappropriateness of the use of the so-called parental alienation syndrome in a context of domestic violence and other notions that position women victims of violence as hostile or unco-operative;**
- b. **for those presiding over criminal cases, gender stereotypes and bias, trauma-induced victim behaviour, the "freeze, flop and befriend" reactions of victims of rape and in-depth knowledge of the standards of the Istanbul Convention.**

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

71. Perpetrator programmes are important elements of an integrated and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating violence against women. Under Article 16 of the 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 to adopt 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

72. GREVIO welcomes the Maltese authorities' engagement with the findings issued in relation to perpetrators of domestic violence in its baseline evaluation report, with important strides having been made in respect of many critical points that had been identified therein.

73. First, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that its findings on perpetrator programmes were incorporated in the third GBVDV strategy. The strategy sets as objectives the strengthening of perpetrator treatment programmes and their evaluation; their incorporation into the criminal justice system as a tool to reduce recidivism; and the training of the judiciary and of lawyers on their importance.

74. When it comes to the implementation of the objective of strengthening the perpetrator programmes, since the baseline evaluation report, in addition to the "STOP! the Violence and Abuse Service" run by Aġenzija Appoġġ (under the FSWS), two additional programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence have been introduced in custodial settings. One of these programmes is run in the Corradino Correctional Facility and the other is run in a youth prison, supporting those who have perpetrated or witnessed domestic violence and are serving a prison sentence. As was the case in its baseline evaluation report, these programmes assist men/youth to become aware of and take responsibility for their behaviour and are based on a gendered understanding of violence against women. Moreover, since the baseline evaluation report, the level of staff working for the perpetrator programme run by Aġenzija Appoġġ has been increased to now include a family therapist, a forensic psychologist and a neuropsychologist, enabling the running of two programmes per year.

75. As regards the need to increase court referrals to perpetrator programmes, which was raised in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, the judiciary was made aware of the preventive role of perpetrator programmes in the training carried out by the CGBVDV in 2023.⁵³ Moreover, the CGBVDV emphasised the importance of the use of referrals to perpetrator programmes in

53. See the state report, p. 46.

sentencing in a meeting with the Chief Justice.⁵⁴ When compared to the number of court referrals observed in the baseline evaluation report (11 over a three-year period), GREVIO notes with satisfaction that there has been a rise in the number of court referrals in the period under review.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, according to indications provided by civil society, court referrals are still underused and very much depend on the presiding judge, thus requiring more effective training of judges on the subject.⁵⁶ Moreover, it appears that where there has been a court referral, no measures are taken if the perpetrator refuses to attend the programme, as his consent is required.

76. The co-ordination between perpetrator programmes and specialist support services for victims continues to be ensured and has been further strengthened through MARAM meetings, in which representatives of both services are present. According to the authorities, locating the domestic violence services of Aġenzija Appoġġ in the same premises as the STOP! the Violence and Abuse Service further reinforces this co-ordination.

77. Finally, as regards the evaluation of the current perpetrator programmes, the main perpetrator programme is being evaluated through the IMPACT Toolkit developed by the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence.⁵⁷ Moreover, staff on the perpetrator programme have received training on how to evaluate the progress of each participant through the IMPACT Toolkit, which GREVIO welcomes.

78. While acknowledging the progress made with regard to the running of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to use all available means to ensure that perpetrator programmes are widely attended. This includes integrating them into the criminal justice system as a tool to reduce recidivism, ensuring that they are attended and providing for mandatory court referrals.

b. Programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence

79. The Department for Probation and Parole (DPP) runs a community-based sex offender intervention programme for convicted offenders aged 16 years and over. After an initial in-depth assessment of the sexual offenders has been conducted to identify their specific needs, individual sessions are then offered. There appear to have been no significant developments since the baseline evaluation report on programmes for perpetrators of sexual violence and the observations expressed in the baseline evaluation report are therefore still valid.

B. Protection and support

80. 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.

54. The Chief Justice is the most senior judge in Malta and presides over the Constitutional Court and the Court of Appeal. See: www.judiciary.mt/en/the-chief-justice/.

55. Although official data were not provided, GREVIO was informed that in 2024 there were 120 court referrals to perpetrator programmes and that in 2025 in a six-month period 123 court referrals were registered.

56. Information obtained during the evaluation visit. See also the NGO written submission by Dar Hosea, the Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebh, Professor Marceline Naudi, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service), Victim Support Malta (VSM) and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF), p. 7.

57. The IMPACT Toolkit is an outcome measurement tool that enables organisations to evaluate changes in perpetrators' behaviour, as well as the impact of that behaviour on the victim, with a view to verifying whether the programme is having the intended effect of keeping victims safe. See: www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/what-we-do/research/project-impact.

1. General obligations (Article 18)

81. 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.

82. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had welcomed the existence and implementation of protocols that ensured co-ordination between a number of state agencies in relation to cases of domestic violence, noting however the need to extend co-operation to key stakeholders such as judges, prosecutors and all relevant NGOs, while ensuring at the same time that support is provided on a "one-stop-shop" basis. Furthermore, GREVIO had found that co-ordination in the provision of support services for sexual violence was not effective, and that no interagency collaboration existed for other forms of violence against women such as stalking, FGM and forced marriage. Finally, it had noted that the planned measure of setting up a multi-agency risk-assessment meeting (MARAM), had been stalled due to problems pertaining to information sharing between agencies.

83. GREVIO welcomes, since the baseline evaluation report, the inclusion in the third GBVDV strategy of the objective to strengthen the multi-agency approach across the competent state agencies in relation to cases of domestic violence and gender-based violence; and to reinforce the role of the MARAM in handling high-risk cases of domestic violence in a co-ordinated manner. In line with this last objective, GREVIO commends the Maltese authorities for having set up the MARAM in July 2023 and for issuing dedicated regulations in 2025 that underpin its functioning. According to these regulations, the MARAM meets at least twice a month to discuss cases of domestic violence that have been assessed by the competent risk assessor as "high risk". This co-ordinated meeting aims to design an action plan that will reduce the identified risks to the victim and their dependants. In this last respect, the MARAM discusses the safety and well-being of any child involved, with input received from child-protection services and the relevant school, for example. It also aims to ensure that the entities participating therein execute such a plan.⁵⁸ GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the MARAM has been very active, discussing in the course of 2025 up to 26 cases in each sitting and that, overall, the authorities consider it to have greatly enhanced co-ordination.⁵⁹ Moreover, the problems that had been observed in the baseline evaluation report pertaining to the insufficient sharing of information between agencies has been overcome by the requirement foreseen under the regulation that each entity enter into a data-sharing agreement with the MARAM board. As regards its composition, the MARAM regulation foresees the participation of a number of representatives of state agencies and bodies, although other officials from public services and NGOs dealing with gender-based violence can be invited on an ad hoc basis.⁶⁰

58. See the MARAM Board Regulations, 2025, paragraph 16.

59. Information provided by the authorities.

60. Notably, the MARAM regulation foresees the participation of representatives of the Accident and Emergency Department, the Department of Probation and Parole, the Director of Child Protection, the Education Department, the FSWS, including in Gozo, the Malta Police Force, mental health services, primary health care departments, the STOP! the Violence and Abuse Service and the Victim Support Agency.

84. Nevertheless, GREVIO regrets that co-ordination with key stakeholders such as judges, prosecutors and civil society is not systematically foreseen in the MARAM, although from time to time information from NGOs has been sought in writing. In this last respect, GREVIO underscores that women's rights NGOs play an important role in guaranteeing that the rights of victims are safeguarded in multi-agency co-operation and that their perspective is reflected in decisions that are taken. They are key players in providing victim-centred expertise and in conveying, among other things, the needs of women subject to intersectional discrimination. Without their direct participation, co-ordinated responses risk becoming fragmented and incomplete. GREVIO also points to the need to spell out more clearly in the relevant regulation the need to take into account the victim's perspective when drafting and executing the safety plan.⁶¹

85. In the area of domestic violence, despite the existence of standard operating procedures between a number of stakeholders, GREVIO's attention was drawn to the need to develop a standardised pathway and referral system applying to healthcare establishments as well as to other entities providing support and protection.⁶² GREVIO notes, for example, that entities providing assistance in employment and housing have received in the period under review few requests from victims of domestic violence or other forms of violence against women, suggesting, therefore, that the referral pathway may not be functioning as it should be. In the area of sexual violence, an update to the sexual assault pathway is being developed with a view to, *inter alia*, better defining multi-agency co-operation in this area. According to the authorities this process has helped to establish a network of professionals and to facilitate co-operation.⁶³ Nevertheless, GREVIO notes that serious deficiencies have been identified in the specialist support provided to victims of sexual violence, including in relation to the effective co-operation ensured between the relevant professionals and institutions involved.⁶⁴

86. As regards other forms of violence against women and, in particular, FGM and forced marriage, mandatory reporting guidelines were issued by the FSWS in 2020 instructing professionals on the reporting procedure in place for children, including for these forms of violence. While GREVIO notes the existence of a child-protection network encompassing different stakeholders, which discuss, among other things, the issue of child marriages, it regrets that no specific protocol is in place describing how the various authorities should co-operate in relation to FGM and forced marriage where adults are concerned.

87. Article 18 of the convention requires parties to allow for a range of protection and support services to be located on the same premises. GREVIO had observed in its baseline evaluation report that as regards support and protection provided to victims of domestic violence and sexual violence/rape, this standard was not achieved. Since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO notes that the situation has remained unchanged.⁶⁵

88. As regards the requirement to provide support to victims regardless of their willingness to report the violence, GREVIO notes that the situation has not changed since the baseline evaluation report. Indeed, professionals, including health professionals, are required under the law to report to the police and Aġenzija Appoġġ any act of violence against women, irrespective of the victim's consent. GREVIO reiterates that blanket reporting obligations may raise issues around the provision of victim-centred and gender-sensitive support services and may constitute a barrier for those women who do not feel ready to initiate formal procedures against their partner. Mandatory obligations for professionals should allow for the balancing of the victims' protection needs – including those of her children – with respect for the victim's autonomy and empowerment and should thus be circumscribed to cases in which there are reasonable grounds to believe that a serious act of violence covered by the scope of the convention has been committed and further serious acts are to be expected. In these cases, reporting may nevertheless need to be made subject to certain

61. The regulation in its paragraph 15 currently requires MARAM representatives to "make every possible attempt to establish contact with the victim prior to the meeting of the MARAM".

62. Information received during the evaluation visit.

63. See the state report, p. 49.

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

65. See respectively, paragraphs 110 and 125 of the baseline evaluation report; and Article 22, Specialist support services, and Article 25, Support for victims of sexual violence, in this report.

appropriate conditions such as the consent of the victim, with the exception of some specific cases such as where the victim is a child or is unable to protect her/himself because of disabilities.

