

# COI Focus

## ALBANIA

### Domestic violence

13 October 2017

Cedoca

Original language: Dutch

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All the sources used are briefly mentioned in a footnote and described in detail in a bibliography at the end of the document. Sources which have been consulted but which were not used are listed as consulted sources. In exceptional cases, sources are not mentioned by name. When specific information from this document is used, the user is asked to quote the source mentioned in the bibliography.

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TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATED MIGRATION POLICY, THANKS TO THE AMIF

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1. The nature and extent of domestic violence in Albania</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2. International treaties and national strategies</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Legislation</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>4. Responsible bodies</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Existing structures to prevent and protect victims of domestic violence</b> .....	<b>13</b>
5.1. National Referral Mechanism .....	13
5.2. National online database.....	16
5.3. Training of professionals involved in various sectors.....	17
5.4. Awareness-raising campaigns.....	18
<b>6. Implementation of protective measures</b> .....	<b>19</b>
6.1. Reports and protection orders .....	19
6.1.1. Procedure and figures .....	19
6.1.2. Reports of domestic violence.....	20
6.1.3. Issuing and implementing the protection order.....	21
6.2. Role and action of the police .....	23
6.3. Judicial prosecution.....	24
6.4. Right to information .....	26
6.5. Treatment programmes for offenders .....	27
<b>7. Services for victims of domestic violence</b> .....	<b>27</b>
7.1. Refuges .....	28
7.2. 24-hour emergency line.....	31
7.3. Medical assistance .....	31
7.4. Financial support and housing .....	32
7.5. Free legal assistance .....	33
7.6. Non-governmental services.....	34
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>39</b>

## Introduction

For this COI Focus, Cedoca carried out a study into the situation of domestic violence in Albania. The primary objective of this COI Focus was to gather information on the protection measures taken by the Albanian authorities and on the existing governmental and non-governmental structures and services that provide shelter and assistance to victims of domestic violence.

Within the planned timeframe, Cedoca consulted as extensive and varied a number of sources of domestic violence as possible. The information in this COI Focus primarily comes from reports from international organisations, Albanian government agencies, international and local human rights organisations, NGOs and research institutes, supplemented by information from independent media, official press channels and government-focused media. Further information in this COI Focus was obtained from governmental and non-governmental sources during and after a fact-finding mission carried out by Cedoca in Albania from 13 to 21 March 2017. The study was concluded on 22 September 2017.

Cedoca attempted to use as much recent information as possible in order to highlight the protection possibilities and services for victims of domestic violence in 2016 and 2017. There are reports from 2016 and 2017 that draw conclusions or provide criticism on the basis of recent findings, but there are also several national and international reports from 2016 and 2017 that refer to studies and figures from 2013, 2014 and 2015 to describe the current functioning and provision of services for victims of domestic violence, and the current functioning of the judiciary and police forces in situations of domestic violence, and make recommendations. Key sources regularly referred to in recent reports on domestic violence include: a 2013 INSTAT report on a large-scale population survey among victims of domestic violence, a 2014 CEDAW Committee report on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention, a Council of Europe report in collaboration with UN Women in 2015 on service provision for victims, and a 2014 report from the Albanian "High Council of Justice" on the judiciary in situations of domestic violence.

The first chapter outlines the problem of domestic violence in Albania based on possible causes and figures.

The second chapter provides an overview of the treaties that Albania has signed and the strategies they have elaborated to combat domestic violence and other gender issues.

The third chapter deals with Albanian legislation on penalties in situations of domestic violence, the legal procedures for obtaining protection and possible protection measures.

Chapter four describes the role of national and local authorities in situations of domestic violence.

Chapter five outlines how different actors are informed about situations of domestic violence, and how they cooperate with other competent authorities. This chapter also looks at the training received by the actors involved and the impact of this. Awareness-raising campaigns initiated by different actors are also addressed.

Chapter six describes how the legal framework to protect victims of domestic violence and prosecute perpetrators is applied in practice, as well as the obstacles faced by victims and authorities.

Chapter seven outlines which governmental and non-governmental services a victim of domestic violence can turn to, how they are eligible and what the shortcomings are.

This COI Focus was made possible with the help of the AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund).

## 1. The nature and extent of domestic violence in Albania

Domestic violence is a common problem in Albania, affecting mainly women but also children.<sup>1</sup> In 2015, 74% of the victims were women or girls.<sup>2</sup> Domestic violence is violence committed by someone from the family circle, such as a partner or former partner, or a family member.<sup>3</sup>

According to experts including Dr Robin Haarr and United Nations (UN) experts studying domestic violence in Albania, gender stereotypes and a deeply-rooted patriarchal mentality in Albanian society are at the basis of domestic violence and gender inequality.<sup>4</sup> The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) believes that gender stereotypes encourage discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Awareness-raising campaigns are organised every year to ensure that women and girls are put in a more positive light (see below 5.4 Awareness-raising campaigns).<sup>6</sup>

According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), a UN organisation dedicated to women's rights and gender equality, a patriarchal mentality is mainly prevalent in rural areas where families often have a traditional division of roles: women work on their husbands' farmland, but are not paid for it, while their husbands manage the income. According to UN Women, financial dependence and gender inequality put women in a vulnerable position.<sup>7</sup> A report by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reveals that domestic violence occurs in all sections of the population, but that women who are financially dependent on their husbands are more at risk of violence than women who work outside the home, and women with a diploma in higher education.<sup>8</sup>

Economic problems, property disputes, divorce and alcohol consumption are other factors that increase the risk of violence in a family situation.<sup>9</sup> Another reason may be that perpetrators of violence want power and control over their partner, or that they used to witness domestic violence themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Mirela Arqimandriti from the NGO Qendra Aleanca Gjinore për Zhvillim (Gender Alliance for Development Center, GADC) makes the link between the patriarchal mentality, property issues, economic interests and the role of family in cases of domestic violence. Family members can exert pressure to commit an act of violence when someone has brought shame to the family's honour, for example by divorcing. Arqimandriti gives the example of the recent murder of an Albanian female judge by her ex-husband. In an interview, the perpetrator's brother justified the murder by saying that it was fair retribution since she had filed for divorce. The same brother now manages the property and income of the company of his brother who is in prison.<sup>11</sup>

Domestic violence can take various forms. It can be physical, psychological or sexual in nature, or a combination of different forms of violence. In a report by INSTAT on domestic violence in Albania, the following definition is used:

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of State, 3/03/2017, pp. 1, 19-20 [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> General Directorate of the Albanian State Police via UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 36 [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, p. 54 [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> UN Albania, 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#); INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, p. 9 [url](#); UN, 25/11/2016, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> CEDAW, 25/07/2016, p. 5 [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> CEDAW, 25/07/2016, p. 5 [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 56 [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, pp. 47, 50-52 [url](#); Dogjani A., 16/01/2017, pp. 138-139 [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, pp. 46-47 [url](#); Albanian Helsinki Committee, 12/2015, p. 11 [url](#); Albanian Helsinki Committee, 04/2017, p. 28 [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> Dogjani A., 16/01/2017, p. 140 [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017; BalkanWeb, 8/09/2017, [url](#)

"a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one intimate partner or family member to gain and maintain power and control over another intimate partner or family member. Domestic violence includes psychological, physical, and sexual violence that aims to humiliate, manipulate, intimidate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, threaten, and harm or injure an intimate partner or person in the family."<sup>12</sup>

In a large-scale population survey carried out by INSTAT in cooperation with UNDP in 2013 among women aged 18 to 55, 59.4% of women indicated that they experienced domestic violence at some point in their relationship or marriage. 53% of women replied that they had suffered violence in the 12 months prior to the survey.<sup>13</sup> 52.8% of women were confronted with psychological violence in the 12 months prior to the survey, 14.7% with physical violence, 5% with sexual violence and 16.2% with both physical and sexual violence.<sup>14</sup>

With the exception of 2015, the police have registered more reports each year. In 2016, the police received 4163 reports of domestic violence.<sup>15</sup> In 2015 there were 3867.<sup>16</sup> In 2014, 4121 reports were made.<sup>17</sup> In 2005, the police recorded 94 cases of domestic violence.<sup>18</sup>

Various reports, including a report by the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) and the CEDAW Committee, indicate that not all victims of domestic violence report it.<sup>19</sup> According to CEDAW experts, this is due to shame, fear of further acts of violence or ignorance of the procedures which exist.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, various experts including the Ombudsman and the AHC have expressed their concern about the number of people murdered in the context of domestic violence.<sup>21</sup>

In 2014, there were 17 murder cases related to domestic violence, with 22 victims.<sup>22</sup>

In 2015, 54 murders were committed in Albania. Of these, 18 were related to domestic violence, with a total of 20 victims, including 10 women and girls.<sup>23</sup>

In 2016, there were 71 murders in Albania, 17 of which were committed in the context of domestic violence.<sup>24</sup>

Various newspapers have reported that in the first nine months of 2017, one murder has been committed every month in the context of domestic violence.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>12</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, , p. 20 [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, pp. 33, 53 [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, p. 34 [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> UN Albania 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> General Directorate of the Albanian State Police (Albanian: *Drejtoria e Përgjithshme e Policisë së Shtetit*) via UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 36 [url](#); European Commission, 9/11/2016, p. 66 [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> INSTAT, 13/06/2016, p. 49 [url](#); Le Courrier des Balkans, 22/09/2017, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> UN Albania 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#); Albanian Helsinki Committee, 04/2017, p. 14 [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 62 [url](#); Albanian Helsinki Committee, 04/2017, p. 14 [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 47 [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> General Directorate of the Albanian State Police (Albanian: *Drejtoria e Përgjithshme e Policisë së Shtetit*) via UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 36 [url](#); and via INSTAT, 13/06/2016, p. 51 [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> INSTAT, 8/06/2017, p. 92 [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> Independent Balkan News Agency, 7/09/2017, [url](#); Albanian Daily News, 7/09/2017, [url](#)

## 2. International treaties and national strategies

In 1993, Albania ratified the CEDAW Convention, the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women". Albania signed the Additional Protocol in 2003. As such, Albania agrees to comply with all the obligations of this Convention.<sup>26</sup>

On 19 December 2011, Albania signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. This convention is also referred to as the Istanbul Convention. On 4 February 2013, the Albanian Government ratified the Convention, and it entered into force on 1 August 2014.<sup>27</sup> As such, Albania undertakes to: adopt a policy to combat and prevent violence against women, guarantee legislation that prosecutes and punishes all forms of violence against women, and offer services to shelter and support women psychologically, medically, financially and legally.<sup>28</sup>

On 19 December 2007, the Council of Ministers adopted the first "National Strategy on Gender Equality and the Elimination of Domestic Violence". This strategy covered the period 2007-2010, and was intended to make gender equality and domestic violence a policy priority.<sup>29</sup>

The second "National Strategy on Gender Equality and Reduction of Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence" covered the period 2011-2015. This strategy aims to create a society in which gender equality is respected, valued, taught, supported and encouraged, and in which all forms of gender-based violence are not tolerated but punished, and in which victims are supported and defended, and in which every individual is given equal treatment and opportunities regardless of their gender.<sup>30</sup> This strategy has four priorities: strengthening the legal and institutional framework, involving more women in decision-making, making women economically independent and reducing gender-based violence.<sup>31</sup> In addition, there are also specific strategic objectives: organise awareness-raising campaigns as a preventive measure, provide services to victims (legal and administrative protection, rehabilitation and reintegration), heavier punishment for perpetrators, and capacity building of staff at the local and national level.<sup>32</sup>

The third "National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality" dates from October 2016 and covers the period 2016-2020. This strategy considers gender equality as a prerequisite for sustainable development and aims for zero tolerance of gender-based violence and domestic violence. This strategy has four priorities: the economic independence of women and men, effective and equal participation of women in political and public decision-making, the reduction of gender-based violence and domestic violence, strengthening the coordinating and monitoring role of "National Mechanisms for Gender Equality" and raising public awareness of gender equality.<sup>33</sup>

An additional national action plan on gender equality and domestic violence is the "National Action Plan for the Involvement of Men and Boys as Partners of Women and Girls in Gender Equality and Prevention of Gender Related and Domestic Violence 2014-2019". This action plan aims to involve men and boys in order to combat violence against women and girls by getting men and women to work together.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>26</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 9 [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> Council of Europe, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> Council of Europe, 11/05/2011 [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Albania, 19/12/2007, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 8 [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Albania, 06/2011, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, pp. 8-9 [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 20/10/2016, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 10 [url](#)

The "National Action Plan for the Socio-Economic Reintegration of Women and Girls who are Victims of Human Trafficking in the Republic of Albania" from February 2016 also pertains to victims of domestic violence.<sup>35</sup>

