

CROATIA

Stakeholder Report for the United Nations Universal Periodic Review

Submitted April 2025 by Autonomous Women's House Zagreb, a non-governmental organization

and

The Advocates for Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1996

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Autonomous Women's House Zagreb ("AWHZ") is a feminist, non-governmental, and non-profit organization providing support and help to women who have survived violence and empowering women's position in society since 1990. AWHZ runs the only shelter in the country with a secret address, providing accommodation, legal aid and representation, and psychological aid, as well as a Counselling Centre for women, with a free hotline, in-person counselling, risk assessment, and safety planning, psychological counselling, and legal aid. AWHZ has carried out numerous public campaigns against violence against women and has advocated for legal changes and better implementation of existing legislation.

The Advocates for Human Rights (The Advocates) is a volunteer-based non-governmental organization committed to the impartial promotion and protection of international human rights standards and the rule of law. Established in 1983, The Advocates conducts a range of programs to promote human rights in the United States and around the world, including monitoring and fact finding, direct legal representation, education and training, and publications. The Advocates has published multiple reports on violence against women as a human rights issue, provided consultation and commentary of draft laws on domestic violence, and trained lawyers, police, prosecutors, judges, and other law enforcement personnel to effectively implement new and existing laws on domestic violence.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholder report is submitted for Croatia's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and focuses on domestic violence and violence against women as persistent and systemic human rights challenges. Drawing on recent research, case law, and monitoring by civil society organizations, the report highlights key gaps in the implementation of international human rights standards, particularly in relation to prevention, protection, and access to justice for survivors. It also identifies emerging concerning trends and institutional practices that undermine the rights of women and children, especially in the context of family law proceedings. In addition, the report addresses the availability, accessibility, and sustainability of shelters and specialized support services for women survivors of violence. The report concludes with targeted recommendations aimed at strengthening Croatia's legal and policy response to gender-based violence and ensuring full compliance with its international obligations.

II. BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

2. Croatia has ratified international and regional treaties relevant to its obligations to prevent and eliminate VAW. Croatia has ratified Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)ⁱ and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)ⁱⁱ on 12 October 1992. Croatia also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on 9 September 1992ⁱⁱⁱ, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)^{iv} in 1992. Croatia adopted the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action on 13 September 1994^v and the Beijing Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women on 1 September 1995^{vi}. Croatia ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ("the Istanbul Convention") on 13 April 2018^{vii}. Croatia's constitution includes the principle that binding international treaty provisions take precedence over conflicting provisions of domestic law.^{viii}

A. 2020 Universal Periodic Review

3. At its last UPR in 2020, Croatia received several recommendations related to violence against women (VAW) and domestic violence (DV). The government expressed full support for most of these recommendations. This section assesses the extent to which selected recommendations have been implemented.

Human rights education, trainings & awareness raising

Status of Implementation: Accepted, Partially Implemented

4. Croatia accepted a recommendation related to VAW on training on gender equality and gender-based violence (GBV)^{ix}. Although cross-sectoral training on VAW and DV exists in Croatia, it is often not comprehensive and can even harm victim safety when

not conducted in accordance with best practice standards and an understanding of the dynamics of VAW. Dual arrests, where both parties are arrested in a domestic violence case, still occur, and the state has charged women victims alongside their abusers for using self-defence or verbal reactions during assaults^x. Initial resistance to Ministry of Interior training on dual arrests subsided only after scientific evidence demonstrated the extent of the problem. The misuse of “parental alienation” against the non-violent parent remains problematic due to years of institutional training on child manipulation in so-called “high-conflict divorces” and situational violence^{xi}. Training on “parental alienation” in Croatia has been provided by systemic actors, but also external NGO experts, including perpetrator programs to professionals in institutions like the police, CISW, and courts.^{xii}

Violence against women

Status of Implementation: Accepted, Partially Implemented

5. Croatia received 23 recommendations regarding violence against women^{xiii}. Key areas include improving victim services, ending harmful practices like prosecuting victims, enhancing training for professionals, ensuring effective investigations and punishments of perpetrators, and addressing structural discrimination and gaps in support for women. Although Croatia has made significant strides, especially in improving the legislation, problems in implementation persist, as detailed throughout section III of this report.

National Human Rights Action Plans

Status of Implementation: Accepted, Partially Implemented

6. Croatia received 4 recommendations to adopt the National Plan on Gender Equality^{xiv}. In 2023, the Government adopted the National Plan until 2027^{xv} as a strategic act, bypassing parliamentary approval. Unlike previous national policies, this plan lacks the legal and political weight of earlier frameworks, which many women’s NGOs and female politicians see as a setback for gender equality^{xvi}.

B. Domestic Legal Framework

7. In Croatia, domestic violence is criminalized both as a misdemeanor and as a criminal offence. Police and prosecutors are responsible for deciding whether an act constitutes a misdemeanour under the Law for Protection from Domestic Violence (LPDV) or a crime under the Criminal Code. However, the legislation lacks a clear and consistent distinction between acts treated as misdemeanors and those classified as crimes. The LPDV defines misdemeanor domestic violence to include physical violence that does not cause injury, corporal punishment, psychological and economic violence, as well as neglect of the needs of elderly or disabled persons. These acts are punishable by a minimum fine of 300 euros or up to 90 days of imprisonment.^{xvii} The law also mandates protection measures, including psychosocial treatment for the perpetrator; prohibition

of approaching, harassing, or stalking the victim; removal from the shared household; and compulsory addiction treatment.^{xviii}