89. While acknowledging the progress made in Malta with regard to its general obligations in the area of protection, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. develop formal protocols or institutionalised structures detailing co-ordination measures to be taken by all agencies, entities and non-governmental organisations providing support to victims of domestic violence and all forms of violence against women;**
- b. ensure that protection and support services for women victims of violence are made available as far as possible on the same premises, on a one-stop-shop basis;**
- c. take legislative or other measures to ensure that a multidisciplinary risk assessment is carried out in co-ordination with key stakeholders such as judges, prosecutors and women's rights organisations in the context of the multi-agency risk-assessment and management framework (MARAM) and that the victim's perspective is taken into account when drafting and executing the safety plan.**

2. General support services (Article 20)

90. 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 able to respond to victims in a supportive manner, in particular those that women and girls turn to first (often health and social services).⁶⁶ 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

91. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that social housing and subsidised rent in the private market were allocated according to "a points system" and victims of domestic violence were given, in principle, precedence. Nevertheless, GREVIO had found that no schemes prioritising victims of violence against women in securing long-term accommodation were in place. Moreover, GREVIO had observed that social housing did not meet the demand and that married victims could not benefit from social housing unless they could prove that separation proceedings had been finalised. As regards financial assistance, GREVIO had observed that no dedicated social benefits were made available to victims of violence against women and had remarked that those available to the general population implied a lengthy procedure. Regarding reintegration into the labour market, while no dedicated training schemes and employment opportunities were available for victims of violence against women, GREVIO had observed that victims of domestic violence could benefit from various programmes offered to vulnerable individuals by Jobsplus, Malta's public employment service.⁶⁷

92. Since the baseline evaluation report, no dedicated schemes for victims of domestic violence or for victims of violence against women have been developed with regard to social housing. Proof of separation is still required under the law for married victims who wish to access such housing. According to the authorities, efforts are being made to develop a scheme that can remedy this gap and that, in the interim, documents attesting the initiation of separation proceedings may be accepted. However civil society organisations have brought to GREVIO's attention that this does not

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

67. These include services offered by the Inclusive Employment Services, whereby an employment adviser draws up a personal action plan with the vulnerable person; the VASTE programme, which assists disabled and vulnerable persons to find and retain employment, including through training and counselling; the Bridging the Gap scheme, which supports individuals in the transition period from unemployment to employment; and the A2E scheme, providing aid to enterprises in order to promote the employment of vulnerable persons.

happen in practice. Concerning subsidised rent, since the baseline evaluation report, a new benefit has been introduced for individuals in a vulnerable situation whereby the authorities provide the deposit and the first rent of the lease, which GREVIO welcomes. The Housing Authority is also developing schemes that foresee the lease property at a subsidised rate to NGOs, which in turn will sub-let it to vulnerable individuals, including victims of domestic violence.⁶⁸ Moreover, the authorities aim to increase the amount of rent that is subsidised, particularly for victims of domestic violence.⁶⁹ GREVIO welcomes these developments and points to the need to bring them to fruition. On a general note, however, very few victims have submitted requests for subsidised rent since the baseline evaluation report. This suggests that the provision of information on this type of support should be enhanced and referrals to the Housing Authority should be strengthened.

93. In the area of employment, the situation observed in the baseline evaluation report has remained largely unchanged. According to indications provided by the authorities, Jobsplus has received few requests from victims of domestic violence to benefit from its programmes, suggesting also in this case the need to enhance the provision of information and the referral system in this area.

94. **Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to set up dedicated programmes that cater for the specific needs of victims of violence against women in the areas of financial assistance, training, employment and housing, thus ensuring their recovery as well as their economic independence and empowerment. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:**

- a. **remove the requirement of proof of separation to access social housing;**
- b. **ensure the systematic provision of information to victims on dedicated programmes in the area of social services and strengthen referrals to the relevant agencies.**

b. Healthcare services

95. In the area of healthcare services, GREVIO had observed in its baseline evaluation report that an information booklet for primary healthcare professionals was in place outlining a pathway to document injuries of victims of domestic violence, report the violence to the police and further refer the victims to other support services. Moreover, GREVIO had referred to a standardised care path for the management of cases of rape or sexual assault and had noted with concern that there were no specific protocols for health professionals addressing the steps to be taken in cases of FGM, including referrals of a young child or a female family member of the victim, such as sisters or daughters, who may be at risk of FGM.

96. Since the baseline evaluation report, antenatal clinics and gynaecological departments systematically interview pregnant women separately and provide information on support services, where the patient discloses that she is a victim of domestic violence.⁷⁰ Moreover, the state report also highlights the presence of social workers and police officers in Mater Dei Hospital with a view to, respectively, assisting patients, including victims of violence against women, and receiving their reports.

97. While GREVIO welcomes these positive developments, GREVIO regrets that a recent audit carried out at the emergency department of Mater Dei Hospital and information brought to GREVIO's attention point to an inadequate pathway of support for victims of domestic violence.⁷¹ First, as also acknowledged by the authorities, Mater Dei Hospital does not actively screen patients to identify potential victims of domestic violence.⁷² Moreover, healthcare personnel consider that there is

68. Information provided during the evaluation visit.

69. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

70. See the state report, p. 57.

71. The audit interviewed 35 nurses in the Emergency Department of Mater Dei Hospital with a view to identifying any gaps in the pathway of care for victims of domestic violence. The relevant information was obtained during the evaluation visit.

72. See the state report, p. 57.

insufficient training on how to identify domestic violence victims, preserve evidence and how to refer the victim to other support services. Closely related to the inability to identify victims and the absence of an adequate pathway is the excessive waiting times spent by victims in the emergency department. Additional gaps highlighted by the audit include a lack of dedicated spaces/rooms to ensure the victim's privacy when disclosing the violence suffered and lack of support provided by a psychologist or a social worker on call. Finally, the audit highlights the need to streamline the number of times the victim is required to retell her experience of violence to the various professionals she encounters. GREVIO furthermore notes with grave concern that victims of domestic violence and violence against women who are breastfeeding are not allowed to be admitted to the hospital with their baby, a practice that clearly hinders victims' access to much needed healthcare. As reports show that in Malta women victims of intimate partner violence are more likely to seek healthcare support than contact law-enforcement authorities,⁷³ GREVIO notes that it is all the more essential to provide a clear and exhaustive pathway in healthcare for victims of domestic violence and other victims of violence against women.⁷⁴

98. As regards protocols addressing the steps to be taken in cases of FGM, GREVIO regrets that no measures have been taken since the baseline evaluation report to develop such protocols for health professionals.⁷⁵ While the authorities have referred to a change in migration patterns since the baseline evaluation report, leading to fewer cases, GREVIO underscores the need, nevertheless, to develop comprehensive guidelines to properly address such grave violations of women's human rights.

99. **GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to introduce adequate protocols and standards in the area of healthcare that provide professionals with a clear and exhaustive pathway for victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, including female genital mutilation (FGM), taking into account in the case of FGM both the victim and any female member who may be at risk. Such protocols should in particular ensure that:**

- a. **patients are actively screened with a view to identifying potential victims of domestic violence and violence against women;**
- b. **healthcare personnel are sufficiently trained on how to identify such victims, preserve evidence and refer them to other support services;**
- c. **victims are received without undue delay in dedicated spaces/rooms to ensure their privacy when disclosing the violence they have suffered;**
- d. **a psychologist or a social worker is available on call to support the victim;**
- e. **support and care are provided as much as possible without the victim having to retell the violence suffered multiple times;**
- f. **identify and reduce obstacles for victims of domestic violence and violence against women seeking healthcare, such as the inadmissibility of babies who are breastfed.**

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

100. 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.

73. See Dr Chantelle Marie Said, "An overview of intimate partner violence cases presenting to the Mater Dei Hospital Emergency Department", p. 6.

74. See Article 25, Support for victims of sexual violence, for an analysis of the support provided to these victims.

75. GREVIO notes that a memorandum of understanding has been signed between the International Protection Agency (IPAS) and the Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers (AWAS), whereby applicants for international protection with claims grounded on FGM are referred to health authorities for a medical evaluation to verify whether their claim is founded.

101. GREVIO welcomes several positive developments that have taken place in Malta in the area of specialist support services since the baseline evaluation report. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the third GBVDV strategy builds on some of the findings issued by GREVIO in its baseline evaluation report, setting as objectives, for example: the increase in capacity of the first-stage emergency shelter and the opening of new shelters to provide safe accommodation to victims of domestic violence with addiction issues; and the strengthening of specialised support services for victims of gender-based violence, beyond domestic violence, on the islands of Malta and Gozo. In furtherance of this last goal, GREVIO commends the authorities for having set up a team providing specialist support service to victims of domestic violence on the island of Gozo, remedying in this way an important gap in service provision. Such support encompasses emotional support, risk assessment, safety planning and referrals to psychological services in Gozo as well as an emergency on-call, after-hours service to assist victims at any time of the day. More generally, with a view to improving the provision of support services for victims of domestic violence, GREVIO welcomes the commissioning of an independent audit of the domestic violence services provided by Aġenzija Appoġġ, the state agency that operates as the primary support services provider for victims of domestic violence.⁷⁶ It equally welcomes the increase in staff of such domestic violence services since the baseline evaluation report, which as of September 2023 numbered 53 professionals.⁷⁷ Finally, GREVIO notes with interest the development of standards for service provision for victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence and for shelters.⁷⁸

102. However, a number of shortcomings identified in the baseline evaluation report as concerns the provision of specialist support to victims of violence against women have yet to be addressed. Notably, in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that no specialist support services were available for grave forms of violence against women such as FGM, forced marriage, sexual harassment and stalking outside a domestic violence context, supported by relevant protocols. Although information provided by the authorities indicates that cases of sexual harassment and one case of forced sterilisation have been dealt with by the domestic violence services, no specific measure appears to have been taken to develop dedicated protocols and reinforce service provision in respect of forms of violence against women other than domestic violence.

103. As regards the provision of adequate legal services for victims of domestic violence, GREVIO had observed in the baseline evaluation report that they were not readily available. This was due to the employment of only one lawyer by domestic violence services and the fact that referrals to Legal Aid Malta could not be considered as satisfactory given the lack of training of these lawyers on domestic violence and violence against women. Moreover, referrals to women's rights NGOs with long-standing experience in the area of violence against women, providing free legal counselling, were not always ensured. Since the baseline evaluation report, in addition to referrals to Legal Aid Malta for legal services, victims are also referred to the Victim Support Agency and are provided with contacts for relevant NGOs that offer legal counselling. This notwithstanding, it does not appear that mandatory training on domestic violence and violence against women is offered to lawyers working in these two agencies, despite the fact that victims are frequently referred to them. In terms of psychological counselling, as described in the baseline evaluation report, victims can be referred to dedicated services provided by the FSWS; however, women's rights organisations have alerted GREVIO to persistent long waiting times.⁷⁹ The provision of language and cultural mediators to assist migrant women in obtaining specialist support is also an area that women's rights organisations have identified as requiring reinforcement.⁸⁰

76. The domestic violence services comprise the Domestic Violence Unit, which supports victims and their children through the identification of risk factors, safety planning and referral to any other services they may require in the areas of shelter, psychological and legal assistance, and health. Social workers from the Domestic Violence Unit may also support victims with regard to employment, financial assistance and other matters.

