

Shadow Report presented by
Community Safety and Mediation Centre Foundation (CMSC)
Fundația Centrul de Mediere și Securitate Comunitară
www.cmsc.ro

**Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic
Violence (GREVIO)**
Romania, August 2025

Shadow report on the Istanbul Convention
From an operational perspective

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*Due to insufficient time and human resources on documenting the answers to all questions focusing to GREVIO its 1st thematic evaluation round on the theme of building trust by delivering support, protection and justice, we decided to contribute only to **articles 7, 8, 18, 51** in the hope that other organisations will contribute to more chapters. We hope to offer more input during GREVIO visit in Romania or later on, with additional informations.*

Special thanks to our colleagues contributing to this report:

Cătălina Mițel, social worker

Cătălina Șchiopu, therapist

Diana Kolcu, social worker

Paula Ciortan, social worker

Petronela Elena Șerban, service coordinator and supervisor

Laura Albu, executive president

CENTRUL DE MEDIERE ȘI SECURITATE COMUNITARĂ

www.cmsc.ro , telverde 0800.070.017, emergency phone +40787.878.806 www.helenahelpline.com , email fundatiacmsc@gmail.com

Introduction

Over the past 25 years, Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation (CMSC) has evolved into a center of expertise, applying highly specialized knowledge and an innovative way of working to complex cases that require a different approach. From this position, we observe that significant strides have been made on the Istanbul Convention in Romania. Yet, major challenges remain to ensure an effective and comprehensive combat of violence against women and domestic violence. Drawing from our extensive experience in handling such cases, this report offers our operational perspective on the state of the Istanbul Convention in Romania.

Recognition of the problem is growing, but it has yet to translate into concrete policies and frameworks. On a national level, the issue still struggles to make it onto the agenda, and politicians are hesitant to address critical topics such as coercive control and femicide. We are grateful to our partners for recognizing the importance of Community Safety and Mediation Center and enabling our work - helping those affected by domestic violence find the support they need to sustainably escape unsafe situations.

This report aims to provide a unique perspective on the Istanbul Convention, based on CMSC's expertise and operational position: working daily with victims of violence against women and domestic violence, while maintaining strong connections with regional, national, and international partners. From this comprehensive point, we highlight several critical topics that, in our view, require attention to ensure that the commitments of the Istanbul Convention are upheld.

Since its establishment in 2000, CMSC has been committed to a coordinated, cross-sectoral response to the serious problem of domestic violence, assisting an average of 500 cases of women and children each year. Domestic violence is different from other crimes because the victim was or is currently in an intimate relationship with the aggressor. Victims frequently face the reluctance and stereotypes of public authorities: doctors, police officers, social workers, magistrates, local authorities. This limits the victim's access to services provided by law. The phenomenon does not take into account the socio-economic background of the victims or differences in geographical space: on average, according to statistics from recent years, 48% of crimes occurred in urban areas and 52% in rural areas. According to the statistics of the Iasi and Vaslui County Police Inspectorate regarding acts of domestic violence, in 2024 over 5000 acts were registered in these counties, representing 33.87% of the number of crimes reported against the person - one in three reported crimes is a case of domestic violence. However, interventions are sporadic and uncoordinated, services are completely lacking, and information about services and their accessibility is absent.

Community Safety and Mediation Center (CMSC) is an independent foundation established in 2000 in Iasi, with the mission to build, together with local communities, development and cooperation models aimed at providing a safe, open and sustainable space.

The four directions of action of the Foundation are:

- Rural community development

CENTRUL DE MEDIERE ȘI SECURITATE COMUNITARĂ

www.cmssc.ro , telverde 0800.070.017, emergency phone +40787.878.806 www.helenahelpline.com , email fundatiacmssc@gmail.com



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- Projects, services and legislative initiatives in the field of preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
- Local, European and international cooperation for safe communities
- Technical assistance, research, innovation and legislative initiatives in the social and cultural field

CMSC operates in rural and urban communities in the NE Romania region and is a member of the **RuralNet Network, the Romanian Women's Lobby, the Network of NGOs in the violence against women (VIF Network) FONSS (Federation of Social Service NGOs) and European Family Justice Centers Alliance**. CMSC is the only NGO in Iași licensed in services for victims of domestic violence – assisting approximately 450-500 women and children annually under **GLORIA** brand. It has the second licensed helpline in the country (after ANES, national) - free toll-free 0800.070.017 or urgent +40787.878.806 for victims of domestic violence - accessible in RO, EN, UA, under **HELENA HELPLINE** brand.

The foundation is involved in influencing public policies and legal changes in Romania. The war in Ukraine involved CMSC in updating Romania's "National Plan for Women, Peace and Security", UN Resolution 1325. CMSC's advocacy efforts led to the updating of Law 217/2003 on the prevention and combating of domestic violence. CMSC initiated joint partnerships with the national coordinations of the European Women's Lobby in Romania, Iceland, the Netherlands, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, and with organizations in Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada, Norway, and strategic partnerships with organizations in the USA in regional projects.

