



# Finding Assistance, Delivering Outreach

Project Reference number: 2024-1-FR01-KA220-ADU-000255033



## | Module 2 | Knowledge of Regulations

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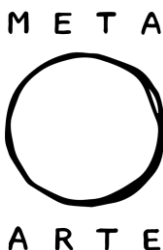
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Finding Assistance, Delivering Outreach:  
A comprehensive support system for victims of  
gender-based violence  
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## Description of the module

“States have a positive obligation to prevent violence, protect victims, and prosecute the perpetrators – doing nothing is not an option.”

*Council of Europe, Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention*

This training module provides an overview of international, European, and national legal frameworks addressing gender-based violence. It explores State obligations in prevention, protection, prosecution, and reparation, and aims to strengthen your understanding of the rights attached to gender-based violence, your responsibilities, and the legal tools at your disposal.

## What will I Learn ?

1. Understand the key principle of international and European legal texts on gender-based violence
2. Identify State obligations and monitoring mechanisms
3. Become familiar with the main national laws of each partner country
4. Identify good practices and gaps between legal frameworks and realities on the ground
5. Make connections between the legal framework and actions in prevention, protection, and support for survivors



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## 1. States' responsibilities in combating gender-based violence : an introduction

### 1.1. What is gender-based violence (GBV) ?

Gender based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, gender identity, or gender expression. It is rooted in unequal power relations between men and women and disproportionately affects women and girls, although it can affect people of all genders. It is important to note that GBV also includes violence against LGBTQIA+ individuals, although not all legal systems explicitly address this.

*For more information on the definition of GBV and a better understanding of their roots and history, please refer to Module 1 "Understanding Gender-Based Violence".*

### 1.2. Why are legal frameworks necessary ?

GBV is not a private matter or a personal dispute, it is a violation of human rights. Therefore, victims have the right to get protection, to access justice and to reparation. Legal frameworks at the national, european and international levels are crucial because they define what constitutes violence and what is prohibited through criminal law. They also establish State obligations in terms of prevention, protection, prosecution, and policy development. Finally, they set out penalties and victim support rights. The important thing to remember here is that a strong legal framework ensures coordinated responses from different institutions (police, justice, health, social services, education), promotes multi-agency cooperation and fights against impunity for perpetrators.





## 1.3. Focus on the States' obligations: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and Reparation

International and regional legal instruments such as the CEDAW Convention, the Istanbul Convention and various EU directives, clearly affirm that States have a legal duty to respond to Gender Based Violence. These obligations go beyond simply punishing perpetrators. Indeed, States are required to adopt a comprehensive, proactive, and victim centred approach that includes prevention, protection, prosecution and reparation.

### 1.3.1. Prevention: Stop violence before it happens

States must take active steps to prevent all forms of gender based violence, including raising public awareness to challenge harmful norms and stereotypes, integrating gender equality and GBV education in schools, training professionals to detect and respond to GBV, and working with communities to promote respectful relationships and gender equality. Prevention is a long term investment that aims to change mindsets, behaviours, and systems that allow GBV to persist.

### 1.3.2. Protection: Ensure safety and support survivors

States must ensure that victims are safe, heard, and supported. This includes the necessity to provide accessible shelters, helplines and crisis centers, to ensure legal protection such as restraining orders and protection orders, to offer psychological, legal and medical support services that are gender-sensitive and trauma-informed, and to ensure safe reporting mechanisms that do not expose victims to further risk or discrimination. Protection measures should be available to all, without discrimination, and tailored to specific needs of each individual.

### 1.3.3. Prosecution: Ensure justice and accountability





States must bring perpetrators to justice and guarantee victims' right to a fair trial. This obligation includes to adopt clear and specific laws that criminalise all forms of GBV, to ensure that judges, prosecutors, and the police are trained to handle GBV cases, to guarantee that legal procedures are accessible, respectful, and do not re-traumatise victims, and to fight impunity by ensuring that GBV crimes are investigated and prosecuted effectively. Effective prosecution is a key to reinforcing public trust in the justice system and deterring future violence.

### 1.3.4. Reparation: Acknowledge harm and restore dignity

States must ensure that survivors can access reparation for the harm they have suffered by allowing them compensation, rehabilitation, restitution and satisfaction, including public apologies or symbolic recognition of the harm, and a guarantee of non-repetition, through structural reforms and institutional accountability. Reparation is not only about justice, it is also about helping survivors to rebuild their lives and restore their dignity.

