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OVERCOMING CRISES

Reimagining essential services for women survivors of violence in the Western Balkans after the COVID-19 pandemic





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* For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence. For UN Women, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

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List of Acronyms

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CLCI	Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives
DV	Domestic violence
EU	European Union
GADC	Gender Alliance for Development Centre
GBV	Gender-based violence
IPA	Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance
NGO	Non-governmental organization
she	Center “Shelter Edlira Haxhiymeri”
TF	Technology-facilitated
VAW	Violence against women



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings of the assessment of the impact of multiple crises on the provision of services in response to violence against women (VAW), supported through the regional programme ‘Implementing norms, changing minds’, implemented by UN Women with financial support from the European Commission. The regional programme in its second phase (February 2020 to July 2023) aims at ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) and Türkiye, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT?

The assessment is based on a survey conducted in March 2023 designed as a follow up of the assessment conducted in the first month of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020). The first assessment was motivated by the need of the regional programme “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds” to understand how the reality of service provision to women survivors of gender-based violence by partner organizations had changed and the key challenges and needs for support in order to adapt and continue providing support to women throughout the pandemic.

The purpose of this in-depth assessment is to contribute to identifying the capacities and constraints of service providers in addressing and preventing VAW and VAW-related issues in the situation of multiple crises, also focusing on new challenges, including safety in the digital space and technology-facilitated (TF) violence; to provide insights into organizational responses to old and new challenges and pressing needs as well as to inform key stakeholders’ policy and programming strategies directed towards prevention and response to violence against women.¹

The assessment was conducted using mixed methodology: (1) online survey with 41 NGO programme partners² that provide support services to survivors of VAW, but also those who participated in the programme with research and advocacy activities, complemented with (2) in-depth interviews with selected organizations (12); from all programme Western Balkan

1 More about the programme can be found at <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/regional-programme-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey/about-the-programme#issue>

2 Geographical distribution: 8 from Albania, 5 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 5 from Kosovo, 6 from Montenegro, 8 from North Macedonia and 9 from Serbia.

countries and regional partners). The questionnaire was designed to ensure comparability with the first assessment, but also to include new issues, such as technology-facilitated violence.

WHO ARE THE ORGANIZATIONS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE ASSESSMENT?

The organizations participating in the follow-up assessment are partners of the “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds” regional programme. These are the same organizations who participated in the first assessment, with four additional organizations participating in the 2023 survey than in 2020. The organizations are diverse in a number of aspects: longevity, size, outreach in terms of geographical coverage as well as in terms of target groups, and provision of specialized and/or general services. The ‘oldest’ organization was established in 1994 and the ‘youngest’ in 2018. The organizations are mainly women’s organizations, as they were (with few exceptions) founded as women’s rights or feminist organizations and engage predominantly women as employees and volunteers.

WHAT DOES THE ASSESSMENT TELL US ABOUT CHANGES, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS FOR SUPPORT AMONG PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS?

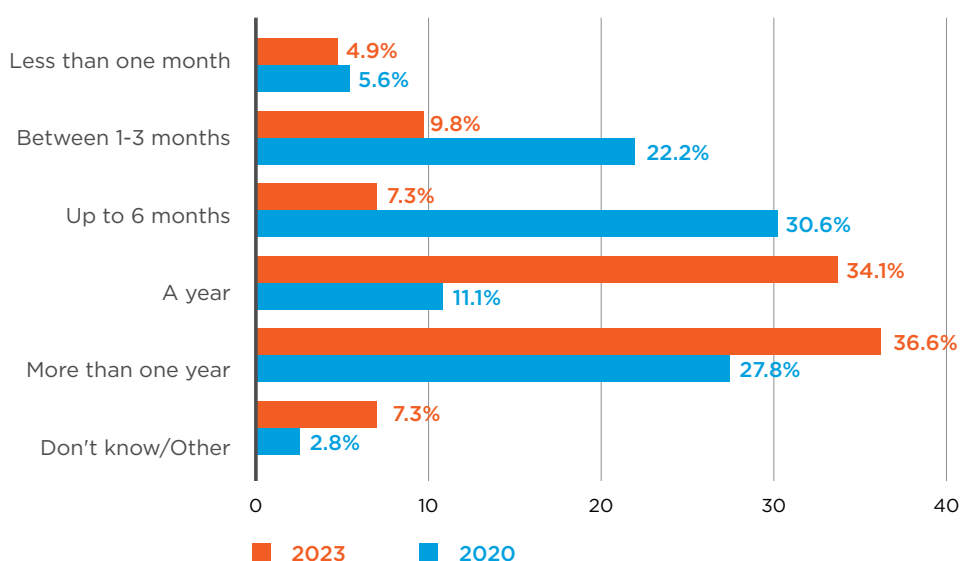
The organizational profile has slightly changed, as organizations on average have decreased in size...

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations on average employed and otherwise engaged 25 persons (including permanent and temporary staff, volunteers and interns). In March 2023, the average number of persons engaged was 22.

...Organizations have expanded geographical outreach of services and increased resilience...

The proportion of organizations delivering services limited to the local community has decreased (from 16.2% to 2.4%), and the share of organizations delivering services to the particular region in the country or on the national scale has increased from 16.2% to 29.3% and from 51.4% to 63.4% respectively. This was partly the consequence of providing online services, which enabled extended outreach of at least some services.

Figure: Estimated period of ability to provide services in a crisis situation, comparison of April 2020 and March 2023, %



The response to the COVID-19 crisis and programme support increased the resilience of organizations. The proportion of organizations stating they would be able to continue service provision for one year or more without additional financial support has remarkably increased, while the proportion of those able to continue for 1-3 months has declined. The proportion of very fragile organizations (those who would be unable to continue service provision for even one month) remained stable.

...Organizations are predominantly funded by international donors, while funding from national and local budgets is rare and small in scale...

The proportion of organizations that are at least partly funded by international donors **has increased** between the two assessments from 78.4% to 87.8%. The proportion of organizations receiving financial support from international **non-governmental donors, foundations and charities has decreased** from 67.6% to 48.8%. Financing from public budgets is much smaller than funding from international and bilateral funding streams. The assessment revealed opposing trends regarding the proportion of organizations accessing funds from local and central level public budgets. The share of organizations receiving funds from **local budgets has decreased**, while the share of those who receive funds from **central level budgets has increased**. Nevertheless, the proportion of funds coming from state budgets remains small compared to international donors, and the proportion of organizations receiving funds from state budget remains low.

Representatives of organizations reported that available funds are declining. They have found themselves in a financial gap because donors increasingly claim that states should take over the responsibility of financing these important community services, while states at national or local level expect that donor support will still be available. In particularly difficult situations are small organizations, which are disappearing, leaving communities without available support services for women survivors of violence in already weak institutional settings that do not provide an adequate response to VAW.

...After the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, organizations temporarily cancelled services, but services were mostly restored due to programme support and huge efforts of staff, who managed to maintain crucial services despite the multiple crises...

The organizations provide a diversity of specialist and general support services. In March 2023 the most common specialist service was a helpline (provided by 53.7% of organizations), while less than a third ran shelters for women survivors of violence, one in seven provided support to child witnesses, one in eight ran rape crisis or sexual violence centres, and one in twenty had specialized programmes for perpetrators. In addition to these services, slightly less than half of organizations participate in local coordination teams and more than one-third include in their protection services the development of safety plans.

In addition to specialized services, the organizations provide various general support services. The most common service is general counselling and information sharing, followed by assistance to victims of violence to access other institutions in the coordinated support system, such as police, judiciary, and social protection. The majority of organizations offer some form of free legal aid and psychological services, either as part of other support services or as a stand-alone service. Organizations offer also, albeit to a lesser extent, assistance accessing health care or services related to social integration for women survivors of violence, such as education and training, assistance in finding employment, in kind or financial assistance and housing support. Comprehensive social (re)integration programmes, which combine simultaneously several general support services (for example housing, education and employment), are being delivered by slightly more than one fifth of organizations.

In addition to service provision, 95% of organizations are engaged in **advocacy activities** related to the advancement of women's rights and protection from VAW, as well as in various VAW **prevention activities and campaigns** aiming at changing attitudes, gender norms and eliminating gender stereotypes. **Research and analysis** also inform advocacy and awareness raising campaigns and have been conducted by 80% of organizations participating in the assessment. Some organizations are also active in capacity building of diverse stakeholders, monitoring the system for protection of women and girls from VAW, and other related activities.

Organizations address all forms of gender-based violence against women, but they mostly focus on physical and psychological violence, followed by sexual harassment, economic violence and neglect, and sexual violence, including rape, stalking, and to a smaller degree child and forced marriages, forced abortion and sterilization, female genital mutilation, with few organizations also active in the area of prevention and protection of victims of human trafficking.

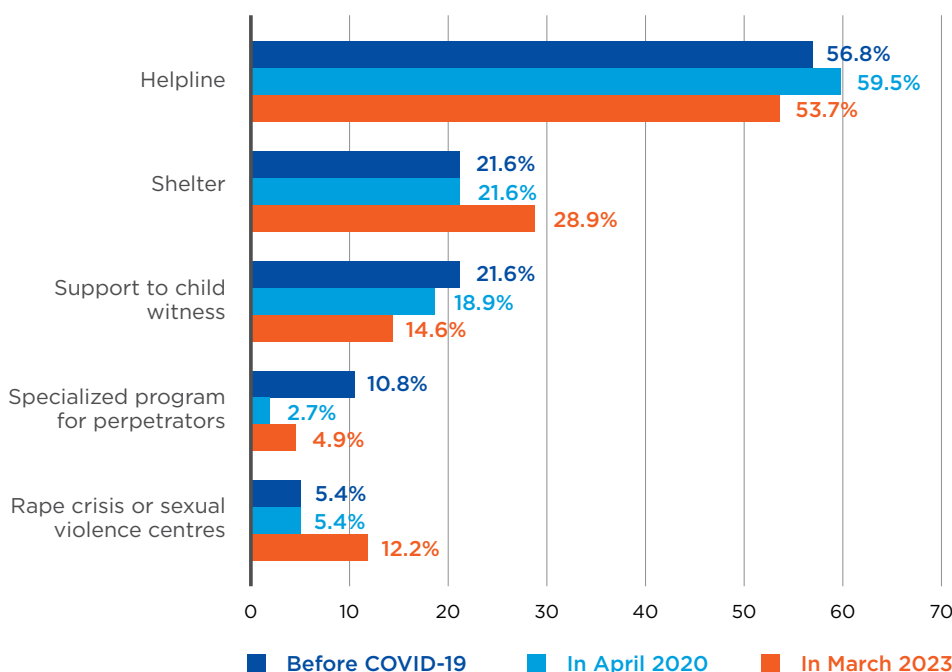
At some point after the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, 82 services were cancelled. With the exception of a few, **all were restored to some or full extent** and the UN Women’s regional programme “Implementing Norms, Changing Minds” was reported as crucial for service restoration in the case of 62 services (75.6%).

...Times of crises have impacted the provision of specialized services: the proportion of organizations running shelters and rape crisis or sexual violence centers has increased while the proportion of organizations providing helpline, support to child witnesses or specialized programmes for perpetrators has declined...

Helpline support is the service that has transformed the most during the observed period, as the impact of pandemic and restrictive measures called for innovation. While in pre-COVID times this support was almost fully provided through telephone lines, today diverse channels are used – online platform, mobile apps, special hidden apps. As a result, organizations report increased outreach overall and better outreach to some previously poorly targeted women from marginalized groups or communities.

Challenges to sustainability and quality of services are numerous and similar for all specialized services: lack of sufficient and stable funds, need for more staff including those with specific skills and specialization, staff burnout due to the increased demand for support and lack of adequate financial and human resources, and weakening cooperation with other institutions in the system for protection.

Figure: Types of services provided by organizations prior to COVID-19 as reported in the April 2020 assessment and currently provided services as reported in March 2023 assessment, % of organizations who provided services



The lack of state support to services is systematic and noticeable across the countries and types of services. International donors are those that keep services going. However, these funds are not always tailored in line with the needs of service providers and contexts influenced by multiple crises.

‘COVID has strongly influenced the situation of women and service provision. Many women experienced socio-economic decline, particularly those who were employed in black and not entitled to governmental support provided to formally employed workers. Due to the lockdowns, they were confined for a long time with perpetrators in their homes, so their situation was overall very difficult. Donor support helped us adjust to this situation and support women more adequately. Thanks to donor support we were able to pay rent, deliver food packages, to be available 24 hours.’

NGO from Albania

...All general services except psychosocial counselling, financial and in-kind assistance, and housing support are presently offered by organizations to a lesser extent than before the pandemic...

An area of particularly noticeable decline is the participation of NGOs in multisectoral coordination. In general, cooperation with state institutions in the system for protection – police, health care, social protection, judiciary – has worsened since the COVID outbreak. As a consequence, organizations face higher demand for assistance but at the same time are less able to provide adequate support when the participation of mentioned institutions is required. Examples of good cooperation are relatively rare, and the majority of organizations report worsening cooperation with other stakeholders and bigger obstacles in referrals.

Psychosocial support and free legal aid remain the two most important general services, and many organizations invest significant efforts to maintain or expand these services since demand has been increasing.

...Multiple crises have a negative impact on other forms of engagement – campaigning, awareness raising, advocacy and research...

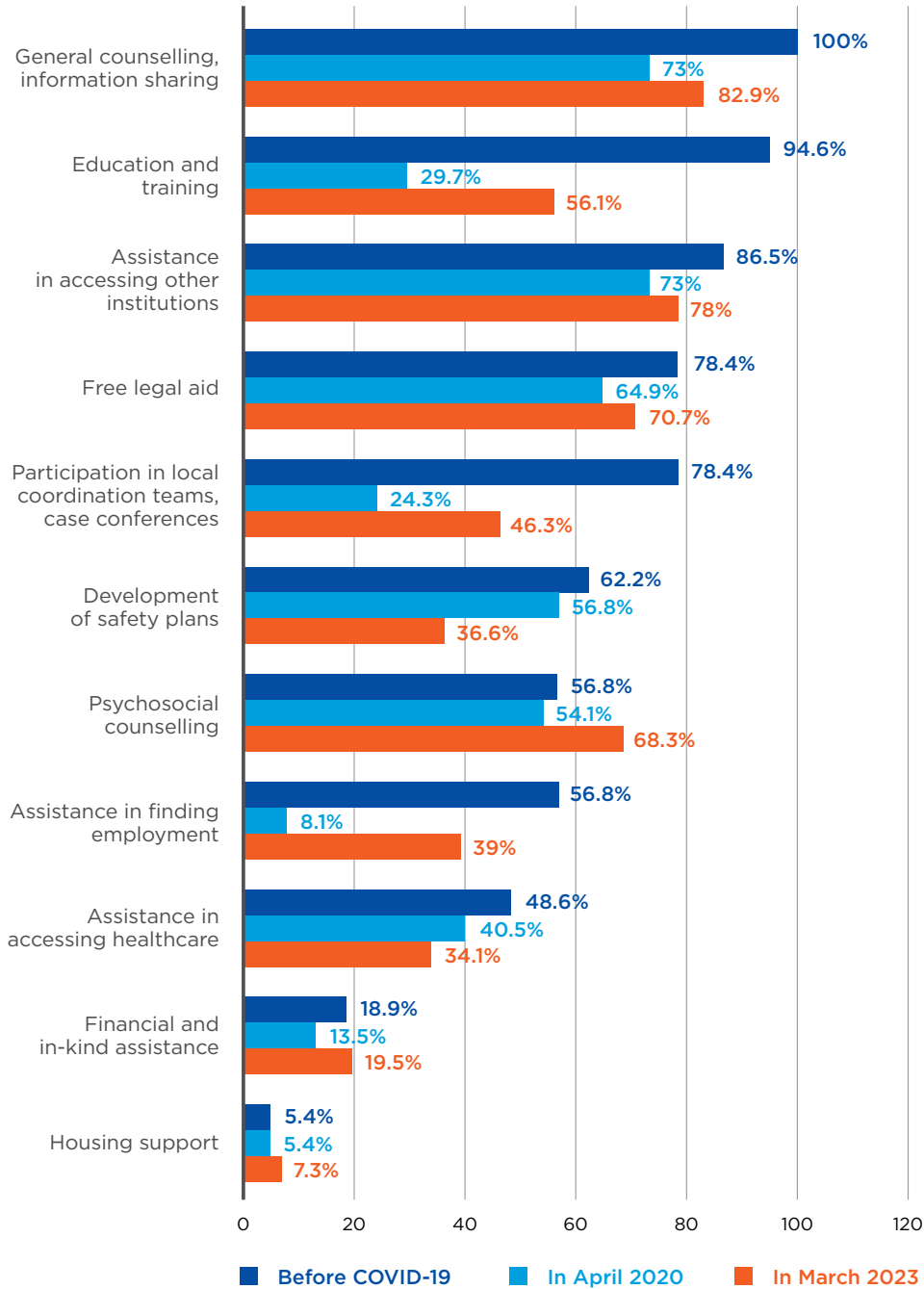
Awareness raising and campaigning activities, which are important for outreach but also for broader changes of norms and stereotypes, are faced with a lack of funds. “Big campaigns are missing,” there is lack of state actors to finance such campaigns, and a lack of cooperation with the media, particularly the most influential ones. Organizations lack professional skills related to campaigns and funds to engage marketing experts.

Similar obstacles are present for research, with the addition of obstacles related to access to administrative data, lack of transparency of institutions and willingness of governmental stakeholders to provide information and data from their records.

The research capacities of organizations are limited and cooperation with academia underdeveloped. The agency of many groups of women are weakening, and their motivation to participate in awareness raising activities is often low.

The motivation of policymakers to be receptive to advocacy and lobbying initiatives is much lower than before, and organizations report difficulties in bringing them onboard for ERAW initiatives.

Figure: Types of services provided by organizations prior to COVID-19 as reported in April 2020 assessment and currently provided services as reported in March 2023 assessment, % of organizations who provided services



...Particularly challenging was the delivery of support services to women survivors from marginalized groups...

Organizations noticed that violence against women has increased since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. It became more complex as women reported more often multiform violence (e.g., physical combined with psychological and economic) and more severe violence.

Organizations provide support to diverse groups of marginalized women: older women, women from ethnic minorities, refugees and other migrant women, women living in rural areas, women with disabilities, LGBTI women and women who they identify as sex workers or women in prostitution. They face diverse challenges in outreach and assistance to these groups due to their specific situation, including more difficult outreach to those who do not use digital technologies and could not access support services during lockdowns and isolation. Other challenges include poor transport, language barriers, and lack of cooperation with other institutions with an important role in protection.

Organizations employed various mitigation strategies to ensure outreach to women from these groups and provide adequate assistance, including information sharing through channels that are more suitable for these women, using connections with institutions to ensure referral as needed, establishing mobile teams for outreach, and similar.

...There is huge untapped potential among organizations for more diverse, available and quality services, but with the current situation, organizations are more focused on survival than expansion and innovation...

There is huge potential among participating organizations to further develop their services. The largest proportion of organizations reported they would like to open a shelter for survivors of violence, special programmes for perpetrators, and rape crisis or sexual violence centers. However, with the current level of support, they are not able to introduce new services on a larger scale or in a sustainable manner.

Their engagement with online and TF violence is becoming increasingly important, but they need to build capacities to address these new forms of violence as well as a more adequate legal framework.

Although there are examples of innovative strategies and approaches that were induced by crises, representatives of organizations claim that times of crises force them more to focus on survival than to be creative and to introduce innovations.

WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE REGIONAL PROGRAMME DURING THE TIMES OF MULTIPLE CRISES?

- The programme was open to listen to practical problems and address them. This ensured good results in terms of organizations being able to maintain or restore services and to increase their own resilience to multiple crises.
- Having an annual thematic focus was a very good choice as it enabled more focused attention and action on selected topics.
- Regional exchange and networking is of particular importance in times of crises, as organizations learn they are not alone or isolated with their problems, but that others share the same challenges. Regional cooperation enables the sharing of learning, findings, and solutions and multiplying benefits of new practices and answers to same or similar challenges.
- The programme supported smaller NGOs which face many obstacles to access funds, particularly from donors with demanding administrative procedures.
- Mobile teams are a good solution for some groups of women, especially for outreach and support in times of crises.
- The right balance between campaigning and service provision is key to success in challenging contexts of crisis. As campaigns increase demand for services, organizations should be certain they have the capacity to meet increased demand.
- Self-help groups are a very good modality to bring women out of isolation in times of crisis and provide peer support.

WHAT IS RECOMMENDED TO IMPROVE SERVICE PROVISION IN TIMES OF CRISES?

Recommendations for policymakers:

- The legal framework should be fully aligned with the Istanbul Convention in all countries in the region as they are signatories, particularly in the area of some forms of violence that are currently not properly legally recognized, such as sexual violence, child marriages, etc.
- The legal framework should be improved in regard to new forms of GBV, such as online and technology-facilitated violence against women.
- Licensing policies should be reviewed and revised accordingly, as currently in some countries they are unrealistic and require too high of standards from NGO providers (even those with decades of experience) without proper support.
- Introduce some safety net crisis funding as part of the state budget to support services in times of crises.
- There is a need to establish crisis centres as reports of sexual violence has been on the rise, and demand for support has been noticed in all countries. Experienced NGO service providers should be recognized as partners in these efforts.
- It is important to increase cooperation between NGOs and state services, which will enable the sensitization of professionals and the development of procedures and standards centered around victims and survivors. Also, all administrative barriers should be addressed through cooperative efforts.

Recommendations for NGOs service providers and activists:

- A legal analysis that provides recommendations for the improvement of the normative framework addressing online and technology-facilitated violence should be conducted in all countries in the region.
- Advocacy and lobbying directed toward state stakeholders should take place at national and local levels to recognize the importance of services and the state's responsibility to finance them as required by the Istanbul Convention.
- Organizations providing services should approach in a more systematic way the issue of addressing excessive workload and burn out among professionals and activists providing services, as this influences their quality of life as well as the quality of services.
- Fundraising capacities should be increased within organizations, and information about available funds, their requirements and available core/institutional funding should be disseminated among partner organizations and more broadly in the civil sector engaged in EVAWG.