More information on foundation work:

www.cmssc.ro ,

<https://www.facebook.com/centruldemedieresisecuritatecomunitara/>

<https://www.instagram.com/fundatiacmssc/>

<https://www.facebook.com/WhatHappenedToTheHeart/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Helenahelpline/>

<https://www.facebook.com/FeminismGLORIA/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ProiectGLORIA/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CampanieVictimAssist/>

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Article 7: Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies

CMSC will point out the aspects observed as organisation implementing on the ground co-ordinated policies from the national level.

Observation regarding *The National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Sexual Violence – SINERGIE (2021–2030)*¹, covering multiple forms of sexual violence addressed in the Convention and the *National Strategy on Equal Opportunities and Domestic Violence 2022–2027* (Government Decision no. 1.547/2022)² are given below: Regarding the measures proposed in the Strategy Action Plan which should target interventions that aim to increase the level of access to programs of the multiple needs of women, absolutely necessary to reduce the level of vulnerability of specific categories (e.g. Roma women, rural women seeking work, women with disabilities).

- **Targeted Programs:** CMSC has not identified in the last years any particular programs developed at national or regional level which focused on: **Roma Women:** Implementing programs focused on education, skill development, and vocational training tailored to their specific needs and cultural context, while also addressing issues of discrimination and antigypsyism. **Rural Women:** Focused on access to resources like land, technology, and financial services, as well as promoting their participation in value-added activities and non-farm employment. **Women with Disabilities:** Ensuring accessibility to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, and address attitudinal barriers through awareness campaigns and disability-inclusive practices.
- Except for the Roma women, rural women or women with disabilities entering the national network of protected houses or shelters (42 protected houses) created by ANES through the *project Venus for combating violence against women and domestic violence* -there were no other programs funded, promoted or accesible to these categories of women in vulnerable situations. There were no specific provisions though for these specific categories, and data collection on the cases accesing these services was never designed to collect the information on how many Roma women, rural women or women with disabilities have acces to services and have targeted programs designed for their needs.
- **Addressing Systemic Barriers:** CMSC has not identified public funded initiatives tackling **Gender-Transformative Approaches** with the aim to design and implement programs that challenge gender norms and power imbalances, promoting women's agency and decision-making power.
- The only programs in Romania addressing the issue in the last years were developed with external funding by **Romanian Women's Lobby Association** (<https://rowl.ro/en/projects>) and their partners, under different initiatives: „Gloria -feminism and strategic approach of gender equality” funded under the EEA Financial Mechanism – ActiveCitizens Fund

1 <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/243338>

2 <https://legislatie.just.ro/public/DetaliiDocument/262994>

Romania -01.06.2021-12.02.2024, www.feminismgloria.com ; Project 50/50 Campaign - Women in Solidarity EEA Financial Mechanism – Active Citizens Fund Romania 05.04.2023-15.11.2023, The 51% Minority, Embassy of Netherlands in Romania, 01.10.2023-30.04.2024, 50/50 Campaign Membership And Activities Support Fund (MASF) 2023 European Women’s Lobby, 15.09-15 12.2023 , Women's priorities, first! Membership And Activities Support Fund (MASF) 2024 /EWL Operational Grant (CERV–Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme). 01.06.2024-30.11.2024,<https://rowl.ro/en/projects/women-s-priorities-first>, “Women4Advancement: Equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making for women advancement, Membership And Activities Support Fund (MASF) 2024 /EWL Operational Grant (CERV–Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme). 01.06.2024-30.11.2024, <https://rowl.ro/en/projects/women4advancement>

- **Community Engagement:** CMSC has not identified in the last years any of the public programs dedicated to women victims of domestic violence and gender based violence involving stakeholders and engage directly women from diverse backgrounds, including Roma women, rural women, and women with disabilities, in the design and implementation of programs and policies.

Regarding the field of preventing and combating domestic violence, for the period 2022 – 2027, and the measures and actions of the strategy:

- On the development of a unitary system of social services aimed at the effective protection of victims of domestic violence and violence against women, as well as their rights (e.g. increasing the number of protected shelters, psychological assistance services, legal counseling, settlement of forensic certificates, facilitating access to justice, material support);
- **Protected shelters and protected houses.** CMSC can observe that on the ground, at the level of year 2025, with very few exceptions, in each county of Romania (from all 42 counties) there are an average of one or two protected shelters with additional protected house/county, funded by ANES through external funding (Norway grants, EU grants), making the services dependent and vulnerable of the existence of external projects. Local and regional public administrations are only with few exceptions supporting with city halls budgets or county hall budgets local shelters (more regarding funding on the chapter on *Article 8 Funding*.)
- **Psychological assistance** services and specialised therapy. CMSC has observed that, with the exception of women and their children who are accomodated in public shelters and protected houses (so a very limited number of women), there are no funding allocated from public sources to allow schemes in which women victims of domestic violences or gender based violence to acces free therapy post trauma. The only free therapy or counselling is available under the roof of a couple of NGOs providing specialised assistance (CMSC included here) and only under external funding (different donors) or through different schemes -un related to protection of women victims of gender based violence. Even if in theory these services exist under DGASPC or DAS services (General Directions of Social Assistance and Protection of

Children/ Social Assistance Directions) in each county, a women searching for help and support for therapy related services would not find these services easily.