These four pillars are interdependent. A country cannot claim to be addressing gender-based violence by focusing only on prosecution while neglecting prevention or survivor support. States must adopt a holistic and coordinated approach, ensuring that policies are coherent, resources are allocated, and systems are in place to meet their obligations at all levels.

Understanding gender-based violence means recognizing that it is not an individual issue but a collective societal challenge, deeply rooted in power dynamics and social injustice. The law plays a central role in naming these violences, protecting victims, punishing perpetrators, and ensuring accountability.

We will now explore the legal frameworks that exist at the international, European, and national levels.





## 2. International legal framework on gender-based violence

### 2.1. Key international declarations and conventions that define and address gender-based violence

The international response to GBV is built on a set of foundational legal and political instruments that define the nature of the problem and articulate States' obligations.

The cornerstone is the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations in 1979. Although CEDAW does not explicitly refer to GBV, the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No.19 (1992), and its updated Recommendation No.35 (2017), clearly establish that violence against women constitutes a form of gender-based discrimination and a violation of human rights. Therefore, these recommendations interpret the Convention's provisions in a way that places a legal obligation on States to prevent and address GBV.

Another pivotal document is the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, enacted in 1993. While not legally binding, it offers one of the first widely accepted definitions of violence against women, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence, occurring in both public and private spheres. This declaration encourages States to adopt legislative, policy, and educational measures to eliminate such violence.

Then, in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action reaffirmed and expanded the international commitment to ending GBV. It identified violence against women as one of the twelve critical areas for action and called for concrete steps from governments, including legal reforms, support services for survivors, and prevention through education and awareness.

Several other instruments further expand the scope of protection. In 2015, a Joint Statement by UN Member States was issued, calling for an end to violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) persons. This marked a significant moment of international





recognition of the specific vulnerabilities faced by LGBTIQ+ populations in the context of gender-based violence and discrimination. Building on this, the UN Secretariat adopted a new strategy in 2024 aimed at protecting LGBTIQ+ individuals from violence and discrimination across all areas of UN operations. This strategy promotes inclusive policies, data collection, and training to ensure protection mechanisms are accessible and respectful of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.

In contexts of conflict, displacement, and natural disaster, gender-based violence often increases, requiring specific institutional responses. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has developed a dedicated institutional framework for preventing and responding to GBV in crisis situations.

Together, these texts form a comprehensive international foundation that defines gender-based violence in all its forms, outlines State responsibilities, and increasingly addresses the diversity of victims affected by such violence, including those impacted by crisis, displacement, or systemic discrimination.

## 2.2. How the United Nations monitors and supports the fight against gender-based violence

The United Nations not only sets standards but also monitors their implementation through a variety of mechanisms. The CEDAW Committee, composed of independent experts, regularly reviews State reports and can issue concluding observations that identify gaps and recommend improvements in addressing GBV. States that have ratified the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW also allow individuals or groups to submit complaints when national remedies have failed.

The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls plays a complementary role by conducting country visits, producing thematic reports, and receiving individual allegations of violations. This independent expert



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monitors State compliance and brings international attention to persistent gaps or emerging issues in the fight against GBV.

Additionally, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), conducted under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council, reviews the human rights situation in every UN Member State every four to five years. GBV is frequently addressed in these reviews, and States receive recommendations on improving laws, services, and prevention strategies.

Through these monitoring mechanisms, the UN enables international accountability, reinforces political pressure on governments, and offers a platform for civil society actors and survivors to raise their voices at the global level.

### 2.3. Gender-based violence and the 2030 agenda: linking legal obligations with the Sustainable Development Goals

The global fight against GBV is also embedded in the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all UN Member States in 2015. In particular, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”, is directly relevant.

Target 5.2 calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation. Target 5.3 aims to eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, as well as female genital mutilation. These goals recognise that violence is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, and that ending GBV is essential to achieving social justice, public health, and sustainable development.

Beyond SDG 5, other goals such as SDG 3 “Good Health and Well-Being”, SDG 4 “Quality Education”, and SDG 16 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”, also provide important entry points for addressing GBV. For instance, ensuring access to healthcare, promoting education for all, and building effective





institutions are all part of a comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to violence.

The SDGs do not impose legal obligations, but they function as a global roadmap for policy development, resource allocation, and evaluation. States are encouraged to integrate these goals into national strategies and to report regularly on their progress, which includes indicators related to violence against women and girls.