International donors:

- It is important to support organizations in building their capacities for work with victims of online and technology-facilitated violence. Presently they face increased demand for support that includes addressing these forms of violence, but they do not have sufficient knowledge and instruments for that.
- Possibilities to introduce core/institutional funding at least to a certain extent should be discussed and assessed, as it promotes the sustainability of services.
- Sub-granting should be continued, as it enables small and grassroots organizations to access funds who may otherwise struggle to survive or disappear because they are not able to meet the criteria of larger funds.
- It is important to restore and advance the participation of NGOs in multisectoral coordination. UN Women can be a 'mediator' that can support (re)establishing links between NGO service providers and state stakeholders.
- It is needed to organize regional exchanges on a regular basis, and more often in a face-to-face format, as there is certain fatigue from online meetings. The exchange can be organized around specific topics and can serve to exchange experiences, good practices, and discussion on the situation, as well as to plan for joint advocacy and lobbying. Concerted efforts, even if focused on specific countries, can provide better impact than isolated attempts, particularly in fighting anti-gender movements, misogyny, and gender stereotypes. There is need for more cooperation, solidarity and synergy to counter rising anti-gender equality movements.
- Foster cooperation through joint projects as funds for regional initiatives become available.
- Cooperation between NGOs and academia should be promoted through exchange and project cooperation.
- Support more networking between women's organizations in the region with the aim to counter rising anti-gender equality movements.
- Work on raising awareness through more large-scale campaigns as small campaigns have a very limited effect.



1. Introduction

1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This report presents the findings of the assessment of the impact of multiple crises on the provision of services in response to violence against women (VAW), supported through the regional programme 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds', implemented by UN Women with financial support from the European Commission. The regional programme in its second phase (February 2020 to July 2023) aims at ending gender-based discrimination and violence against women in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) and Türkiye, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women.³

The second phase of the programme started at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, to which the programme responded with a rapid assessment of the challenges faced by organizations engaged in the provision of services to women survivors of VAW as well as by other programme partners who

were more focused on research, advocacy and awareness-raising activities related to gender-based violence against women. The first assessment was conducted in April 2020, providing valuable insights to the rapidly changing reality in the ground, organizational practices and modalities of service delivery, challenges and needs for support to organizations so they will be able to continue their important role of providing support to survivors of gender-based violence.

As the assessment was conducted during restrictive governmental measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it showed that organizations faced extensive challenges; their need for support ranged from the use of new technologies and channels for communication and outreach, through developing the capacities of staff to be able to work in the new environment and with new protocols, to the provision of protective equipment and humanitarian aid to women beneficiaries.

³ More about the programme can be found at <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/regional-programme-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey/about-the-programme#issue>



1.2 CONTEXT OF MULTIPLE AND CONTINUOUS CRISES

The period between the two assessments (April 2020–March 2023) was marked by multiple crises, as the COVID-19 pandemic was complemented or replaced by other crises: the war in Ukraine, economic crises resulting from the war, frequent or continuous political tensions and conflict in the programme countries, and the growing distance between civil society and governments in some countries in the region. Political instabilities and tensions were remarkable within the countries, with high tensions between political parties around election periods (for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, and Serbia), as well as in very challenging negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina.

Such context has contributed to an increasingly unfavourable environment for women’s rights and the everyday safety of women. As various assessments revealed,⁴ during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence (DV) intensified due to the lockdowns, frustrations related to movement restrictions, job loss, and the health and economic

insecurities of citizens. Political tensions in the region strengthened aggressive public discourses that encouraged backlash against women’s rights and enhanced patriarchal relations and ideologies that are deeply rooted in the Western Balkan region. Violence against women is used as one of the instruments of maintaining such ideologies and structural gender inequalities in public and private/intimate space, increasing the need for protection and more dedicated response to such violence. However, at the same time, key stakeholders’ priorities (governmental, international) shifted towards pressing issues related to these multiple crises, which was reflected in the availability of support (for example, EU IPA 2023 was fully dedicated to support the energy supply in Western Balkan beneficiary countries).

To know how this reality affects the provision of services in prevention and response to VAW and protection of survivors, as well as opportunities to conduct research, advocacy and awareness raising campaigns related to

4 UN Women, From Insights to Action. Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19, <https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-COVID-19-en.pdf>

this issue, is a first step towards a well-tailored system of support and effective programming. As experiences from the first assessment revealed, a programme implementation strategy that was highly sensitive to the context and needs of partner organizations had positive outcomes. As findings

from this follow-up assessment indicate, the resilience of organizations providing services has increased, mainly due to the support of the regional programme, and despite a very unfavourable context, they have been able to continue to provide support services.

1.3 PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The follow-up assessment was conducted to take stock of the adaptation of services in response to crises three years into the pandemic and to provide a comparison with the first iteration.

The purpose of the assessment is to contribute to identifying capacities and constraints of service providers in addressing and preventing VAW and VAW-related issues in the situation of crisis, also focusing on new challenges, including safety in the digital space and technology-facilitated (TF) violence; to provide insights in organizational responses to old and new challenges and pressing needs as well as to inform key stakeholders' policy and programming strategies directed towards prevention and response to violence against women.

The objectives of the assessment are to:

- Identify and examine the capacities and constraints of service providers in addressing and presenting VAW and VAW-related issues, particularly through the provision of specialist services as detailed in the Istanbul Convention;
- Identify the needs, recommendations, and challenges of specialist service providers, including but not limited to safety in the digital sphere and TF violence;
- Analyse the current effectiveness of mechanisms used by institutions to track and/or respond to VAW and issues related to gender-based violence (GBV), including opportunities for improving information systems and referral systems that could be used by organizations helping victims seeking support.

The assessment was conducted in March 2023 using mixed methodology: (1) online survey with 41 NGOs programme partners⁵ which provide support services to survivors of VAW, but also those who participated in the programme with research and advocacy activities, complemented with (2) in-depth interviews with selected organizations (12 – from all programme Western Balkan countries and regional partners). The questionnaire was designed to ensure comparability with the first assessment, but also to include new issues, such as technology-facilitated violence.

While in the first assessment (April 2020) 37 organizations from Western Balkans participated in the survey, in March 2023, in addition to these 37 organizations, 4 more organizations from Western Balkan countries participated in the survey. Due to the difference in survey sample size, all comparisons included in the report use percentages instead of numbers of organizations. All comparisons with the first assessment were done based on 2020 data recalculated without Türkiye.

5 Geographical distribution: 8 from Albania, 5 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 5 from Kosovo, 6 from Montenegro, 8 from North Macedonia and 9 from Serbia.



2. Service providers: profiles and resilience

Key findings:

- While organizations on average slightly decreased in size compared to pre-COVID-19, they managed to maintain almost all services, became even more resilient, and expanded the outreach of services.
- The increased resilience and recovery and extension of services is predominantly the result of support from the regional programme and other funds from international and bilateral organizations, as almost all organizations rely heavily on funding from international donors; support from national and local governments is rare and weak.

2.1 PROFILE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

The organizations participating in the follow-up assessment are diverse in a number of aspects: longevity, size, outreach in terms of geographical coverage as well as in terms of target groups, and provision of specialized and general services. The ‘oldest’ organization was established in 1994 and the ‘youngest’ in 2018. Organizations are mainly women’s organizations, as they are (with few exceptions) founded as women’s rights or feminist organizations and engage predominantly women as employees and volunteers (Table 1). They engage human resources in diverse ways, including through permanent and temporary staff, volunteers, and interns. The employment aspect is important for two reasons: as an indicator of human resources and

**SLIGHT
DECREASE
IN THE SIZE
OF ORGANIZATIONS
IN TERMS OF NUMBER
OF EMPLOYEES,
VOLUNTEERS,
AND INTERNS**

organizational capacities to provide services, but also as an indicator of the stability of employment for women and men who provide their own livelihoods working in these organizations. Comparative assessment data indicate a trend of **slight decrease in the size of organizations in terms of**

number of employees, volunteers, and interns (Table 1). While before the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations on average employed 25 persons (including permanent and temporary staff, volunteers, and interns), in March 2023 the average number of persons engaged was 22.

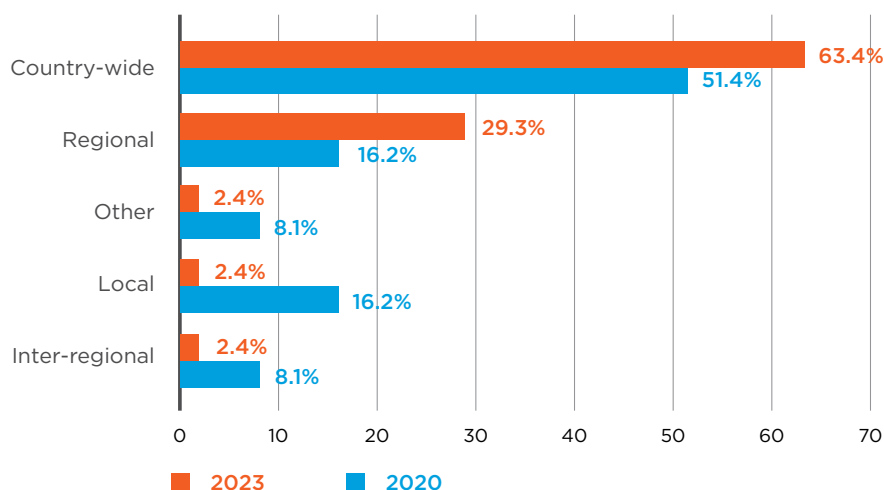
Table 1: Average number of employees before COVID-19 pandemic and in March 2023

Status	Pre-COVID 19 situation (February 2020)			Presently (March 2023)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Permanently employed	12.94	2.71	10.39	10.34	1.77	8.81
Temporarily employed	4.84	1.16	3.90	4.11	0.82	3.46
Volunteers	9.30	1.88	7.62	9.26	1.55	8.39
Interns	1.96	0.50	1.44	0.79	0.20	0.93
Total	25.32	6.28	21.81	22.13	4.25	20.81

During the same period the **geographical scope of services expanded**: the proportion of organizations delivering services limited to the local community has decreased (from 16.2% to 2.4%), and the share of organizations delivering

services to a particular region in the country or on a national scale has increased from 16.2% to 29.3% and from 51.4% to 63.4% respectively (Figure 1).

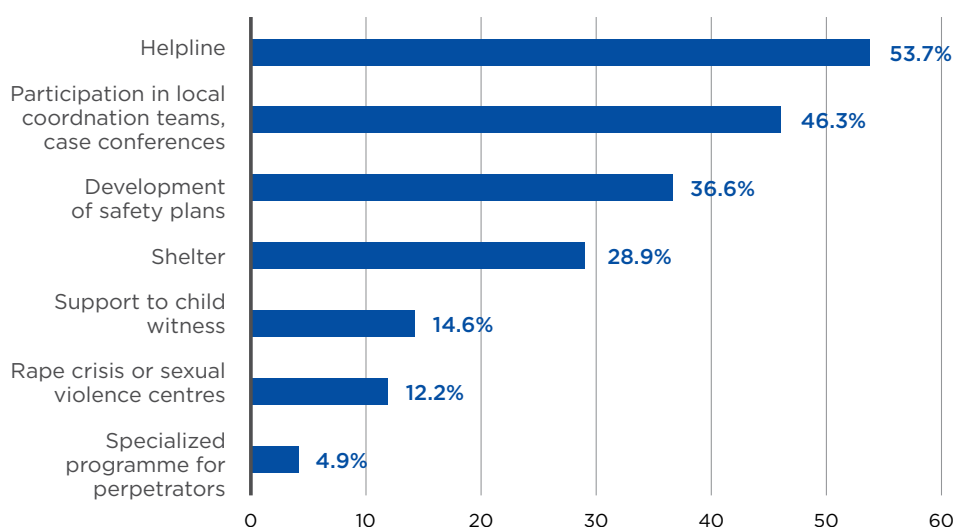
Figure 1. Geographical scope of services provided by NGOs



The organizations provide a diversity of specialist and general support services (Figures 2 and 3). In March 2023 the most common specialist service provided by organizations participating in the assessment was a helpline, while less than a third ran shelters for women survivors of violence, one in seven provided support to child witnesses, one in eight

ran rape crisis or sexual violence centres and one in twenty had specialized programmes for perpetrators. In addition to these services, slightly less than half of organizations participate in local coordination teams and more than one in three include in their protection services the development of safety plans.

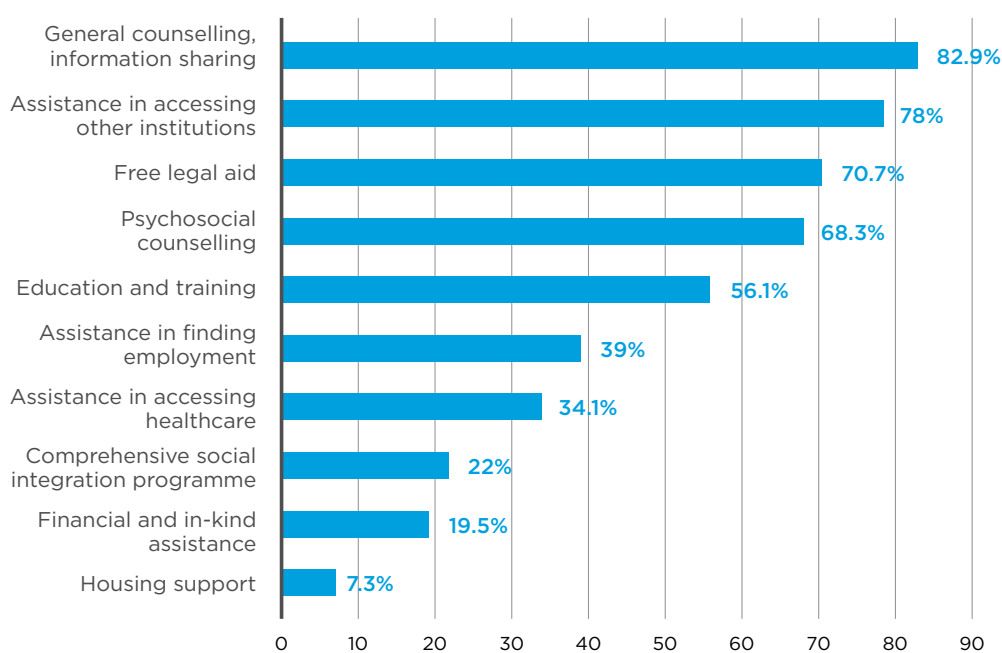
Figure 2: Types of services provided by organizations in March 2023 assessment, %



In addition to specialized services, organizations provide various general support services. The most common service is general counselling and information sharing, followed by assistance to victims of violence to access other institutions in the coordinated support system, such as police, judiciary, or social protection. The majority of organizations offer some form of free legal aid and psychological services, either as part of other support services or as a stand-alone service.

Organizations also offer, albeit to a lesser extent, assistance in accessing health care or services related to social integration for women survivors of violence, such as education and training, assistance in finding employment, in-kind or financial assistance and housing support (Figure 3). Comprehensive social (re)integration programmes, which combine simultaneously several general support services (for example housing, education and employment), are being delivered by 22% of organizations.

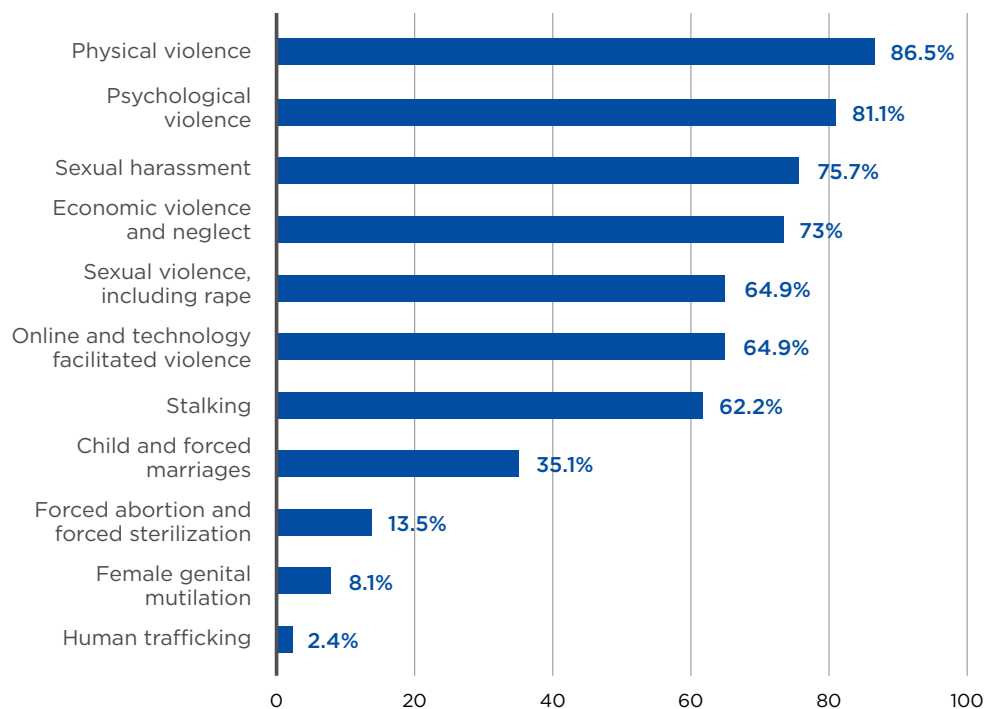
Figure 3: Types of services provided by organizations in March 2023 assessment, %



In addition to service provision, 95% of organizations are engaged in **advocacy activities** related to the advancement of women’s rights and protection from VAW, as well as in various VAW **prevention activities and campaigns** aiming at changing attitudes, gender norms and eliminating gender stereotypes. **Research and analysis** also inform advocacy and awareness raising campaigns and have been conducted by 80% of organizations participating in the assessment. Some organizations are also active in capacity building of diverse stakeholders, monitoring the system for protection

of women and girls from VAW, and other related activities. **Organizations address all forms of gender-based violence against women**, but they mostly focus on physical and psychological violence, followed by sexual harassment, economic violence and neglect, and sexual violence, including rape, stalking, and to a smaller degree child and forced marriages, forced abortion and sterilization, female genital mutilation, with few organizations also active in the area of prevention and protection of victims of human trafficking (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Types of violence organizations address. 2023, %



Even though almost two-thirds of organizations address in some way **online and technology-facilitated violence**, as findings presented in later sections indicate, **as these are emerging forms of violence, organizations often lack the**

capacities and experience to fully address these forms of violence. Some of the respondents indicated that legal and policy frameworks regarding these forms of violence are still underdeveloped.

Organizations share their experiences

‘Digital violence – it is used as part of violence in sexual and in family and partner violence. Most of the victims of sexual violence – 25% of shelter beneficiaries are victims of sexual violence and it is strongly related – either the violence started in the digital world and ended as sexual or it started as sexual and continued as digital. A lot is needed – prevention, raising awareness, a legal framework which is currently not adequate, stronger digital channels of communication with potential and current beneficiaries. Some applications, counter applications to work on communication with young girls. To work on making girls aware that they have to agree to be photographed, to be filmed. In many cases, video recordings and photographs are used in courts. First of all, we need training on how to fight it and how to empower others to fight it. It’s a new venue for us.’

NGO from BiH

The experiences and testimonies of other organizations are similar. For example, one very experienced organization from Albania has a very good network of professionals engaged in support to women victims of GBV, including lawyers and psychologists. However, the legal framework is not sufficiently developed to provide adequate ground for protection of women and girls from online and TF violence,

and professionals are not sufficiently specialized in this form of violence. The representatives of the organization recognized the need to train their activists and professionals on TF violence so they will be more effective in their advocacy efforts directed towards improving the legal framework as well as better able to provide more adequate support to women who have experienced online and TF violence.

2.2 CAPACITIES TO COPE WITH CRISES

Resilience and capacity to cope with crises was explored through three aspects: availability of premises for organizational work and service delivery, structure of funding, and estimation of period during which organizations would be able to maintain services in case of funding cuts.

OFFICE SPACE AND SERVICE FACILITIES

Organizations were instructed to combine access to premises if they had more than one office or facility for service delivery. In total, 17% of organizations own at least part of the premises they use for work or service delivery, 85.4% rent premises, 14.6% use premises provided by local government or other governmental stakeholders without paying rent, while 2.4% use premises provided by other non-governmental stakeholders without compensation. The data indicate that **expenses to cover facilities take up a significant portion of funds available to organizations and represent one of the key challenges**, particularly in the areas that experienced an inflow of Ukrainian and Russian citizens and an increase in real estate prices.

Representatives of organizations participating in interviews reported various challenges related to this aspect. Donors and programming rules often do not recognize this cost and do not want to fund office rent as an eligible cost. In other cases, when donors recognize these costs, they limit the proportion or the amount that is possible to spend on renting premises. Meanwhile, the prices of real estate have severely increased in some regions due to the abovementioned inflow of Ukrainian and Russian citizens who moved to other countries in the region after the outbreak of war in Ukraine, and organizations are not able to keep pace with increased costs of renting office space. This is particularly a problem in the coastal area of Montenegro and in some cities in Serbia.

