

**Questionnaire for the evaluation of the implementation of the Council of Europe
Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic
Violence by the Parties**

**1st thematic evaluation round: Building trust by delivering support, protection and
justice**

Adopted by GREVIO on 13 October 2022

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Introduction

In accordance with Article 66, paragraph 1, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) shall monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Following its baseline evaluation procedure which provided an overview of the implementation of the full spectrum of provisions of the

convention by each state party, Article 68, paragraph 3, of the convention and Rule 30 of the Rules of Procedure of GREVIO (the Rules of Procedure) mandate GREVIO to carry out subsequent evaluation procedures divided into rounds. At the beginning of each round, GREVIO shall select the specific provisions on which the evaluation procedure shall be based and shall send out a questionnaire (Rule 31 of the Rules of Procedure).

For its 1st thematic evaluation round, GREVIO adopted this questionnaire to be sent to all states parties which have undergone the baseline evaluation procedure, according to an order approved by GREVIO. States parties are requested to transmit to GREVIO a reply to this questionnaire within five months from the date it was sent.

GREVIO decided to focus its 1st thematic evaluation round on the theme of building trust by delivering support, protection and justice. To address this overarching theme, the present questionnaire aims, in its first section, 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. In its second section, it sets to obtain more in-depth information on the implementation of selected provisions in the area of prevention, protection and prosecution, in respect of which baseline evaluation procedures and the Conclusions on the Recommendations of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention have revealed significant challenges and the need for further sustained implementation. In its third section, it brings its attention to emerging trends in the area of violence against women and domestic violence. Its fourth and last section requests annual statistics for two complete calendar years prior to receiving this questionnaire on specific administrative and judicial data.

The reply to the questionnaire should be submitted in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe (English and French) and should contain all the relevant information on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention since GREVIO's first baseline evaluation report, including copies or extracts of relevant legislation, regulations, case law and strategic documents or action plans referred to (Rule 33 of the Rules of Procedure).
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Part I: Changes in comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the area of violence against women and domestic violence

Article 7: Comprehensive and co-ordinated policies

1. Please provide information on any new policy development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country to ensure comprehensive policies covering the areas of prevention, protection, and prosecution in relation to stalking, sexual harassment and domestic violence, including their digital dimension, rape and sexual violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, thereby demonstrating further implementation of the convention. Please specify the measures taken particularly in relation to those forms of violence against women that have not been addressed in past policies, programmes and services encompassing the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention.

In May 2021, the Republic of Serbia adopted the Law on Gender Equality, representing a positive step forward in ensuring gender equality in various social spheres. This law implies equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities, equal participation and balanced representation of women and men in all areas of social life, equal opportunities to exercise rights and freedoms, and equal benefits from work results. In the same year, amendments to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination were also adopted, which contain more precise provisions and a broader list of those to whom discrimination applies.

However, after the adoption of the Law on Gender Equality, various political and social actors followed a public campaign against that law, including the dominant Serbian Orthodox Church, which had objections primarily to the provisions of this law concerning the public use of gender-sensitive language and prescribed sanctions. This was followed by several submissions to the Constitutional Court for the evaluation of the constitutionality of this law. In this respect, in June 2024, and based on the initiative of the Citizens Protector Mr. Pasalic, the Constitutional Court suspended the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality, i.e., gender-sensitive language, until the procedure for assessing its constitutionality was completed.

In the observed period, several legislative initiatives were launched in which the NGO Atina participated, which lean on the mentioned issues or are directly related. During 2021, the National Coalition to End Child Marriage in Serbia submitted legislative initiatives to amend the Criminal Code, the Family Code, and the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, which aimed to ensure better criminal and civil protection of children from child, early and forced marriages, as a form of violence against children. Also, at the end of 2022, NGO Atina and the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality submitted a legislative initiative for amendments to the Law on Public Order and Peace, which provides for better protection of women in prostitution, including their decriminalization. Furthermore, in 2024, the NGO Atina and NGO Astra sent a joint submission to the Commissioner for the

Protection of Equality as a supplement to their legislative initiative for amendments to the Law on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions, in which it is requested that the provision on informing victims of violence about the release from prison of those convicted of such crimes extend to victims of human trafficking. However, to date, none of these initiatives have led to changes in the law.

2. Where relevant, please provide information on any measures taken to ensure the alignment of any definitions of domestic violence and of violence against women in national legislation or policy documents with those set out under Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention and provide the relevant applicable provisions in English or French.

The Law on Gender Equality contains definitions per the Istanbul Convention. According to the Law on Gender Equality, Article 6:

Par. 10) “gender-based violence is any form of physical, sexual, psychological, economic and social violence that is perpetrated against a person or groups of persons due to belonging to a certain gender or gender, as well as the threat of such acts, regardless of whether they occur in public or private life, as well as any form of violence that affects persons of a certain gender to a greater extent”;

Par.11) “violence against women means a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and all acts of gender-based violence that lead or can lead to: physical, sexual, psychological, i.e., financial injury or suffering for women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, either in public or in private life”;

Par. 12) “domestic violence means any act of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence that occurs within the family or household, or between former or current spouses or partners, regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim”;

3. Please provide information on how your authorities ensure that policies on violence against women and domestic violence put women’s rights and their empowerment at the centre and on any measure taken to enhance the intersectionality of such policies, in line with Articles 4 paragraph 3 of the convention.

According to the Law on Gender Equality, Article 14, policies for the realization and improvement of gender equality, prevention and suppression of gender-based violence and violence against women are carried out in accordance with the National Strategy for Gender Equality. Also according to this law, Article 25, public authorities are obliged to continuously monitor the realization of gender equality in the area of social life for which they are responsible, the application of international standards and rights guaranteed by the Constitution in that area. Additionally, according to Article 25, public authorities, directly or through the body responsible for cooperation with civil society, cooperate with associations, especially for the purposes of "implementing activities related to the promotion of gender equality, prevention and suppression of gender-based violence and violence against women, combating discrimination based on gender, i.e. gender, in the areas of work, employment, self-employment, social insurance, social and health care, education, defense and security, traffic, energy and communications, environmental protection, culture, public information, sports, political activity and public affairs, reproductive and sexual rights and access to goods and services with the aim of promoting the principle of equal treatment and overcoming and suppressing gender stereotypes".

Article 8: Funding

4. Please provide information on any new development since the adoption of GREVIO’s baseline evaluation report on your country concerning the allocation of appropriate and sustainable financial and human resources for the implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention.

During 2022 and 2023, NGO Atina conducted and published research on the functioning and operation of safe houses for women and children victims of violence, entitled *Functioning and operation of shelters for women victims of violence in Serbia*¹ (hereafter: NGO Atina’s research on shelters). The data collection for this research included all 13 safe houses and one shelter for victims of human trafficking in Serbia. The participants mentioned service licensing as one of the problematic issues, i.e., an issue that is not given enough attention or resources. Therefore, when asked to comment on the licensing procedure, 85.7% of respondents in this research (safe house staff) said that licensing would make financing the safe house service significantly more straightforward. Furthermore, research results showed that the biggest obstacle in the licensing process is the shortage of human resources (71.5%), which is also backed by the results showing that 50%

of safe houses do not meet the licensing standards regarding human resources. Only five of these safe houses have work licenses, two are renewing their licenses, and more than half of them – seven - have been in the licensing process for eight years now.

