

State Funding for SOS Helplines in the Western Balkans and Republic of Moldova





This publication was created within the Gender Budget Watchdog Network in the Western Balkans and Republic of Moldova Project with financial support from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The views expressed in this study are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of ADA or SIDA.

Impressum

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Introduction

This policy brief is related to funding of SOS helplines, one of specialised services for combating gender-based violence. The states are obliged to provide these, and other services and to implement other measures in order to ensure protection of women from gender-based violence.

All Western Balkan (WB) governments have ratified and/or adopted into their legal frameworks the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as the “Istanbul Convention”). It includes three obligations relevant for this analysis.

First:

Article 8 - Parties shall allocate **appropriate financial and human resources** for the adequate implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, including those carried out by nongovernmental organisations and civil society.

Second:

Article 9 – Parties shall recognise, encourage and support, at all levels, **the work of relevant nongovernmental organisations and of civil society active** in combating violence against women and establish effective co-operation with these organisations.

Third:

By ratifying the Convention, states are obliged to have a **national SOS helpline available and accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week**, as stated: Article 24 - Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up state-wide round-the-clock (24/7) telephone helplines free of charge to provide advice to callers, confidentially or with due regard for their anonymity, in relation to all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

In this analysis, the Gender Budget Watchdog Network (GBWN) attempted to identify state funds allocated for SOS helplines in accordance with their obligations.

This policy brief is intended to governments, but also CSOs and wider (interested public), to advocate for increased funds and to increase recognition of GRB as a tool for acceleration of implementation of policies and measures related to protection and advancing of women’s human rights.

Historically, and still today, this specialised service usually has been provided by non-governmental women’s rights civil society organisations (WCSOs), whose work is based on feminist principles of respect for women who have suffered violence, a “victim-centred” approach as outlined in the Istanbul Convention, and deep understanding of the socialised gender structures that contribute to gender-based violence. As per the Istanbul Convention, governments should fund these WCSOs and recognising they are key actors and partners in advancing women’s human rights and gender equality. Moreover, ensuring funding for commitments under the Istanbul Convention should be an objective and result of gender responsive budgeting. Gender responsive budgeting is a key tool for keeping governments accountable, as it should enable monitoring of allocated funds, expenditures, and the results of these expenditures, based on policy commitments.

This brief analysis has been conducted in seven countries: Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Moldova. This mapping is a first step towards comprehensive monitoring of investments directed at combating gender-based violence, which is much broader than this analysis, as it would require costing all measures for preventing gender-based violence, protection of women and children, and rehabilitation and reintegration programs. The analysis aims to inform advocacy for increasing allocated funds in accordance with commitments in the Istanbul Convention. Also, it will help understand the role and some of the funding needs of WCSOs as key agents and partners in addressing gender-based violence and furthering gender equality.

¹ Council of Europe, The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence , November 2014, ISBN 978-92-871-7990-6, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/548165c94.html>

This brief contains a description of these services; how they are organised at the central level and other levels; the amount of money allocated and spent on SOS helplines in the last three years at the central level; which organisations benefitted from this funding; and how the funding is organized. Data on calls received annually enables estimation of the total reach of this service.

This brief also seeks to draw attention to gender responsive budgeting tools that women's rights organizations and networks can use to support their advocacy for funding their services, as well as for the state to allocate adequate funds for addressing gender-based violence and ensuring protection for women and children from violence.

Methodology and data collection

The analytical framework is based on: the aforementioned obligations and policies related to the protection of women and girls; obligations and practices in the implementation of gender responsive budgeting (GRB); and midterm objectives for adequate budgeting of services and actions directed at combating gender-based violence.

The methodology included collecting the following data: the annual amounts allocated and executed at the central level for SOS helplines in the last three years; data on SOS helpline service providers at the country level including the organization of the service; sources of funding and amounts received from the public budget, central or local; and an estimation of monthly costs for sustainable, qualitative service provision.

Data was collected by GBWN members in the respective countries from the responsible line ministries (usually ministries for social policy or welfare) and from WCSOs and women's networks that provide SOS helpline services. Data were compared with GREVIO findings.

From the perspective of GRB watchdogging, an important question is the availability of data and possibility of determining the amounts allocated for combating gender-based violence. One of the important requests in GRB is transparency and accountability of governments to women and WCSOs. On top on resources, governments should ensure availability of data about allocated funds.