The "National Strategy for Social Protection 2015-2020" was approved by the Council of Ministers on 23 December 2016 and aims to financially support the most vulnerable population groups, including victims of domestic violence.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Legislation

Albania has regularly adapted its legislation to meet international standards. A report from the Council of Europe notes that Albanian legislation complies with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, except for a number of recommendations.<sup>37</sup>

The Criminal Code has been amended several times to add new criminal offences and new forms of violence, and to impose heavier penalties on perpetrators. Article 130/a on domestic violence states that:<sup>38</sup>

"Battering and any other act of violence against a person who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, close relative or close relative in-law to the perpetrator of the criminal offence, resulting in violation of his or her physical, psycho-social and economic integrity, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to two years. A serious death threat or serious injury, against a person who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, close relative or close relative in-law to the perpetrator of the criminal offence, resulting in violation of his or her physical, psycho-social and economic integrity, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to three years. Intentional injury committed against a person who is a spouse, former spouse, cohabitant or former cohabitant, close relative or close relative in-law to the perpetrator of the criminal offence, resulting in a temporary disability for work for more than nine days, shall be punished by imprisonment of up to five years. The same offences which are committed repeatedly or in the presence of minors, shall be punishable by one to five years of imprisonment."<sup>39</sup>

Since 2013, rape within marriage or between partners has been considered a criminal offence, and was included in the Criminal Code (Art. 102).<sup>40</sup>

The Criminal Code also contains provisions on other forms of violence against women: stalking, forced marriage, termination of pregnancy without the woman's consent, rape, exploitation through prostitution, etc.<sup>41</sup>

The 2013 amendments to the Criminal Code ensure that there are no mitigating circumstances for the offender in the event of domestic violence or criminal offences against children, regardless of whether the relationship with the victim has returned to normal (Art. 48). Aggravating

<sup>35</sup> International Organization for Migration, 02/2016, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 23/12/2016, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 53 [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> *Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania*, 27/01/1995 (last amendment on 11/06/2015), [url](#); *Kodi Penal (Criminal code)*, 24/08/2017, [url](#); Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 53 [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> *Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania*, 27/01/1995 (last amendment on 11/06/2015), [url](#); *Kodi Penal (Criminal code)*, 24/08/2017, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> *Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania*, 27/01/1995 (last amendment on 11/06/2015), [url](#); *Kodi Penal (Criminal code)*, 24/08/2017, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> *Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania*, 27/01/1995 (last amendment on 11/06/2015), [url](#); *Kodi Penal (Criminal code)*, 24/08/2017, [url](#)

circumstances apply in case of gender related motives (Art. 50/j) or if criminal offences are committed during or after the issuing of an (immediate) protection order (Art. 50/e/1). Furthermore, the Criminal Code prohibits suspended sentences in the event of criminal offences in the context of domestic violence (Art. 59/a). If a person murders a family member or intentionally and gravely wounds a family member, harsher sentences apply, and imprisonment of at least 20 years to life is imposed (Art. 79/c and 88/2).<sup>42</sup>

In December 2006, the Parliament adopted the first "Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations".<sup>43</sup> The purpose of this law is to:

- Establish a coordinated network of responsible bodies who are in charge of protecting, supporting and rehabilitating victims of domestic violence and taking preventive measures;
- Strengthen the judiciary in taking protection measures and issuing protection orders;
- Ensure rapid, affordable and accessible services for victims of domestic violence.<sup>44</sup>

This law was amended in 2008 and 2010.<sup>45</sup> The amendments from 2010 concern the establishment of a coordinated network and national services for victims of domestic violence. The amendments to the law oblige social workers, legal representatives and lawyers to keep confidential the details of victims of domestic violence and exempt persons applying for a protection order from legal costs. The amendments guarantee additional and better protection for child victims of domestic violence.<sup>46</sup>

Violence is defined in this law as:

"[...] any act or omission by a person against another person, which results in violation of physical, moral, psychological, sexual, social, and economic integrity."<sup>47</sup>

Domestic violence is then defined as:

"[...] any act of violence [...] carried out by or against persons who are or have been in family relationship."<sup>48</sup>

The Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations provides for various forms of protection measures:

- a prohibition for the offender to use threats of violence or violence against the victim or their family members;
- an immediate restraining order for the offender;
- an injunction requiring the offender to temporarily leave the place of residence;
- a ban on entering or staying in the victim's home, even if the offender has ownership rights over the home;
- an immediate ban on the offender from approaching the victim or family members of the victim anywhere;

<sup>42</sup> *Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania*, 27/01/1995 (last amendment on 11/06/2015), [url](#); *Kodi Penal (Criminal code)*, 24/08/2017, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 46 [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 53 [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)



- a (temporary) shelter for the victim and children;
- the revocation or restriction of rights of access to children;
- accompaniment of the victim or offender if he or she wants to collect personal belongings;
- temporary custody of the victim and temporary revocation of the parental rights of the offender;
- confiscation of weapons;
- an obligation for the offender to pay the rent of the victim's (temporary) residence;
- measures to cover the victim's costs;
- an obligation for the offender to participate in rehabilitation programmes.<sup>49</sup>

A district court (Albanian: *gjykata*) can issue a regular protection order (Albanian: *udher mbrojte*) or an immediate protection order (Albanian: *udher menjëherë mbrojte*). Both may contain several protection measures.<sup>50</sup>

The District Court is required by law to conduct a hearing within 15 days of an application for a protection order. The duration of a regular protection order is limited to 12 months but may be extended. The protection order shall expire automatically on the expiry date unless the victim or an authorised representative files an application to renew the protection order 15 days before the expiry date. The order shall specify the protective measures to be imposed and is effective immediately. The order must also state that failure to comply with it is a criminal offence and that the offender can appeal within 15 days of its issue. This appeal does not suspend the procedure. If the circumstances have changed, the victim or a representative of the victim, the offender or the public prosecutor, if he or she was aware of the situation, may request an adjustment or termination of the protection order. Following an investigation, the court shall decide on the continuation, modification or termination of the protection order. This request does not suspend the procedure.<sup>51</sup>

If a person applies for an immediate protection order, the court must take a decision within 48 hours. In such situations, the perpetrator constitutes a direct threat to the victim. An immediate protection order enters into force immediately and must specify which protection measures are applicable. It must also indicate that it carries on when converted into a regular protection order and that failure to comply with it is a criminal offence. The order must state that the offender may appeal within five days of the issuance of the order. This appeal does not suspend the procedure. The order must contain a date of the hearing to confirm the immediate protection order. That date should be within 20 days of the issuance of the immediate protection order. At this hearing, the court will decide to end the immediate protection order or to impose a regular protection order.<sup>52</sup>

The District Court shall issue an (immediate) protection order when there is sufficient evidence against the perpetrator. Evidence may consist of testimony, police reports, medical reports, expert statements, statements by those involved, documents from social workers or social services in the municipality, or documents from legally registered NGOs. If an application for a protection order shows that a police station, local government office or health centre has written evidence of

<sup>49</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>52</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

domestic violence, they are obliged to send a certified copy to the court or the applicant on request.<sup>53</sup>

An (immediate) protection order can be applied for by the victim themselves, as well as by their authorised representative or lawyer, and by the police or the public prosecutor. If the victim is a minor, an application for a protection order may be made by the parent or guardian, authorised representative or lawyer, family members, delegates of the social services of the municipality where the minor is temporarily or permanently resident, or by recognised centres for the protection and rehabilitation of victims of domestic violence. If the victim is a minor, the court must decide on a protection order within 24 hours.<sup>54</sup>

If the police or public prosecutor submits a request for a protection order, the victim cannot drop their complaint. In such situations, the judicial process will continue.<sup>55</sup>

A request for an (immediate) protection order must contain information on the personal details and family or blood ties between the victim and the perpetrator. It also requires that the precise facts and the circumstances in which they were committed are presented, as well as the reasons why a person fears that their safety, health or well-being is in danger. The applicant must also indicate which specific protection measures they wish to have, and sign the application. This application may be submitted at any time in a district court or at the nearest police station. The applicant is entitled to free assistance from a lawyer in preparing and submitting the application, and is exempt from legal costs. The court fees are charged to the perpetrator of the domestic violence. If the application is not substantiated, the applicant shall bear the legal costs.<sup>56</sup>

If the District Court issues a protection order or immediate protection order, the perpetrator must be immediately informed of the protection order, in the event of absence during the hearing. The victim receives two copies of the ruling. The court must send a copy of the (immediate) protection order within 24 hours to the victim and other persons mentioned in the protection order, the public prosecutor, the social service of the municipality where the victim is permanently or temporarily staying, the police station in the municipality where the victim lives, or to other persons mentioned in the order.<sup>57</sup>

Breaching a protection order is a criminal offence, is subject to criminal prosecution and can be punished by a fine or imprisonment of up to two years.<sup>58</sup>

The "Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations" defines the obligations of the Albanian police in situations of domestic violence. If there is a suspicion that someone has been threatened with violence, has committed domestic violence or breached a protection order, the police must immediately check this, confirm it, draw up a report and start an investigation on their own initiative. The victim must be given an emergency number by the police. The law stipulates that the

<sup>53</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>56</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> *Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania*, 27/01/1995 (last amendment on 11/06/2015), [url](#); *Kodi Penal (Criminal code)*, 24/08/2017, [url](#)

police must set up special units to prevent and combat domestic violence and train police officers in dealing with situations of domestic violence.<sup>59</sup>

The "Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations" states that all competent authorities<sup>60</sup> must respond to all reports of acts of domestic violence, threats of domestic violence and breaches of (immediate) protection orders. Furthermore, the law provides that competent bodies must draw up a report of each reported incident, and provide a copy to the victim or the person accompanying the victim. Competent persons or bodies may be held administratively or criminally liable if they fail to act in accordance with the law on domestic violence.<sup>61</sup>

The "Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations" stipulates that the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, together with other ministries and local authorities, is responsible for taking measures and establishing structures to support victims and meet their needs, including financial and social assistance, and medical and psychological support (Art. 7 & 8).<sup>62</sup>

The 2003 "Family Code of Albania", amended in December 2015, does not contain provisions linking domestic violence with abuse or neglect of parental responsibility. Nor does the law provide that offenders on whom the court has issued a protection order may visit their children under supervision.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, local authorities, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Justice cfr. *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 53 [url](#); *Family Code of Albania*, 8/05/2003, [url](#); *Kodi i Familjes*, 30/06/2016, [url](#)

## 4. Responsible bodies

From 2013 to September 2017, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) was primarily responsible for gender equality and domestic violence issues. Following the parliamentary elections in June 2017, the new Albanian government reduced the number of ministries from 20 to 11, whereby the MSWY was abolished.<sup>64</sup> According to Mirela Arqimandriti of the Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC), the new Ministry of Health and Welfare will take over MSWY's competences in the area of gender equality and domestic violence.<sup>65</sup> One of these competences is the "National Council on Gender Equality". This is an advisory body which monitors the implementation of policies to combat gender-related violence. The "Directorate for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality" is also part of the former MSWY and analyses, among other things, the legal and institutional framework on gender issues, the functioning of the "National Referral Mechanism" (see below 5.1 National Referral Mechanism), and the handling of cases of domestic violence, and drafts reports in this respect.<sup>66</sup> According to Arqimandriti, the new Ministry has given assurances that it will not modify the mission of the Directorate.<sup>67</sup> Following the murder of an Albanian judge in late August 2017, the new Albanian Government decided to make combating domestic violence a political priority.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the former MSWY, other ministries also integrate gender issues into their policies, including domestic violence. In 16 of the former ministries, 18 "Gender Contact Points" (a new term for "Gender Equality Employees" in the ministries) were appointed to address, alongside their other tasks, part-time problems of gender equality, gender-related and domestic violence.<sup>69</sup>

According to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, by June 2017, 58 of the 61 municipalities had appointed "Gender Equality Employees" (Albanian: *Nëpunës të Barazisë Gjinore*).<sup>70</sup> By April 2016, 44 of the 61 municipalities had appointed "Gender Equality Employees". They must integrate gender equality into local government, draft a plan, draw up a budget and monitor the situation in the municipality. This staff member is also the local coordinator of the "National Referral Mechanism" in his/her municipality (see below 5.1 National Referral Mechanism).<sup>71</sup>

Albania's first national report on domestic violence to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) was prepared under the guidance of the MSWY and published by the Council of Europe in January 2017. This report states that municipalities have a responsibility to identify domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence, and to refer victims to other bodies that can offer them social services, financial support, medical assistance, etc. Collaborative networks ensure that NGOs, public and non-governmental bodies can provide social services to victims of domestic violence. The Social Service in the municipalities tries to identify hidden and unreported situations of domestic violence or violence against children. Social workers do this through interviews with families who receive financial support from the municipality.<sup>72</sup>

A group of experts from the CEDAW Committee noted in July 2016 that the budget to combat gender inequality is relatively small and comes mainly from donors. In addition, an expert from the

<sup>64</sup> Albanian News, 3/09/2017, [url](#); Albanian News, 27/08/2017, [url](#); Albanian News, 16/09/2017, [url](#)

<sup>65</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>66</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, pp. 17, 20 [url](#)

<sup>67</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>68</sup> Shekulli, 4/09/2017, [url](#); OSCE, e-mail, 18/09/2017.