5. Please provide information on any development concerning the provision of appropriate and sustainable financial and human resources for women's rights organisations that provide specialist support services to victims, including those supporting migrant women and girls.

For more than 20 years, NGO Atina has been providing specialized support to victims of human trafficking, primarily women and girls, and also support to refugee and migrant women and girls, victims of gender-based violence. Despite several years of announcements by the state that the licensed and unique support services that NGO Atina provides to these beneficiary groups will be financially supported, this has not yet happened. We are also not aware that any other women's organization that offers specialized support to women victims has received systemic support from the state. Since GREVIO's previous report, nothing has changed in this field, and it appears that sustainable support for women's specialized organizations is still a significant and unsolvable challenge in Serbia. For this reason, many organizations are about to be shut down, and the survival of many services that these organizations have provided so far is questionable.

Regarding the safe accommodation service for women victims of gender-based violence, legal provision that defines the number of professional workers per number of victims is more rigorous in Serbia than in some European countries. To go through the licensing process, and bearing in mind the ban on employment in the public sector in Serbia, safe houses then reduce their accommodation capacity to, for example, ten victims even though they could be accommodating 30 of them.

Article 11: Data collection and research

6. Please provide information on any new development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country on the introduction of data collection categories such as type of violence, sex and age of the victim and the perpetrator, the relationship between the two and where it took place, for administrative data of relevance to the field of violence against women and domestic violence emanating from law enforcement agencies, the justice sector, social services and the public health care sector.

According to the Strategy for gender equality for the period from 2021 to 2030², consolidated statistics on the number of femicides and murders of women in the Republic of Serbia do not yet exist. The Republic Institute of Statistics publishes data on the number of deaths, according to the pattern of death and gender, based on a regular survey of fatalities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs created the "KDU" (Criminal Acts and Perpetrators) application in which criminal reports are entered under the Criminal Code. From these reports, the number of murders, serious murders, and events with a fatal outcome in family and partnership relations can be seen, considering that when filling out the criminal report, there is a mandatory field – kinship. In practice, data on the number of murdered women are provided and made public as necessary (according to state officials). Otherwise, the number of femicides can only be traced from media reports.

However, it has to be noted that even seven years after the start of the implementation of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, a central data record has not yet been established, nor is there a publicly available report that integrates data from various sources, so in practice, it happens that centers for social work, the police, the prosecutor's office, the Republic Institute for Social Protection and the Republic Institute for Statistics have different data on domestic violence. In the Report on monitoring the implementation of the Law on the prevention of domestic violence for the year 2023³, it is stated that during the year 2023, 28,413 cases of domestic violence were registered, the most in the period from 2018-2022. When it comes to the age structure of the perpetrators of domestic violence, the most common age group is 31-50 (51.6%), and the ratios are similar to those of previous years. The age of the victims is kept in the categories of minors/adults, and in 2023, the most significant number of minor victims was registered (9%). This is a considerable increase compared to previous years but still far below the number of minor victims registered by the centers for Social Work. The kinship relationship between the victim and the perpetrator of domestic violence is dominated (53.6%) by a partner relationship (marital, extramarital, emotional, current and former). Men are the most frequent perpetrators of violence against women (91.5%), most often their partners (65.9%) and other male relatives (25.6%). Men are most often the perpetrators of violence against men who are victims of violence (67.5%), while women, partners (21.7%), and relatives (10.3%) commit other violence. And these data unequivocally confirm the gendered nature of domestic violence. There was no significant change in the number of persons registered for the criminal acts of stalking and sexual harassment, and the number of convicted persons is still disproportionately low compared to the number of reports and the number of investigations conducted. It would be essential to investigate the

² http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2021_11/SG_103_2021_001.htm

³ https://www.udruzenjesz.rs/images/PDF/12_Izvestaj_primena_Zakona_o_sprecavanju_nasilja_u_porodici_2023.pdf

causes of the large gap between the number of reported and convicted persons for these crimes and the reasons for the significant differences in the data from the two sources. The number of minor victims of the criminal offense of sexual harassment (46.7%), of which a significant number (17.8%) are children under 14 years of age, is of grave concern. In 2023, there were no reports of the criminal offense of forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

7. Where relevant, please provide information on any new development since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country to enable disaggregated data collection:

- a. on the number of emergency barring and protection orders and the number of breaches and the resulting sanctions;

In 2023, compared to the previous year, there was a slight decrease in the number of proposals for the extension of emergency measures (by 1.1%) and the number of extended emergency measures (by 0.8%), which does not correspond to the increase in the number of police orders for emergency measures. The number of misdemeanor reports for violation of emergency measures also decreased (by 4%). When it comes to the reduction in the number of cases in which information is collected, or there is a reasonable suspicion that a criminal offense has been committed, this data does not necessarily reflect a reduction in the number of initiated investigative procedures, bearing in mind the increase in the number of perpetrators who have been repeatedly imposed emergency measures on. However, since 2019, there has been a steady decline in the number of criminal reports for the crime of domestic violence. A slightly more significant increase is registered in the number of orders that imposed both emergency measures (7.2%). Accordingly, there is an increase in the imposition of measures of temporary removal from the apartment/house (8.2%). The number of cases discussed at the Group for Coordination and Cooperation meetings increased (10.5%), and the number of perpetrators repeatedly issued emergency measures increased (9.2%).

- b. on the number of times custody decisions have resulted in the restriction and withdrawal of parental rights because of violence perpetrated by one parent against the other.

There is no official data on this anywhere, but the practice of NGO Atina confirms that this does not happen and that the abuser is not deprived of custody of the children due to the violence against the other parent.

8. Please provide information on measures taken to allow cases of violence against women and domestic violence to be tracked from reporting to conviction, at all stages of the law-enforcement and judicial proceedings.

No adequate measures have yet been taken to monitor cases of violence against women from reporting to conviction. There is a lack of effective coordination between authorities and a unique system/program for monitoring cases. The content of individual protection and support plans for victims remains unknown. When it comes to the measures undertaken by the Centers for Social Work in the protection of victims, as in previous years, it is most often the provision of material, legal, or professional advisory support and assistance. There was no increase in the number of children who were separated from their families due to violence, and the number of separated adult victims increased significantly. The number of procedures for measures to protect against domestic violence is not known, nor is the number of lawsuits filed ex officio by the Centers for Social Work. There is no data on whether the decrease in the number of eviction measures for perpetrators of violence from the apartment/house is related to the increase in the number of separation of adults from the family in the same year.