- **Legal counseling** – The same explanation as above.
- **Settlement of forensic certificates** -Even if different legislative provisions ensure that victims of domestic violence should have free access to medical assistance and can have forensic certificates issued free of charge, with the exception of the cases in which victims came accompanied by Police at Medical Forensic offices (and when costs are covered by institution for the victim), if the women adress the services without willing to file an official complaint, she will be charged by the medical institution. CMSC is covering the costs for victims for many years, trying to facilitate access to services for all vulnerable women who don't have the money to pay for the certificate, always these costs were covered by external donors, never from public funding.
- **Regarding the area of prevention** (Order no. 20.266/50/2023 for the approval of the Methodology on measures to prevent domestic violence³). The order includes the concrete ways to implement prevention measures and is addressed, in particular, to the categories of professionals who interact in their daily activities with victims, aggressors and community members, with a main focus on the intervention of police officers and specialists from the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection/Social Assistance Directorates/Public Social Assistance Services.

This order is very good in the measure it includes in terms of methodology but in order to be implemented properly in the field there is a need to take into consideration the following needs:

- **Lack of human, material and time resources** among police officers on the ground. Despite their willingness to implement prevention measures, in the absence of a political will focusing on declaring domestic violence as **Priority Zero** on using Police on the ground, prevention measures will be pushed at the end of the list of the activities and will rely mainly on the small prevention team police has at county level and is involved in ALL other prevention work on several layers.
- **Lack of community outreach among specialists from the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection/Social Assistance Directorates/Public Social Assistance Services.** Prevention is always happening at community level, and here is a huge gap between the number of specialists employed at county level and the ones working on the small communities level. As the case of police, human resources in this field are torred between the huge case overload, lack of specilised information allowing them to offer the type of communication which would have an impact on audiences in the prevention activities and total lack of resources.
- **Absence of inter-agency collaboration:** There are no concrete protocols which would encourage collaboration among different agencies and organizations involved in addressing

3 <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/267262>

violence to ensure a coordinated response. The prevention is always based on shared information and best practice among professionals and organizations to improve prevention and response efforts. In the absence of pilot campaigns which can be multiplied easily by local institutions, standard kits for prevention (videoclips which are easy to be shared, materials in an easy to read format, posters with referral information and helpline numbers which can be accessed) the methodology will remain a very good legislative piece with no impact on the ground. Recently, 2025, CMSC during an information training with 40 police officers from rural area in NE region observed that the materials presented, including videoclips used by National Police to advertise the work they do on protection of domestic violence victims (which were viral on TikTok and YouTube platforms) were not known and used by local police.

➤ **Regarding area of support and intervention both for victims and aggressors:**

In 2022 both Order no. 20840/2022 of the Minister of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities for the approval of the Minimum Mandatory Standards on the application of case management within social services for victims of domestic violence and the Order no. 20841/2022 for the approval of the Minimum Mandatory Standards on the application of case management within social assistance services for aggressors have been issued.

First order stipulates principles applicable to case management in social services for victims of domestic violence to ensure the protection of the victim and social service staff during the provision of assistance, respect for human rights, each stages of case management and specific elements: initial assessment and activation of emergency protection measures, systemic assessment of the personal, social and professional context of the victim of domestic violence, establishment of the intervention plan. Second order stipulates the steps necessary for applying the case management in social services addressed to the aggressor in cases of domestic violence, to facilitate access to integrated social services, with the aim of eliminating the risk of repeating acts of aggression, empowerment, rehabilitation and social reintegration.

- For example, there is ***no stand-alone normative provision that expressly regulates the obligation of police bodies to call on DAS, DGASPC, mobile teams in every situation*** (obligations regulated by the Procedure approved by Order no. 2525/2018 - art. 3 letters e), f), h) - iii, art. 8 - SPAS obligations, art. 6 paragraph (4), art. 5 letter c) of the Methodology on measures to prevent domestic violence, approved by Order no. 20266/2023 - SPAS obligations, art. 5 letter f) of the same procedure regarding DGASPC obligations), but only, according to art. 8 of Order no. 146/2018 on the method of managing cases of domestic violence by police officers, in the situation where the need for providing social services is found; However, it is necessary that the obligation to inform be expressly regulated so that local authorities that can provide social services can exercise their powers.

In the last years (2022-2024) CMSC in consortium with other NGOS implemented the project ***"VERA – Positive change through integrated actions in difficult times"*** coordinated by ANES with the purpose to improve response capacity of inter-institutional mechanisms for emergency

intervention in cases of domestic violence at community level (mobile teams) and improve institutional capacity through training of specialists from the domestic violence departments (DVD) at the DGASPC level and increasing their capacity to facilitate access to justice for victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence and children affected by it. In connection with the above Orders and based on direct discussions with participants in the project, CMSC could offer the following information:

- **Lack of knowledge and experience in case management of most of the mobile teams across country.** During the project, CMSC has been in contact with hundreds of specialists from mobile teams across Romania. For many people participating in the training, beside the fact it was the first training in the field in their lives, more than 50% of them have never been managing at least one case of domestic violence since they were nominated in a mobile team. Case management is done at regional county level by specialists in DGASPC institutions, DAS institutions (if services are licenced) or in NGOs like CMSC which held a license in the field, having professional trained staff.
- Also, *the intervention of the mobile team should not be limited to situations in which the victim has resorted to other means of notifying the authorities* and not to the emergency number 112, or only in cases in which the aggressor has been ordered to be evacuated from the home and it is necessary to take him to residential centers or other social services (art. 4 para. (2) and art. 5 of the Procedure approved by Order no. 2525/2018). Moreover, at the normative level, among the principles set out in art. 2 of Law no. 217/2003 for the prevention and combating of domestic violence, republished, are the principle of celerity, the principle of partnership and the principle of integrated approach, the importance of inter-institutional collaboration also resulting from the provisions of art. 51 para. (1) and (2) of Law 217/2003 and of art. 3 par. (2) let. a) and art. 7 par. (1) of the Methodology of 9 March 2023

Article 8: Funding

- **Lack of gender budgeting policies focused on violence against women and girls and domestic violence.** Regarding access to resources, starting in 2018, CMSC and Corona Foundation, in partnership with ANES -initiated a project “Gender Budgeting in Public Policies”. One of the public policies proposed back then was called *-Development of the mechanism for building a fund for victims of domestic violence by County Councils and Local Councils⁴*. This proposal was developed by our organisations with the goal to increase access of victims of domestic and sexual violence to information services, legal and psychological counseling, emergency medical diagnosis and treatment, and financial assistance for immediate needs, other urgent needs (housing, security measures) by introducing a simplified local system for settlement of services/subsidies from a fund dedicated to victims of domestic violence, built at the level of each county council and, where possible, local council. This would also increase reporting among victims: clearer

4 <https://www.fundatiacorona.ro/wp-content/uploads/PPA4-Mecanismul-de-constructie-al-fondului-pentru-victimele-violentei-domestice.pdf> Development of the mechanism for building a fund for victims of domestic violence by County Councils and Local Councils.

procedures and a feasible alternative regarding access to financially supported services from a local fund will encourage victims to report acts of domestic and sexual violence.

None of the scenarios proposed by CMSC and Corona in consultation (August-September 2019) with approximately 80 people was taken into consideration – even if they were representing the university sector, the non-governmental sector, the media, local public administration in the counties of Iasi, Botosani, Bacau, Vaslui (mayors of communes, municipalities and county councils), the presidential administration, community social assistance departments, general social assistance and child protection departments, county public health departments, regional and county emergency hospitals and forensic medicine services, AJPIS Iasi, Bacau and Vaslui, county police inspectorates in Iasi, Bacau and Vaslui, county school inspectorates, the prefect's institution, territorial labor inspectorates in Iasi, Bacau and Vaslui, CJRAE, AJOFM in Iasi, Bacau and Vaslui, the national agency against human trafficking.

- ***Lack of vision in the operationalization of the National Mechanism for Sustaining Crime Prevention***, established under the **National Strategy for Criminal Asset Recovery (2021–2025)** in using financial sustainability for victim protection and crime prevention. There is no clear coleration of how the money allocated from this mechanism reach in an efficient and corelated manner victims of domestic violence and gender based violence. The law provision included the fact that the funds allocated through the Mechanism are distributed as follows:

- a) 20% – Ministry of Education;
- b) 20% – Ministry of Health;
- c) 15% – Ministry of Internal Affairs;
- d) 15% – Public Ministry;
- e) 15% – Ministry of Justice;
- f) 15% – the Agency for non-reimbursable funding of projects proposed by associations and foundations active in the field of victim assistance, protection, and social support.

Without clear planing on how the money from **points a)-e)** are going to be spend on programs directly dedicated for victims of crimes, even if the mechanism is planned to function for 5 years with posibility of extension, if you cannot monitor the use of funding, there is no possibility of analysis of the efficiency of the mechanism. **Regarding point f)** -the only provision dedicated to NGO funding, since it's establishment, The National Mechanism for Sustaining Crime Prevention has facilitated direct financial support for organizations delivering specialized victim support services, but funded only 3 projects with the main goal prevention of violence and monitoring services, ***none of the three projects selected to receive funding***, with a total allocation of 824,394.38 lei (approximately €165,700 -47% of the funds) from the overall budget of 1,737,703.62 lei (approximately €349,000) ***was focused on domestic violence or gender based violence victims.***

Also, this was the ONLY funded available in 2024, and in 2025, even at the hour of submitting this report, August 2025, the new call was not yet opened⁵.

➤ ***NGOs have no funding or support for assistance of domestic violence victims and victims of crimes such as sexual violence when implementing of the new voucher-based advance system.*** In June 2023, the Romanian Government approved Government Decision No. 541/202326, establishing the methodological norms for the implementation of the ***new voucher-based advance system***. The methodology assumes that institutions and organisations enrolling in the system have budgets for implementation of this methodology. Reality is that public institutions, due to lack of information, human resources or interests in assuming new roles within the existing job descriptions - are not accessing the mechanisms. NGOs, which are interested and informed and willing to offer the support, have no allocated funds for current operational work, salaries or service provision, relying entirely on external funding (EU funds, Norway grants, private sponsors, private foundations). This is the reason most of the NGOs stopped providing direct services and engage only on advocacy work, campaigns and prevention activities. Until August 2025, only 9 vouchers were issued under this scheme.