<sup>69</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, pp. 13-15 [url](#); Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 20 [url](#); Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 1/06/2017, [url](#)

<sup>70</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 1/06/2017, [url](#)

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 20/10/2016, p. 10 [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 18 [url](#)

CEDAW Committee pointed out that the employment of gender equality staff was not effective in practice, in ensuring gender equality. According to the expert, this is because there is no comprehensive strategy and a lack of resources. The CEDAW expert further noted that gender equality staff should be engaged in full time work on gender equality.<sup>73</sup>

UN Women and UNDP note in their report of October 2016 that more specialised staff dealing with gender issues on a full-time basis is needed at both the central and local level.<sup>74</sup>

Mirela Arqimandriti of GADC was in charge of training gender equality staff herself and also pointed out the lack of professionalism of these people in the municipalities. Arqimandriti highlighted the fact that people who have been appointed as gender equality employees perform this function in addition to their other tasks, meaning that they do not have enough time or a sense of responsibility to perform this function properly. According to Arqimandriti, what happens in reality is that the victim's name is noted down and an allowance is arranged, and nothing else. In her opinion, there are also municipalities where things are better, but she adds the caveat that it is unrealistic for one person to monitor all situations in his/her municipality. At the same time, she notes that victims can only access the town hall during opening hours, while violent incidents usually occur outside office hours. According to Arqimandriti, domestic violence should be a competence of the Ministry of the Interior, in which the police play the main role.<sup>75</sup>

## 5. Existing structures to prevent and protect victims of domestic violence

### 5.1. National Referral Mechanism

The "National Referral Mechanism" for dealing with cases of domestic violence and violence against women was established following a decision by the Council of Ministers in 2011. This principle is based on the "Coordinated Community Response", a system developed in collaboration with the UN in 2007 to provide services to victims of domestic violence in a coordinated manner. The "National Referral Mechanism" must ensure that victims of domestic violence are immediately referred to the appropriate bodies to meet all their needs.<sup>76</sup>

According to a report by the United Nations in Albania (UN Albania), several existing<sup>77</sup> mechanisms have been strengthened and six new ones were launched<sup>78</sup> in 2016. Most of the reports from 2016 state that there is a "National Referral Mechanism" in 29<sup>79</sup> out of 61 municipalities in Albania. This mechanism should be extended to all municipalities in Albania by the end of 2020.<sup>80</sup> The referral mechanism has a three-pronged structure in each municipality: a steering group led by the mayor of

<sup>73</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 15 [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>76</sup> Metaj E. (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), 3/06/2015, pp. 11-12 [url](#)

UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 41 [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> Erseka, Burrel, Permet, Kruja, Saranda, Kavaja cfr. UN Albania, 1/06/2017, pp. 26, 44 [url](#)

<sup>78</sup> Roskovec, Patos, Perrenjas, Gjirokaster, Bulqiza en Diber cfr. UN Albania, 1/06/2017, pp. 26, 44 [url](#)

<sup>79</sup> Shkodra, Vlora, Berat, Rreshen, Pogradec, Durres, Korca, Kamza, Kukes, Puka, Lezha, Manze, Elbasan, Mini-municipality no. 6 in Tirana, Tirana, Fier, Burrel, Permet, Sukth, Shijak, Rrushbul, Maninas, Drenove, Libonik, Mollaj, Voskop, Erseka, Patos cfr. Metaj E. (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), 3/06/2015, pp. 5, 6 [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 20/10/2016, p. 23 [url](#)

the municipality, a multidisciplinary technical team that supports victims and provides services to them, and a local coordinator.<sup>81</sup>

The steering committee is made up of representatives of all the relevant bodies in a given municipality. These can be representatives of the police, the district court, the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Education Department, the Public Health Directorate, the social services of the municipalities, the bailiff, the province, the labour office, religious institutions providing services to victims of domestic violence, directors of NGOs involved in domestic violence, managers of refuges for victims of domestic violence in the municipality or province, etc. The composition of the referral mechanism depends on the bodies and services present in a given municipality.<sup>82</sup>

The technical team is made up of representatives from the police, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Courts, lawyers, NGO employees active in the area of domestic violence, delegates from the Child Protection Unit (Albanian: *Njësia për Mbrojtjen e Fëmijës*) in the municipality and psychologists. The team is responsible for monitoring situations of domestic violence and responds to the needs of victims, arranges contacts with the necessary services, monitors the service and reports on this to the team leader and the steering committee. All parties concerned are bound by the obligation of confidentiality regarding the victims' personal details.<sup>83</sup>

The role of local coordinator is generally filled by a municipality's "Gender Equality Employee" (see point 4. Responsible bodies). Local coordinators have been trained by UNDP on domestic and gender-related violence and usually have several years of experience. The local coordinator supervises and coordinates the work and services of the technical team and acts as an intermediary with other services and organisations (police, court, health care, social service, NGOs, refuges, etc.). This person informs the victim about his rights and the possibility and substantive procedure to apply for an (immediate) protection order. In addition, he or she will accompany the victim to court, the police station and other services, and will ensure that the victim's file is complete and up to date.<sup>84</sup> In places where there are no local NGOs or other organisations or agencies providing services to victims of domestic violence, the local coordinator will search for such services in neighbouring municipalities or in Tirana.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Metaj E. (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), 3/06/2015, p. 6 [url](#)

<sup>82</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 18 [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 18 [url](#); Metaj E. (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), 3/06/2015, p. 13 [url](#)

<sup>84</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 19 [url](#); Metaj E. (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), 3/06/2015, p. 14 [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> Metaj E. (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), 3/06/2015, p. 14 [url](#)

The diagram below shows which bodies are involved in the "National Referral Mechanism". The person who has survived Domestic Violence (DV) or Violence Against Women (VAW) is in the centre of the diagram. A network of bodies is shown around this person:



Referral Mechanism Actors and Roles<sup>86</sup>

When a victim of domestic violence contacts one of the relevant partners of the "National Referral Mechanism", the full support system is activated. Each relevant body is required to inform at least one representative of the municipality, police and health service. All the bodies concerned have signed a cooperation agreement setting out their precise tasks, duties and procedures.<sup>87</sup>

The police are usually the first to be informed about a situation of domestic violence and they then refer the matter to the courts. Hospitals and other health services take care of the victim, provide medical documents and refer the victim to other services. NGOs play an important role in providing services to victims of domestic violence (see below 7. Services for victims of domestic violence).<sup>88</sup>

In 2015, this referral system was evaluated on behalf of UNDP. The evaluation report indicates that the cooperation between the various competent bodies in some municipalities was good, but that the mechanism was not equally effective in each municipality. In addition, limited financial resources make it difficult to provide efficient services to victims of domestic violence.<sup>89</sup>

In July 2016, the CEDAW Committee also drew attention to the shortcomings of the referral mechanism in its discussions on the fourth periodic report of December 2014. The Committee considers that the mechanism is not being applied effectively, primarily at the local level, due to a lack of coordination and the limited capabilities of staff.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 42 [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 19 [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 19 [url](#)

<sup>89</sup> Metaj E. (Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth), 3/06/2015, p. 6, 7, 15 [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> CEDAW, 25/07/2016, p. 6 [url](#)

The lack of coordination between the various bodies is also highlighted by the European Commission as an area for improvement in the fight against gender-related violence.<sup>91</sup>

In its 2016 report, UN Albania identified improvements in the areas of identification, reporting and tackling situations of domestic violence.<sup>92</sup> In their report of October 2016, UN Women and UNDP also pointed to the positive evolution of the referral system, but at the same time noted that much effort is still needed to be fully functional and sustainable. According to UN Women and UNDP, interventions by NGOs or international organisations are more successful.<sup>93</sup>

In its report of December 2016, UN Women found that although issues of domestic violence have been much better addressed at the local level since the introduction of the referral mechanism, there is a need for more qualified staff and more full-time posts.<sup>94</sup> Social services in the municipalities have made progress in terms of referring victims, informing other actors and assisting minors in court in applying for a protection order. In some municipalities, the social service has set up a helpline and established a rehabilitation centre. According to UN Women, additional efforts are required by the social services to ensure that the protection order is implemented, that an application for a protection order is always submitted when the victim is a minor, that victims and perpetrators can participate in a treatment programme in every municipality, that a helpline is set up which is operational 24 hours a day, and that victims are provided with transport in dangerous situations. In its report, UN Women also makes comments on the functioning of health care. According to UN Women, the identification of situations of domestic violence by healthcare workers could be improved. UN Women identified the following areas for improvement for the health sector: providing psychological assistance in addition to medical care, systematically issuing a medical certificate, providing certified documents in court, accompanying the victim or providing them with transport.<sup>95</sup>

## 5.2. National online database

Since 2014, there has been an online database<sup>96</sup> where all situations of domestic violence have to be registered with the National Referral Mechanism bodies. According to Albania's first national reporting to GREVIO, the database is secure and respects the confidentiality of victims' details. Local coordinators in the municipality have access to the details, but are bound by confidentiality. They are trained to use and manage the system.<sup>97</sup> The MSWY can also consult data, but does not have access to the personal details (name, first name, date of birth). During registration, codes are assigned to the victim and the perpetrator.<sup>98</sup>

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) has developed this registration system in collaboration with UNDP in order to monitor situations of domestic violence. This system exists in municipalities with a referral mechanism. The database contains information on all steps in a particular situation of domestic violence from the time of registration until a definitive solution is found. The system records information about the victim, the perpetrator, all forms of violence

<sup>91</sup> European Commission, 9/11/2016, p. 66 [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> UN Albania 1/06/2017, p. 44 [url](#)

<sup>93</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, pp. 41, 42 [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 55-56 [url](#)

<sup>95</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 57 [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> Recording Violence in Albania (REVALB), [url](#)

<sup>97</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 24 [url](#); Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 20/10/2016, pp. 12,13 [url](#)

<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 1/06/2017, [url](#)



perpetrated, the development of a case, problems that have occurred, the services provided to the victims, etc.<sup>99</sup>

According to UN Albania, more than 500 cases of domestic violence were registered in the online database in 2016.<sup>100</sup> The first MSWY national report mentions that there were 531 registered cases by the local coordinators of 29 municipalities in the first month after the database was established. The report notes that "gender equality staff" encounter difficulties in checking and compiling information from other actors in the referral system. The police, the judiciary and the Public Prosecution Service in particular are lagging behind in completing data. The report states that this is related to their workload and the fact that they are not aware of this obligation.<sup>101</sup>

According to the UN Women and UNDP report of October 2016, systematic use of the online database remains a challenge for the bodies in question.<sup>102</sup>

### 5.3. Training of professionals involved in various sectors

Since 2010, employees of various bodies that come into contact with victims of domestic violence have been trained on domestic violence. International organisations and NGOs have supported the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth in this respect.<sup>103</sup> In 2016, Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) reported that all women's networks, refuges, women's helplines and women's homes provide training on domestic violence. They do not receive financial support for this from the Albanian government, but are dependent on international donors. The main target groups receiving training are police officers, health care staff and social workers.<sup>104</sup>

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Albania is responsible for, inter alia, capacity building within the Albanian state police by providing training in police academies and in regional police directorates. In 2016 and 2017, the OSCE organised trainings on domestic violence in all 12 regional police directorates in Albania. The OSCE was informed by the Albanian state police that the number of police officers dealing with cases of domestic violence has increased by 25%.<sup>105</sup> According to UN Albania, more than 155 police officers were trained in 2016 to provide coordinated assistance to victims of domestic violence.<sup>106</sup> Between 2010 and 2015, 648 police officers received training.<sup>107</sup> Domestic violence is also included in the curriculum of general police training.<sup>108</sup>

Between 2010 and 2013, 4,400 employees in the healthcare sector received training on domestic violence. During this period, one employee responsible for child protection and domestic violence was appointed in the Department of Public Health of each district.<sup>109</sup>

In 2012, the School of Magistrates, the school where judges and public prosecutors in Albania receive training, 51 members of the judiciary (judges and public prosecutors) received training on domestic violence. In 2013, the number was 151 (judges, public prosecutors, forensic experts,

<sup>99</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 24 [url](#); Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 1/06/2016, [url](#)

<sup>100</sup> UN Albania 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#)

<sup>101</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, pp. 23,24 [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 42 [url](#)

<sup>103</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 20/10/2016, p. 12 [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> WAVE, 14/07/2016, p. 9, [url](#)