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

Article 12: General obligations

9. Please provide information on any primary prevention measures aiming to change mentalities and attitudes in relation to violence against women and to reduce women's exposure to gender-based violence by:

- a. addressing harmful gender stereotypes and prejudices, customs and traditions based on the idea of the inferiority of women;

In 2022, NGO Atina conducted a survey "Behind the Screen"⁴ on gender-based violence in the digital space, in which 624 girls aged 18-19 participated. The issue of safety took a key place in the research due to the risk of digital violence, which is higher among girls, and the results indicate that the most significant percentage of respondents (78%) believe that they are not as safe as young men. More than half of the respondents who participated in the research (53.%) state that they have survived violence in the digital space, as well as that they know a female peer who has survived digital violence. In most cases, the respondents do not perceive the digital space as safe due to numerous reasons and also recognize the gender dimension in digital violence against girls. Research has shown that the spread of the influence of digital networks has not only reinforced existing forms of male violence but has also created new mechanisms for harming girls and women.

- b. addressing the heightened exposure to gender-based violence by women and girls at risk of intersectional discrimination;
- c. encouraging all members of society, including men and boys, to contribute actively to preventing all forms of violence against women covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention, and promoting the empowerment of women and girls in all areas of life, notably their participation in politics at all levels and in the labour market.

⁴ <http://www.atina.org.rs/sites/default/files/Ispred%20ekrana%20sa%20koricom.pdf>

In February 2020, the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia adopted amendments to the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament and the Law on Local Elections, which stipulates that the number of women on electoral lists should be increased to 40 percent, i.e., that for every five candidates, at least two must be women. However, bearing in mind the autocratic form of government in Serbia, the question remains whether this change will bring about an essential improvement of gender equality in politics or whether it is just another formality by which women's participation in politics has been reduced to numbers.

Article 14: Education

10. Please provide a few examples of promising teaching or prevention programmes, materials, or initiatives for use in formal education (from pre-school to higher education) that:

- a. educate children and youth about equality between women and men, the right to personal integrity, mutual respect and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, including the notion of freely given consent;
- b. address some or all the forms of gender-based violence against women and girls covered by the Istanbul Convention;
- c. promote the inclusion of digital literacy and online safety in formal curricula as foreseen under GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women;
- d. ensure that teaching material used in school does not convey negative gender stereotypes of women and men of all ages;
- e. offer tailored interventions aimed at preventing gender-based violence and empowering all girls, including those at risk of intersectional discrimination.

In 2023, NGO Atina implemented the project "Initiative of young feminist advocates in Serbia" in 5 local communities in Serbia, together with 105 youth activists. As part of this project, basic and specialized trainings and mentoring sessions were carried out to support the development and empowerment of young women. The topics discussed during the training were relevant and current for them, namely women's reproductive health (including menstrual poverty and advocacy for free menstrual products in schools and health centers), then discrimination against women in the workplace, in the sports environment and schools, then violence in the digital space (including issues related to image-based violence, "deep fake" technology and unrealistic standards of beauty), and digital rights and protection of personal data, as well as gender-based violence and family violence.

Also, in 2023 and 2024, NGO Atina conducted workshops for young people (150 young people) in several cities in Serbia, to share knowledge and raise awareness about human trafficking and gender-based violence. NGO Atina created the workshop program in line with recent advancements in the field of trafficking in human beings and gender-based violence, but also attractive and interactive educational methods and techniques dedicated to youth involvement in community work. The workshop methodology was based on the Non-Formal Education (NFE) program for young people, which deals with various concepts, such as the general concept of human trafficking and gender-based violence, causes and contributing factors to gender-based violence and human trafficking, its forms, but also concrete measures which can be used in addressing this problem within the community through the activist approach. The activity aimed to inform the youth and, equally importantly, to mobilize them to become actively engaged in this issue and be advocates for change.

Article 15: Training of professionals

11. Please complete tables I and II included in the Appendix in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the professional groups that receive initial and in-service training on the different forms of violence against women and domestic violence. Please specify the frequency and scope of the training and whether it is compulsory.

According to the NGO Atina research on shelters, the professional workers in the shelters who were interviewed stated that none of the trainings attended by social workers prepares qualified workers for actual work; only 30% contribute to developing their skills and knowledge. Further, this research showed that 50% of safe house managers have between 11 and 20 years of work experience, while half of the safe house managers also work as professional workers. The research revealed that shelter managers are mostly very experienced (71% have more than 10 years of experience), while as much as 40% of all employees have 0-4 years of experience.⁵ Furthermore, respondents in this research emphasized the necessity to strengthen the capacities and skills of professional teams working in safe houses for victims of violence. One of the key recommendations referred to the need to make precise and clear legal guidelines necessary for the efficient and comprehensive provision of services to victims of violence and closer local and national networking of all relevant actors in the protection system.

In 2023, NGO Atina itself organized three trainings entitled "Practitioners in the fight against human trafficking and gender-based violence regarding migration, in three different cities (Sombor, Bujanovac, and Belgrade), which brought together a significant number of professionals (70 them) from various non-governmental organizations and state institutions active in social sphere, in migrations, etc. At these trainings, experiences were exchanged, and the capacities of the present professionals were improved in terms of better recognition of the risks of human trafficking and gender-based violence in mixed migrations and timely response in case of potential victims. NGO Atina also organized training entitled "Prevention of burnout syndrome in working with victims of gender-based violence" on April 27 and 28, 2023, in Kragujevac. The training was attended by 22 professional workers who directly provide help and support to victims of gender-based violence, namely from the shelter for victims of violence from Vranje, Kragujevac, Niš, and Leskovac, as well as representatives of social work centers from Leskovac, Kragujevac, Bojnik, but also representatives of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office Kragujevac and the Red Cross Kragujevac. Furthermore, during 2023, NGO Atina worked on raising the capacity of other actors, such as judges, through participation in the Days of the Forum of Judges of Serbia at the end of September in Sombor, where they discussed the prevention of prostitution and sexual exploitation, as well as raising capacity of local teams to fight human trafficking. In December, meetings were held with local teams in Subotica and Sremska Mitrovica, where the prevention of prostitution and sexual exploitation was also discussed. The contacts and cooperation with local institutions that NGO Atina achieves are essential for the further fight against human trafficking at the local level.

12. Please specify if the expertise of women's rights organisations or specialist support services is integrated in the design and/or implementation of the training.

NGO Atina has been providing specialized and comprehensive support to victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence from the migrant population for over 20 years. This support refers to case management and all kinds of services that victims need to recover fully. The staff of NGO Atina, which provides this specialized support, are women professionals in social welfare, psychotherapy, and other related fields. The staff has the appropriate professional licenses for work and continuously improves their skills in their operations, attending various seminars, trainings, and other professional gatherings. And that expertise of the organization and the entire staff is integrated into the trainings.

Article 16: Preventive intervention and treatment programmes

13. Please provide information on measures taken to increase the number of available preventive intervention and treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence both for voluntary and mandatory attendance.

NGO Atina deals with providing support to victims, and working with abusers is not a field of action of the organization.

14. Please provide information on measures taken to:

⁵ <http://atina.org.rs/en/not-even-30-necessary-places-safe-houses-available-serbia>

- a. increase the number of men and boys attending perpetrator programmes for domestic and sexual violence;
- b. ensure that the perpetrator programmes apply standards of best practice; c. ensure the safety of victims and co-operation with specialist support services for victims;
- d. ensure that the outcomes of the programmes are monitored and evaluated.

