

ACADEMIC PAPER

‘A THOUSAND WAYS TO SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS’:

An Analysis of Existing Violence Against
Women and Girls (VAWG) Approaches
for Minoritized Women and Girls in the
Western Balkans and Turkey



This programme is funded
by the European Union

imkaan



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following members of the Imkaan team were responsible for the research: Marai Larasi and Sumanta Roy conceptualized and ‘mapped out’ an intersectional analysis of VAWG services for minoritized women and girls; Neha Kagal led on project coordination, data analysis and report development; Leah Cowan and Neha Kagal co-facilitated data collection and analysis; Sumanta Roy supervised and contributed to the data analysis and report writing; Dorett Jones, Rahni Kaur Binjie, Sumanta Roy, Natalia Dawkins and Yasmin Rehman provided support for data collection and analysis; Leah Cowan provided administrative and editorial support; and Ikamara Larasi provided editorial support.

We would like to give thanks to the European Union and UN Women for acknowledging the importance of funding a specific piece of work to look at intersectional approaches to violence against minoritized women and girls. Special thanks to the staff of the regional programme ‘Implementing Norms, Changing Minds’ for providing technical input, oversight and support during the field work and preparation of the research report. We are also grateful to Savitri Bisnath and Rashida Manjoo, whose insights and guidance at different stages of the research process helped shape this report. Many thanks to the activists, researchers and academics across the Western Balkans and Turkey who shared with us their time, knowledge and critical insights. This report owes perhaps the most to the minoritized women who we met during the course of this research study: Roma women, women with disabilities, LGBTQI women, rural women, Egyptian and Ashkali women and refugees from Syria. We are deeply grateful that you took the time to speak with us and are humbled by your journeys in addressing VAWG, despite significant challenges. We hope that in the gathering of this information we are able to tell your stories in ways that honour and highlight the nuances and complexities of your inspiring work.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ACPD	Albanian Centre for Population and Development
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
Crink	Centre for Roma Initiatives
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
DV	Domestic Violence
ECRI	European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance
EU	European Union
FGE	Fund for Gender Equality
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
KADAV	Kadınlarla Dayanışma Vakfı / Women's Solidarity Foundation
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
NGO	Non-government Organization
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
REWG	Regional Expert Working Group
RWRC	Roma Women's Rights Centre
SOC	Sarajevo Open Centre
TA	Temporary admission
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background of the project

This research study was undertaken by Imkaan, a London-based, second-tier women's organization dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritized¹ women and girls, as part of UN Women's Programme on Ending Discrimination and Violence against Women: 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds'. The Programme aims at ending discrimination and violence against women and girls (VAWG), with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women, in six Western Balkans countries – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo² and Serbia – and Turkey. This UN Women Programme is anchored in the normative frameworks of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (also known as the Istanbul Convention), and in alignment with the European Union (EU) accession standards on gender equality.

Acknowledging the structural inequalities that lie at the intersection of gender with factors such as age, disability, membership of a particular ethnic group and nationality, among others, the 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds' Programme places a strong emphasis on tackling multiple discriminations where gender aspects are involved, with a view to avoiding the 'silencing' of gendered issues, and instead taking an intersectional approach to addressing VAWG.

With this in mind, UN Women selected Imkaan to support the establishment of a Regional Expert Working Group (REWG) on intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination in the context of VAWG across the Western Balkans and Turkey.

1.2 Who we are

Imkaan is a UK-based, Black feminist organization and the only second-tier women's organization in the UK dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minoritized women and girls – in other words, women and girls who are defined in policy terms as Black and 'Minority Ethnic' (BME).

The organization has nearly two decades of experience of working around issues such as domestic violence, forced marriage and 'honour-based' violence. Imkaan works intersectionally at local, national and international levels, within a clear rights-based agenda, and in partnership with a range of organizations, to improve policy and practice responses to minoritized women and girls. Imkaan delivers a unique package of support which includes: quality assurance; accredited training and peer education; sustainability support to front-line BME women's organizations; and facilitation of space for community engagement and development. Imkaan works with its members to represent the expertise and perspectives of front-line, specialist and dedicated BME women's organizations that work to prevent and respond to VAWG. Imkaan's research activities support the ongoing development of a robust evidence base around the needs and aspirations of Black and minoritized women and girls, as well as promising practice and approaches to addressing violence.

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1. In this report the term 'minoritized' (rather than 'minority' or 'minority ethnic') is used to highlight that "groups and communities do not occupy the position of 'minority' by virtue of some inherent property (of their culture or religion, for example), but rather they come to acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical and political process" (Burman, 2005, p.533).
 2. All references to Kosovo in this report shall be understood to be in full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

1.3 Aims of the research

This research sought to explore the nature and types of services that exist for minoritized women and girls facing violence in the **Western Balkans** and **Turkey**, with the aim of identifying a REWG that will address, advocate and make recommendations from a regional perspective on law reform, policy development and provision of support services for minoritized women facing violence. More specifically the project aimed to:

- Highlight the main challenges that ‘by and for’ women’s organizations face in incorporating an intersectional approach, and in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, monitoring and reporting to CEDAW, and engaging with the EU accession process.
- Identify initiatives supporting innovative and effective solutions focused on VAWG from an intersectional approach.
- Set the scenario and road map for a REWG to guide its work in exploring prevention and essential service measures that do not take a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Produce a concept paper/set of recommendations for the REWG’s first meeting, including potential participants, draft agenda, key questions, presentation of papers, and draft action plan, to set the scenario and road map for the REWG.

1.4 Analytical framework

This research study has been framed through an ‘intersectional’ lens of analysis. Intersectionality as an analytical tool and a method of praxis challenges the idea of ‘sameness’ – in other words, we as women are not all navigating the same version of ‘womanness’ – and in doing so, accounts for the fact that differently situated women encounter inequality in different ways. The term, which is rooted in Black feminist thought and praxis, was first coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. While Crenshaw offered a theoretical framework

for analysing multiple intersecting oppressions, Black feminists had long been theorizing the experiences of marginalized women through a lens which included gender, ‘race’/ethnicity and class, and other sites of structural inequality.

Our research found that specialist ‘led by and for’ organizations often use an ‘intersectional’ approach to VAWG, even though they might not use the formal ‘language’ of intersectionality. Within such organizations, VAWG is understood within a context where gender intersects with other inequalities/oppressions (sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, indigeneity, immigration status and disability) to produce unique experiences of violence. By understanding the different ways in which violence is perpetrated and experienced, an intersectional praxis can design and develop appropriate context-specific responses when addressing VAWG.

1.5 Methodology

The overall approach to the project was one rooted in a strong intersectional value base which facilitated the full participation of minoritized women as experts and leaders.

The project adopted a mixed-methods approach, which is outlined below:

1. Literature review and background policy/legislative analysis

An electronic desktop search of relevant social science databases was conducted, handsearching for conference papers and ‘grey literature’ on intersectionality and VAWG. This included a search of project reports, evaluations and action research reports produced by women’s organizations in each State. The literature review provided a knowledge foundation for the primary research. A review of national government policy and legal developments across each country was also conducted.

2. Online mapping survey and call for participation

The project identified key individuals in all programme participating countries through a) working with UN Women and other partners, and b) developing a detailed call to promote the project and its aims and invite participation in an online survey. This helped us to build a strong knowledge foundation to the work and ensured that the project's time was being used effectively. The project developed a short paper outlining the criteria for participation, which was framed broadly around the following typology:

- Individuals/organizations and networks that are either emerging or operating through a 'by and for' approach to service delivery and engagement with groups that experience specific intersecting forms of vulnerability and marginalization
- How organizations articulate the 'intersectional' nature and reach of their work
- Types of issues and population groups being addressed and supported by organizations
- Nature and types of support; e.g. direct advice and support, advocacy and outreach, and wider strategic lobbying
- Governance/structure of organization/network
- Partnerships (formal/informal)
- How the work they deliver challenges and/or influences/disrupts policies, programmes, laws that create structural barriers to inequality
- How their approach facilitates the agency/voice of groups experiencing specific intersecting forms of vulnerability and marginalization
- Lessons learned/impact of their work

3. Review of survey responses and coordination of country visits:

The survey responses were reviewed to identify a smaller number of key organizations who offered a promising approach to intersectionality/VAWG. This formed the foundation for in-country visits to key stakeholders that were delivered through a combination of one-to-one interviews and community consultations with those identified during the online process. This helped us to better understand organizational approaches; the needs and experiences of populations who are impacted by multiple, intersecting forms of vulnerability and marginalization; gaps and barriers to delivering support; and the types of issues and population groups being addressed and supported by organizations. The interviews sought to collate views on wider external structural needs, challenges and barriers, including barriers for 'by and for' minoritized groups with respect to the Istanbul Convention, CEDAW and engagement in the EU accession process.

The project adopted a 'snowballing' technique for individual country visits (4-5 days per programme participating country). In other words, conversations initiated with key organizations/individuals helped us to identify other key stakeholders: e.g. specialist activists/change-makers/influencers who were offering a specific promising intersectional approach to VAWG and/or providing spaces of safety and trust for groups with a specific experience of discrimination/marginalization.

4. Data analysis and report writing

The process of data analysis in this research study involved transcribing interviews into narratives. This was followed by a process known as coding. Coding is a process where the data gathered is separated, sorted and synthesized, and labels are attached to segments of data that depict the content of that data. Based on the codes that had been developed, emergent themes and patterns were identified and integrated in order to arrive at a picture of barriers that women's organizations face in incorporating an intersectional approach to VAWG across countries. This project report is based on the key findings from this process.

1.6 Key themes in the report

The key themes emerging from the study include:

1. Intersectionality as a term is often conflated with ‘multiple oppressions/ discriminations’. There is a limited understanding among organizations working to address VAWG and international donors of ‘intersectionality’, as well as the specific nature of violence faced by minoritized women and girls. This engenders an inability to identify the specific needs of minoritized women, which, in turn, limits the development of a holistic and robust approach to VAWG, grounded in the realities of women’s everyday lives. This results in an ‘add and stir’ approach to VAWG, in which minoritized women are simply added into existing services that are largely designed around the needs of the majority population.
2. Organizations led ‘by and for’ minoritized women provide the most innovative pathways and holistic services for minoritized women and girls facing violence. They are able to respond to the complex, intersecting needs of women and girls within a broader context of structural inequality. These organizations are women-led, located in close proximity to minoritized communities, and their priority and goal settings reflect the priorities of minoritized women. The model therefore offers a uniquely empowering experience to women and children, as the presence of minoritized women is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organizations.
3. However, ‘by and for’ organizations continue to face significant barriers to intersectional practice. These include: hostile sociopolitical climates; structural barriers faced by minoritized women (lack of access to education, employment, health care, transport; discriminatory attitudes by State institutions towards minoritized women; lack of access to shelters); structural barriers faced by ‘by and for’ organizations (new licensing requirements for VAWG services, nature of funding); existing responses to violence against minoritized women and girls by mainstream NGOs (attitudes of prejudice, recruitment of majority women as staff); and legal barriers to working intersectionally on VAWG (poor implementation of existing legislation, multiple interpretations of existing legislation, barriers to accessing legal aid).
4. The report makes a series of recommendations (see p. 50) including key mechanisms and action plans to address the issue of violence against minoritized women and girls in the Western Balkans and Turkey, through a lens of intersectional practice and policymaking.

CASE STUDY

Montenegro: No clear definition of child/early marriage

In Montenegro, the lack of a single definition of child marriage within the legal system makes it extremely challenging to prove and incriminate cases of child/early marriage. Thus, most of the cases fail to reach the conviction stage. Currently, Article 24 of Montenegro’s Family Law (which covers ‘Entering into marriage/Conditions for full validity of a marriage’) specifies that a person under the age of 18 may not enter into a marriage; however, by way of exception, a child aged 16 to 18 can get married with the permission of the court. The procedure is described in the Law on Non-contentious Proceedings. The definition of child is framed differently in the Criminal Code. According to Article 142 of the Criminal Code, a person who has not reached the age of 14 is considered a child; a juvenile is a person who has reached the age of 14, but not yet the age of 18; and a minor is a person who has not reached the age of 18.

NGOs who deal with cases of child and forced marriage state that the lack of clarity in law makes it extremely challenging to prove and incriminate cases of child marriage.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 Conceptual understandings of intersectionality and VAWG

2.1.1 Expanding our understanding of VAWG

VAWG is a violation of women's human rights; and while some forms of violence are more common in some regions than others, VAWG is both prevalent and persistent across the globe. VAWG in all its manifestations, is a cause and consequence of gender inequality, and at any stage in the life course, causes varying degrees of harm, vulnerability and disadvantage in a number of multiple, intersecting ways. This includes impacts on physical and mental health, damage to self-esteem and confidence, isolation, homelessness, reduced economic prospects and sometimes death for the woman. VAWG negatively impacts families, communities and societies at large. In addition, the impacts of VAWG can be intergenerational, in that children who have witnessed or been subject to violence, are more likely to experience violence or become perpetrators later in life. and minoritized women and girls, as well as promising practice and approaches to addressing violence.

The Istanbul Convention definition of VAWG is as follows:

‘Violence against women’ is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 3).

However, through this research, it was found that State institutions and policies, as well as mainstream VAWG organizations, usually operated within a ‘hierarchy of

violence’, wherein VAWG was often reduced to mean ‘domestic violence’. For example, a mainstream NGO worker in Albania stated: “Yes, we work on gender-based violence, in other words, domestic violence.”

A critique of legislative frameworks around VAWG across Council of Europe Member States is that the primary emphasis has been placed on domestic violence compared to other forms of VAWG (Hagemann-White et al., 2006). For example, the first measures that Albania adopted to combat VAWG were those concerning violence in the domestic unit. Particularly since the enactment of Law No.9669/2006 ‘On Measures against Violence in Family Relations’, efforts have primarily targeted women as members of the family, and more particularly as “spouses or cohabitating partners or former spouses or former cohabitating partners”. This de-prioritizes other forms of VAWG such as stalking, sexual harassment in the workplace, online harassment, forced abortion, early/forced marriage³ and sexual violence.⁴

In addition, certain forms of violence are framed within the language of ‘culture’, as opposed to gender-based violence. For instance, it was common for State institutions and some mainstream NGOs to consider ‘early/forced marriage’ as a ‘cultural’ practice prevalent within Roma and Syrian refugee communities, instead of as a form of VAWG.

Lastly, State institutions and mainstream VAWG organizations rarely acknowledged the fact that VAWG can be compounded by multiple, intersecting inequalities, and a broader context of social exclusion and marginalization. For example, Ortoleva and Lewis (2012, p. 38) note that: “Women with disabilities are two to three times more likely than women without disabilities to experience violence and abuse in various spheres, although no overall global data exists.”

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3. Because in most countries children are not considered able to give legal consent, all early/child marriages are sometimes considered forced marriages. See <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage-frequently-asked-questions>
 4. Though many of these forms of violence might be criminalized in the countries which made up the research study, current civil legislation as well as prevention and protection mechanisms across countries disproportionately focuses on domestic violence. Thus, criminalization in and of itself does not prevent the incidence and prevalence of VAWG.

This research echoes this view. Through Imkaan's interviews with organizations working on addressing violence faced by minoritized women and girls, it was found that for minoritized women it is not sufficient to speak of VAWG only as a gendered phenomenon; other systems of inequality (race, class, sexuality, ability, geographical location, etc.) also need to be taken into account when engaging with the nature of violence that these women face.

The distinct contexts of patriarchy within communities of minoritized women, for instance, result in particular manifestations of violence. For example, NGOs working to support Roma women facing violence, report that Roma communities preserve clear unwritten rules directly governing women's sexual activity and sexuality. These include: protection of 'virginity', emphasis on obedience and devotion, and an acceptance of violence as a normal part of married life.

“Many Roma women think, ‘So what if he slapped me? This is part of marriage.’”
Roma ‘by and for’ organization, Serbia

As ‘honour’ is thought to reside in the bodies of Roma women, they often face severe restrictions on their mobility and sexuality. Girls are married at a young age to prevent their families from being ‘shamed’ by breaching codes of ‘virginity’ and extramarital sex; at the same time early/forced marriage is not recognized within the community (or often in wider society) as a form of sexual violence. Young Roma girls often end up living in large joint or extended families, which condone or perpetrate violence against them. At a personal level, Roma women are commonly reluctant to report

violence due to a fear of ‘repercussions’ or violence being perpetrated by the extended family. In addition, Roma women may fear losing custody of children if they report violence. The ‘shame’ of disclosing violence acts as a deterrence to reporting, as public knowledge of a disclosure can bring a bad reputation to one’s family’s name (Veizi, 2012).

Similarly, women with disabilities⁵ experience violence from family members who they are dependent on. NGOs supporting women with disabilities facing violence in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina,⁶ Albania and Serbia all identified that women will often not recognize or identify experiences of violence, particularly if perpetrated by a partner or primary carer.

“It is very risky for a woman with a disability [to report an experience of violence], as most of the time she is dependent on the person that is neglecting her.”

‘By and for’ women with disabilities NGO, Serbia

NGOs supporting women with disabilities facing violence describe that violence against them often manifests as isolation, economic violence and neglect. In some cases, family members will seize power of attorney, even when a woman with disabilities still has legal capacity. This means that a woman can no longer vote or own property, and all of her money is channelled directly to the family. NGOs in Serbia report that there have been several cases of family members or carers controlling or spending the pensions of women with disabilities. In addition, women with disabilities face prejudice and misconceptions around their sexuality and ability to live a full life.

5. In this report the term ‘women with disabilities’ is used in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

6. Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises two autonomous entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Republika Srpska, with a third region, the Brčko District, a self-governing administrative unit. At an entity level, both the Federation and the Republika Srpska have significant autonomy. Entities’ parliaments have jurisdiction over health care, education, agriculture, culture, veteran issues, labour, police and internal affairs. The Federation of Bosnia is further divided into 10 cantons, each with its own administrative government and relative autonomy on local issues such as education and health care.