8. The most recent changes in 2024 extended the rights of the victims, increased fines, and removed the option to fine violations of protection measures, leaving only the option of jail.^{xix} It also importantly removed the obligation of civil society organizations to report each case of violence, which now allows women's NGOs to provide anonymous and confidential support.^{xx} The 2024 amendments also defined that a restraining order must apply for at least 100 meters.^{xxi} This change, which AWHZ lobbied for many years, is intended to eliminate the practice of issuing restraining orders for perpetrators who still live with the victim – the previous lack of minimum distance requirements forced victims to have to leave a room if the perpetrator entered. While courts are issuing protection orders requiring a minimum distance of 100 meters, other legal changes have not yielded positive results after a year of implementation. Although fines for violating protection orders have been abolished, in practice, perpetrators are often not jailed. Instead, new misdemeanour proceedings are initiated, and fines continue to be imposed.^{xxii}
9. There are several articles in the Criminal Code on aggravated acts committed against a close person, including murder^{xxiii}, bodily injury^{xxiv}, grievous bodily injury^{xxv}, particularly grievous bodily injury^{xxvi}, female genital mutilation^{xxvii}, unlawful deprivation of liberty^{xxviii}, coercion^{xxix}, threat^{xxx}, and stalking^{xxxi}. The Criminal Code also includes a separate offence of domestic violence in Art 179a.^{xxxii} Both the Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure include protection measures to ensure the victim's protection during court proceedings and after the verdict. In harmony with the LPDV, the Criminal Code includes five safety measures that can be used against the perpetrator in cases of VAW. These include: prohibition of approaching, harassing, or stalking the victim (Art. 73); removal from a joint household (Art. 74); compulsory psychiatric treatment (Art. 68); compulsory treatment for addiction (Art. 69); and compulsory psychosocial treatment (Art. 70). Recent changes to the Criminal Code clarified Art. 74, thus, restraining orders must be at least 100 meters, in line with the recent changes to the LPDV. The Croatian Parliament also included the crime of femicide in early 2024 into the Croatian Criminal Code in Art. 111a, under “Aggravated murder of a woman.”^{xxxiii} This change was made following repeated requests from women's organizations, fueled by several cases of femicide.^{xxxiv} Legislative changes also include a definition of gender-based violence.^{xxxv}

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

Gender-neutral approach to VAW and DV

10. A key issue inhibiting the state's response to VAW and DV is the lack of recognition that women survivors experience severe trauma and need tailored, victim-centred,

trauma-informed support from state institutions. VAW and DV are often treated as isolated incidents, ignoring patterns of coercive control and prolonged abuse. This leads to victim-blaming, secondary victimization, and discourages women from seeking help. Despite recent legal changes, the law still fails to clearly distinguish intimate partner violence from other forms of domestic violence, which remains a serious concern.^{xxxvi}

Prosecution and punishment

11. Prosecutors often lack a gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approach, failing to recognize the repeated and coercive nature of domestic violence. Cases are frequently treated as isolated incidents without investigating the history of abuse. As a result, women are sometimes charged as equally violent, even when defending themselves or reacting to ongoing abuse.^{xxxvii}
12. Fines and conditional sentences tend to be the most common punishments under both the Misdemeanour and Criminal Codes. In 2024, according to data from the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, there were 6,949 reported cases of domestic violence under the LPDV, involving 6,168 perpetrators—76% of whom were men.^{xxxviii} Fines were imposed in 60% of cases, conditional sentences in 29% of cases, while prison sentences were imposed in only 7%.^{xxxix} Regarding the application of Article 179.a of the Criminal Code – Domestic Violence, 65% were conditional sentences, 33.5% were unconditional imprisonment sentences, 0.19% were fines, and 1.16% were imposed community service sanctions.^{xl} While penalties for domestic violence under the CC are mostly conditional or minimal,^{xli} for women accused of manipulation, proposals and imposition of unconditional prison sentences for parental alienation or separation are more severe than those for abusers.^{xlii}
13. Protection orders for victims are not sufficiently prioritized or implemented. While the number of issued restraining orders under LPDV have increased, the number of eviction orders are decreasing, with the police implementing 215 such orders in 2020^{xliii}, 212 in 2021^{xliv} and 175 in 2022^{xlv}. Out of 162 perpetrators mandated to undergo psychosocial treatment in 2024, only 115 received such treatment (71%).^{xlvi} The Ministry of the Interior attributes this to exclusion criteria, disqualifying 47 individuals.^{xlvii} This inconsistency prompts scrutiny of why such treatment is labeled mandatory when inclusion criteria render it effectively optional.^{xlviii}
14. Research by civil society showed that only about a third of women who were victims of domestic violence requested protection orders. According to the survey results, women who abstained from requesting any protection measures were mostly afraid (36.04%), did not feel they needed one (21.83%), or did not know that they could apply for one (14.72%). What is especially concerning is that over half of the respondents who have received the protection order (52.46%) did not perceive it to be effective in ensuring protection.^{xlix} The same research showed that 56% of legal experts felt the protection orders in Croatia are generally ineffective. Related, most NGOs (73%) noted that the

protection orders in Croatia are not adequately available to survivors and over half (56%) of the surveyed NGOs considered protection orders are not adequately enforced.¹

15. The practice of dual arrests, although lessened, still persists in Croatia.^{li} Women are charged alongside perpetrators for domestic violence when defending themselves or for insulting the perpetrator who was beating them. The Ministry of the Interior twice urged training on this issue, but this concept was met with resistance initially.^{lii} Acceptance grew only after citing scientific sources to validate the necessity of such training.^{liii} Despite the Ministry of Interior claims that such cases of dual arrests are rare, official statistics do not track them, making their frequency unclear. However, shelter and counselling staff report encountering them regularly.^{liv}
16. Croatia's policies regarding reporting domestic violence and dual arrests have been relatively widespread and generated indignation for many women. According to results of online research conducted by AWHZ^{lv}, 46% of women are not satisfied with the conduct of the police after reporting violence, 14.2% of women who made reports to the police have personally experienced dual arrests, and 17.3 % of these women have been processed as the second accused in cases of domestic violence.