Article 18: General obligations

15. Please provide information on any multi-agency co-operation mechanisms, structures or measures in place designed to protect and support victims of any of the forms of gender-based violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention (e.g., interdisciplinary working groups, case-management systems, cross-sectoral protocols/ guidelines...). Please describe:

- a. the state agencies involved in their functioning (law-enforcement agencies, judiciary, public prosecutor, local authorities, healthcare services, social services, educational institutions etc.);

According to the NGO Atina's research on shelters, more than 70% of safe houses have signed protocols in cooperation with health institutions, which greatly facilitates access to health care for their beneficiaries in their local communities.

Further on, the Coordinating Body for Gender Equality of the Government of Serbia informed in 2023 that it has signed nine agreements with civil society organizations and has helped women in shelters and living and working in villages through projects supported by the EU. In partnership with the Mozzart local company, this body provided 13 safe houses in Serbia with equipment (television sets).⁶

In the period from January to April 2023, NGO Atina has organized meetings with representatives of Safe houses for victims of gender-based violence in Leskovac, Niš, Kragujevac, Vranje, and Priboj to jointly map the challenges and issues safe houses face not only in their daily functioning but also about the sustainability of these services at the local level. The focus of these multi sectoral meetings and gatherings of different actors was on establishing a network of assistance and support at the local level, aimed to enable continuous support for victims of domestic violence, not only during their stay in the Safehouse but also after exiting. During the meetings, the participants exchanged examples of good practices in the community and issues and challenges they all face in their work. The focus of the discussion in all the meetings was the question of the best strategies for improving the safety and security of women who have survived violence and ways to enable them to continue living independently in a safe environment even after exiting the safe house. Furthermore, NGO Atina also organized the regional meeting with safe house representatives in June 2023, which led to important observations and recommendations, some of the most important being the necessity to form a joint coalition of representatives of all Safe houses who will clearly and precisely state their needs, the challenges they face on a daily level, as well as increase the visibility of all safe houses for victims of gender-based violence that operate on the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

- b. whether they involve specialist support services provided by civil society organisations, especially women's rights organisations;

NGO Atina has signed a memorandum of cooperation with several institutions, such as the Ministry of the Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic, and the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, based on which cooperation with these institutions takes place, the exchange of information and the creation of joint responses to improve the protection and support of victims of human trafficking. Outside of these formal agreements, NGO Atina fosters good cooperation with other relevant institutions and supports their work. In this regard, and as already described, NGO Atina organizes various trainings for professionals from these institutions, but also participates in their trainings, seminars, as well as multiple mechanisms that have been launched to protect and improve victims. NGO Atina has for years been a member of the Special Working Group for the Implementation of the Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking, which ceased to exist in 2021, and will also participate in the work of the new Working Group for the implementation of the new Program in the area of combating human trafficking (2024-2029).

- c. how they adopt a gender-sensitive approach to violence against women, including the prioritisation of the safety of women and girl victims, their empowerment and a victim-centred approach;

⁶ <http://www.atina.org.rs/en/how-improve-accessibility-and-capacities-safe-houses-republic-serbia>

The results of the NGO Atina's research on shelters show that slightly more than half of the safe houses have a procedure for ensuring the secrecy of the location, and the safety of beneficiaries and the engaged staff.

- d. the financial and human resources dedicated to their implementation; and
- e. any available information on the evaluation of their outcome or impact.

16. Please detail whether any such co-operation mechanisms or structures set up for the delivery of support services for a specific form of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention is based on a legal or policy document advocating for or requiring such approaches.

It has to be noted that the social welfare system suffers from systemic inconsistency, and from the incoherency of legal regulations. Therefore, the regulations and the procedure defining the relations within the system are insufficiently developed.

17. Please explain whether all or some of the services of protection and support offered for victims of the different forms of violence against women are provided on the basis of a one-stop-shop approach.

NGO Atina strives to provide comprehensive support to victims who are in its support program. Practice has shown that women's needs are very broad and that service providers must respond to them in a timely and quality manner. Through 20 years of practice, it has been shown that it is better when all services are implemented in one place, without involving a large number of people and a large number of CSOs or institutions, and without spreading information unnecessarily and putting beneficiaries at a security risk. This is very difficult to ensure, but NGO Atina has been trying all these years to implement comprehensive, continuous, long-term support for women victims of violence and human trafficking.

Article 20: General support services

18. Please provide information on programmes and measures aimed at ensuring, through general services, the recovery of victims of violence, including in the health and social areas, financial assistance, education, training and assistance in finding employment and affordable and permanent housing.

As has been mentioned, NGO Atina provides direct support to victims of human trafficking, as well as to victims of gender-based violence. In providing direct support to women and children who have experienced exploitation and gender-based violence, NGO Atina fosters a long-term, person-centered approach based on respect for the individuality, understanding, support, acceptance, and non-judgment of women and girls who have experienced human trafficking and gender-based violence. Only in 2023, throughout the comprehensive social inclusion program, direct assistance was provided for 159 beneficiaries, of which 105 were direct (primary) beneficiaries, and 54 were indirect (secondary) beneficiaries.

The beneficiaries who are in NGO Atina's program of comprehensive social inclusion have experienced various forms of violence, and they are most often on the social margins and discriminated against in multiple forms and times. Of the total number of direct beneficiaries in 2023, 76 have been identified as victims of human trafficking, 7 have the status of presumed victims of human trafficking, and 22 persons have been identified as victims of gender-based violence by relevant actors and NGO Atina representatives. As for gender, the most significant number of beneficiaries are female 98%, then male – 1% and trans persons – 1%. Among newly referred victims of human trafficking and/or gender-based violence, the highest percentage of them are young people under 30 years of age – 66%, while the total share of minor beneficiaries is 31.38% (9, 38% aged 10 to 14 and 22% aged 15 to 17).

NGO Atina maintains the Reintegration Center – a place that represents a safe and supportive space for women and girls who are victims of human trafficking. Within it, a wide range of services is provided to achieve their full social inclusion: psychosocial support, social counseling, help and support in formal and informal education, support in civil-legal processes, economic empowerment, individual/group empirical support and training of beneficiaries to participate in support groups if the need arises. Hence, in 2023, beneficiaries of the comprehensive social inclusion program were provided with all these types of support in the Reintegration Center.

Solving the civil-legal status implies assistance and support in obtaining the necessary documentation (birth certificate, certificate of citizenship, declaration of residence, identity cards, health records, etc.). In 2023, this was provided for 53 beneficiaries. Further, legal assistance and counseling provides assistance and support in gathering the necessary information from referral services and mediation with competent institutions where procedures are conducted. In 2023, this type of support was provided to 34 beneficiaries. Medical support, which includes referral to an assessment of the current state of health and urgent medical assistance if it is needed after the evaluation, then the assistance in exercising the right to health care, provision of the necessary therapy, development of health and hygiene habits and culture through workshops, was provided to 46 beneficiaries in 2023. Formal education

and alternative education were provided to 47 beneficiaries. Economic support, which included responding to emergencies and the continuous provision of funds to meet basic needs (food, clothing, hygiene products) and other types of financial assistance, was also provided to beneficiaries: 70 of them received this type of support in 2023. Psychosocial support and counseling are provided to the beneficiaries by an employed psychotherapist, who is educated to work with people with trauma experience, which includes working with mental content but also with physical phenomena that are especially pronounced in people with long-term violence experience; in 2023 this type of support received 43 beneficiaries.