Findings: Funding for SOS helplines

In all countries in the region and the Republic of Moldova the legal and policy framework is aligned with Istanbul Convention. The annual amount allocated for SOS helplines are similar in a way that between 115 – 140 EUR is available per month for consultants on SOS helplines. Other costs are not covered and there are not funds that will enable further development of services, prevention and protection.

Table 1. Fulfilment of three obligations included in legal frameworks the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence” by countries.

| Country | Obligations | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|----------------|
| | First: appropriate financial and human resources | | | Second: recognition and support to the relevant nongovernmental organisation | | | Third: 24/7 SOS helpline available at the national level for various forms of violence | | |
| | FF | PF | NF | FF | PF | NF | FF | PF | NF |
| Albania | | ● | | | ● | | | | ● |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | | ● | | | ● | | | | ● ² |
| Kosovo | | ● | | | ● | | | | ● |
| Moldova | | ● | | | ● | | ● | | |
| Montenegro | | ● | | ● | | | | | ● |
| North Macedonia | | ● | | | ● | | | | ● |
| Serbia | | ● | | | | ● | | | ● |

*FF-fully fulfilled; PF-partially fulfilled; NF-not fulfilled

² No national level, entity-level helplines.



The following sub-sections examine the funding available for SOS helplines in the respective countries.

Albania

In Albania, the national SOS helpline, available 24/7, has been established based on an agreement between the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth and the WCSO the Counselling Line for Women and Girls (CLWG). Altogether, the CLWG has 10 counsellors. Some of them are full time while the others work the night shift and weekends.

In the baseline evaluation report for Albania, GREVIO concluded that information on the amounts allocated for combating of gender-based violence and implementing policies is unavailable. GREVIO therefore recommended that Albania pursue and step-up efforts in implementing gender responsive budgeting so as to be able to allocate appropriate funding and to monitor public spending dedicated to combating violence against women and to measure progress achieved. The same report it stated that “the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (the MSWY) plans the annual budget for measures concerning violence against women alongside gender equality measures within the budgetary programme for social inclusion”.

CLWG opened the first Counselling Line for Abused Women and Girls in Albania in 1996. The hotline provides telephone counselling as well as face-to-face counselling to women and girls every year. The hotline offers free psychological and legal counselling aimed at empowering and supporting women who are victims of violence.

The National Counselling Line for Women and Girls 116-117 is a 24/7 service that operates pursuant to Istanbul Convention standards. The number of calls significantly increased in 2018 and was the highest in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. Number of calls received per year

| Year | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Number of calls received | 2540 | 3014 | 5597 | 3469 |

The Counselling Line continued to operate during the lockdown imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The forms of violence reported were psychological abuse (57%), physical abuse (42%), economic abuse (31%) and sexual abuse (7 cases); often these were combined. The reporting of sexual violence generally remains low.

As of 2018, the Municipality of Tirana has been supporting the CLWG in the sum of €4,015 ALL. During 2020, as a result of the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, an extra €7,820 was allocated based on a special agreement signed between the Municipality of Tirana and CLWG, for the Strengthening of the Counselling Line for Women and Girls and the Counselling Line for Men and Boys in support of victims of domestic violence. The support came as a result of an official

request submitted by the CLWG to the local government. The request highlighted that CLWG bears the majority of the burden regarding direct services offered to survivors of violence in the municipality of Tirana, both in urban and rural areas. Also, from 2019 the CLWG has been financed by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in the amount of €25,200 for nine months for salaries and social insurance for five employees; in 2020, in the amount of €33,700; For 2021, the Ministry approved and financed salaries and social insurance for eight employees in the total amount of €58,400. This financing came from the Social Fund for specialized services in the regions and covers almost 30% of the total running costs of the Helpline.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina has an immensely complex governmental structure which is reflected in the management of the national SOS helplines. The state consists of two entities – Republika Srpska (RS) and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), and Brčko District (BD). Each of the entities has their own government and gender equality mechanisms, Gender Centres, while in Brčko District there is no distinct gender mechanism. The Gender Centres provided the SOS helplines framework at the entity level. The entity-level free SOS helplines in FBiH and RS were established in 2008.