<sup>105</sup> OSCE in Albania, e-mail, 18/09/2017

<sup>106</sup> UN Albania 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 20/10/2016, p. 12 [url](#); Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 33 [url](#); CEDAW, 3/12/2014, p. 22 [url](#)

<sup>108</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 31 [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> CEDAW, 3/12/2014, p. 21 [url](#)

etc.).<sup>110</sup> In 2013-2014, 238 judges, public prosecutors and judicial police officers were trained on the amendments to the Criminal Code in 2012 and 2013. During this training, they learned to approach women in a gender-specific way.<sup>111</sup> Further training sessions on domestic violence were organised at the "School of Magistrates" in 2015.<sup>112</sup>

In 2012, 31 women from centres that provide services to victims of domestic violence received training. Between 2012 and 2014, 339 members of the technical teams of the referral mechanism, including 210 women, were trained.<sup>113</sup> In 2014, 37 employees of the "National Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence" received training on domestic violence and 51 local coordinators and gender equality staff received training on the use of the digital database.<sup>114</sup> In 2016, these courses were continued according to UN Albania.<sup>115</sup>

There are also handbooks for employees of different services who come into contact with victims of domestic violence. Since 2008, the General Police Directorate of Albania has had a handbook on the procedures to be followed by police officers in situations of domestic violence. Another handbook from 2013 explains how the police should respond to situations of domestic violence. Since February 2015, the Albanian Ministry of Public Health has also had a handbook to document cases of violence uniformly. This handbook contains a sample register to record cases of violence, and should help health services identify and deal with situations of violence. A handbook for judges, which has existed since 2006 and which was updated in 2013 and 2016, should help judges to issue an (immediate) protection order.<sup>116</sup>

An Albanian women's network, Rrjeti i Fuqizimit të Gruas në Shqipëri (Albanian Women Empowerment Network, AWEN), refers in its report to a study by the Council of Europe and UN Women in 2015 on services to victims of domestic violence. The study acknowledges that staff from various bodies and service providers have received training on domestic violence, but notes that many employees of such services do not have sufficient knowledge of the legal framework on domestic violence, and do not have sufficient capabilities to deal with victims of domestic violence. According to the same study, training courses by NGOs are much clearer and consequently more effective than training courses by public institutions. The study also reveals that data on the number of courses on domestic violence are not clear-cut.<sup>117</sup>

## 5.4. Awareness-raising campaigns

Every year, local and central government agencies, in cooperation with NGOs and international organisations, organise awareness-raising campaigns on domestic violence. The aim of such campaigns is to make people understand that domestic violence cannot be tolerated or considered normal, in order to prevent new situations of domestic violence and to inform victims of the possibilities to address their problems.<sup>118</sup>

The campaign "16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence" is organised every year from 25 November to 10 December. Since 2013, the campaign has been

<sup>110</sup> CEDAW, 3/12/2014, p. 21 [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 55 [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 32 [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> CEDAW, 3/12/2014, p. 21 [url](#)

<sup>114</sup> CEDAW, 3/12/2014, p. 22 [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> UN Albania, 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#)

<sup>116</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 38 [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> AWEN, 12/2016, p. 12, [url](#)

<sup>118</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 37 [url](#)

seeking to actively involve more men and boys in the fight against violence against women.<sup>119</sup> In 2015, this campaign involved religious authorities in the fight against gender-related violence.<sup>120</sup>

"He for She" is a campaign, launched by UN Women in March 2014 and subsequently supported by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, which aims to involve men and boys to combat gender stereotypes.<sup>121</sup>

"UNiTE to End Violence against Women" is a UN initiative which takes place during the campaign "16 Days of Activism".<sup>122</sup>

Another campaign entitled "I Choose to Live without Violence" was launched on 25 November 2016 by the Ministry of Social Welfare in collaboration with UNDP, UN Women and UNFPA. This campaign calls on women to report violence and provides information about solutions and services.<sup>123</sup>

Albania's first national report, published by the Council of Europe, reveals that awareness-raising campaigns have led to different attitudes towards gender-related violence, and increased reporting of domestic violence.<sup>124</sup> During a fact-finding mission to Albania in March 2017, Cedoca spoke with Mirela Arqimandriti of GADC. In her opinion, victims of domestic violence are much better informed since the campaigns, in terms of what to do to lodge a complaint.<sup>125</sup>

## 6. Implementation of protective measures

According to several international organisations, the legal framework to protect victims of domestic violence has significantly improved. A report by UN Women and UNDP in 2016 refers to the amendments to the Criminal Code in the area of domestic violence: heavier penalties for offenders, aggravating circumstances if a crime occurs during or after the issue of a protection order, and rape within marriage and sexual harassment are considered as crimes. Despite progress in terms of legislation, policies and strengthening the institutional framework, UN Women and UNDP believe that additional efforts are needed to ensure full protection and effective preventive measures.<sup>126</sup> The Albanian Helsinki Committee, the European Commission and CEDAW experts have similarly criticised the implementation of the legal framework.<sup>127</sup>

### 6.1. Reports and protection orders

#### 6.1.1. Procedure and figures

Victims of domestic violence can obtain protection from the Albanian authorities in two ways. The first is at the initiative of the victim. Victims can go to the nearest police station to report domestic violence. In this case, the police make an assessment of the specific situation and inform the court in order to issue an (immediate) protection order. The victim can also apply for an (immediate) protection order in the district court of his or her permanent or temporary residence. The procedure

<sup>119</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#); Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 27 [url](#)

<sup>120</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 38 [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> HeforShe, [url](#); UNDP, 24/11/2016, [url](#)

<sup>122</sup> UNDP, 2016, [url](#)

<sup>123</sup> UNDP, 24/11/2016, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 9 [url](#)

<sup>125</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017.

<sup>126</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 39 [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> Albanian Helsinki Committee, 12/2015, p. 11 [url](#); European Commission, 9/11/2016, p. 65 [url](#); CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

is described in the chapter "Legislation" (see point 3 above).<sup>128</sup> The second way to obtain an (immediate) protection order is through the "National Referral Mechanism". Each body involved in the referral mechanism is required to inform the other members of the mechanism and to do everything in their power to protect the victim and prevent any recurrence of violence. There are several criticisms of the operation of this mechanism (see point 5.1 National Referral Mechanism).<sup>129</sup>

Figures in newspaper articles on the number of reports of domestic violence filed in the first eight months of 2017 range between 2000 and 3000. The same newspapers report that courts issued 1563 protection orders during the same period. According to the Independent Balkans News Agency, 458 people were arrested in the first nine months of 2017.<sup>130</sup>

In 2016, the police recorded 4163 complaints relating to domestic violence.<sup>131</sup>

In 2015, the police recorded 3867 complaints relating to domestic violence. A protection order was applied for in 2148 situations. The police made 730 arrests and jailed 130 people.<sup>132</sup>

In 2014, there were 4121 reports of domestic violence and 2422 applications for protection orders.<sup>133</sup>

In 2013, the police received 3020 reports of domestic violence. 1851 applications for protection orders were submitted in that year.<sup>134</sup>

### 6.1.2. Reports of domestic violence

Several sources indicate that not all victims of domestic violence complain or seek help.<sup>135</sup> According to the CEDAW Committee, gender-related violence continues to be under-reported because people do not want to disgrace the family, are afraid of retribution, do not know the appeal possibilities, and have little confidence in the system due to long legal proceedings and limited reactions from police officers.<sup>136</sup>

According to a representative of the Regional Police Directorate in Shkodër, socioeconomic and cultural factors prevent women from complaining, or pressure is exerted on them not to lodge a complaint.<sup>137</sup> The Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) and Mentor Kikia, a lawyer and human rights activist, also highlight socio-economic factors. The AHC highlights the fact that women often do not lodge a complaint, or they withdraw their complaint, because they have no possibility to provide for themselves.<sup>138</sup> According to Kikia, it is more difficult for people in rural areas to complain because women there do not know their rights and consider marital violence to be normal. Kikia goes on to say that, in principle, every victim can report domestic violence and that the police and local authorities are reliable, but the problem situation remains because the victim and the perpetrator are often forced to live in the same house.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 16, 41 [url](#)

<sup>129</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 41 [url](#)

<sup>130</sup> Albanian Daily News, 5/09/2017, [url](#); Albanian Daily News, 7/09/2017, [url](#); Independent Balkan News Agency, 7/09/2017, [url](#)

<sup>131</sup> UN Albania, 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#); UN Albania, 25/03/2017 [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> General Directorate of the Albanian State Police via UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 36 [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 47 [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 47 [url](#)

<sup>135</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#); Albanian Helsinki Committee, 04/2017, p. 28 [url](#)

<sup>136</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

<sup>137</sup> Regional Police Directorate of Shkodër, interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

<sup>138</sup> Albanian Helsinki Committee, 12/2015, p. 11 [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> Kikia M, journalist and human rights activist, interview, Tirana, 14/03/2017

In a report by the GADC, uncertainty about obtaining effective protection is cited as one of the reasons why many women are afraid to lodge a complaint. The report refers to a situation of a divorced woman who was subjected to violence on several occasions by her ex-husband, despite the fact that three restraining orders were imposed on him in the space of three years.<sup>140</sup>

In an online newspaper article by Tirana Times, the head of the Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) stated that between 5 and 15% of victims report domestic violence. In her opinion, this is because domestic violence is regarded as an individual or family problem and not as a crime or social problem. According to the head of AWEN, victims are also afraid of bringing shame to their family or are unable to support themselves and their children in the event of a separation or divorce.<sup>141</sup>

The 2013 INSTAT investigation found that 8.4% of all correspondents had sought help. The majority of people who had asked for help did so among family members (92%), parents-in-law (61%) and/or friends (29%). A minority had sought help from the police (17%), a doctor or medical service (15%), a lawyer (15%), a judge (11%) or a social service (11%).<sup>142</sup>

According to UN Women, an increasing number of people report domestic violence and more and more people are asking for help. In their opinion, this is because the population is increasingly aware that domestic violence is a crime and must be reported. The report notes that sexual violence, especially in marriages, is still often taboo and under-reported.<sup>143</sup>

A judge in Shkodër, with whom Cedoca spoke during a fact-finding mission to Albania, said that victims used to be ashamed to say that they were beaten by their husbands, but that nowadays more women admit that they have been put under pressure by their husbands. The judge attributes this to women's organisations such as *Gruaja tek Gruaja* (Women to Women).<sup>144</sup>

### 6.1.3. Issuing and implementing the protection order

An application for a protection order does not automatically result in its issuance. The Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) monitored 97 hearings on domestic violence and protection orders between July and October 2016. They found that 37% of the cases were dismissed because the victim did not appear in court, or had stated that the dispute was over.<sup>145</sup> Amnesty International stated in its 2016 annual report that 406 applications for protection orders were submitted in Tirana between January and August 2015. Of these, 118 applications were granted. 251 applicants had withdrawn their application or did not appear in court because the perpetrator(s) or family members exerted pressure on them.<sup>146</sup> In its 2017 annual report, Amnesty International does not mention domestic violence in Albania.<sup>147</sup> In 2014, Amnesty International stated that two thirds of the applications for protection orders in Tirana were withdrawn or terminated. When the protection order was issued, it was often not applied.<sup>148</sup>

In 2011 and 2012, Aurela Bozo, a lawyer and human rights activist, carried out a study with other experts into the application of the law on domestic violence by judges.<sup>149</sup> In 2015, Bozo stated in an article that a protection order will not be issued if the complainant does not appear during the trial

<sup>140</sup> GADC, 10/06/2016, p. 12 [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> Tirana Times, 11/11/2016, [url](#)

<sup>142</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, pp. 55-56 [url](#)

<sup>143</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 36 [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> Judge, Shkodër District Court, interview, Shkodër, 17/03/2016

<sup>145</sup> Albanian Helsinki Committee, 04/2017, p. 28 [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> Amnesty International, 24/02/2016, p. 64 [url](#)

<sup>147</sup> Amnesty International, 22/02/2017, p. 62 [url](#)

<sup>148</sup> Amnesty International, 11/03/2015, p. 54 [url](#)

<sup>149</sup> CLCI, 12/2013, [url](#)

or if the complainant wishes to terminate the trial. Bozo believes that victims of domestic violence take such a decision only out of fear of further violence. In her opinion, victims' fear is also linked to uncertainty about the implementation of protection measures and the effective protection that the victim will receive from the authorities.<sup>150</sup>

The 2006 law on domestic violence stipulates that the police and the Public Prosecution Service are entitled to take the case to court and ask for a protection order even if the victim has withdrawn the complaint or application.<sup>151</sup> In this way, the offender can still be prosecuted if the victim is afraid to file a report or has withdrawn his/her complaint for fear of retribution by the offender. According to Bozo, neither the police nor the Public Prosecution Service have exercised this right.<sup>152</sup> According to UN Women, far fewer cases would be dismissed if the police and the Public Prosecution Service exercised this right properly. Nonetheless, according to UN Women, bad practices are not the norm everywhere. They refer to an investigation by the "High Council of Justice", published in January 2014, which found that the police in Elbasan referred 40 cases to court on their own initiative during the study period.<sup>153</sup>