77. See "A review of domestic and gender-based violence services", European Social Network, p. 8.

78. These standards were developed by the Social Care Standard Authority but were not yet in force in the period under review.

79. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

80. See in this respect the NGO written submission by Dar Hosea, the Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, Professor Marceline Naudi, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service), Victim Support Malta (VSM) and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF), p. 3.

104. In the area of shelter provision, the authorities are planning to expand the services provided by the state-run shelter (Ghabex), so that it includes longer-term support for women and their children and facilitates their transition to independent living. Moreover, GREVIO notes that there has been an increase in the number of victims supported by this specific shelter, which GREVIO welcomes. This notwithstanding, GREVIO notes with concern that data provided by the authorities show that since the baseline evaluation report there has been a consistent number of victims and children whose accommodation could not be ensured because of the specialist shelters being at full capacity.⁸¹ Indeed, since the baseline evaluation report, the number of specialist shelters for women has not risen (four in total) and several shortcomings are yet to be addressed. First, a specialist women's shelter has not been set up in Gozo. Second, while some shelters do their utmost to accommodate women with specific needs, both the authorities and civil society have acknowledged the necessity to ensure accommodation for women with more serious disabilities and to introduce a low-threshold shelter for women with addiction issues.⁸² Third, as regards the accommodation of migrant women in an irregular situation, this is generally ensured by shelters; nevertheless, civil society has drawn GREVIO's attention to a policy introduced by the authorities requiring specialist shelters to report migrant women who do not have a permit to stay in the country. This requirement exposes them to a risk of deportation and thus contravenes the convention's requirement to ensure the implementation of its provisions without discrimination on any ground as set out in Article 4, paragraph 3. Finally, mandatory referrals from Aġenzija Appoġġ to shelters are still required. This requirement might prevent some women from coming forward to seek help due to a possible lack of trust in the authorities and, at the same time, stands in the way of self-referrals by victims themselves. The financial hardship incurred by shelters since the baseline evaluation report is addressed earlier in this report.⁸³

105. Since the baseline evaluation report, the support line 179 continues to be the national, 24-hour telephone helpline identified by the authorities as providing the services required by Article 24 of the convention. The helpline addresses different crisis situations, including child abuse and domestic violence. Although the authorities have clarified that it also provides support to victims of gender-based violence, GREVIO notes that the training provided to its staff appears to focus mainly on domestic violence. Moreover, assistance is limited to referring the victim to the necessary service rather than providing crisis counselling.

106. As regards support for children exposed to violence, GREVIO notes with concern that the provision of dedicated support services, as well as decisions on schooling, are hindered by the requirement of both parents' authorisation. GREVIO observes that with fewer opportunities available to subjugate their former partners after separation or after the victim has left the common residence, many perpetrators retaliate or maintain power and control via decisions regarding their children. Not giving their consent to allow their children to receive the needed support may be one of the ways to do so and must be addressed. GREVIO therefore welcomes the fact that the audit of domestic violence services has identified this issue as requiring remedial action and encourages the authorities to pursue such measures.⁸⁴

107. Recalling the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to ensure the provision of immediate short- and long-term specialist support services to victims of all forms of violence against women, beyond domestic violence, supported by a sufficient number of cultural mediators. Provision of prompt psychological support and legal counselling should be particularly increased, with systematic referrals, where necessary, to specialist women's organisations with in-depth knowledge of violence against women.

81. The data shared indicated that between 2021 and the last quarter of October 2025, 221 women and 250 children could not be offered a place in a specialist shelter. The data do not specify whether the number refers specifically to the Ghabex shelter or to all domestic violence shelters.

82. It is positive that the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability is undertaking an audit of domestic violence shelters to address and make recommendations on their accessibility by women with disabilities and on training requirements.

83. See Article 8, Financial resources.

84. See "A review of domestic and gender-based violence services", European Social Network, p. 16.

108. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. remove mandatory referrals from Aġenzija Appoġġ to domestic violence shelters, including by offering women victims of domestic violence the opportunity to self-refer;**
- b. ensure that the number and capacity of specialist women's shelters meet the growing demand, including in Gozo, and comply with the minimum standard of one family place per 10 000 head of population as set out in the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention;**
- c. ensure that specialist women's shelters are equipped to welcome women with different needs, including women with disabilities and women with addiction issues;**
- d. ensure that shelters are not required to make a report to the authorities when they provide accommodation to women in an irregular situation;**
- e. set up a round-the-clock helpline dedicated to all forms of violence against women, staffed by professionals duly trained on all such forms of violence against women and capable of providing crisis counselling to victims, with due respect for the confidentiality and anonymity of all callers and operated by trained staff;**
- f. ensure that the provision of support services to children exposed to or victims of domestic violence or any other form of violence against women and/or any other important decision is not subject to the approval of both parents.**

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

109. 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.⁸⁵

110. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that Mater Dei Hospital was the designated hospital for cases of sexual violence and rape and had issued guidelines on managing such cases. GREVIO had also described the role of the NGO Victim Support Malta in providing the "care for victims of sexual assault" (CVSA) service, which involves liaising with the police, healthcare establishments and Aġenzija Appoġġ, as well as providing victims with short- and long-term support, including practical assistance, and psychological and legal counselling. However, GREVIO had identified numerous shortcomings in the provision of immediate support services for victims of sexual violence and a dire need for healthcare personnel to receive training on sexual violence.

111. GREVIO welcomes the increase since then in the number of forensic experts used to lift forensic evidence from rape victims, which has the potential to reduce waiting times for victims. GREVIO also notes with satisfaction that the morning-after pill is now routinely provided free of charge to victims at Mater Dei Hospital, a positive development since the baseline evaluation report when GREVIO had noted that victims had to purchase such contraception themselves. Finally, GREVIO views the provision of CVSA services to children over 13 years of age as a positive development.

112. Another significant development since the baseline evaluation report has been the ongoing revision of the protocol for cases of sexual violence at Mater Dei Hospital. The draft protocol aims to establish a clear pathway of care for victims of sexual violence, reduce waiting times for victims, ensure co-ordination between specialists to minimise the number of times victims are asked to recount the violence suffered, and ensure that visits take place in a dedicated, suitably equipped

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

room. GREVIO notes with regret that the finalisation and adoption of this draft policy has been stalled and that, pending its adoption, the procedure on how to proceed in such cases is not standardised or clear.

113. In particular, it was brought to GREVIO's attention that many of the shortcomings identified in the baseline evaluation report are still unresolved.⁸⁶ In particular, although the authorities have referred to plans to increase training on sexual violence for healthcare staff, dedicated and mandatory training is still lacking and sought by such professionals. Civil society organisations and experts in the field have alerted GREVIO to persistent long waiting times for victims as cases of rape/sexual violence must go through the triage system in the emergency department,⁸⁷ with no dedicated premise for disclosing the violence suffered. While some efforts are being made to ensure that the multiple visits take place in two rooms of the emergency department, with medical professionals coming to the victim, nevertheless, services and care for victims of sexual violence are still not being offered in a one-stop-shop format. In most cases, in fact, it is the victim who must present herself to multiple services and recount her trauma to different professionals, which often leads to secondary victimisation. GREVIO further notes with concern that while the third GBVDV strategy explores the possibility that in the future evidence may be lifted from the victim regardless of whether she reports the violence to the police, this objective has not been implemented thus far. Women who do not want to lodge a report to the police in the immediate aftermath of a rape are thus denied the opportunity to preserve medical evidence should they decide to seek justice later, a serious shortcoming that needs to be addressed.

114. Additionally, GREVIO notes with grave concern the absence of a standardised procedure for the taking of forensic evidence, which GREVIO considers may strongly impact on the quality of the evidence obtained and used in court. Indeed, GREVIO's attention was drawn to the fact that the procedure for the taking of forensic evidence varies depending on the magistrate in charge and her/his instructions. Accordingly, in some cases medical personnel may be instructed to lift evidence from the victim, whereas other magistrates may send court experts to carry out this delicate task. This lack of clarity is exacerbated by the absence of a standardised rape kit, with some cases brought to GREVIO's attention involving the use of improvised kits by healthcare personnel, raising doubts as to whether the evidence that is secured meets the required standards for criminal justice purposes.⁸⁸ In this regard, GREVIO points to the importance of ensuring that forensic examinations are carried out in line with internationally recognised standards,⁸⁹ according to a standardised procedure and with the use of standardised rape kits. Moreover, the victim's free and timely access to medical documentation, including medical certificates and forensic reports documenting their injuries, are of central importance to enabling victims to make informed decisions about seeking justice and support. With a view to empowering victims, such documentation should be made available directly to them irrespective of their willingness to report to the authorities.

115. **Recalling the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, and while welcoming number of improvements, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to set up dedicated rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centres in Malta and Gozo equipped with trained specialist staff, providing a response to sexual violence and rape with a victim-centred approach, in dedicated premises, on a one-stop-shop basis and supported by a protocol setting out the standardised pathway. Such a protocol should ensure that:**

- a. **forensic examinations are carried out in line with internationally recognised standards, according to a standardised procedure and with the use of standardised rape kits;**
- b. **samples are stored with the consent of the victims, regardless of whether the matter has been reported to the police.**

86. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

87. Particularly when the victim is not accompanied by the police.

88. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

89. See the "Guidelines for medico-legal care for victims of sexual violence", World Health Organization, 2003.

116. In the interim, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to finalise and implement the draft protocol for cases of sexual violence at Mater Dei Hospital with a view to establishing a clear pathway of care for victims of sexual violence, reducing waiting times for victims, ensuring co-ordination between specialists to minimise the number of times victims are asked to recount the violence suffered, and ensuring that visits take place in a dedicated, suitably equipped room.

C. Substantive law

117. 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 the further victimisation of women and girls 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)

118. 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.⁹⁰

119. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed a number of serious shortcomings with regard to custody, visitation rights and the safety of victims and their children. Despite judges' ability to exempt parties from the required mediation in separation proceedings where domestic violence is alleged, victims in practice often faced difficulties obtaining such exemptions. Moreover, despite mediators' obligation to inform the court if they suspect domestic violence, this had not happened in practice because of a lack of training on domestic violence. GREVIO had found this to be particularly concerning in light of the power imbalance that is typical in cases of domestic violence, which is likely to impair the ability of the victim to negotiate an agreement that ensures her and her children's safety. Where mediation was indeed dispensed with and the case proceeded to court, GREVIO had noted concerns that judges, court-appointed experts and the child advocate, where appointed, all lacked essential training on domestic violence. Moreover, in terms of legislation, while the legal framework allowed the judge to declare sole custody for serious reasons, including in cases of domestic violence, there was no specific provision providing for the need to take into account incidents of domestic violence in the determination of visitation rights when separation is pronounced, in breach of the convention.⁹¹ Turning to court practice, GREVIO had been informed that in cases of domestic violence, shared custody prevailed, with supervised visitation being granted almost systematically to perpetrators. This situation equally stemmed from the absence of policies or guidelines providing guidance to judges on what tests should be applied in reaching a decision on custody and visitation in cases of domestic violence. A lack of communication channels between civil and criminal courts, necessary to enable courts to take into account any pending or finalised criminal proceeding against the perpetrator, also contributed to this outcome. Finally, as regards supervised visitation, GREVIO had observed that Aġenzija Appoġġ, which was responsible at the

90. It is noteworthy that in the case of *Bizdiga 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 (§ 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.