Various empowerment workshops were also held in the Reintegration center, both for the beneficiaries housed in the NGO Atina's safe shelter and for other beneficiaries, including women and children from the refugee-migrant population. The reintegration center is also a safe space where various other activities were planned and carried out with the beneficiaries, including psychological counseling, information sessions, language classes, etc.

Questions specific to the public health sector:

19. Have specific measures been taken to ensure that public health services (hospitals, health centres, other) respond to the safety and medical needs of women and girls victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention on the basis of national/regional standardised protocols?

In regard to functional standards, the results of the NGO Atina's research on shelters revealed that there is no standardized admission procedure, especially regarding information on service provision, medical examinations, and the like.

20. Do such protocols detail the procedure to:

a. identify victims through screening;

In June 2010, the Special Protocol of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia for the protection and treatment of women who are exposed to violence⁷ was adopted. The Special Protocol is an instrument for recognizing, recording, and documenting gender-based violence to involve health workers and react to the detection plan, suppression, and prevention of violence. However, what is disputed is the application of that Special Protocol in practice, which can be heard from women victims of violence every day. It is about the fact that the health workers did not inform them or make a report on injuries and the like.

b. provide treatment for all the medical needs of victims in a supportive manner;

c. collect forensic evidence and documentation;

d. ensure that a clear message of support is conveyed to the victim;

e. refer to the appropriate specialist support services that form part of a multi-agency co-operation structure; and

f. identify children who may have been exposed to domestic violence or other forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and require further support.

In association with UNICEF, the Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Republic of Serbia launched a National Coalition to End Child Marriage in 2019. This coalition included numerous civil society organizations that are relevant in the field of combating violence against children, including the NGO Atina. In 2021, this coalition drafted proposals to amend the Criminal Code, the Family Code, and the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence to prevent the practice of child marriage, punish those involved in it, and improve the overall protection of children; these proposals have not yet been entered into parliamentary procedures. In addition, this coalition holds regular meetings and periodically publishes newsletters, however, there were no other concrete actions.

21. Please provide information on the procedures in place for the documentation and collection by actors of the public health sector of forensic evidence in relation to victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual violence, including rape, and victims of female genital mutilation.

There is the aforementioned Special Protocol of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia for the protection and treatment of women who are exposed to violence.

22. Are all women victims of violence, irrespective of any of the grounds listed in Article 4 paragraph 3 of the Istanbul Convention, in particular asylum-seeking women, refugee women, migrant women, women from national or ethnic minorities, women with irregular residence status, women with disabilities and LGBTI women, able to benefit on an equal footing from existing healthcare services? Please describe any measure taken to reduce legal

⁷ <https://www.sigurnakuca.net/sites/default/files/inline-files/TirkizniTekst.pdf>

or practical barriers to their accessing regular healthcare services.

By the Law on asylum and temporary protection, Article 54, the asylum seeker has the right to health care under the regulations regulating the health care of foreigners. In enabling the claimant to exercise his/her right to health care, appropriate health care is given priority to a seriously ill claimant, a claimant who is a victim of torture, rape and other severe forms of psychological, physical, or sexual violence, as well as a claimant with mental disorders. However, in practice, there is a lack of clear instructions to health workers that refugee and migrant women have the right to equal health care as domestic citizens. Therefore, it is often necessary to accompany these women to the doctors, with someone from the helping professions or civil society organizations that provide support, to clarify this and ensure refugee and migrant women receive appropriate health care.

23. Please provide information on the measures in place to facilitate the identification and care of victims of violence against women in institutions for persons with disabilities and for the elderly as well as for those in closed reception facilities for asylum-seekers and to respond to their safety and protection needs.

The results of the NGO Atina's research on shelters showed that 42.9% of safe houses are not accessible for women with disabilities and that 64.3% of safe houses do not have a space within the facility that is equipped to accommodate women with disabilities. This result indicates that in almost 2/3 of the shelters that can accommodate women with disabilities, the quality of the service following admission will be drastically lower.

24. Please provide information on how the authorities ensure that different groups of women and girls, *inter alia* women with disabilities, Roma women and other women belonging to national or ethnic minorities, migrant women and intersex persons are fully informed, understand and freely give their consent to procedures such as sterilisation and abortion.

Such types of interventions are performed in Serbia only at the request of the woman and are paid additionally so that they do not include services from primary health insurance, and are only mandatory and urgent in situations where the life of a woman or girl is at risk.

Article 22: Specialist support services

25. Please describe the type of specialist support services dedicated to women victims of the forms of gender-based violence covered by the Istanbul Convention (e.g., stalking, sexual harassment and domestic violence, including their digital dimension, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced sterilisation, forced abortion), including those specialist support services providing:

a. shelters and/or other forms of safe accommodation

In Serbia, there are currently 11 safe houses for women victims of domestic violence and one state-run emergency shelter for women victims of human trafficking, as well as one shelter for victims of human trafficking run by NGO Atina. As for the shelters for women victims of gender-based violence, in Serbia, there are 190 available beds for women with experience of gender-based violence, which is 74% below the Council of Europe standard for such shelters. As much as 14.5% of safe houses do not have separate rooms for mothers with children. Per the EU standards, every country should have one place to accommodate victims of violence per 10,000 inhabitants. If we bear in mind that Serbia now has around 6.7 million citizens, this means that we should have at least 670 safe places for women and children who have left the abuser. The existing 190 places are only 28.3% of the necessary number. For a country the size of Serbia, it is required to provide 719 places for the accommodation of victims of domestic violence.

In 2021, NGO Atina, with the support of UNWOMEN and with authorization of the line ministry for social affairs, drafted a Rulebook on detailed conditions and functional standards of provision and implementation of the service of accommodating in shelters women and children with experience of gender-based violence was drafted. The main aim of producing a Rulebook was to separate this service as specialized from the other social welfare services to further define the standards related to the quality of service provision. Furthermore, the Rulebook was to prescribe and enumerate in one place the detailed conditions and functional standards for the provision and implementation of accommodation services in shelters for women and girls with experience of gender-based violence and domestic violence to improve the safe accommodation service itself, recovery women and girls who have suffered gender-based violence and who use this service, and also facilitate the work of shelters and their employees. The intention is to point out all the necessary steps in working with women victims of violence, as well as in working with their children, to close the circle of violence. In this regard, this Rulebook is a guideline for action and should be used in all activities in which shelter users are involved or organized for them. The draft of this Rulebook has been sent to the relevant Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans

and Social Affairs of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and it should take further steps necessary to adopt this document. The drafting and adoption of regulations in this area is also an obligation of the Republic of Serbia, which results from the recommendations of the GREVIO Committee Report of the Council of Europe.