The study by the "High Council of Justice" also found that the legal deadlines for issuing a protection order in situations of domestic violence were not respected in 183 of the 2689 cases. Another 2013 study referred to by UN Women in its report confirms that court proceedings are often postponed because there is insufficient time to gather evidence. The same study indicates that the legal terms of regular protection orders (15 days) are violated more often than immediate protection orders (48 hours). According to UN Women, non-compliance with legal deadlines and lengthy legal proceedings is contrary to the law on domestic violence, which states that immediate action must be taken to protect a victim and prevent further incidents.<sup>154</sup>

Another problem is that competent authorities do not implement the protection order or the offender breaches the protection order. Between 2011 and 2014, the number of breaches increased. Protection orders were breached 86 times in 2011, 119 times in 2012, 138 times in 2013 and 151 times in 2014. In 2015, protection orders were not respected by the offender in 112 cases.<sup>155</sup> According to UN Women, this is due to the lack of coordination between different actors responsible for implementing a judicial protection order.<sup>156</sup> UN Women states that the courts process protection order procedures swiftly, but the enforcement authorities, including the bailiff, the police and local government departments, do not react as quickly.<sup>157</sup> In addition to UN Women, the European Commission, Amnesty International and the Ombudsman also note that there are problems with the implementation of protection orders.<sup>158</sup>

Mirela Arqimandriti of the GADC draws the same conclusions and believes that there are insufficient resources and staff to ensure that the protection order is enforced. The police are one of the actors responsible for ensuring that a protection order is executed and, in Arqimandriti's opinion, they intervene when they are informed about a situation, for example when the offender comes to the victim's house and threatens the victim. Arqimandriti also points out that the social worker who is competent to monitor the situation is usually also the local coordinator and gender equality officer of the municipality, who has various other competences. According to Arqimandriti, it is impossible for

<sup>150</sup> Bozo A., (CLCI), 6/01/2015, p. 5 [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> *Law on Measures against Violence in Family Relations*, 18/12/2006, [url](#); *Ligji për Masa ndaj Dhunës në Marrëdhëniet Familjare*, 30/09/2010, [url](#)

<sup>152</sup> Bozo A., (CLCI), 6/01/2015, p. 5 [url](#)

<sup>153</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 54 [url](#)

<sup>154</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 55 [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 36 [url](#); Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 65 [url](#)

<sup>156</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 56 [url](#)

<sup>157</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 12 [url](#); People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania, 02/2015, p. 9 [url](#)

<sup>158</sup> Amnesty International, 11/03/2015, p. 54 [url](#); European Commission, 9/11/2016, p. 65 [url](#)

one person to monitor all situations of domestic violence in his/her municipality. In her opinion, due to a lack of supervision of the enforcement of the protection order, many women are forced to stay in the same house as the offender without any guarantee of protection.<sup>159</sup>

## 6.2. Role and action of the police

A representative of the Regional Police Directorate in Shkodër states that the police follow strict procedures on domestic violence. According to this source, there is zero tolerance for domestic violence. This means that the police act immediately when they are informed about a situation of domestic violence. In his opinion, all resources are deployed to arrest perpetrators. Women who lodge a complaint at the police station will receive appropriate treatment. According to this source, the police have psychologists at their disposal and employ a sufficient number of female officers.<sup>160</sup>

In July 2016, a representative from the Albanian government reported to the CEDAW Committee that 14% of the police force is made up of women.<sup>161</sup> The Albanian state police has set a 50% quota for the recruitment of women and has launched a special recruitment campaign for women only.<sup>162</sup>

According to the Human Rights Report of the US Department of State (USDOS) in 2017, the police have often received no training on domestic violence, and they lack adequate capabilities to deal effectively with domestic violence.<sup>163</sup>

In 2016 and 2017, the OSCE organised training on domestic violence in the police academy and in all 12 regional police directorates. The OSCE notes that the number of registered cases and judicial proceedings initiated increased in the cities where OSCE training was organised. Nevertheless, according to the OSCE, there are still several areas for improvement. In order to build capacity and unity within the police, there is a need for a robust and long-term training programme in the police academy. There is also a need for training on interviewing techniques in order to interview victims of domestic violence more effectively. According to the OSCE, such training does not yet exist. The OSCE also notes that complaints about domestic violence are recorded in the same way as complaints about minor crimes or accidents. This ensures that essential information in a file, such as person's history and a psychological report, is often missing. The evidence is consequently less robust and judicial proceedings are then deferred. In addition to training courses, the OSCE organised campaigns between 2012 and 2016 at the police academy in various Albanian cities. During the campaigns, 1,000 students took part in a week of activities on domestic violence: awareness-raising campaign material was distributed, simulations of reporting an incident were made, school debates were carried out and there was a forum with members of parliament. Since 2016, raising awareness in the municipalities has been the responsibility of the Albanian state police. According to the OSCE, progress is slow-going as a result of a high staff turnover within the police force.<sup>164</sup>

The NGO GADC also organised training courses for police officers and other actors of the referral mechanism and noted in its report that the training courses did not have the desired sustainable and effective impact. According to GADC, this is partly due to frequent dismissals and changes within the police and other government agencies.<sup>165</sup> In the opinion of GADC's director, Mirela Arqimandriti, the police have paid much more attention to cases of domestic violence since they have been trained.

<sup>159</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>160</sup> Regional Police Directorate of Shkodër, Interview, Shkodër, 16/03/2017

<sup>161</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

<sup>162</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 20/10/2016, p. 15 [url](#)

<sup>163</sup> United States Department of State, 3/03/2017, p. 19 [url](#)

<sup>164</sup> OSCE, e-mail, 18/09/2017

<sup>165</sup> GADC, 10/06/2016, p. 11 [url](#)

She also believes that there are situations in which a police officer does not take any action and sends a victim home "because the husband is drunk".<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, Arqimandriti believes that the police assume their responsibility in cases of domestic violence and follow strict procedures. In her opinion, the presence of a psychologist and a social worker during the police investigation can strengthen the functioning of the police in order to delve deeper into situations of domestic violence.<sup>167</sup>

The Ombudsman is aware of situations in which the police (and other actors) have attempted to reconcile victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.<sup>168</sup> In 2014, the Ombudsman wrote a recommendation to the General Director of the State Police, entitled "Improving Police preventive work and the effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies in combating criminal acts of domestic violence". This highlights the fact that the police must be closer to the community, and must cooperate with local authorities, perform judicial police tasks in a more efficient and effective manner so that perpetrators are brought to justice, and ensure that victims of domestic violence can reintegrate into society.<sup>169</sup>

In addition to the Ombudsman, UN Women and UNDP note in their report of October 2016 that many actors, including the police, tend to mediate or negotiate in cases of domestic violence and violence against women.<sup>170</sup> At the same time, UN Women and UNDP argue that the increasing number of reports of domestic violence is an indication that there is more confidence in competent state institutions. In their opinion, the changes in legislation on domestic violence and gender-related violence have made it possible for institutions to deal with such situations much more effectively, which also contributes to greater confidence in state institutions.<sup>171</sup> According to UNDP, the number of arrests in cases of domestic violence rose by 24% in 2015 compared to 2014.<sup>172</sup>

### 6.3. Judicial prosecution

According to UN Women, domestic violence - given the number of applications for protection orders - is considered a criminal offence at the administrative level, but there may be a certain level of oversight in initiating criminal proceedings in cases of domestic violence. As such, it would appear that domestic violence is indirectly regarded as less serious. UN Women believes that criminal proceedings are usually initiated when there are clearly visible injuries or repeated violence.<sup>173</sup> At the same time, UN Women states that Albania has made considerable legislative progress in order to better protect victims of domestic violence and gender-related violence, and effectively punish perpetrators in accordance with the amended Criminal Code.<sup>174</sup>

In 2015, there were 3866 reports of domestic violence. A protection order was applied for in 2148 situations. Criminal proceedings were initiated in 1719 cases and 1300 cases of these were prosecuted.<sup>175</sup> In 2014, judicial proceedings were initiated in 1699 out of 4121 cases.<sup>176</sup> Cedoca does not have figures for 2016 and 2017.

<sup>166</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017.

<sup>167</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017; Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>168</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 62 [url](#)

<sup>169</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 61 [url](#)

<sup>170</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 40 [url](#)

<sup>171</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 34 [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> UNDP, s.d., [url](#); UNDP, s.d., [url](#)

<sup>173</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 36 [url](#)

<sup>174</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 40 [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> General Directorate of the Albanian State Police via UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 34 [url](#); Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 65 [url](#)

<sup>176</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 65 [url](#)



The first national report from the MSWY presents figures on judicial proceedings in cases of domestic violence. The figures in the report come from the Albanian State Police and the Ministry of Justice. In 2015, 821 perpetrators were convicted: 9 people received a fine and 804 were sentenced to two years' imprisonment, 8 were sentenced to between two and five years' imprisonment. In 2014, 516 people were convicted: 16 people received a fine and 492 were sentenced to two years' imprisonment, 8 were sentenced to between two and five years' imprisonment.<sup>177</sup>

The 2014 figures to which UN Women refers differ slightly from the figures in the first national report. In addition, the report states that in 2014, legal proceedings were also instituted against 55 persons for infringements under article 321 of the Criminal Code on "acts contrary to judicial decisions". 3 people received a fine and 52 were sentenced to imprisonment for up to two years.<sup>178</sup>

According to Amnesty International, at the court of Tirana in 2012, the year in which domestic violence was included as a criminal offence in the Criminal Code, 35 cases were registered under article 130/a concerning domestic violence. Of these, 23 cases were closed by the end of 2012. Five offenders were sentenced to a maximum of one year's imprisonment, three people were given suspended sentences and 15 were granted amnesties for the acts committed before 30 September 2012.<sup>179</sup> In its annual human rights report for 2014, Amnesty International states that judicial proceedings take too long and that the legal deadlines for issuing a protection order were not respected. Amnesty International bases its assertions on a study by the "High Council of Justice" from June 2014.<sup>180</sup>

The NGO GADC notes in its report that there are situations in which courts process a case too swiftly. GADC states that such situations have led to repeats of violence and new complaints. According to GADC, the efforts of the courts are not sufficient to protect women, even though the legal framework allows for this possibility.<sup>181</sup> Mirela Arqimandriti of GADC states that judges do not take sufficient responsibility to handle cases of domestic violence with due care, unlike the police. In her opinion, the practice of judges shows that the entire system set up to protect victims of domestic violence has failed. Arqimandriti refers to the murder of a female judge from Shkodër in August 2017 by her ex-husband. According to Arqimandriti, to the extent known, the judge did not solicit NGOs, helplines or refuges, but used the legal system to obtain protection. The judicial system was unable to protect her. Arqimandriti believes that the murdered judge had twice received a protection order and withdrew her third application herself. Arqimandriti told Cedoca that in 2015, the ex-husband of the judge was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for attempted murder. After having served one and a half years of his sentence, he received amnesty at the start of 2017 and was released early. Five months after his release, he committed the murder. According to Arqimandriti, the ex-husband claimed his innocence during the hearing, stating that he could no longer remember what had happened. He also spoke of his love for his ex-wife and the fact that she had defrauded him after the divorce. Arqimandriti believes that lawyers abuse the legal system and try to circumvent the law by demanding more lenient penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence, for example by claiming that the offender was in a psychotic state, or by bribing judges. Arqimandriti also believes that it is wrong to grant amnesty to perpetrators of domestic violence. She believes that the judicial system will function better after the screening process of judges, which recently started and will be completed in a year's time.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 65 [url](#)

<sup>178</sup> Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Albania via UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 61 [url](#)

<sup>179</sup> Amnesty International, 1/10/2013, pp. 4-5 [url](#)

<sup>180</sup> Amnesty International, 11/03/2015, p. 54 [url](#)

<sup>181</sup> GADC, 10/06/2016, p. 14 [url](#)

<sup>182</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017; Top Channel, 31/08/2017, [url](#)

According to the OSCE, impunity is widespread in the Albanian judicial system in cases of domestic violence. For this reason, the murdered Albanian judge had requested the help of the American Ambassador to Tirana instead of seeking help through the Albanian judicial system. The OSCE notes that the media claimed that the judge had a protection order, but this did not appear to be the case.<sup>183</sup>

Both the US Department of State (USDOS) and UN Women note in their report that victims rarely report marital abuse, and that rape within marriage was not prosecuted. According to USDOS, both the authorities and the population have a distorted perception of marital rape, as it is often not considered a crime.<sup>184</sup> According to UN Women, there are few legal proceedings for sexual violence between partners or spouses, but sexual violence has led to divorce.<sup>185</sup>

The Albanian Ombudsman notes that the burden of proof may complicate the judicial procedure. The Ombudsman states in his annual report of 2014 that it is difficult to demonstrate psychological violence and perpetrators consequently often go unpunished.<sup>186</sup> In his annual report for 2016, the Ombudsman states that family conflicts remain a cause for concern in Albania. The Ombudsman recommends that victims immediately turn to the police, the Public Prosecution Service and the judiciary and cooperate closely with them. In the event of obstacles in the judicial process, people can rely on the Ombudsman to further investigate and settle cases.<sup>187</sup>

#### 6.4. Right to information

Albania's first national report on domestic violence to GREVIO, drawn up under the guidance of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MSWY) and published by the Council of Europe, draws attention to the importance of informing victims of domestic violence in good time about all the options available to them, what protection measures are in place and what steps have been taken by competent bodies. This is a requirement of the Istanbul Convention, to which Albania is a signatory. Victims also need to be informed about the impact of protection measures and their time frame. Victims should also be informed about the referral mechanism, existing services for victims, their right to free legal assistance and their right to financial support when they have a protection order. According to the first national report, victims are often insufficiently informed and think that an application for a protection order is the same as filing for divorce.<sup>188</sup> The procedures for divorce are set out in the "Family Code"<sup>189</sup> and the "Civil Procedure Code"<sup>190</sup>.