“Disabled women are perceived as asexual beings. Even when you have support from your family, they don’t understand that you have rights [...] they think no man will want you [...] my mother wanted me [to have a partner] but she didn’t believe I could.”

‘By and for’ NGO supporting women with disabilities, Serbia

It is in response to the fact that VAWG occurs within specific social, political and cultural contexts that minoritized women’s NGOs articulate definitions of VAWG that go beyond existing legal definitions. Although not all minoritized women’s organizations conceptualized structural violence as part of their work, there was a unanimous understanding among them that tackling significant barriers such as poverty, discrimination, insecure housing, and lack of access to education, employment and health care was a necessary component of doing work on VAWG.⁷ In other words, economic rights, or the lack thereof, impacts VAWG.

For instance, some Roma women’s organizations have included within their understanding of VAWG, Roma women’s exclusion from employment, health care and high-quality education. In addition, these organizations pay attention to the linkages between poor infrastructure and violence against minoritized women and girls. In some cases, their work on VAWG includes efforts to highlight poor standards of housing in Roma settlements and lack of access to sanitation/electricity, as well as limited investment by the State in infrastructure such as roads and street lights. Social exclusion, discrimination and poverty are therefore part of Roma women’s ‘narrative of VAWG’ and not separate from it.

Similarly, organizations working with refugees in Turkey have defined violence against refugee women as comprising of xenophobia, often reflected in the discriminatory treatment by State institutions, such as the police, shelters and health services, towards refugee women. Refugee women are routinely denied medical treatment, often humiliated when they enter hospitals and ignored by the police if they do complain. Furthermore, refugee women are excluded from access to formal employment because of State laws, which do not grant them work permits easily. In cases where refugee women do take up informal employment, their wages are usually less than half of what would be paid to a Turkish woman for the same job.

Organizations working with women with disabilities have included within their understanding of VAWG the lack of infrastructure that would remove barriers in educational institutions (such as ramps, books in Braille, personal assistants to help students physically navigate school, college and university buildings), lack of access to employment, neglect, isolation, sexual violence in State mental health institutions, and societal attitudes, prejudices and stigma against women with disabilities.

2.1.2 Intersectionality conflated with multiple oppressions/discrimination

This research found that within the Western Balkans and Turkey the term ‘multiple discrimination’ was used widely to connote the varied inequalities that minoritized women face due to their multiple identities as women, Roma, LGBTQI, people with disability/ disabilities, etc. When women’s organizations were asked whether they would describe their VAWG services as ‘intersectional’, almost all organizations answered in the affirmative. There was a tendency for mainstream VAWG organizations to understand their work as intersectional based on the fact that they worked with a small number of minoritized women who faced ‘multiple discriminations’.

7. It must be noted that this approach of addressing the structural causes of violence against minoritized women and girls mirrors UN Women’s ‘leaving no one behind’ campaign, which calls for addressing the structural causes of inequality and marginalization in order to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

“Yes, our services are intersectional. However, we do not use the word [intersectionality]; instead we use ‘multiple oppressions’. We understand multiple oppressions [to mean] women and girls who experience multiple sorts of violence.”
Mainstream NGO, Albania

However, a *notional* understanding that minoritized women face multiple oppressions does not always translate into intersectional praxis. Furthermore, a conflation of ‘intersectionality’ with ‘multiple discriminations’ engenders an inability to assess the needs of different communities and respond accordingly. The inability to identify the specific needs of minoritized women and the different ways in which patriarchy manifests itself across communities, classes, sexualities, ethnicities, races, abilities, etc., limits the development of a holistic and robust approach to VAWG, grounded in the realities of women’s everyday lives. This results in an ‘add and stir’ approach to VAWG, in which minoritized women are simply added into existing services, which are largely designed around the needs of the majority population.

To meaningfully address violence faced by minoritized women and girls, it is critical that VAWG services understand that intersecting inequalities, not only define minoritized women’s specific experiences of violence, but that VAWG services need to be designed in a specific way so that they respond to these intersecting oppressions. An intersectional approach to VAWG includes a consideration of where gender intersects with other inequalities/oppressions (sexuality, gender identity, ethnicity, indigeneity, immigration status, disability) to produce unique experiences of violence. By understanding the different ways in which violence is perpetrated and experienced, an intersectional praxis can design and develop appropriate context-specific responses when addressing VAWG.

Organizations working intersectionally often draw linkages between VAWG and structural issues such as poverty, inequality and exclusion, as well as the policies and institutions that perpetuate them. Their

strategies to combat VAWG, therefore, include efforts towards improving women’s access to education, health care and employment. For example, an intersectional analysis of a Roma woman’s experience of domestic violence would take into account not only how she is positioned within her family and community context but also the wider intersecting, structural barriers she is likely to face. These include: exclusion from health care services, educational institutions and employment opportunities; her (in) ability to access free legal aid; a lack of access to information and/or appropriate VAWG support; and prior poor/discriminatory treatment from State institutions such as the police and judiciary, which is likely to lead to a lower level of confidence and trust that she will be both heard and understood.

An intersectional VAWG service then might support these needs in different ways. For instance, it would be staffed by workers who can communicate in the language the woman is comfortable speaking in, support workers will accompany the woman to State institutions (police, courts, centres for social work), and support workers will support women to develop different protective strategies – for example, navigating a way that a woman could safely leave home for a few hours to attend a court hearing. Several ‘by and for’ organizations employ minoritized women who themselves are survivors of violence. For a minoritized woman facing violence, entering a space that is led by and staffed at all levels by minoritized women – many of whom are survivors themselves – offers comfort, trust and solidarity. It provides a space for minoritized women to be ‘*heard, believed and understood*’; critical components in her journey towards addressing VAWG.

“Many women do not have information about NGOs that offer legal advice. Roma women do not have the freedom to go into an office in central Tirana to get legal advice. Often, if women try to do this, the family will intervene and try to reconcile the relationship...We instead understand that women need support to access services. I will go and pick up a woman and take her to the lawyer, rather than call her [to the lawyer’s office]. I will always be waiting with open arms.”
Roma ‘by and for’ organization, Albania

2.2 Value of a specialist ‘by and for’ approach

This research highlights the importance of specialist ‘by and for’ organizations in providing a holistic response to violence against minoritized women and girls across the Western Balkans and Turkey. ‘Led by and for’ VAWG organizations are independent, specialist and dedicated services run ‘by and for’ the communities they seek to serve (Voice4Change England and NAVCA, 2012). They are able to respond to the complex, intersecting needs of women and girls within a broader context of structural inequality. Being able to access services that understand the context in which the violence is taking place and the ‘cultural’ nuances that are often part of the abusive pattern, enables minoritized women to disclose violence, with the knowledge that they will be understood and believed. The ‘led by and for’ model therefore offers a uniquely empowering experience to women and children, as the presence of minoritized women is reflected in staffing, management and governance structures of these organizations. These organizations are also women-led, are located in close proximity to the minoritized communities, and their priority and goal settings reflect the priorities of minoritized women.

‘By and for’ organizations in the Western Balkans that were interviewed for this research, were largely led by minoritized women – in other words, Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali women, women with disabilities, LGBTQI women and rural women. In cases where minoritized women have not set up the organization themselves or are not in charge of running the organization, the organization could be considered to have adopted some aspects of a ‘led by and for approach’ if (a) minoritized women’s needs and unique experiences of oppression frame the organization’s vision, mission and ways of working; (b) within these organizations it is minoritized themselves who determine organizational priorities and strategic direction; and (c) consequently the strategies to combat VAWG are rooted in minoritized women’s lived realities.

Turkey was the only country where organizations were not staffed or managed by the minoritized group this research was focusing on (i.e. Syrian refugee women). This is largely due to current employment law in Turkey, which states that an organization cannot have more than 10 per cent of its staff being comprised of non-Turkish citizens. Furthermore, the bureaucratic processes involved in obtaining work permits for Syrian refugees are time-consuming and expensive, further disincentivizing the employment of refugees. However, most of the organizations working with refugees who Imkaan met have a strong feminist praxis rooted in an intersectional framework of analysis. It is for this reason that they have been included within the analysis of this report.

The following section focuses on the value that such ‘by and for’ approaches lend to addressing VAWG. By focusing on *how* these organizations work, this research situates specialist ‘by and for’ services within the framework of ‘*Tallawah*’.⁸

Tallawah has developed out of the collective ‘herstory’ and experience of black ‘minority-ethnic’ women and girls in the UK as survivors, practitioners, activists, advocates and academics (Larasi and Jones, 2017). It is a framework that captures how organizations work rather than simply focusing on each element of what they do. It is an approach that highlights intersectional praxis; in particular the ways in which ‘by and for’ specialist services aim at being diverse, innovative and responsive to the needs of minoritized women and girls. *Tallawah* has four overlapping, interconnected core elements: **social justice, safety, support and space.**

8. Tallawah is a Jamaican word which means strength. It is commonly used when this strength is not immediately obvious – for example, when someone is small and assumed to be ‘weak’.

“Social justice is concerned not in the narrow focus of what is just for the individual alone, but what is just for the social whole.”

Capeheart and Milovanovic (2007, p.2)

2.2.1 Social justice

Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002, p.162) define social justice *“as the exercise of altering [institutional and organizational] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions”*.

CASE STUDY

Although there exists a number of Roma NGOs in the Federation of BiH, these organizations are mostly led by men. Indira Bajramovic first joined a Roma organization as a secretary in 2000. She was the only woman there. Soon, other Roma women began to turn to her with their problems. The same year, Indira left her job to establish the first Roma women’s rights organization in BiH, Better Future. Since then Indira has gone on to become the first Roma woman to be a political candidate and the first Roma woman to sit on a national board for the Roma community.

1. ‘By and for’ specialist services have developed out of gaps in wider movements for social justice

‘By and for’ organizations have developed out of the need to address women’s specific experiences at the intersections of VAWG and multiple axes of inequality.

Similar to the case study in BiH, the Roma Women’s Rights Centre (RWRC) in Albania was set up in response to the fact that there were no Roma women’s organizations operating in the country.

“Most Roma organizations that are present are run by men. And most women’s organizations are run by majority women. So, although other NGOs wanted to help Roma women, they did not understand us and our specific [reality]. We know how things are in our community.”

RWRC, Albania

The VAWG work that ‘by and for’ specialist organizations in the Western Balkans and Turkey do is intimately connected to a broader commitment to, and struggle for, social justice; which is evident in three ways:

1. ‘By and for’ specialist services have developed out of gaps in wider movements for social justice.
2. ‘By and for’ specialist services are able to respond to the complex, intersecting needs of women and girls within a broader context of structural inequality.
3. ‘By and for’ specialist services are staffed and managed by minoritized women themselves.

Similarly, an organization working with women with disabilities stated that the issues of violence faced by women with disabilities ‘fell through the crack’ between organizations for people with disabilities (run by men) and women’s organizations (who focused mostly on able-bodied women). This gap in understanding and provision inspired them to start their own organization focusing specifically on violence faced by women with disabilities.

“Traditional disability organizations only want to work on disability, and ‘majority’ women-led VAWG organizations do not have an understanding of disabled women’s lives. When we go to these organizations to distribute our leaflets about violence, they tell us that disabled women are not facing violence, so we can’t talk about this...so we needed to start Iz Kruga.”

‘By and for’ women with disabilities organization, Serbia

KADAV, a feminist VAWG NGO in Istanbul, Turkey began working with refugees simply because they saw that not many organizations were reaching out to them.

“We started our work with refugees in 2011, even before the Syrian civil war started. KADAV’s office was in a building which was full of NGOs working in the field of migration – like Amnesty. We started meeting refugee women on the stairs. When they couldn’t find anyone, they knocked on our doors. This is how our work with refugees began.” - KADAV, Turkey

This is how KADAV began working with not only Syrian refugees, but also women from the African subcontinent and women from former Soviet countries. Today, migrant women of all nationalities approach KADAV for support.

It is important to recognize that the services that many of these organizations provide have emerged out of the feminist, disability-rights and human rights movements, and that this positioning is a core aspect of their ability to influence, innovate and evolve. Minoritized women’s organizations, therefore, are constantly creating connections between one woman’s journey, the organization, their ‘communities’ and society (Larasi and Jones, 2017).

2. ‘By and for’ specialist services are able to respond to the complex, intersecting needs of women and girls within a broader context of structural inequality.

‘By and for’ specialist services understand VAWG as operating within particular social, cultural, economic and political structures. These specialist services have, therefore, developed holistic models of VAWG work which involve addressing the structural barriers that minoritized women face. Given entrenched socioeconomic inequalities, work that supports women with economic freedom and autonomy, alongside addressing discrimination across different aspects of identity (gender, race, disability, etc.), is critical. In some respects, work of this nature is prioritized over typical ‘ending VAWG’ work because, in the absence of addressing the many structural barriers women face, there are few support options/pathways for minoritized women experiencing violence. The ‘by and for’ organizations consulted in this research are innovative in their approach to service delivery, often combining front-line services with advocacy and consciousness-raising.

For example, several Roma ‘by and for’ organizations work on education, housing, economic empowerment, and sexual and reproductive health, as critical components of a preventative VAWG strategy.

CASE STUDY

Daje is a specialist ‘by and for’ Roma women’s organization set up by Nada, a Roma woman activist, in 2001. The organization was founded in response to the rape of a Roma woman in Zemun polje, north Belgrade. Over the years, there had been frequent rapes and attacks on the road linking the Roma settlement with the urban parts of Zemun polje because of the poor transport linkages into the Roma communities. On this particular occasion, Roma women got together and demanded better transport, as well as lighting on streets, so that Roma women could move freely without fear of being attacked. Eventually, they succeeded in convincing the municipality to clear a part of the forest and develop a four-kilometre extension of the local bus line all the way to the Roma community. Buoyed by this success, the Roma Centre for Women and Children, Daje, was formed.

The Centre began helping Roma families without legal documents register their children in elementary schools. It also began providing Roma boys and girls school books as an incentive to remain in education. Through this support, the organization gained the trust of the Roma community and began venturing into areas of health care and family planning. They also started helping Roma families obtain important documents to prove their identity and residence. As women began trusting Daje, incidents of domestic violence and early marriage started being reported to them. Daje’s work on VAWG developed organically in response to women’s disclosures of the various kinds of violence that they were facing. Today Daje works across 156 informal Roma settlements.

Within organizations like Daje educating Roma girls is seen, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a larger goal – in other words, if young girls are in school they are less likely to be married at an early age, and also more likely to be knowledgeable about their rights. VAWG’s work within such organizations involves frequent visits to Roma communities and a gradual building of trust with both men and women within the Roma settlements; eventually convincing them to send their girls to school. Building the trust of Roma men is important because they are often regarded as ‘gatekeepers’ to the community.

A Roma ‘by and for’ organization in Montenegro similarly stressed the value of education in addressing VAWG.

Some organizations have focused on providing Roma women access to housing. For example, under the ‘EU Decade of Roma Inclusion’, Better Future, a ‘by and for’ Roma organization in BiH, is advocating for prioritizing housing for single Roma mothers. Better Future also advocates for the economic empowerment of women, because existing VAWG support structures are not effective for minoritized women. Economic independence not only helps women to reduce the risk

of violence, but also helps them to navigate existing violence within the family.

“80 per cent of Roma adults are illiterate, which greatly affects the quality of education of their children...[The] Ministry for Minorities has scholarships for higher education but so far no one has received them. As an organization we advocate, lobby and question the Ministry about why these scholarships have not been disbursed. As a result, many students drop out of education due to a lack of money to sit for an exam or pay for transport to and from the faculty. Education prevents early marriage.⁹ If a girl goes into high school, we can say we have resolved the case of early marriage because high school opens up new opportunities and new ways of seeing the world. So, we support obligatory higher education for Roma.”

Roma ‘by and for’ organization, Montenegro

CASE STUDY

Better Future provides skills-based training for Roma women, to support them into self-employment or to start their own businesses (e.g. farming). They have staff to support women with business planning and practical advice. They avoid giving money to women directly but instead give women money/capital to, for example, purchase a cow to help produce and sell milk products. Typically, a woman will reinvest 20 per cent of the profit back into the community by, for example, supporting another Roma family with milk or cheese. Better Future claims that violence is reduced when they implement these types of projects.

The organization also supports women selling products. However, because of discrimination (non-Roma do not buy from Roma), they set up the first Roma women’s cooperative, which has been running successfully for two years. The organization stresses the importance of economic empowerment in changing women’s lives. It urges donors to understand that simply funding training or capacity-building does not actually support women with the practical livelihood changes, that are critical as a means of becoming economically independent and developing self-confidence. Economic empowerment work, as part of VAWG work, is critical because options for minoritized victims of VAWG are limited.

9. Although education can be one of the most powerful tools to enable girls to avoid child marriage, education alone is not enough to end the practice. Addressing the root causes of child marriage – gender inequality, poverty, insecurity, and the lack of economic and social opportunities for girls – is critical.

Similarly, the Association of Roma in Serbia states:

“Our organization recognizes economic insecurity and poverty as exacerbating Roma women’s vulnerability to violence, and therefore engages in providing Roma women opportunities for gainful employment as a preventative measure against violence within the home.”

Organizations like these have, therefore, developed economic empowerment projects that are aimed at preventing violence, early/forced marriage and improving Roma women’s confidence.

In the last two years, the Centre for Roma Initiatives, Montenegro (Crink) has trained survivors of violence in entrepreneurial skills, some of whom have been given grants to start microenterprises. Crink has also started a social cooperative with women victims of violence, which grows raspberries. The organization is also training young Roma girls at risk of early/forced marriage to be hairdressers. Crink hopes that engaging them in economic activities will delay marriage as well as provide them the means to negotiate violence within a marriage.