Further on, the state-run emergency shelter for human trafficking victims (maintained by the Center for the Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking) was opened in February 2019. Still, since then, it has been closed several times. Firstly, this shelter was closed in 2019 and reopened at the beginning of 2022. However, in 2022, it was closed again (due to infrastructure work) and remained closed until February 2023. Then, it did not work again from July to September in 2023. Given all this and given the fact that several months have passed from the official reopening of this shelter in 2022 to the reception of the first beneficiaries, the question arises if this service is sustainable at all. The fact that the necessities of life in the shelter, such as food and hygiene products, are not always available also contributes to such a question. The shelter management in 2023 was also concerned about its sustainability, as the shelter was closed twice for 5 months during that year. During the closure periods, all victims from the accommodation were urgently referred to and accepted for accommodation at the NGO Atina.

- b. medical support
- c. short- and long-term psychological counselling

Serbia's Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs has informed us that it is implementing an IPA project 2020-2024 to empower women and women's organizations that provide social welfare services. The Ministry reported that it would provide support through grants for the provision of services for women (shelter, telephone helplines, psychological-social support).⁸

- d. trauma care

When it comes to psychosocial support, 82.6% of shelters for women victims of gender-based violence reported that they offer psychotherapeutic support and counseling. Still, none of the shelters employ professionals providing this service. This leads to the conclusion that the employees of Safe Houses provide supportive psychotherapy on their initiative, without a clear standard and structure, but instead based on their additional education and interests. What is also lacking are the standards for an integrative approach to preventing secondary victimization. On the other hand, NGO Atina provides long-term psychosocial support and therapy for all of its beneficiaries (which are human trafficking and gender-based violence victims) as part of its comprehensive social inclusion program and within their recovery process.

- e. legal counselling
- f. outreach services
- g. telephone helpline

In Serbia, there are 10 licensed providers of telephone helplines for women victims of gender-based violence.

- h. other forms of support (e.g. socio-economic empowerment programmes, online assistance platforms etc.)

In the economic empowerment segment, 52% of safe houses for women victims of gender-based violence have signed memorandums of cooperation with local partners that increase the employability of the women in safe houses. On the other hand, 43.5% of safe houses do not have developed programs for the economic empowerment of the women using their services.

On the other hand, NGO Atina continuously provides training programs within its social enterprise Bagel Bejgl (since it was established in 2015), then external training, and support when beneficiaries look for a job for its beneficiaries since economic empowerment is key to realizing women's rights and achieving full equality. This part of the comprehensive social inclusion program is also intended for migrant and other foreign women.

26. Which type of specialist support service includes child psychologists or other professionals specialised in supporting children who have been exposed to domestic violence, including violence perpetrated by one parent against the other?

In Serbia, there is a lack of specialized support programs for children who are exposed to domestic violence, but

⁸ <http://www.atina.org.rs/en/how-improve-accessibility-and-capacities-safe-houses-republic-serbia>

also for children who are victims of sexual, psychological, and physical violence. The resources of centers for social work are minimal, and there is a small number of child psychologists and psychiatrists in Serbia. Only CSOs that have direct support programs and services for women victims of violence try to provide psychological support for children as well.

27. Do specialist support services exist that cater to the specific needs of migrant women and girls or those belonging to national or ethnic minorities who are victims of violence against women, including women and girls seeking asylum and those granted refugee or international protection status?

According to the NGO Atina's research on shelters, the coverage of beneficiaries of the Roma population, migrants, and women with disabilities in safe shelters for women victims of gender-based violence is worryingly low, and the conclusion is that the shelters are not specialized in providing these categories of beneficiaries with protection from gender-based violence.

Article 25: Support to victims of sexual violence

28. Please indicate if any of the below services are available in your territory:

- a. sexual violence referral centres (e.g. specialist support services offering immediate medical care, forensic examination and crisis intervention to victims of sexual violence);
- b. rape crisis centres (e.g. specialist support services offering long-term counselling, therapy and support to victims of sexual violence regardless of whether the sexual violence occurred recently or in the past);
- c. any other specialised services offering short-term and/or long-term medical, forensic and psycho-social support to victims of sexual violence.

According to NGO Atina's research on shelters, shelter employees seldom raise the issue of sexual violence, while 82.6% of safe houses do not have protocols on response to sexual violence. The only long-term specialized psycho-social support program for victims of sexual exploitation and violence is the program of the NGO Atina and a couple of other organizations that work in general with victims of violence and, among other things, with victims of sexual violence. There are no state-funded rape crisis centers in Serbia with trained professionals.

29. Please provide information on the number of such services and the number of women and girls supported annually.

There are still no such centers and services financed by the state.

30. Please indicate the procedures and time frames for collecting and storing forensic evidence in cases of sexual violence (e.g. existence of protocols, use of rape kits) in the relevant services.

31. Please describe any applicable access criteria for use of these services (e.g. affiliation with a national health insurance, residence status, prior reporting of the case to the police, other).

Article 31: Custody, visitation rights and safety

32. Please indicate whether under national law incidents of violence covered under the scope of the convention must be taken into account in the determination of custody and visitation rights of children. If this is the case, please clarify to what extent these provisions:

- a. explicitly list domestic violence as a criterion to be taken into account when deciding on custody and/or visitation rights in the applicable legislation. If so, please clarify whether this criterion is/has been applied in practice in the determination of both custody and visitation rights;
- b. acknowledge the harm that witnessing violence by one parent against the other has on a child;
- c. ensure that custody with the non-violent parent is preferred over foster-care;
- d. foresee the screening of civil proceedings related to the determination of custody or visitation rights for a history of domestic violence among the parties;
- e. foresee that judges conduct risk assessments or request the disclosure of risk assessments drawn up by law-enforcement agencies or other competent stakeholders for victims of domestic violence, with a view to taking them into account and determining the best interest of the child in the context of custody and visitation decisions.

33. Please describe the measures in place to ensure that judges, court-appointed experts and other legal professionals:

- a. have sufficient knowledge of the law and understanding of the dynamics of intimate partner violence, including the psychological impact of witnessing violence on the child;
- b. duly take into account victims' grievances in cases of domestic violence and hear children victims/witnesses, where applicable, in the determination of custody and visitation rights;
- c. are informed of the unfoundedness of notions of "parental alienation"⁹ or analogous concepts that are used to overshadow the violence and control exerted by perpetrators of domestic violence over women and their children.

34. Please provide details on the procedures in place to ensure that the competent court for family-related issues co-operate/communicate with other relevant bodies/professionals, including, but not limited to, criminal courts, law-enforcement agencies, health and education authorities and specialist women's support services when taking decisions on custody and visitation or when offering family law mediation. Please specify whether the law provides a legal framework for any of the procedures in place.

⁹ In its baseline evaluation reports GREVIO has consistently referred to the statement of December 2017 by the European Association for Psychotherapy (EAP), which draws attention to the fact that the concepts of "parental alienation syndrome" (PAS) and "parental alienation" (PA) are unsuitable for use in any psychotherapeutic practice. This statement by the EAP, which is made up of 128 psychotherapy organisations from 41 European countries, acts as a guiding principle for European psychotherapists. Moreover, in February 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) published its new draft International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11) and confirmed that it had removed parental alienation from index term in the final ICD-11. See also the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) statement of May 2019 "[Intimate partner violence against women is an essential factor in the determination of child custody, say women's rights experts](#)".