The voucher methodology provides specific elements for issuance, distribution and settlement of vouchers for victims of crime, for establishing their amount, as well as the criteria for selecting public and private entities enrolled in the granting mechanism. The voucher covers the urgent needs of the victims of the crimes and represents the advance payment of the financial compensation approved by the Commission (the Commission within the court of domicile), according to art. 30 of Law no. 211/2004 on some measures to ensure information, support and protection of victims of crimes, with subsequent amendments and completions. The victim who filed a criminal complaint may file a request for financial compensation or a request with an advance payment of the financial compensation in the form of a voucher to cover urgent needs at the court in whose jurisdiction the victim resides and is resolved by two judges from the Commission for granting financial compensation to victims of crimes, established in each court.

➤ ***CMSC was the first organisation in Romania to obtain the voucher for a victim a domestic and sexual violence since the mechanism has been established, and all the interventions were not funded by any public funds, all specialists involved in the cases were supported from external funding.*** For better understanding, even if the funding of the vouchers comes from ANABI, Ministry of Justice, CMSC was not able to access ANABI grants to support the specialists working on the cases.

For better understanding the amount of work/case, we present here the study case which succeeded to access the voucher mechanism. These vouchers can cover expenses related to accommodation, food, transportation, personal items within the limit of 5 average gross monthly salaries. In April 2024, legal steps were taken to enroll CMSC in the mechanism in order to be able to provide support to the beneficiaries in accessing the vouchers. Thus, in June 2024, the specialists from the CMSC took the necessary steps to prepare the file of a minor girl from Iasi -beneficiary of the center, victim of sexual violence living with her mother (Ms.M) and her younger sister, to be submitted to the Iași

5 <https://anabi.just.ro/info/finantari-nerambursabile-asociatii-si-fundatii>



Court for the attention of the Commission for the provision of financial compensation to victims of crimes. The file contained the following documents: The report estimating the expenses to cover the urgent needs of the victims of crimes, the application for the voucher, a certificate from the psychologist from the residential center with whom the minor had psychological counseling sessions, the extract from the Iași Court portal of the criminal file that had as its object sexual assault, continuous rape, continuous sexual corruption of minors and a stick containing the recordings made by the minor during the abuse. The application for the voucher was completed with the help of specialists from CMSC, which was quite complex, the beneficiary not being familiar with such formulations. Subsequently, the court set a trial date during which the girl and her mother were heard. On 17.07.2024, the application was admitted, which granted the first voucher for crime victims. The issuing unit enrolled in the mechanism sent the girl, through the CMSC Foundation, 3 different cards, each covering one of the needs expressed in the report, namely, accommodation, food and personal use (clothing, footwear). Given that it was the first such financial support, there were numerous obstacles that we encountered in using them. Some of the impediments were related to the type of accommodation where the victim could stay for a longer period of time. Most of the companies that signed contracts where payment could be made with this card were travel agencies, thus the victim could live for a short period of time after which it was necessary to identify a new home. In order to ensure housing stability, but also emotional stability for the mother-child couple, specialists from CMSC, together with representatives of the card issuers, began steps to identify real estate developers, apartment owners, real estate agents who wish to conclude a collaboration protocol with the card provider in order to be able to settle the accommodation through vouchers. Specialists from CMSC identified a developer who was willing to accept payment by voucher, but also to ensure the beneficiary's payment of maintenance expenses throughout the stay. After identifying the home, specialists from CMSC offered support to the woman regarding relocation. Ms. M and her daughters continues to benefit from social and psychological support from specialists from CMSC. It is important to understand that victim assistance should not be limited to sending papers or documents, but to long-term psychological support. Although Ms. M is safe with her two daughters in her new home, she still needs support both in terms of managing her own emotions and interacting with other institutions and specialists (court, prosecutor's office, lawyer). As you can see, none of this effort is usually done by the public institutions in order to assist a victim on her path, this is the reason that, without any support for NGOs assisting directly the victims, all these good mechanisms will remain forms without content.

➤ Regarding funds allocated to NGOs working in the field of violence against women, **there are (and never been) NO public subsidies granted to NGOs**, neither to larger organisations nor smaller, community-based NGOs that have direct experience of working with women victims of violence. This impacts on organisations working with migrant and refugee women as well, women from rural areas, women with disabilities, Roma women, etc.

➤ With one or two exceptions – **there are NO sub-contracting of service-providing NGOs through public procurements at local level, county level, regional level and national level.** This has as results in serious practical difficulties for NGOs in terms of ensuring continuity in the services they provide. All NGOs providing specialised services to the victims are struggling and

have resorted to innovative projects in order to be able to cover the costs of the salaries for the specialised staff -social workers, supervisors, therapists, lawyers.