The SOS helpline 1264 in RS was established within the scope of work of the Gender Centre of RS, while since 2013 it is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sport of RS, with around 750 EUR per year in funding directed towards maintenance of the phone number. The professional, legal, and psychological help to the victims of violence who resort to the SOS helpline is provided by the WCSOs United Women Banja Luka, Fondacija Lara Bijeljina, and Budućnost Modriča. The WCSOs fundraise from donations and international organizations, as well as from the local or cantonal (in FBiH) level governments for proper functioning of their work. In RS, three mentioned NGOs also run shelters for women survivors of domestic and gender-based violence.

As for FBiH, the SOS helplines are employing the persons who have gone through special educational programmes to work with victims of domestic and gender-based violence. The funds for the smooth running of the helpline number (for the Regulatory Agency of Communication) 1265 in this entity are allocated from the Gender Centre of FBiH's budget in the amount of around 750 EUR per year, while all other costs and services are covered by the five NGOs running shelters which were chosen on the basis of Memorandum of Cooperation by which the SOS helpline was established in 2008.

NGOs operating the SOS helplines in Bosnia and Herzegovina in BiH submit the data on the number of calls to the Federal Ministry of Work and Social Policies (FBiH) and Ministry of Family, Youth, and Sport (RS). In 2019, 4202 calls were made to 1264 and 1265 SOS helplines, 4103 of which were made by women. In 2020, this number was 5011 with women comprising 4910 of the calls in question.

There are also examples of other helplines and distinct numbers which are managed by the 8 CSOs which run the shelters as well, but there is no public funds allocation for those, the same as for the services of answering and providing support to victims who contact the SOS helplines.

The legal framework and standardization of services, along with exact data on this particular issue, are lacking in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is partially why the service appears in various budgets across all levels of government.

Kosovo

In Kosovo, the **National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women 2022-2026** foresees a new efficient Helpline, with nationwide service, available 24/7, dedicated to all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, with service in all official languages in Kosovo and meeting the standards of the Istanbul Convention. However, it has not been established yet. Nor does the Action Plan include any estimated cost for this new helpline, though the Action Plan includes other costs.

At present, there is no "SOS hotline" fully funded by the state that is dedicated solely for victims of all forms of gender-based violence. However, the Victims Advocacy and Assistance Office (VAAO) within the State Prosecution Office has a Helpline Operator that receives calls. Helpline operators are engaged 24 hours a day and with a public, toll-free number, available in Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish, but not Romani languages. Through this hotline, victims and other members of

³ Women and Men in BiH Report, Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2021.

the public have a confidential mechanism for reporting 27 different criminal offences. Operators inform victims and other callers about victims' rights, provide information regarding existing services and share contact numbers for reaching other institutions for further assistance. Thus, this state-funded Operator does not provide a dedicated line only for assisting survivors of gender-based violence in line with the Istanbul Convention requirements.

Although it operates from within a state institution, there is no specific budget line for this hotline in the Law for Budget Appropriations in the Republic of Kosovo. However, it is funded through the State Prosecution Office and the VAAO. According to official data, the helpline has received 1091 calls in 2020, which included 423 cases of domestic violence, four cases of sexual violence during the war, and two rape cases. Whereas in 2021 this line received 327 calls, which is a significantly lower number of calls compared to 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to KWN research, this line is often reported to be unreliable and sometimes not functioning.

Legal Aid Officers also have a free helpline which victims can contact directly. This helpline, however, is not in line with the IC's recommended standards as it does not provide specialized support solely related to gender-based violence; nor do these offices seem adequately trained to provide such support.

Meanwhile, for years WCSOs have provided services for addressing gender-based violence and particularly domestic violence. Kosovo has eight WCSOs officially licensed as service providers by the government, which specialize in providing services for women and children suffering from gender-based violence. Some have telephone helplines through which citizens can call and some have recently established tele-counselling services. However, these are not all toll-free, consistent, or funded by the government.