FUNDING

International and bilateral donors are the main source of funding in both assessments, and data from March 2023 indicate that the proportion of organizations that are at least partly funded from these sources **has increased** from 78.4%

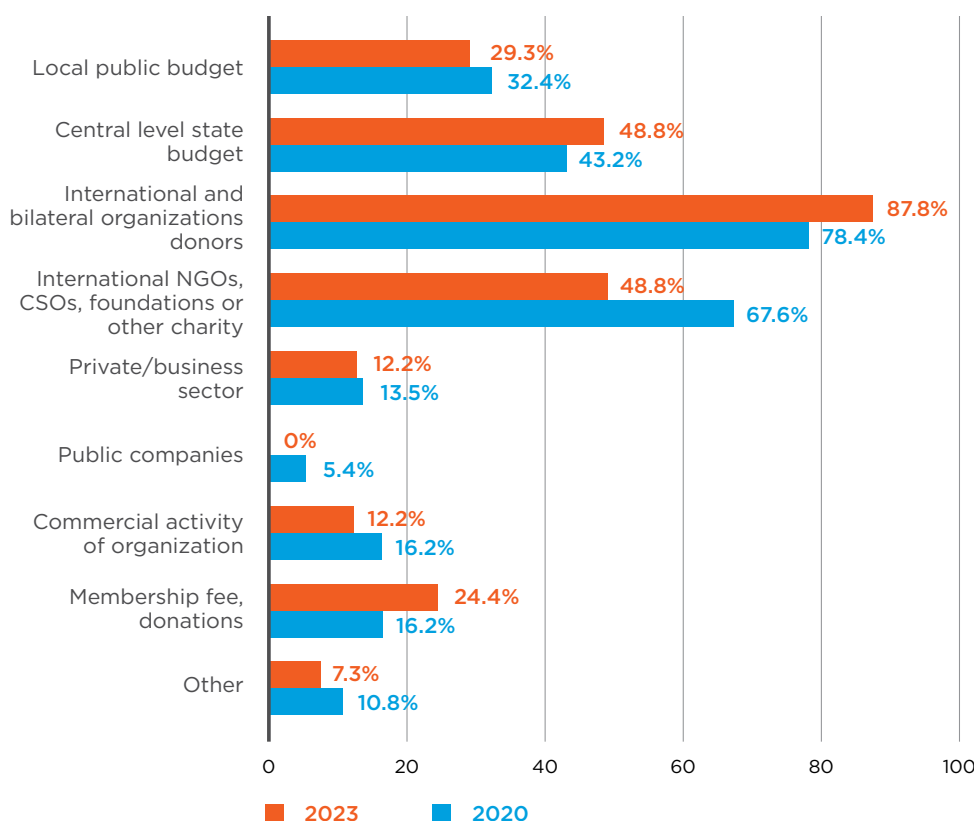
to 87.8% (Figure 2). The proportion of organizations receiving financial support by international **non-governmental donors, foundations and charities has decreased** from 67.6% to 48.8%. Financing from public budgets is much smaller than funding from international and bilateral funding streams. The assessment revealed opposing trends regarding the proportion of organizations accessing funds from local and central level public budgets. The share of organizations receiving funds from **local budgets has decreased**, while the share of those who receive funds from **central level budgets has increased**. Data also indicate that an already small proportion of organization receiving funds from **private business sector has further decreased**, while funding from **public enterprises has ceased** altogether. A decrease or shortage of external funds led to an **increase** in the proportion of organizations that receive some funding from internal sources – **membership fees or member donations** (Figure 5).

International donors or bilateral organizations are a major source of financing on which most organizations are reliant. For 78% of organizations, funds from this source are the main part of organizational funds (more than half) and 8 organizations are fully (100%) funded from this source.

More than half of organizations (60% or 12 organizations) that receive funds from international NGOs, CSOs, foundations or other charities receive less than half of their total funds from this source, while remaining 40% relies strongly on this source, as it represents more than half of their total funds.

In all countries in the region, by legal and institutional framework, local governments have an important role in financing social services, including the services in response to violence against women. However, not only has the share of organizations who receive support from this source decreased, but the amount of support received is relatively small. There is only one organization among the 41 participating in the assessment that is predominantly financed by the local government (municipality of Strumica in North Macedonia), while in other cases the amount obtained from local public budgets contributes to total organizational funds up to 20%.

Figure 5: Structure of funding by sources, comparison of April 2020 and March 2023, % of organizations that receive funds from listed sources



Funds from national/central public budgets are also relatively modest. There is no organization in the sample that receives half or more of its total funding from national/central state budgets. For most organizations who receive funds from this source (13 out of 20 or 65%), these funds represent up to 15% of total organizational funds.

Private businesses are small donors, and their donations contribute to total funds of receiving organizations up to 10%. Five organizations earn their own income from commercial activities, but the share of this income within total organizational funds is generally small, up to 5%. Some of the interviewed representatives of organizations indicated that

the funding situation has become increasingly difficult, particularly for small organizations. There are less funds available for small organizations, and as a result, they are disappearing. In some local communities, which are already marked by weak institutions for protection, women have no adequate support services. Bigger and better established organizations have to compensate for this loss, but they are also faced with stretched funding so this cannot be done easily.

Some interviewees emphasized the importance of subgrating, as larger organizations can support smaller ones and contribute to their sustainability without placing on them the burden of complex project administration.

Organizations share their experiences

‘The municipality has a system to give everyone a little bit from the local budget. It doesn’t set priorities or have strategies to allocate funds to priority areas. They put us in the same group as folklore clubs and dance groups. Those groups are co-financed by the municipality, but they also have membership fees. Here in the coastal area, rent is more expensive - now it costs around 700 euros due to the war in Ukraine, while it cost 400-500 euros before. All the funds we received did not ensure the stability of the organization. The stability of the service is important. You cannot move the service from one place to another every few months. The crisis center must be in one place.’

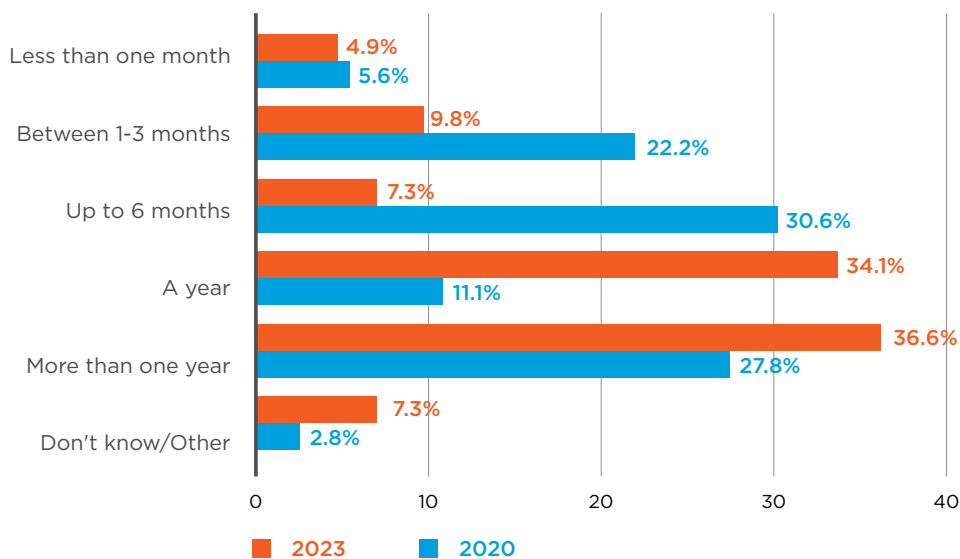
NGO from Montenegro

RESILIENCE

The response to the COVID-19 crisis and the support of the regional programme increased the resilience of organizations as evidenced by the assessment data (Figure 6). The proportion of organizations stating they would be able to endure one year or even more has remarkably increased,

while the proportion of those stating they would be able to endure between 1-3 months has declined. The proportion of very fragile organizations that could not endure even one month remained nearly the same.

Figure 6: Estimated period of ability to provide services in crisis situation, comparison of April 2020 and March 2023, %



Organizations share their experiences

‘COVID has strongly influenced the situation of women and service provision. Many women experienced socio-economic decline, particularly those who were employed in black and not entitled to the governmental support to the formally employed workers. Due to the lockdowns they were isolated for a long time with perpetrators in their homes, so their situation was overall very difficult. Donor support helped us to adjust to this situation and to be able to support women more adequately. Thanks to donor support we were able to pay rent, deliver food packages, to be available 24 hours. ‘

NGO from Albania



3. Provision of specialized services in times of crises

Key findings:

- Times of crises have impacted the provision of specialized services: the proportion of organizations running shelters and rape crisis or sexual violence centers has increased, while the proportion providing helplines, support to child witnesses or specialized programmes for perpetrators has declined.
- The pandemic had strong impact on services at some point, as in total 82 services were cancelled. With exception of few, all were restored to some or full extent and the regional programme was reported as crucial for service restoration in the case of 62 services (75.6%).
- Helpline support is the service that has transformed the most during the observed period, as the impact of the pandemic and restrictive measures incentivized innovation. While prior to COVID, this support was almost fully provided through telephone lines, today diverse channels are used – online platforms, mobile apps, special hidden apps. As a result, organizations report increased outreach overall and better outreach to some previously poorly targeted women from marginalized groups or communities.
- Challenges to sustainability and quality of services are numerous and similar for all specialized services: lack of sufficient and stable funds, a lack of staff including with specific skills and specialization, unaddressed issue of staff burnout due to increased demand for support and lack of adequate financial and human resources, and the weakening of cooperation with other institutions in the system for protection.
- A lack of state support to services is systematic and noticeable across the countries and types of services. International donors are those that keep services going on. However, these funds are not always tailored in line with the needs of service providers and contexts influenced by multiple crises.

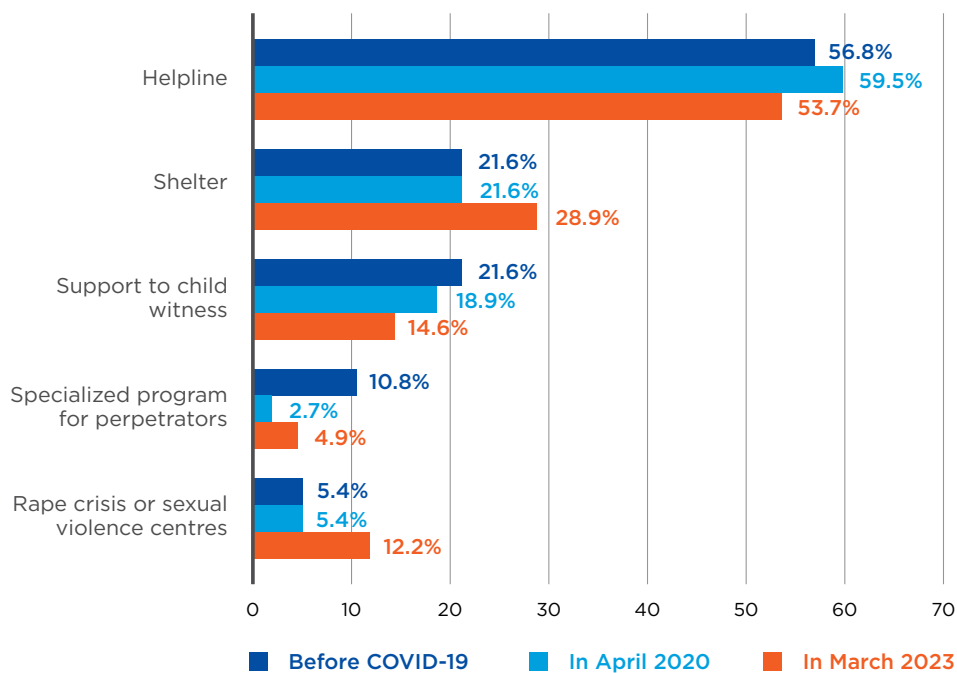
3.1 CHANGES IN SERVICE PROVISION DURING CONTINUED CRISIS

Data indicate certain shifts in the portfolio of specialized services delivered by organizations between the pre-COVID period and the first month of pandemic marked by restrictive measures and current situation. During the restrictive phase of the pandemic, the proportion of organizations providing helpline services was the highest. This is understandable, as due to the lock downs and closures, demand for support increased while options for support decreased, so organizations concentrated their efforts into providing helpline support via various channels. After the restrictive period, the proportion of organizations providing helpline services declined to a level lower than in the pre-COVID period.

There is a visible trend of an increasing proportion of organizations providing support through shelters for survivors of violence and rape crisis or sexual violence centres. In March 2023, the proportion of organizations providing these services was higher than prior to and at the beginning of COVID.

On the other hand, the proportion of organizations providing support to child witnesses and programmes for perpetrators has declined, and in March 2023, was lower than in pre-COVID times.

Figure 7: Types of services provided by organizations prior to COVID-19 as reported in April 2020 assessment and currently provided services as reported in March 2023 assessment, % of organizations who provided services



The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was strong at some point. Organizations participating in the assessment reported being forced to cancel 82 different services (both specialized and general) due to the restrictive measures, a lack of staff or a lack of funds.

Almost all services that were cancelled at some point due to the pandemic were restored and the **regional programme had a significant role in restoring these services**, as 62

out of 82 cancelled services (or 75.6%) were restored due to the regional programme support, as reported in the survey.

Participants in the interviews confirmed that support obtained through the regional programme and sometimes enhanced with support from other donors was crucial for maintaining services throughout the COVID crisis and to enable them to adjust to the challenging circumstances.

3.2 HELPLINE SERVICES

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.

Istanbul Convention, Article 24

CHANGES IN SERVICE PROVISION

Not only did the proportion of organizations providing this service change following the outbreak of COVID, but changes were also visible in the type and method of service provision. The COVID pandemic induced significant innovations in methods for service provisions. Previously predominantly provided by phone, helpline services evolved to become more accessible and available through a diversity of channels, many very well adapted to the new era of ICT technologies and for situations in which survivors may have limited opportunities to look for help.

Organizations introduced helpline support via channels such as e-mail, Viber, WhatsApp, Facebook chat or similar. Some organizations also increased the number of phone lines due to increased demand for support. Of particular value are new mobile apps specially designed to enable easy access to women in cases of violence. Some of these apps are disguised as apps that offer other content, ensuring the safety of women and easy access without risk of being seen by perpetrators.

Good practices

With support of the regional programme, the SOS Network Vojvodina from Serbia has developed a mobile phone application for reporting violence and requesting assistance. The application is prepared for IOS and Android phones and appears as a media player and library. The component of the application through which women report violence is hidden but easily accessible. With two clicks, women can report violence; the tracking system will identify them and send the report/request to one of the 13 partner organizations included in the support network, whichever is the closest to the woman.

The increase of violence and demand for support together with new technological approaches led to increased outreach as reported by organizations. Among organizations

providing helpline support, one-third (33%) reported changes in outreach, and some of them reported better or more focused targeting of some specific groups of women, such as women with disabilities and women from suburban or rural areas.

CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Key challenges that organizations faced in the provision of helpline services include difficulties related to licensing the service, burn out of staff due to the increased work overload, insufficient funds and lack of qualified staff.

Organizations face **difficulties with licensing** either because the licensing is not well regulated legally or because procedures and criteria are too demanding and complicated – for example, stable funds may be required, which are difficult to ensure or prove in advance by the organizations, and administrative procedures are burdensome, requiring a lot of documentation. As a mitigation strategy, some organizations continue to provide services without a license, while others managed to successfully complete the licensing process despite the difficulties.

Lack of qualified staff was another challenge that was mitigated by reassigning qualified staff from other tasks to the helpline, adding working hours to helpline workers and training staff engaged in other activities to be able to work on the helpline. Mobilizing additional internal resources, however, led to the burnout of persons working on helpline services. In terms of health risks, organizations were strongly focused on the pandemic and applying WHO protocols, but staff burnout was not an issue that was adequately addressed.

While organizations faced strong pressure from the community to maintain or expand services as demand for support increased after the COVID outbreak, **additional funds were either not available or insufficient to fully cover the costs of services**. One of the **mitigation strategies was to increase self-reliance** through volunteering work

or through self-financing the service for some time by transferring funds from other projects or budget lines, or in the case of networks, supporting the service from organizations who could provide funds in times of crisis. For example, the helpline delivered by SOS Network Vojvodina was maintained thanks to a coordinating organization which took responsibility to ensure minimum funds from its budget to maintain the service.

One of the issues related to the lack of funds is the limited possibility to organize information campaigns to ‘advertise’ the service and thus ensure better outreach, particularly for women from marginalized groups or communities.

The lack of information on available support services among potential women beneficiaries is a continuous problem as indicated by many organizations participating in the assessment. A good information campaign requires funds, and those specifically dedicated to awareness and outreach are often lacking.

Mitigation strategies that organizations employed include using different opportunities to disseminate information about helplines, such as social media or to deliver information or leaflets during other project activities. Interestingly, no organization mentioned cooperation with media in this regard.

Table 2: Challenges and mitigation strategies in provision of helpline support to survivors of VAW

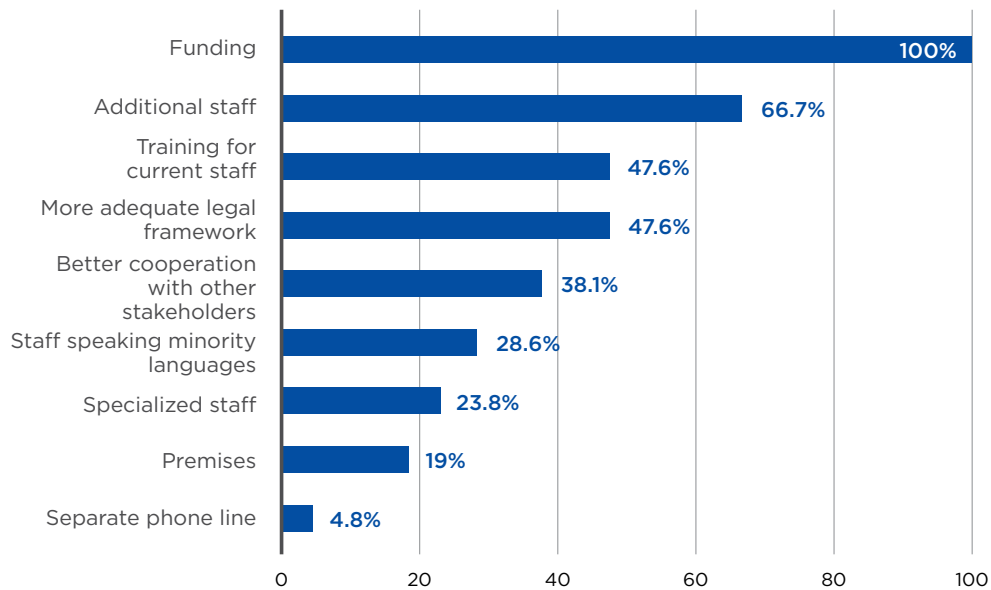
Challenges	Organizations which provide service		Cause of problems	Mitigation strategies
	N	%		
Licensing	5	23.8	Rules not clear, criteria too demanding in terms of funding and documentation	Succeeded in fulfilling requirements, providing services without license
Health risk of staff and beneficiaries related to pandemic	5	23.8	Risks related to burnout of staff due to the increased demand for support	Not mitigated
Ability to provide necessary funds	16	76.2	Lack of available funds, insufficient funds, donors prefer to support campaigns and not services.	Programme support, applying for other projects, solidarity transfer from organizations in the network, volunteering.
Lack of qualified staff	7	33.3	Not enough employees, inadequate profile of professionals, lack of young women activists	Reassigning available qualified staff to helpline from other tasks, training of staff
Lack of information about the service	12	57.1	Lack of funds to organize outreach campaigns, ‘advertising’ services, difficulties to reach marginalized women	Informing through social media, public campaigns, distributing information or leaflets within other activities

NEEDS FOR SUPPORT

For sustainability and quality of helpline services, the most needed factors are funds, additional staff and better trained current staff. No organization in the sample has secured regular continuous funding for a helpline, therefore funding is crucial for the sustainability of this service across all countries in the region. Funding is necessary to invest in human resources such as additional staff and training for current staff. Almost half of organizations indicated a

need for an improved legal framework and multisectoral cooperation, as the helpline is one of the crucial entrance points through which survivors enter the system for support. More than a quarter of organizations indicated a need for staff who speak minority languages, as in many cases organizations are working in areas with multi-ethnic and multi-lingual beneficiaries.

Figure 8: Percentage of organizations providing helpline services that indicated various needs for support



3.3 SHELTERS

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out proactively to victims, especially women and their children.

Istanbul Convention, Article 23

The oldest shelter covered by the assessment dates from 1994, while the newest was established in 2020. Through shelters, all organizations provide accommodation for women survivors of violence and their children, psychological support, legal assistance, and assistance in communication with other institutions. In addition to that, nine organizations provide individual safety plans, and seven provide short term financial or in-kind support for women in shelters.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, there have been occasional changes in the work of shelters, but these changes were either temporary (e.g., special entrance protocols due to health protection measures) or minor, experienced by one or two organizations.

Basically, the main trend, as indicated previously, is the increase in the number of organizations providing this service. However, the increase of the number of shelter providers does not mean that organizations face fewer challenges in providing this service.

CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

The situation regarding shelters is very different between countries and in some cases within countries. For example, in Serbia, NGOs do not provide this service (except in the case of NGO Atina, which runs a shelter for victims of human trafficking), while in BiH, all shelters are provided by NGOs. The financing of shelters is also different. While in Republika Srpska, the financing of shelters is regulated by the law (shared financing by the entity and local governments in proportion 70/30%), there is no such law in the Federation of BiH, and the financing of shelters depends on the relations between organizations and cantonal governments. Due to that system, organizations providing shelter in Sarajevo have more stable funds as the canton has been increasingly financing the service since 2003, while in the canton of Mostar, there are years when the shelter is not supported at all by the cantonal government. Shelters in other countries of the Western Balkans as well as in other parts of BiH are still very much dependent on donor funds.

The most common challenges faced during the provision of sheltered services were related to referral and cooperation with other institutions involved in multisectoral response to violence, lack of information about availability of shelter services during restrictive pandemic periods, and lack of sufficient funds, particularly during periods when costs

increased due to increased demand, increased spendings on health protection measures, and increased need for financial and in-kind support to beneficiaries who lost their jobs and faced economic insecurity.