➤ At this moment, the only public funding accesible to NGOs for supporting their services dedicated to women victims of gender based violence and domestic violence, are the subsidies offered through the mechanism given to *NGOs which have licensed social services (all types of services) funded annually under the law 34/1998* ⁶Few women NGOs though have the capacity and spaces and hired staff on a full time based to fulfill the conditions to access this type of funding. In 2024 and 2025, CMSC and other two NGOs at national level were able to access this type of funding for category of services dedicated to victims of domestic violence. Nevertheless, from the total amount of 35.000.000 euro dedicated to social services in 2025, only 100.000 euro were allocated to services of assistance of victims of domestic violence⁷, **the percentage being 0.28% from all funding at national level for this scheme.** In 2024, CMSC and only another NGO from Bucharest were able to access this scheme, cumulating together an amount of 82.240 euro from the total allocated for all social services at national level of 26.553.700 euro. This means in **2024⁸ the percentage was also of 0.30% from all funding at national level under this scheme** allocated to services of assistance of victims of domestic violence.

Article 18: General obligations

Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention establishes general principles that must be respected in the provision of protection and support services, both general and specialized, for women victims of violence. One of the principles is the need for services to act in a concerted and coordinated manner, with the involvement of all relevant agencies that can ensure effective cooperation between the judiciary, prosecutors, police, local and regional authorities, NGOs and other relevant organizations.

- Despite the existence on paper of coordination mechanisms, *these instruments are not implemented in Romania.* Local authorities do not have the resources to set up such mechanisms. Where they exist, they are not based *on formalized protocols*, which does not contribute to ensuring their sustainability and creates uncertainties regarding the roles and responsibilities of each actor.
- *NGOs that manage specialized services are not systematically involved in coordination, are underfunded and work without a multidisciplinary team* or joint case management with the

6 Law 34/1998 refers to the granting of subsidies to Romanian associations and foundations with legal personality that establish and manage social assistance units, including those recognized as providers of social services according to the law. This law is complementary to Law no. 292/2011 (Social Assistance Law) and establishes rules for the granting of these subsidies. Social assistance units: These can be, for example, day centers, homes for the elderly, etc. Level of subsidies: These cannot exceed the average monthly maintenance cost, per assisted person, in state social assistance units, with a similar profile according to the law. Accreditation: NGOs must be accredited as social service providers to receive subsidies under the law. https://lege5.ro/gratuit/ge4tmobt/legea-nr-34-1998-privind-acordarea-unor-subventii-asociatiilor-si-fundatiilor-romane-cu-personalitate-juridica-care-infiintea-si-administreaza-unitati-de-asistenta-sociala#google_vignette

7 https://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/ORDIN_SUBVENTII_IANUARIE_2025_24122024.pdf

8 https://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/ordinMMSSnr555-subventii_feb-dec2024-anexa.pdf

DGASPCs or DAS (which run shelters and other services) or with the police and forensic services.

- High-risk or femicide cases reported in the media show that, most of the time, the *victim did not know where to seek support, the police did not intervene with mobile teams to develop a personal safety plan and there was no referral to local specialized services* (in many cases non-existent).
- In recent decades, many countries have developed policies and programs that focus on a personalized multi-agency approach, with different organizations working closely together to create a dedicated “family plan”. Although this multi-agency approach has shown encouraging results, there are still two major obstacles. Firstly, *victims – often severely traumatised – are still expected to travel to a variety of organisations* to seek safety, help and support. Victims experience this as a huge barrier. They also have to *relive their painful story over and over again*. For many victims, this is the reason why they do not seek help or withdraw from seeking help at an early stage.
- Secondly, *victims are not routinely involved in the development of their family safety plan*. Organisations often have multiple coordination meetings “about” families in distress, rather than talking “with” the family to find a comprehensive solution. Recent research and a wealth of practice-based evidence argue for services located in a single space to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of an improved approach to violence against women.

Good practices models covered by CMSC in Iasi and Vaslui counties (NE part of Romania)

CMSC is the only organisation in Romania which started to promote, develop and implement *under one roof the services that victims need, together with accompanying services for extended family members and children, in one building*. Here victims are able to access a wider range of services, starting with a risk assessment plan for their immediate safety. Since 2024, CMSC has become a member of European Family Justice Centers Alliance (having since 2021 in Iasi an *incipient family justice centre built as a one stop shop* within the Iasi Institute of Forensic Medicine).

Elements of innovation and added value of CMSC services:

- CMSC model is covering the total lack of emergency assistance services for victims of domestic violence in urban areas (Iasi city) and rural areas within a radius of more than 40 communes in Iasi and Vaslui counties by introducing *a mobile emergency team* (called *Daciana*) consisting of two teams of two social workers each and a social services supervisor.
- *Complementary helpline service*, assistance, information and telephone counseling (licensed helpline service called *Helena Helpline*) - access to quality services is facilitated, which meets the needs of women victims of abuse and domestic violence who call Tel. Green: 0800.070.017 (accessible only in Romania); Emergency phone: +40787.878.806, normal rate on the phone (voice call) and free online for written or voice messages on Telegram,

WhatsApp and for written SMS messages, written messages on the platform www.helenahelpline.com