## 3. European legal framework on gender-based violence

### 3.1. The Istanbul Convention: Europe's landmark treaty on preventing and combating violence against women

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention, is the most comprehensive legally binding instrument in Europe specifically dedicated to addressing violence against women and gender-based violence. Adopted in 2011 and entering into force in 2014, the Convention sets a gold standard for prevention, protection, prosecution and integrated policies.

The Istanbul Convention defines violence against women as a human rights violation and a form of discrimination. It obliges States Parties to take measures to prevent violence, protect and support victims, prosecute perpetrators, and implement integrated policies that involve all relevant sectors. The Convention also provides for the establishment of shelters, helplines, legal aid, and training professionals.

Importantly, it introduced monitoring through the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), an





independent body tasked with evaluating implementation. GREVIO's country reports and thematic evaluations offer essential guidance for improving national responses.

As of 2025, the Convention has been ratified by most EU Member States, though not all. The European Union itself officially ratified the Istanbul Convention in June 2023, limited to areas of EU Competence, reinforcing its commitment to tackling gender-based violence at both Union and Member State levels.

### 3.2. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union: A legal basis for equality and protection

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, enacted in 2000 and legally binding since the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, provides the constitutional foundation for the EU's commitment to gender equality and the fight against GBV.

Article 3 ensures the right to the integrity of the person, while Article 21 prohibits discrimination, including on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Article 23 explicitly guarantees equality between women and men, and Article 24 protects the rights of the child. These provisions serve as a legal basis for EU legislation and policy measures, and are directly applicable in cases involving EU law.

Although the Charter does not specifically mention GBV, its provisions reinforce legal and political action against violence, especially when combined with secondary EU legislation and Member States' obligations under international law, including the Istanbul Convention.

### 3.3. EU Directives and Resolutions addressing gender-based violence: From principles to legal action





The European Union has adopted several legal instruments and policy documents aimed at strengthening protection from gender-based violence, particularly in areas of criminal justice, victims' rights, and equality. The Victims' Rights Directive (2012/29/EU), establishes minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of victims of crime. It explicitly includes victims of gender-based violence and obliges Member States to ensure access to information, protection from secondary victimisation, and specialised support services.

In March 2022, the European Commission proposed a new directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. This proposal includes provisions on criminalising certain forms of violence (including rape based on lack of consent), ensuring victim support, and improving access to justice. The proposal is still under negotiation, but if adopted, it would represent a major step toward a unified EU legal approach to GBV.

### 3.4. The EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025): A political framework for action

Beyond legal instruments, the European Union has articulated a strong political commitment through its Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. This strategy provides a roadmap for integrating gender equality into all EU policies and actions, and places the elimination of gender-based violence at the top of the agenda. Key priorities of the strategy include:

- Ending gender-based violence
- Challenging gender stereotypes
- Ensuring equal participation across sectors
- Closing gender pay and care gaps
- Mainstreaming gender equality in EU external action

The strategy also commits to improving data collection, funding initiatives under the EU's Rights and Values Programme, and promoting cooperation between Member States. It supports civil society and grassroots organisations that work with victims, survivors, and communities.





## 3.5. The EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020-2025): Towards an inclusive approach to violence and discrimination

In parallel with its Gender Equality Strategy, the European Union has adopted the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025, a landmark political framework aimed at addressing the persistent inequalities, discrimination, and violence faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer individuals across the EU. This strategy acknowledges that gender-based violence and discrimination often intersect with sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, and therefore require a broader, inclusive and intersectional approach. The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy defines four key pillars for EU action:

- Tackling discrimination against LGBTIQ people
- Ensuring safety, including combating hate speech and hate crimes
- Protecting LGBTIQ rights around the world
- Building inclusive societies through equality mainstreaming

When it comes to safety and protection, the strategy clearly highlights that LGBTIQ people are disproportionately affected by physical and psychological violence, both in public and private spaces, and often lack access to adequate support services or legal remedies. The strategy therefore calls on Member States to:

- Strengthen legal protections, including the recognition of hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity;
- Ensure access to victim support services that are safe and inclusive;
- Improve the collection of disaggregated data to better monitor the scale and nature of violence affecting LGBTIQ communities;
- Train law enforcement and justice actors to prevent and respond effectively to anti-LGBTIQ violence and hate crimes.