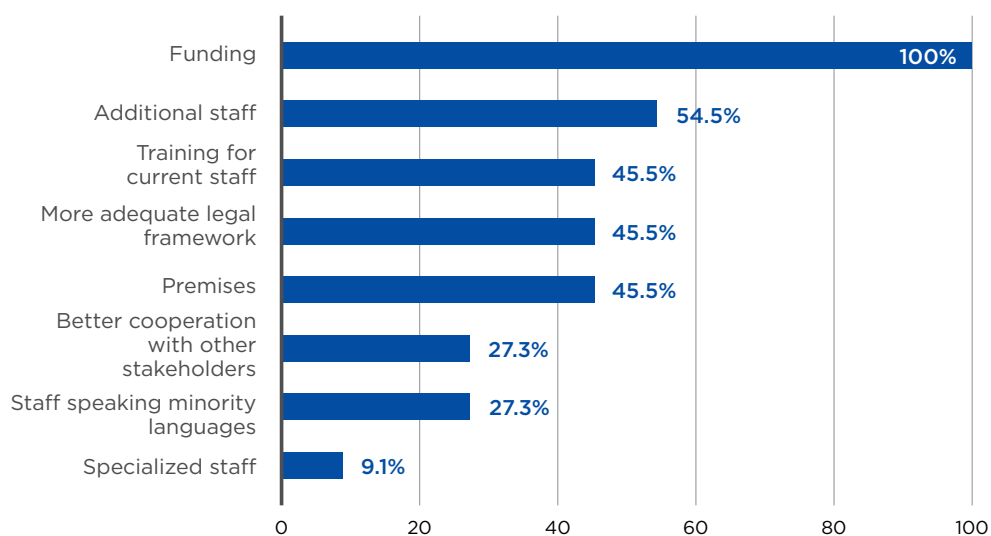
Table 3: Challenges and mitigation strategies in provision of shelter for survivors of VAW

Challenges	Organizations which provide service		Cause of problems	Mitigation strategies
	N	%		
Health risk of staff and beneficiaries related to pandemic	5	45.5	Counsellors at higher risk in direct services, risks related to burn out due to the increased demand for support	Implementing WHO health protocols, using protective equipment, organizing indoor activities for protection of mental health of beneficiaries. Burn not mitigated.
Ability to provide necessary funds	7	63.6	Lack of available funds, insufficient funds.	Regional programme support, advocacy and promotion of shelter work for fundraising purposes.
Lack of qualified staff	2	18.2	Lack of staff specialized for specific forms of violence, such as online violence, harassment	Not mitigated
Lack of transport	4	36.4	During movement restrictions	Organizing transport by the organization, sometimes private car by staff
Lack of information about the service	6	54.5	Lack of information on shelters availability during restrictive measures	Informing through social media, through public services
Insufficient space	4	36.4	Increased 'demand'	Some organizations made adaptation of shelter, others could not mitigate
Difficulties in provision of food, clothes, hygiene materials	5	45.5	Lack of funds during increased safety protocols and needs	Additional fundraising, sometimes lack of sufficient materials (not always mitigated)
Problems in referrals and cooperation with other institutions	9	81.8	Restricted work of public institutions, ineffective cooperation	Good cooperation before pandemic, using personal connections, but often court processes were postponed, no effective mitigation strategies

Like in the case of helplines, all organizations emphasized the need for stable and sufficient funding for the sustainability and quality of services. In addition, the most common needs

for support included additional staff, training for current staff, a more adequate legal framework and adequate premises in which a shelter can host beneficiaries.

Figure 9: Percentage of organizations providing shelter that indicated various needs for support



In the case of shelter services, the need for better premises is more frequently emphasized than in the case of other

services, which is understandable considering the costs of renting space or difficulties to find appropriate space.

Organizations share their experiences

‘Not to be pathetic, but it is a reality that we are facing. The cost of living is growing daily, and the finances we have are unchanged, they are the same as before the crisis, and the number of women, unfortunately, is growing.’

NGO from North Macedonia

‘We have conducted the assessment of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on shelters. We have estimated that in crisis situations, shelters need 27% more funds to cover the costs. The problem in providing shelter services is inflation. Costs of bills, maintenance, food for beneficiaries are much higher. We have to be very committed to fundraising to ensure sufficient funds.’

NGO from Bosnia and Herzegovina

3.4 RAPE CRISIS OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE REFERRAL CENTERS

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting up of appropriate, easily accessible rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres for victims in sufficient numbers to provide for medical and forensic examination, trauma support and counselling for victims.

Istanbul Convention, Article 25

A relatively small number of organizations (5) has been providing this service in the region, which is one of the major gaps in the spectrum of services for the protection of women from gender-based violence. Through this service, organizations provide immediate and long-term psychological support to victims of rape or other forms of

sexual violence, psychological support during preparations for forensic investigation, assistance during preparations for forensic investigation, assistance during medical procedures, direct health care support (provided by some organizations), assistance during court proceedings, and accommodation in shelter if needed (provided by one organization). As

reported by organizations providing this service, no major changes were experienced since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. The changes mainly included specific pandemic health care protocols. But the challenges to the sustainability and quality of services are continuous and related primarily to

the lack of readiness of governments to finance the service, irregularity of non-governmental funds, and difficulties in referral and coordination of multisectoral cooperation in cases of sexual violence, which is crucial for this service.

Organizations share their experiences

‘The biggest challenge is lack of funding. Since 2016, our organization has established four centers for support to victims of sexual violence with the help of donors. It is necessary to combine the funds of different donors as no single grant is sufficient to cover the costs fully. The centers are demanding as they require highly skilled and trained staff, specialized for work with women in crisis situations and for overcoming trauma. The second challenge is related to health care professionals. Doctors are not motivated to work in the center or to prioritize women who come for support. They have an overload of work already with their regular duties. The third challenge is the lack of motivation of decision makers to expand the service. There are hospitals willing to introduce the center, but they do not know how, so they contact us for technical expertise. But without additional funds, they cannot establish the service. So it comes back to the funding issue. The problem is also a lack of knowledge and understanding, the problem of mandates and responsibilities, low motivation and complete lack of support from the state. Currently, those four centres are not supported at all from the state budget and depend fully on donors, after 7 years of work.’

NGO from Serbia

Similar to the previously described services, organizations referred to the following aspects needed to maintain or improve this service:

- Better legal framework in some countries where the current legal framework does not adequately recognize sexual violence and therefore cannot adequately organize response to it
- Additional funding
- Adequate premises
- Adequate human resources, as organizations often need additional staff or professionals with adequate expertise for sexual violence
- Staff speaking minority languages as in some communities there are language barriers to providing service to women from all language groups
- Better cooperation with other institutions in the system for protection.

3.5 SUPPORT TO CHILD WITNESSES

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that in the provision of protection and support services to victims, due account is taken of the rights and needs of child witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

Measures taken pursuant to this article shall include age-appropriate psychosocial counselling for child witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention and shall give due regard to the best interests of the child.

Istanbul Convention, Article 26

Only six organizations currently provide support to child witnesses. Based on the answers of organizations, it can be concluded that support to child witnesses is usually not perceived as a service with specific challenges, but as a

part of broader support services sharing the same risks and challenges. Organizations point to the challenges related to licensing, financial stability, adequate staff and cooperation with other institutions.

3.6 PROGRAMMES FOR PERPETRATORS

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or support programmes aimed at teaching perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt non-violent behaviour in interpersonal relationships with a view to preventing further violence and changing violent behavioural patterns.

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or support treatment programmes aimed at preventing perpetrators, in particular sex offenders, from re-offending.

In taking the measures referred to in paragraphs 1 and 2, Parties shall ensure that the safety of, support for and the human rights of victims are of primary concern and that, where appropriate, these programmes are set up and implemented in close co-ordination with specialist support services for victims

Istanbul Convention, Article 16



Only two organizations provide programmes for perpetrators, one in Bosnia and Herzegovina and one in North Macedonia. Organizations reported different challenges. While for the organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the major challenge

is related to the licensing of the service, in North Macedonia, the service has been licensed for a long time, but the sustainability is at risk due to a lack of funds.

Organizations share their experiences

'The service was established in 2013 based on the Croatian model. 10 professionals were trained, and it was delivering results. In 2021 the city cut the budget allocated to the service by 30%, and in 2022, there were additional cuts, so we had to reduce the programme for perpetrators, and now we have waiting lists. Local communities do not see that as a priority or give small amounts. This kind of service still depends on political will, and there is no sustainability.'

NGO from North Macedonia

Organizations providing programmes for perpetrators emphasized a need for better legislative framework, stable

and sufficient funding, and additional staff specialized in therapeutical work with perpetrators.



4. Provision of general support services in times of crisis

Key findings:

- All general services except psychosocial counselling, financial and in-kind assistance and housing support are presently offered less frequently by organizations than before the pandemic.
- There is a particularly noticeable decline in the participation of NGOs in multisectoral coordination. Generally, cooperation with state institutions in the system for protection – police, health care, social protection, judiciary – has worsened since the COVID outbreak. As a consequence, organizations face higher demand for assistance but at the same time they are less able to provide adequate support when the participation of those institutions is required. Examples of good cooperation are relatively rare, and the majority of organizations report worsening cooperation with other stakeholders and bigger obstacles in referrals.
- Psychosocial support and free legal aid remain the two most important general services, and many organizations invest significant efforts to maintain or expand these services since demand has been increasing.

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures, in accordance with internal law, to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms to provide for effective co-operation between all relevant state agencies, including the judiciary, public prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, local and regional authorities as well as non-governmental organisations and other relevant organisations and entities, in protecting and supporting victims and witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, including by referring to general and specialist support services as detailed in Articles 20 and 22 of this Convention.

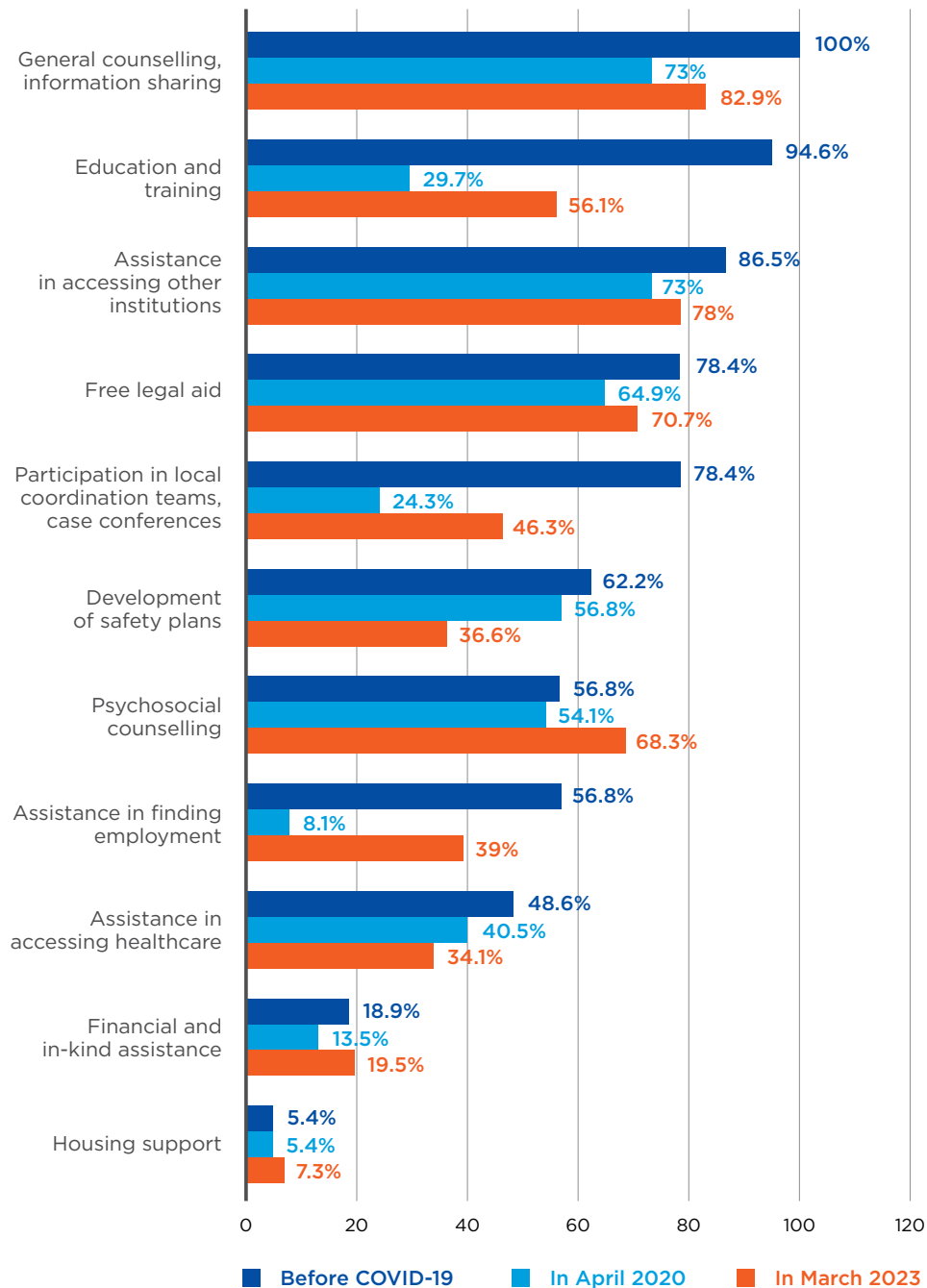
Istanbul Convention, Article 18

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that victims have access to services facilitating their recovery from violence. These measures should include, when necessary, services such as legal and psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, training and assistance in finding employment.

Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that victims have access to health care and social services and that services are adequately resourced and professionals are trained to assist victims and refer them to the appropriate services.

Istanbul Convention, Article 20

Figure 10: Types of services provided by organizations prior to COVID-19 as reported in April 2020 assessment and currently provided services as reported in March 2023 assessment, % of organizations who provided services



After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of organizations providing general support services has sharply declined. Organizations struggled to maintain core specialized services, and due to increased demand for support and increased challenges, the provision of general support services and particularly participation in multisectoral cooperation has declined. After the high peaks of the pandemic and the removal of restrictive measures, general services were restored to a certain extent. Measured by the proportion of organizations delivering services, only

psychosocial counselling has remarkably increased since the pandemic and early pandemic phase, while for other services, the proportion of organizations offering the service has declined (Figure 10). The exceptions are financial and in-kind assistance and housing support, which are reported by a slightly higher proportion of organizations than before and immediately after the outbreak of COVID, but since this is a small number of organizations, it is not reliable to conclude that there is increased availability of such services.

4.1 PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING

While 28 organizations provide some form of psychosocial counselling, 19 organizations provide this service as a ‘stand alone’ service. The provision of this kind of support to women survivors of gender-based violence since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic faced various challenges, similarly to specialized services. The most common challenges are related to the lack of sufficient and stable funds for maintaining the service, lack of qualified staff and obstacles to effective referral to other institutions when needed (Table 4). In addition to that, almost half of organizations have reported challenges related to outreach and sharing information about the availability of the service, more than one-third reported challenges related to transport that

prevent potential beneficiaries from accessing the service face-to-face, and one quarter of organizations reported problems related to licensing the service and health risks of staff and beneficiaries.

One of the organizations reporting difficulties to license the service explained that despite the fact that it has been providing psychosocial support for more than a decade, it was not able to meet all the requirements of the licensing procedure. The requirements posed by the state were described as ‘unrealistic’. This difficulty was reported to GREVIO.

Organizations share their experiences

‘Domestic funding for GBV during and after the pandemic have experienced a serious trend of decline. Our counselling centre was funded by the local government during the past 10 years. In 2021 and 2020 the funding was cut by more than 30%, and funding for 2023 is not known yet (there is a possibility the funding will be completely cut due to financial crises).’

NGO from North Macedonia

Table 4: Challenges and mitigation strategies in provision of psychosocial support to survivors of VAW

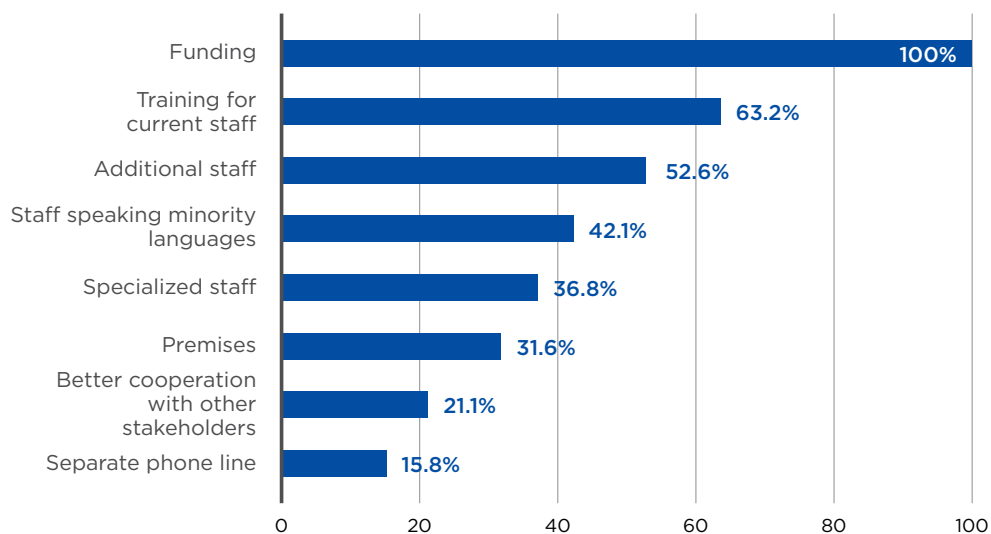
Challenges	Organizations which provide service		Cause of problems	Mitigation strategies
	N	%		
Licensing	5	26.3	Administrative barriers, too demanding requirements, no legal framework	Advocating for improvement of legal framework, simplification of standards, some organizations gave up from licensing.
Health risks	5	26.3	Risks related to pandemic	Applying pandemic related health care protocols.

Challenges	Organizations which provide service		Cause of problems	Mitigation strategies
	N	%		
Ability to provide necessary funds	16	84.2	Lack of readiness of governments at different levels to finance the service, cuts in domestic funds, irregularity of non-governmental funds	Advocating donors for increased focus on services, fundraising.
Lack of qualified staff	10	52.6	Lack of funds to engage adequate profile of professionals, lack of professionals with appropriate expertise in the community	Engaging professionals on volunteering base, sharing knowledge and resources between organizations in the network, working without optimal staff
Lack of transport	7	36.8	Restrictions during pandemic, continuously poor transport in some regions and areas	Providing ad-hoc solutions, using organization's vehicle.
Lack of information about the service	9	47.4	Lack of funds to provide information campaigns	Using social media or other no-cost channels to disseminate information
Problems in referrals and cooperation with other institutions	13	68.4	Weak multisectoral cooperation	Advocacy for improvement of multisectoral cooperation

In order to ensure sustainability or to improve psychosocial support, organizations mainly require stable funding, training

of staff already employed in the service, additional staff, and staff who speak minority languages (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Percentage of organizations providing psychosocial support that indicated various needs for support



4.2 FREE LEGAL AID

Free legal aid has been provided as a ‘stand alone’ service by 18 organizations (43.9%). Among major challenges in sustaining this service, organizations emphasized:

- Lack of funds (15 organizations or 83.3%) which is mitigated by continuous fundraising and pro bono work of staff. Only one organization has an institutional grant to deliver this service, the rest relies on project-based funds. Also, organizations report the occasional interruption of services during times when they are not able to secure funding.
- Insufficient outreach, poor information dissemination (44.4%). This challenge is mitigated by providing printed and online information on free legal aid services to potential women beneficiaries. Sometimes information is shared through other social or community services.

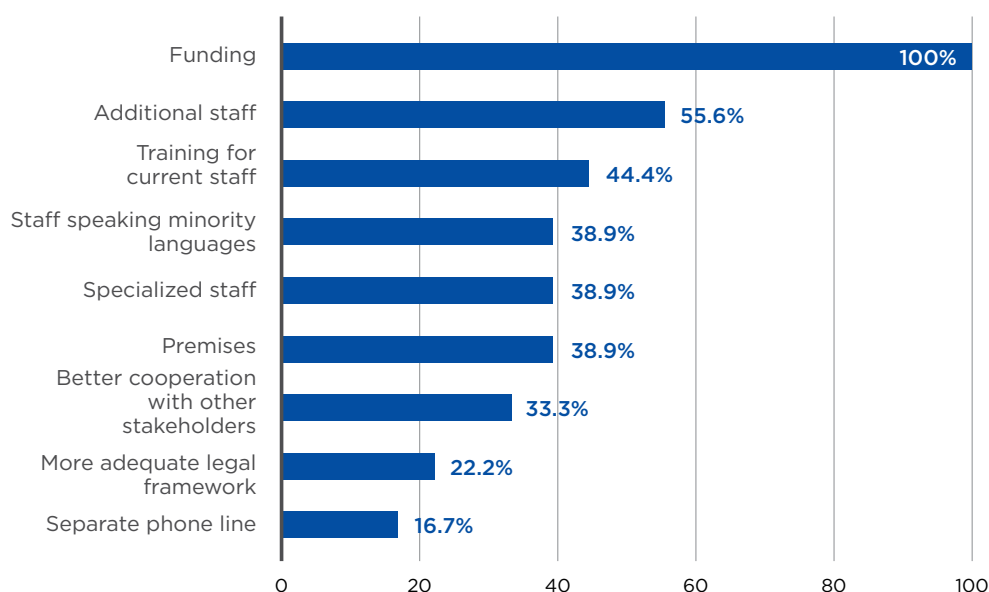
Good practices

Macedonian Young Lawyers Association is an organization specialized for this service. The service is licensed under the Law on Free Legal Aid. Presently, the organization has stable funding through projects but also due to an institutional grant. Every lawyer in the organization provides free legal aid to victims of violence. Part of human resources is also provided through internship programmes through which they encourage young lawyers to continue to provide free legal aid. Potential beneficiaries are informed about the service through announcements in police stations, centres for social work, municipalities, and schools. The organization is active in the media trying to maintain or expand outreach. The organization cooperates with prosecutors and centres for social work.