91. See Articles 56A and 47, respectively, of the Civil Code.

time of the baseline evaluation report for supervised visitation, lacked sufficient trained staff, with often inadequate premises, allowing the re-victimisation of the victim by the perpetrator.

120. Since the baseline evaluation report, a reform has been launched aiming to establish a specialised family court. In the context of the proposed reform the authorities have recommended that a risk assessment be carried out for all cases brought before this court so that domestic violence can be detected. This would be a welcome development, given the absence of an obligation for courts to systematically screen proceedings relating to custody and visitation rights for instances of domestic violence by means of a standard questionnaire submitted to the parties or otherwise. Moreover, recommendations were made to ensure that separation proceedings in which domestic violence is alleged are exempted from mandatory mediation and fast tracked.

121. While welcoming these proposals, GREVIO notes with grave concern that the serious shortcomings identified in the baseline evaluation report have yet to be addressed. As regards more specifically legislation on proceedings related to custody and visitation, GREVIO recalls its analysis in the baseline evaluation report and underscores that it is essential, in order to ensure a more effective implementation of Article 31 of the Convention, to explicitly include in legislation, as criteria to be taken into account when determining custody and visitation rights, incidents of violence against women, including those witnessed by children.⁹² Judges should specifically lay out the reasons in their decisions to maintain custody and visitation rights in the presence of such incidents. 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.⁹³ GREVIO also reiterates that joint parenting in these circumstances allows perpetrators to maintain their control and dominance over the mother and children.

122. In addition to the persistent shortcomings mentioned in this section, GREVIO notes with concern certain worrying developments since the baseline evaluation report that are manifestly leading to heightened risk for victims' and children's safety. More specifically, the use of allegations of "parental alienation" in contexts of domestic violence, both by lawyers and in judicial practice, has grown.⁹⁴ Such reference is made to require the child to meet with the abusive parent, while placing the blame on the victim for the child's fear or reluctance to do so. References to this concept have, unfortunately, also gradually gained ground in policy documents. For example, the mandatory reporting guidelines for professionals under the Minor Protection (Alternative Care) Act, developed by a technical committee in 2020 upon request of the Minister for Social Policy and Children's Rights, defines parental alienation as a type of child abuse and/or vicarious abuse, without making any distinctions or exceptions to its use against mothers in domestic violence contexts.⁹⁵ GREVIO also notes that the technical committee appeared to include the participation of an organisation reportedly run by an individual convicted of domestic violence.⁹⁶ Equally concerning are references made to parental alienation, without consideration for children's reasons to reject or fear meetings with the other parent that are rooted in that parent's use of violence against the child or the mother, in an official document summarising the outcome of a public consultation on the prospective reform of the family court.⁹⁷ The recommendations and/or observations made in this document include the following: the technical committee continues to work on legislative solutions to prioritise the use of this concept in courts; "parental alienation" is significant enough to be considered as a crime; mediators and child advocates should be trained on this phenomenon and that a board of specialists should be set up to assess its occurrence in family law proceedings; if confirmed, therapy should be provided to the "perpetrator" of parental alienation, the "victim" and their children. Furthermore, the

92. See the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, paragraph 144.

93. *Ibid.*, paragraph 143.

94. As outlined in the NGO written submission by Dar Hosea, the Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, Professor Marceline Naudi, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service), Victim Support Malta (VSM) and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF), p. 7, and from information obtained during the evaluation visit.

95. See the Mandatory Reporting Guidelines for Professionals in terms of the Minor Protection Act, Technical Committee, September 2020, Government of Malta, pp. 6 and 8.

96. See the NGO written submission by Dar Hosea, the Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, Professor Marceline Naudi, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service), Victim Support Malta (VSM) and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF), p. 7.

97. See "Family courts reform. The first phase of the reform in the Family Courts", Government of Malta, pp. 5, 22, 31 and 35.

document proposes to qualify parental alienation as a form of domestic violence warranting the waiving of shared parenting.

123. GREVIO, therefore, notes with grave concern that the concept of parental alienation is being used as an enabling mechanism allowing the perpetrator to persist in his abusive behaviour. In this respect, as GREVIO has had occasion to note in several of its evaluation reports, the positioning of mothers as alienating, hostile or unco-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.⁹⁸ GREVIO stresses the importance of ensuring an understanding among family law professionals at all levels of the historical use of such concepts to discredit women's valid reports of domestic violence and children's legitimate reluctance to make contact with an abusive father and the potential safety risks that reliance on such concepts may pose. It underlines that where parental alienation has been enshrined as a concept in the national legislation of a party to the Istanbul Convention, GREVIO has urged its removal, similar to the calls made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.⁹⁹

124. When it comes to visitation, GREVIO notes that judges allow, as a matter of standard practice, visitation with the abusive parent in cases of domestic violence, through supervised visitation.¹⁰⁰ According to the authorities, in such cases, where there is a risk of violence or of witnessing violence, visitation takes place in the premises of Aġenzija Appoġġ, in the presence of a police officer. Nevertheless, women's rights NGOs have pointed to persistent opportunities for the perpetrator to continue his abuse in the context of such visitation arrangements, for example through the use of common waiting areas. In this respect, GREVIO stresses the importance of having mechanisms in place for safe supervised visits as well as adequate support from social services.

125. **GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation rights:**

- a. **ensure that the devastating impact that violence against women has on children is reflected in legislation and that incidents of violence against women are a mandatory legal criterion to be taken into account when deciding on custody and visitation rights; to this effect, all decisions should be duly reasoned;**
- b. **systematically screen all cases on custody and visitation for possible instances of domestic violence, using a standard questionnaire or other appropriate means, and, in parallel, consult all relevant bodies to ascertain whether criminal proceedings are pending or have been initiated in the past against the alleged perpetrator;**
- c. **ensure that all relevant professionals, including social workers, lawyers, judges, court experts, child psychologists and the Children's Advocate are trained in domestic violence and understand the very harmful impact of allegations of parental alienation and similar concepts that portray women victims of abuse as alienating, hostile or unco-operative and ensure that the use of such concepts in/by courts is prohibited and is not promoted in policies;**
- d. **ensure an adequate number of judges in family courts that are trained in the area of domestic violence and provide them with guidelines for deciding on custody and visitation rights in cases with a history of domestic violence;**
- e. **take measures to ensure that in the context of supervised visitation and during meetings with the Child Advocate, the mother of the child does not have to meet face to face with the perpetrator and that supervised visits are carried out under the supervision of a professional with expertise in the dynamics of coercive control and the impact of trauma.**

98. See for example GREVIO's first thematic evaluation reports on Denmark, paragraph 116, and on Serbia, paragraph 140.

99. See GREVIO's first thematic evaluation report on Romania, paragraph 132.

100. See the reply by Malta to the reporting form on the implementation of the Recommendations of the Committee of the Parties adopted on 15 December 2020, p. 29.

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

126. 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 re-privatisation 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.

127. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that while mandatory alternative dispute resolution was not applicable to criminal proceedings, there was an ongoing worrying practice whereby, in concurrent civil/family proceedings, the lawyer for the perpetrator would attempt to negotiate a “deal” with the victim to refuse to testify in criminal proceedings in exchange for a favourable civil settlement. GREVIO had noted that that was made possible, on the one hand, by the *de facto* mandatory nature of mediation in relation to separation and custody/visitation issues, and, on the other hand, because criminal proceedings relied heavily on the victim’s testimony and failed to properly look into other types of evidence.

128. GREVIO regrets that since the baseline evaluation report steps have not been taken to end this practice, despite its serious implications for the accountability of perpetrators. Indeed, civil society organisations and experts in the field have brought to GREVIO’s attention that this practice continues. It appears that despite judges’ ability to exempt parties in separation and custody proceedings from mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes, such as mediation, these continue to take place in many instances between spouses with a clear history of such violence.¹⁰¹

129. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to address and end the practice by lawyers whereby victims are discouraged from testifying in criminal proceedings in exchange for a favourable civil settlement (where there are concurrent civil/family proceedings). This could be achieved through training or protocols, underscoring how this practice interferes with and prevents the dissuasive effect of criminal punishment, leading ultimately to repeated violence and the impunity of perpetrators.**

130. **GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:**

- a. **take measures to ensure that the exemption from mediation in proceedings dealing with separation, custody and visitation rights in cases of violence, including domestic violence, is implemented in practice;**
- b. **ensure that mediators receive robust training on violence against women and issue guidelines on their obligations with respect to cases of domestic violence.**

D. Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

131. 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.

¹⁰¹. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

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

132. 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 professionals 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.¹⁰² A consequence 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

133. GREVIO commends the Maltese authorities for having taken significant measures to strengthen the response of law-enforcement authorities, particularly in relation to domestic violence, since the baseline evaluation report. At the policy level, the third GBVDV strategy sets as a goal the elimination of barriers to reporting for victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence in Gozo and the setting up of specialist gender-based and domestic violence hubs in Malta and Gozo (specialist hubs), which are to apply a one-stop-shop approach. Indeed, since the baseline evaluation report, in addition to a rise in the number of female police officers from 20% to 25%, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that, starting in 2020, three specialist hubs have been established across Malta, in the north, in the south and on the island of Gozo. The specialist hubs have a total workforce of 70 officers specifically trained on domestic violence, of which 58% are women. While district police officers frequently continue to be the first responders in cases of domestic violence, competence to investigate these offences rests with the specialist hubs, and cases must, therefore, swiftly be transferred to them. Furthermore, the specialist hubs investigate in co-operation with other specialist units such as the Vulnerable Victims Unit (formerly the Vice Squad), where there are elements of sexual violence, or the cyberviolence unit, where there is a digital dimension of violence against women. Offering a supportive environment with dedicated, comfortable rooms to receive victims, the specialist hubs also include on their premises staff from Aġenzija Appoġġ who are responsible for carrying out a risk assessment for each victim, upon their consent. According to the authorities, since the specialist hubs have been set up, there has been a rise in reports of domestic violence by 68%, thus demonstrating victims’ growing trust in the police. Indeed, lawyers working in the area of violence against women have confirmed that reporting in such cases is much easier and swift.

134. GREVIO equally notes with satisfaction that since the baseline evaluation report any police officer investigating a case of domestic violence is now supported by a comprehensive standard operating procedure on dealing with gender-based and domestic violence (the GBV and DV SOP), which was introduced in 2023. The GBV and DV SOP, *inter alia*, emphasises the importance of showing empathy and respect to victims and the need to ensure their privacy when interviewing them. The SOP also acknowledges that migrants may face additional barriers to reporting and requires that an interpreter, translator or cultural mediator to be made available, where assistance is needed.