The adoption of this strategy represents an important step forward in recognising that LGBTIQ persons are at increased risk of gender-based





violence, particularly when other factors, such as age, disability, ethnicity, or migration status, intersect with their identities. By linking anti-discrimination and GBV prevention, the EU promotes a more comprehensive and human-rights-based approach to protection.

The European legal and political framework on gender-based violence is multidimensional and evolving, combining legally binding instruments such as the Istanbul Convention, EU directives, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, with comprehensive political strategies like the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025

## 4. National legal framework on gender-based violence: Commitments and realities in five partner countries

Although international and European frameworks provide common standards and orientations, each country translates these commitments into national law and policy with varying approaches and levels of implementation. This section will explore how five countries, Spain, Italy, Serbia, France and Cyprus, have developed their legal and institutional responses to GBV, highlighting both progress and ongoing challenges.

### 4.1. Spain : A comprehensive and pioneering approach combatting GBV

Spain is widely recognised as a global leader in the fight against gender-based violence, thanks to its ambitious and coordinated national policies. A cornerstone of this commitment is Organic Law 1/2004 on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence, which laid the foundation for a wide-ranging approach that includes not only criminal prosecution but also prevention, education, support services, and institutional coordination. This law frames GBV as a structural issue rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances.





Spain has also adopted a State Pact against Gender Violence (2017), which ensures the participation of all levels of government and includes civil society organisations in the design and monitoring of actions. The country has set up specialised courts, enhanced legal aid for victims, and developed training for professionals across sectors. Recent legal reforms have extended protection to children, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and victims of digital violence, reflecting a broader understanding of the forms GBV can take.

Beyond its borders, Spain has become an international reference point for its feminist foreign policy, actively promoting gender equality and the fight against GBV in international fora. It engages in bilateral and multilateral cooperation through platforms such as the UN Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and contributes to humanitarian responses focused on the protection of women and girls, especially in conflict zones. Spain also plays a key role in global initiatives on online GBV, as a member of the Global Partnership to End Online Gender-based abuse and violence, promoting safe digital environments and gender-sensitive responses to misinformation. In 2024, Spain is co-chairing the Feminist Foreign Policy+ Group alongside Mexico, reinforcing its commitment to an intersectional, rights-based, and globally coordinated approach.

Despite its strong legal and policy frameworks, Spain still faces implementation challenges, especially in ensuring consistency across its autonomous regions, improving protection for migrant women, and addressing emerging forms of violence. Nevertheless, its integrated, rights-based approach offers a valuable model for other countries working to fight GBV at national and international levels.

## 4.2. Italy : Legal progress with persistent implementation gaps

Italy has made significant legislative and policy progress in recent years to combat gender-based violence, aligning its national efforts with international and European obligations. The legal framework is primarily anchored in the Italian Penal Code, which includes specific criminal provisions addressing domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, forced marriage, and genital





mutilation. Law No. 69/2019, also known as the “Codice Rosso” (Red Code), introduced fast-track procedures for cases involving gender-based violence and expanded legal protections for survivors.

In March 2025, a major milestone was reached with recognition of femicide as a distinct criminal offence. This shift reflects a broader understanding of gender-based violence and aims to improve both legal accountability and public awareness. Italy has also launched a new National Strategic Plan (2024-2026) to prevent and combat violence against women. This strategy adopts an integrated, multi-sectoral approach that focuses on prevention, victim protection, prosecution of perpetrators, and long-term support.

In addition to domestic measures, Italy has ratified the Istanbul Convention and periodically reports to its monitoring body, GREVIO. The country also works closely with international human rights mechanisms such as CEDAW, which has recognised Italy’s legislative progress while urging efforts, especially regarding unequal access to justice for migrant and minority women, and the need for improved data collection and support services.

Despite these advances, Italy continues to face persistent challenges, including deep-rooted gender stereotypes, underreporting of violence, and uneven implementation of protection measures across regions. Nonetheless, recent legislative reforms and strategic commitments mark a clear political will to strengthen the fight against GBV, and to align Italian practice more closely with international standards.

### 4.3. Serbia : A gradual alignment with European Standards on Gender-Based violence

Serbia has taken notable steps to address gender-based violence, particularly through its legal and institutional alignment with European and international human rights frameworks. A key milestone was the adoption of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence (2016), which introduced urgent protection measures, risk assessments, and interinstitutional coordination between police, social services, and the judiciary. This law marked a shift toward a preventive and coordinated response to violence within the family context.