Similarly, a ‘by and for’ Roma women’s organization in Serbia has raised finances to buy musical instruments for Roma women to earn money through street performances, as well as bought laundry machines for salons run by Roma women.

In Turkey, KADAV began a Women’s Labour and Employment platform within the NGO, to engage in research and advocacy in the field of employment of refugee women. The platform highlights the plight of Syrian women and attempts to change societal attitudes to employing Syrian refugees. Syrian women not only have more limited access to work than Turkish women (only 27 per cent of whom have a paid job),¹⁰ but they also get paid less. An average Syrian woman worker will earn a maximum of 700 liras per month, compared to 1,300 liras for a Turkish woman. Sexual assaults in the workplace are rife. Recognizing these intersecting oppressions, KADAV developed a number of strategies to improve employment opportunities for Syrian refugee women.

Through the Women’s Labour and Employment platform, KADAV organized workshops to re-skill Syrian women, helping them to create CVs and prepare for

job interviews. In addition, KADAV’s community centre also ran computer, hairdressing, sewing and design classes, as well as Turkish language classes, with the aim of making Syrian women more employable. The classes were also aimed at improving women’s self-confidence and integration into society. Being part of the community centre meant something for these women, as evidenced by one woman: *“After these classes we even started walking differently.”* Two women even started their own tailoring business after KADAV donated some sewing machines and found them some funds. However, the Turkish Government has prohibited all NGOs from engaging in ‘training activities’, insisting that the State-run Ministry of Education should be doing the training. KADAV cannot run any of these training classes because they are currently banned from doing so.

3) ‘By and for’ specialist services are staffed and managed by minoritized women themselves.

A distinct element of social justice in ‘by and for’ organizations is that minoritized women are responsible for governance, management, service delivery, organizational development, community work, strategic advocacy and more. This is unlike mainstream organizations where minoritized women are employed often as front-line workers/community workers, without any representation in management or governance of the organization. Many ‘by and for’ organizations working to address VAWG consulted in this research, employed survivors of violence and so-called ‘service users’ as a key part of their organizing strategy. For example, KADAV and KAMER in Turkey, who work with Syrian refugees, have employed Syrian women, who used to access their services, as translators and community workers. Similarly, the Association of Roma and Daje – both ‘by and for’ Roma woman’s organization in Serbia – are run by Roma women who are survivors of violence.

“We do it the hard way, whereby we train young Roma girls as volunteers in their community. And over time they become ‘experts’ who are then integrated into the organization. Empowerment means that we need to empower those who suffer the violence, and this is one way to do it.”
Association of Roma, Serbia

10. Schick, S. (2016).

It is these personal experiences of violence, which have helped shape their understanding of the wider context of inequality and oppression, that enables them to identify clearly what women need when they approach these organizations.

“These experiences (of violence) change us. It is like a school we’ve all been through; a bond that forms. We recognize a woman’s situation and know how to work with her. Our life experiences teach us a lot and we develop empathy...we can then share this with other women who are facing violence.” Daje, Serbia

This strategy of employing survivors of violence as key employees within the organization disrupts the false separation and consequent hierarchy between ‘worker’ and ‘survivor’. Minoritized women are viewed as reservoirs of knowledge and specialist expertise, capable of articulating their needs and finding solutions to their problems, and the problems of other women experiencing violence.

Similarly, this approach questions the normative understanding of donors as ‘experts’ in approaches to addressing violence experienced by minoritized groups. In addition, through developing this approach, ‘by and for’ NGOs hold themselves accountable to the individuals, groups and communities that they work within, rather than solely to a board of directors or donor(s).

This model of working also means that ‘by and for’ organizations do not view the women they work with simply as ‘beneficiaries’ or ‘recipients’ of a service but as allies in a larger struggle for social justice. This approach acknowledges that minoritized women do not themselves constitute a deficit in need of remedy, but rather that conditions of inequality are created by a dominant global culture of gender inequality, which intersects with other oppressions along lines including race, class, sexuality, disability, age, immigration status and ethnicity. Therefore, it makes the case that large-scale inequality must be addressed at a structural level, and defines minoritized women as ‘rights holders’, locating the State as a ‘duty-bearer’ in upholding, protecting and enforcing these rights (UN Women, 2017).

For example, by positioning human rights as the “rational basis for a justified demand” (Shue, 1996, p.13), a Roma women’s NGO interviewed in this research demanded better infrastructure such as street lighting, proper roads and public transport, in order to mitigate the ‘conductive context’ (Kelly, 2016) for sexual violence which was being perpetrated in an environment of poverty and isolation in a Roma settlement. This demand is congruent with the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which defines VAWG as constituting a “violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women” that “impairs or nullifies their enjoyment of those rights and freedoms”, with reference to the fact that minoritized women are “especially vulnerable to violence”. As per Article 3 of the Declaration, as part of the commitment to eliminating VAWG, States have a duty to uphold women’s human rights, which include the right to equality, security and freedom from discrimination.

In this way, ‘by and for’ NGOs consulted in this research are, through their activities and approach, demonstrating best practice for working in ‘solidarity’ rather than working through a lens of ‘charity’ to end VAWG, both in language and practice.

2.2.2 Support

‘By and for’ organizations provide minoritized women supportive services that acknowledge the various ways in which they experience violence. For instance, violence against minoritized women not only manifests as interpersonal violence, but also in the complete absence of appropriate VAWG services or women’s lack of access to existing VAWG services. For example, in the Republic of Srpska in BiH, health facilities generally do not have accessible health equipment for gynaecological care for women with disabilities. Consequently, if a woman with disabilities reports sexual violence, she cannot be examined appropriately. Furthermore, even if minoritized women do have access to services, they often fail to use them because of fear of discrimination and prejudice stemming from the everyday exclusion and racism that they face. A Roma women’s organization in Macedonia, for example, reported what they term ‘doctor violence’. The racism and use of violent language by health professionals to describe and interact with Roma women and their children, and the refusal of gynaecologists to examine or treat them, often translates into poor sexual health among Roma women.

Within this context, 'by and for' organizations are providing the following services:

- Firstly, they support women to access and navigate existing State services. Recognizing that Roma women face discrimination and racism within State institutions, it is common for activists from 'by and for' organizations to accompany minoritized women to the police, court and doctors. A Roma women's leader explained: *"We assist them with all problems that they don't feel secure enough to seek help for on their own"*. In Turkey, organizations working with refugees often have to use their personal contacts (for example, make phone calls to people they know in local municipal authorities) to ensure that refugee women are provided a space in shelters.
- Secondly, 'by and for' organizations provide their own front-line services, such as free legal aid, psychological counselling and court representation, to make up for the gap in existing State services. They either provide these services themselves or refer women to other organizations that do. 'By and for' organizations also collaborate together to run round-the-clock VAWG services such as SOS helplines (in languages that minoritized women speak), in the absence of State support. To ensure sustainability of such services, 'by and for' organizations draw on each other's resources. For example, in Novi Sad, Serbia two Roma women's organizations operate in the same office premises to share rental fees; and in Belgrade the Roma organization, Daje, is part of an attempt to 'harmonize the work of seven organizations', each providing different services such as legal information, psychosocial counselling and help with documentation.
- Lastly, when existing services do not meet the needs of minoritized groups, 'by and for' organizations advocate with local and State authorities for inclusion and change, thereby expanding the mandate of the State with regards to VAWG. For example, Roma women's organizations in Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and BiH have been advocating for setting up a shelter specifically for Roma women facing violence. This is in response to the widespread prejudice against Roma women when accessing shelters.

"Roma women are not accepted into safe houses. They are given different excuses and reasons; often we are told that there is no place. We are now in the process of researching how many Roma women are actually in safe houses and what kinds of discrimination they face."
'By and for' organization, Serbia

Similarly, women with disabilities organizations in Serbia and BiH are at the forefront of advocacy to address the fact that women with disabilities cannot access support services for women facing violence because of lack of infrastructure and human resources. For example, support services only have written information, which is not accessible to women with reading difficulties; services such as shelter homes, police stations and courts are not accessible for wheelchair users because they do not have ramps; and the State does not provide personal assistants to help women with disabilities who might need to move into a shelter. In BiH, the Association of Women with Disabilities (NIKA) ran a campaign with the women's sector to lobby for each existing refuge to have at least one accessible space for women with disabilities.

'By and for' organizations are also engaged in policy advocacy; either advocating for new legislation or for amendments to existing legislation. For instance, Crink in Niksic, Montenegro has been advocating for raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 (from the current age of 16 with court and parental consent).

Similarly, 'by and for' organizations working with women with disabilities in Serbia have been campaigning around the fact that the legal definitions of domestic violence in Serbia do not take into consideration the *specific* nature of violence faced by women with disabilities such as isolation, neglect or being forced to sign over power of attorney to a family member.

"Nobody believes a [disabled] woman; she cannot talk and nobody wants to listen. If someone listens to her, nobody will believe her. People say: 'who would hit a woman with a disability? What normal person would do something like this?' But domestic violence is commonplace. Also, sexual violence is a huge issue in mental health institutions."

Iz Kruga, Novi Sad, Serbia

In addition to the types of specialist support being provided by 'by and for' organizations, our research also identified the ways in which support was being provided. By tailoring their VAWG strategies to meet the sociocultural contexts of the populations they work with, 'by and for' organizations are developing innovative pathways to address VAWG.

'By and for' organizations recognize that minoritized women's responses to violence might not necessarily be the same as that of 'majority' women. For instance, for many Roma women, leaving an abusive partner is not an option because of the stigma of living alone. This stigma is particularly marked for Roma women, who are less able to access formal education,¹¹ face discrimination in accessing public life and services, and are consequently more if not entirely economically dependent on their families. In addition, young Roma women might have a number of young dependent children that shelters are often unwilling or unable to accept. Roma women might also be reluctant to move into a shelter because of the possible fear of discrimination within the shelter and the fear of potential retribution when they inevitably have to return to their joint families (due to a lack of State-provided options for housing). It follows from this that the strategies that 'by and for' organizations use to combat VAWG are developed around Roma women's social, cultural and economic realities.

As a young Roma activist from Daje notes:

"It is important not to insist that the only solution that women have is to leave. We need to help women from within the context of the family."

In such situations, the work of 'by and for' organizations focuses more on looking at ways to make a Roma woman's home as safe as possible: How can they make the family a safer space? How might they economically and psychologically empower a Roma woman so that when faced with ongoing violence she has the tools and support to prioritize her safety and wellbeing?

An activist from KAMER, a VAWG organization working with refugees, said:

"I wouldn't send immigrant women [Syrian refugees] to shelters. There are a thousand other ways to solve their problems, [so] why should they be in a shelter? In there, they are discriminated against in broad daylight. Why would we send them to a shelter and kick them into a corner of the system? I can find a thousand other volunteers who will open up their doors and accommodate them. This happens a lot."

KAMER's approach in offering support to refugees facing violence takes into account the lived realities of refugee women in Turkey. The traditional shelter models in Turkey do not speak to the reality of Syrian women, many of whom have faced the loss of their homes and families, have a precarious immigration status, and often face discrimination in State institutions; and for whom shelters need to be able to provide support, and a sense of community and belonging. Within this context, KAMER have found that one of the ways to support a Syrian woman facing domestic violence is to provide her with temporary accommodation in a safe space, giving her the time and opportunity to think through her options. Although this is not an ideal solution, given the lack of shelters that are specifically designed to meet the needs of refugee women, KAMER's approach fills in the gaps in current State provision.

CASE STUDY

The husband of Lola, a 14-year-old Roma girl, died from a heroin overdose. Lola was imprisoned in her parents' home while her family tried to find another husband for her. It was during this period that Manjola – the founder of the Roma Women's Rights Centre (RWRC) – got in touch with Lola and asked whether she would like to become a community worker for RWRC. Although Lola was keen, her family was against it. Knowing that the girl's family were against her leaving the house, Manjola struck a deal with them. She would pick Lola up every day and drop her back to her house after work. The family agreed, and Lola began working in the community. Over time, as their trust in Manjola and RWRC developed, their resistance towards Lola's work diminished. Today Lola is an activist married to a fellow Roma activist.

11. See chapter 'Access of Roma girls and women to education' in the 2013 Shadow report for the CEDAW Committee submitted on behalf of the members of Roma Women's Network Serbia

Says Manjola on her decision to take responsibility for Lola's transport to and from the office:

"We want [to do this work]; we can't see it as a project. We want this from our spirit, our soul. Because I know what Roma girls go through, and I know what Roma women go through. I know the differences in our community. It is a spirit that maybe naturally non-Roma cannot have. Also, the Romani language is a key point – when you go into a community (in this case, Lola's parents) and speak the Romani language they trust you more and feel that you are one of them."

Manjola's approach in dealing with the violence being faced by a young Roma girl highlights her intimate understanding of the manifestation of gender inequality and patriarchal norms within this particular context. At a tactical level, Manjola was enabling Lola to 'buy time' so that she would not be subject to another marriage at a young age. However, strategically Manjola was focusing on Lola's long-term interests; by providing her an opportunity for economic independence and a chance to move outside of the confines of her home, Manjola was gradually building Lola's self-confidence and ability to realize a better life for herself.

RWRC's work highlights the importance of 'by and for' organizations that work through the lens of intersectionality. Innovative techniques used by the organization include the use of role plays to support women in developing the communication skills and confidence required to navigate State services such as health, employment and benefits. In addition, RWRC also uses 'community mediators' in managing domestic conflict. To be able to engage effectively with Roma women, it is essential for the organization to build trust at a grassroots level and offer a broad range of services and support to the broader community. Given that divorce rates within Roma communities are quite low, the role of community mediators is to try and empower women through sharing information about their rights, providing them access to adult education and teaching them ways in which to manage conflict.

Another example of the use of community networks is the Roma organization, Better Future, in BiH. This 'by and for' organization places great value in being visible and present in the community, by employing community mediators who operate at a community level. The community mediators are able to proactively gather information through community networks; this 'information from the field' helps to determine whether

girls are going to school, ask questions about girls' safety and welfare, and can eventually be used to safeguard women. Through their interventions, they have helped to prevent at least 28 cases of forced marriage of minors. It was through these community networks that Better Future supported a 13-year-old who was being forced into multiple marriages with men who were in their forties and fifties. The organization intervened and removed the child from the family. Eventually, the girl was housed in a shared home with other girls that is funded by the State.

Another innovative strategy used by a 'by and for' organization – in this case, to raise awareness about gender-based violence – comes from Roma SOS in Prilep, Macedonia. A group of Roma women who met regularly at the Roma SOS office decided to create a wall calendar to highlight issues affecting Roma communities which were often not discussed openly. An activist from the organization explains:

"The women decided that they would like to make a calendar because it is visible to everyone, and therefore becomes a talking point. It is a way to engage men on issues that they consider to be 'women's issues'; as well as encourage intergenerational dialogues. Women decided to use a popular soap opera as pictures in the calendar. Every month, the calendar would have a theme: early marriage, marriage customs, contraception, discrimination in school, young Roma boys and girls getting married to please family members. All the things that were rarely discussed openly. There was a lot of debate in the group about what could be put in the calendar and what should be left out. The Roma women's group presented the idea of the calendar to the men's group and the men thought it was very good. The calendar wouldn't have been of any value without acknowledgement from both the groups that it would work. It was a good way to change attitudes and look at issues impacting the community."

Roma SOS, Prilep, Macedonia

“Safe spaces are ‘social spaces where Black women speak freely’. These safe spaces are, of course, common occurrences for all oppressed groups. In order for an oppressed group to continue to exist as a viable social group, the members must have spaces where they can express themselves apart from the hegemonic or ruling ideology.”

Hill Collins (1990, p.100)

2.2.3 Space

Minoritized women-led ‘by and for’ organizations provide a space where women feel ‘safe’, heard and understood. ‘By and for’ organizations are creating ‘space’ for minoritized women and girls to connect with each other. This is done in a number of ways. Some organizations run regular workshops for women facing violence. These workshops not only aim at building awareness about women’s rights but also become a space for women to seek refuge from the drudgery of their daily lives. It offers women an opportunity to do something for themselves and be supported by women who share similar experiences.

Other organizations organize cooking events in the kitchens of their offices. Creating a space for women to bond through skills that they are good at is an important way to build confidence, cohesion and trust. Impuls Tutin, who work with rural migrants in south Serbia, stated: *“We often organize cooking workshops*

in our office. Women come in and you can see them transform. They laugh and joke and enjoy themselves. This is important in the context of how hard their lives are.” Similarly, an organization working with refugees in southern Turkey said: *“We use cooking as a way to bring women together and to open up. Over the months, women share their stories with each other. And if they want our social workers to help, we help them.”*

“In our workshops women realize that they are not alone. They open up and talk about their lives and realize that whatever their situation might be, there are people who care for them. This makes them stronger and less afraid.”

Daje, Serbia

Some NGOs provide a ‘safe’ space where women can be themselves. For example, NIKA in BiH, organize regular workshops for women with disabilities. These workshops offer a space to counter the isolation that many women with disabilities experience because of their exclusion from public life due to inaccessible public transport, exclusion from employment and stigma. Another example of ‘by and for’ organizations providing a ‘safe space’ for women is the Sarajevo Open Centre in BiH. The organization provides a crucial space of security and safety for LGBTQI people in BiH, where attitudes of conservatism and prejudice have led to spiralling levels of violence against the LGBTQI community.