35. Please provide detailed information on the procedures in place (including, if applicable, the relevant personnel used, the specific infrastructure available), in the exercise of custody and visitation rights, to:

- a. eliminate the risk for the abused parent to be subjected to further violence;
- b. eliminate the risk for the child to witness or experience violence;
- c. ensure that the responsible personnel are trained and that the facilities are suited to enable safe supervised visitation.

36. Please indicate whether national provisions foresee the withdrawal of parental rights in criminal sentences if the best interest of the child, which may include the safety of the victim, cannot be guaranteed in any other way.

Article 48: Prohibition of mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes or sentencing

Criminal law:

37. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure that mandatory alternative dispute resolution processes are prohibited in criminal proceedings related to cases involving the different forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention.

38. Where voluntary alternative dispute resolution processes exist for any criminal offences within the remit of the Istanbul Convention, such as conciliation or mediation, please provide information on the safeguards incorporated to ensure the free and informed consent of the victim to such processes and the measures taken to avoid that direct or indirect pressure is placed on the victim. Please also state whether the offer of alternative dispute resolution processes may result in the discontinuation of criminal investigation and prosecution or other consequences for the victim.

Civil law:

39. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure that alternative dispute resolution processes such as mediation or procedures which can be considered tantamount to the latter are not used in family law proceedings such as divorce proceedings or proceedings related to custody and visitation of children, where there is a history of violence.

Articles 49 and 50: General obligations and immediate response, prevention and protection

40. Please describe the human, financial and technical resources provided to law enforcement agencies to diligently respond to and investigate all cases of violence against women, including their digital dimension.

According to the data of the Republic Institute of Statistics, in 2020, a total of 36,656 cases of domestic violence were recorded by the Centers for Social Work.

In 2022, the ombudsman requested the inspection of shelters for women victims of violence and that all six shelters be inspected.

41. Which measures have been taken to ensure that the premises of police stations are accessible and suitable for receiving and interviewing victims of violence while ensuring their privacy? Is it possible to report cases of violence against women elsewhere than in police stations, including through digital means?

42. Please explain whether specialist police/prosecution units exist to investigate and prosecute violence against women and specify:

- a. which forms of violence against women they are competent for;
- b. whether such units exist in all police/prosecution districts throughout the country.

43. Please describe any measures taken to ensure swift investigation into and effective prosecution of cases of violence against women and domestic violence such as prioritisation through fast-tracking, benchmarking or other initiatives, without compromising the thoroughness of the investigation.

In 2021, the Republic Institute for Social Protection conducted a survey in which it was established that every fifth woman experienced violence from an intimate partner. Research by the Autonomous Women's Center showed that in the first year of implementation of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, out of 56 victims of femicide, one in three women previously reported violence to the authorities.

44. Are any measures taken to encourage women and girls who experience any of the forms of violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention to report incidents of violence to the authorities? Please provide examples of any measures taken to instill confidence in law-enforcement officials, including those aimed at addressing any language or procedural difficulties they encounter when lodging complaints, in particular those of migrant women, asylum-seeking women, women with disabilities, women with addiction issues and other women and girls at risk of intersectional discrimination.

The research *Why women do not report domestic violence*, conducted by CeSID in November 2022, showed the importance of safe houses for women who have experienced violence. It has to be noted that a representative sample of respondents gave the highest rating to safe houses when asked about trust in institutions. It is also significant that 75% of respondents in this research said they believe that fear of abusers is the most common reason why victims do not report violence. In comparison, 50% believe they do not report it because they have nowhere to go.

45. Please indicate whether protocols/standard operating procedures or guidelines for police officers are in place providing guidance on how to receive reports, interview victims, investigate and collect evidence in cases of rape and sexual violence, domestic violence, psychological violence, stalking, sexual harassment (including their online manifestation), forced marriage, female genital mutilation and forced sterilisation/abortion. Please provide information on how the authorities ensure the comprehensive collection of evidence beyond the victim's testimony.

The research conducted by NGO Atina on shelters showed that the shelters are trying to ensure the women's safety through increased police presence but that, in most cases, this kind of cooperation is not standardized but mostly takes the form of occasional visits by the police. Out of the total number of safe houses, 13.77 percent of them pointed out through questionnaires that they try to preserve women's safety in safe houses through the greater presence of the police. In the course of their work, all the safe houses at least once had situations when the confidentiality of the location was breached, while 70% of them had no security guards. It is concerning that all respondents had situations when the secrecy of the location was breached, which directly threatened the safety of the accommodated women as well as the staff.

46. Please describe the efforts taken to identify and address all factors that contribute to attrition (the process whereby cases drop out of the criminal justice system) in cases of violence against women and domestic violence.

47. Please indicate if legislative or other measures have been taken to issue a renewable residence permit to migrant women who have become a victim of any of the forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention if the competent authority considers that their stay is necessary for the purpose of their co-operation in investigation or criminal proceedings.³

Article 51: Risk assessment and risk management

48. Please describe any standardised and mandatory risk assessment tools in use by all relevant authorities in all regions for forms of violence against women such as stalking, violence committed in the name of so-called honour and domestic violence and to what extent these tools are being used in practice to assess the lethality risk, the seriousness of the situation and the risk of repeated violence with a view to preventing further violence. Please specify whether the following elements are considered as red flags when carrying out the risk assessment:

- a. the possession of or access to firearms by the perpetrator;
- b. the filing for separation/divorce by the victim or the break-up of the relationship;
- c. pregnancy;
- d. previous acts of violence;
- e. the prior issue of a restrictive measure;
- f. threats made by the perpetrator to take away common children;
- g. acts of sexual violence;
- h. threats to kill the victim and her children;
- i. threat of suicide;
- j. coercive and controlling behaviour.

49. Please specify how effective co-operation is ensured between the different statutory authorities and specialist women's support services in making risk assessments and whether the risks identified are managed by law enforcement agencies on the basis of individual safety plans that include also the safety of the victim's children.

50. Please describe the efforts made to analyse retrospectively all cases of gender-based killings of women, in the context of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women to identify the existence of possible systemic gaps in the institutional response of the authorities with the aim of preventing such acts in the future.

Article 52: Emergency barring orders

51. Have any legislative or other measures been taken to introduce and/or amend the legal framework governing emergency barring orders in order to align it with the requirements of Article 52? If yes, please specify whether:

- a. emergency barring orders may remain in place until a victim can obtain a court ordered protection order in order to ensure that gaps in the protection do not arise; b. support and advice are made available to women victims of domestic violence in a pro-active manner by the authority competent to issue an emergency barring order;

³ This question refers to the obligation contained in Article 59, paragraph 3. State parties that have entered a reservation in respect of Article 59 may reply to this question but are not required to do so.
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- c. children are specifically included in contact bans issued under the emergency barring order;
- d. any exceptions to contact bans are made and in which circumstances.