Serbia is also a party to the Istanbul Convention, which it ratified in 2013. However, implementation remains uneven, with civil society organisations regularly highlighting gaps in enforcement, insufficient support for victims, and persistent societal tolerance of violence. In response to these challenges, the Serbian government adopted a National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based violence against women and domestic violence (2021-2025). This strategy reflects Serbia's commitment to a systemic and proactive approach, aiming not only to improve victim protection and perpetrator accountability but also to address the root causes of gender-based violence, such as structural inequalities and cultural norms.

Despite this strategic framework, practical challenges remain, including underreporting, limited access to services in rural areas, and a lack of sustainable funding for support organisations. Human rights bodies and women's organisations continue to advocate for stronger political will and more consistent implementation of legal provisions, particularly in marginalized communities such as Roma women, women with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ persons.

#### 4.4. France : Reinforcing the legal and institutional response to gender-based violence

France has progressively strengthened its legal and policy framework to address gender-based violence (GBV), particularly through a combination of legislation, national strategies, and public awareness campaigns. The country recognises a wide range of acts as forms of GBV, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and psychological abuse. These acts are punishable under the French penal code, and specific laws have been enacted to ensure stronger protection and reparation for victims.

A key policy tool in recent years has been the Grenelle on Domestic Violence, launched in 2019, which brought together stakeholders from across society to propose urgent and long-term measures. This initiative led to more than 40 concrete actions, including the creation of emergency accommodation spaces,





expansion of protection orders, better monitoring of perpetrators, and enhanced training for professionals. France has also implemented several national action plans, such as the 2023-2027 National Strategy to combat violence against women, which focuses on prevention, early detection, victim support, punishment of perpetrators, and coordination between services. The strategy aims to promote an integrated approach, with particular attention to women in vulnerable situations, such as migrants, women with disabilities, and those living in rural areas. In addition, France has demonstrated a growing commitment to combating violence and discrimination targeting LGBT+ individuals. The 2020–2023 National Plan against Anti-LGBT+ Hatred and Discrimination introduced targeted measures.

In 2023, France also adopted a National plan for equality between women and men, which addresses structural discrimination and promotes gender equality across all sectors. In the judicial system, the creation of specialised units in police and gendarmerie services, as well as dedicated prosecutors, aims to improve the treatment of GBV cases and facilitate access to justice for survivors.

On the international stage, France remains an active supporter of the Istanbul Convention, engages with CEDAW, and promotes gender equality through its development and diplomatic policies. However, significant challenges persist: underreporting remains widespread, and the justice system is still criticised for secondary victimisation, delays in legal proceedings, and the inconsistent enforcement of protective measures.

#### 4.5. Cyprus : Consolidating legal and policy commitments to combat gender-based violence

Cyprus has taken important steps in recent years to strengthen its legal and institutional response to gender-based violence, aligning its national efforts with international and European standards. The country ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2017, which has since become a central reference point for national legislation and policy planning. A major legislative development was the adoption of Law 115(I)/2021 on the Prevention and Combating of Violence



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against women and domestic violence. This comprehensive law not only incorporates the provisions of the Istanbul Convention but also establishes a clear definition of gender-based violence, recognises various forms of violence (physical, psychological, economic, and sexual), and outlines the responsibilities of state institutions. It also strengthens legal protection mechanisms and sets minimum standards for victim support services, such as shelters, hotlines, and specialised counselling.

Cyprus has developed National Action Plans on gender equality and more specifically National Strategies on the prevention and combating of violence against women. The 2023–2026 strategy reinforces inter-agency cooperation and promotes a survivor-centred approach, ensuring victims are supported throughout the legal and recovery processes. Efforts have also been made in the education sector, with awareness campaigns in schools and training for educators to identify and respond to early signs of GBV. The Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality plays a central coordinating role, monitoring implementation and promoting gender mainstreaming across public institutions.

In parallel, Cyprus has committed to combating discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ+ individuals, with specific initiatives to promote inclusion and ensure access to justice. While progress is ongoing, civil society organisations have called for further action to address persistent barriers, such as underreporting and societal stigma. Despite these advances, challenges remain, including the need for more effective law enforcement, improved data collection, and stronger support services in rural areas. Continued efforts are required to ensure that laws are not only well-crafted but fully implemented and accessible to all.