CASE STUDY

The Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC) in the Federation of BiH provides an important space for the LGBTQI community; it provides a space of safety and security and a place to make new friends, where *‘they don’t have to hide’*. The SOC were approached by a young woman who was subject to domestic violence at home because of her sexual orientation. At the centre, the woman was offered a safe space to access peer-to-peer counselling and other activities offered by the centre. They are also seeking to refer her for additional therapeutic support. She has engaged in a lot of work at the Centre to support her wellbeing, which has also helped the young woman to recognize the abuse she is experiencing at home. A critical issue is that without SOC there are no other safe spaces for this young woman to access: *“We worked with her on an ongoing basis and did a lot of work with her to recognize the violence at home ... we don’t have any safe place for her to live because donors don’t fund these types of activities”*.

Providing women with these ‘spaces’ opens up opportunities for self-expression, self-definition and self-determination (Larasi and Jones, 2017, p.8). It also allows women to gain new knowledge, share information, form opinions and develop a deeper understanding of issues. Furthermore, it enables minoritized women to develop the ability to strategize and, consequently, rightfully claim what is theirs.

Another element of ‘space’ is the location of these ‘by and for’ organizations. Most ‘by and for’ organizations are located either within minoritized communities or close enough to make their presence felt and to maintain sustained interactions.

“From the beginning of the project we were present in the [Roma] community on a daily basis.”
Association of Roma, Serbia

Organizations who cannot be geographically located ‘within’ the community, use innovative ways to make their presence felt and encourage women to access their services.

“We visit people if they do not have access to our services. We visit them in their homes. We provide shuttles to make sure they can come, and we provide drinks and food, and we make sure it is served to go, because most women do not want to eat here, they want to take it home and share it. This is our biggest expense: transportation.”
KAMER, Turkey

Organizations are also strategic in how they choose their locations, as an activist from Roma SOS, Montenegro explains:

“[The] Roma Centre was created for women and children outside of the Roma settlements, so that women and children could travel out of isolated areas. We want women to come out of their communities, where they are visible to the rest of the population. Having the office outside the community is a good chance for them to be outside the control of men.”

Insisting that Roma women must come to their office for any help that they might require is a strategy that allows women the chance to leave the narrow confines of their homes, provides opportunities to interact with the ‘world outside’ and a chance to escape the ‘daily drudgery’ of their lives. Given that often Roma men do not allow Roma women to travel outside of the settlement, Roma SOS in the city of Niksic strategically challenged men’s control over women’s mobility.

2.2.4 Safety

“Safety will mean different things for different girls, women and their children. However, we assert that, at a fundamental level, safety involves a disruption of systems of harm..... An effective intersectional practice approach to safety is therefore likely to engage with a woman’s experiences of her own well-being, her sense of ‘place’ and belonging, how she ‘feels’, and critically what makes her feel safe.”

Larasi and Jones, (2017, p.6)

CASE STUDY

KADAV (*Kadınlarla Dayanışma Vakfı* / Women's Solidarity Foundation) started working with refugee women and the violence they face towards the end of 2015. They define themselves as a 'women's safe space' and as an aid or humanitarian support organization. The work at KADAV is driven by women's needs and the methodologies that KADAV use reflect the 'felt-needs' of refugee women.

"We started working with Syrian women in a little room in the community centre of another organization (Hayata Destek) in Istanbul. It was the first time a humanitarian organization and a feminist organization had come together to work with refugees. Women would bring their children to the community centre and we started informally interacting with these women. It started with story-telling, cooking simple meals — through this we would begin discussing our lives in Syria, our lives here — this is how we started talking about violence." (KADAV employee)

KADAV then opened their own centre, where they started meeting with more women and began discussing violence. Some Syrian women from the group began working as translators with KADAV. KADAV staff started holding workshops on sexual and reproductive health, body mapping and accessing State institutions (for example, how to get an ID card). As trust developed with refugee women, more started attending the drop-in centre. KADAV also runs a kindergarten so that women can leave their children and go out to run errands. Women asked for help on a number of issues: applying for ID cards, getting appointments in the health system, enrolling children in schools, finding a job and writing their CVs. KADAV recognizes that addressing the immediate needs of women is critical to women feeling safe and secure; only then can they begin to disclose the violence they have experienced.

In line with this 'organic' approach, KADAV started organising gatherings in women's homes. KADAV staff began to realize that many refugee women (and Turkish women) were not aware of their rights. As an employee from KADAV states: *"We can't just sit in the office and wait for women to call the hotline. The women's movement didn't start with the purpose of doing these 'projects'. It started in neighbourhoods, with consciousness raising...we need to go back to our roots."* Based on these principles, KADAV staff go to settlements and organise gatherings with tea and snacks in women's houses. The house gatherings usually have a group of around 10 women. There has been a 'snowball effect', with more women offering their homes. These informal discussions build trust, intimacy and a feeling of shared experiences.

Many women come to KADAV for psychological support, to learn coping mechanisms for dealing with violence and develop skills to make them and their children feel safer. Women drop into KADAV for a safe space to socialize, relax and meet other women, and heal emotionally. In most cases, women do not want to go to the police or to the court. Very few women want a divorce or make an official complaint. KADAV operates with a 'women-first' agenda; recognising that often just 'being there' is all women need. The underlying belief of the organization is that "if women know about their rights, at some point they will try and use them"; a philosophy that KADAV uses to support women facing violence.

Organizations such as KADAV enable minoritized women to feel safe by providing them a space to be heard, believed and understood. In the context of minoritized women's lived realities, this is important because of the prejudices and biases they often face from State institutions such as the police and/or judicial systems.

In addition, 'by and for' organizations like KADAV develop their VAWG interventions in response to women's own prioritization of violence in their lives. This is a critical component of making women 'feel safe'. It is women's 'felt-needs' that determine organizational priorities. Other 'by and for' organizations consulted in this research also stressed the value of centring their VAWG approach(es) on women's expressed needs.

“When there were floods in our city, some women lost everything. They didn't have a roof over their head. So, we helped them procure material to re-build their homes. At the time, violence was not an issue that they were interested in talking about.”

Roma 'by and for' organization, Daje, Serbia

In response to the floods, Daje helped women re-build their homes, which not only built trust among both women and men in the Roma community, but also helped to convince Roma women that their lives (in their entirety) were important to the organization. In most cases, the organization did not have funding to engage in such activities, normally considered 'peripheral' to the issues of VAWG and, therefore, had to make do with raising their own funds or incurring out-of-pocket expenses.

Similarly, Support to Life, a humanitarian organization working with refugees in Turkey said:

“Refugee women say: ‘We don't have money, and we experienced a war, and I lost my family and I am alone – I don't have my husband and my family’. When they say these kinds of things they can't say ‘violence is an issue for me’. It is a luxury issue [...] When working with refugee women [to address VAWG] it takes time.”

An intersectional approach to VAWG, therefore, means that organizations understand that often violence is not the most pressing concern that women contact them about. For instance, the SOS helpline run by the Association of Novi Bejec, provides Roma women with a wide variety of assistance: support with obtaining personal documents (e.g. birth certificates), enrolling children in school, supporting Roma families access housing and negotiate social welfare systems, and language interpretation. It is through responding to women's 'felt-needs' that women develop trust in the organization and, over time, disclose any violence that they might be facing.

Similarly, KAMER's work with refugee women reflects an understanding of women's felt-needs.

“We said whatever you need – whether it is health, accommodation, family, IDs – we will help you’. First, they came in flocks trying to get their IDs [...] we started working with the migration management department, public community education centres, the directory of health; we tried to come up with lots of possibilities and tried to help everybody.”

KAMER, Turkey

2.3 Challenges to intersectional responses

As evidenced in the previous section, the ‘by and for’ organizations consulted as part of this research in the Western Balkans and Turkey were attempting to build holistic responses to minoritized women’s experiences of VAWG, rooted in a framework of safety, security, social justice and space. However, during this process, these organizations also encountered significant challenges to developing a truly intersectional response to VAWG. The next section highlights some of these obstacles.

2.3.1 Sociopolitical climate

Within political climates that de-prioritize VAWG and violence against minorities, advocating for specialist ‘by and for’ services is especially hard. Organizations across the Western Balkans and Turkey have indicated how a shift in the political landscape towards conservatism, negatively impacts their ability to respond to VAWG in ways that are holistic, relevant and sustainable.

CASE STUDY

Anti-LGBTQI attitudes in BiH

On 1 February 2014, about a dozen masked people stormed into the Merlinka Festival at the Sarajevo art cinema (Kriterion) at around 3:20 pm. The venue is known for being LGBTQI-friendly. The attackers shouted homophobic insults such as, “There will be no [Pride] parade in Sarajevo” and “There will be no faggots in Sarajevo”, then attacked three of the participants. Two were hospitalized with minor injuries and psychological trauma. The perpetrators fled the scene unharmed.

Because a group on Facebook had posted numerous threats and incited violence against LGBTQI activists, the event’s organisers, the Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC), had made arrangements three weeks earlier for police officers to be at the festival. They were meant to be there half an hour before the start of the event, but no officers had arrived by the time of the attack. The police reportedly appeared just after the attackers left and did not explain the delay.

Following the attack, SOC filed criminal charges to the prosecutor’s office as well as the Ministry of Interior of the Sarajevo Canton. To date, no indictments have been issued against the perpetrators.

This is not the first time police in BiH have failed to safeguard LGBTQI activists. In 2008, Sarajevo police failed to protect organisers and participants at the Queer Sarajevo Festival. The perpetrators, who were a mix of football fans and religious extremists, swarmed the festival, reportedly shouting “kill the gays” and “Allah akbar”. They threw rocks and dragged people from their cars. Several onlookers sustained head injuries. Nobody has been charged with the attacks on eight people during the event.

These attacks are just two examples of the many violent attacks aimed at the LGBTQI community in Bosnia. Bosnia has never held a Pride Parade and the authorities do not strongly support the LGBTQI community. Members of the LGBTQI community are regularly targets of violence. However, because prosecutions are rare due to a system that still harbours anti-LGBTQI attitudes, most of their attackers have never been arrested or tried. Moreover, LGBTQI people generally do not report episodes of anti-gay violence because of perceived police prejudice.

Perhaps the most obvious political tensions and shifts towards right-wing agendas have emerged in Turkey, as documented in the NGO Shadow Report submitted to the GREVIO Committee in 2017. In the last five years, feminist NGOs in Turkey note that they have seen a move by the State from women's rights towards a 'family first agenda'. The 2016 coup d'état attempt has given the Turkish Government a legal base to fight what they term 'anti-democratic issues'. In addition, the peace process with the Kurdish State and the war in Syria has had a major impact on the political situation in the country.

“In these situations, there is no freedom. You can't feel free and can't go or do anything here. The education system has collapsed as well.” NGO, Turkey

“The Government frequently uses the state of emergency that they declared, to stop anything progressive from happening. For example, women facing violence have to wait for a very long time to get a lawyer because the State has 'more important issues' at the moment. So, some women give up and go back to their husbands. Very few [women] are resilient and willing to fight to the end.” NGO, Turkey

Many NGOs, particularly smaller ones, are struggling to operate in the national state of emergency. Under the current state of emergency in Turkey, the government has given power to the Cabinet to issue decrees by the power of law. Through these decrees, some feminist organizations have been closed down and individuals and activists arrested. NGOs are left running programmes in a fluctuating, politically-charged atmosphere (Golubovic, 2017).

“Civil society has shrunk more and more...we are noticing it is getting increasingly difficult for small organizations to survive. It is a problem for everyone. We should have partnerships and collaboration with smaller organizations, but it is getting more and more difficult to do this.” NGO, Turkey

“After the coup the priorities changed. Women's issues are less important for the State and for the public.” NGO, Turkey

“We are forced to use a discourse/language that will not cause us to lose our connections. Today I cannot be very oppositional in my views and statements.” NGO, Turkey

For some organizations in (south-east) Turkey the biggest threat comes from armed, organized crime groups and militia.

“They are totally against feminism. They kept saying women will be liberalized after Kurdistan is formed. They personally threatened me for years. I have been attacked several times.” NGO, Turkey

In Serbia, organizations that support women facing violence describe a creeping 're-patriarchalization' and 're-traditionalization' of the Serbian State. NGOs reported that the role of the Orthodox Church in civil society is being strengthened with issues of abortion and domestic violence gradually shifting away from a discourse on human rights, to a discourse on keeping the 'family together'. Another way that 're-patriarchalization' plays out is in the licensing of VAWG services, whereby feminist organizations working from a rights-based perspective risk not being able to qualify for these licences, which are granted by the State. Furthermore, any funding provided by the government is channelled into organizations that support the current Government's ideology, which in practice is racist and xenophobic. Smaller NGOs working with minoritized women are particularly at risk, as an activist from a 'by and for' Roma women's organization explains:

“Roma women's organizations have difficulty accessing funds because of prejudices against us. Institutions are now moving to the right; and patriarchal, right-wing institutions are unlikely to support us.”

2.3.2 Structural barriers faced by minoritized women

A minoritized woman's ability to access services when facing VAWG is limited by the multiple oppressions she is subject to at the intersections of her ethnicity, class, gender, geographic location and sexuality. In the Western Balkans and Turkey, barriers to accessing support are exacerbated by structural discrimination that significantly impacts Roma women, LGBTQI women, refugee women and women with disabilities.

Women with disabilities, LGBTQI women, Roma women and refugee women (including women who live at the intersections of many of these experiences and identities) are often rendered 'invisible' in countries across the Western Balkans and Turkey. This 'invisibilization' occurs because of societal attitudes that discriminate against women, and State institutions which fail to recognize and respond to women's differing identities, needs and experiences of oppression. In addition, social movements have 'invisibilized' intersecting oppressions faced by minoritized women. For example, in BiH, women with disabilities NGOs describe how, in general, the women's movement in BiH does not take into account the experiences of women with disabilities, while the broader movement for equality, rights and justice for people with disabilities lacks a gendered analysis.

This 'invisibilization' has multiple impacts: if groups are 'invisibilized', they are forced to expend time and energy on advocating and justifying their existence. This drains resources that would otherwise be channelled into lobbying for significant changes in policies or laws that relate to VAWG. Furthermore, NGOs report that the 'invisibilization' of LGBTQI people, women

with disabilities, and refugee and/or Roma women translates into an 'invisibilization' of the violence that these groups face. Consequently, when the particular nature of violence is not acknowledged or spoken about, services cannot be designed to meet specific needs, and this pernicious cycle continues.

Rendering minoritized women invisible has a number of implications, including:

2.3.2.1 Lack of access to education and employment

Across the Western Balkans, Roma girls' experience of State education institutions is characterized by exclusion, low enrolment rates, high dropout rates and their disproportionate placement into 'special schools' for students with disabilities. There is insufficient support (both financial, academic and pastoral) for Roma pupils to stay in mainstream education, and low attainment rates are reflected in low levels of employment in Roma communities and levels of earnings. In Serbia, for instance, only one in five Roma people are in employment (European Commission, 2012). For Roma women, low employment, low earnings and the consequent lack of economic independence means that they are often unable to leave a violent partner on whom they are economically dependent. In addition, Roma women facing violence have limited access to information about their rights, which is compounded by low literacy rates. This significantly impacts their knowledge of and access to services that might exist to support them. Low literacy levels mean that Roma women may also require support with accessing social care entitlements, and other State services such as health care and maternity care.

CASE STUDY

Serbian NGOs report the common practice of employers using legal loopholes to avoid employing workers with disabilities. In Serbia, there is a new national programme which attempts to encourage companies to employ people with disabilities by subsidising 65 per cent of their tax for one year. However, if companies do not want to employ people with disabilities, they can pay a penalty, and most companies will opt to do this.

Similarly, women with disabilities also face exclusion from the education system. Often, they will be forced to attend ‘special schools’ when there is no need for them to do so, because buildings in mainstream schools are architecturally inaccessible. In addition, student dormitories are not adapted for people with disabilities, which often means that students with disabilities drop out of higher education. These low levels of education are compounded by significant barriers to women with disabilities accessing work.

“When I tried to find my first job, I was discriminated against. When I sent my [application], they rejected me. We have laws against discrimination, but I didn’t do anything. I was just angry.”
‘By and for’ women with disabilities NGO, Serbia

2.3.2.2 Lack of access to transport

NGOs across the region report that a significant deterrent to accessing VAWG services is minoritized women’s lack of mobility. Roma women commonly live in settlements on outskirts of towns and so accessing their communities is difficult (ERRC and Minority Rights Centre, 2012). Often transport linkages to Roma settlements are poor, which means that Roma women find it time-consuming and expensive to access services such as the police and judiciary.

For women with disabilities, the lack of accessible transport means that they are also unable to easily access support services or police services. In BiH, many women with disabilities live without any form of personal assistance to support them with independent living, which makes moving around almost impossible for some women. Women in rural areas find it difficult to access public services, particularly in areas without public transportation. In addition, many women with disabilities, and women living in rural areas experience social isolation, and will be prohibited from seeing or contacting friends or wider family. Consequently, women in these situations are often only able to call SOS helplines when their carer is not around. These helplines exist as a crucial specialist resource for a group of incredibly ‘vulnerabilized’ women.

“We need a support system provided by the State, which will provide personal assistants, accommodation and financial support.”

‘By and for’ women with disabilities NGO, Serbia

2.3.2.3 Lack of access to health care

‘By and for’ organizations also highlighted the lack of appropriate and effective health care for rural women, Roma women and women with disabilities. For instance, in BiH, health facilities typically do not have accessible health equipment for gynaecological care, such as tables for examinations. There is also a lack of medical professionals (doctors, nurses) who have expertise on supporting people with disabilities. An NGO working to support women with disabilities in BiH, carried out a survey of 100 women, which revealed that women feel fearful and embarrassed about visiting health professionals who are discriminatory and cannot cater to their needs.