Divorce proceedings, including child custody and child contact

17. The State fails to recognize the structural nature of VAW and coercive control, leading to discrimination against women survivors in divorce proceedings. Domestic violence is rarely seen as a cause of divorce or a key factor in custody decisions. Courts often mislabel such cases as “high-conflict” instead of recognizing abuse, and prioritize contact with both parents—even when one is violent—reflecting a lack of a gender-sensitive approach in civil proceedings.^{lvi} This typically results in preserving the father's rights to contact or even custody despite the child's fear and the father's abusive behavior.^{lvii} According to reports, when children resist contact, mothers are often blamed by the perpetrator and the Croatian Institute for Social Work (CISW).^{lviii} Civil society has reported instances where courts and CISW have ordered contact between the parent (reportedly violent) and the child to occur at the shelter, endangering residents and staff.^{lix}
18. Although the CISW can revoke parental rights in cases of violence^{lx} and can also deny shared custody or limit contacts, they rarely do so. Contact is sometimes supervised, but this typically depends on whether the mother has access to a competent lawyer rather than being standard practice.^{lxi} The CISW can issue protective measures for children or recommend other court actions, and they can report violence. If a restraining order includes the child, contact with the father is forbidden.^{lxii} Despite the availability of protective measures, civil society has reported that if the order only protects the mother, supervised contact between the father and child is allowed, aiming to restore their relationship.^{lxiii}

19. Reports from civil society present that in everyday work and cooperation with the CISW, organizations have identified a lack of sensitivity towards women survivors of violence resulting in identifying victims as an “uncooperative mother,” which then follows the victim of violence through the entire criminal/misdemeanor and divorce proceedings. Such assumptions influence the adoption of temporary measures that force children to see the violent father despite the existence of clear signs of high traumatization by the child.^{lxiv} When CISW approaches reports of violence with distrust, women are often seen as manipulative or vengeful, aiming to separate fathers from children. Even with convictions, women are expected to co-parent positively with abusers. The system prioritizes the father's contact rights, assuming both parents are essential for the child's development, even when the child has witnessed or experienced violence.^{lxv}
20. Due to delays in judicial decisions, even on urgent temporary measures, women are often unable to exercise basic rights—especially regarding childcare and preschool enrolment. Many kindergartens require joint parental consent, which forces victims of violence into further contact with the perpetrator and often results in denied access when abusers withhold consent.^{lxvi} Although CISW can legally provide consent in the father's place, they routinely refuse to do so, citing the rights of both parents. Even when they do intervene, the process is unreasonably slow, making it impossible for women to enrol children, return to work, or achieve stability. These same institutions then criticize mothers for not enrolling children in kindergarten, accusing them of denying their children a “normal” childhood.^{lxvii}
21. CISW also routinely impose supervisory measures on both parents after reports of domestic violence, including against mothers who are survivors. This not only equates the perpetrator with the victim, but also jeopardizes women’s employment, especially those working in education or as classroom aides, as such measures disqualify them from holding these jobs.^{lxviii} Child visitation supervision is poorly regulated—unqualified individuals like theologians or technicians can act as supervisors, often siding with fathers and blaming mothers.^{lxix}
22. According to information by experts and legal aid providers, mandatory dispute resolution, or mediation, is explicitly forbidden in cases of domestic violence but still frequently finds its way into divorce proceedings.^{lxx} The Family Law was positively amended to forbid mediation in cases with claims of domestic violence.^{lxxi} A legal expert noted that Croatia fails to protect all women from revictimization, as survivors of non-physical violence may still be required to attend mediation, unlike women in shelters.^{lxxii}
23. In a 2022 online survey of 277 participants who underwent official separation procedures and had shared children, the results showed that institutional practices often lacked trauma-informed knowledge and an understanding of domestic violence dynamics^{lxxiii}. Just under half (47%) of participants had participated in mediation, and 38% gave joint statements at CISW^{lxxiv}. Regarding child-parent contact, 55% of

participants^{lxxv} reported difficulties, with most children either refusing to see their father or doing so reluctantly. In 60% of cases^{lxxvi}, violence from the father was present, while 39% reported inappropriate behaviour during visits^{lxxvii}. Despite this, 81% were accused of manipulating the children, with accusations made by the former partner in most cases, and 45% of cases also raised by CISW, 10% by expert witnesses, and 9% by the court^{lxxviii}.