52. Please provide information on the measures taken to enforce emergency barring orders and on responses to any violations of such orders.

Article 53: Restraining or protection orders

53. Have any legislative or other measures been taken to introduce and/or amend the legal framework governing restraining and protection orders in order to align it with the requirements of Article 53? If yes, please specify whether:

- a. restraining or protection orders are available – in the context of criminal proceedings and/or upon application from civil courts - to women victims of all forms of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, including domestic violence, stalking, sexual harassment, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, violence related to so-called honour as well as digital manifestations of violence against women and girls;
- b. children are specifically included in protection orders;
- c. any exceptions to contact bans are made and, if so, in which circumstances these may be made.

54. Please provide information on the measures taken to enforce protection orders and on responses to any violations of such orders.

Article 56: Measures of protection

55. Please provide information on the measures taken to ensure the following:

- a. that the relevant agency informs the victim when the perpetrator escapes or is released temporarily, at least when they or their family might be in danger (paragraph 1 b);
- b. the protection of the privacy and the image of the victim (paragraph 1 f); c. the possibility for victims to testify in the courtroom without being present or at least without the presence of the alleged perpetrator, notably through the use of appropriate communication technologies, where available (paragraph 1 i); d. the provision of appropriate support services for victims so that their rights and interests

are duly presented and taken into account (paragraph 1 e).

The NGO Atina's research on shelters revealed that when it comes to the application of a gender-based approach, 95% of safe houses insist on the violence being reported regardless of the position and opinion of a woman who experienced the violence. In comparison, in 34% of shelters, the principle of confidentiality is violated if a woman refuses to report violence. Many recorded shortcomings stem from the fact that, except for the one in Belgrade, safe houses in Serbia are not based on feminist principles. If they were, it would be difficult to ignore the importance of location secrecy (violated in 100% of safe houses), since 43% of institutions do not have defined security procedures and 70% do not have round-the-clock security in the facilities. In regards to safety and security, NGO Atina's research on shelters revealed that 42.9% of safe houses do not have defined security procedures, 42.8% try to keep their location confidential by not publicly displaying their address, 21.43% by having their beneficiaries sign a statement on maintaining the confidentiality of the location, while in 22% of safe houses the allowed access to third persons is only referring to representatives of institutions.

On the other hand, practice shows that the state does not provide the necessary support to victims, particularly victims of human trafficking who are still involved to a significant extent, not only in court proceedings but also in investigative proceedings. Victims do not receive any protection in terms of activating witness protection services. The only way to support persons who are victims of human trafficking during court proceedings is to grant the status of a particularly sensitive witness. Although the number of assigned statuses increases from year to year, the question of applying this status remains open, that is, the difficulty of realizing all the rights obtained by this status. Namely, still, only five courtrooms in Serbia have the possibility of using a video link and other means to reduce the victimization of the victim and fulfill the status of a particularly sensitive witness.

During 2023, the trend of deficient application of security and witness protection measures, envisaged by the Serbian legislation, continued. The only applied protection measure for victims of trafficking during court proceedings, granting the status of a particularly sensitive witness, does not guarantee the protection of the victim's privacy and whereabouts but only refers to questioning before the court. In most cases, the trials were open to the public, and the victim's identity was publicly available, as well as her location, i.e., whether she was staying in one of the specialized accommodations or at a private address. The minutes from the trials state the presence of representatives of the CPVHT and civil society organizations by name and surname, the organization's name, and the reasons they attended the trial. For these reasons, the organizations themselves must take measures to protect their staff and the victims.

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

56. Please provide information on new developments since the adoption of GREVIO's baseline evaluation report on your country concerning:

- a. emerging trends in violence against women and domestic violence, including its digital manifestations (types of perpetration, groups of victims, forms of violence); b. emerging trends in domestic case law related to violence against women; c. emerging trends in the allocation of funding and budgeting by your state authorities; d. innovative approaches to primary prevention, for example new target audiences and means of communication, public/private partnerships etc.
- e. emerging trends related to access to asylum and international protection for women victims of violence against women.

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Part IV: Administrative data and statistics

57. Please provide annual statistics for two complete calendar years prior to receiving this questionnaire on administrative and judicial data on:

- a. the number of reports, investigations opened, prosecutions, final convictions secured and sanctions imposed in respect of all forms of violence against women and domestic violence covered by the Istanbul Convention;
- b. the number of emergency barring orders issued by the competent authorities, the number of breaches of such orders, and the number of sanctions imposed as a result of these breaches;
- c. the number of protection orders issued, the number of breaches of such orders and the number of sanctions imposed as a result of such breaches;
- d. data on the number of decisions issued by family courts on custody/visitation/residence of children

APPENDIX

Table 1: Initial training (education or professional training)

Please fill in the table and list the professionals (in the area of healthcare, law enforcement, criminal justice, social welfare, education, asylum and migration, media/journalism and support services) which have received initial training on violence against women. Please place each category of professional in a separate line.

Professionals	Do they benefit from initial training on violence against women and domestic violence?	Is this training mandatory?	Are training efforts supported by guidelines and protocols?	Who funds the training?	Please describe the content and the duration of the training

Please fill in the table and list the professionals (in the area of healthcare, law enforcement, criminal justice, social welfare, education, asylum and migration, media/journalism and support services) which receive in-service training on violence against women. Please place each category of professional in a separate line.

Professionals	Number of professionals trained	Is this training mandatory ?	Frequency	Training efforts supported by guidelines and protocols	Please describe the content and duration of the training

General Recommendations from Articles:

- It is necessary to clearly define and determine the capacities of safe houses for women victims of gender-based violence
- It is essential to issue licenses to all safe houses accommodating women to ensure prerequisites for providing quality services.
- It is necessary to specialize services for women with experience of violence following real needs, analysis of the current situation, as well as with the internationally undertaken obligations and recommendations.
- The shelter service for women with experience of violence needs to develop and define programs and methods of working with the children staying with their mothers, and these children must at all times be recognized as victims of violence.
- It is necessary to standardize the service in terms of functional standards so it would be fully defined in line with the needs and experience of gender-based violence.
- The service providers must define and provide, with the Ministry's support, specialized training for qualified workers at the shelters, especially regarding sexual

Violence.

- It is necessary to create a plan and network support for women who exit the Safehouse;
- the employment of a more significant number of professional workers in Safe houses for victims of violence must be facilitated;
- encouraging the development and more meaningful activities of the non-governmental sector as critical actors and partners in supporting the victims;
- improvement and clear communication and competencies of the Safe house for victims of violence and competent centers for social work;
- facilitating economic empowerment and training for the development of skills and knowledge of women who have survived violence;
- better connections between safe houses and the National Employment Services;
- creating suitable ground for the development of social entrepreneurship as an opportunity for employment and self-employment;
- formation and formalization of different groups of employers who have the chance to employ vulnerable groups;
- more effective local networking and formalization of cooperation through protocols on cooperation between actors who provide support to victims of domestic violence for more intensive and direct collaboration in the future.
- Sustainable state support to civil society organizations that provide specific support to women victims of violence, including their funding