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

135. With regard to training, as already outlined earlier in this report,¹⁰³ considerable efforts have been undertaken to ensure that all police officers working in specialist hubs have been trained on domestic violence and that at least one district police officer per police station has received such training. Additional positive developments since the baseline evaluation report that show continued progress include the ability for victims to file a police report remotely through an online portal; the introduction of a new shared drive allowing the police to record all reports/incidents of violence and identify patterns of abuse; and the provision of panic alarms to victims who have filed a report of domestic violence and score high on the risk assessment or are in imminent danger. When activated, the alarm allows the police to geo-locate the victim so that protection can be provided.

136. While specialist hubs primarily investigate cases of domestic violence, district police officers are nevertheless the first to respond to most reports and are competent to investigate certain cases of domestic violence considered less grave.¹⁰⁴ GREVIO notes with concern that reports from civil society point to district police officers' insufficient training on violence against women and domestic violence, as well as persistent harmful attitudes leading to the secondary victimisation of victims.¹⁰⁵ GREVIO has accordingly been alerted that some of the shortcomings identified in the baseline evaluation report persist, such as the dismissal of some reports of domestic violence, including in particular those from women in prostitution. Moreover, victims continue to be charged for trivial offences such as insults when lodging a complaint to the police, due to the prosecuting role of the police.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, lawyers working in the area of violence against women have drawn GREVIO's attention to instances in which police officers warn victims, particularly migrant victims, that they may be prosecuted for false reporting.¹⁰⁷ Harmful attitudes also seem to persist among some police officers working in the specialist hubs.¹⁰⁸ While GREVIO acknowledges the strides made in improving reporting to the police, it emphasises that further efforts are required to eliminate persistent stereotypes and to ensure that all police officers receive training that promotes a gender-sensitive understanding of violence against women. It is also essential to strengthen victims' trust in the system, including by reconsidering the prosecutorial role of the police or adopting alternative measures, so that victims no longer fear being accused of filing a false report or being accused of insulting their abusive partner or former partner.

137. On another point, GREVIO notes that reports of cases of rape and sexual violence outside of a domestic violence context, as well as reports of FGM and forced marriage, are received, in principle, by the Vulnerable Victims Unit. As is explained further, however, comprehensive standard operating procedures for these forms of violence are either not in place or were not shared with GREVIO. Moreover, it is not clear to what extent mandatory training on these forms of violence against women is provided to the relevant investigating officers, which GREVIO notes with concern. Finally, worthy of note is the fact that civil society has pointed to district police stations sometimes not being open at night with victims having nowhere to turn to.

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

- a. explore the possibility of extending the remit of specialist gender-based and domestic violence hubs to deal with all forms of violence against women, supported by standard operating procedures covering all such forms of violence and/or otherwise ensure that all grave forms of violence against women are dealt with and investigated by trained professionals, supported by dedicated standard operating procedures;**

103. See Article 15, Training of professionals.

104. As previously mentioned, the district police investigate cases of domestic violence perpetrated by a former spouse/partner of over two years, where no children are involved and where there have been no reports of domestic violence for 12 months.

105. See the NGO written submission by Dar Hosea, the Dar Merħba Bik Foundation, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, Professor Marceline Naudi, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SOAR Service), Victim Support Malta (VSM) and the Women's Rights Foundation (WRF), p. 4.

106. While the police are responsible for prosecuting insults, threats, breaches of protection orders and slight bodily harm, the Attorney General prosecutes offences such as rape, grievous bodily harm, FGM and aggravated cases of stalking.

107. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

108. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

- b. remind police officers of their due diligence obligation to immediately respond to, prevent and protect women and their children from all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and apply the related sanctions for failure to do so;**
- c. take measures to ensure that the prosecutorial competence of the police does not represent, in practice, a barrier to reporting for victims;**
- d. ensure that reports to local police stations can be made at any time of day or night;**
- e. ensure that police premises are accessible for women with disabilities and special assistance is provided for women who are speech impaired.**

b. Effective investigation and prosecution

139. Since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO welcomes the inclusion in the third GBVDV strategy of the objective to reinforce protocols and guidelines on gender-based violence and domestic violence with a view to improving the prosecution of these crimes, including those with a digital dimension. Moreover, GREVIO notes with interest one objective exploring the possibility of allowing the lifting of forensic evidence for victims of rape and sexual violence even when the crime has not been reported to the police.

140. When it comes to developments in relation to swift investigations and prosecutions, the adoption of the GBV and DV SOP has undoubtedly led to the strengthening of investigations related to domestic violence. Notably, cases of domestic violence are now fast tracked and assigned to dedicated inspectors. Moreover, clear instructions are provided in relation to important aspects of the investigation, for instance in relation to responding to call-outs. In this respect, the GBV and DV SOP stresses the importance for officers to activate their body-worn camera, as this is considered to be crucial if the victim subsequently decides not to testify and highlights the importance of speaking with victims in privacy. It equally puts an emphasis on collecting all evidence so that the case does not solely rely on the victim's statement, listing in a comprehensive manner the different types of evidence that must be explored, and requires officers to consult with all relevant professionals who may have been in contact with the victim. The GBV and DV SOP further specifies that police officers are required to carry out a preliminary risk assessment, followed by a standard risk assessment carried out by dedicated staff from Aġenzija Appoġġ on the premises of the specialist hubs. The protocol also clarifies that where a victim scores above a certain threshold, officers must proceed to arrest the perpetrator. Finally, GREVIO welcomes the practice and requirement for police officers to interview victims of domestic violence in designated victim-sensitive rooms and to record such interviews. Indeed, GREVIO considers that this new obligation allows all those in the criminal justice system, including prosecutors, to gain a more comprehensive account of the violence experienced by the victim, thereby increasing the chances of the case successfully proceeding through the criminal justice chain. Moreover, it reduces the burden on victims to give their statement repeatedly.

141. As regards more specifically investigations related to rape and sexual violence, investigative competence lies with the Vulnerable Victims Unit. GREVIO welcomes the fact that victims' statements are systematically recorded by a court-appointed expert. As regards guidelines supporting the work of investigating officers, according to the authorities, an SOP on how to investigate this form of violence was in the process of being updated, but its details remain unclear. It is thus not clear whether guidance is provided on the importance of collecting all relevant evidence, in addition to forensic evidence. Moreover, as was the case at the time of the baseline evaluation report, it is not possible for forensic evidence to be taken from the victim if she has not filed a report to the police. This means that women who are unready to report but who may do so in the future will be deprived of the opportunity to have medical evidence preserved. Furthermore, GREVIO notes with concern the absence of a standardised procedure for the taking of forensic evidence and that rape kits are not standardised. Finally, on a general note, as is discussed earlier in this report, it is not clear to what extent mandatory training on this form of violence against women is provided to the relevant investigating officers.¹⁰⁹

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

142. Concerning investigations into the digital dimensions of violence against women, in the period under review there have been investigations on online and technology-facilitated stalking, all investigated by the specialist hub in co-operation with the cybercrime unit. When it comes to investigations into other grave forms of violence against women such as FGM and forced marriage, comprehensive SOPs are not in place and it is not clear to what extent mandatory training on these forms of violence against women is provided to the relevant investigating officers.

143. As regards more specifically the prosecution of domestic violence and offences under the scope of the convention, while according to the authorities one unit of the Attorney General Office is assigned such cases, the relevant prosecutors do not appear to receive mandatory training on all forms of violence against women nor are they supported by dedicated guidelines, a shortcoming that needs to be addressed.

144. On a general note, GREVIO notes with concern that no official data are available on the number of indictments or prosecutions for domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. It is therefore not possible to measure whether the recent positive developments outlined above are improving the effectiveness of investigation and prosecution for all forms of violence against women, nor the rate of attrition at the prosecution stage.

c. Conviction rates

145. Since the baseline evaluation report, GREVIO notes with interest some positive developments. These include, as also noted by the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention,¹¹⁰ an increase in the number of judges presiding over cases of domestic violence, which appears to have reduced some of the backlog and reduced delays in proceedings.¹¹¹ Moreover, certain court proceedings for domestic violence can be prioritised if a victim is considered by the MARAM to be at extremely high risk.¹¹² A rise in court referrals to perpetrator programmes has also been recorded.¹¹³ Finally, it is promising that the third GBVDV strategy pursues as an objective the analysis of court judgments on domestic violence with a view to identifying patterns in these legal proceedings.

146. Despite the above, GREVIO notes with grave concern the persistent absence of mandatory training for judges and court-appointed experts on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence and the very limited provision of voluntary training in this area. GREVIO points to the general sentiment among experts from women's rights organisations and the authorities alike that training and guidelines for judges presiding over cases of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence is urgently needed in order to address a lack of gendered understanding of violence against women and the use of language leading to secondary victimisation, which seem to be recurrent.¹¹⁴

147. Concerning more specifically court proceedings related to domestic violence, lawyers working in the area of violence against women have alerted GREVIO to the fact that where concurrent charges are filed against the victim for trivial offences such as insults, this is used in court to either acquit the perpetrator or to issue a lenient sentence. Moreover, while it is too early to assess the impact of the new the GBV and DV SOP, which provides guidance on the comprehensive collection of evidence and which was introduced to ultimately reduce the current reliance on the victim's testimony, lawyers working in the area of violence against women confirm that in most proceedings in which the victim refuses to testify or asks to stay the proceedings, judges continue to pronounce an extinguishment of action. GREVIO notes in this regard the possibilities offered by recording the victim's statement for use as evidence in criminal proceedings as foreseen in Article 646(2) of the Criminal Code. This would significantly reduce the need for the victim to be

110. See the conclusions on the implementation of recommendations in respect of Malta adopted by the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention, May 2024.

111. Notably, in 2021 only one judge presided over cases of domestic violence whereas in 2025 four judges were assigned to such cases.

112. See the state report, p. 82.

113. See in this respect Article 16, Preventive intervention and treatment programmes, which highlights, however, that in case of non-attendance, no measure seems to be taken.

114. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

cross-examined in person, due to the psychological harm that *viva voce* examination may cause the witness to suffer.¹¹⁵ As GREVIO has had occasion to note, video recording of witness statements is a vital element in the protection of victims from secondary victimisation, which is why its sensitive implementation in practice needs to be ensured.¹¹⁶

148. Linked to the continued pivotal role of the statement of the victim in proceedings on domestic violence, GREVIO further notes with concern the persisting practice, brought to the attention of GREVIO by experts in the field of violence against women,¹¹⁷ of defence lawyers pressuring victims to sign a “waiver” and to withdraw her criminal complaint, including with the promise of ensuring a more favourable outcome in parallel civil proceedings involving children.