- creating the capacity of experts/volunteers to respond fully/adequately to the complex needs of victims of domestic violence by introducing **multidisciplinary case coordination licensed service** called **Gloria** - adequate communication facilities/tools (working together in a team on a case that shortens the duration and efficiency of the intervention, bringing together specialists from several fields who work simultaneously on the same case - not successively, fragmentarily as is currently the case);
- introducing the working together method in the multisectoral approach to cases of effective intervention on a case and the application of existing legislative norms;

Article 51: risk assessment and risk management

Major challenges remain to ensure an effective and comprehensive combat of violence against women and domestic violence in Romania. Recognition of the problem is growing, but it has yet to translate into concrete policies and frameworks. On a national level, the issue still struggles to make it onto the agenda, and politicians are hesitant to address critical topics such as coercive control and femicide.

CMSC has observed from practical perspective several issues affecting the way risk assessment and risk management are coordinated in Romania, which are linked with following gaps:

- **Subordinate legal position of the victim.** The position of victims – often women and/or children – is subordinate to that of their abusers in terms of rights and obligations. This is a result of a limited recognition of violence against women and domestic violence as a high impact crime, as well as the fact that specific form of psychological violence, defined in several other countries as coercive control, is not criminalized. Consequently, the power position of the abuser limits the framework of action for victims and social services organizations, such as CMSC. This ultimately results in cases where victims will feel discouraged to get the support that they need. In addition, we see the need to educate the judiciary on domestic violence.
- **Recognition of violence against women and domestic violence as a high impact crime.** Despite the initial steps taken, we recognize the importance of acknowledging domestic violence and violence against women as a high-impact crime. This would enable a more comprehensive toolbox of administrative measures that reach beyond voluntary measures. As long as domestic violence is not treated as a high impact crime and the support options remain voluntary, the position of the abuser remains superior to that of the victim. Additionally, the penalties for domestic violence could be in line with that of high impact crimes, as domestic violence and violence against women have significant social impact, and the dependent nature of the relationship between victim and abuser should be judged as an aggravating circumstance.

- ***Coercive control, as specific form of psychological violence, is not criminalized.*** Unlike common offenses, coercive control concerns systematic, recurring and escalating patterns of (one-sided) intimidating behaviors that escalate and can ultimately result in fatal outcomes. However, the ‘red flags’ for these patterns cannot be formally recognized based on our incident bases criminal code, and thus cannot be prosecuted, making it virtually impossible to gather enough evidence of this specific form of psychological violence. Examples of such ‘red flags’ are coercive control, stalking, (attempts at) non-fatal strangulations, isolation, violence during pregnancy and an escalating cycle of violence. Criminalization and recognition of coercive control and the ‘red flags’ will make preventive interventions possible, so that we can work within a forensic framework in the phases leading up to violence or murder, rather than only after the violence has already occurred. In addition, public education is needed to inform both victims and bystanders, but also, and especially, potential abusers about the dangers of escalating behavioral patterns. Raising awareness and knowledge about topics such as non-fatal strangulation can save victims and prevent abuse. It is also essential to provide clear information on where to access specialized help, so that the escalating pattern can be broken successfully through proper interventions.
- ***Limitations in the operational framework.*** The limited recognition of violence against women and domestic violence on a national level, and the resulting subordinate position of the victim, are the basis of insufficient, uncomprehensive and uncoordinated policies and operational framework. This translates both to a limited toolbox and possibilities to share information with other organizations. Ultimately this limits effective collaboration between criminal justice and social services in Romania. As violence against women and domestic violence are not recognized as a high impact crime, cannot use the same toolbox of (administrative) measures to ensure the victim’s safety as can be used to ensure the safety of victims of high impact crimes. We see that complaints of the women victims of domestic violence are not treated the same as the ones considered as “important” and “high level crimes”, according to the *Ombudsperson Report dedicated to domestic violence crimes 2025*⁹.
- ***Limited possibilities for effective collaboration between criminal justice and social services.*** In addition to a limited operational toolbox, we are unable to effectively share information with our partners in criminal justice and social services. The system is too compartmentalized and structured in a way that discourages collaboration rather than promoting it. This means we often lack in providing solutions together with all relevant partners to make a difference. It is necessary to dismantle these barriers and enable the work of highly specialized centers like CMSC, and as such create space for collaboration. Doing more together in the early stages prevents unnecessary intensive care and escalation in later stages.
- ***Limited possibilities to support the judiciary.*** Professionals in our field, such as our intensive case managers or therapists, are currently not able to provide evidence to the court about the ‘red flags’, behavioral patterns or other relevant information about the case, unless

9 <https://avp.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Raport-special-violenta-domestica.pdf>

specifically invited by the Court or lawyers. As a result, we experience a dependency on other partners that can provide evidence to take our conclusions and present these to the judge. This is an unproductive and vulnerable dependency. As a result, the judges are not always sufficiently aware of the behavioral patterns that play a role in the case.