Women Forum Elbasan from Albania provides free legal aid to women survivors of violence. According to their experience, women are more comfortable when they are supported by a lawyer in situations where the police have to issue protection orders. Despite many trainings, the police do not act effectively in issuing protection orders, so lawyers from WFE support police officers to issue these orders. Lawyers also support women during court proceedings.

When proceedings are finished, women are entitled to support from the state amounting for 100 US dollars per month. Many women are not aware of this financial assistance, and one of the tasks of lawyers in the organization is to inform women about the right to this benefit.

Figure 12: Percentage of organizations providing free legal aid that indicated various needs for support



4.3 REFERRALS AND MULTISECTORAL COOPERATION

Judging by survey data, the impact of multiple crises is the most striking in the area of multisectoral cooperation and activities related to that cooperation, such as referrals, assistance in access of survivors of violence to health care, police, judicial or social protection system and the development of individual protection plans which rely on such cooperation. Three-fourths of organizations reported participation in multisectoral coordination teams in the period prior to the pandemic (Figure 10). During the period of very restrictive measures just one month after the WHO proclaimed the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of organizations which continued to participate in multisectoral coordination has dropped sharply to one-fourth. Data from March 2023 indicate a partial recovery of multisectoral cooperation, but it is still far below the pre-pandemic period, as less than half of organizations presently participate in multisectoral teams, case conferences or similar mechanisms of multisectoral cooperation.

The development of safety plans is another activity that declined since the outbreak of the pandemic (Figure 10), which is probably also the consequence of weakening multisectoral coordination, at least the one that includes civil society organizations.

In describing challenges, organizations reported that survivors' access to institutions is generally worse than in pre-COVID times. Some organizations indicate that since the pandemic outbreak, policework in response to VAW is less effective and cooperation between police and organizations has worsened. Organizations report cases in which police officers fail to make official reports on incidents of violence, provide limited information about available support services to victims, and sometimes act in a biased manner that reflects gender stereotypes and a misunderstanding of violence against women (blaming survivors, failing to intervene, etc.). Consequently, organizations face increased demand for support, but on the other hand they are not in a position to provide adequate protection by referring women to police when needed due to the weakening of cooperation. Some organizations indicated that perpetrators are encouraged by ineffective police and judicial responses.

On the other hand, few organizations reported improved cooperation with police. In-depth interviews indicate that this is usually the case in small communities where cooperation between local women's organizations and

police has evolved during long periods and there were no changes in personnel that could undermine established cooperation.

According to the majority of responses, the health care system was overwhelmed due to the pandemic, so victims of violence were not the priority. Some organizations reported a loss of confidence and trust among victims of violence in health care institutions and a decrease in motivation to turn for help to these institutions. On the other hand, few organizations, particularly those that developed cooperation with health care institutions while establishing rape crisis and sexual violence centres, indicated that the development of such services contributed to improved cooperation and generally better understanding of VAW among health professionals.

Organizations also reported a weakening of the role of centres for social work in the protection system. Even before COVID, these institutions were faced with a lack of material and human resources, specialized knowledge on VAW, professional capacities as well as motivation to address the issue of VAW. By the experience of organizations participating in the assessment, professionals in the social protection system are often overwhelmed with the number of cases, they have to deal with different social problems and cannot be fully committed to VAW cases. As a consequence, women are discouraged to look for help in local social protection institutions, and more frequently turn for help to local women's organizations.

The impact of crises on the judicial system was also noted by organizations. By their experiences, during the pandemic the accessibility of courts was very restricted and the VAW/domestic violence cases were not given priority in processing. The courts were open only for cases of issuing protection orders or security measures. The problem is also related to the frequent changes of judges and prosecutors and lack of understanding of VAW. Cooperation with courts in such circumstances was also not evaluated positively by organizations. It was also reported that survivors of VAW receive limited information from judicial institutions on their rights and available assistance.

These setbacks in multisectoral coordination during times of crisis are not easy to tackle. Organizations use advocacy as an instrument for the restoration of previously better multisectoral coordination, and for that they would need

additional funds and human resources, but also research and practical evidence, in which advocacy should be grounded.

Participants in interviews predominantly reported challenges in multisectoral cooperation. Often the quality of

multisectoral cooperation depends on the local government and some form of legacy of good or weak cooperation between institutions in the local community or cooperation between institutions and NGOs. In some regions, such as northern Kosovo, such cooperation is completely interrupted due to the situation of political conflict.



Organizations share their experiences

‘We provide support to women in three municipalities in Kosovo. The coordinating mechanism in Djakova works perfectly. The representatives of institutions are very responsive, joint meetings are regular, cooperation is good. But this is not the case in other municipalities. Coordination mechanisms do not function there. There should be more sharing of experiences between municipalities in order to encourage those who don’t have good coordination mechanisms to develop based on good examples of successful municipalities.’

NGO from Kosovo

‘Since November last year, institutions in Northern Kosovo have been abandoned. Only the police are present, while the other institutions have disappeared and there is no sign of a return to the institutions any time soon. Therefore, all those who were users of services, be it social services or victims of violence, were all denied protection services. This also affected the non-governmental sector. The NGO sector is faced with a lack of funds for operational activities.’

NGO from Kosovo



5. Prevention, VAW-related research and advocacy in times of crisis

Key findings:

- Multiple crises have a negative impact on other forms of engagement – campaigning, awareness raising, advocacy and research.
- Awareness raising and campaigning activities, which are important for outreach but also for broader changes of norms and stereotypes, are faced with a lack of funds, ‘big campaigns are missing’, there is lack of state actors to finance such campaigns and a lack of cooperation with the media, particularly the most influential ones. Organizations lack professional skills related to campaigns and funds to engage marketing experts.
- Similar obstacles exist for research, with the addition of obstacles related to access to administrative data, lack of transparency of institutions and willingness of governmental stakeholders to provide information and data from their records.
- Research capacities of organizations are limited and cooperation with academia underdeveloped.
- The agency of many groups of women are weakening and their motivation to participate in awareness-raising activities is often low.
- The motivation of policymakers to be receptive to advocacy and lobbying initiatives is much lower than before, and organizations report difficulties to bring them onboard with EAW initiatives.

**MULTIPLE
CRISES HAVE
A NEGATIVE
IMPACT
ON OTHER FORMS
OF ENGAGEMENT**

5.1 AWARENESS RAISING AND ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

Organizations report significant and dynamic involvement in advocacy and awareness raising activities. They share the observation that the context for women's rights, the empowerment of women and the protection of women from gender-based violence is less favourable than before. Shifting policy priorities during times of crisis, the rise of political instabilities, and conflicts also foster more aggressive public discourse and stronger voices from conservative forces that is followed by shrinking public funds dedicated to the response to violence and growing gap between non-governmental and governmental stakeholders.

In such a context, organizations reported numerous challenges related to advocacy and awareness raising:

- Awareness raising activities face huge barriers from the anti-gender equality movement, which has damaged public discourse and debates using gender disinformation, negative narratives related to gender equality and promotion of patriarchy. Organizations are not equipped to counter these narratives in online spaces such as social media and various internet platforms, particularly when bots are used in counter-campaigns.
- Cooperation with national media or other influential media is poor. The majority of media outlets are not allies of women's organizations. To the contrary, they are often more prone to participate in anti-gender campaigns. Organizations, therefore, mainly rely on social media and design campaigns in line with these communication platforms.
- Campaigns can be very costly, and project funds are not sufficient for larger or more intense campaigns. At the same time, governments at various levels are not ready to finance such campaigns. In many cases, organizations emphasized the problem related to a lack of institutional grants that could give them more freedom to focus on campaigns and advocacy activities.
- Awareness campaigns require professionals who are well aware of the women's rights agenda, which is not always easy to find, or funds are lacking to engage this type of professional.
- Awareness campaigns could be very effective, and some organizations reported that after such campaigns, the demand for their protection services sharply increases, but they are not always able to meet increased demands because of limited material and human resources. So, the right balance between campaigning and service provision is key to their success in this challenging context.
- The agency of many different groups of women has been weakening. They are presently more difficult to mobilize and motivate to take active roles in various advocacy and awareness raising activities, particularly women outside big cities and women belonging to social groups at risk of social exclusion. As a mitigation strategy, some organizations engaged more in field work, but this was also restricted during the COVID crisis, and due to the economic crisis, it is much more difficult to ensure a sufficient number of field workers or funds that can cover field work costs.
- Lack of solidarity among NGOs was also mentioned as a challenge. Activist from some countries in the region emphasized the widening gaps between activists and academia as well as between service provider organizations and feminist organizations. This reduces the power and potential advocacy impact of women's civil society and consequently reduces the opportunities for adequate service provision due to the lack of recognition and negotiating power in accessing public funds.

Organizations share their experiences

'Officials, local and national, are closed to interacting with any contacts or influences outside their circles. They don't come to activities, they don't respond to invitations to do something together, they don't respond to our initiatives and they don't make their own. Disrespectful behaviour. Our capacities are also a problem. We are too few for all we have to do. Our knowledge and resources are different.'

NGO from Serbia

‘Continuous political crisis across the country and the negative portrayal and hate speech against CSOs in general by politicians seriously affect our work and the security of women human right defenders in general. Lack of access to information regarding legislative and public policy changes, lack of transparent work of authorized ministries, undermining our expertise and contribution to progress in the area of prevention and combating VAWG, these are some of the key challenges.’

NGO from Bosnia and Herzegovina

‘Institutions and decision-makers do not respond to our calls or sometimes participate but do not implement common agreements and decisions they have made.’

NGO from Serbia

‘State institutions, especially key stakeholders in policy making and policy decision do not take seriously the recommendations and findings of our reports.’

NGO from Kosovo

Despite the prevailing trend of a widening gap between NGO service providers and state actors, some good practices still endure.

Cooperation that was built for decades managed to be preserved in some cases, but at the cost of enormous efforts and energy of organizations and activists.

Organizations share their experiences

‘We are at the negotiating table every day. We are negotiating for the wellbeing of our beneficiaries. We follow trials, publish analyses, communicate directly with them. We go to court with our beneficiaries, and as soon as our workers enter the courtroom with a woman, even though they are not legal experts, a lot changes in the courtroom. It seems to me that we have chosen good strategies. We worked directly with women, victims of violence, refugees, we chose to connect with institutions and cooperate, and it is a very painful job, but it produced results. After some time, it becomes the standard, this advancement of the rights of our users.’

NGO from Bosnia and Herzegovina

Organizations listed the following needs for support in relation to their awareness raising and advocacy work:

- Sufficient funds for ‘stronger’ campaigns. Organizations complained that they never receive enough funds for large campaigns with the most influential media; their funds can usually cover small local campaigns, social media campaigns or similar.
- Building coalitions and closer cooperation with other stakeholders including NGOs, but not only women’s organizations- for example associations of persons with disabilities, organizations of other marginalized groups, developmental organizations. More cooperation between service providers, better cooperation with local governments.
- They emphasized a need for trust in their expertise, recognition of their work and results, and visibility of their work and achievements in their communities.
- Gender sensitized marketing experts that can design campaigns.
- Better media presence, sound communication strategies and presence in other media as Facebook is ‘outdated’ as indicated by some activists.
- New advocacy strategies and tools as context has changed.

5.2 VAW RESEARCH

Organizations conduct research about various aspects of violence against women and the system for prevention and protection. Recent and current research is focused on: availability of specialized services, judicial practices, sexual violence, gender-based violence against women experiencing multiple discrimination, femicide, implementation of the Istanbul Convention, mental health of women, sexual and reproductive rights of women with disabilities, funding GBV services, monitoring implementation of domestic laws on GBV, prevalence of violence against women in marginalized communities.

As key challenges in the area of research, organizations reported:

- Unresponsive institutions, lack of transparency and accountability which prevents access to data and information;
- Lack of funds that can be allocated to research, particularly more expensive large-scale research;
- Lack of researchers among organizational staff and activists;
- Difficulties related to response rates, as citizens often are reluctant to participate in research and it is particularly difficult to reach women from marginalized groups or communities.

These challenges are usually mitigated by ad hoc strategies, except in the cases where organizations systematically insist on obtaining data from administrative sources, referring to the laws on access to information of public importance.



When official sources are not available (such as for example in cases of femicide) they use alternative sources, such as media publications and the first-hand experiences of women or other stakeholders where relevant. They try to fundraise from different sources to collect funds for research. They look for external expertise when such expertise is needed. Interestingly, there is **no organization that reported on cooperation with academia which could be valuable resource for the research work of organizations.**

In order to enhance their capacities for research, organizations would need trainings for the staff to access and use various type of data, research funds, technical expertise, and more joint strategic planning among NGOs. Public research funds are predominantly allocated to universities and institutes, and due to the lack of cooperation between this 'sector' of civil society and academia, these funds remain inaccessible for these organizations.



6. Situation among beneficiary groups and access to services

Key findings:

- Organizations noticed that violence against women has increased since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic, became more complex as women reported more often multiform violence (e.g., physical combined with psychological and economic), and become more severe.
- Organizations provide support to diverse groups of marginalized women: older women, women from ethnic minorities, refugees and other migrant women, women living in rural areas, women with disabilities, LGBTI women and women who they identify as sex workers or women in prostitution. They face diverse challenges in outreach and assistance to these groups due to their specific situation, including more limited use of digital technologies (and thus could not access support services during lockdowns), isolation, poor transport, language barriers, and a lack of cooperation with other institutions with an important role in protection.
- Organizations employed various mitigation strategies to ensure outreach and adequate assistance to women from these groups, including information sharing through channels that are more suitable for these women, using connections with institutions to ensure referral as needed, establishing mobile teams for outreach and similar.

Based on their experience in providing support to women over the last three years, organizations reported certain changes in the types, complexity and severity of violence since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost half of organizations reported changes in types of violence. Although all forms of violence have increased during the last three years, organizations repeatedly reported an increase in online and technology-facilitated violence, sexual violence, and economic violence. This might be the consequence of the specific situation related to lockdowns, when

women used more digital technologies, as well as isolation and economic hardships due to job loss or economic crisis.

Organizations also reported that violence became more complex during the last three years. Physical violence was more often combined with sexual violence or with psychological and economic violence. According to their experience, women reported more frequently more intense and severe forms of violence than in pre-COVID times.

Organizations provide support to women from various marginalized groups or communities. In the context of multiple crises, outreach to these women brought new challenges or intensified previous challenges.

Having in mind that each group is specific, the following table presents key challenges for each group and mitigation strategies organization used to address these challenges.

Table 5: Challenges and mitigation strategies in outreach and support provided to women from marginalized groups

Group	% of organizations providing support to the group	Type of challenge	Mitigation strategies
Older women	81%	Poor access to Internet, social networks and smart apps which are now used more for reporting, increased economic violence and neglect, increased violence committed by family members, increased mental problems	Campaigns through media to reach women, cooperation with institutions through multisectoral teams, cooperation with mental health services, educating professionals to work with this group, appointing trust persons in residential institutions for older people.
Roma women	89.2%	Discrimination by institutions, increased all forms of violence, language barriers, no service providers from this group organizations, child marriages, lack of trust in institutions due to which drop out fast from support, strong patriarchal values inhibiting women	Activating Roma women in their communities, awareness campaigns, workshops, cooperation with Roma organizations, educating staff to work with this group, organizing helpline in Roma language, using mobile apps in Roma language.
Refugees and asylum seekers	48.6%	Barriers in access to services, often not entitled to public support services, language barriers.	Workshop in asylum centers, mobile teams, using interpreters, safety plans, organizing transport.
Women in rural areas	86.5%	Poor access to services and to information about services, exposure to economic violence and exploitation, limited mobility due to the poor transport	Improving outreach through focal points in rural areas, or improved cooperation with local women's associations formal or informal, organizing mobile outreach teams, self-help groups, organizing transport
Women with disabilities	83.8%	Barriers in access to services, lack of trust in institutions, discrimination by institutions which makes referral more difficult	New channels of communication adjusted to women with different types of disability, educating staff to work with this group, advocacy for increasing accessibility of institutions.
Women from ethnic minorities	81.1%	Obstacles in access to services, language barriers, discrimination by institutions	Cooperation with their associations, sensitization of employees who work with these women, outreach campaigns.
LGBTI women	64.9%	Discrimination by institutions, lack of trust in institutions	Direct assistance, women are accompanied by trusted person from organizations, sensitization of staff.
Women in prostitution/ sex workers	29.7%	Lack of trust to ask for help, discrimination and criminalization by institutions	Sensibilization of staff, awareness raising of professionals in institutions, self help groups.



In order to be able to improve outreach to these groups of women and provide services that are more adjusted to specific groups, organizations would need:

- More funds, particularly for services that increase costs, such as interpretation, using technologies for women with disabilities, sign language interpreters, publishing information in accessible ways, organizing mobile teams, etc.; all of that requires additional funds and cannot properly rest on the voluntary efforts of current staff;
- Additional staff, particularly in terms of engaging women from vulnerable groups which can take role of mediators (like Roma mediators), interpreters, or otherwise socially closer to women from specific groups, increasing their understanding and trust;
- Staff that is trained or sensitized for work with different vulnerable women to better understand their needs and to act without bias or stereotypes;

- Better cooperation with institutions is of particular importance because women from all the listed groups are at risk of discrimination.

Good practices

Women Forum Elbasan from Albania has expanded their support services to women from all religious groups.

They are currently able for the first time to provide services to women from all five religious groups in Albania.

As a result, they recorded an increase in reported violence among women from all religious groups.



7. Advancing services in the future

Key findings:

- There is huge potential among participating organizations for the further development of services. However, with the current level of support they are not able to introduce new services on a larger scale or in a sustainable manner.
- Their engagement with online and TF violence is increasingly important, but they need to build capacities for these new forms of violence, as well as a more adequate legal framework.
- Although there are examples of innovative strategies and approaches that were induced by crises, representatives of organizations state that times of crisis force them to focus more on survival than to be creative and introduce innovations.

7.1 PLANS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICE PROVISION

One of the purposes of the survey was to explore the plans for the future development of services among organizations or what they would like to include in their service portfolio if funds and other resources were available. This is a measure of their unused potential due to the lack of additional resources, which might come from the public budget at local or national level, or from the international funds which are the main source of funding presently. In regard to specialized services, the largest proportion of organizations reported

they would like to open a shelter for survivors of violence, special programmes for perpetrators, and rape crisis or sexual violence centers (Figure 13).

When it comes to general services, the highest proportion of organizations would like to introduce education and training support to victims of violence, employment programmes, and general counselling. More than a quarter of organizations would like to participate or

intensify participation in multisectoral coordination teams (Figure 14).

Figure 13: Percentage of organizations that plan or would like to add the specialized service to their current portfolio

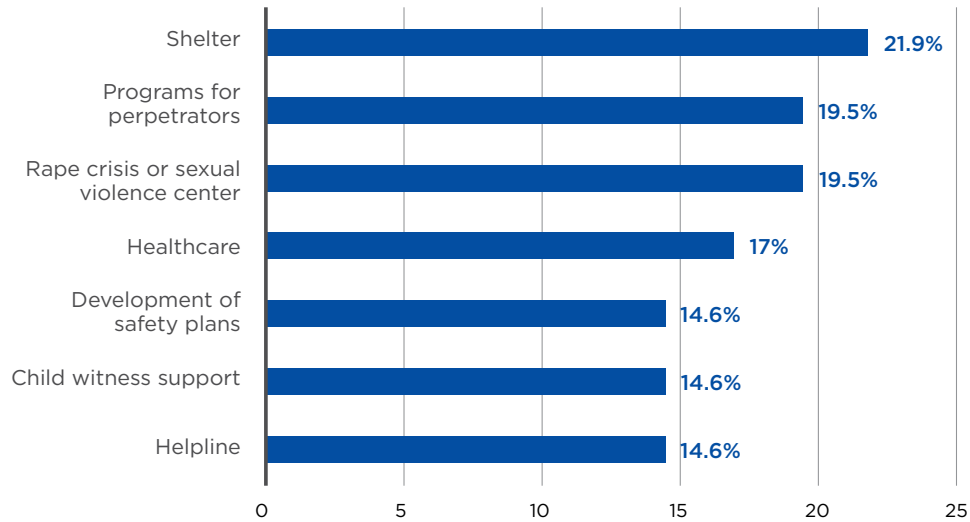
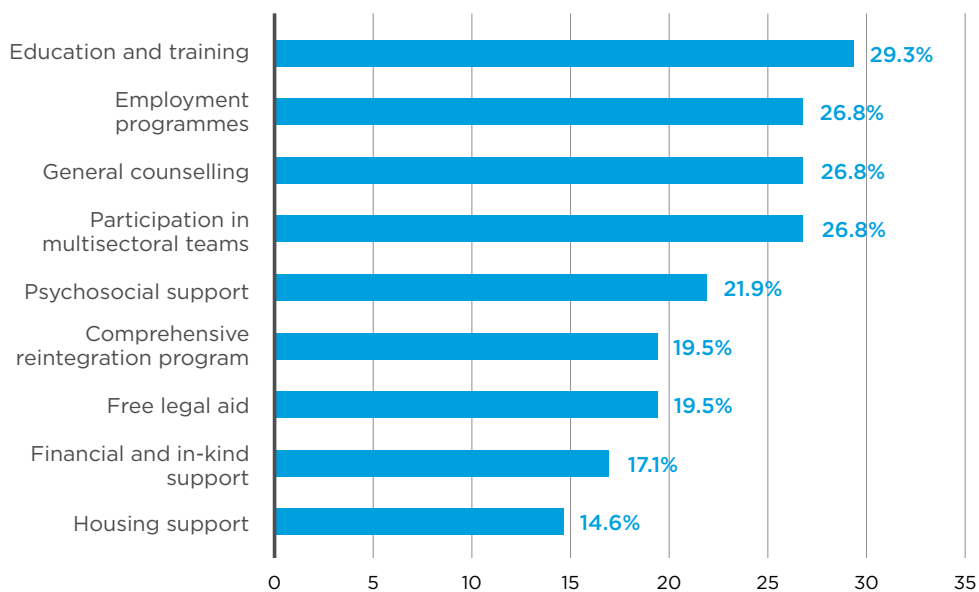


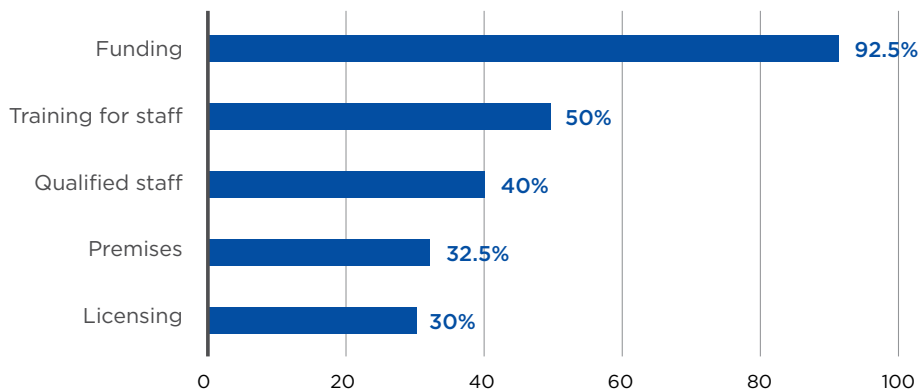
Figure 14: Percentage of organizations that plan or would like to add the general service or activity to their current portfolio



However, several organizations reported they have no plans to expand services but instead to reduce them due to the lack of funds. In a few other cases, the number of services will remain the same, but the outreach of services would be limited due to lack of staff.