Given that Kosovo does not use programmatic budgeting, it is difficult to transparently identify the budget for shelters within the expenditure categories of the budget. Nevertheless, the Kosovo Women's Network (KWN) has information available based on their own advocacy efforts. For years, WCSOs were almost solely funded through international donations with some contributions periodically from municipalities where they operate. Following WCSOs' advocacy for several years, the parliament finally adopted a budget for WCSO shelters in 2019, amounting €880,000. In 2022, the amount to be allocated to each shelter was based on a costing exercise that estimated their needs to provide all basic services (€1,000,000), passed by the parliament as requested by WCSOs. However, the shelters have faced issues with the distribution of these resources because the Ministry did not allow them to apply for the amounts foreseen in the state budget. Further, delays in the procurement process contributed to delays in shelters receiving the funds. The funds were insufficient to cover all of their needs, including those related to helplines. An annual €320,000 is foreseen to "Support shelters with continuous funding" under the specific objective to "support and strengthen the specialized support services for victims/survivors from all groups and child victims and witnesses of violence". This does not include the costs for a helpline.

Thus, although according to the Istanbul Convention "Parties shall recognize, encourage and support, at all levels, **the work of relevant nongovernmental organizations and of civil society active in combating violence against women** and establish effective co-operation with these organizations", these service providers receive insufficient funding from the state.



Moldova

The Toll-free Telephone Hotline Assistance Service for Victims of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (hereinafter SOS Helpline) is the only national service of this type in the Republic of Moldova. The SOS Helpline was launched in November 2009 by the International Centre for Women's Rights Protection and Promotion "La Strada" (hereinafter La Strada).⁴

In 2016, the Law No. 45/2007 on preventing and combating domestic violence introduced a new competence for the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection: to ensure the establishment and maintenance of a toll-free telephone helpline to provide counselling 24 hours a day, seven-days-a-week for prevention of domestic violence and information on available services for victims of domestic violence.

In November 2020, La Strada and the Unified National Service for Emergency Calls 112 signed a cooperation agreement aimed at strengthening the efforts of the two institutions and improving the assistance provided to victims of domestic violence. The 112 service assumed the responsibility of redirecting all calls of victims of domestic violence to the SOS Helpline in cases where the caller refuses police intervention or does not require emergency intervention by specialized emergency services (police, ambulance, fire) and needs emotional support and psychological counselling. Redirection takes place also when the caller needs information about their rights and the services available to victims of violent crimes.

The SOS helpline is funded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection through specific purpose transfers from the State Budget. In 2019, €46,700 was allocated, in 2020 €45,800 and in 2021 €38,700. The decrease in allocated funds can raise concerns, considering that the number of calls remained at the same level. In 2019, there were 2131 calls and in 2020, 2040 calls. The data are available for the first six months of 2021 during which 961 calls were received. Thus, on average, they received 2085 calls per year, and the average annual funding was €43,700. That averages to approximately €20 per call.

Montenegro

The national free telephone helpline for support to domestic violence victims started working on 1 September 2015, under the patronage of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare and UNDP. It has been managed by NGO Telephone Helpline for Women and Child Violence Victims Niksic. UNDP in cooperation with the Ministry approved resources for this service totalling €71,800 for 1 September 2015 – 31 December 2017. This was a pilot project funded by UNDP and further funding was planned to be provided by the state budget.

The Ministry of Finance and Social Care in 2021 funded two SOS helplines: one for children and youth and another for adults and elderly people. The second service is provided by NGO SOS helpline for Women and Children.

SOS Line Nikšić received €37,988 for 2021 from the Ministry of Finance and Social Welfare for the National SOS line for victims of domestic violence.

The Ministry of Justice, Human and Minority Rights in 2021 also supported NGOs SOS Helpline Podgorica and SOS Helpline Niksic with €23,000. The support was provided following a public call for projects aimed at gender equality; it was not part of a dedicated government budget line for SOS helpline service provision.

From January to June 2021, SOS Line Nikšić received 1093 calls from 22 cities in Montenegro on the National SOS line for victims of domestic violence. Of 1093 calls received, 1001 or 91.5% were from women who survived violence. We can estimate that at the annual number of calls will be 2000, and that the service per call would cost €19,00.