24. The problem with the concept of “parental alienation” in Croatia stems from years of systematic training of professionals within institutions like the police, CISW, and courts on child manipulation in “high-conflict divorces” and situational violence. Training courses for systems actors implemented over the years introduced the concept of family conflict, especially the harmful “Parental Alienation Syndrome.” Consequently, discussing domestic violence in courts became challenging, as abusers and their lawyers would immediately claim “parental alienation syndrome” and accuse the mother of manipulation whenever a history of violence was mentioned.
25. The concept of “parental alienation” is based on a theory of behaviors allegedly used by parents to harm the relationship between the child and the other parent.^{lxxix} It relies on two dangerous misperceptions: women victims of domestic violence are 1) falsely reporting violence, and 2) creating the impression of danger. According to this theory, “parental alienation” is seen as severe emotional abuse, necessitating the urgent separation of the child from the alienating parent.^{lxxx} “Parental alienation” has no universal scientific definition, and the World Health Organization dropped it from its index of diseases in 2020.^{lxxxi} However, the idea resonated with the values and beliefs of experts who hold that children should have both parents and view the father as the head of the family. People who subscribe to “parental alienation” state that the concept provided a framework to explain their daily observations of mothers allegedly manipulating their children.^{lxxxii}
26. State agents have not undergone training on gender-based violence in Croatia by civil sector representatives who work with victims of violence.^{lxxxiii} As a result, these state actors lack basic knowledge about the dynamics of violence, forms of abuse, its consequences on women and children, and relevant legal frameworks and protocols, despite these protocols being fundamental to their work.^{lxxxiv}
27. In the past, mental health professionals—psychiatrists, psychologists, and other experts—have publicly questioned the expertise of the Polyclinic for Child Protection of the City of Zagreb. According to reports, this institution, often the primary authority on child custody cases, based its opinions on the “alienation of a child by one parent” model. A series of newspaper articles titled “System for the Protection or Abuse of Children”^{lxxxv} highlighted the harmful practices of the Polyclinic and other institutions regarding this concept. Following widespread negative reactions from professionals and the public, the director of the Polyclinic resigned, and the institution's work underwent review.^{lxxxvi} The Ministry of Health carried out an inspection into the work of the Polyclinic in October 2021 without major findings.^{lxxxvii}

28. After the reaction of the institutions and the “ban” on the use of the concept of alienation, proponents of Parental Alienation Syndrome increasingly note that it does not matter what the concept is called, because to them, it indicates emotional abuse of children, and they have encouraged staff in the institutions to act accordingly as if the so-called syndrome were valid in these cases.^{lxxxviii} Despite efforts to limit its use, VAW experts and service providers report that the concept remains deeply embedded in social services and courts. While the term itself is used less openly, its logic continues to shape custody decisions, especially in domestic violence cases.^{lxxxix}
29. This concept continues to be promoted in the education of professionals, as illustrated by a recent lecture at a meeting of the Section for Forensic Psychology of the Croatian Psychological Society^{xc}. The sole topic of the meeting was “False accusations of abuse.^{xcii}” The presentation included statements such as “mothers use false accusations to gain an advantage in court,^{xciii}” and that false allegations of domestic or even sexual violence by children and teenagers are “a teenage attempt to deal with a strict parent.^{xciii}” The lecture also explicitly referred to “parental alienation syndrome^{xciv},” using alternative terms like “parental programming^{xcv}” and “parental induction.^{xcvi}” It was made clear that these tactics are typically attributed to mothers who, according to the presentation, try to turn both the children and the system against fathers—downplaying even clinical signs of trauma^{xcvii}. Such education for both new and practicing psychologists risks causing long-term harm in the treatment of survivors of violence and their children.
30. Courts in Croatia appoint expert witnesses to assist in decisions regarding child custody. In practice, many court-appointed psychologists and psychiatrists appear to lack familiarity with key international human rights instruments and fail to apply them in their assessments^{xcviii}. This has serious implications for the protection of the rights of women and children, especially in cases involving domestic violence. In numerous instances, the work of these experts has further traumatized survivors by employing victim-blaming approaches and lacking trauma-informed, gender-sensitive methodologies^{xcix}.
31. Court experts frequently fail to acknowledge the violence experienced by women, often downplaying it, questioning its validity, or accusing women of manipulation—even in cases where fathers have been convicted of abuse^c. As a result, many experts’ reports ultimately favour abusive fathers.^{ci} It is therefore essential to provide continuous education for expert witnesses and to introduce mechanisms for the regular evaluation of their work to improve both the quality of their assessments and their alignment with international standards.

Provision of shelters and other specialized services

32. Croatia must improve support services for women victims of GBV, particularly access to shelters. While the Council of Europe recommends 428 shelter spaces,^{cii} only 25

shelters with 325 spaces currently exist.^{ciii} These shelters differ greatly in their approach, principles, experience, resources, and funding.

33. Croatia's history of women's shelters began in 1990 when AWHZ opened its first shelter. Following this, six additional autonomous women's shelters were established, mostly in the 2000s. These shelters are now funded based on three-year contracts following public tenders.^{civ} AWHZ has reported that, unlike the early years of joint agreements between the state, city, county, and women's NGOs —where each covered 30% of the annual funding, amounting to 90% of the total budget—current funding is less comprehensive, with each covering less than 30% of operational costs.^{cv} Shelters must raise the remaining funds independently, often through tenders, direct agreements, or project fundraising. In addition to the regression in sufficient funding for support services, the delivery of such resources is often delayed. For instance, the 2022–2024 funding decision was made two months into 2022, causing shelters to wait at least three months for the first payment while still covering operational costs.^{cvi}
34. State, church, city, and some NGOs run homes for children and adult victims of domestic violence, based on state guidelines and funded per bed. As per the protocols and according to legislation, access to these homes requires CISW to issue a decision on accommodation, contingent on the victim reporting the violence to the police.^{cvi} Article 71 of the Social Services Act (SSA) lists the types of social services a person can receive, including accommodation.^{cvi} In its decision, which is required for these types of homes to receive per person-based funding, Article 112 of the SSA defines accommodation for victims of domestic violence as accommodation service in crisis situations^{cix} which can last up to 6 months, but can be extended for victims of violence.^{cx} In contrast, autonomous women's shelters have no referral requirements and allow women to stay up to a year or longer, which is crucial given lengthy legal procedures.^{cx}
35. The Ministry for Labor, Pension System, Family, and Social Policy imposes licensing rules designed for state institutions, making it challenging for shelters to meet space and furnishing requirements without state funding.^{cxii} Despite this, six new shelters were opened in 2019–2020 with funding from European Social Fund (ESF) and are mostly run by women's NGOs with experience in providing support. Aligning these shelters with state regulations has been challenging, especially in rural areas lacking social workers.^{cxiii} Historically, specialized training, rather than specific professional qualifications, was prioritized for shelter staff, developed by women's NGOs.^{cxiv} The Ministry's tender for these new shelters overlooked essential aspects like the security, and data protection of the shelters, focusing instead on visibility and promotion.^{cxv}
36. In late 2020, funding for the national specialized hotline was redirected to the National Call Centre of the Association for Victim and Witness Support. However, this centre is not specialized for women or victims of gender-based or domestic violence and is not advertised as such. As a result, many women seeking help may be unaware of its existence and not accessing it. The 2024 report from the National Call Centre cites 2,369 beneficiaries without disaggregated data on women survivors of VAW and domestic