There were victims of domestic violence who complained to the Ombudsman because they were not informed about the steps taken by the police or decisions of the district courts. In 2014, the Ombudsman examined these complaints. The investigation revealed that some police officers had not complied with the legal provisions in force.<sup>191</sup> In their report of December 2016, UN Women and the Ombudsman made recommendations to better inform victims of ongoing investigations and prosecutions, and to inform them when an offender is released, or has escaped.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>183</sup> OVSE, e-mail, 18/09/2017; Tirana Times, 8/09/2017, [url](#)

<sup>184</sup> United States Department of State, 3/03/2017, p. 19 [url](#)

<sup>185</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, pp. 61-62 [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania, 02/2015, p. 9 [url](#)

<sup>187</sup> People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania, 04/2017, p. 93 [url](#)

<sup>188</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 41 [url](#)

<sup>189</sup> *Family Code of Albania*, 8/05/2003 [url](#); *Kodi i Familjes* 30/06/2016, [url](#)

<sup>190</sup> *Civil Procedure Code*, 29/03/1996 (most recent amendments 30/03/2017) [url](#)

<sup>191</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 57 [url](#)

<sup>192</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 60, 63 [url](#)

## 6.5. Treatment programmes for offenders

Treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence are relatively new in Albania and demand exceeds supply.<sup>193</sup> There are several services that offer such treatment programmes. A treatment programme can be initiated at the request of the victim or perpetrator, or because it was ordered by the court. Treatment is often based on family therapy and mediation, but can also consist of anger management, relationship counselling, relationship therapy, group therapy, etc.<sup>194</sup>

UN Women believes that mediation or negotiation in situations of domestic violence should be avoided because the relationship between victim and perpetrator is unbalanced. Additional efforts are also required to ensure that all actors place responsibility on the perpetrator.<sup>195</sup>

The MSWY's first national report contains various criticisms of the treatment programmes: not all programmes are completed, not all staff have received appropriate training, and there is insufficient knowledge and a lack of resources.<sup>196</sup>

Two services are however put in a positive light: the "Counselling Line for Men and Boys" service in Tirana (Albanian: *Linja e Këshillimit për Burra dhe Djem*) and the "Counselling Office for Boys and Men" service in Shkodër (Albanian: *Qendra e Këshillimit për Burrat dhe Djemtë*). Both were established in 2014. The initiators are the NGOs "Counselling Centre for Women and Girls" (Albanian: *Qendra e Këshillimit për Grat dhe Vajza*) in Tirana and "Women to Women" (Albanian: *Gruaja tek Gruaja tek Gruaja*) in Shkodër. The aim of these services is to help men change their behaviour. All consultants are men who have been trained by international organisations to advise offenders and cooperate with other relevant actors. In April 2017, due to the high demand for guidance for offenders in other cities in Albania, a new training course for consultants was launched, which will take place every two years.<sup>197</sup>

According to Mirela Arqimandriti, there are too few initiatives to change the behaviour and mentality of the perpetrators in a constructive manner. In her opinion, the existing services offered by treatment programmes do this rather superficially instead of structurally.<sup>198</sup>

## 7. Services for victims of domestic violence

Services are either short-term or long-term. Short-term services are: an immediate protection order, security, health care, shelter (and transport to a safe place), information about and assistance in initiating legal proceedings and applying for and obtaining an (immediate) protection order. Depending on the situation, other short-term services may also be offered. Long-term services include: employment and housing, social assistance, legal advice, divorce assistance, counselling and psychotherapy, rehabilitation and reintegration support, support for children.<sup>199</sup>

In 2015, the Council of Europe and UN Women conducted research into services for victims of domestic violence. They found that there were 61 services, of which 42 offered general assistance services and 19 specialised assistance. Most of these services (62%) spend less than half their time on victims of domestic violence. The report also notes that many specialised NGOs rely on volunteers and part-time staff due to lack of financial support. The report also notes that most of the

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<sup>193</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 34 [url](#)

<sup>194</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 54

<sup>195</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 40 [url](#)

<sup>196</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 34 [url](#)

<sup>197</sup> Men Care, 28/06/2017, [url](#)

<sup>198</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>199</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 19 [url](#)

services are located in large cities or municipalities. In rural and suburban areas, there are usually no services, which makes access to such services more difficult for many women. The report further states that there are still obstacles to informing women about the existence of certain services. Not all services disseminate information about their services and others do so mainly through their own websites or brochures in public places, and to a much lesser extent on websites of public authorities and women's networks, via medical services or via television. According to the report, many vulnerable and poor women are not reached because they have no internet access or do not know how to use it.<sup>200</sup>

UN Women and UNDP state that Albanian women often do not have access to basic services that can provide them with safety and protection. Existing services tend to suffer from a lack of financial support.<sup>201</sup> Both UN Women and the European Commission note that the provision of services to victims of domestic violence needs to increase, that the quality and geographical distribution of services needs to improve, and that the services should also be within reach and accessible.<sup>202</sup>

## 7.1. Refuges

According to the Council of Europe and UN Women, there are ten refuges in Albania with a total reception capacity of around 163 beds. Not all refuges are intended for victims of domestic violence. One of these is specifically for children with disabilities, and another is for LGBT people. The tenth and most recent refuge is an emergency shelter set up in 2015 by Caritas in Shkodër, which should accommodate ten people. This means that there is a shortage of 127 beds, according to international standards. In 2013, 180 beds were still needed.<sup>203</sup> According to the report by Women Against Violence in Europe (WAVE) in 2016, no refuge has closed its doors since 2013, but they are facing financial difficulties and most depend on international donors.<sup>204</sup> UN Women is one of the international donors who financially supports the municipalities of Tirana, Vlorë, Fier and Berat, in order to take in victims of domestic violence and provide services in 2017.<sup>205</sup>

According to the report of the Council of Europe and UN Women, refuges in Albania are situated in secret locations in Tirana, Elbasan, Vlorë and Shkodër. Two are run by the government, one by a religious organisation and the others by NGOs. The report also refers to hidden actors, such as religious communities, who shelter victims of domestic violence. The Catholic Church of Lezhë in northern Albania is an example of this.<sup>206</sup> In his report of April 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur stated that there are two refuges belonging to the Albanian authorities and seven belonging to NGOs: two in Tirana and one in Berat, Korça, Elbasan, Vlorë and Gjirokastër.<sup>207</sup> In 2014, a source from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada referred to the same locations as the UN Special Rapporteur, with the exception of Gjirokastër.<sup>208</sup>

According to GADC's director, Mirela Arqimandriti, there are currently four refuges which exclusively take in victims of domestic violence: one run by the Albanian authorities in Tirana, which accommodates 35 people and three others run by NGOs and with 10 to 15 beds (in Vlorë, Tirana and Elbasan). There are also two other emergency refuges which provide 24-hour shelter (in Elbasan and Shkodër). The refuges run by NGOs are not financially supported by the government and, according

<sup>200</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, pp. 34-36, 43, 92

<sup>201</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 39 [url](#)

<sup>202</sup> European Commission, Albania 2016 Report, 9/11/2016, pp. 21, 66 [url](#); UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 12 [url](#)

<sup>203</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, pp. 44-47

<sup>204</sup> WAVE, 14/07/2016, p. 6, [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> UN Albania, 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#)

<sup>206</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, pp. 45-46

<sup>207</sup> UN Human Rights Council (Heyns C), 23/04/2013, p. 12 [url](#)

<sup>208</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 30/04/2014, p. 7, [url](#)

to Arqimandriti, are not sufficiently monitored. Due to lack of funding, the future of some refuges is uncertain. According to Arqimandriti, there are also refuges for other target groups, including victims of human trafficking, who provide a number of beds to victims of domestic violence. In her opinion, it is usually the most serious cases, for example women with serious injuries, who end up in a refuge. They generally stay in the refuge between six months and one year, and live independently afterwards. They are psychologically supported during their stay at the refuge, and given help to find work. Their children can go to school. According to Arqimandriti, the refuge run by the Albanian government functions very well. She also notes that not all victims of domestic violence want to stay in a refuge. This may have something to do with their job, which they wish to continue, or caring for their children.<sup>209</sup>

According to the Council of Europe and UN Women's report on the provision of services to victims of domestic violence, the reception capacity of refuges varies from five to fifty people. "Vatra" in Vlorë, "ARSIS" in Tirana and "Women's Forum Elbasan" (Albanian: *Forumi Gruas Elbasan*) have five places, "Other Vision" (Albanian: *Tjetër Vizion*) in Elbasan has fifteen places, "Different & Equal" (Albanian: *Të Ndryshëm & Të Barabartë*) in Tirana has fifteen places for women and three to five extra places for children, the "National Shelter for Domestic Violence Victims" (Albanian: *Qendra Kombëtare për Viktimat e Dhunës*) has 36 beds and the "National Shelter for Victims of Trafficking" (Albanian: *Qendra Kombëtare Pritëse e Viktimave të Trafikimit*) has 50 places. The "Shelter for Abused Women and Girls" (Albanian: *Strehëza për Gra dhe Vajza të Abuzuara*) in Tirana has twelve beds for women and children, and a special refuge for LGBT people can accommodate eight people.<sup>210</sup>

In some refuges, the stay is limited to less than one week, in other places women can stay for three to six months, in the two refuges operated by the authorities, the stay varies from seven to twelve months, and in one refuge, the stay is unlimited. Women are allowed to leave the refuge between 6.00am and 10.00pm, except in life-threatening situations.<sup>211</sup>

In all refuges, women are allowed to take their children with them, but in most refuges a maximum age of fourteen years applies to boys. There is no age limit for girls. In some refuges, the maximum age limit for boys is eight. In the refuges of the Albanian government, eighteen years is the maximum age in principle, but in reality boys over fourteen need to submit a psychosocial report. One of the NGOs places mothers with sons in apartments to prevent mothers and children from being separated from each other.<sup>212</sup>

Women with mental health problems or disabilities can find a place in the majority of refuges. In centres where women with mental health problems or serious health problems cannot stay, they are referred to a specialised service or hospital.<sup>213</sup>

The admission conditions were laid down in a Ministerial Decree of June 2012, which was revised in December 2014. Since December 2014, women only need to have a protection order. In the past, they needed a police referral document in addition to the protection order, as well as a written report from the municipality and a report from a court doctor. During the study of the Council of Europe and UN Women in 2015, some refuges indicated that it was enough for them that an application for a protection order had been submitted, or that an official procedure had been used to obtain victim status. There are also refuges which admit women without a protection order when they have been referred by the police or another actor from the referral mechanism. However, it

<sup>209</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, interview, Tirana, 20/03/2017; Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>210</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, pp. 44, 117

<sup>211</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 46

<sup>212</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 46

<sup>213</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, pp. 46-47

remains essential that victims are able to submit a written report from the authority that refers him/her.<sup>214</sup>

In its report of December 2016, UN Women believes that the admission conditions are too strict. In their opinion, it is unfair that only victims who have reported an incident, applied for a protection order or wish to testify against the perpetrator are entitled to shelter. UN Women further states that there are still too few reception facilities at the local level, which makes women hesitate to report cases, and miss opportunities to get help.<sup>215</sup>