In the baseline report for Montenegro, GREVIO stated that it "has obtained very little information regarding the financial resources that the Government of Montenegro has earmarked for the implementation of its policies, strategies and legislation to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. It seems that most operational costs are to be borne by the regular budgets of the respective line ministries, while some of the specific activities set out in the various action plans and strategies are to be funded by international donors".⁵ GREVIO also recommended that

⁴ La Strada is a non-governmental organization established in the Republic of Moldova in 2001, being part of a European network against trafficking in human beings of the same name, La Strada International

⁵ Grevio Baseline Evaluation Report Montenegro <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-montenegro/16808e5614>

implementation of gender responsive budgeting should be applied and that data about funds allocated have to be publicly available.⁶

In the shadow report to GREVIO, prepared by WCSOs in Montenegro, it is mentioned that the Commission on Distribution, of Part of the Revenues from Games of Chance for the year 2013 has allocated only 2.99% or €54,000 from the total fund. For organizations, directly dealing with violence against women that per cent falls to 2.38%.

Macedonia

Macedonia currently has four SOS helplines. All lines are national and operated by the CSOs: the National Council for Gender Equality (NCGE), the Organization of Women of City of Skopje, the Crises Centre "Hope" and La Strada (the SOS line on human trafficking, where domestic violence also has been reported). Still, according to the verification data interview, not all lines are available at night, and they are not fully in line with request of Istanbul Convention.

Although, all helplines are nationally available, there is no official National SOS helpline. In 2021, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) announced the Standards and procedures for work of licensed providers of specialized services - SOS line for assistance of victims of violence, which regulates the space and equipment, required professional and other staff, and organization of working hours and procedures.

NCGE is funded by MLSP with the annual amount of €13,046 (in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively). The Organization of Women of City of Skopje is funded by the local government of the City of Skopje, with annual amounts of approximately €4,000 (2020 and 2021), of which part is devoted for operation of the SOS helpline, whereas the rest for the overall shelter facility.

Crises Centre "Hope" is also funded by MLSP with the amount of approximately €13,000 in total for 2021, 2020 and 2019 funded by MLSP and Municipality of Gazi Baba. In this financial package support, biggest part is budgeted for the operation of the crisis centre (the facility provides safe accommodation for approx. 48h), whereas the rest is spent on maintaining their SOS line service, as the case with Organization of Women of Skopje.

La Strada has the annual budget of around €14,000 but it is funded by international and national donations and not from the state budget.

All of these organizations have been selected via calls for support of NGOs, issued both from national and local institutions (such as MLSP, City of Skopje, Municipality of Gazi Baba) in the framework of their annual programs for support of civil society organizations or by international donor programs.

All organisations have 5-6 consultants. Based on the interviews with the coordinators of these SOS lines, some operators are paid approximately €115,00 per month as a full-time equivalent to their engagement on this work. The monthly average is 30-40 calls, or at least one call per day. However, there are periods when more calls are operated, as well as periods with fewer SOS calls.

NCGE also has at least one call per day and in 2021 they received 434 calls. In an interview with the national coordinator, it was said that there is a huge need for higher funding heaving in mind the increased tendencies of domestic and gender-based violence during and post-pandemic times combined with nowadays of economic and energy crisis.

Limited resources impact the quality and comprehensives of service. SOS lines / operators only give directions to women what to do, in a form of directions for adequate reporting to police and locating nearest shelter centre if needed so, instead of offering full package of service, including interventional psycho-social assistance. During the validation of the collected results with a representative of the National network to end violence against women and domestic violence it was highlighted that it should be seriously considered establishing single national SOS helpline from which are calls would be answered and processed in an adequate conditions and in that way avoid inappropriate managing some of the receiving calls, especially those received on mobile phones. Namely, it was said that sometimes operators must process the calls while outside, in traffic jam or noise having in mind the current working conditions. Additionally, the single national helpline will ensure availability of operators that could answer

⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/report-ngo-montenegro-2/168073c980>

all calls, especially ones during the night and enable more easily capacity development in terms or availability of SOS helpline service(s) in other languages.

Serbia

In Serbia SOS helpline services are traditionally provided by WCSOs and the first SOS helpline was established in the early 1990s by the feminist movement. There is a national SOS helpline network that gathers organizations who provide the service at the local level in Serbia and there is also the SOS network at the provincial level of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The SOS network of Vojvodina has one phone number for the territory of the whole Province.

The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (LEVS) established the National SOS Helpline in accordance with the ratification of Istanbul Convention and announced the SOS helpline project as one of four priorities in 2018. The announcement stated that the Ministry would organise public procurement, and all licensed Associations who already provide SOS helpline services would be eligible to apply. In practise, the tender was won by the Centre for Women and Children in Belgrade, a non-specialised institution with no previous experience with supporting women survivors of gender-based violence or those in risk.