Those organizations that reported plans to expand their service portfolio indicated what would be needed to execute these plans. As expected, the most necessary resource is financial resources, followed by trainings and qualifications of staff, additional space and licensing (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Resources needed to realize planned expansion of services, %



Organizations share their experiences

‘We need core funding. Every day women come to us with their problems through all channels: face to face, digital. We do not have the funds for SOS helpline, self-help groups, a lawyer. These are some additional services for women in the community who are not beneficiaries of safe houses, they are not financially covered, but they are important. Through self-help groups, we connect women with the experience of violence and strengthen and encourage them to fight for themselves. They help each other, exchange information, look after each other’s children. When women come out of violence, they have no social security to move around, they are isolated, they have no experience, they are vulnerable, and then with other women who have the same experiences, they become empowered. There are no funds for such services nor for mobile teams, which enable us to go to communities where there are no organizations.’

NGO from BiH

Although a crisis can trigger innovation as organizations have to adjust to the new context, and organizations have been innovative in finding ways to work in challenging environments (e.g., introducing new channels for outreach and support, new protocols for admission to shelters, finding

additional resources to meet the increased demand, etc.), some of them pointed out that the context of multiple crises is not very stimulative for innovation as organizations are focused on survival.

Organizations share their experiences

‘It is difficult to be innovative in such a challenging environment, struggling with cuts. More in focus is sustainability. A more proactive approach to donors. This is critical. Donors have to step in and to bridge the gap in funding because the state is not eager to do that at national or local level. They have to understand that the state is responsible for services. We can do campaigns, advocacy, all of that but without services, there is no impact.’

NGO from North Macedonia



Representatives of organizations participating in the survey emphasized the importance of regional exchange in regard to the improvement of services. They found regional exchange of experiences, expertise, innovation, raising common concerns regarding the sustainability and quality of services or protection of some groups of women as extremely useful.

They also pointed to the benefits of regional cooperation in the form of more concerted advocacy for legislative, policy, institutional or funding issues across the region. Even if these efforts remain focused on national or local targets, simultaneous pressure can bring added value across the region.

7.2 LESSONS LEARNED

- The regional programme was open to listen to practical problems and to address them. This ensured good results in terms of organizations being able to maintain or restore services and to increase their own resilience to multiple crises.
- Having an annual thematic focus was very good choice as it enabled more focused attention and action in regard to selected topics.
- Regional exchange and networking is of particular importance in times of crises as organizations learn they are not alone or isolated with their problems, but that others share the same challenges. Regional cooperation enables shared learning, findings and testing of solutions and offers multiple benefits.
- The regional programme supported smaller NGOs, which face many obstacles to access funds, particularly from donors with very requiring administrative procedures.
- Mobile teams are a very good solution in regular times for some groups and an especially good modality for outreach and support in times of crisis.
- The right balance between campaigning and service provision is key to success in challenging context of crisis. As campaigns increase demand, organizations should be certain they can meet such increase of demand.
- Self-help groups are a good modality to bring out women from isolation in times of crisis and provide peer support.



8. Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 CONCLUSIONS

Multiple crises have had a strong impact on organizations providing services in support to women survivors of gender-based violence. Three years after the first assessment, organizations still see the COVID pandemic as the crisis that had the greatest impact on services but also on other forms of engagement such as research, advocacy and campaigning. However, they also experienced the impact of war in Ukraine, which has manifested through reduced donor funds as they are reallocated to more urgent needs for support in this war affected country, but also through the increased prices of real estate in the areas with an inflow of Ukrainian and Russian citizens. They experience impact of economic crisis through increased prices of food, clothes, appliances needed for shelters or other materials and equipment that are necessary for their work. They experience the impact of political crises, frequent among countries in the region and particularly prominent in the election periods, which influences the willingness of governmental stakeholders to support services and the availability of national and local state budget resources.

These multiple crises also had a more indirect impact on the context in which organizations operate – they gave rise to patriarchal ideologies, conservative power groups and narrowed the space for women’s rights and empowerment. Interestingly, representatives of the organizations with longer experience reported that the struggle to survive and overcome the obstacles in the unfavourable legal, institutional, policy, economic and social context is something that they are used to facing since they were founded. A constant lack of funding, low recognition of their valuable service to community by the state at different levels is something they have been facing continuously, but in some countries there is growing gap between state and civil society, which narrows the space for support to organizations. Having in mind their experience and expertise in providing support services, this lack of recognition of their importance leads to the neglect and waste of their valuable resources.

In the context of multiple crises, organizations succeeded in maintaining crucial specialized services and even in expanding their scope. Sustainability efforts were more invested in the preservation of specialized services, which were crucial in times of increased need among women survivors of violence. When resources (financial, human, material) were not sufficient, they opted to narrow down the portfolio of general services. Survey data indicate an increased resilience to crisis, but that

was to a large extent the consequence of regional programme support. Organizations have increasingly faced new forms of violence against women, particularly online and technology-facilitated violence. To provide proper response to these forms of violence, they lack knowledge, skills and equipment. Findings clearly indicate growing gaps in service provision, mainly in the area of multisectoral cooperation which was not restored to pre-COVID levels in all countries.

There is huge potential for introducing new services, but in addition to experience and motivation, more funding opportunities are needed for such expansion. It was systematically emphasized that project-based funding is not an appropriate form for service provision. An important set of challenges is related to human resources. Organizations lack staff, particularly qualified staff and staff speaking minority languages, and they do not have the means to prevent or properly address staff burnout, which was the consequence of increased burden during the COVID pandemic but also due to the effects of other crises.

8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for policymakers:

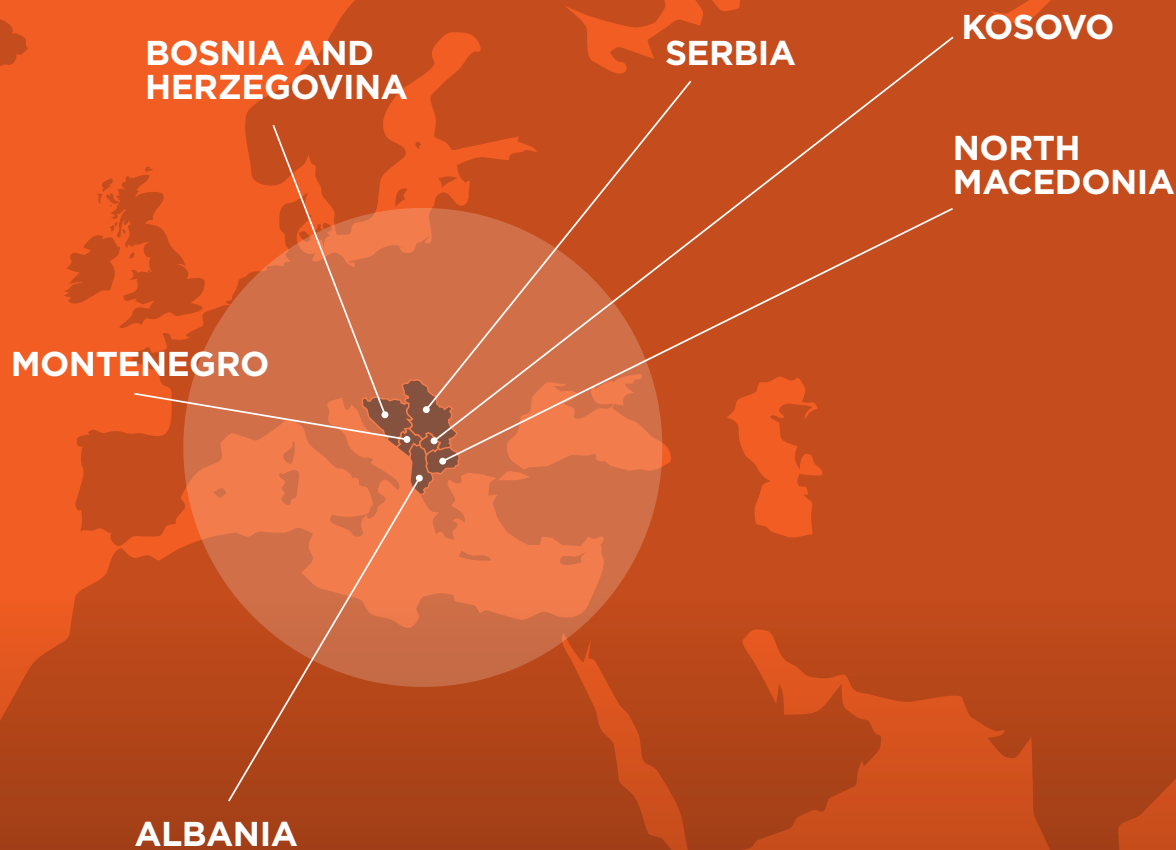
- The legal framework should be fully aligned with the Istanbul Convention in all countries in the region as they are signatories, particularly in the area of some forms of violence that are currently not properly legally recognized, such as sexual violence, child marriages, etc.
- The legal framework should be improved in regard to new forms of GBV, such as online and technology-facilitated violence against women.
- Licensing policies should be reviewed and revised accordingly, as currently in some countries they are unrealistic and require too high of standards from NGO providers (even those with decades of experience) without proper support.
- Introduce some safety net crisis funding as part of the state budget to support services in times of crises.
- There is a need to establish crisis centres as reports of sexual violence has been on the rise, and demand for support has been noticed in all countries. Experienced NGO service providers should be recognized as partners in these efforts.
- It is important to increase cooperation between NGOs and state services, which will enable the sensitization of professionals and the development of procedures and standards centered around victims and survivors. Also, all administrative barriers should be addressed through cooperative efforts.

Recommendations for NGOs service providers and activists:

- A legal analysis that provides recommendations for the improvement of the normative framework addressing online and technology-facilitated violence should be conducted in all countries in the region.
- Advocacy and lobbying directed toward state stakeholders should take place at national and local levels to recognize the importance of services and the state's responsibility to finance them as required by the Istanbul Convention.
- Organizations providing services should approach in a more systematic way the issue of addressing excessive workload and burn out among professionals and activists providing services, as this influences their quality of life as well as the quality of services.
- Fundraising capacities should be increased within organizations, and information about available funds, their requirements and available core/institutional funding should be disseminated among partner organizations and more broadly in the civil sector engaged in EVAWG.

International donors:

- It is important to support organizations in building their capacities for work with victims of online and technology-facilitated violence. Presently they face increased demand for support that includes addressing these forms of violence, but they do not have sufficient knowledge and instruments for that.
- Possibilities to introduce core/institutional funding at least to a certain extent should be discussed and assessed, as it promotes the sustainability of services.
- Sub-granting should be continued, as it enables small and grassroots organizations to access funds who may otherwise struggle to survive or disappear because they are not able to meet the criteria of larger funds.
- It is important to restore and advance the participation of NGOs in multisectoral coordination. UN Women can be a 'mediator' that can support (re)establishing links between NGO service providers and state stakeholders.
- It is needed to organize regional exchanges on a regular basis, and more often in a face-to-face format, as there is certain fatigue from online meetings. The exchange can be organized around specific topics and can serve to exchange experiences, good practices, and discussion on the situation, as well as to plan for joint advocacy and lobbying. Concerted efforts, even if focused on specific countries, can provide better impact than isolated attempts, particularly in fighting anti-gender movements, misogyny, and gender stereotypes. There is need for more cooperation, solidarity and synergy to counter rising anti-gender equality movements.
- Foster cooperation through joint projects as funds for regional initiatives become available.
- Cooperation between NGOs and academia should be promoted through exchange and project cooperation.
- Support more networking between women's organizations in the region with the aim to counter rising anti-gender equality movements.
- Work on raising awareness through more large-scale campaigns as small campaigns have a very limited effect.



Annex 1: Country reports

ALBANIA

Organizational profiles

Eight non-governmental organizations participated in the survey: Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives- CLCI, Gender Alliance for Development Center- GADC, Human Rights in Democracy Center- HRDC, Albanian Disability Rights Foundation – ADRF, Women Forum Elbasan, Counselling Line for Women and Girls, Center “Shelter Edlira Haxhiymeri” – SHE, Different and Equal.

The ‘oldest’ organization was established in 1995, and the ‘youngest’ in 2004. On average, they have been providing support to women survivors of gender-based violence for 24 years – almost a quarter century.

The organizations range from micro to mid-sized by number of employees. The smallest organization employs 3 persons (including permanent and temporary staff), while the largest employs 28 persons. In total, the organizations engage 87 permanent staff, 22 temporary staff, 62 volunteers and 3 interns. Compared to the spring 2020 iteration of the report, the average number of persons engaged as employees (permanent and temporary) or volunteers or interns in these organizations has declined from 27 to 22. The organizations expanded their geographical scope of services, which came at the cost of less secure tenure of premises for offices and facilities. While they still rely primarily on funds from international donors, there has been a slight increase of funding from national and local budgets.

Table 1: Organizational changes April 2020-March 2023

	April 2020	March 2023	Organizational change
Average number of employees (permanent + temporary)	15.2	11.6	On average, organizations lost between 3 and 4 employees
Average number of volunteers	8.8	7.8	On average, organizations lost one volunteer
Geographical scope	50% national 17% inter-regional 17% regional 17% local	63% national 13% inter-regional 25% regional	Organizations extended scope of coverage and outreach
Organization premises	33% premises are owned 50% premises are rented 17% premises are used without paying (provided by LSG or others)	27% premises are owned 55% premises are rented 18% premises are used without paying (provided by LSG or others)	Less secure assets related to offices and facilities where services are provided; expansion came with increased renting space and costs
Main sources of funding	Strong reliance on international donors; only 1 organization was financed from national budget for 20% of its total budget	Strong reliance on international donors; 3 organizations financed from national budget (between 7-23% of organizational budget) and 1 from local budget (5% of total organizational budget)	Continued strong reliance on international donors, but slight increase in state support to organizations from state and local public budgets.
Resilience – how long they are able to sustain operations	50% More than a year 17% A year 33% 1-3 months	25% More than a year 50% A year 12.5% 1-3 months 12.5% other	Increased resilience (ability to maintain services for a year or longer with reduced funding) though fewer organizations in the ‘most resilient’ category, defined as able to maintain services for more than a year.

Impact of multiple crises on services

The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted service delivery during the period between the two assessments. Almost all services were restored, but some only partially. In the following table with green arrow marks services that are fully restored, while the red arrow indicates permanent loss

or partial restoration of services. Organizations pointed to the high importance of the programme in their ability to maintain or restore services that were temporarily cancelled due to the COVID crisis and other factors such as lack of funds, or lack of staff.

Table 2: Cancellation and restoration of services

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Specialized services				
Helpline	4	While 3 services were not interrupted, 1 service was temporarily cancelled due to COVID but also due to lack of funds and human resources	Service that was temporarily cancelled was restored with a reduced scope due to the programme support	➔
Shelter	3	While 2 services were not interrupted, 1 service was temporarily cancelled due to the COVID restrictions	Service that was temporarily cancelled was restored with a reduced scope due to programme support	➔

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres	2	Services were not cancelled	–	↑
Support to child witness	1	Service was temporarily cancelled due to the COVID crisis	Service was fully restored with programme support	↑
Specialized program for perpetrators	1	Service was temporarily cancelled due to the COVID restrictive measures	Service was fully restored due to programme support	↑
General services				
General counselling, information sharing	7	While 3 services were not interrupted, 4 organizations temporarily cancelled this service, 3 due to the COVID crisis and one due to lack of funds	2 organizations restored services fully and 2 with a reduced scope; for 3 organizations, programme support was crucial for service restoration while 1 organization restored the services through voluntary work of their staff	↗
Psychosocial counselling	5	While 4 services were not interrupted, 1 service was permanently cancelled due to the lack of funds	Service was not restored due to lack of funds	↓
Free legal aid	7	While 6 services were not interrupted, 1 service was cancelled due to the COVID restrictive measures and lack of funds	Service was restored to a lesser extent due to programme support and voluntary efforts of staff	↗
Assistance in accessing health care	4	While 4 services were not interrupted, 2 organizations cancelled this service temporarily due to the COVID crisis	Both were fully restored with programme support	↑
Assistance in accessing other institutions	5	While 3 services were not interrupted, 2 organizations cancelled this service temporarily due to the COVID crisis and one due to lack of funds	Both services were restored with a reduced scope to the project support and in case of one organization also due to the voluntary efforts of their staff	↗
Participation in local coordination teams, case conferences	4	While 1 service was not interrupted, 3 organizations cancelled this service temporarily due to the COVID crisis	1 organization restored service with a reduced scope and 2 restored it fully; in all cases the programme support was crucial	↗
Education and training	5	While 2 services were not interrupted, 3 services were temporarily cancelled due to the COVID crisis	1 was restored to a smaller extent and 2 fully due to programme support	↗
Assistance in finding employment	5	While 1 service was not interrupted, 4 services were temporarily cancelled: 2 due to the pandemic measures, 1 due to lack of funds and 1 due to pandemic restrictions and lack of staff	2 services were restored fully and 2 partly	↗
Financial and in-kind assistance	1	Service was not cancelled	-	—
Housing support	2	Services were not cancelled	-	—
Comprehensive reintegration programme	3	1 service was temporarily cancelled due to COVID restrictions	Service was fully restored with programme support	↑

Legend

- ↑ Services were either fully maintained or temporarily reduced and then fully restored by all service providers
- ↗ Services were cancelled by at least one provider and only partly restored (at least one service providers did not fully restore the service or did not restore it at all)
- ↓ Services were cancelled and not restored

Experience with online and technology-facilitated violence

Out of the eight organizations participating in the survey, two provide services specifically focused on online and TF violence against women. Three organizations deal with this form of violence as part of domestic violence, while two do not engage in work related to this type of violence. However, the way in which organizations address this form of violence is mainly limited to reporting, and the target groups typically consist of survivors of domestic violence. One organization, however, focuses on online violence against women and girls with disabilities. There is a high interest among organizations to increase their involvement in addressing online and TF vi-

olence. They would like to concentrate on raising awareness about this type of violence, enhancing the capacities of other stakeholders to address online and TF violence, providing legal support to victims, as well as conducting research, advocacy, and lobbying in this area. The preferred target groups for their efforts are stakeholders from institutions engaged in responding to violence against women and girls.

To effectively engage in prevention and support for victims of online and TF violence, organizations require qualified staff and funding.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

The information gathered during the survey reveals that service providers in Albania continue to face significant impacts from the COVID-19 crisis, in addition to the ongoing challenges they already experience. These challenges include a heavy reliance on project-based funds, which are often

uncertain and discontinuous. Furthermore, a substantial portion of the team's workload is consumed by developing project proposals, which could otherwise be utilized for regular service provision.

Table 3: Challenges and mitigation strategies

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Increased violence against women, increased demand for services	Increased engagement of the staff, longer working hours
Lack of funds, discontinuity of finances	Intensive fundraising, renewing service when new project is ensured
Difficulties in outreach, particularly towards vulnerable groups of women	Organizing mobile teams for rural areas, using social media, as well as traditional media to spread the information on available services
Health risks during peaks of COVID pandemic	Applying WHO health protocols, introducing online counselling, special protocols in shelters (testing new beneficiaries, quarantine for new beneficiaries)
Mental health of beneficiaries in shelters during lock downs	Organized more indoor activities, occupational indoor activities for beneficiaries
Insufficient space for accommodation in shelters	No mitigation strategies have been reported
Insufficient office space or facilities for service provision	No mitigation strategies have been reported
Insufficient equipment	No mitigation strategies have been reported
Lack of human resources in terms of qualified staff, staff with specific specialized skills, insufficient number of staff	Increased workload of existing staff
Difficulties in multisectoral cooperation, referral to institutions, particularly health institutions who were overwhelmed with COVID patients, the courts were open only for cases of issuing a protection orders or security measures, other proceedings such as divorce, child custody were postponed	Training stakeholders from other institutions, advocacy, lobbying, good informal cooperation with local health centres that could treat women with physical injuries from violence,
Challenges related to new forms of violence, such as online and TF violence	Trying to adapt services, learning about online violence
Increased needs of beneficiaries due to the job loss during COVID crisis or economic crisis, impoverishment and increased need for financial and in-kind support	Providing food packages for beneficiaries, paying phone cards to beneficiaries so they can call for help in violence situations, assisting beneficiaries to access social benefits.