violence.^{cxvi} Croatia's decision to fund this centre ignores existing specialized hotlines, such as the one run by AWHZ, which has operated for over 30 years.^{cxvii} Despite receiving the European harmonized helpline number 116 016 for women survivors of violence, the government has not provided additional funding to ensure its 24/7 operation.^{cxviii}

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

This stakeholder report suggests the following recommendations to government of Croatia:

- Fully implement and evaluate the implementation of the Istanbul Convention through national laws and policies, ensuring a gender-sensitive approach throughout.
- Abolish the practice of dual arrests and prosecutions of both the victim and perpetrator in domestic violence cases. Mandate and train law enforcement and prosecutors to identify the predominant aggressor in domestic violence. Identify and report on the number of dual arrest cases and ensure that no victim is criminalized.
- Ensure regular, sufficient, and sustainable funding for women's shelters, counselling centres, and helplines through multi-year contracts that respect their autonomy and feminist orientation.
- Provide mandatory, regular, and gender-sensitive training to judges, police, prosecutors, social workers, healthcare providers, and psychosocial service providers on the dynamics of domestic violence and coercive control. This training must include a trauma-informed approach to working with victims and be developed and delivered in partnership with women's rights and feminist NGOs.
- Guarantee access to shelters for all women and children, including undocumented women, refugee and asylum-seeking women, and women with disabilities.
- Prioritize safety in all shelters and state facilities by providing secure infrastructure (e.g., secret addresses, security systems) and cooperation with police or security services.
- Formally recognize women's civil society organizations as equal partners in policy development, monitoring, and implementation and the adoption of new or amended legislation.
- Ensure the participation of women's rights experts, including those from NGOs, in all government bodies addressing violence against women and domestic violence.
- Involve women's NGOs and autonomous shelters in coordinated community responses, focusing on victim safety and perpetrator accountability.
- Provide training to authorities on the remedies in a protection order and prioritizing those that protect victim safety, including removal of the perpetrator from the shared home when requested.
- Ensure effective access to and enforcement of protection orders, including appropriate sanctions for violations.

- Monitor compliance with protection orders through electronic surveillance measures, such as electronic bracelets.
- Guarantee that domestic violence is systematically considered in custody and visitation proceedings to prevent further harm to victims.
- Establish clear protocols to protect children placed in shelters, including procedures for school and healthcare enrolment without requiring consent from the abuser, ensuring full anonymity and safety.
- Ban the use of the concept of "parental alienation" and any similar or adapted concepts—regardless of terminology—in all judicial and administrative proceedings. Provide ongoing training on the harms of “parental alienation” misconceptions and protecting children’s best interests in domestic violence in accordance with best practice standards. Hold accountable professionals who apply such concepts in ways that harm women and children in custody decisions.
- Ensure all children exposed to direct or indirect violence are formally recognized as victims in criminal proceedings, with prompt determination of appropriate protection measures for both the child and the non-violent parent.
- Introduce mandatory training for court-appointed psychologists and psychiatrists on key human rights, women’s rights, and children’s rights standards^{cxix} relevant to custody and domestic violence cases.
- Establish a system for the regular evaluation of court-appointed psychologists and psychiatrists to prevent the development and continuation of harmful practices and ensure alignment with international and European standards^{cxx}.
- Establish regular collection and publication of disaggregated data on all forms of violence against women and domestic violence, including by age, sex, victim–perpetrator relationship, and other sociodemographic factors, across all stages of investigation, prosecution, and sentencing, to guide evidence-based policy and response.

ⁱ United Nations Treaty Collection. “*Status of treaties: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – Status as at 17/03/2025.*” Accessed Mar 24, 2025,

https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-9&chapter=4&clang=_en

ⁱⁱ United Nations Treaty Collection. “*Status of treaties: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – Status as at 17/03/2025.*” Accessed Mar 24, 2025,

https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&clang=_en

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Treaty Collection. “*Status of treaties: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – Status as at 17/03/2025.*” Accessed Mar 24, 2025,

https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=_en

^{iv} OHCHR. “*View the ratification by country or by treaty. Ratification Status for Croatia.*” Accessed 17 Mar 2025, <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>.

^v Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations. Statement by H.E. Minister of Health Prof. Dr. Željko Reiner: The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development - New York, 30 June - 2 July 1999, (July 2, 1999), available at <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/croatia.pdf>.