2.3.2.4 Lack of access to appropriate VAWG provision

a) VAWG services are designed for ‘majority’ women

Across countries, anecdotal evidence suggests that even if VAWG services do exist, they do not reflect the intersectional needs of minoritized women.¹²

For instance, organizations in both BiH and Serbia highlighted that existing safe houses are designed for ‘majority’ women and are therefore not accessible to women with disabilities. Safe houses typically lack infrastructure such as ramps and disabled toilets, and personal assistants to support them. In BiH there is only one shelter that has an accessible space for a woman with physical disabilities.

“A safe house is not an option in Bosnia for women with disabilities.”

‘By and for’ women with disabilities group, BiH

12. In most of the countries studied for the purpose of this research, services for women victims of violence are generally insufficient, inadequate and under-resourced. If VAWG services do exist, they do not reflect the needs of minoritized women.

In Serbia, NGOs working to support women with disabilities report that State institutions including courts, police stations and the Centre for Social Work are not accessible for these women. There is currently one project being funded by the Ministry for Reconstruction to enable NGOs to make a safe house accessible for women with disabilities. However, this project is progressing slowly as there is an emphasis on keeping costs low. Disturbingly, however, there was a televised ribbon cutting when the building was opened, which means that the location of this safe house is not secret.

In Turkey, a major issue of concern is the lack of translators in police stations, which acts as a major deterrent to refugee women making official complaints against perpetrators.

“For Syrian refugees, it is much harder to disclose violence because most of them are not economically dependent, they are confined to the house, taking care of the children, and have no State support. Disclosing violence also brings about feelings of shame and stigma. However, there are some women who surmount this and still go ahead and complain [to the police]. But when they go to the police station they are told: ‘We don’t have any translators here, so we cannot record your complaint.’” NGO, Turkey

The previous quote also highlights the fact that services that do exist often do not reflect the intersectional needs of minoritized groups. This is further illustrated in the case of BiH, where women who are finally able to gain access to a safe house can only stay there for a limited length of time. By law this length of time is six months, but NGOs consulted in this research explained that many women are ‘moved on’ after a period of only three months. In practice, the safe house operates only as a respite and the State has no further obligations to provide support. There are almost no programmes for supporting women after they exit a safe house.

Similarly, in Montenegro, a ‘by and for’ organization explained:

“Minors at risk of child sexual abuse or early marriage are placed in the safe house, but there isn’t a long-term programme for integration and empowerment. The Centre for Social Work tends to pressurize girls into returning to the family. The Centre does not follow up on cases, and the girls are at risk of being remarried.”

‘By and for’ Roma NGO, Montenegro

b) Lack of access to shelters/safe houses.

A number of ‘by and for’ organizations across the Western Balkans and Turkey highlighted the limited number of State-funded safe houses. In Albania, for instance, only one State-run safe house exists for women facing domestic violence and one safe house for trafficked women. Similarly, in Montenegro, there are no State-funded safe houses for victims of violence. The three independent shelters for women facing domestic violence that do exist, are run and funded by NGOs. There is one shelter for trafficked victims, which is currently funded by the State. In BiH, all nine of the available safe houses are run by NGOs. In 2015, BiH did not allocate any funds for the safe houses.

It must be noted, however, that in cases where State funding has been provided to run safe houses, the State then plays a very important role in determining the *ways* in which they should be run. Given that a number of States are moving towards right-wing, conservative agendas this is a potential area of significant concern.

2.3.2.5 Discriminatory attitudes by State institutions towards minoritized women

This research found that among minoritized women, there exists a general distrust of State institutions (particularly law enforcement) due to the historical legacy and lived experience of being subjected to discrimination and social exclusion. This limits women’s access to such services as well as acts as a barrier to minoritized women reporting violence.

For disadvantaged groups, the barriers to accessing justice include the lack of a functioning legal aid system, excessive length of court proceedings, perceptions that the system is corrupt, and the high fees involved (UNDP, 2017). Moreover, when women do file cases against their abusers, they are rarely taken seriously, their stories are not trusted and they are often ridiculed. State institutions continue to embody and enforce deeply-ingrained discriminatory views in relation to minoritized groups, especially Roma communities and Syrian refugees. For instance, evidence from interviews conducted for this study suggests that State actors, such as the police and judiciary, stereotype and characterize Roma women as hypersexual and Roma men as hyperaggressive. These attitudes have the effect of dismissing and belittling Roma women's and girls' experience of violence.

“[Police and law enforcement] say that the gypsy women are ‘fighting-loving-fighting-loving-fighting-loving’, so they don’t take notice [of reports of violence]...the police send women back saying that ‘one slap is not violence.’”

‘By and for’ Roma NGO, Albania

“Health care professionals, lawyers, judges, police; all assume that violence is part of our ‘tradition’ so they don’t take it seriously.”

‘By and for’ Roma NGO, Serbia

Similarly, there have been reports of Syrian women being humiliated by doctors and/or nurses, and being forced to face a barrage of negative stereotypes when accessing health care in Turkey.

“Doctors here say: ‘You Syrians give birth all the time.’” NGO, Turkey

Representatives of State institutions often attribute domestic violence, sexual violence, and early/forced marriage in Roma and refugee communities to ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’, rather than acknowledge them as a cause and consequence of gender inequality.

The over-identification of particular *kinds* of violence with particular communities (e.g. forced marriage as only a Roma issue) creates and feeds into existing broader negative perceptions, racism and stereotypes about minoritized communities. This informs State inaction in relation to providing services and support to minoritized women and girls, which, in turn, prevents minoritized women from reporting violence because the risk is simply too high.

“Police and other authorities hold attitudes that gender-based violence and child marriage are common in Syria, and that it is a cultural issue. There is a lack of recognition that child marriage is violence.” NGO, Turkey

“When the police don’t do anything, the woman is forced to come back to her family. She will then be blamed by her community for what she did, and she will be used as a bad example.”

‘By and for’ Roma NGO, Albania

Evidence from Turkey suggests that the police often prioritize mediation and reconciliation over the protection of women. They try and ‘send women back’ to their homes and often attempt to ‘negotiate’ between an abusive husband and his wife, instead of filing a police complaint.

“If a Syrian woman approaches the police by herself (without an NGO present) the police rarely take her seriously. They might say that there is nothing they can do, or that they cannot file a case because they don’t have a translator. Most Syrian women don’t know about these rights and laws, and that, even though they are Syrian women, the State is supposed to protect them from violence.” NGO, Turkey

“There are many cases of shelters trying to reconcile survivors with perpetrators. Most of the guidelines say Syrian women have the right to directly access shelters but, in practice, women are obliged to report to the police in order to access a shelter. Furthermore, many women don’t want to spend a long time in the shelter as they experience discrimination, the living conditions are poor, and most Turkish women don’t speak Arabic.” NGO, Turkey

In Montenegro, organizations complained about the attitude of the police in gathering evidence, preparing witness statements and issuing protection orders. The police were criticized for not gathering robust evidence in a way that was required for prosecution, and for failing to properly write up reports.

“Protection orders are rarely issued, and the police hardly ever remove perpetrators from their homes. In fact, they say: ‘it is his home, we can’t just go in and remove him’. The police are patriarchal and have solidarity with men. They also say it’s not a big deal to slap a wife.... So, at the most, they will warn the perpetrator. There have been cases where if a woman has made multiple calls from one location/property to the police, the police have said, ‘We cannot keep going there. We have other things to do.’”

‘By and for’ Roma NGO, Montenegro

Similarly, in BiH, minoritized women complained about not being taken seriously by the police and law enforcement authorities.

“When I was giving my statement to the police, the police officer literally asked me: ‘How could you have four children with him when he is so violent? How could you sleep with him?’ I went to the Centre for Social Work for the second time to ask why they had not visited my children. The social worker told me: ‘What do you mean? You saved your own ass. You want him to attack your son?’ she said those very words...I have saved my own ass...The social worker backed off because she is afraid of him (the abuser). I went to the court to ask what date the trial had been scheduled for and they told me I should ask the judge. And I went to the judge and she told me: ‘What do you want me to do? I didn’t pick him for you. You picked your own husband. And now you are coming here and pestering people.’”

NGO, BiH

Across the region, NGOs reported that minoritized women, especially Roma women, are routinely denied access to safe houses because of prejudice against them.

“They will not accept our people in the shelters... so we are now trying to raise funds to build a shelter just for Roma women.”

‘By and for’ Roma NGO, Serbia

2.3.3 Structural barriers faced by ‘by and for’ organizations

2.3.3.1 New requirements for VAWG services to be licensed by the State

The licensing of specialist VAWG services has been identified as a recent development and barrier to intersectional service delivery, by organizations in both Montenegro and Serbia. With the State in charge of licensing what are considered essential services for women and girls facing violence, concerns have been raised about the threat to the sustainability, autonomy and innovation of ‘by and for’ organizations.

For example, in Montenegro, as part of the process of ‘social reform’, NGOs working on VAWG are expected to have their services ‘licensed’ by the State. This requires all persons who are engaged in providing social services, including NGO staff that provide VAWG services, to pass a comprehensive exam conducted by the State authorities. The licensing requirements are the same for all kinds of social service provision. The process of licensing VAWG services is contentious, with feminist NGOs highlighting the need to remain autonomous from the State.

“We had more freedom before when we were not recognized at all, as compared to now when we are becoming part of the State.”

NGO, Montenegro

Feminist NGOs are concerned about the impact of licensing on women’s ability to choose whether they want to disclose violence to the State. For instance, under this new model of licensing, when a woman discloses violence to a licensed service provider, the service provider is legally obliged to report the woman.

“Women who face violence should have the right to stay anonymous; without reporting to the police or the Centre for Social Work. However, the new licensing laws mean that organizations are obliged to report the woman...This can be dangerous for her because our State systems [police, CSW, etc.] are not strong enough and often fail women. Also, women should have the ultimate choice of whether they want to be part of the State system or not.”

NGO, Montenegro

In addition to compounding the risk to a woman’s safety, licensing also reduces the autonomy of feminist NGOs to develop innovative solutions to violence, based on established minoritized women-led and informed pathways of support, whose primary focus is not necessarily rooted within the criminal justice system. In Serbia, during 2018, the government intends to overhaul and take control of the SOS helpline, transforming it into a generic mainstream service staffed by non-specialist workers. For many years, the SOS helpline, in its current form, has been run collaboratively by minoritized women’s groups, offering support in several languages. Minoritized groups fear that this new model will present a threat to the sustainability of minoritized groups, as they are pushed out of the funding landscape by a new State-led and supported helpline offering generic support. Similarly, for NGOs that support women with disabilities to receive State support for their programmes, every service they provide must be licensed by the Ministry of Work and Social Policy. This means that smaller, specialist NGOs are pushed out of the State funding landscape if they do not have the resources required to qualify for a license.

2.3.3.2 Nature of funding

a) Lack of State funding

The levels of State funding of VAWG services across the Western Balkans and Turkey were abysmally low, with organizations reporting that as States adopt right-wing/conservative agendas, funding for VAWG work is further decreasing. For example, in Serbia, a review of the services around domestic violence shows that existing services are underfunded, understaffed and overworked (Brankovic, 2015).

“In 2008, we received 2 million Serbian dinars (17,000 euros), but in 2017, we have received only 750,000 Serbian dinars (6,375 euros). The right-wing national government provides limited funds. Every day, something is changing. We are not secure. You cannot plan.”

NGO, Serbia

CASE STUDY

Article 35 of the Law on Combating Domestic Violence in the Federation of BiH, adopted in 2013, stipulates that the Federation of BiH and the cantons will fund safe houses through a 70-30 split – in other words, 70 per cent of the funding will be provided by the Federation and 30 per cent by the cantons. However, the government has not committed the money and has been, as a result, ‘in breach of the law for years’. This is a critical issue for safe houses in the Federation – essentially it means that the existing funding would only cover the costs of one safe house for the entire year (rather than the six that exist in the region). In 2015, the government decided that, in order to qualify for funding, safe houses would need to be registered as ‘institutions’ and that the Federation would only fund the accommodation costs of women (which does not reflect the real expenses that safe houses incur). There used to be six houses in BiH but now there are only five. The cantons have also failed to provide their proportion of the funding. NGOs are having to advocate individually with their local canton to sustain funding and, at times, have to approach international donors.

Similarly, countries such as Montenegro, Albania and BiH also complained of low levels of funding from the State for VAWG services.

“We have received only 2,000 euros from the State in the last five years.”

NGO, Montenegro

“The State has limited budgets assigned to VAWG work, as well as limited staff working on these issues. Prior to 2013, there were eight people employed by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth to look into issues around VAWG. Today there are only three.” NGO, Albania

“The State provides scarce funding for NGOs through the Agency for Support of Civil Society – funding depends heavily on international donors.” NGO, Albania

In cases where the State has decided to fund VAWG services, it is doing so in ways that disenfranchises and drives out specialist ‘by and for’ organizations, or it is providing funding only to large, ‘corporatized’ NGOs. For example, in Serbia, the government is keen to invest in and manage the SOS helpline. By contracting only ‘licensed’ NGOs to deliver the helpline service, this new approach risks threatening the sustainability of ‘by and for’ minoritized women’s groups across the country that are currently running the service.

“For 12 years, we have been trying to get funds from local government, but they have rarely responded to our requests, and when they have responded, the answer was negative...And now they want to put money into the helpline but manage it themselves! Where are we to go? What are we to do?” NGO, Serbia

States are also attaching funding to licensing requirements. For example, in Serbia, in order to qualify for State funding, NGOs supporting women with disabilities facing violence report that they must obtain a licence from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy in order to provide their services. This requirement to obtain a licence is particularly onerous for smaller, underfunded and under-resourced NGOs.

Another criticism of State funding is that it is often linked to political and moralistic ideologies.

“The State doesn’t provide funds for NGOs. It is more likely to support religious organizations, the church or the Red Cross; so, to receive funds, you need to be ‘an organization of interest’ for the State.” NGO, BiH

For organizations such as the Sarajevo Open Centre, who work openly on LGBTQI issues, funding from a conservative State is hard to come by.

“Our work is not recognized by the government. We received only 750 euros last year for a festival from the Ministry of Culture/Arts. It is important to receive funding from the State as it will help to shift the culture.”

Sarajevo Open Centre, BiH

There have also been instances when the State has withdrawn funding when the values of feminist organizations are at odds with the ideology of the State.

CASE STUDY

The Foundation for Women’s Solidarity in Ankara, Turkey had previously received funding from the government to run a shelter for trafficked women. In 2017, without explanation, the centre was closed down by the State, as a representative from the Foundation explains:

“Our work is rooted in feminism and women’s empowerment, and we wanted the shelter for trafficked women to be more open. For example, imposing a strict curfew isn’t empowering to women. We also wouldn’t let the State officials enter when the women were in the shelter, as it was a safe space for the women, and we didn’t want them to feel threatened. You know how State officials dress – with their guns and big boots. It can be very intimidating for women who have been through so much. The authorities did not like the fact that we allowed women to have their partners and boyfriends visit. They wanted the shelter to be a dormitory for ‘little girl students’. The authorities saw themselves as a father figure. They would ask us: ‘How can you let them out at night, travel to other cities?’ But we believe in the autonomy of women, and that they should have the freedom to make whatever choices they want to. They don’t need our ‘protection’. They just need space to decide what they would like to do next.

After 2010, bit by bit, the issues with the government increased. Sometimes, we wouldn’t receive funding for months at a time, and we had to pay the staff – psychologists, lawyers, counsellors – from our own pocket. Then one Friday last year, the government came and transferred the women to an immigration detention centre, and shut down the shelter. Overnight we were closed down. No explanation was given. The shelter is now run by the municipality, and women stay for a few days before they are sent to this immigration detention centre from where they are quickly returned to their country.”

CASE STUDY

Polio Plus, an NGO in Macedonia, works towards the full integration of people with disabilities into society, and views VAWG as part of this broader commitment. Polio Plus used to get funding from the State to support people with disabilities around various vulnerabilities. Towards this end, they intervened in a case of child sexual abuse of a girl with disabilities who was raped and became pregnant. The young girl terminated the pregnancy.

In Macedonia, people with disabilities are viewed as being on the fringes of society and in need of institutionalization. In line with this view, the State wanted to put the girl in a hostel for people with disabilities, notorious for being a 'dumping ground'. Polio Plus were certain that the hostel would not be able to address the victim's unique needs and vulnerabilities by providing appropriate support. The NGO advocated on the girl's behalf for accommodation that would not only enable her to live independently but was also accessible, and where the girl could receive ongoing counselling and support from the NGO's outreach services. These suggestions were built around the young girl's unique experience of oppression/violence as well as the support she required to recover from the trauma of rape and a medical termination of pregnancy.

As an activist from the organization explains: *"In the State-run disabled persons home, people are just dumped and forgotten. The attitude is 'out of sight, out of mind'. The State only understands physical disabilities; all other needs are siloed. Within this understanding of disability, there is no voice for girls like her. The State lacks a holistic approach – that a disabled girl has a human right to support, that is in line with her (unique) needs."*

In this case, the NGO managed to successfully advocate on behalf of the girl: she did not go into institutional care but instead was placed in shared private accommodation. However, due to their altercation with the State over the issue, they were threatened with a withdrawal of funding because they were operating 'outside their remit'. State funding for the organization was discontinued after this case.

b) Project-driven, short-term donor funding

Given the low levels of State funding for VAWG services, almost all the ‘by and for’ organizations consulted in this research rely heavily on international donors for access to funds. In the absence of State support, international donor investment is welcomed by ‘by and for’ organizations whose existence depends on support from donors.

“A significant proportion of services for women facing violence (e.g. legal information, shelters, counselling) are provided by NGOs. These NGOs are donor-funded, and therefore rely on external funds to keep their services going.”

NGO Albania

However, in general, the funding provided by international donors is project-focused and short-term, which is a significant deterrent to intersectional praxis.