Needs for support

The organizations participating in the survey highlighted the following needs for support:

- Continuous funds and institutional grants
- Adequate human resources, including additional staff, qualified staff, specialized staff for specific forms of violence or assistance, staff proficient in minority languages, and increased digital skills
- Essential equipment such as additional phone lines, suitable premises, and digital equipment
- Enhanced cooperation with other stakeholders engaged in responding to VAW, including more effective referrals and case conferences
- Increased regional exchange and networking to empower individual organizations, provide vital information and ideas, and facilitate concerted advocacy and lobbying efforts.

Organizations in Albania face significant challenges in securing funding for the services they provide. This issue was consistently emphasized by all organizations in the country. Representatives of service providers in Albania specifically mentioned that project-based funding is not suitable for sustaining their operations. They also noted that service providers often find themselves caught between the expectation of the state that international donors will continue to support them and the expectation of donors that the state should take responsibility for financing these services, as they fulfill an important public function.

From interviews with service providers in Albania

“Donors should introduce core funding in order to enable organizations to provide tailored support. Organizations know how to combine the survival of the organization in terms of supporting human resources and administrative resources with proper activities, including advocacy, lobbying, and direct services. Core support could be a solution.”

“Donors claim that states should take responsibility for service delivery, but this is not happening, so it is still the duty of organizations to provide funds.”

“We are asking local governments for money. But now there are elections, so nobody wants to respond to our requests. We have to wait until after the elections.”

“Donor funds are less available due to the increased support to Ukraine, and local governments do not increase their support, so the sustainability of services is in question.”

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Organizational profiles

Six non-governmental organizations participated in the survey: United Women Banja Luka, Foundation ‘Lara’ Bijeljina, Foundation of Local Democracy from Sarajevo, Roma Women Association ‘Better Future’ from Tuzla, Citizen’s Association ‘Vive Zene’ from Tuzla, and the Union Associations of experts in social activities from the Republika Srpska.

The oldest organization was established in 1994, and the youngest in 2015. On average, they have been providing support to women survivors of gender-based violence for 22 years, which is almost a quarter-century.

These organizations vary in size, ranging from micro to mid-sized in terms of the number of employees. The smallest organization employs 8 people (including both permanent and temporary employees), while the largest employs 100 people (all of whom are temporary employees). In total, the organizations engage 69 permanent employees, 107 temporary employees, and 90 volunteers. Compared to the assessment conducted in spring 2020, the average number of employees (permanent and temporary) has increased from 22.2 to 29.3, primarily due to one organization that significantly increased its number of temporary employees. However, the average number of volunteers has remained steady at 15 volunteers. In contrast to the general regional trend of expanding geographical coverage, the organizations in BiH have somewhat narrowed the geographical scope of their services. The proportion of organizations providing services nationwide has decreased, while the proportion of those serving a few regions or only the local community has increased. While these organizations still primarily rely on funds from international donors, there has been a slight increase in funding from state/entity and local budgets.

Table 1: Organizational changes April 2020-March 2023

	April 2020	March 2023	Organizational change
Average number of employees (permanent + temporary)	22.2	29.3	On average, organizations employed 7 more persons than in 2020
Average number of volunteers	15.0	15.0	No change
Geographical scope	80% country-wide 20% inter-regional	50% country-wide 33% inter-regional 17% local	Organizations extended the scope of coverage and outreach
Organization premises	60% premises are owned 20% premises are rented 20% premises are used without paying (provided by LSG or others)	25% premises are owned 25% premises are rented 38% premises are used without paying (provided by LSG or others) 12% Other	Less secure assets related to offices and facilities where services are provided; expansion came with increased rent and costs
Main sources of funding	80% were partly funded from local budget 60% were partly funded from state or entity budget All were funded by IOs or INGOs 2% supported by public companies	50% were partly funded from local budget 83% were partly funded from state or entity budget All were funded by IOs or INGOs 33% received small support from private companies 33% were financed by membership fees	Less reliance on local budgets, more organizations supported from state/entity budgets, more diverse sources of funding
Resilience – how long they are able to sustain operations	20% More than a year 20% A year 20% up to six months 20% 1-3 months 20% less than one month	17% More than a year 67% A year 16% Other	Increased resilience- more organizations can maintain services for year or longer with reduced funding.

Impact of multiple crises on services

Service provision was impacted by the multiple crises, but it seems that in comparison to other countries, partner organizations in BiH managed to better preserve uninterrupted services.

Table 2: Cancellation and restoration of services

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Specialized services				
Helpline	4	No service was interrupted since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic	-	—
Shelter	4	No service was interrupted since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic	-	—
Rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres	2	No service was interrupted since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic	-	—
Support to child witness	1	No service was interrupted since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic	-	—
Specialized program for perpetrators	1	Service was temporarily cancelled due to COVID restrictive measures	Service was restored to a large extent due to programme support and other donors	↗
General services				
General counselling, information sharing	5	While 3 services were not interrupted, 2 organizations temporarily cancelled this service due to COVID restrictive measures	One organization restored service fully and one to a large extent due to programme support and the voluntary efforts of staff.	↗
Psychosocial counselling	4	While 2 services were not interrupted, 2 services were temporarily cancelled due to the restrictive pandemic measures and lack of staff.	In both cases, the service was restored to a large extent due to programme support and the voluntary efforts of staff.	↗
Free legal aid	4	While 3 services were not interrupted, 1 service was temporary cancelled due to COVID restrictive measures	Service was restored fully due to programme support and other donors.	↑
Assistance in accessing health care	4	While 1 service was not interrupted, 3 organizations cancelled this service temporarily due to the COVID crisis and lack of staff.	All three services were restored to a large extent due to programme support and the voluntary efforts of staff.	↗
Assistance in accessing other institutions	5	While 3 services were not interrupted, 2 organizations cancelled this service temporarily due to the COVID crisis.	Both services were fully restored automatically when COVID restrictions were removed.	↑
Participation in local coordination teams, case conferences	5	While 2 organizations did not interrupt this service, three others temporarily cancelled participation in coordination teams due to the restrictive pandemic measures.	Two organizations restored participation in local coordination teams fully and one partly when restrictive measures were removed, also due to support from state stakeholders, programme support and voluntary efforts of the staff.	↗
Education and training	5	While 2 services were not interrupted, 3 services were temporarily cancelled due to the COVID crisis	All three interrupted services were restored to a large extent due to programme support	↗
Assistance in finding employment	4	While 3 services were not interrupted, 1 service was temporarily cancelled due to pandemic measures.	2 services were restored to a large extent due to programme support	↗

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Financial and in-kind assistance	2	Service was not cancelled	-	↗
Housing support	-	-	-	↗
Comprehensive reintegration programme	1	Service was temporarily cancelled due to COVID restrictions	Service was restored to a large extent with programme support	↗

Legend

- ↑ Services were either fully maintained or temporarily reduced and then fully restored by all service providers
- ↗ Services were cancelled by at least one provider and only partly restored (at least one service providers did not fully restore the service or did not restore it at all)
- ↓ Services were cancelled and not restored

Experience with online and technology-facilitated violence

Out of the six organizations participating in the survey, only one organization works with online and TF violence, primarily focusing on preventive work through educational workshops with pupils and students. The remaining five organizations address this form of violence as part of the domestic violence context. Four organizations expressed a desire to enhance their work on online and TF violence

in different ways: prevention initiatives with young people, direct support to victims of online and TF violence, support for professionals from social protection and other relevant institutions to address this form of violence, and working with specific groups such as the Roma community to prevent this form of violence. To do so, they require qualified staff, licensing, and funding.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

Organizations in BiH face similar challenges as organizations in other countries. One of the differences is the emphasis placed by respondents on challenges related to licensing of services. It was also reported that in some cases, professionals in healthcare centers do not provide timely and sensitive services to women survivors. Their work is burdened with stereotypes and inappropriate comments on the behavior of survivors, among other issues. Survivors of VAWG receive limited information from judicial institutions regarding their rights and available assistance. Additionally, police officers sometimes fail to make official reports on violent events, provide limited information to VAWG services, and their actions occasionally reflect stereotypes (blaming survivors, failing to intervene, etc.).

Respondents from BiH indicated significant differences in service provision and state support to services across the country. In Republika Srpska, there is a Law on protection from domestic violence that defines financing of shelters, with 70% of the funding coming from the entity-level budget and 30% from local budgets. However, in the Federation of BiH, the law was not adopted, and financing of shelters depends on the cantonal governments. So, in some cantons like Sarajevo, the shelter is fully financed per beneficiary, while in other cantons like Mostar, the financing of the shelter is often interrupted. Nevertheless, the financing of the shelters is currently under review, which will determine the specific percentages to be financed by the cantonal, federal government, and municipalities.

Table 3: Challenges and mitigation strategies

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Inadequate legal framework for licensing of services	Advocacy for improving the legal framework; cooperation with other NGOs to organize stronger advocacy campaigns
Inadequate legal framework for protection from sexual violence	Advocacy for improving the legal framework
Lack of funds, discontinuity of finances	Intensive fundraising; renewing services when new project is ensured
Limited monitoring for risk of burnout among staff providing helpline services	Not mitigated

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Difficulties faced by women in accessing services due to poor transportation	Organizing transportation with their vehicles
Particularly high health risks in shelters during peaks of the COVID pandemic	Applying WHO health protocols, implementing special protocols in shelters (testing new beneficiaries, quarantine for new beneficiaries), and communication with local committees for disaster management
Insufficient space for accommodation in shelters	Planning reconstruction or expansion of shelter
Lack of human resources, including qualified staff and staff with specialized skills	Increased the workload of existing staff; hiring external professionals
Difficulties in achieving multisectoral cooperation and making referrals to institutions, especially health institutions that were overwhelmed with COVID patients; courts were open only for issuing protection orders or security measures; other proceedings such as divorce, child custody were postponed	Training stakeholders from other institutions; advocacy, lobbying; good informal cooperation with local health centres that can treat women with physical injuries from violence; defining priority plans for beneficiary needs

According to participants in the interviews, organizations within the network of shelters are currently focused on improving the protection of women from sexual violence. Field work data suggests an increase in reporting of sexual violence, attributed to heightened awareness and encouragement for women to come forward. However, the system for protecting women from sexual violence remains underdeveloped. State stakeholders view shelters primarily as crisis centers, whereas the Istanbul Convention recommends establishing such centers within healthcare

institutions. NGO service providers would like to offer long-term support and rehabilitation services to victims of sexual violence. Preparatory work has already been undertaken, important documents have been prepared, and capacities have been built with programme support. However, there is still a need for education, additional resources, increased capacities of shelters, the involvement of additional psychologists, and improved multisectoral cooperation in addressing this form of violence.

Needs for support

Organizations reported the following needs for support:

- More adequate legal framework, particularly regarding licensing and addressing sexual violence
- Continuous funds and institutional grants
- More adequate human resources, including additional staff, qualified staff, staff specialized in addressing certain forms of violence or providing specific forms of assistance, staff speaking minority languages, increased digital skills
- Equipment such as additional phone lines, more adequate premises, digital equipment
- Improved cooperation with other stakeholders from institutions engaged in response to VAW, more effective referrals, case conferences.
- Replication of good practices in other communities, more mutual learning, more regional exchange.

From interviews with service providers in BiH

“Regional cooperation is rare. That is the special value of the [regional] programme – regional cooperation was organized during the programme. We met representatives from other countries, and it meant a lot to us. Apart from the programme, there is little regional cooperation. Regional conferences and exchanges between organizations are needed. It helped us also to find partners when applying for projects and to establish cooperation with organizations from other countries.”

“UN Women and a few other donors provided emergency support to service providers in the form of medical equipment and financial contributions for purchasing food. We didn’t have the support of domestic institutions.”

“We still don’t feel the economic crisis. There are still funds secured for NGOs. There is no shortage of funds. However, inflation creates a problem in the delivery of specialized services. The costs of utilities and food for safe house users have increased significantly. We are constantly searching for additional means for the functioning of these services.”

Organizational profiles

Ten non-governmental organizations participated in the survey: Center for Protection of Women and Children ‘My Home’ Ferizaj, Safe House Gjakova, OJQ LIRIA from Gjilan, AKTIV from North Mitrovica, Women Wellness Center from Peje, Network of Roma Ashkali and Egyptian Women Organizations- RROGRAEK/NRAEWOK from Prishtina, Kosova Women 4 Women, Kosova Gender Studies Center, Kosovo Law Institute from Prishtina, and Safe House for Women and Children, and QSGF from Prizren.

The oldest organization was established in 1999, and the youngest in 2016, so on average they have been providing these important community services for 17 years. The organizations vary in size, ranging from micro to mid-sized in terms of the number of employees. The smallest organization employs 8 people (including permanent and temporary staff), while the largest employs 70 people. In total, the organizations engage 132 permanent employees, 54 temporary employees, and 55 volunteers. Compared to the spring 2020 assessment, the average number of employees (permanent and temporary) has decreased from 19.5 to 18.6. Similarly, the average number of volunteers engaged in organizations has slightly decreased from 6.4 to 6.1 individuals. The scope of service provision has become more regionalized, with organizations focusing less on the national scale. In comparison to other countries, service providers in Kosovo receive more financial support from the state budget at both national and local levels, which has potentially had a positive impact on increased resilience and better sustainability of services during the pandemic crisis. Data from the two assessments also indicate a significant increase in the resilience of organizations.

Table 1: Organizational changes April 2020-March 2023

	April 2020	March 2023	Organizational change
Average number of employees (permanent + temporary)	19.5	18.6	On average, organizations lost 1 employee
Average number of volunteers	6.4	6.1	Small loss of volunteers
Geographical scope	80% national 20% regional	70% national 30% regional	The scope of coverage and outreach has become more regionalized
Organization premises	20% premises are owned 80% premises are rented	29% premises are owned 43% premises are rented 29% premises are used without paying (provided by LSG or others)	Better access to offices and facilities
Main sources of funding	60% were partly funded from national budget All were funded by IOs or INGOs 40% supported by private businesses	70% were partly funded from national 60% were partly funded from local budget 90% were funded by IOs or INGOs	Stronger support from state budget at local level
Resilience – how long they are able to sustain operations	20% A year or more 80% up to six months	70% A year or more 20% Between 1-3 months 10% Other	Increased resilience- more organizations can maintain services for year or longer with reduced funding.

Impact of multiple crises on services




As already noted, during the COVID crisis, specialized services and many general services continued uninterrupted.

Table 2: Cancellation and restoration of services

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Specialized services				
Helpline	7	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Shelter	5	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres	1	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Support to child witness	0	-	-	—
Specialized program for perpetrators	1	Service was temporarily cancelled	Service was restored in a reduced format	↗
General services				
General counselling, information sharing	7	While 6 services were not interrupted, one organization temporarily cancelled this service due to COVID restrictive measures	Service was fully restored due to programme support	↑
Psychosocial counselling	5	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Free legal aid	3	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Assistance in accessing health care	4	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Assistance in accessing other institutions	9	While 8 services were not interrupted, 1 organization cancelled this service temporarily due to the COVID restrictions.	Service was fully restored due to the voluntary efforts of staff.	↑
Participation in local coordination teams, case conferences	6	While 4 organizations did not interrupt this activity, 2 organizations temporarily cancelled participation in coordination teams due to the restrictive pandemic measures.	One organization restored participation in local coordination teams fully and one to a lesser extent. The factors that contributed to restoration are combined support from the state, programme and voluntary efforts of staff.	↗
Education and training	7	While 5 services were not interrupted, 2 services were temporarily cancelled due to the COVID crisis	One service was fully restored and one to a large extent due to programme support	↗
Assistance in finding employment	5	While 3 services were not interrupted, 2 services were temporarily cancelled due to the pandemic measures.	One service was restored fully and one to a large extent due to programme support and voluntary efforts of staff	↗
Financial and in-kind assistance	2	No interruption in service provision	-	—

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Housing support	2	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Comprehensive reintegration programme	2	One service was temporarily cancelled due to COVID restrictions	Service was restored to some extent with state support	↗

Legend

-  Services were either fully maintained or temporarily reduced and then fully restored by all service providers
-  Services were cancelled by at least one provider and only partly restored (at least one service providers did not fully restore the service or did not restore it at all)
-  Services were cancelled and not restored

Experience with online and technology-facilitated violence

Out of the 10 organizations participating in the survey, only one organization specifically focuses on online and technology-facilitated (TF) violence, primarily through prevention work with students. Additionally, four organizations address online and TF violence within the context of their work with domestic and other forms of violence. Eight organizations expressed a desire to enhance their work on online and TF violence through various means,

including prevention initiatives targeting young people, direct support for victims, and the provision of free legal aid and psychosocial support. While some organizations aim to offer support to all women and girls, others intend to focus on specific groups such as students and rural populations. To achieve these goals, qualified staff, licensing, and funding are needed.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

Many of the challenges reported by organizations in Kosovo during the assessment are common and also present in other countries in the region. However, the context of Kosovo adds an additional layer of fragility due to political and security challenges associated with the dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina. The situation is particularly difficult in the northern municipalities of Kosovo, where institutions are not functioning properly and the system for protection and multisectoral cooperation is not fully operational. NGOs in these areas are not adequately supported or included

in the protection system, leaving survivors of violence without adequate support. According to interviews with representatives of organizations running safe houses for survivors of violence, there has been increased demand for shelter support since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic. Some report that the number of victims requiring safe house services has doubled. The challenge arises from the fact that they cannot refuse any victim, so they had to accept all, resulting in overcrowding of safe houses.

Table 3: Challenges and mitigation strategies

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Inadequate legal framework, policy makers do not take into account recommendations of NGOs, lack of political will	Advocacy, awareness raising of policymakers
Socio-political challenges, particularly those related to Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue process, security issues.	Not mitigated
Lack of funds, discontinuity of finances, withdrawal of some donors	Continuous work to identify local and international donors, private businesses and cooperation with other sister organizations
Sufficient space in shelters to accommodate all victims.	Using additional premises, increasing number of beds in existing space
Language barriers that affect the quality of service provision	Partly mitigated with ad hoc interpretation services.

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Difficulties faced by women in accessing services due to the poor transportation	Organizing transportation with organization vehicles
Particularly high health risks in shelters during peaks of COVID pandemic; difficulties in providing support in the shelters for women with mental problems; women who needed to be hospitalized could not be accompanied by shelter staff, which triggered fears and insecurities among victims of violence	Applying WHO health protocols, providing primary health services inside the shelter by emergency teams
Lack of human resources, including qualified staff and staff with specialized skills	Increased workload of existing staff, hiring external professionals
Difficulties in multisectoral cooperation and referral to institutions; when women leave shelters their social assistance is interrupted; state stakeholders are not well trained for some forms of violence, such as sexual violence; due to poor referrals and slow work of institutions, women started to lose trust in support services as they were not able to do proper referrals; institutions are often not responsive; lack of transparency and accountability of institutions.	Advocacy, lobbying, discussing with other members of coordination mechanisms against violence how to change these practices
Poor cooperation with electronic media, particularly TV and more specifically national TV outlets, in order to disseminate information about available services and improve outreach	Cooperating with local TV outlets, using social media
Delays in court sessions, protection orders were not always issued when needed	Not mitigated

Needs for support

Organizations reported following needs for support during the survey:

- Better cooperation with policy makers and their willingness to consider proposals from NGOs for improving the legal and institutional frameworks.
- More adequate legal framework, particularly regarding sexual violence and online violence.
- More adequate human resources, including additional staff, qualified staff, specialists in specific forms of violence or types of assistance, staff who speak minority languages, and improved digital skills.
- Equipment such as additional phone lines, more adequate premises, digital equipment
- Improved collaboration with other stakeholders from institutions involved in addressing VAW, including regular meetings, more effective referrals, case conferences, and better-trained professionals who recognize the importance of multisectoral cooperation.
- Some organizations require support to develop programmes for perpetrators, both financially and in terms of technical expertise.

From interviews with service providers in Kosovo

“Sexual violence is the challenge. It needs to be better addressed. After receiving support for some time, women victims of domestic violence often realize they are also victims of sexual violence. We need to be trained to provide better support for that. We need to increase our capacities to address the consequences of the sexual violence inflicted on them.”

“Since November of last year, northern Kosovo has abandoned the institutions. Therefore, anyone in need of social services, whether social protection services or services for women survivors of violence, are denied support. This has impacted NGO service providers without access to funds. Multisectoral cooperation and referrals are disrupted. We had very good cooperation with the police, who were trained to respond to VAW. All of this disappeared at once. It took a long time to build and then disappeared overnight.”

Organizational profiles

Six non-governmental organizations participated in the survey: Xena from Herceg Novi, IKRE from Rozaje, SOS helpline for women and children victims of violence, NGO ‘Good Life’, Montenegrin Women’s Lobby, and NGO Women’s Safe House from Podgorica.

The oldest organization was established in 1997, and the youngest in 2018, so on average, they have been providing these essential community services for 18 years. These organizations are categorized as micro or small in terms of number of employees. The smallest organization employs 2 people (including permanent and temporary staff), while the largest employs 28 people. In total, the organizations engage 12 permanent employees, 21 temporary employees, and 39 volunteers. Compared to the spring 2020 assessment, the average number of employees (permanent and temporary) has increased from 7.7 to 8.3. However, the average number of volunteers has decreased from 9.2 to 7.8. The organizations have slightly shifted their focus from working on a national scale to a more regional approach in service provision. Access to office premises or facilities has weakened in 2023 compared to 2020, and there has been a decrease in state support from national and local budgets. However, organizations have shown improved resilience, with half of them able to maintain services for at least one year.