The "National Centre for the Treatment of Victims of Domestic Violence" was set up in April 2011 to address the lack of services at the local level.<sup>216</sup> In 2016, this centre drew attention to rehabilitation and reintegration with the help of government agencies and NGOs. As a result, almost 55% of women who were accommodated in a refuge were successfully reintegrated, compared to 38% in 2014. Reintegration was made possible through employment, social housing and legal aid.<sup>217</sup> In 2015, this centre helped 75 people, including 28 women and 47 children. Of these, 55 people were new to the centre.<sup>218</sup> From April 2011 to September 2014, 174 people of whom 69 were women and 105 were children, had solicited this centre. The centre provides food, clothing, temporary shelter within the centre, individual support and advice, psychosocial support, children's programmes, education, group therapy, medical assistance, legal advice, vocational training, rehabilitation activities, help with reintegration into the family or society, follow-up of the situation, etc. In 2012, the centre was the subject of an inspection following complaints about living conditions there. The Ombudsman then drew up a series of recommendations which, according to UN Women, were all complied with.<sup>219</sup>

In 2014, 145 women and 179 children found shelter in eight refuges. According to the refuges, they did not have to refuse any women in 2014 for reasons of lack of space, although in four situations there was no room for the children due to a shortage of beds. Yet, according to the Council of Europe and UN Women, the refuges are not accessible to all women and girls who need them. The report points out that the refuges are in secret locations and that there are strict conditions in order to obtain a place. Actors within the referral mechanism, including the police, believe that there is an urgent need for additional places which are easily accessible.<sup>220</sup> Experts from the CEDAW Committee also highlight this need.<sup>221</sup>

The increasing number of applications for a protection order means that there is an increased need for emergency accommodation pending the issue of the protection order.<sup>222</sup> UN Women stresses the importance of giving women shelter during the 48 hours in which the court must decide on an immediate protection order. According to UN Women, they are exposed to significant risk if they do not receive accommodation during that period.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 46; UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 58 [url](#)

<sup>215</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 58 [url](#)

<sup>216</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 58 [url](#)

<sup>217</sup> UN Albania, 1/06/2017, p. 26 [url](#)

<sup>218</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 46 [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 58 [url](#)

<sup>220</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 45

<sup>221</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

<sup>222</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 45

<sup>223</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, pp. 56, 58 [url](#)

## 7.2. 24-hour emergency line

There are various helplines in Albania for victims of domestic violence. These services are mainly provided by NGOs, but in most situations they are not available free of charge or on a continuous basis. Two helplines are free but are not manned 24 hours a day due to lack of financial resources. The free helpline "Counselling Line for Women and Girls" (Albanian: *Linja e Këshillimit për Gra dhe Vajza*) (0800 4020) was established in 1996 by the NGO "Counseling Centre for Women and Girls" (Albanian: *Qendra e Këshillimit për Gra dhe Vajza*) and is considered to be the national helpline.<sup>224</sup> The other free helpline is that of the "Community Development Center" (Albanian: *Qendra për Zhvillim Komunitar*) under the name "Today for the Future" (Albanian: *Sot për të Ardhmen*) (0800 9888).<sup>225</sup>

Several municipalities also have a helpline for victims of domestic violence, but these calls are neither free nor available 24 hours a day.<sup>226</sup>

Some helplines ask for personal information, while others do not. Victims can also contact a helpline anonymously. All calls are recorded in an electronic register accessible only to specialised staff. The data is encoded or encrypted in most situations. All helplines are obliged to inform other actors within the referral mechanism when they have received a call. In most situations, the members of the technical team are informed. Personal information is only shared at the request of the local coordinator of the municipality, the police department or the economic department and the social service. In other situations, only statistics are shared.<sup>227</sup>

There is no guarantee that telephone calls to a helpline cannot be traced. In their report, the Council of Europe and UN Women highlight the risk that the husband may discover that his wife has called a helpline from the call history of the telephone.<sup>228</sup>

There is also a free national children's helpline available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: ALO 116.<sup>229</sup> This helpline received more than 27,000 calls in 2016, 80% of which were exploratory conversations. According to UN Albania, the increasing number of calls indicates an increasing awareness of the need to report violence.<sup>230</sup>

## 7.3. Medical assistance

Health care in Albania is largely public and accessible to all, but the budgets earmarked in this respect are small. This means that in practice patients often pay for services that are actually free.<sup>231</sup> According to an INSTAT study in 2013, victims of domestic violence had to pay between 1,000 and 10,000 old Lek (between 1 and 10 dollars) to a medical service or doctor.<sup>232</sup>

The Council of Europe and UN Women's report on the provision of services to victims of domestic violence in 2015 does not highlight this problem - as is the case in other recent reports on domestic violence - but notes that people without valid health insurance have to pay for a specialised examination.<sup>233</sup> This report also states that there are no obstacles for victims of domestic violence to

<sup>224</sup> Counselling Line for Women and Girls (Albanian: *Linja e Këshillimit për Gra dhe Vajza*), [url](#); Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 48; WAVE, 14/07/2016, p. 5 [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> Community Development Center – Today for the Future, [url](#)

<sup>226</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 48

<sup>227</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 48

<sup>228</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 48

<sup>229</sup> ALO 116, [url](#)

<sup>230</sup> UN Albania, 1/06/2017, pp. 26, 44 [url](#)

<sup>231</sup> Frontiers in Public Health (Tomini S. M., Groot W., Pavlova M. & Tomini F.), 28/08/2015, [url](#)

<sup>232</sup> INSTAT (Haarr Dr. R.N.), 11/2013, , p. 56 [url](#)

<sup>233</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 68

obtain medical care, but doctors often fail to comply with the legal obligation to draw up a medical report of injuries, and provide help to the victim. Some doctors believe that this is the responsibility of a court doctor, or they do not go to the trouble themselves because the victim does not request it. Doctors are required by law to indicate on an image of a body where the victim has been injured. This report may be useful for the victim to demonstrate that a doctor has examined them after one or more incidents of violence. An examination by a court doctor can only take place after an official referral by the police or the Public Prosecution Service. Some NGOs also refer victims to a court doctor.<sup>234</sup>

According to the NGO GADC, health care should be made more accessible to victims of domestic violence. In its June 2016 report, GADC stated that it is not possible for many victims of domestic violence to immediately go to a doctor, and that they often face financial problems. GADC notes that when women are referred to a doctor a few days after a violent incident, to have the injuries determined, the examination is often unnecessary because the injuries are no longer visible.<sup>235</sup>

Medical services are part of the "National Referral Mechanism" in the municipalities where this system has been developed (see point 5.1 National Referral Mechanism). Health care professionals are obliged to inform the other actors within the mechanism when they become aware of a situation of domestic violence, and to register this information in the online database (see section 5.2. National online database). According to UN Women, there is a need in the health sector for improvement in identifying situations of domestic violence. In addition, medical services should, among other things, pay more attention to providing psychological assistance in addition to care, and always provide a medical certificate at the request of the victim or judicial authorities.<sup>236</sup>

## 7.4. Financial support and housing

One of the priorities of the "National Strategy for Social Protection 2015-2020" is to provide financial support for the most vulnerable groups. These include women and children who are victims of domestic violence, women at the head of the family and families suffering from social exclusion, such as Roma and people with mental disabilities.<sup>237</sup>

The "Social Assistance and Services Law" of 2005 was amended in 2011, and again in April 2016.<sup>238</sup> This law states that victims of domestic violence are entitled to benefits of 3,000 Albanian Lek per month during the period of validity of the protection order. The law also provides that both spouses may apply for economic assistance during divorce proceedings. In this case, they receive half of the amount. According to UN Women, the procedure for claiming financial support is straightforward. The documents to be submitted in this respect are: a family certificate, a copy of the identity card and the protection order. UN Women states that women have had increased access to social assistance and services since the law was amended. Furthermore, UN Women believes that some municipalities set a good example in terms of financial support for women with a protection order.<sup>239</sup>

In July 2016, representatives from the Albanian government declared that there had been three major reforms to ensure women's economic independence. For one of the reforms, a pilot project was launched in 2016 in three regions, covering 40% of the population. This reform meant that the benefit was paid to the women of the family, since women were able to manage it more effectively. Victims of domestic violence, like other vulnerable groups, were among the beneficiaries. In July

<sup>234</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 42

<sup>235</sup> GADC, 10/06/2016, p. 14 [url](#)

<sup>236</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 57 [url](#)

<sup>237</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 23/12/2016, p. 28 [url](#)

<sup>238</sup> INSTAT, 8/06/2017, p. 17 [url](#); UN Women, 12/12/2016, pp. 64-65 [url](#)

<sup>239</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, pp. 64-65 [url](#)



2016, 9,253 women as head of the family and 86 victims of domestic violence received benefits. Representatives of the Albanian authorities highlighted these reforms in response to CEDAW experts' criticism during a discussion of the fourth periodic report of December 2014. During this discussion, CEDAW experts noted that women are disadvantaged in the legislation with regard to property rights, which in their view has a negative impact on their economic independence.<sup>240</sup>

In addition to economic independence, housing is also cited in various reports as an essential factor for re-integration after a situation of domestic violence.<sup>241</sup> The Ombudsman notes in his report on 2015 that there are too few possibilities, both nationally and locally, to support victims of domestic violence to rebuild their lives.<sup>242</sup>

Similarly to the Ombudsman, UN Women highlights the difficulties that victims of domestic violence face in finding housing and securing their own livelihoods. However, the "Law on Social Programs for Housing Inhabitants in Urban Areas"<sup>243</sup> envisages that they are entitled to this.<sup>244</sup>

An application for social housing must be submitted in the municipality. The local council decides on an application through an evaluation system. Within ten days of the decision, candidates may request a second evaluation. The "National Strategy on Social Housing 2016-2025" states that there should be more transparency about the scoring system in order to qualify for a social housing, that vulnerable groups should be better informed, and that there is a need for a clear division of responsibilities between the various bodies. Victims of domestic violence are specifically mentioned as a vulnerable group which should be given priority attention when allocating social housing.<sup>245</sup>

A UNDP study in 2014, in which 27 out of 61 Albanian municipalities participated, showed that victims of domestic violence were less inclined to apply for social housing. Of all six applications, none of the women were allocated housing. Most of the applications were made by women who headed a family. Of 739 applications, 138 women received social housing.<sup>246</sup>

Mirela Arqimandriti of GADC states that there are no legal provisions requiring the parent serving a prison sentence to place his property and/or finances at the disposal of his children. In the situation of the murdered judge (see 6.1 Judicial prosecution) the municipality made an apartment available free of charge for one year, while the uncle of the children receives the income from their father's business.<sup>247</sup>

## 7.5. Free legal assistance

The 2008 "Law on Legal Aid"<sup>248</sup> was amended in 2013 to make legal aid more accessible to victims of domestic violence.<sup>249</sup> Negotiations were under way in 2016 to revise the law again so that everyone has a right to free legal aid.<sup>250</sup>

Since the 2013 amendments, victims of domestic violence have been explicitly mentioned in the "Law on Legal Aid". Beneficiaries must show that they are either members of the social protection programme or meet the conditions for admission, or that they are victims of domestic violence or

<sup>240</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

<sup>241</sup> UN Women & UNDP (Kocaqi M., Plaku A. & Wittberger D.), 3/10/2016, p. 39 [url](#)

<sup>242</sup> People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania (Albanian: *Avokati Popullit*), 02/2016, pp. 13, 83 [url](#)

<sup>243</sup> *Law 9232/2004, amended on 10.05.2012* cfr. UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 76 [url](#)

<sup>244</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 71 [url](#)

<sup>245</sup> Ministry of Urban Development of the Republic of Albania, 06/2016, pp. 13-14, 37 [url](#)

<sup>246</sup> UNDP, 29/10/2014, pp. 6, 28-29 [url](#); Ministry of Urban Development of the Republic of Albania, 06/2016, p. 19 [url](#)

<sup>247</sup> Arqimandriti M, Director, GADC, Skype conversation, 22/09/2017

<sup>248</sup> *Law on Legal Aid*, 22/12/2008, [url](#)

<sup>249</sup> *Law No 143/2013 Legal Aid to Survivors of Domestic Violence*, [url](#); CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#)

<sup>250</sup> EURALIUS, 17/03/2016, [url](#)

human trafficking. According to the law, legal aid also means that victims of domestic violence are exempted from the legal costs and other administrative costs involved.<sup>251</sup>

The Albanian Ministry of Justice opened an office in its building in Tirana in May 2016 where legal advice is given free of charge.<sup>252</sup> Since 2013, the law faculty of the University of Tirana has also had a legal advice office.<sup>253</sup> The intention is to open additional legal advice offices in Durrës, Elbasan, Shkodër, Kukës, Korçë and Fier. A 2016 study by the "Cooperation & Development Institute" on legal aid in Albania notes that it is too early to draw conclusions on the efficiency of legal advice offices.<sup>254</sup>

Various NGOs also provide free legal advice.<sup>255</sup> One of them is the "Center for Legal Civic Initiatives" (CLCI) (Albanian: *Qendra për Nisma Ligjore Qytetare*). In addition to free legal advice, the centre also offers free psychosocial support.<sup>256</sup> An article from UNDP from March 2016 states that this centre has provided 700 women with free legal advice and counselling. Every year, an average of 120 vulnerable women are assisted free of charge in court by CLCI employees.<sup>257</sup>

According to the Ombudsman, the lack of legal advice offices hampers access to justice for women of all social classes.<sup>258</sup>

As regards the right to free legal aid, the Ombudsman notes that citizens are poorly informed about this right and that the procedure for requesting free legal aid is complex. The Ombudsman further states that there are people who have applied for free legal aid but have not received it because the necessary documents were not submitted in time.<sup>259</sup> An application must be submitted to the "Legal Aid Committee" of the Ministry of Justice. If the Ombudsman receives such applications, he or she will inform the applicant of the procedure and immediately forward the request to the competent body.<sup>260</sup>

According to UN Women, free legal aid is essential for victims of domestic violence because it lowers the threshold for bringing legal proceedings against the offender and claiming compensation. UN Women stresses that the number of women who have received free legal aid is small in relation to the number of women who need it.<sup>261</sup>

In the first half of 2014, two women applied for free legal aid in the "Legal Aid Committee".<sup>262</sup> In 2015, the "Legal Aid Committee" reported that legal costs were covered in 153 cases, without mentioning how many of these cases victims of domestic violence were assisted.<sup>263</sup> Cedoca does not have figures for other years.