‘By and for’ organizations consulted in this research voiced concern over the fact that the aims of their projects were largely being determined by donors. When priorities are determined by donors, as opposed to minoritized women themselves, projects risk not ‘speaking to’ women’s lived realities. For instance, RWRC in Albania have identified an urgent need to provide VAWG services for Roma women in communities around Tirana. However, the only funding available to them was for providing adult education to both men and women in Roma communities. Since the organization required funds to continue its existence, pay staff salaries and fulfil core expenses, they applied for this funding and received it. This issue around ‘donor determined priorities’ is of critical importance for ‘by and for’ organizations because the expressed needs of a community might be vastly different from the priorities that donors might suggest.

“I want to work on projects that only support women, but I also have to consider my staff...I need the funding to pay salaries. Sometimes, I have to take work to sustain us, depending on what is available on the market. This does not always reflect the needs of the community...but I have no choice.”

‘By and for’ NGO, Albania

Due to the nature of donor-driven funding, organizational work becomes fragmented, as the mission and aims of the organization shift to meet the demands and interests of funders. The fragmented nature of funding with its pre-conceived goals thereby prevents ‘by and for’ organizations from working on issues that they identify as critical. In addition, since ‘by and for’ VAWG organizations recognize the structural issues that make minoritized women vulnerable to violence, they are not in a position to operate in ‘intersectional siloes’ – in other words, they cannot solely focus on elements of intersectional VAWG work that are currently being funded, such as legal aid or shelter provision, without simultaneously addressing minoritized women’s access to employment, health care and education. The interconnected nature of these issues means that minoritized women’s organizations are often dealing with a multiplicity of issues within a single case, something that donor-driven funding does not recognize or acknowledge.

In cases like the one described above, accepting funding that does not necessarily speak to the reality of minoritized women leads to an inevitable overload of work. As Manjola, the founder of RWRC, explains: *“I cannot turn a Roma woman away just because I don’t have a project on violence.”*

Additionally, working intersectionally with minoritized women often involves innovative approaches to service delivery. ‘By and for’ organizations play a critical role in filling gaps in existing VAWG services, such as by providing access to essential services such as translators, trained staff to accompany clients to and from their homes, and outreach services for women who might live in remote locations. Services might also include methodologies that take into account differing needs of minoritized women – for example, disseminating information in ways that do not solely rely on literacy or access to IT facilities. These innovative approaches to service delivery are rarely funded by donors, whose ‘project deliverables’ are often concrete and inflexible.

Another issue with donor-driven funding is that it focuses on achieving ‘tangible’ goals as measurements of success. This is problematic on two fronts. Firstly, definitions of success are not always measurable and tangible. Improvements in self-confidence and self-belief, and a better understanding of oneself as a citizen with rights (and not solely as a ‘wife, mother or daughter-in-law’) are all critical elements in women’s ability to negotiate violence (Friedemann-Sanchez, 2008).

Furthermore, minoritized women have vastly different indicators of what counts as ‘success’. Several ‘by and for’ organizations recognize that for many women leaving an abusive partner is not an option. Therefore, they operate from the understanding that it is sometimes more effective to economically and psychologically empower women so that they might be able to negotiate the violence better, while continuing to live alongside their perpetrators.

“Funders don’t understand the economic empowerment model and the role of cooperatives. And so, we don’t receive any funding for it.”

Roma women’s activist, BiH

“It is important not to insist that the only solution that women have is to leave. We need to help women from within the context of the family.”

Roma women’s activist, Serbia

It is likely that projects that focus on pre-determined indicators of what counts as ‘successful interventions’ are unlikely to capture the different ‘forms’ that success might take.

A Serbian NGO working to support women with disabilities described a utopian ‘successful outcome’: *“In a best case, we will help a woman to leave the perpetrator, get a job, keep her children, get all the support she needs from the State, live without fear and with the confidence to start a new [non-abusive] relationship, have trust in herself, and to lead a normal life.”* While some aspects of this outcome can be quantitatively measured, within a project-based model reliant on donor-driven performance indicators, outcomes such as ‘living without fear’ and ‘confidence to start a new relationship’ become less of a priority.

Thirdly, due to the disproportionate focus on funding project-based activities, ‘by and for’ organizations experience a dearth in funding for core activities and long-term capacity-building of staff and minoritized women they work with. Core funding for rent, electricity/gas/water/Internet, payment of administrative staff and quality assurance monitoring is hard to come by, forcing smaller ‘by and for’ organizations to operate in a constant state of uncertainty and precarity.

“Institutional costs need to be covered but donors are more focused on visibility and project activities. They rarely focus on sustainability of the organization. We need money for salaries, for rent. We need more lawyers, but we cannot afford to employ them and pay pensions, health insurance, etc.... [Currently donors] focus so much on capacity-building, but it’s all in short-term projects. So, we are raising the capacity of those who will leave! And we have to start from the beginning all over again.” NGO, Montenegro

In addition, short-term funding means that organizations are not able to invest in the long-term capacity-building or professional development of unskilled or semi-skilled jobseekers who often belong to minoritized communities. This is critical for ‘by and for’ organizations looking to recruit minoritized women to key staff positions. The nature of short-term funding also means that organizations can only offer minoritized women limited periods of employment, which, given the economic precarity that most minoritized women live with, is unsustainable.

“This type of funding destroys the possibility of working in an intersectional way. Who can afford to work in precarious conditions? Usually it’s ‘majority’ women.” ‘By and for’ NGO, Albania

“We do not have any permanent staff because of the nature of funding. All our staff members are hired on contracts which are renewable every month.” ‘By and for’ NGO, Serbia

“A UN Report says that it is hard to work with women’s NGOs because of [our] lack of capacity! [They don’t seem to realize that] all the VAWG expertise still lies with [our] organizations.” ‘By and for’ NGO, Montenegro

In mainstream organizations these limitations of short-term funding translate into salaried roles in NGOs being occupied by candidates who already possess the knowledge and skills to deliver desired project outcomes within limited time frames (sometimes as short as 6-12 months); often these candidates belong to the 'majority' community. This leads to limited project staff from minoritized communities, which, in turn, is a deterrent to minoritized women accessing services (evidence from Imkaan's interviews suggests that minoritized women often find it easier to trust people from their own community and those who speak their language).

Short-term funding also stands in the way of the longer-term transformative change in minoritized women's lives that 'by and for' organizations strive towards. Empowerment of women as a strategy to combat VAWG is a long-term goal, requiring years of continuous, sustainable presence of 'by and for' organizations in women's lives. For minoritized women to be able to stand up to violence, access State support or advocate for services that do not exist requires time, something that is not taken into consideration in short-term, project-driven funding.

“The nature of humanitarian aid funding is generally fast-paced and ‘outcomes’-focused, which can be problematic when working on long-term issues such as VAWG and GBV. With these issues, With these issues, it is a long process to gain results, [one where] you need to really get into the activities. This takes time and effort. Combining humanitarian aid funding with women’s issues is very challenging. Donors [...] should be able to see these problems and crises from these perspectives.” NGO, Turkey

Lastly, the bureaucratic processes involved in donor funding are significant deterrents to intersectional praxis, especially for 'by and for' organizations. Small 'by and for' organizations often lack the language skills, networks and financial requirements needed to apply for large amounts of funding. Competing for funding with organizations that are far more established, run by 'majority' women who speak English, are well-networked, and are able to spend significant amounts of time filling

in applications for funding, can feel overwhelming. In addition, the reporting requirements of donors can often be tedious and exhausting, especially for smaller 'by and for' organizations who often only have 1 or 2 permanent staff.

“Applications are complex and complicated, reporting is demanding, and smaller organizations are not able to do it right. So, funds are mainly accessed by people who work on human rights on a higher level, and who have started their work in a highly professionalized way.” 'By and for' NGO, Montenegro

“The donor environment is becoming increasingly corporatized and academic. Donors want to partner with organizations who are ‘organized’, who can produce reports, feasibility studies and appear quite ‘tidy’ in the way they work. Donors don’t seem to like the ‘messiness’ of real lives.” 'By and for' NGO, Kosovo

Lastly, donor organizations do not consider the fact that for minoritized women to make themselves visible, articulate the issues facing them and start a 'by and for' organization to address these issues, it often involves challenging significant sociocultural norms as well as personal challenges such as low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

“When a Roma woman sets up an NGO, it involves challenging norms in her community regarding her access to mobility and resources, which can create tension and catalyze interpersonal conflicts. In addition, the lack of positive leadership role models means that Roma women find it difficult to imagine a different reality for themselves. They often have low self-confidence and a lack of belief [in their ability to set up an NGO].” 'By and for' NGO, Albania

2.3.4 Existing responses to violence against minoritized women and girls by some mainstream NGOs

Existing responses to VAWG by some mainstream organizations are a barrier to intersectional VAWG responses, when compared to the ways in which 'by and for' organizations operate.

The work that 'by and for' organizations engage in is inevitably complex since it involves acknowledging and responding to intersecting oppressions faced by minoritized women and bringing about longer lasting transformative change. Mainstream organizations might not pick up on this level of complexity as they often engage with VAWG through the lens of case work, rather than situating violence within historical structural inequalities. Although mainstream organizations understand VAWG as rooted in structures of power, their approaches in dealing with the manifestations of this power and inequality, centre largely on 'status quo' solutions. For this reason, mainstream NGOs are more likely to reproduce the structures and frameworks provided by the State. For example, the support options that mainstream organizations provide to women facing domestic and sexual violence, usually include pursuing a criminal justice solution such as a prosecution, or pursuing individual well-being support such as counselling or therapeutic support. Though vital to women's ability to escape violence, these avenues of support (on their own) are not always reflective of some of the more creative, innovative and flexible approaches that 'by and for' organizations have developed in response to minoritized women's contexts (such as working on economic empowerment alongside VAWG).

Furthermore, services provided by mainstream NGOs are almost always delivered 'by and for' 'majority' women. Frequently, organizations working in this model employ 'majority' women as staff and provide services which are largely designed around the needs of women from the 'majority' population. This approach reflects the 'professionalization' of organizations that are less integrally embedded in the community they support, and whose approach to supporting women facing violence is potentially less holistic, and more rigid and prescribed. Mainstream NGOs also tend to have a more formal organizational structure, and are therefore more able to attract larger grants, as well as employees with higher educational qualifications and salary expectations, more social mobility and physical freedom. Such candidates are often more likely to be from the 'majority' population.

Lastly, some mainstream organizations consciously or unconsciously hold attitudes of prejudice against minoritized women. This was highlighted in the discussions with organizations. For instance, mainstream organizations often refer to minoritized women as 'beneficiaries' of a service instead of as equally capable partners with the potential to come up with their own solutions for long-term change. Although well-intentioned, a move from charity to a language and approach of 'rights', would enable mainstream NGOs to work in solidarity with such groups through a lens of equality and justice. Another example of prejudice is that some mainstream NGOs view 'early/forced marriage' as a 'cultural practice' instead of a manifestation of patriarchy and gender inequality (as with other forms of gender-based violence). In addition, some mainstream organizations stereotype minoritized communities with 'low education', 'limited information about services' and 'low levels of reporting of violence', without attempting to frame such behaviours within larger structures of exclusion, marginalization, poverty and vulnerability. In this way, minoritized communities become problematized and agencies absolve themselves of the responsibility for reflecting on their own practice and implementing ways of improving access to support.

“When it comes to Roma girls and women, they have low levels of education, limited information, culture, mentality – it is complicated. Yes, early marriage is a fact, but they don’t have any documents to prove they are married – in a legal sense they are not married. Then they have children – they don’t have money for fees and don’t have access to services to help them. We have been on the alert to highlight discrimination faced by Roma women with respect to access to services...Roma women don’t report these cases. So, it is not that they report them and aren’t provided help.”

Mainstream NGO, Montenegro

“Roma women often leave a [domestic violence] case halfway through.”

Mainstream NGO, Albania

Prejudices such as these, do not provide the full context of the different challenges and barriers minoritized women face. A 'by and for' Roma women's activist had this to say in response to the criticism of Roma women in particular "leaving a case halfway through".

“A Roma woman might ‘drop a domestic violence case midway’ for a number of reasons. For example, she might lack the resources to make repeated trips to legal aid offices and courts. She might also lack the confidence to ask questions. Often in State institutions and other NGOs, information is communicated in particularly complex ways. Roma women might not be able to voice their experiences of violence in the ‘language’ of the courts and police system.”
‘By and for’ NGO, Albania

What this Roma activist is highlighting is that, although on the surface it might appear that Roma women routinely abandon cases, in reality they are being forced to give up their cases because of processes and systems that do not respond to their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Some organizations also suggest that mainstream NGOs can potentially discriminate against minoritized groups

when providing VAWG services. For example, a 'by and for' Roma women's organization in Montenegro described a situation where a woman was denied entry to a safe house because of racism and discriminatory treatment by the SOS helpline run by a mainstream women's NGO.

In the words of the 'by and for' NGO worker involved in this case:

“Isn't this [behaviour] questionable? Why aren't the SOS helpline and Centre for Social Work on the side of the woman? They should have tried to find some sort of solution. This is not the only time this has happened. It keeps happening. They rarely find a free space [in a shelter] for a Roma woman. Whenever the national SOS line receives a call from a Roma woman, they have a chat among themselves to 'decide' if there is a free space or not... [what they do not understand is that] when a Roma woman decides to report violence it takes so much courage that it should be taken seriously and treated as an important case. Especially when she has her young children with her. If she doesn't receive an appropriate response, we are sending a message to perpetrators that their actions will not be held accountable. It discourages other Roma women from complaining. It sends the message out that they will not receive help and that Roma women are not equal to women from the majority population. Both the State and NGO support is failing.”

CASE STUDY

In July 2017, a Roma woman from Podgorica arrived at her cousin's house in Niksic with bruises on her body that had been inflicted by her partner. The cousin reported the case to a mainstream NGO that supports women facing violence and asked them to find space for the Roma survivor in their shelter. The staff at the mainstream NGO explained that they were busy working on another woman's case, couldn't offer a shelter space, and that the survivor should report to the police.

When the survivor arrived at the police station and made her report, the police called the SOS helpline (run by a mainstream NGO) and asked for a shelter referral. The shelter began to explore various options, but when the police clarified that the referral was for a Roma woman, the shelter said that they did not have space available. The survivor returned to stay with her cousin overnight, while the police attempted to find a safe place for her.

In the meantime, the perpetrator had learnt about the survivor's location and he sent death threats to both the survivor and her cousin. The cousin grew concerned for the safety of herself and her family and asked the survivor and her three children to leave.

The survivor was found on the street with her three children by a group of Roma women, who notified the local 'by and for' Roma NGO, Crink. A representative from Crink met the survivor on the street and called the mainstream SOS line, informing them about the severity of the situation. The SOS helpline made a referral to the Centre for Social Work, again stating that they had no free space. The NGO worker was forced to threaten media action in order to persuade the Centre for Social Work to find a shelter space.

2.3.5 Legal Challenges to working intersectionally on VAWG

NGOs working across the Western Balkans and Turkey to support minoritized women facing violence identify a series of challenges including:

2.3.5.1 Poor implementation of existing legislation

NGOs across the region commonly describe how the poor implementation of satisfactory legislation acts as an obstacle to supporting women and girls facing violence. NGOs report an urgent need for a shift in attitudes within law enforcement and the judiciary, in order to enable proper implementation.

In Turkey, poor implementation of Law No 6284 on the Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women (2012) is often attributed to a lack of information about laws pertaining to VAWG – including who the law applies to and what processes it obliges law enforcement to engage in.

Turkish NGOs report that police are often not fluent in or even familiar with Law No 6284 and are commonly unaware that the Law applies to refugee women as well as ‘majority’ women and citizens. The other impact of this information gap, suggested by anecdotal evidence, is that law enforcement often prioritize family mediation and reconciliation with a perpetrator over the protection of women and children. NGOs report that police officers will frequently opt to ‘send women back’ to their homes and attempt to negotiate between a violent perpetrator and a woman who has experienced violence, rather than filing a police complaint.

“Public officers in all these institutions do not know that these laws cover Syrian citizens as well. In fact, they ask us what the law is. The main law 6248 came into being in 2012 but they still don’t know about it.” NGO, Turkey

In line with other countries in the region, in 2010 Montenegro also adopted a Law for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, which was followed by the adoption of a Prevention Strategy to end domestic violence (LPDV) in 2011. NGOs report inaction around implementation of the LPDV by law enforcement, which is attributed to a lack of knowledge, lack of capacity and serious failures in implementation. For example, a 2017 report co-authored by three Montenegrin NGOs notes that law enforcement often relies entirely on the victim’s statement to build a case, or on her statement and a medical report, which, in turn, may not accurately describe the nature of the victim’s injuries or extent of domestic violence (Women’s Rights Centre et al., 2017).

Furthermore, NGOs report ineffective prosecution in both misdemeanour and criminal cases due to incomplete police reports, and “deficient police investigation and communication”. The Montenegrin police does not have the capacity, or is not willing to gather sufficient proof, to process women’s and girls’ reports of violence with the prosecutor’s office. This process typically involves interviewing perpetrators and those who are aware of the violence (e.g. neighbours and other family members) who are often reluctant to give evidence. As police do not commonly use any other mechanisms to obtain information, such cases are not processed due to a lack of evidence.

CASE STUDY

Poor implementation of legislation in Montenegro protecting girls from early marriage

In general, there is a well-coordinated initial response to preventing early marriages in Montenegro, including effective cooperation with local coordinators, the police and the Centre for Social Work (CSW). However, significant issues exist in implementation of the legal framework. NGOs report that from January 2015-17, there were 49 reported cases of early marriages, all of which were processed; but once they reached the judiciary none of them were treated as criminal cases. They were rejected on the basis of a lack of evidence collected by social workers at the CSW, and only one early marriage was prevented. Methods used to collect proof are very limited: they do not use secret surveillance, check telephone calls, or speak to family members and neighbours. In one case, the family disappeared and left the country overnight. The NGO later learnt that the girl was married, and the family lived in Germany. She was 13 years of age.