This comparative overview shows the importance of context-sensitive approaches, strong political engagement, and collaboration between institutions and civil society. It also underlines the necessity to monitor and evaluate national strategies to ensure that rights on paper translate into meaningful protection and empowerment in practice. As we move forward, sharing good practices and learning from both successes and shortcomings across these countries can foster a stronger, more coordinated European





response to gender-based violence, rooted in human rights, equality, and justice for all.

## 5. Resources, support systems and protection mechanisms available at international, European and national levels

### 5.1. International resources and support mechanisms

At the international level, a wide range of mechanisms and institutions provide guidance, technical support, and coordination to combat GBV. Key actors such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have developed global standards, data tools, and response systems. These include the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for GBV in humanitarian settings, and the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), which helps collect and manage data ethically and safely.

These mechanisms aim to ensure survivor protection, inform programming, and strengthen national capacities in both stable and crisis contexts. They promote a human rights-based and gender-responsive approach, while encouraging governments and NGOs to ensure access to services such as safe shelters, legal assistance, psychosocial care, and emergency healthcare.

### 5.2. European-level mechanisms and resources

Within the European Union and the Council of Europe, several mechanisms exist to support states in preventing and responding to GBV. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) monitors the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) provides research, indicators, and good practices to inform policy and improve support services.





In addition, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) regularly conducts surveys and publishes reports on violence and discrimination. Through various EU-funded programmes (such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme), NGOs and institutions receive financial support to strengthen local prevention and protection measures. These instruments aim to ensure coherence across Member States, close protection gaps, and support a rights-based and victim-centred approach to violence.

### 5.3. National-level support systems and services for victims

Each partner country has developed specific mechanisms to support survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), often combining public services and civil society initiatives. While legal frameworks provide the foundation, it is the practical implementation of services that determines their real-life impact on victims. Below are concrete examples from each country involved in the partnership:

In the five partner countries, several mechanisms support victims of gender-based violence. In Spain, the 016 hotline is free, multilingual, accessible to persons with disabilities, and complemented by a network of shelters and specialized care centres. In Italy, the Centri Antiviolenza (CAV), largely managed by feminist associations, provides legal, psychological, and social assistance, reinforced by the national 1522 hotline. In Serbia, SOS helplines and safe houses run by the state or NGOs offer support, protection, and advocacy, such as the Autonomous Women's Center in Belgrade. In France, the innovative Maison des Femmes model brings together medical, legal, psychological, and police services under one roof, making survivors' pathways simpler and more accessible. Finally, in Cyprus, the SPAVO association operates the national 1440 hotline, shelters, and counselling centres, while also conducting awareness-raising and professional training initiatives.

These examples demonstrate how national systems are concretely structured to respond to GBV. Yet, disparities remain in accessibility, especially in rural or marginalised areas. In addition, some services still fail to adequately include or protect LGBTIQ+ persons, migrants, or individuals with disabilities, who face





specific forms of violence and barriers. Strengthening institutional coordination, funding, and staff training is essential to ensuring effective and inclusive services.

## 5.4. The importance of coordination and a survivor-centered approach

An effective response to GBV cannot rely on isolated measures. Instead, it requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that brings together legal, medical, psychological, and social services at all levels. This coordination ensures that survivors do not fall through the cracks of fragmented systems and that responses are consistent, timely, and adapted to survivors' needs.

Coordination means building clear and reliable pathways between institutions: the police, hospitals, legal aid services, shelters, social workers, and civil society organisations. By establishing joint protocols, shared standards of care, and efficient communication channels, each actor understands their role and contributes to a seamless chain of support. Some countries have even introduced shared data systems, respecting confidentiality and the rights of survivors, to ensure better case tracking and coordination. National coordination bodies or inter-ministerial committees, as found in countries like Spain or France, often help ensure that all stakeholders are aligned and that GBV policies are implemented consistently.

However, coordination alone is not enough. The effectiveness of any system depends on how survivors are treated. A survivor-centered approach places the dignity, rights, and needs of the person at the heart of all interventions. It begins with ensuring the survivor's safety and continues with protecting their confidentiality, seeking their informed consent at every step, and avoiding any form of judgment or pressure. A truly survivor-centered approach acknowledges that recovery from GBV is not only about immediate protection or crisis intervention, it is also about long-term empowerment. This includes access to justice, education, employment, housing, and psychological recovery. Survivors must be supported in rebuilding their lives with autonomy, dignity, and hope.



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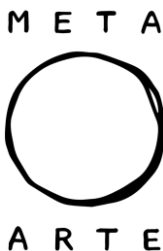
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