## 7.6. Non-governmental services

Various reports, including UN Women's reports, the third national strategy on gender equality and the CEDAW Committee, highlight the importance of NGOs, civil society organisations and women's

<sup>251</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 19 [url](#)

<sup>252</sup> Cooperation and Development Institute (Xhaferaj O.), 10/2016, pp. 4-5 [url](#); CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#); Albanian Daily News, 13/05/2017, [url](#)

<sup>253</sup> USAID, 6/11/2014, [url](#)

<sup>254</sup> Cooperation and Development Institute (Xhaferaj O.), 10/2016, pp. 4-5 [url](#)

<sup>255</sup> Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 37

<sup>256</sup> Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, [url](#)

<sup>257</sup> UNDP, 31/03/2016, [url](#)

<sup>258</sup> People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania (Albanian: *Avokati Popullit*), 04/2017, p. 82 [url](#)

<sup>259</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, pp. 19, 22, 57 [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania (Albanian: *Avokati Popullit*), 02/2016, p. 53 [url](#)

<sup>261</sup> UN Women, 12/12/2016, pp. 12, 19, 22, 57 [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> CEDAW, 3/12/2014, pp. 5, 10, 20 [url](#)

<sup>263</sup> Council of Europe, 19/01/2017, p. 48 [url](#)

networks in the area of victim services, organisation of training and combating domestic violence in general.<sup>264</sup> The third national strategy points out that NGOs have taken on tasks which are actually the responsibility of the Albanian authorities. It is also noted that local authorities respond better to situations of domestic violence by cooperating with NGOs or applying the advice of NGOs in their work. For many people, NGOs are the only way to access services because services such as refuges, advice and free legal aid are mainly provided by donor-dependent NGOs. The third national strategy points out that the Albanian authorities should provide more financial and structural support to NGOs providing services to victims of domestic violence, and that there is a need for increased cooperation between public authorities and NGOs.<sup>265</sup>

In Tirana, victims of domestic violence can go to the "Center for Legal Civic Initiatives (CLCI) (Albanian: *Qendra për Nisma Ligjore Qytetare*) for free legal advice, legal assistance and psychosocial support.<sup>266</sup> "Human's Rights in Democracy Center" (Albanian: *Qendra të Drejtat e Njeriut në Demokraci*) offers the same services in Tirana and Tropojë.<sup>267</sup> "Community Development Centre – Today for the Future" (Albanian: *Qendra për Zhvillim Komunitar – Sot për të Ardhmen*) also provides legal advice and psychosocial support in Tirana, Durrës, Burrëll en Pukë.<sup>268</sup> "Tirana Legal Aid Society" (TLAS) (Albanian: *Sherbimi Ligjor Falas Tirane*) exists in both Tirana and Durrës, Fier, Lushnjë, Elbasan and Berat, and provides legal advice for free.<sup>269</sup>

At the "Counselling Centre for Women and Girls (Albanian: *Qendra e Këshillimit për Gra dhe Vajza*) in Tirana, victims of domestic violence can seek advice and offenders can follow a treatment programme. "Bethany Social Services" (Albanian: *Sherbimet Sociale Bethany*) offers services to pregnant women in problem situations and provides advice and medical care to women and children. The NGOs "Terre des Hommes" and "ARSIS" offer services to children.<sup>270</sup> "Albanian Center for Population and Development" (Albanian: *Qendra për Popullsinë dhe Zhvillimin*) is an NGO which, among other activities, provides medical care to victims of domestic violence.<sup>271</sup>

In Shkodër, victims of domestic violence can turn to the NGO "Women to Women" (Albanian: *Gruaja tek Gruaja*) for crisis shelter, advice and legal support. In addition, this NGO organises career guidance and training for victims of domestic violence, as well as treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. This NGO is also active in the field of prevention and organises "Women to Women" training for actors who come into contact with victims of domestic violence.<sup>272</sup> Another NGO in Shkodër dealing with women's rights and victims of domestic violence is called "Easy Steps" (Albanian: *Hapa in Lehte*).<sup>273</sup>

In Durrës there is the "Association of Women with Social Problems" (Albanian: *Shoqata e Grave me Probleme Sociale*). Victims of domestic violence can receive psychosocial assistance, medical care and legal advice.<sup>274</sup>

In Elbasan, the NGOs "Women Forum" (Albanian: *Forumi i Gruas*) and "Other Vision" (Albanian: *Tjeter Vizion*) provide services to victims of domestic violence.<sup>275</sup>

<sup>264</sup> CEDAW, 8/07/2016, [url](#); Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 26/10/2016, p. 14 [url](#); UN Women, 12/12/2016, p. 59 [url](#)

<sup>265</sup> Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth of the Republic of Albania, 26/10/2016, p. 14 [url](#)

<sup>266</sup> Center for Legal Civic Initiatives, [url](#)

<sup>267</sup> Human's Rights in Democracy Center, [url](#)

<sup>268</sup> Community Development Center – Today for the Future, [url](#)

<sup>269</sup> Tirana Legal Aid Society, [url](#); Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 117

<sup>270</sup> Terre des Hommes, [url](#); Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 117

<sup>271</sup> Albanian Center for Population and Development, [url](#); Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 117

<sup>272</sup> Women to Women (Albanian: *Gruaja tek Gruaja*), [url](#); Council of Europe and UN Women (Kelly Dr. L. & Lovett Dr. J.), 06/2015, p. 117

<sup>273</sup> Easy Steps (Albanian: *Hapa te Lehte*), [url](#); [url](#)

<sup>274</sup> AWEN, [url](#)

In Vlorë, victims of domestic violence can go to the centres called "Vatra" and "Aulona" for medical treatment, psychosocial support, referral and counselling. The "Vatra" centre also has an emergency shelter.<sup>276</sup>

In Podgradec there is the NGO "Me, The Woman" (Albanian: *Unë Gruaja*).<sup>277</sup>

In Sarandë, victims of domestic violence can turn to the NGO "Jona".<sup>278</sup>

Women's networks in Albania such as the "Albanian Women's Empowerment Network" (AWEN) (Albanian: *Rrjeti i Fuqizimit të Gruas në Shqipëri*)<sup>279</sup> consist of several women's centres and NGOs involved in gender issues. For example, Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) (Albanian: *Qendra Aleanca Gjinore për Zhvillim*) is part of AWEN and works with NGOs, international organisations and local and national government agencies to address gender issues.<sup>280</sup> The majority of the NGOs mentioned above belong to a women's network.<sup>281</sup>

The NGOs mentioned here are those referred to in reports on domestic violence. This does not mean that there are no other NGOs to which victims of domestic violence can turn.

<sup>275</sup> Woman Forum (Albanian: *Forumi i Gruas Elbasan*), [url](#); Other Vision (Albanian: *Tjeter Vizion*), [url](#)

<sup>276</sup> Vatra, [url](#); Aulona, [url](#)

<sup>277</sup> Me, The Woman (Albanian: *Unë Gruaja*), [url](#); AWEN, [url](#); AWEN, 12/2016, p. 29, [url](#)

<sup>278</sup> Jona, [url](#); AWEN, [url](#); AWEN, 12/2016, p. 29, [url](#)

<sup>279</sup> AWEN, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> GADC, [url](#)

<sup>281</sup> AWEN, 12/2016, p. 29, [url](#)

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## Summary

Domestic violence occurs in all sections of the Albanian population, but mainly affects women who are financially dependent on their husbands or partners. Economic problems, alcohol consumption and divorce are often at the root of violent incidents in family situations.

Domestic violence is regarded as normal and not a crime by a section of Albanian society. This is related to gender stereotypes and a patriarchal society in which women are subordinate to men. Awareness-raising campaigns have put women and girls in a more positive light, informed them about their rights and have led to a growing awareness among the Albanian population that domestic violence should not be tolerated, but punished.

Although the number of victims who report domestic violence is increasing every year, experts believe that there are still many women who do not report incidents of domestic violence out of shame or fear for new violent incidents. There are also women who do not complain out of uncertainty in getting protection, or because they do not have the resources to provide for themselves. Other women are insufficiently informed about their rights and the existing procedures. The number of murder cases related to domestic violence is alarming.

Albania has signed several international conventions and developed strategies to combat domestic violence. In 2012, domestic violence was included in the Criminal Code as a crime. Since then, Albania has adapted its domestic violence legislation on several occasions, as well as the severity of penalties for offenders. The legal framework to protect victims and convict perpetrators is praised by experts, but criticism is levelled at its implementation.

At the national level, the Ministry of Health and Welfare is responsible for tackling domestic violence. In addition, most other ministries also have a gender contact point. At the local level, gender equality staff are responsible for gender-related issues. This person is generally also the local coordinator of the referral mechanism in his or her municipality. This mechanism has been developed in the majority of municipalities and is made up of various actors (police, judiciary, education, NGOs, health sector, etc.) who are supposed to inform each other when they are informed of a situation of domestic violence and refer the victim to other services. The referral mechanism is being developed and is making progress, but efforts are still needed for it to be fully functional and sustainable.

This COI Focus explains how the Albanian authorities protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. Victims of domestic violence can lodge a complaint with the police who investigate the case and refer it to the court to issue a protection order and/or initiate legal proceedings. A protection order includes measures to protect the victim. Protective orders are not systematically implemented due to a lack of resources and staff to follow them up, which often forces victims to continue to live in the same house as the perpetrator.

The number of arrests of perpetrators of domestic violence has increased compared to a few years ago, as has the number of convictions. The general consensus is that the police are making efforts to assume their responsibilities in the fight against domestic violence, but that there are still several areas of improvement for it to function properly. Courts are accused of shirking their responsibility. Criticisms generally relate to corruption, bribery of judges, sloppy handling of cases, too lenient sentences and early releases. Experts believe that the judicial system will function better following the recently launched evaluation and reappointment process for judges and prosecutors.

The Albanian authorities have a limited supply of services to victims of domestic violence. Services are mainly provided by donor-dependent NGOs. Experts argue that there is a need for more services

for victims of domestic violence and that accessibility, quality and geographical distribution should be improved. This applies for refuges, among other things. These are primarily located in large cities, but often face a shortage of capacity and financial problems. Victims who are accommodated in refuges are supported in order to be able to reintegrate and live independently. In 2016, more than half of the victims who were accommodated in a refuge successfully reintegrated. Experts believe that it is essential to take in victims while waiting for an immediate protection order to be issued.

There are various helplines for victims of domestic violence that are available 24 hours a day, free of charge or otherwise. A national helpline which complies with international standards is currently being developed. The national children's helpline is available 24 hours a day, free of charge.

Health care in Albania is accessible to victims of domestic violence and most services are free, but experts believe that there is room for improvement in identifying and recording situations of domestic violence.

According to various sources, housing and economic independence are essential factors for the reintegration of victims of domestic violence. Victims are entitled to benefits during the period of validity of the protection order. Victims of domestic violence are also entitled to social housing, but experts find that it is difficult to find housing for victims of domestic violence.

Furthermore, victims of domestic violence are entitled to free legal aid and free legal advice. Experts believe that the supply and geographical distribution of these services is limited, that many women are poorly informed about their right to legal aid and that the procedure for applying for it is complex.

In addition, there are also services that offer treatment programmes for offenders. Experts stress the need for such services, but at the same time point out the shortcomings of these treatment programmes.

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