Despite protection orders being enshrined in LPDV, police in Montenegro often refuse to remove perpetrators from the marital home, citing their inability to evict an individual from a private property – which is not the case as LPDV operates above any other laws. Removal orders are rarely issued, and limitation measures are seldom implemented in practice, except in regions where NGOs are working to exert pressure and advocate.

Similarly, NGOs in Albania report that court proceedings for issuing protection orders and immediate protection orders for women are not necessarily followed by swift responses from those responsible for executing such orders, including the Bailiffs Office, the police and local government units (People’s Advocate, 2015). Major weaknesses exist around the lack of proper enforcement by bailiffs of emergency barring orders and protection orders, inadequate responses from the court system and limited contributions by health care professionals, including forensic experts. In Albania, according to the Domestic Violence Law, protection orders should be issued within 48 hours; however, NGOs are campaigning for protection orders to be released immediately. According to the same law, women can only be referred to shelters once a Protection Order is in place but, in practice, this endangers women at a critical moment when perpetrators are most likely to commit a homicide. NGOs have campaigned hard to ensure they can make referrals before this 48-hour window.

Similarly, in Kosovo, NGOs report limited implementation of their Law on Protection against Domestic Violence No. 03/L-182 (2010),¹³ including limited application of restraining orders and removal of perpetrators from the house. Law enforcement in Macedonia lack the capacity to implement laws in a meaningful way, and there is an absence of accountability in this process.

In Serbia, despite the existence of the 2010 Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination,¹⁴ which provides mechanisms for the prevention of and protection from all forms of discrimination, the country has failed to fully implement amendments to the Criminal Code of Serbia introduced in 2012¹⁵ to ensure the identification, investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. This disproportionately impacts minoritized groups such as Roma and LGBTQI communities.

A 2017 report by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), states that violence against Roma in Serbia is “recurrent”, and that “Many offences are not reported to the police and the police are not always open to receiving complaints, in particular from LGBT persons and Roma” (ECRI, 2017, pp. 9-10).

2.3.5.2 Multiple interpretations of existing legislation

A key barrier to proper execution of laws relating to VAWG in the Western Balkans and Turkey is the lack of knowledge and clarity around legislation, especially multiple interpretations of existing legislation (Soni, 2017).

CASE STUDY

In Montenegro, the lack of a single definition of child marriage within the legal system makes it extremely challenging to prove and incriminate cases of child/early marriage. Thus, most of the cases fail to reach the conviction stage. Currently Article 24 of Montenegro’s Family Law (section on ‘Entering into marriage/ Conditions for full validity of a marriage’) specifies that a person under the age of 18 may not enter into a marriage; however, by way of exception, a child aged 16 to 18 can get married with the permission of the court. The procedure is described in the Law on Non-contentious Proceedings. The definition of child is framed differently in the Criminal Code. According to Article 142 of the Criminal Code, a person who has not reached the age of 14 is considered a child; a juvenile is a person who has reached the age of 14, but not yet the age of 18; and a minor is a person who has not reached the age of 18.

13. Available at <http://www.assembly-kosova.org/common/docs/ligjet/2010-182-eng.pdf>

14. Available at <http://azil.rs/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/antidiscrimination-law-serbia.pdf>

15. Amendments available at <http://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/18731>

Similarly, divergent interpretation of laws in Albania tend to do a disservice to survivors and deny them effective access to justice – for instance, by promoting a narrow interpretation of the offence of domestic violence or by introducing mandatory conciliation in the procedure applying to emergency barring orders (GREVIO, 2017).

In Kosovo, differing legislation and interpretations of legislation across jurisdictions means that legal protections against VAWG are hard to enforce. In Kosovo today, two parallel judicial systems each claim absolute and exclusive jurisdiction over the province. One system is sponsored by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the other by the Government of Serbia. For the people of Kosovo, these parallel systems create legal uncertainties and conflicts on a basic, day-to-day level. Judgements from one system are not recognized by the other, nor do the two systems share court files, or records of births, deaths, marriages or divorces. To ensure enforcement of a divorce or a civil judgement, a Kosovo resident must pursue her claims in both systems. This presents a confusing, costly and complex proposition, especially for minoritized women who do not have the resources to engage in these parallel systems of justice.

CASE STUDY

A woman came to the Centre for Protection of Women’s Rights in north Mitrovica. She had fled violence from her partner who lived in Pristina and wanted the NGO’s help to regain custody of her son, who was still with her violent partner. However, despite Kosovo having very good VAWG laws, the two different sets of jurisdictions in the country meant that her lawyer was unable to get any information about the child and his living conditions. For instance, the victim’s lawyer could not request any papers from the lawyers in Pristina (that would usually be shared between lawyers) because the laws under which she was entitled to get these papers were not recognised in Pristina. Finally, they managed to use other jurisdictions to get the papers, and she applied for visitation rights. Her fight for full custody continues.

Similarly, the legal framework in BiH is complicated by the combination of different government systems. In addition to the State, the two entities – the Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – have their own legal systems. In addition, the Brčko District has a separate legal framework. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in which the Sarajevo Open Centre is located, consists of 10 federal units – the cantons – which have their own constitution, parliament, government and judicial powers. Cantons operate under the laws of the Federation as a whole. Moreover, they are further divided into 79 municipalities and cities, which constitute the local self-government units. Due to this complex system, making changes in existing laws is a slow and complicated process.

CASE STUDY

“Campaigning for policy improvements is a big challenge when every canton has to agree with the law, which does not give victims of gender-based violence security.” Sarajevo Open Centre, Federation of BiH

Existing legislation in the Federation of BiH stipulates that women can only stay in a refuge for three months. This is a significant challenge as many women have no economic security and are dependent on partners and have nowhere to go after leaving the safe house. For this reason, most women have few options but to return to situations of violence. The Sarajevo Open Centre is trying to change the law but two of the cantons are refusing and so the reforms remain in a deadlock. Changes to this law will require ongoing lobbying.

2.3.5.3 Existing legislation not a true reflection of the lived realities of minoritized women/directly discriminates against minoritized women

Serbia has robust laws which support women facing violence. However, existing legislation views ‘women’ as a homogenized group, often overlooking the needs of minoritized women such as Roma women, women with disabilities and LGBTQI women, and solely benefits ‘majority’ women. For example, although the 2017 Domestic Violence Law¹⁶ in Serbia stipulates that survivors of violence must be given access to a safe house, this law does not support women with disabilities, as safe houses are generally not accessible. Only one safe house in Belgrade is architecturally accessible, but the staff are not trained to support women with disabilities. As an SOS helpline consultant described: *“We had a call from one of the safe houses, who asked us to provide a personal assistant [for a disabled woman who was a wheelchair user]. The staff did not know what to do with her. In the end, the woman went back to the perpetrator because she had nobody to assist her; she was not employed, so the State would not offer a personal assistant.”*

In addition, in Serbia, under the 2010 Anti-Discrimination Law, complainants must choose a single form of discrimination on the basis of which to invoke the law. This means that legislation is not fit for purpose for women who live at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression such as racism, poverty, homophobia and ableism, and it cannot deliver appropriate solutions to the specific nature of the violence that they face.

Similarly, in Turkey, discrimination in employment law means that Syrian refugee women with temporary admission (TA) cannot become economically independent and leave a situation of violence. Employment law currently stipulates that an organization cannot have more than 10 per cent of its staff being comprised of non-Turkish citizens. In addition, the process for an individual with TA status to obtain a work permit is

prohibitively difficult: an employer must apply for and fund a work permit, as well as provide justification for employing them as a staff member. This dis-incentivizes employers from giving work to people with TA status. With almost no access to formal employment, Syrian refugee women are forced to work in informal, low paid and sometimes dangerous occupations. A lack of economic autonomy also has implications for women’s ability to negotiate violence.

Across the region, laws pertaining to VAWG and domestic violence often include measures to eject the perpetrator from the family home as soon as violence is reported; in some cases including imprisonment if he refuses to leave. For example, in Serbia, the 2017 Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence includes urgent measures for removing the perpetrator from the family and prohibiting the perpetrator from approaching the victim. This measure does not reflect the lived needs and realities of Roma women, who often live in joint families along with their in-laws. Ejection of the perpetrator in such a case would often expose a survivor of violence to further abuse perpetrated by her in-laws and extended family. Not only is this unsafe and risky for women, but it is likely to deter Roma women from reporting domestic violence to the police. Women can face further retribution if they report, as the law opens up a space for greater harassment from Roma men.

NGOs working with women with disabilities also highlight how the 2017 Law in Serbia does not take into consideration the specific nature of violence faced by women with disabilities such as isolation, neglect or being forced to sign over a power of attorney to a family member. The practice of removing the perpetrator also acts as a deterrent to women with disabilities considering reporting violence, as in many cases the perpetrator also acts as her primary caregiver. A new Gender Equality Law which complies with international standards on human rights and gender quality is currently in draft. The new law aims at addressing deficiencies observed in the current Law.

16. Available at https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_sprecavanju_nasilja_u_porodici.html

2.3.5.4 Barriers to accessing legal aid

Minoritized women are less likely to pursue a criminal justice remedy due to the lack of legal aid and prohibitive legal costs. Many women lack disposable income to pay for legal assistance and in many countries in the region – such as in Serbia – laws on free legal aid are non-existent, in draft, or newly formed and not implemented. Many women are also unable to afford the fees for naturalization, or to obtain an ID card. This creates a two-tiered justice and rights system, whereby Roma women are forced to rely on legal assistance provided by NGOs in order to access the rights they are entitled to.

Legislation in Serbia that is not fit for purpose is compounded by a lack of access to justice and rights for minoritized women, including low-income women, women with disabilities and Roma women. As a Roma woman activist explains: *“There is no justice for poor Roma women in this country. They cannot afford lengthy legal processes and there is no legal aid...Access to justice is a dream for us.”* NGOs supporting women with disabilities in Serbia also report that the justice system is “painfully slow” and corrupt, and that staff in the criminal justice system are not trained to understand the specific problems faced by women with disabilities.

In Albania, despite the Law on Legal Aid no.10039¹⁷ which was adopted in 2008, access to the State legal aid scheme has been virtually non-existent¹⁸ and the only available form of legal assistance is that offered by NGOs. Women have limited information about their right to legal aid and whether they might be eligible for it or not. These inefficiencies have attracted much attention from the CEDAW Committee.¹⁹

A new Law on Legal Aid was recently adopted in Albania – Law No.111/2017 ‘On Legal Aid Guaranteed by the State’²⁰ – which provides for free legal aid without the need to prove financial difficulties to all victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual violence and human trafficking. The law will enter into force in June 2018 and simplifies the existing procedures for applying and benefiting from legal aid. However, the government has yet to build an efficient system for providing legal aid to women victims of violence.

In Montenegro, the right to free legal aid is provided to people who have suffered from Family Violence. However, this violence must be evidenced, and registered with the police and the courts in both cases of misdemeanour and criminal cases. NGOs also raise questions around how much unpaid lawyers will be motivated to represent survivors of violence: there is a prevailing concern that in these cases lawyers do “more harm than good”.

17. Available at http://www.eurailius.eu/pdf/13.Law%20on%20Legal%20Aid,%20promulgated%20on%2012_01_2009_en.pdf

18. According to the State report, only two women benefited from State legal aid in 2014. There are no data indicating that legal aid was ever granted during the year 2015.

19. See paragraph 13, indent a, of CEDAW’s Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Albania: “In light of its General Recommendation No. 33 (2015) on access to justice, the Committee recommends that the State party: (a) Ensure women’s unhindered access to justice systems, including by raising the awareness of the public in general and women victims of discrimination and gender-based violence in particular, about existing laws and mechanisms to obtain free legal assistance, enabling them to file claims about violations of their rights”. Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/840818/?ln=en>.

20. Available at <http://www.eurailius.eu/index.php/en/albanian-legislation/send/21-legal-aid/60-law-on-legal-aid-en>

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

POLITICAL CONTEXT			
Key Findings	Recommendations	Proposed Interventions	Country examples
<p>Shifts in political climate towards conservatism.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage women’s participation in the political sphere, including through the adoption of quota laws. 2. Provide technical and financial support for the development of initiatives promoting women’s political participation. 3. Develop legal skills to enable women to litigate and challenge inequality and discrimination practices at a national level. 4. Develop skills in using the regional and international human rights systems to file complaints. 		<p>In the current political climate in Turkey, civil society has come under increasing pressure, notably in the face of a large number of arrests of activists, including human rights defenders, and the recurrent banning of demonstrations and other types of gatherings, leading to a rapidly shrinking space for fundamental rights and freedoms. Many rights-based organizations remained closed as part of the measures under the state of emergency. This contravenes Article 9 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which states that: “Parties shall recognize, encourage and support, at all levels, the work of relevant non-governmental organizations and of civil society active in combating violence against women, and establish effective cooperation with these organizations.”</p>
<p>Specialist women’s organizations working on VAWG are being penalized by the State: their funding is being blocked or they are being shut down.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support specialist women’s organizations that are independent of the State. Their critical role in eliminating VAWG against minoritized women must be acknowledged and resourced. 2. Conduct in-depth research on existing women’s organizations, including collecting disaggregated data on the sectors that they work in. 3. Determine if donor-funded organizations are treated differently by the State. Identify the differential treatment, including reprisals against staff at these organizations. 4. Use such information to lobby the State about discrimination in practice. 		<p>A State-funded safe house in Turkey (run by an autonomous women’s organization) was shut down overnight by the State in 2017. The State did not supply a justification for this action, but the women’s organization had previously been criticized by officials because of their feminist approach, which included re-empowering survivors of violence in the shelter – for example, by not imposing infantilizing curfews and rules regarding contact with people outside of the shelter.</p>

<p>State funding linked to conservative agendas.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State funding needs to be independent of conservative political agendas and wider State ideology. State funding needs to be gender responsive and grounded in human rights generally, and economic, social and cultural rights specifically. Funding should be linked to global, European and national frameworks. 2. Support NGOs through dialogues and discussions on interrogating such ideologies. 3. Highlight the inherent discrimination in treatment when an organization is treated differently, when it challenges such ideologies and refuses to subscribe to them. 4. Provide the necessary financial and technical assistance tools to facilitate this work. 5. Provide information on measures to be taken when reprisals occur. 6. Encourage donors to support organizations that promote ideologies that are underpinned by human rights norms and values. 7. Provide support for broader public education and information initiatives. 		
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SERVICES			
Key Findings	Recommendations	Proposed Interventions	Country examples
<p>Shelters/Safe houses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited number of shelters • Limited period of residence (three months) • Prejudice, bias within shelters • Not accessible for all (lack of interpreters, inaccessible infrastructure, lack of staff training) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a baseline assessment of the number of shelters, levels and kinds of service provision, time limits for stays, and their ability to cater to the different needs of individual women (religion, ethnicity, disability, etc.). 2. Use the baseline study to highlight gaps in the normative frameworks of States, as well as draw attention to where/how States might be failing in their responsibilities. 3. Increase the number of shelter places to comply with the recommended standard for levels of provision in the Final Activity Report of the Council of Europe Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (Council of Europe, 2008). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support 'by and for' organizations to establish safe minimum practice standards and intersectional approaches, to ensure VAWG services are accessible. 	<p>Across the Western Balkans and Turkey, women's organizations complained about not having enough shelter space. According to the Council of Europe 'minimum standards for support services', shelters are the only support service for which there is a recommended standard for levels of provision in European instruments: set at one place or family place per 7,500 of the population to 10,000 of the population.</p> <p>In BiH, shelter accommodation for survivors of violence is limited to six months in theory and significantly less in practice, after which some women end up returning to their perpetrators because of the absence of intermediary solutions such as social housing.</p>

SERVICES

Key Findings	Recommendations	Proposed Interventions	Country examples
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Recognize shelters exist as part of a process, instead of as a 'solution' to VAWG. Shelters must therefore be embedded within a holistic approach to ending VAWG, as defined by the 'felt-needs' of those facing violence and most at risk. 5. Develop shelters into accessible spaces for disabled women (in terms of infrastructure and provision of personal assistants). Determine if a State is a party to the Disability Treaty and if so, raise the issue with the relevant treaty body. 6. Build the capacity of shelter staff through training. Equip shelters with multilingual professionals who are sensitive to intersectional gender issues. 7. Enable 'by and for' NGOs to develop shelter provision that is designed to meet the needs of minoritized women and girls, through sustained and dedicated funding. 8. Facilitate dialogues between the government and the donor community on the need for specificity and the identification of emerging/best practices. 9. Equip VAWG organizations with the tools to develop protocols and contact lists that can provide needed VAWG services. 10. Facilitate and engender an understanding at State level of the responsibility to support and fund a broad range of crises responses, including, but not limited to, shelters – e.g. rape crisis centres. 		<p>In Serbia, BiH, Albania and Macedonia, there were reports of disabled women being unable to access safehouses because of a lack of appropriate infrastructure and personal assistants.</p> <p>In Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and Turkey, Roma and Syrian women were routinely denied access to safe houses.</p> <p>The GREVIO Committee (2017) to Albania reported that one of the issues of concern regarding shelters were “the limitations to access to the shelters for women victims of domestic violence who come from marginalized groups and/or have special needs, such as women with health problems or disabled women, owing to the lack of specialized services offered in shelters.”</p> <p>Interviews carried out in February 2018 suggested a lack of consensus in Kosovo between women’s organizations on the number of available, operational shelters for women facing violence. A women’s organization consulted in February 2018 in the district of Mitrovica claimed that there are no existing shelters, whereas organizations interviewed in the districts of Gjakova and Pristina were aware of four shelters. News reports at the time suggested that all of the shelters had closed briefly in January due to a delay in funds, and some had reopened using emergency funds²¹ provided by the government until February. Reports also suggested that the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had stipulated a rule in the new open call for grant applications expecting applicants to cover 50% of the cost of projects.²² This is a significant increase from the 20% co-funding rule in previous funding rounds. In July 2018, UN Women staff confirmed that in Mitrovica North there is one shelter, and 7 shelters in total in Kosovo.</p> <p>In Turkey, Syrian women are reluctant to go to safe houses because the staff only speak Turkish.</p>

21. Popova, E. and Kika, A. (2018). Kosovo allocates emergency funds for domestic violence shelters - Prishtina Insight. [online] Prishtina Insight. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-allocates-emergency-funds-domestic-violence-shelters/> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2018].