149. On the whole, GREVIO notes with grave concern that while insufficient data are available from the criminal justice system to assess conviction rates and monitor progress in stemming impunity, anecdotal information points to persistently low levels of convictions for all forms of violence against women, disproportionately low sanctions being applied and the frequent issue of suspended sentences. As regards rape in particular, GREVIO notes with concern that the absence of a standardised rape kit, as well as a non-standardised procedure for the taking of forensic evidence, may strongly impact on the quality of the evidence used in court and the probability of a conviction for this grave form of violence against women.

150. **Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to:**

- a. explore mechanisms and procedures that will prevent over-reliance on the victim’s testimony in criminal proceedings for intimate partner violence and sexual violence;**
- b. identify and address any/all legislative and procedural factors that contribute to the low levels of conviction in relation to all forms of violence against women;**
- c. ensure proportionate sanctions for all acts of violence against women.**

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

151. 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.

152. Since the baseline evaluation report and following an independent inquiry commissioned by the authorities to identify inefficiencies in the authorities’ response leading to a gender-related killing in 2022,¹¹⁸ the DASH risk-assessment tool was replaced by the “Danger Assessment” tool in 2024. In the 2022 killing, the DASH model had classified the victim as medium risk and was therefore considered as inadequate in terms of predicting the degree of lethal danger.

115. Under Article 646(2) of the Criminal Code: “The deposition of witnesses, whether against or in favour of the person charged or accused, if taken on oath in the course of the inquiry according to law, shall be admissible as evidence: Provided that the witness is also produced in Court to be examined *viva voce* as provided in sub-article (1) unless, when assessing the circumstances of the case, it is apparent to the Court that appearing for *viva voce* examination may cause the witness to suffer psychological harm, or when the witness is dead, absent from Malta or cannot be found and saving the provisions of sub-article (8).”

116. See GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report on Germany, paragraphs 301 and 302.

117. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

118. Notably the gender-based killing of Bernice Cassar, who had previously sought protection from the police and social workers.

153. GREVIO welcomes the fact that the present risk-assessment tool in use consists of a questionnaire that is to be completed by the victim, in the presence of a social worker from Aġenzija Appoġġ, thus requiring direct input from the victim. It includes an extensive list of “red flags”, including non-fatal strangulation, a particularly dangerous form of physical violence that is known to greatly increase the risk of physical escalation and lethal violence.¹¹⁹ The risk assessment is carried out with the consent of the victim by social services staff from Aġenzija Appoġġ stationed at the specialist police hubs or directly at Aġenzija Appoġġ if the victim turns to this institution first. GREVIO notes with satisfaction that the stationing of risk assessors at the specialist hubs ensures that the risk assessment is carried out systematically and in a swift manner. Indeed, 26 risk assessors ensure round-the-clock coverage through shift rotations, thus representing clear progress since the baseline evaluation report, in which GREVIO had found that risk assessments were not systematically carried out and were not implemented swiftly. As regards the outcome of the risk assessment, where a victim scores above 14, the police is required to remove the perpetrator from the home and arrest him. Furthermore, if the victim is classified as being at extremely high risk, she is referred to the Victim Support Agency and is eligible for a panic alarm, which GREVIO welcomes.

154. As noted already in this report, GREVIO notes with satisfaction that high-risk cases are referred to the MARAM so that the relevant participating institutions can share information and develop and implement a co-ordinated safety/action plan for the victim and her children, while noting at the same time the absence of certain key stakeholders such as women’s rights organisations, judges and prosecutors in this process.¹²⁰

155. In light of the above, while the Maltese authorities have taken significant steps to improve risk-assessment procedures and co-ordinated safety planning, the initial risk assessment is still carried out on the basis of information originating only from two sources, the police and social services, in addition to the victim, as was already the case at the time of the baseline evaluation report. The convention and best practice require, however, that information is channelled also from other sources such as schools and healthcare facilities. Indeed, while the MARAM ensures co-ordinated action across different institutions, its work pertains to safety planning and only concerns high-risk cases. GREVIO considers it important to also ensure such multidisciplinary, co-ordinated action at the time when the risk of the victim is first assessed and in cases that have not yet reached the high-risk threshold. This is particularly important in situations involving coercive control, where the dynamics of abuse may remain hidden but still pose serious risks to victims. GREVIO further notes that it would be equally important for other relevant stakeholders such as hospitals or healthcare establishments and women’s rights organisations, which may serve as a first points of contact for domestic violence victims, to also administer the risk-assessment tool and to ensure that risk-management procedures are also carried out for cases that are not classified as high risk, as this would help ensure that no victim is overlooked. Moreover, as was the case at the time of the baseline evaluation report, an unintended consequence of the police’s prosecutorial competence can be the stopping of a risk assessment interview when there is a risk of self-incrimination – including for trivial offences –.¹²¹ Finally, no risk-assessment tool has been developed for other forms of violence against women other than domestic violence.

156. As regards retrospective reviews of gender-related killings, while no systematic review mechanism is in place, GREVIO welcomes the commissioning of an independent inquiry into the gender-related killing committed in 2022. The inquiry found inefficiencies such as a lack of resources and excessive workloads for the police, social workers and courts, which led to delayed processing of reports and failure to carry out risk assessments or incomplete risk assessments. While such a review is a positive development, GREVIO considers it important to set up a system of retrospective analysis of all cases of gender-related killings, attempted killings of women and suicides of women. Such a mechanism could identify any possible failure of protection, prevent them in the future, ensure the safety of women and hold to account both the perpetrator and the multiple agencies that come

119. It includes as red flags, *inter alia*, the possession of a firearm, separation from a partner, violence committed during pregnancy, escalating violence, threats to kill the victim and harm her children, sexual violence and non-fatal strangulation.

120. See Article 18, General obligations.

121. In these cases, the police are required to read the victim her rights and inform her that she has the right to not incriminate herself and to speak to a lawyer. Where, as result, the victim interrupts her reporting, the risk assessment is also interrupted.

into contact with the victim. Indeed, GREVIO has underlined the importance of including in such systematic reviews gender-based, violence-related suicides and forced suicides of women and girls as they also represent a lethal end point for those who are on the receiving end of acts of violence against women.¹²²

157. GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. ensure that in cases of domestic violence, an assessment of the victim's risk is carried out systematically and speedily in a multidisciplinary manner by all relevant authorities in co-operation, providing co-ordinated protection and support, and that risk-management procedures are also carried out for cases that are not classified as high risk;**
- b. ensure that the prosecuting role of the police does not stand in the way of the completion of a victim's risk assessment;**
- c. ensure that a risk assessment is created and used for all forms of violence against women;**
- d. set up a system of retrospective analysis of all cases of gender-related killings, attempted killings of women and suicides of women with a view to identifying any possible failure of protection, preventing them in the future, ensuring the safety of women and holding to account both the perpetrator and the multiple agencies that come into contact with the victim.**

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

158. 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 prohibiting 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.¹²³ 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.

159. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed that temporary protection orders (TPOs) as provided for under Article 540A of the Criminal Code did not comply with the requirements of Article 52 of the convention.¹²⁴ First, TPOs could be issued only after a risk assessment had been carried out, an investigation had been conducted and the perpetrator heard by the police, which could require significant time and thus did not allow them to serve as a quick tool with immediate effect as required by the convention. Second, pending the request by the police to the magistrate to issue a TPO and the decision of the court, which could take up to 20 hours, the relevant provisions called for the removal of the victim and her children from their home (to a shelter) rather than the removal of the perpetrator. Moreover, GREVIO had observed that no centralised system to record the issue and breach of a TPO was in place and that magistrates preferred arrest and detention over TPOs, although few arrests had been made by the police in these cases.

160. GREVIO notes with concern that since the baseline evaluation report the legislative framework has remained unchanged and TPOs continue to fall short of the standards required under Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention. From a practical point of view, since the baseline evaluation

122. See in this respect the 5th General Report on GREVIO's Activities, October 2024, paragraph 74.

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

124. Under Article 540A of the Criminal Code, the police can apply to a magistrate for the issuing of a TPO if, following a risk assessment and investigation it emerges that the victim is at serious risk of harm. In these cases, the police will file an application to a magistrate to issue a TPO within 12 hours of the receipt of the report. The magistrate issues the TPO within eight hours of the receipt of the request, if s/he is satisfied that there are sufficient grounds to justify it. The TPO remains in force for 30 days or until the first hearing against the perpetrator. It can be renewed or lapse if the criminal proceedings are not instituted. TPOs, among other things, restrict or prohibit perpetrators' access to premises in which the victim or other individual lives, works or frequents (even if he has legal title to those premises).

report, the GBV and DV SOP has clearly established arrest and arraignment as the preferred option if an investigation into domestic violence identifies a serious risk of harm or if the risk assessment categorises the victim as being at extreme or severe risk. In these cases, an arrest must be made within 48 hours and if an imminent threat to life is identified, the victim is relocated to a shelter. Indeed, the police have clarified that arrest is preferred over the request of TPOs because it is considered as a safer option and because it might not always be feasible to hear the perpetrator within the statutory 12 hours. When the police proceed to arrest and arraign in these cases, courts generally do not grant bail. Where bail is granted or further investigation is required, however, the GBV and DV SOP clarifies that the police must request the issue of a TPO.

161. As GREVIO has had opportunity to note, emergency barring orders should be available and issued in cases of immediate danger, where the threshold for arrest has not been met. Emergency barring orders as construed by the convention, are short-term measures with immediate effect that are much less restrictive than other types of measures separating the victim and the perpetrator, such as arrest and detention, and in many jurisdictions the legitimacy of such measures is usually reviewed by courts, ensuring a more just balancing of the victim's and perpetrator's rights. Emergency barring orders in line with the requirements of the convention should therefore form an integral part of the toolkit available to the criminal justice system to protect victims. The competent authorities must, therefore, issue such orders either as an independent measure or in combination with pretrial detention. This is, however, not the case in Malta, as preference continues to be given to arrest and detention, with a low use of TPOs. Indeed, at the level of implementation, with the exception of the island of Gozo, in which magistrates appear to issue TPOs more frequently, data provided by the authorities show that few TPOs have been issued. Between 2020 and 2025 only 124 TPOs were granted by magistrates, whereas in the same period 9 740 reports of domestic violence were lodged by victims. GREVIO notes at the same time that data show that the number of arrests and arraignments for cases of domestic violence, while higher than the number of TPOs, is still comparatively low (973 arrests). Moreover, in both cases (arrest or issuing of a TPO), women's rights NGOs have pointed to the prevailing practice of having the victim relocate to a protected address/shelter either pending the issue of a TPO or the arrest of the perpetrator. Finally, it is not clear whether TPOs automatically include the children of the victim.

162. As regards the recording of TPOs issued, notwithstanding the existence of a centralised system, civil society has drawn GREVIO's attention to the fact that victims are nevertheless required by the police to show a copy of the original measures.

163. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to take the legislative and or policy measures needed to bring the Maltese legal framework and practice in line with Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention, notably by ensuring that:

- a. temporary protection orders can be issued quickly in situations of immediate danger without lengthy proceedings and that the police are encouraged to apply for such measures in practice;**
- b. the alleged perpetrator is removed from the residence, rather than the victim;**
- c. temporary protection orders automatically include the children of the victim.**

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

164. Restraining and protection orders (POs) 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.

165. In its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO had observed significant shortcomings in the implementation of Article 53 of the convention, both as regards the legal framework and its practical application. GREVIO had noted, in fact, that protection orders could only be obtained in the context

of criminal proceedings and divorce proceedings or where children were involved, in cases of domestic violence.¹²⁵ This fell short of the convention's requirement that POs be available irrespective of, or in addition to, other proceedings, whether criminal or divorce proceedings, and for all forms of violence against women. Finally, GREVIO had also observed a systematic failure to ensure the recording, monitoring and enforcement of POs.

166. GREVIO notes with grave concern that since the baseline evaluation report the above-mentioned shortcomings have not been addressed, as the legal framework and its practical implementation have remained unchanged. Moreover, no statistics are available on the number of POs issued by criminal and civil courts in cases of domestic violence, thus hindering an analysis of their effective use.¹²⁶ Concerning the existence of a centralised system to record the issuing and breach of POs, the police have a data system in place that allows the recording of TPOs and POs issued by courts, although it is not clear whether breaches of such orders are also recorded. As regards more specifically the sanctions foreseen in cases where a protection order is breached, as was the case at the time of the baseline evaluation report, a fine of up to €7 000 or a term of up to two years of imprisonment or a combination of both sanctions are foreseen. Nevertheless, the GBV and DV SOP now specifies that the police should systematically proceed to arrest the perpetrator when a PO is breached. No data are available, however, on the number of arrests carried out in such cases. In addition, although since 2021 the Maltese authorities have been looking into the possibility of introducing electronic tagging to monitor compliance with POs, this option has yet to come to fruition.

167. When it comes to the systematic examination of the situation of the children of the victim when a PO is issued, although under the Criminal Code the welfare of children and the safety of other individuals must be taken into account when a PO is issued, lawyers working in the area of violence against women have drawn GREVIO's attention to the fact that, generally, POs issued to protect a victim do not extend to her children.

168. GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to take the necessary legislative and or policy measures to bring the Maltese legal framework and practice into line with Article 53 of the Istanbul Convention, notably by:

- a. ensuring that protection orders are available under civil law for women victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, irrespective of or in addition to other legal proceedings;**
- b. stepping up efforts to monitor and enforce protection orders, including through technical means such as electronic monitoring;**
- c. ensuring that sanctions for breaching protection orders are effectively applied in practice and all breaches recorded in a centralised database.**

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

169. Article 56 of the 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 for 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.

125. Under Article 412C of the Criminal Code, protection orders are issued during criminal proceedings when a perpetrator has been accused of or charged with a crime, with a view to ensuring the safety of the victim. They can be issued either immediately, *ex officio* or at the request of any party to the proceedings. Under Article 37, paragraph 2, of the Civil Code, protection orders can also be issued in the context of separation proceedings or where there are children involved.

126. On a general note, however, POs are frequently issued when a domestic violence perpetrator is arrested, for the whole duration of the criminal proceedings, or are issued when bail is granted.

170. Since the baseline evaluation report, there have been a number of positive developments in the area of protection measures for victims, including the setting up in 2021 of the Victim Support Agency, providing support to all victims of crime, including victims of violence against women, free of charge. This agency provides a range of services such as: information on the follow-up given to reports lodged with the police; emotional support prior to and after the filing of such reports; support during court sittings when the victim has been summoned to testify; legal guidance, with further referrals to Legal Aid Malta; childcare and transportation services when victims need to attend a court hearing; and information on the date of release of the perpetrator or whether he has applied for parole. Through the Victim Support Agency, women can also seek information in a confidential manner on their partner, to verify whether he has been convicted on charges of domestic violence, and can request and obtain a panic alarm if they qualify as high risk. Women victims of violence can also benefit from support from the Domestic Violence unit of Aġenzija Appoġġ, including support during court hearings, as well as from specialist support provided by women's rights NGOs. GREVIO welcomes, in place since the baseline evaluation report, the new practice and requirement for the police to activate their body-worn cameras and to record interviews with victims of domestic violence and sexual violence, as this reduces the burden on victims to give their statement repeatedly.¹²⁷

171. Despite these positive developments, certain shortcomings identified in the baseline evaluation report have yet to be addressed. Notably, although under Article 646 of the Criminal Code it is possible for victims of various forms of violence against women to give their testimony by videoconference, including on the premises of the Victim Support Agency, such an option is at the discretion of the judge and upon request of the lawyer and is still not the norm in practice.¹²⁸ Moreover, where this practice is allowed, lawyers working in the area of violence against women have brought to GREVIO's attention that the room used within the court for this purpose is close to where the hearing with the perpetrator takes place. Concerning the hearing of child witnesses/victims of domestic violence, while the Children's House allows the recording of a child's statement so that s/he is spared from appearing before court, in practice this option is not always used, which GREVIO regrets.¹²⁹ Finally, since the baseline evaluation report, no measure has been taken to ensure the accessibility of police and court premises for women with disabilities and to ensure the provision of special assistance for women who are speech impaired.

172. While welcoming the progress made in the area of the protection of victims of violence against women, GREVIO encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. ensure that courts have separate waiting areas for victims and perpetrators and systematically give victims and their children the option to testify through the use of videoconferencing material, including outside of the court setting;**
- b. ensure that police stations and courts are equipped sufficiently to cater for the special needs of women with disabilities, whether these are physical or developmental.**

127. See Article 49, General obligations, and Article 50, Immediate response, prevention and protection.

128. Information obtained during the evaluation visit.

129. The Children's House, under the FSWS, serves as a child-appropriate setting where judicial investigations into violence that involves minors as victims or witnesses may be conducted.

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. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to ensure a clear gendered approach in their legislation and policies that fully acknowledges the gendered nature of domestic violence and violence against women, including by introducing a statutory definition of violence against women that acknowledges that it is a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women because it affects them disproportionately. (paragraph 13)

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

2. While acknowledging the progress made in the area of integrated policies, GREVIO invites the Maltese authorities to:

- a. enhance the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and of policies on violence against women in relation to all forms of violence against women, beyond domestic violence;
- b. hold regular consultations with civil society, including with NGOs dealing with migrant women's rights, with a view to ensuring their participation in the design of policies and legislation;
- c. ensure, on a regular basis, the independent evaluation of policies on violence against women on the basis of standardised methodology and predefined indicators with a view to achieving the comprehensive and co-ordinated policy approach required by the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 21)

C. Financial resources (Article 8)

3. While acknowledging the progress made in the funding of policies on violence against women, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. ensure sufficient public funding for policies aimed at preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, while earmarking funds for each foreseen measure;
- b. take steps to identify the sums spent on addressing violence against women and domestic violence by all relevant institutions, in particular through gender budgeting. (paragraph 26)

4. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to put in place a dedicated, transparent and accountable public procedure under which all NGOs that provide specialist support services to victims of all forms of violence against women and their children, including shelters, can compete for and request sustainable and long-term funding that reflects the real costs incurred. (paragraph 27)

D. Data collection (Article 11)**1. Law-enforcement agencies and the justice sector**

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

- a. swiftly ensure the comprehensive collection of disaggregated data in relation to all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention at all stages of the criminal justice system (notably reporting, investigation, prosecution and their outcome, including the sanctions imposed), disaggregated by sex, age, type of violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. Such data should be co-ordinated and comparable so that cases can be tracked across all stages of the law-enforcement and judicial proceedings;
- b. collect disaggregated data on the number of temporary protection orders and protection orders issued, as well as on their violation and the sanctions imposed for all cases of violence against women. (paragraph 33)

2. Healthcare sector

6. Recalling the findings issued in the GREVIO baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to ensure that public and private healthcare services collect data on contacts made for all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator, the type of violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. (paragraph 35)

3. Social services

7. Recalling the findings issued in the GREVIO baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to ensure the collection of data on access to social services with respect to other forms of violence against women under the Istanbul Convention beyond domestic violence, disaggregated by the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator, the type of violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim. (paragraph 37)

III. Analysis of the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the fields of prevention, protection and prosecution**A. Prevention****1. General obligations (Article 12)**

8. GREVIO invites the Maltese authorities to:

- a. increase their primary prevention measures in relation to all forms of violence against women, including on forced abortion and forced sterilisation, while maintaining a strong focus on the role of men and boys in prevention efforts and an intersectional approach to awareness-raising activities;
- b. systematically carry out impact assessments of any awareness-raising campaigns and primary prevention measures taken;
- c. identify, through such impact assessments, any undesirable or adverse effects of the awareness-raising campaigns and adjust them accordingly. (paragraph 48)

9. GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to ensure that prevention efforts adopt a gendered approach that explicitly recognises and addresses the disproportionate impact of violence on women and girls, including by using terminology that accurately reflects violence against women as a gendered phenomenon, in line with the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 49)

2. Education (Article 14)

10. Noting the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO encourages the Maltese authorities to strengthen the teaching about all of the different forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and the specific vulnerability of women at the intersection of discrimination, through the mandatory school curriculum, at all levels of education, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners. (paragraph 57)

3. Training of professionals (Article 15)

11. While acknowledging the progress made in the area of training, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to take legislative and other measures to ensure the mandatory provision of initial and in-service training on all forms of violence against women beyond domestic violence, to all professionals that are in contact with victims and perpetrators. These include, in particular, police officers, prosecutors, lawyers, court-appointed experts, medical doctors, nurses, midwives, healthcare staff, teachers, educators and social workers. Such training must be accompanied by standardised protocols addressing all forms of violence against women, aimed at identifying, providing support to and further referring victims to other services. (paragraph 69)

12. GREVIO further urges the Maltese authorities to ensure the mandatory initial and in-service training of judges, accompanied by guidelines for judicial proceedings in cases of gender-based violence against women that specifically address:

- a. for those presiding over cases involving custody and visitation rights, the devastating effects that witnessing violence against women has on children, the importance that victims' safety has on children's ability to recover from trauma and the need to take such circumstances into account when reaching a decision; the nature and dynamics of domestic violence, including the unequal power relations between the parties, as opposed to a mere conflictual relationship between spouses; and the inappropriateness of the use of the so-called parental alienation syndrome in a context of domestic violence and other notions that position women victims of violence as hostile or unco-operative;
- b. for those presiding over criminal cases, gender stereotypes and bias, trauma-induced victim behaviour, the "freeze, flop and befriend" reactions of victims of rape and in-depth knowledge of the standards of the Istanbul Convention. (paragraph 70)

4. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes (Article 16)

a. Programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence

13. While acknowledging the progress made with regard to the running of programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to use all available means to ensure that perpetrator programmes are widely attended. This includes integrating them into the criminal justice system as a tool to reduce recidivism, ensuring that they are attended and providing for mandatory court referrals. (paragraph 78)

