

Financing for gender-based violence SOS lines and shelters for violence against women

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”). 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. 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.

GBWN approach

The Gender Budget Watchdog Network (GBWN) performed an analysis in which we attempted to identify state funds allocated for SOS helplines in accordance with their obligations. 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. Limited resources impact the quality and comprehensives of service.

The states need to support shelters with continuous funding in order to effectively strengthen the specialized support services for victims/survivors from all groups and child victims and witnesses of violence. One of the important requests in GRB is transparency and accountability of governments to women and WCSOs, therefore, on top of appropriate financial and human resources on preventing and combating gender-based violence, governments should ensure availability of data about allocated funds. Overall, investing in SOS lines dedicated to addressing GBV is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic approach to fostering safer, more equitable societies for everyone.

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.



Advocacy successes/GBWN impact:

In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH)

Here were doubled allocations for safe houses and organizations leading SOS lines. The Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Policy has published a Public Call for the allocation of funds to non-profit organizations working on the implementation of the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence. These funds, in the total amount of 1,000,000 BAM, are intended for providing social care and support to victims of domestic and gender-based violence.

In Kosovo:

The state budget foresees, constructing a shelter for women who have suffered violence in Ferizaj/Uroševac. The budget for the Victim Protection and Assistance Office also has increased, as recommended, by €120,503 (41%) compared to 2023, which can contribute to improved protections for survivors of gender-based violence. Additionally, an SOS telephone line was foreseen by the new State Protocol for the Treatment of Cases of Sexual Violence, as for the moment Kosovo doesn't have an SOS hotline.

In Albania:

The economic assistance for victims of domestic violence has increased significantly. The budget for social protection programs guarantees the support of over 64 thousand families, part of the economic assistance program, where about 45% of the beneficiaries are women victims of violence. For women and girls, victims of violence, or single-parent families, support with social housing will continue. The cost for social housing for 850 women and girls of the category defined by law will be ALL 47,562,600, calculated as a proportion of the two main products of the schemes.

Main challenges:

- Gender responsive budgeting remains insufficiently used tool;
- 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 Women' CSOs 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.
- **Lack of funding for support services, legal aid and awareness campaigns** aimed at changing attitudes and social norms that perpetuate violence against women and other genders.



Gender Budget Watchdog Network
for a gender equal region