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- ^{vi} The Office for Gender Equality, Government of the Republic of Croatia. The Republic of Croatia: A Comprehensive Review of the Situation at the National Level on the Occasion of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, (May 2019), available at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Croatia.pdf>.
- ^{vii} Council of Europe Treaty Office. "Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 210: Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210) – Status as of 17/03/2025." Accessed Mar 24, 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=210>.
- ^{viii} Croatian Constitution, Art. 141, translation available at: <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/hr/hr060en.pdf>.
- ^{ix} UPR of Croatia (3rd cycle – 36th session), *Thematic list of recommendations*. Recommendation 137.169.
- ^x As explained in para. 15 of this report.
- ^{xi} As explained in para. 24 of this report.
- ^{xii} As explained further in par. 24-28.
- ^{xiii} UPR of Croatia (3rd cycle – 36th session), *Thematic list of recommendations*. Recommendations 137.136 – 137.159.
- ^{xiv} UPR of Croatia (3rd cycle – 36th session), *Thematic list of recommendations*. Recommendations 137.29, 137.30, 137.31 and 137.33.
- ^{xv} National Plan for Gender Equality for the period until 2027, available at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/<https://ravnopravnost.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/NPRS%202027%20APRS%202024/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20ravnopravnost%20spolova,%20za%20razdoblje%20do%202027..pdf>
- ^{xvi} Women's Network Croatia. *Croatian NGO Joint Shadow Report to GREVIO*, July 2022.
- ^{xvii} Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, National Gazette 36/24, available in Croatian at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/81/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-od-nasilja-u-obitelji>.
- ^{xviii} Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, Articles 13 and 15-18, National Gazette 36/24, available in Croatian at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/81/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-od-nasilja-u-obitelji>.
- ^{xix} Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, Article 24, National Gazette 36/24, available in Croatian at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/81/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-od-nasilja-u-obitelji>.
- ^{xx} Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, Article 7 ¶1, National Gazette 36/24, available in Croatian at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/81/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-od-nasilja-u-obitelji>.
- ^{xxi} Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, Article 16 ¶2, National Gazette 36/24, available in Croatian at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/81/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-od-nasilja-u-obitelji>.
- ^{xxii} Interview with AWHZ lawyer from 4 April 2025.
- ^{xxiii} Criminal Code, Official Gazette 125/11, 144/12, 56/15, 61/15, 101/17, 118/18, 126/19, 84/21, 114/22, 114/23, 36/24, art 111.3 «whoever murders a close person whom they have abused before...», will be punished by at least 10 years of imprisonment (5 years for regular murder). Available in Croatian at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/98/Kazneni-zakon>.
- ^{xxiv} Criminal Code, art 117.2. – bodily injury punished by 1 to 3 years in prison (up to 1 year for basic form).
- ^{xxv} Criminal Code, art 118.2. – punishment if committed against a close person is 3 to 8 years of imprisonment (basic form of the crime is punished by 6 months up to 5 years).
- ^{xxvi} Criminal Code, art 119.2. – punishment is 3 to 10 years of imprisonment if committed against a close person (1 to 8 years for basic form).
- ^{xxvii} Criminal Code, art 116.3. – punishment if committed against a close person is 3 to 10 years of imprisonment (basic form of the crime is punished by 1 to 8 years).
- ^{xxviii} Criminal Code, art 136.3 – punishment if committed against a close person is 1 to 10 years of imprisonment (basic forms are up to 3 years (for unlawful deprivation of liberty, art 136.1.) and 6 months to 5 years (for unlawful deprivation of liberty for purpose of extortion, forcing a person to do something or with a goal to cause suffering, art 136.2.)).

^{xxix} Criminal Code, art 138.2. – while the punishment is the same regardless of who the victim is, the crime is prosecuted ex officio instead of by private complaint if it is committed against a close person.

^{xxx} Criminal Code, art 139.2. – the punishment is 6 months up to 5 years of imprisonment and it is prosecuted ex officio if committed against a close person (basic form is up to 1 year and prosecuted by a private complaint, or more aggravated up to 3 years and prosecuted ex officio).

^{xxxi} Criminal Code, art 140.2. – punishment is up to 3 years of imprisonment if committed against a close person, basic form is up to 1 year.

^{xxxii} Criminal Code, art 179a: “Anyone who grossly, repeatedly, or otherwise severely violates regulations on protection from domestic violence, thereby causing a family member or close person to fear for their safety or the safety of persons close to them, or placing them in a humiliating position, without committing a more serious criminal offense, shall be punished with imprisonment for one to three years.”

^{xxxiii} Criminal Code, art 111a: “1. Whoever commits a gender-based murder of a woman shall be punished with imprisonment for at least ten years or long-term imprisonment. 2. When determining the criminal offense from paragraph 1 of this article, it will be taken into account if the act was committed against a close person, a person whom the perpetrator had previously abused, a vulnerable person, a person in a position of subordination or dependency, or if the act was committed in circumstances of sexual violence or due to a relationship that places women in an unequal position, or if there are other circumstances indicating that it is a case of gender-based violence.”

^{xxxiv} WAVE, “Femicide as a Separate Criminal Offense: A Milestone in Croatia - WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE”, (Apr. 4, 2024), <https://wave-network.org/femicide-criminal-offense-croatia/> (last visited May 30, 2024).

^{xxxv} Criminal Code, art. 87 ¶ 32 defines gender-based violence as Gender-based violence against women refers to violence directed at a woman because she is a woman or that disproportionately affects women. Such conduct will be considered an aggravating circumstance if this law does not explicitly prescribe stricter punishment.”

^{xxxvi} Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), (*Baseline*) *Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – CROATIA*, (Sept. 6, 2023), ¶13, available at <https://rm.coe.int/baseline-evaluation-report-on-croatia/1680ac76c9>.