Table 1: Organizational changes April 2020-March 2023

	April 2020	March 2023	Organizational change
Average number of employees (permanent + temporary)	7.7	8.3	Slight increase in average number of employees
Average number of volunteers	9.2	7.8	Loss of volunteers
Geographical scope	56% national 22% regional 22% local	83% national 17% regional	The scope of coverage and outreach has expanded
Organization premises	22% premises are owned 67% premises are rented 11% mixed	100% premises are rented	Less stable access to offices and facilities
Main sources of funding	78% partly funded from national budget 44% partly funded from local budgets All funded by IOs or INGOs 33% supported by private businesses 11% supported by public companies	50% partly funded from national 17% partly funded from local budget All funded by IOs or INGOs 33% membership fees	Decreased state support from national and local budgets
Resilience – how long they are able to sustain operations	33% A year or more 33% up to six months 22% between 1-3 months 12% less than one month	50% A year or more 17% up to 6 months 17% Between 1-3 months 17% Other	Increased resilience- more organizations can maintain services for year or longer with reduced funding

Impact of multiple crises on services




As already noted, during the COVID crisis, specialized services and many general services continued uninterrupted.

Table 2: Cancellation and restoration of services

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Specialized services				
Helpline	3	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Shelter	3	2 out of 3 shelters were permanently closed due to lack of funding and lack of premises.	Services were not restored due to the lack of license and lack of funding.	↓
Rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres	1	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Support to child witness	2	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Specialized program for perpetrators	1	No interruption in service provision	-	—
General services				
General counselling, information sharing	6	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Psychosocial counselling	6	While 4 organizations did not interrupt this service, 2 organizations cancelled it permanently due to lack of funding	Services received project-based funding and were cancelled following the end of the project	↓
Free legal aid	6	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Assistance in accessing health care	2	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Assistance in accessing other institutions	5	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Participation in local coordination teams, case conferences	5	While 3 organizations did not interrupt this activity, 2 organizations temporarily cancelled participation in coordination teams due to the restrictive pandemic measures.	Two organizations restored participation in local coordination teams to some extent, one with programme assistance and one due to the voluntary efforts of staff.	↗
Education and training	4	While 2 services were not interrupted, one service was temporarily and one permanently cancelled due to the restrictive pandemic measures and lack of funds	One service was fully restored due to programme support and voluntary efforts of staff, while one service was not restored.	↗
Assistance in finding employment	1	The service was temporarily cancelled due to restrictive pandemic measures, lack of money and lack of staff.	Service was restored to a lesser degree due to the voluntary efforts of staff and programme support.	↗

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Financial and in-kind assistance	1	No interruption in service provision	-	—
Housing support	0	-	-	—
Comprehensive reintegration programme	1	Service was temporarily cancelled due to the lack of money and lack of staff.	Service was restored to a lesser degree due to the voluntary efforts of staff.	—

Legend

-  Services were either fully maintained or temporarily reduced and then fully restored by all service providers
-  Services were cancelled by at least one provider and only partly restored (at least one service providers did not fully restore the service or did not restore it at all)
-  Services were cancelled and not restored

Experience with online and technology-facilitated violence

Out of the six organizations participating in the survey, two have a specific focus on online and TF violence, while the remaining 4 organizations address online and TF violence as part of their work on domestic and other forms of violence. The organizations that specifically focus on online violence provide information, emotional support, and referrals to other institutions for victims. They also engage in awareness-raising efforts and direct victims to web platforms where they can receive support and report incidents of violence. One organization offers a service called WebAlarm, which

provides psychological counseling and free legal aid to victims of online violence. These specialized services are available to women and girls in general, as well as specific vulnerable groups such as those with disabilities, those from rural areas, LGBTQ+ women, and women in need of social assistance. Three organizations expressed a desire to further focus their efforts on online and TF violence, particularly in prevention and online education. To accomplish this, they require qualified staff and funding.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

Representatives of organizations from Montenegro highlighted the challenges they faced during a period of significant political crisis and a fragile security situation. These circumstances made it difficult for staff and activists to carry out their work effectively. The crisis resulted in insufficient functionality of institutions, posing obstacles to service provision and referral processes.

One specific challenge relates to the financing of services by local governments. While one organization provides

services to multiple municipalities, the current legal framework restricts its financing to the municipality in which it is registered. Despite the willingness of neighboring municipalities to contribute financially, as the organization serves their populations as well, it is currently not possible under the existing regulations. The organization is engaged in advocacy efforts, aiming to raise awareness of this issue among policymakers and seek a legal decision that would enable alternative modalities for financing services by multiple local governments.

Table 3: Challenges and mitigation strategies

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Political crisis, poor functionality of institutions	More efforts of the staff to provide protection in unfavourable context
Lack of funds, discontinuity of finances, lack of state to finance services	Intense fundraising
Difficulties women face in accessing services due to poor transportation	Organizations do not have their own vehicles, so it is not mitigated

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Lack of campaigns to reach women with information about available services	Using social media
Particularly high health risks in shelters during peaks of COVID pandemic	Applying WHO health protocols, renting separate apartments for victims
Lack of human resources in terms of qualified staff, staff with specific specialized skills, insufficient number of staff	Increased workload of existing staff, sometimes not mitigated
Difficulties in multisectoral cooperation, referral to institutions; difficult cooperation with judiciary due to the high fluctuation of judges and lack of awareness on VAW; lack of awareness among social workers employed in centres for social work; inadequate responses of police which often relativize violence and tries to reconcile victim and perpetrator.	Advocacy, lobbying, often not mitigated

Needs for support

Organizations reported following needs for support during the survey:

- More adequate legal framework
- Stable funding and sufficient funds to ensure quality of services
- Better access to premises for shelters
- More adequate human resources, including additional staff, qualified staff, staff specialized for certain forms of violence or specific forms of assistance, staff who speak minority languages, increased digital skills
- Equipment such as additional phone lines, more adequate premises, and digital equipment
- Improved cooperation with other stakeholders from institutions engaged in VAW response, regular meetings with institutions, more effective referrals, case conferences, and better trained professionals from institutions who recognize the importance of multisectoral cooperation
- Some organizations require technical and financial support to introduce rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators.

From interviews with service providers in Montenegro

“The municipality has a system that gives everyone a little bit [of funding]. It doesn't set priorities or have strategies that guide prioritization. They put us in the same group as folklore and dance groups. Those groups are co-financed by the municipality, but they also have membership fees. Here on the coast, rent has become more expensive – it costs around 700 euros but used to be 400-500 euros – because of the inflow of Ukrainian and Russian citizens. All the funds we receive haven't ensured the sustainability of the organization. The stability of the shelter location is important. You cannot move shelter from one place to another every few months. The crisis center must be in one place.”

NORTH MACEDONIA

Organizational profiles

Eight non-governmental organizations participated in the survey: Association National Roma Centrum from Kumanovo, Skaj Plus from Strumica, Educational Humanitarian Organization – ECHO from Stip, Women’s Forum Tetovo, HERA- Health Education and Research Association, Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, National Council for Gender Equality, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights from Skopje.

The “oldest” organization was established in 1994, and the “youngest” in 2013, so on average, they have been providing these important community services for 21 years. The organizations are micro and small in terms of the number of employees. The smallest organization employs only one person, while the largest employs 48 people. In total, the organizations engage 68 permanent employees, 25 temporary employees, and 68 volunteers. Compared to the spring 2020 assessment, the average number of persons engaged as employees (permanent and temporary) has decreased from 11.0 to 7.7. During the same time, the average number of volunteers engaged in organizations increased from 13.7 to 17.0 persons. The scope of outreach in service provision has expanded as more organizations provide services at the national and regional levels than before, and fewer solely on the local level. The access to premises for offices and facilities has become weaker, but funding from the state budget at the local and national levels was available for more organizations than in the first assessment. Data on resilience are inconsistent.

Table 1: Organizational changes April 2020-March 2023

	April 2020	March 2023	Organizational change
Average number of employees (permanent + temporary)	11.0	7.7	On average, organizations lost about 3 employees
Average number of volunteers	13.7	17.0	On average, organizations gained around 3 volunteers
Geographical scope	40% national 20% regional 20% local 20% European	63% national 25% regional 12% local	The scope of coverage and outreach has extended beyond local and regional towards national level
Organization premises	20% premises are owned and rented 80% premises are rented	13% premises are owned 87% premises are rented	Less stable access to offices and facilities
Main sources of funding	60% partly funded from national budget 40% supported from local budgets All funded by IOs or INGOs 20% supported by private businesses 20% had revenue from commercial activity 40% had membership fees	63% partly funded from national budget 63% partly funded from local budget 88% funded by IOs or INGOs 12% supported by private businesses 25% had very minimal revenue from commercial activities 38% has very minimal income from membership fees	More organizations supported from state budget at national and local level
Resilience – how long they are able to sustain operations	60% A year or more 40% no answer	62% A year or more 25% Less than 1 month 13% Other	Slight increase in resilience, but cannot be assessed due to the lack of answers in the first assessment.

Impact of multiple crises on services

As already noted, during the COVID crisis, specialized services and many general services continued uninterrupted.

Table 2: Cancellation and restoration of services

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Specialized services				
Helpline	1	Service was not interrupted	-	—
Shelter	1	Service was not interrupted	-	—
Rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres	0	-	-	—
Support to child witness	1	Service was not interrupted	-	—
Specialized program for perpetrators	1	Service was not interrupted	-	—
General services				
General counselling, information sharing	6	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Psychosocial counselling	5	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Free legal aid	7	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Assistance in accessing health care	1	Service was not interrupted	-	—
Assistance in accessing other institutions	6	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Participation in local coordination teams, case conferences	4	While 3 organizations did not interrupt this activity, 1 organization temporarily cancelled participation in coordination teams due to lack of funds.	Activity was restored to a lesser extent due to the voluntary efforts of staff.	↗
Education and training	2	While 5 services were not interrupted, 2 services were temporarily cancelled due to the COVID crisis	One service was fully restored and one to a large extent due to programme support	↗
Assistance in finding employment	3	While 3 services were not interrupted, 2 services were temporarily cancelled due to the pandemic measures.	One service was restored fully and one to a large extent due to programme support and voluntary efforts of staff	↗
Financial and in-kind assistance	1	Services were not interrupted	-	—

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Housing support	1	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Comprehensive reintegration programme	2	One service was temporarily cancelled due to the COVID restrictions	Service was restored to a small degree with state support	↗

Legend

- ↑ Services were either fully maintained or temporarily reduced and then fully restored by all service providers
- ↗ Services were cancelled by at least one provider and only partly restored (at least one service providers did not fully restore the service or did not restore it at all)
- ↓ Services were cancelled and not restored

Experience with online and technology-facilitated violence

All eight organizations participating in the survey focus on addressing online and TF violence exclusively within the context of domestic and other forms of violence. Each organization expressed a desire to further concentrate their efforts on online and TF violence in various ways, including enhancing digital literacy among young women, engaging men and boys in discussions, providing training

for law enforcement and justice personnel on online and TF violence, conducting informative campaigns, implementing prevention-focused educational activities, and offering direct support services to victims of online violence. They would like to work with students, girls and women from vulnerable groups, as well as men and boys. To accomplish this, they require qualified staff, funding, and office space.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

Participants from North Macedonia highlighted the challenges arising from a combination of political and economic crises. The country is experiencing unfavorable trends, and a key challenge is the decreasing support for services from the state budget at both national and local

levels. Additionally, the COVID pandemic and other crises have led to an increased demand for services, which cannot be adequately met. Local governments do not prioritize services for victims of VAW, resulting in minimal or no financial support for such initiatives.

Table 3: Challenges and mitigation strategies

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Lack of funds, discontinuity of financing	Intensive fundraising
Licensing of services is too demanding and does not correspond with the level of support NGO service providers receive from the state.	Advocacy and lobbying with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
Lack of funds to advertise services and provide information about their availability, particularly for SOS helpline which should be broadly available to women.	Using different channels, like social media, disseminating information through institutions in police stations, centres for social work, health institutions.
Difficulties to refer beneficiaries to health care centers during pandemic.	Use pressure and connections; sometimes not mitigated.
Lack of human resources, including staff with specialized skills, and burnout of staff.	Increase workload of existing staff, hire external professionals, including interns, for example young lawyers to provide free legal assistance.
Difficulties in multisectoral cooperation, referral to institutions; when women leave shelters their social assistance is not ensured, the judicial system is generally unresponsive and police while increased sensibility to VAW still needs further education; social protection system is cooperative, but it is understaffed and lacks qualified staff	Advocacy, lobbying, using connections established through previous cooperation

Needs for support

Organizations reported the following needs for support during the survey:

- More adequate legal framework, including loosening of criteria for licensing.
- More adequate human resources, including additional staff, qualified staff, those specialized for certain forms of violence or specific forms of assistance, those who speak minority languages, those with increased digital skills
- Stronger support from the state budget
- Improved cooperation with other stakeholders from institutions engaged in response to VAW, regular meetings with institutions, more effective referrals
- To understand and address global and regional threats to effectively counter anti-gender equality and anti-feminist movements.

From interviews with service providers in North Macedonia

“The pandemic brought many challenges, both globally and for us in the organization. No woman was abandoned, and we managed everything - we had sharp senses back then. The number of women grew daily, but no one was left without food, clothing, or health care. I am proud of my team that proved they were able to overcome those challenges.”

“Not to be pathetic, but [financial difficulties] are a reality that we are facing. The cost of living is growing daily, and the finances we have are unchanged, they are the same as before the crisis. But the number of women who need support, unfortunately, is growing.”

Organizational profiles

Eight non-governmental organizations participated in the survey: SOS Network Vojvodina from Kikinda, Fenomena Association from Kraljevo, Association of Women Sandglass from Krusevac, Association of Roma Women 'Osvit' from Nis, Association 'From Circle Vojvodina' from Novi Sad, FemPlatz from Pancevo, Victimology Society of Serbia and NGO Atina from Belgrade.

The oldest organization was established in 1997, and the youngest in 2018, so on average, they have been providing important community services for 15 years. The organizations are micro and small in terms of the number of employees. The smallest organization employs five people (including permanent and temporary staff), while the largest employs 35 people. In total, the organizations have 70 permanent employees, 33 temporary employees, and 73 volunteers. Compared to the 2020 assessment, the average number of employees (permanent and temporary) has decreased from 13.8 to 11.4. However, the average number of volunteers has increased from 6.9 to 8.1. The outreach in service provision has remained relatively stable, with a similar national outreach, but a slight increase in regional outreach. Access to office space and facilities has weakened, but there has been a slight increase in the number of organizations supported by national and local budgets. The organizations have shown increased resilience, with the ability to maintain services for at least one year.

Table 1: Organizational changes April 2020-March 2023




	April 2020	March 2023	Organizational change
Average number of employees (permanent + temporary)	13.8	11.4	Loss of employees
Average number of volunteers	6.9	8.1	Higher engagement of volunteers
Geographical scope	57% national 14% regional 29% local	56% national 33% regional 11% other	Inconsistent trend – slight decrease in national scope, increase in regional and decrease in local
Organization premises	85% premises are rented 15% premises are used without paying (volunteers)	100% premises are rented	Less stable access to offices and facilities
Main sources of funding	14.3% supported from local budget All funded by IOs or INGOs 43% have membership fees 27% have revenue from commercial activities	22% partly funded from national budget 11% partly funded from local budgets All funded by IOs or INGOs 22% supported by private sector 33% have small revenue from membership fees	More organizations receive support from state budget at national and local level
Resilience – how long they are able to sustain operations	29% a year or more 29% up to six months 42% between 1-3 months	67% a year or more 22% up to six months 11% between 1-3 months	Increased resilience- more organizations can maintain services for year or longer with reducing funding

Impact of multiple crises on services




As already noted, during the COVID crisis, specialized services and many general services continued uninterrupted.

Table 2: Cancellation and restoration of services

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Specialized services				
Helpline	8	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Shelter	1	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Rape crisis or sexual violence referral centres	1	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Support to child witness	1	Service was not interrupted	-	—
Specialized program for perpetrators	0	-	-	—
General services				
General counselling, information sharing	7	While five services were not interrupted, two organizations temporarily cancelled this service due to the COVID restrictive measures	Both services were fully restored with programme support	↑
Psychosocial counselling	7	While six organizations did not interrupt this service, one organization temporarily cancelled this service due to the COVID restrictive measures	The service was restored fully with programme support	↑
Free legal aid	4	Services were not interrupted	-	—
Assistance in accessing health care	3	One organization did not interrupt the service while two cancelled it temporarily due to the restrictive pandemic measures	Both services were fully restored with programme support and voluntary efforts of the staff	↑
Assistance in accessing other institutions	7	While five services were not interrupted, two organizations cancelled this service temporarily due to the restrictive pandemic measures	Both services were fully restored with programme support	↑
Participation in local coordination teams, case conferences	3	While one organization did not interrupt this activity, two organizations temporarily cancelled participation in coordination teams due to the restrictive pandemic measures	Both services were fully restored when restrictive measures were removed	↑
Education and training	5	One service was temporarily cancelled due to the restrictive pandemic measures	Service was fully restored with programme support	↑
Assistance in finding employment	2	Both services were temporarily cancelled due to restrictive pandemic measures	Services were fully restored with programme support and voluntary efforts of staff	↑

Services	Currently provided (N)	Changes due to the multiple crises	Restoration of services	
Financial and in-kind assistance	2	One service was temporarily cancelled due to lack of funds	Service was restored to a large extent with programme support	
Housing support	0	-	-	
Comprehensive reintegration programme	2	One service was temporarily cancelled due to the COVID restrictions	Service was fully restored with programme support	

Legend

-  Services were either fully maintained or temporarily reduced and then fully restored by all service providers
-  Services were cancelled by at least one provider and only partly restored (at least one service providers did not fully restore the service or did not restore it at all)
-  Services were cancelled and not restored

Experience with online and technology-facilitated violence

Out of the eight organizations participating in the survey, one organization specifically focuses on online and TF violence, six organizations work with online and TF violence as part of their work on domestic and other forms of violence, and one organization does not work with this form of violence at all. The organization that focuses on online and TF violence provides information, emotional support, and referrals to victims. Their services are available to both women and men.

Six organizations expressed the desire to enhance their work on online and TF violence through various means, such as awareness raising, direct psychological and legal support to victims. They would like to work with women and girls, with some organizations highlighting their interest in supporting women and girls with disabilities. To achieve their goals, they require qualified staff and adequate funding.

Challenges and mitigation strategies

The key challenges in Serbia are related to the growing gap between government and NGOs, which reflects the broader gap between state and civil society. Women's organizations that have been providing services for an extended period and possess substantial expertise in their work are facing a lack of funding from the state budget. Additionally, respondents from Serbia have highlighted the lack of collaboration among

NGOs as a specific challenge. This growing gap is observed between organizations that primarily offer services and those that are more focused on feminist activism or possess an academic feminist background. Such divisions weaken the women's NGO sector, especially within an unfavorable political context.

Table 3: Challenges and mitigation strategies

Challenges	Mitigation strategies
Inadequate legal framework, policy makers do not take into account recommendations of NGOs, lack of political will	Advocacy, awareness raising of policy makers
Lack of funds, discontinuity of financing, lack of readiness of governments at different levels to support services from public budget	Fundraising with international donors
Difficulties faced by women to access to services due to poor transportation	Organize transportation with the organizations' vehicles; pay for transportation when needed
Particularly high health risks during peaks of COVID pandemic; difficult referral to health care institutions	Apply WHO health protocols, using previously developed cooperation with health care institutions for emergency cases
Lack of human resources, including qualified staff and those with specialized skills	Increase workload of existing staff, engage volunteers, train volunteers
Difficulties in multisectoral cooperation, referral to institutions, lack of knowledge about protocols among professionals in different institutions	Advocacy, lobbying

Needs for support

Organizations reported the following needs for support:

- More adequate legal framework, particularly regarding sexual violence and online violence
- More funds, not only project-based but also institutional, that would enable more consistent service provision and the ability to have an impact on the broader women's rights agenda
- More adequate human resources, including additional staff, qualified staff, staff specialized for certain forms of violence or specific forms of assistance, staff speaking minority languages
- Improved cooperation with other stakeholders from institutions engaged in response to VAW, regular meetings with institutions, more effective referrals, case conferences, inclusion of better trained professionals from institutions who recognize the importance of multisectoral cooperation.

From interviews with service providers in Serbia

“The position of women’s organizations at the local level depends on the local political leaders. There is no empathy for victims anymore, and ‘gongo’ organizations are made. This is where the problem is - women’s NGOs still provide services, while the money goes to other organizations.”

“Men’s football clubs often receive more financial support at local level than NGOs providing services to women survivors. And then, only when women protest, local governments give small amount of funds to rural women’s organizations. Women’s issues, women’s needs, women’s problems are being manipulated. Everything is viewed through the prism of giving them a small amount of funds so they don’t protest.”

“The problem is there is a polarization among women’s organizations. On one hand, there are organizations that are called authentic feminist organizations that deal with theory and call themselves radical feminists, and on the other hand, there are activist feminist organizations that are also service providers. The latter lose their activist potential, because they focus on the provision of services funded by donors. However, the feminist organizations with an academic approach to feminism and feminist theory do not try to make the language of feminism more visible and understandable for women’s service providers. There is the thesis that both streams [service providers and think-thank feminists] should exist, but they should not mix, they should only be solidary to each other. This is wrong because the organizations that provide services are focusing on the social sphere of action, struggling to sustain themselves and are slowly losing the feminist thread. The only place where the F of Feminism is left in these organizations are the principles of working with the victim. They neglect themselves, their needs, they have become only helpers, saviours, who help those who need it. Their feminist potential is being lost.”