- **CMSC offers walk-in option with ‘one-stop-shop’ principle for victims of complex domestic abuse and child abuse**, so victims can immediately and without having to share their story more than once (one face principle) be provided with the necessary support and safety measures can be taken. In addition, we have strong and short connections with judiciary, safety and social services. Research indicates that these three elements provide an effective approach that is distinct from other the other support options in Romania. To put the three effective element in practice we are still faced with some barriers. ***There is no sufficient legal coverage to apply these measures most effectively.*** This adds onto the limited recognition of coercive control and the limits of the operational framework. In addition, there is no nationwide coverage for highly specialized centers for research and support, and no coordinated framework for financing.
- ***We ask for recognition of violence against women and domestic violence as a high impact crime.*** This would enable a more comprehensive toolbox of administrative measures that reach beyond voluntary measures. As long as domestic violence is not treated as a high impact crime and the support options remain voluntary, the position of the abuser remains superior to that of the victim. Additionally, the penalties for domestic violence could be in line with that of high impact crimes, as domestic violence and violence against women have significant social impact, and the dependent nature of the relationship between victim and abuser should be judged as an aggravating circumstance.

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

We finish by giving a link to the stories of the 33 femicides happening in Romania, only in the first 7 months of the year. This shows the failure of the state to protect vulnerable victims and women even when there are protection orders in force.

“New case – 33rd femicide of 2025: In early August, a young woman from Arad was kidnapped and brutally murdered by her ex-boyfriend, who had already issued a protection order for their two children. The woman was found dead in a field after the man dragged her away with his car.

This tragic case confirms that, in Romania, public order does not protect women even when there are protection orders in force.

So far in 2025, at least 33 women have been murdered in contexts of domestic violence or controlling/coercive relationships. We can no longer accept this normalization of femicide.

UPDATE – August 2025: The Minister of Justice, Radu Marinescu, recently stated, in a broadcast on Prima News, that “the tightening of penalties for domestic violence is being

analyzed” and that the introduction of the crime of femicide is being considered, following the model of Italy, where the Senate has already approved the life sentence for the murder of a woman.

In the context of the tragedy of Teodora Marcu, but also of other cases of femicide that have not been effectively investigated, we call for the urgent adoption of legislative and institutional measures to prevent and sanction violence against women”.

<https://campaniamea.declie.ro/petitions/teodora-a-fost-ucisa-cerem-raspunsuri-si-actiune-de-urgenta>

Recommendations

- CMSC strongly advocate for the ***One-Stop Centre (OSC)*** Model integration of into National Systems in Romania. The model could be integrated into national social service framework in Romania to ensure the stability and longevity of this type of service. By embedding the model within existing public systems, the model could transition from being a stand-alone pilot to a standard component of service delivery. It is essential that relevant authorities assume ownership of the model, and clear protocols establish the manner to collaborate closely with ANES, Ministry of Labour, Health, Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs and other key stakeholders to align the model with national policies and systems, establishing a strong institutional foundation for its integration and long-term operation. Furthermore, CMSC advocate for government commitment to the one-stop-shop model through supportive policy frameworks and dedicated budgeting. With sufficient political and financial backing, the model can be successfully institutionalized.
- ***New instruments for the protection and support of victims of GBV, models focused on high risk cases and setting up intersectional approach on each case need to be developed.*** CMSC will continue to advocate for using intersectional lens, to continue to build on the pilot data bases/data collection analysis on femicide, push for modification of national legislation or obtain a friendly framework to expand the collection of data to national level and other institutions involved in data collection.
- ***Start funding NGOs dealing with prevention, protection and intervention in supporting women and girls victims of gender based violence and domestic violence on a constant base,*** with national dedicated programs of national interest, with procedures of procurement of services at local and county level, and with multi-year funding at national level, in order to ensure that minimum standard services are met in all communities.
- ***We ask for Coercive control, as specific form of psychological violence, to be recognised and criminalized.*** Unlike common offenses, coercive control concerns systematic, recurring and escalating patterns of (one-sided) intimidating behaviors that escalate and can ultimately result in fatal outcomes. However, the ‘red flags’ for these patterns cannot be formally recognized based on our incident bases criminal code, and thus cannot be prosecuted, making it virtually impossible to gather enough evidence of this specific form of psychological violence. Examples of such ‘red flags’ are coercive control, stalking, (attempts at) non-fatal strangulations, isolation, violence during pregnancy and an escalating cycle of violence.

Criminalization and recognition of coercive control and the ‘red flags’ will make preventive interventions possible, so that we can work within a forensic framework in the phases leading up to violence or murder, rather than only after the violence has already occurred.

- CMSC ask to **introduce the concept of a multi-agency committee group in each county in Romania- focused on high risk GBV cases**. The role of committee would be to have a case management review process conducted in order to identify and tackle high risk cases using an intersectional approach. These committees will conduct systematic examinations of the circumstances surrounding complex domestic violence such as intimate terror or violence resulting in injury, sexual violence and trauma, to identify what lessons can be learned, in order to improve responses to GBV. Proposed committees also will collect relevant administrative data, which would be made public in regular analytical reports, to allow case managers to manage cases, providing a centralized repository for storing case details, such as personal information, risk assessments, support plans, documents and communications. Working together on better assessment of high risk cases will ensure no vulnerable case is missed by allowing referrals or custom assessments to be made;