^{xxxvii} Information on file with the authors, 2024.

^{xxxviii} Ombudsperson for Gender Equality Year Report 2024, 93-94.

^{xxxix} *Ibid.*

^{xl} *Ibid.*, 98.

^{xli} Interview with AWHZ lawyer, Apr. 4, 2025.

^{xlii} *Ibid.*

^{xliii} Ministry of Justice and Administration: „Report on the Work of the Commission for Monitoring and Improving the Work of Criminal and Misdemeanor Procedure Bodies and the Enforcement of Sanctions Related to Protection from Domestic Violence 2020“, 21 Jun 2021, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/<https://mpudt.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e%20Povjerenstva%20za%202020.pdf>

^{xliv} Ministry of Justice and Administration: Report on the Work of the Commission for Monitoring and Improving the Work of Criminal and Misdemeanor Procedure Bodies and the Enforcement of Sanctions Related to Protection from Domestic Violence 2021“, 29 Jun 2022, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/<https://mpudt.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Pravo%20na%20pristup%20informacijama/Izvje%C5%A1%C4%87a/Izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e%20Povjerenstva-2021.pdf>

^{xl} Ministry of Justice and Administration: Report on the Work of the Commission for Monitoring and Improving the Work of Criminal and Misdemeanor Procedure Bodies and the Enforcement of Sanctions Related to Protection from Domestic Violence 2022“, 21 Jun 2023, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/<https://mpudt.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Strategije,%20planovi,%20izvje%C5%A1%C4%87a/Izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e%20o%20radu%20Povjerenstva%20za%202022.%20godinu..pdf>

^{xlvi} Ombudsperson for Gender Equality Year Report 2024, 103.

^{xlvi} Ibid.

^{xlvi} Ombudsperson for Gender Equality Year Report 2023, 95-96.

^{xlvi} Ibid, 32.

¹ AWHZ, ARTEMIS: Promoting the right of protection of women through the application of the EC Directive 2011/99/EU and the European Protection Order – National report Croatia”, 2020. <https://www.artemis-europa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Artemis-national-report-Croatia.pdf>

^{li} GREVIO Baseline report para. 225.b; CEDAW Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Croatia* para. 19.c, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/234/47/pdf/n1523447.pdf?token=ZMAfaOI6xm8gkggjJ&fe=true; CAT Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Croatia* para. 16

^{lii} Interview with a lawyer, 2024.

^{lii} Ibid.

^{liv} Interview with the shelter director, Mar. 20, 2025.

^{lv} The Autonomous Women's House Zagreb (AWHZ) conducts research aimed at examining the experiences of women who have survived male violence and to review the actions of the police with an emphasis on experiences of women who survived double arrests. The target group of the research is women who survived male violence and who survived double arrest by the police. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential.

^{lvi} GREVIO, *(Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – CROATIA*, (Sept. 6, 2023), ¶193, available at <https://rm.coe.int/baseline-evaluation-report-on-croatia/1680ac76c9>.

^{lvii} GREVIO, *(Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – CROATIA*, (Sept. 6, 2023), ¶169, 195, available at <https://rm.coe.int/baseline-evaluation-report-on-croatia/1680ac76c9>.

^{lviii} GREVIO, *(Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – CROATIA*, (Sept. 6, 2023), ¶195, available at <https://rm.coe.int/baseline-evaluation-report-on-croatia/1680ac76c9>.

^{lix} Women's Network Croatia, “Croatian NGO Joint Shadow report to GREVIO”, 2022, Available at <https://rm.coe.int/croatian-ngo-joint-shadow-report-to-grevio-final/1680a795c4>.

^{lx} Family Law, Official Gazette 103/15, 98/19, 47/20, 49/23, 156/23, art. 171. <https://www.zakon.hr/z/88/Obiteljski-zakon>

^{lxi} Women's Network Croatia, “Croatian NGO Joint Shadow report to GREVIO”, 2022, Available at <https://rm.coe.int/croatian-ngo-joint-shadow-report-to-grevio-final/1680a795c4>.

^{lxii} GREVIO, *(Baseline) Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) – CROATIA*, (Sept. 6, 2023), ¶194, available at <https://rm.coe.int/baseline-evaluation-report-on-croatia/1680ac76c9>.

^{lxiii} Women's Network Croatia, “Croatian NGO Joint Shadow report to GREVIO”, 2022, 40. Available at <https://rm.coe.int/croatian-ngo-joint-shadow-report-to-grevio-final/1680a795c4>.

^{lxiv} AWHZ and CWWV ROSA submission to Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Compliance with International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Suggested List of Issues Relating to the Second periodic report submitted by Croatia under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2023.

^{lxv} Ibid.

^{lxvi} Interview with the director of a women's shelter, Mar. 20, 2025.

^{lxvii} Ibid.