B. Protection and support

1. General obligations (Article 18)

14. While acknowledging the progress made in Malta with regard to its general obligations in the area of protection, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. develop formal protocols or institutionalised structures detailing co-ordination measures to be taken by all agencies, entities and non-governmental organisations providing support to victims of domestic violence and all forms of violence against women;
- b. ensure that protection and support services for women victims of violence are made available as far as possible on the same premises, on a one-stop-shop basis;

- c. take legislative or other measures to ensure that a multidisciplinary risk assessment is carried out in co-ordination with key stakeholders such as judges, prosecutors and women's rights organisations in the context of the multi-agency risk-assessment and management framework (MARAM) and that the victim's perspective is taken into account when drafting and executing the safety plan. (paragraph 89)

2. General support services (Article 20)

a. Social services

15. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to set up dedicated programmes that cater for the specific needs of victims of violence against women in the areas of financial assistance, training, employment and housing, thus ensuring their recovery as well as their economic independence and empowerment. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. remove the requirement of proof of separation to access social housing;
- b. ensure the systematic provision of information to victims on dedicated programmes in the area of social services and strengthen referrals to the relevant agencies. (paragraph 94)

b. Healthcare services

16. GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to introduce adequate protocols and standards in the area of healthcare that provide professionals with a clear and exhaustive pathway for victims of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, including female genital mutilation (FGM), taking into account in the case of FGM both the victim and any female member who may be at risk. Such protocols should in particular ensure that:

- a. patients are actively screened with a view to identifying potential victims of domestic violence and violence against women;
- b. healthcare personnel are sufficiently trained on how to identify such victims, preserve evidence and refer them to other support services;
- c. victims are received without undue delay in dedicated spaces/rooms to ensure their privacy when disclosing the violence they have suffered;
- d. a psychologist or a social worker is available on call to support the victim;
- e. support and care are provided as much as possible without the victim having to retell the violence suffered multiple times;
- f. identify and reduce obstacles for victims of domestic violence and violence against women seeking healthcare, such as the inadmissibility of babies who are breastfed. (paragraph 99)

3. Specialist support services (Article 22)

17. Recalling the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to ensure the provision of immediate short- and long-term specialist support services to victims of all forms of violence against women, beyond domestic violence, supported by a sufficient number of cultural mediators. Provision of prompt psychological support and legal counselling should be particularly increased, with systematic referrals, where necessary, to specialist women's organisations with in-depth knowledge of violence against women. (paragraph 107)

18. GREVIO further strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. remove mandatory referrals from Aġenzija Appoġġ to domestic violence shelters, including by offering women victims of domestic violence the opportunity to self-refer;

- b. ensure that the number and capacity of specialist women's shelters meet the growing demand, including in Gozo, and comply with the minimum standard of one family place per 10 000 head of population as set out in the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention;
- c. ensure that specialist women's shelters are equipped to welcome women with different needs, including women with disabilities and women with addiction issues;
- d. ensure that shelters are not required to make a report to the authorities when they provide accommodation to women in an irregular situation;
- e. set up a round-the-clock helpline dedicated to all forms of violence against women, staffed by professionals duly trained on all such forms of violence against women and capable of providing crisis counselling to victims, with due respect for the confidentiality and anonymity of all callers and operated by trained staff;
- f. ensure that the provision of support services to children exposed to or victims of domestic violence or any other form of violence against women and/or any other important decision is not subject to the approval of both parents. (paragraph 108)

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

19. Recalling the findings issued in its baseline evaluation report, and while welcoming number of improvements, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to set up dedicated rape crisis and/or sexual violence referral centres in Malta and Gozo equipped with trained specialist staff, providing a response to sexual violence and rape with a victim-centred approach, in dedicated premises, on a one-stop-shop basis and supported by a protocol setting out the standardised pathway. Such a protocol should ensure that:

- a. forensic examinations are carried out in line with internationally recognised standards, according to a standardised procedure and with the use of standardised rape kits;
- b. samples are stored with the consent of the victims, regardless of whether the matter has been reported to the police. (paragraph 115)

20. In the interim, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to finalise and implement the draft protocol for cases of sexual violence at Mater Dei Hospital with a view to establishing a clear pathway of care for victims of sexual violence, reducing waiting times for victims, ensuring co-ordination between specialists to minimise the number of times victims are asked to recount the violence suffered, and ensuring that visits take place in a dedicated, suitably equipped room. (paragraph 116)

C. Substantive law

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

21. GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to take the following priority action in the area of custody and visitation rights:

- a. ensure that the devastating impact that violence against women has on children is reflected in legislation and that incidents of violence against women are a mandatory legal criterion to be taken into account when deciding on custody and visitation rights; to this effect, all decisions should be duly reasoned;
- b. systematically screen all cases on custody and visitation for possible instances of domestic violence, using a standard questionnaire or other appropriate means, and, in parallel, consult all relevant bodies to ascertain whether criminal proceedings are pending or have been initiated in the past against the alleged perpetrator;
- c. ensure that all relevant professionals, including social workers, lawyers, judges, court experts, child psychologists and the Children's Advocate are trained in domestic violence and understand the very harmful impact of allegations of parental alienation and similar concepts that portray women victims of abuse as alienating, hostile or unco-operative and ensure that the use of such concepts in/by courts is prohibited and is not promoted in policies;

- d. ensure an adequate number of judges in family courts that are trained in the area of domestic violence and provide them with guidelines for deciding on custody and visitation rights in cases with a history of domestic violence;
- e. take measures to ensure that in the context of supervised visitation and during meetings with the Child Advocate, the mother of the child does not have to meet face to face with the perpetrator and that supervised visits are carried out under the supervision of a professional with expertise in the dynamics of coercive control and the impact of trauma. (paragraph 125)

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

22. GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to address and end the practice by lawyers whereby victims are discouraged from testifying in criminal proceedings in exchange for a favourable civil settlement (where there are concurrent civil/family proceedings). This could be achieved through training or protocols, underscoring how this practice interferes with and prevents the dissuasive effect of criminal punishment, leading ultimately to repeated violence and the impunity of perpetrators. (paragraph 129)

23. GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. take measures to ensure that the exemption from mediation in proceedings dealing with separation, custody and visitation rights in cases of violence, including domestic violence, is implemented in practice;
- b. ensure that mediators receive robust training on violence against women and issue guidelines on their obligations with respect to cases of domestic violence. (paragraph 130)

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

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

- a. explore the possibility of extending the remit of specialist gender-based and domestic violence hubs to deal with all forms of violence against women, supported by standard operating procedures covering all such forms of violence and/or otherwise ensure that all grave forms of violence against women are dealt with and investigated by trained professionals, supported by dedicated standard operating procedures;
- b. remind police officers of their due diligence obligation to immediately respond to, prevent and protect women and their children from all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention and apply the related sanctions for failure to do so;
- c. take measures to ensure that the prosecutorial competence of the police does not represent, in practice, a barrier to reporting for victims;
- d. ensure that reports to local police stations can be made at any time of day or night;
- e. ensure that police premises are accessible for women with disabilities and special assistance is provided for women who are speech impaired. (paragraph 138)

c. Conviction rates

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

- a. explore mechanisms and procedures that will prevent over-reliance on the victim's testimony in criminal proceedings for intimate partner violence and sexual violence;
- b. identify and address any/all legislative and procedural factors that contribute to the low levels of conviction in relation to all forms of violence against women;
- c. ensure proportionate sanctions for all acts of violence against women. (paragraph 150)

2. Risk assessment and risk management (Article 51)

26. GREVIO strongly encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. ensure that in cases of domestic violence, an assessment of the victim's risk is carried out systematically and speedily in a multidisciplinary manner by all relevant authorities in co-operation, providing co-ordinated protection and support, and that risk-management procedures are also carried out for cases that are not classified as high risk;
- b. ensure that the prosecuting role of the police does not stand in the way of the completion of a victim's risk assessment;
- c. ensure that a risk assessment is created and used for all forms of violence against women;
- d. set up a system of retrospective analysis of all cases of gender-related killings, attempted killings of women and suicides of women with a view to identifying any possible failure of protection, preventing them in the future, ensuring the safety of women and holding to account both the perpetrator and the multiple agencies that come into contact with the victim. (paragraph 157)

3. Emergency barring orders (Article 52)

27. Recalling the findings issued in GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to take the legislative and or policy measures needed to bring the Maltese legal framework and practice in line with Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention, notably by ensuring that:

- a. temporary protection orders can be issued quickly in situations of immediate danger without lengthy proceedings and that the police are encouraged to apply for such measures in practice;
- b. the alleged perpetrator is removed from the residence, rather than the victim;
- c. temporary protection orders automatically include the children of the victim. (paragraph 163)

4. Restraining or protection orders (Article 53)

28. GREVIO urges the Maltese authorities to take the necessary legislative and or policy measures to bring the Maltese legal framework and practice into line with Article 53 of the Istanbul Convention, notably by:

- a. ensuring that protection orders are available under civil law for women victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, irrespective of or in addition to other legal proceedings;
- b. stepping up efforts to monitor and enforce protection orders, including through technical means such as electronic monitoring;
- c. ensuring that sanctions for breaching protection orders are effectively applied in practice and all breaches recorded in a centralised database. (paragraph 168)

5. Measures of protection (Article 56)

29. While welcoming the progress made in the area of the protection of victims of violence against women, GREVIO encourages the Maltese authorities to:

- a. ensure that courts have separate waiting areas for victims and perpetrators and systematically give victims and their children the option to testify through the use of videoconferencing material, including outside of the court setting;
- b. ensure that police stations and courts are equipped sufficiently to cater for the special needs of women with disabilities, whether these are physical or developmental. (paragraph 172)

Appendix II

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

National authorities and public bodies

Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence
Foundation for Social Welfare Services
Aġenzija Appoġġ - Domestic Violence Service and DAIP
Aġenzija Sapport
Ministry for Gozo and Planning
Ministry for Home Affairs and Security
Malta Police Force
Victim Support Agency
Ministry for Justice, Research and Innovation
Attorney General's Office
Court Services Agency
Department for Probation and Parole
Ministry for Social Policy and the Family
National Commission for the Promotion of Equality
Commissioner for Children
Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
Social care Standards Authority
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ministry for Health
National Statistics Office
JobsPlus
Housing authority
The International Protection Agency
Agency for the Welfare of Asylum Seekers
Ministry of Education and Sport
Secretariat for Catholic Education
Human Rights Directorate

Non-governmental organisations and civil society

Dar Hosea - shelter
Womens Rights Foundation - women's rights organisation providing legal support services
The Good Shepherd Sisters - shelter
Victim Support Malta – NGO providing support services to victims of crime
National Council of Women Malta - network of women's rights organisations
Malta Women's Lobby - network of women's rights organisations
Fondazzjoni Sebħ - shelter
Aditus Foundation – NGO dealing with migration
Dr. Camilleri Zahra, University of Malta
Lawyers for Choice – women's rights organisation providing legal support services

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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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.