22. Kika, A. (2018). Kosovo domestic violence shelters face financial strain - Prishtina Insight. [online] Prishtina Insight. Available at: <https://prishtinainsight.com/kosovo-domestic-violence-shelters-face-financial-strain/> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2018].

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

Key Findings	Recommendations	Proposed Interventions	Country examples
<p>Legal Barriers</p> <p>a) Poor implementation of existing legislation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct an empirical study of existing legal barriers, reasons for such barriers and proposals on how to remedy this. Disaggregated data should be used to identify whether the barriers are financial or attitudinal, or due to a lack of specialization in staffing, a lack of training or a lack of accountability for non-actions by staff/or actions that violate women's right to equality, dignity and non-discrimination. 2. Highlight the need for effective implementation of legislative frameworks. The UN Women's Handbook for Legislation on Violence Against Women (2012) recommends that [existing] legislation [must] contain provisions for its effective implementation, evaluation and monitoring. 3. Establish a baseline study of all relevant legislation to ascertain if (a) all manifestations of violence are reflected in laws; (b) if existing legal frameworks address accountability of direct perpetrators and State authorities who fail in their duty to protect against and prevent harm; (c) there are effective civil and criminal law remedies attached to the numerous crimes that are perpetrated against women and girls; (d) there is fragmentation of laws and policies. 4. Establish if there are separate monitoring bodies at the national and regional levels. If so, conduct an assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of their mandates. 5. Highlight the need for a clear definition of terms commonly used across multiple pieces of legislation within a country. 		<p>A common concern across the Western Balkans was that countries had excellent legislation on VAWG (due to EU accession processes). However, implementation of laws was limited and lacking in political will.</p>

<p>b) Multiple interpretations of existing legislation</p>	<p>6. Conduct a review of the existing laws to establish inconsistencies – e.g. between civil and criminal laws and between laws addressing different manifestations of violence. Review of cases against the laws will provide evidence of interpretation and implementation problems.</p>		<p>In Montenegro, there is no single definition of ‘early/child marriage’, making it extremely challenging to prove and incriminate cases of early/child/forced marriage. With respect to the legal framework, it is recommended to raise the minimum age for marriage to 18, with or without court and parental consent. This is also the key recommendation by the CEDAW Committee with reference to the prevalence of child and/or force marriage, based on the second periodic report on Montenegro. Considering that many Roma and Egyptian marriages are customary marriages, it would be important to mandate for every marriage to be officially registered.</p>
<p>c) Existing legislation does not reflect minoritized women’s lived realities</p>	<p>7. Advocate for a more holistic response to VAWG, in line with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Legislation must account for the fact that not all women are the ‘same’; and therefore a holistic response to VAWG might differ for different categories of ‘women’.</p> <p>8. Conduct a review of laws to identify (a) exclusions, (b) lack of situational context, (c) where a State is falling short of its regional and international obligations.</p> <p>9. Conduct a review of the functioning of the justice system to reveal practices within the justice system that negatively impact the right of access to justice for women.</p> <p>10. Develop judicial education programmes which focus on social context for training on a contextual and human rights-based approach.</p>		<p>Though Serbia has robust laws to support women facing violence, existing legislation approaches ‘women’ as a homogeneous category and overlooks the needs of minoritized women such as Roma women, disabled women and LGBTQI women. For example, the new Domestic Violence law in Serbia includes urgent measure to remove a perpetrator from the home; a measure which does not reflect the lived realities of Roma women who live in large extended families.</p> <p>In Turkey, the employment law requires that 90 per cent of an organizations staff must be Turkish citizens. Syrian refugees (especially women) therefore face significant hardships when looking for formal employment. This contradicts SDG 10: ‘Reduce inequalities within and among countries by adopting policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies [which can] progressively achieve greater equality’.</p>
<p>VAWG reduced to ‘domestic violence’ in policy and praxis</p>	<p>1. Disrupt the hierarchy of violence in State policy and services, NGOs and by international donors that de-prioritizes and ‘invisibilizes’ the multiple manifestations of VAWG. SDG 5 calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres.</p>	<p>1. Support donors to develop a more comprehensive understanding of VAWG that is informed by the lived realities of minoritized women and girls; rooted in an analysis of structural inequalities.</p>	<p>In Albania, the first measures adopted to combat violence against women were those concerning violence in the domestic unit. Particularly since the enactment of Law No. 9669/2006 ‘On Measures against Violence in Family Relations’, efforts have primarily defined women as members of the family, and more particularly as “spouses or cohabitating partners or former spouses or former cohabitating partners”.</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Engender a greater understanding of particular manifestations of VAWG (e.g. early/child/forced marriage) among State services, mainstream NGOs and donors. These need to be understood, not in terms of ‘cultural practice’, but through a framework of VAWG and structural inequality. Customs, traditions or religious considerations must not be used to justify violence against women and girls. This is also highlighted under section 3.1 in the Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women (2012). 3. Develop education programmes on manifestations, causes and consequences of VAWG across different sectors: civil society, government and judicial. The approach must be dialogical, to promote understanding and listening, and to challenge dominant narratives and views on VAWG. 4. Promote accountability for VAWG, which challenges the normalization and acceptance of VAWG and the impunity that goes with it. 		<p>In the Federation of BiH, a ‘by and for’ Roma women’s NGO reported on how difficult it was to convince international donors to understand the importance of ‘economic empowerment’ as an integral part of a preventative strategy to combat VAWG.</p> <p>Interviews highlighted that child/early/forced marriage among Roma communities across the Western Balkans, and among Syrian refugees in Turkey is routinely viewed by State authorities as a ‘cultural practice’ in which they could not ‘interfere’. In Turkey, an NGO that reported the case of a Syrian girl at risk of being subjected to early marriage to the police, was told by law enforcement to simply “alter the young child’s age” so that the police would not have to be involved.</p>
<p>Multiple oppressions conflated with intersectionality.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a robust understanding of intersectionality to avoid conflating it with ‘multiple oppressions’. This is in line with UN Women’s Handbook for Legislation on Violence Against Women (2012), which highlights that women’s experiences of violence are shaped by factors such as their race, colour, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, marital status, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status, migrant or refugee status, age or disability, and include targeted measures for particular groups of women, where appropriate. This is also in line with Article 4 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which states that “measures to protect the rights of victims, shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status” (p. 8). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop training and capacity-building for mainstream NGOs and donors to develop a holistic understanding of an intersectional VAWG approach. 	<p>In Serbia, under the 2010 Anti-Discrimination Law, complainants must choose a single form of discrimination on the basis of which to invoke the law. This means that legislation is not fit for purpose for women who live at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression such as racism, poverty, homophobia and ableism. UN Women’s Handbook for Legislation on Violence Against Women (2012) recommends that legislation make specific provision for the appropriate and sensitive treatment of women complainants/survivors of violence who suffer from multiple forms of discrimination.</p>

	<p>2. Develop educational programmes, policies and materials to understand difference, specificity, intersectionality and multiple oppressions.</p>	<p>2. Facilitate the sharing of existing intersectional practices and approaches between NGOs providing support and services delivered 'by and for' minoritized women, through building mutual collaboration and partnerships within a 'strengths-based' approach. Utilizing local experts from minoritized communities as leaders, facilitators and advisers, is an example of an effective strategy for operationalizing the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and its commitment to 'leave no one behind'</p>	<p>In Albania, it was observed that working through the lens of 'multiple discrimination' resulted in mainstream NGOs providing VAWG services for minoritized women which had been [unconsciously] designed around the needs of 'majority' women.</p> <p>Minoritized women's organizations in Serbia, Albania, BiH, Macedonia and Montenegro expressed the desire to learn from each other's best practices – e.g. approaches to advocacy, research, design of support structures, staff training/development.</p>
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DATA			
Key Findings	Recommendations	Proposed Interventions	Country examples
<p>Limited statistics on VAWG and GBV, especially pertaining to minoritized women.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collect comprehensive disaggregated data on violence faced by minoritized groups of women, including Roma, rural, disabled, LGBT and refugee women. Methodologies such as story-telling and women's tribunals can be used to break the silence. 2. Ensure that information and collected data are available to the public. Collecting these statistics should be a collaborative piece of work between the organizations delivering services and academics with a sound understanding of intersectionality. Data collection should be led by 'by and for' practitioners/organizations. It should not be a complex, heavy-handed, State-led process or one where data is misused and goes against the principles of confidentiality, safety, protection and justice for minoritized women. 3. Collate data from multiple sources (government, statutory agencies, NGOs, etc.) to arrive at an accurate picture of the scope of the problem. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support specialist 'by and for' organizations in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and strengthening community-based research methodology and action research • collecting data that highlights their impact • sharing with each other how they collect data and what data they collect • developing a strengths-based approach to monitoring and evaluation 	<p>Although Macedonia has comprehensive VAWG laws, there is a lack of baseline data nationally on DV, VAWG and other forms of GBV.</p>

ORGANIZATIONS SITUATION/CAPACITIES

Key Findings	Recommendations	Proposed Interventions	Country examples
<p>Limited number of ‘by and for’ organizations across the Western Balkans and Turkey.</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support existing ‘by and for’ NGOs to make the case at local, national and regional level for the need for specialist ‘by and for’ services. 2. Facilitate seed-funding and technical assistance to develop ideas for establishing organizations. UN agencies can act as conduits for funding from donors – to enable donors to feel comfortable about providing funding to unknown entities. 3. Engage in the capacity-building of minoritized women and appropriately resourced peer support to ensure that they possess the information, skills and self-confidence to support their ongoing development and establish specific organizations. This should be delivered by organizations and individuals with a track record and expertise of VAWG and intersectionality. 4. Promote collaboration, connection and learning between ‘by and for’ organizations/activists across countries. 5. Support non-‘by and for’ organizations willing to take an intersectional approach. 6. Ensure that funding applications, obligations and reporting requirements speak to the current capacity of ‘by and for’ NGOs, in terms of human resources, language requirements and access to professional networks. 	<p>‘By and for’ organizations across the Western Balkans highlighted the difficulties in applying for State and international donor funding, due to complex application processes, limited access to professional networks and inability to prove a sustained history of handling large grants.</p>

<p>Solutions to VAWG are overwhelmingly rooted in the criminal justice system.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create intermediary forms of assistance such as social housing, where women can safely stay, work and benefit from financial aid without having to go to a shelter. 2. Recognize that for minoritized women, economic empowerment is an essential component of the broader strategy to combat VAWG. This is in line with Article 18 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which states that '[Parties should] aim at the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence.' 3. Promote civil law remedies including protection orders. 4. Compile a list of lessons learned and good practices. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop 'communities of practice' where 'by and for' organizations can come together to share expertise, points of innovation, promising/best practice. This is in line with UN Women's Guidance Note on documenting good practices on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2017). 2. Support 'by and for' organizations to develop effective analytical methods to determine the real needs of women and accompanied children through a rights-based perspective. 	<p>Survivors of violence living in a safe house in Kosovo started a bakery as a social enterprise. Women are involved in the production and sale of bread and bakery products. The income and skills they acquire are a critical component of women's ability to move on after they have recovered from their experience of violence and have left the shelter.</p>
<p>Discriminatory attitudes by State institutions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote accountability of State actors who discriminate against women and girls. 2. Promote active citizenship education through National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide capacity-building and training on VAWG and intersectionality to the police, centres for social work, health care professionals and educators, and the criminal justice system. This is in line with Article 15 of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which states that: "Parties shall provide or strengthen appropriate training for the relevant professionals dealing with victims or perpetrators of all acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, on the prevention and detection of such violence, equality between women and men, the needs and rights of victims, as well as on how to prevent secondary victimization." 	<p>Across the Western Balkans and Turkey minoritized women voiced complaints over poor and discriminatory treatment by the police, courts and centres for social work.</p>

<p>Limited funding by the State for VAWG services</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold States accountable for fulfilling their commitments to funding VAWG services, in line with national strategic plans and as per the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. 2. Conduct gender budgeting analysis to gather empirical evidence on the amount that States spends on VAWG services. Based on these reports advocate with Treaty bodies, Special Procedures and regional human rights systems to highlight gaps and failures in State provision. 3. Analyze donor funding to the sector, including financial and technical support. Disaggregate the figures to establish how much is provided to mainstream services and how much to specialist services. 4. Encourage States to routinely prioritize the resourcing of specialist 'by and for' organizations. <p>These recommendations are in line with UN Women's recommendations for budgeting VAWG services as stated in the Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women (2012).</p>		<p>Across the Western Balkans and Turkey, NGOs observed minimal State investment in VAWG services.</p>
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DONOR RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Key Findings	Recommendations	Proposed Interventions	Country examples
<p>International funding agencies offer short-term, donor-driven funding.</p>		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reconfigure existing funding frameworks to create an enabling environment to allow for the possibility of intersectional approaches to combating VAWG. Funding provided by international donors should be relevant to minoritized women as articulated by 'by and for' specialist NGOs. In particular: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Funding must be flexible, long-term and sustained in order to bring about transformative change. (b) Funding must support economic empowerment of minoritized women, as a crucial strategy for combating VAWG. 	<p>Across the Western Balkans and Turkey, 'by and for' organizations commented on how the nature of international funding impacts their ability to provide intersectional responses to VAWG.</p>

		<p>(c) Work with ‘by and for’ organizations to strengthen their capacity for measuring and articulating the impact of their work.</p> <p>(d) Metrics used to measure outcomes and ‘success’ must be guided by the expressed needs and objectives outlined by ‘by and for’ NGOs, which provide a robust mechanism for addressing VAWG within an intersectional context.</p> <p>(e) Minoritized women must be supported to identify their own funding priorities as part of the ‘effective strategies for operationalizing the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030’ and its commitment to leave no one behind.</p> <p>(f) International funders/donors should be educated on effective intersectional approaches to supporting minoritized women.</p>	
Licensing of VAWG services.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Licensing should not violate the autonomy of organizations. Licensing should not regulate the funding or functioning of organizations. If the State is funding an organization, then accountability should be limited to fiscal matters, and should not include programmatic or ideological aspects of VAWG service provision. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity-building of ‘by and for’ organizations to develop service standards rooted in their individual contexts of practice and support. Involve specialized women’s NGOs in preparing licensing guidelines and frameworks. Large funding organizations (such as UN Women and UNDP) should support this. Advocate for donor support/ investment in creating separate licensing procedures for specialized services provided by women NGOs. 	In Serbia and Montenegro , with the State in charge of licensing essential VAWG services, concerns have been raised about the threat to the sustainability, autonomy and innovation of ‘by and for’ organizations.
Mainstream NGOs and international donors view minoritized women as ‘beneficiaries’ of a service.		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate a move from the language of ‘charity’ to a rights-based language and approach in development praxis. Support minoritized women to recognize themselves as ‘rights holders’ – i.e. as women who know and can claim their own rights; and states as ‘duty bearers’. This is also an example of the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality’s (FGE) effective strategies for operationalizing Agenda 2030. 	

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5. ANNEX

Map of 'by and for' VAWG organizations visited across the Western Balkans and Turkey

Albania

- Roma Women Rights Centre (RWRC), Tirana
- Serbia
- Iz Kruga, Belgrade
- Iz Kruga, Novi Sad
- Roma Centre Daje, Belgrade
- Association of Roma, Novi Bejec
- Roma Women's Centre, Novi Bejec
- The Association of Roma Women "OSVIT", Niš
- Women's Space, Niš

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Bolja Budućnost Tuzla Association of Roma Women/Better Future, Tuzla
- Association of Women with Disabilities (NIKA), Banja Luka
- Sarajevo Open Centre (SOC), Sarajevo

Montenegro

- Centre for Roma Initiatives (Crink), Nikšić
- Macedonia
- Roma SOS, Prilep
 - Women's Civic Initiative ANTIKO, Skopje
 - Women's Forum, Tetovo

Kosovo

- Lawyers Association Norma, Pristina
- Women's Rights in northern Mitrovica, Mitrovica
- Safe House, Gjakova

Map of Mainstream VAWG organizations visited across the Western Balkans and Turkey

Albania

- Human Rights in Democracy Centre (HRDC), Tirana
- Albanian Centre for Population and Development (ACPD), Tirana
- Centre for Legal Civic Initiatives, Tirana

Serbia

- Impuls Tutin, Tutin
- ATINA, Belgrade
- Femplatz, Pancevo

Turkey

- Kadınlarla Dayanışma Vakfı/ Women's Solidarity Foundation (KADAV), Istanbul
- KAMER, Kahramanmaraş
- Support to Life/ Hayata Destek, Istanbul
- Foundation for Women's Solidarity, Ankara
- Mor Cati, Istanbul
- ENKAD, Istanbul
- Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence, Istanbul
- Women Without Borders, Istanbul

Montenegro

- Roma SOS, Nikšić
- Women's Rights Centre, Podgorica

Macedonia

- Polio Plus, Skopje
- SUMNAL, Skopje

Kosovo

- Network of Roma Ashkali and Egyptian Women Organization Network (NRAWEOK), Pristina
- AKTIV, Mitrovica

UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

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