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- lxviii Ibid.
- lxix Interview with the director of a women's shelter, May 23, 2024.
- lxx Interview with a legal expert, May 23, 2024.
- lxxi Family Law, Official Gazette art. 332 ¶ 1. available in Croatian at <https://www.zakon.hr/z/88/Obiteljski-zakon>
- lxxii Interview with legal expert, May 23, 2024.
- lxxiii Lauri Korajlija, A. "Monitoring and improving the support system for women survivors of violence: Research findings report", January 2025, Autonomous Women's House Zagreb, available in Croatian at <https://azkz.hr/pracenje-i-unaprjedenje-sustava-podrske-zrtvama-nasilja-izvjesce-o-rezultatima-istrazivanja/>.
- lxxiv Ibid.
- lxxv Ibid.
- lxxvi Ibid.
- lxxvii Ibid.
- lxxviii Ibid.
- lxxix Buljan-Flander, G. and Roje-Đapić, M: Dijete u središtu (sukoba): Razvod roditelja, visoki konflikt i otuđenje – Znanost, teorija i klinička praksa" (Child in the centre of the conflict: Divorce, high conflict and alienation – Science, theory and clinical practice), Geromar d.o.o., (2020), 42-44.
- lxxx AWHZ, "Response to the Call for inputs – Custody cases, violence against women and violence against children of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences", Dec. 2022.
- lxxxi University College London, *Parental Alienation: Domestic Abusers' Legal Tool Against Protective Parents and Children*, by Haocheng Fang (15 Feb 2023), accessed 5 June 2024, available online at <https://reflect.ucl.ac.uk/1wob-ucl/2023/02/15/parental-alienation-domestic-abusers-legal-tool-against-protective-parents-and-children/>.
- lxxxii AWHZ, "Response to the Call for inputs – Custody cases, violence against women and violence against children of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences", Dec. 2022.
- lxxxiii Ibid.
- lxxxiv Ibid.
- lxxxv Portal H-alter: "Sustav za zaštitu ili zlostavljanje djece?" (System for the protection or abuse of children), July 12, 2021. available at <https://h-alter.org/ljudska-prava/sustav-za-zastitu-ili-za-zlostavljanje-djece/>.
- lxxxvi Nakon ostavke Buljan Flander čekaju se rezultati nadzora poslovanja Poliklinike, HRVATSKA RADIOTELEVIZIJA, <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/hrvatska/nakon-ostavke-buljan-flander-cekaju-se-rezultati-nadzora-poslovanja-poliklinike-3015180> (last visited Jun 3, 2024).
- lxxxvii GREVIO, Comments submitted by Croatia on GREVIO's final report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Baseline Report), (Sept. 4, 2023), available at <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-inf-2023-17-croatia-s-comments-on-grevio-s-baseline-report/1680ac6fa4>
- lxxxviii Information on file with the authors, 2024.
- lxxxix Information on file with the authors, 2024.
- xc Croatian Psychological Society – Section for Forensic Psychology, "Announcement of the 119th meeting with a lecture," Mar. 31, 2025. Document on file with the authors.
- xci Ibid.
- xcii Croatian Psychological Society – Section for Forensic Psychology, PowerPoint presentation "False accusations of abuse", document on file with the authors.
- xciii Ibid.
- xciv Ibid.
- xcv Ibid.
- x cvi Ibid.
- xcvii Ibid.
- xcviii Interview with the shelter director from Mar. 20, 2025.

^{xcix} Cases on file with the authors.

^c Ibid.

^{ci} Ibid.

^{cii} Croatian Ministry of Interior: Survey of Basic Safety Indicators in 2018 in the Republic of Croatia (Jan 2019), available (in Croatian) at <https://mup.gov.hr/pristup-informacijama-16/statistika-228/statistika-mup-a-i-bilteni-osigurnosti-cestovnog-prometa/283233>.

^{ciii} Human Rights Committee, Fourth periodic report submitted by Croatia under article 40 of the Covenant pursuant to the optional reporting procedure, due in 2020 (date received: 3 May 2022), U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/HRV/4 (10 Jan 2023), ¶90.

^{civ} Women's Network Croatia, "Croatian NGO Joint Shadow report to GREVIO", 2022.

^{cv} Women's Network Croatia, "Croatian NGO Joint Shadow report to GREVIO", 2022.

^{cvi} Women's Network Croatia, "Croatian NGO Joint Shadow report to GREVIO", 2022.

^{cvi} Law on Protection from Domestic Violence, Official Gazette , Art 7 para. 1, <https://www.zakon.hr/z/81/Zakon-o-za%C5%A1titi-od-nasilja-u-obitelji>.

^{cvi} Social Services Act, Art 71 para. 15, Official Gazette 18/22, 46/22, 119/22, 71/23, 156/23 <https://www.zakon.hr/z/222/Zakon-o-socijalnoj-skrbi>.

^{cix} Social Services Act, Art 112 para. 7, Official Gazette 18/22, 46/22, 119/22, 71/23, 156/23 <https://www.zakon.hr/z/222/Zakon-o-socijalnoj-skrbi>.

^{cx} Social Services Act, Art 113 para. 1 and 2, Official Gazette 18/22, 46/22, 119/22, 71/23, 156/23 <https://www.zakon.hr/z/222/Zakon-o-socijalnoj-skrbi>.

^{cx} GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Croatia, 2023, ¶ 115.

^{cxii} Regulation on criteria for providing social services, Official Gazette 110/22, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2022_09_110_1624.html.

^{cxiii} Ibid.

^{cxiv} Ibid.

^{cxv} Ibid.

^{cxvi} Association for Victim and Witness Support "Year Report 2024", 45, available in Croatian at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://pzs.hr/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Godisnji_izvjestaj_2024_UPZS__compressed.pdf.

^{cxvii} Women's Network Croatia, Croatian NGO Joint Shadow report to GREVIO, 2022.

^{cxviii} Information on file with the authors.

^{cxix} Relevant standards include international and European instruments on human rights, women's and children's rights, the role of court-appointed experts, and the impact of intimate partner violence on custody decisions, in particular:

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;

Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention);

Convention on the Rights of the Child;

Guidelines of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) on the role of court-appointed experts in judicial proceedings of Council of Europe member states (12 December 2014);

European Parliament Resolution of 6 October 2021 on the impact of intimate partner violence and custody rights on women and children (2019/2166(INI));

European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights.

^{cx} Ibid.