At the national level, a national SOS helpline is funded, established in 2018 within the Centre for the protection of newborns, children, and youth. The Centre provides numerous services, including three different types of helplines. Before 2018 they did not have SOS helpline for gender-based and domestic violence.

The Ministry provided data based on the reports received by the Centre and not from budget reports.

In 2020, the Centre received €554,649. For the SOS helplines, 35% of this amount was allocated. According to the data published by the Centre, in the last three years (2019-2021) for the helplines a total of €520,000 has been allocated from the national budget. The biggest amount was transferred in 2020 but the number of calls not increased.

The Centre has 367 employees, including eight staff for the SOS helpline for women, or 0.2% of all employees.

In the first six months in 2021 there were 1600 calls, of which 352 related to violence and 87% of callers are women. The annual number of gender-based violence cases can be estimated at 700. Considering the funds allocated, the service would cost around €300 EUR per call.

In a response to inquiry on the funding of SOS helplines, the Ministry stated that development and delivery of social services would be in the jurisdiction of local self-government units and therefore SOS helplines should be funded from the local level. That means financing the national SOS helpline from the central level, while other services should be provided at the local level and funded from the local budgets as well. The government has some funds aimed to support to local governments in funding and implementation of social services. Anyhow, the state does not feel obliged to provide funds to WCSOs and their services.

GREVIO's baseline report for Serbia states that: while GREVIO appreciates the efforts made by the Serbian authorities to fund women's NGOs within the limits of available funds, GREVIO notes that the funding provided to women's specialist support services by state bodies at local, regional or central level is generally low, and most rely on international donor funds to run their services. The risk of significant downscaling of service provision is omnipresent for most, and many have indeed reduced their services or rely on volunteers and unpaid work.

CSOs who provide SOS helpline services for women have not received any funds from the local budget, except the Women's Centre Uzice.

It is crucial that local self-government units provide funds for SOS helplines under the budget program 11 – social and children's protection, towards implementing GRB in accordance with the Budget System Law and the Law on Prevention and Combating Gender-based violence or Gender Equality Law which also defines specialised and general services for women survivors or at the risk of GBV. The service is not available in minority languages, there is no guarantee of anonymity, and it is not provided in line with feminist principles of service provision.

Conclusion

All countries consider combating and eliminating violence against women a top political priority. It is also a priority considering the prevalence of gender-based violence and femicide. According to the report prepared by the regional network for addressing violence against women in 2020, there were 55 femicide cases in the WB Region based on the media sources, so the number could be even higher. Laws and policies in several countries define actions needed. Now, sufficient funds need to be provided, based on gender responsive budgeting.

Very minimal data related to the state funding of SOS helplines is publicly available. WB countries and Moldova lack codes or methods within budget systems to accurately track allocations and spending on SOS helplines, including funding for WCSOs providing these services for the state. This likely contributes to inaccurate and inefficient budgeting for this legally required service, which also affects the quality of services provided.

Recommendations



Responsible ministries should use gender responsive budgeting tools to adequately assess the costs of SOS helplines, in close consultation with WCSOs that possess expertise and experience in providing these services, using this information to plan adequate budget allocations.



The legal framework at all administrative levels in the field of social protection should recognize services for women at risk of violence and survivors.



Transparency in funding national strategies for combating gender-based violence should be improved.



While the responsibility for adequate budgeting for national helplines falls with relevant ministries, municipalities can also budget for locally provided services, such as in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina at the state level.

Responsible ministries should publish annually expenditures, including related to SOS helpline funding, including data on funding provided to WCSOs to provide these services and the number of beneficiaries.



Using clear, transparent and fair procedures, responsible ministries should increase support to qualified WCSOs running SOS helplines and shelters in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, given their expertise and special services provided; many operate voluntarily or depend on inconsistent international funds, risking the wellbeing of women and children should such funds be discontinued. Application procedures should be designed with WCSOs, drawing from their expertise, and should ensure continuous funding for quality services provided.



GBWN, in cooperation with WCSOs and networks, will continue to advocate for increased funds and transparent funding of SOS helplines through consistent implementation of gender responsive budgeting.



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